

WW II
STORY of a SURVIVOR

S.J Rutkowski
October, 1994

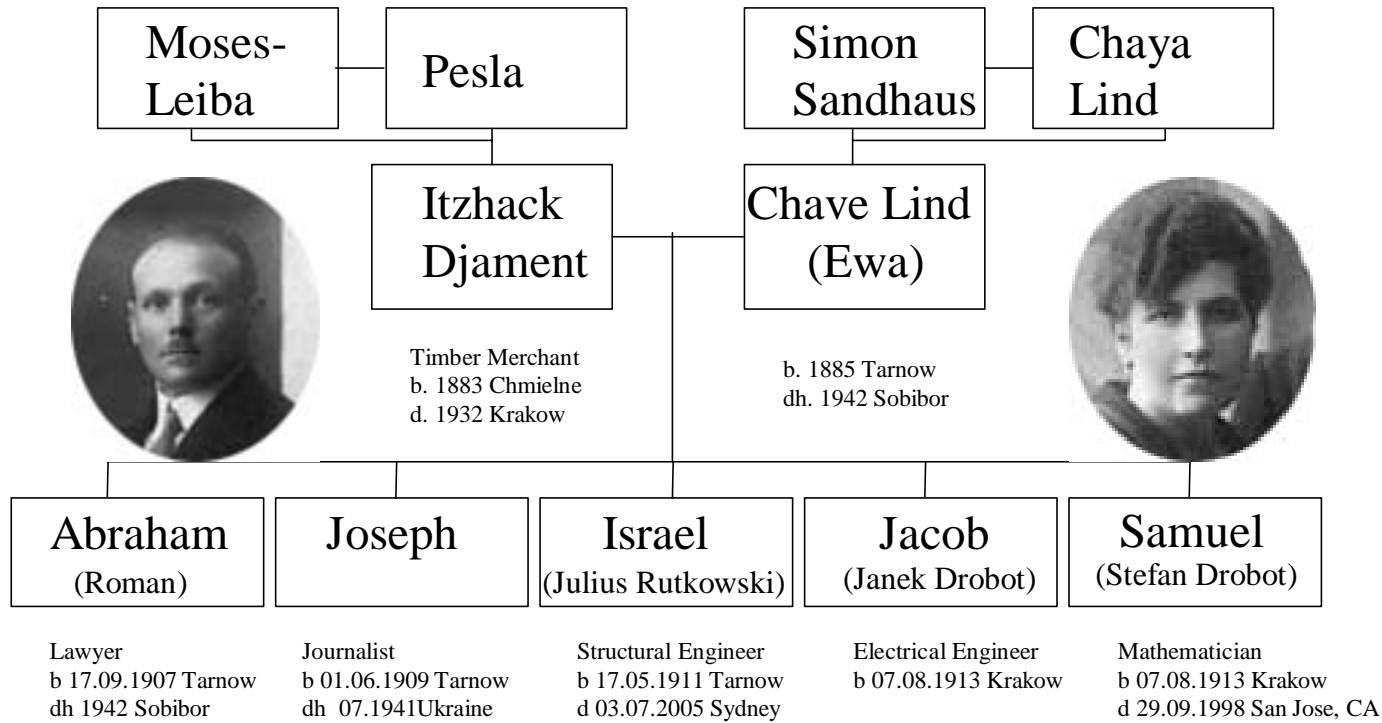
Editors note:

This is an edited version of a manuscript prepared by my father Stanislaw Julius Rutkowski (born Israel Djament) recalling his experiences in Poland during WWII. The original phrases and grammar has been retained. Explanatory notes have been added as appropriate.

The original was written in 1994.

Sydney, May 2002.

Revision 1 April, 2004
 Added notes gathered from my father about his childhood.
Revision 2 November 2005
 Added notes following my father's death in July 2005



Aged 16



Aged 14



Aged 12



Aged 10



Aged 10

dh. Holocaust victim

PREFACE

“Why don’t you write memoirs of your life during the war? You are no longer young and what you told me will go with you without any trace.” These were the words of my nephew with whom I discussed mysteries of this world, in particular destiny and fate, which guide human life on this earth.



Sydney, Oct 2001

Experience of many people as well as my own, after surviving the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind, confirmed these assumptions. There is an old Latin saying: *“Fortes adjuvat ipse deus – God himself helps courageous people”*. It proved not to be always right. A bit of luck decides every case.

The stories described in my memoirs are based partially on my own experiences and those of my friend and relatives. I cannot be held responsible for the authenticity of the latter, I therefore refer to these as *“Si non a vero, e bene trovato – If this is not true, at least it is well invented”*.

My deep belief in destiny is supported by other facts. There were 1½ million Poles and Jews deported by the Soviets to Russia. There were people who went there voluntarily. They reasoned that being hundreds or thousands of kilometres from the Germans they had a better chance of survival, although nobody had the slightest idea what would the future bring. Many of these people did not survive. Illnesses, hunger, labour camps, hard work and climate decimated the strongest. Even those that survived the war and returned from Russia or concentration camps to their home town died murdered by bandits, hoodlums or religious fanatics who believed that the only way to save Poland from communism is to get rid of its supporters, especially the Jews, who were always the scapegoats of any misfortune in Poland. Innocent people were killed in the name of the old Polish saying *“Beat the Jews and save Poland”*. There were even organised pogroms¹.

There were people with history of various diseases, who in normal circumstances would not run their life without the help of medication and doctors. These people survived in spite of lack of basic necessities, which they took for granted before the war. They died long after returning from Russia of old age or illnesses not related to previous ones. There were Jews whose appearance did not show their origin but they perished by denunciations to Gestapo by Polish, Ukrainian or even Jewish individuals.

All of them died because such was their destiny.

¹ One such pogrom was organised in July 1946 in Kielce, a town with population of 100,000. It was the place where the most distressing events took place only one year after the end of the war. A young boy disappeared from his parental home. Some hoodlums and religious fanatics spread rumours that the boy was abducted by Jews and killed for blood to be used in their religious rituals. In one day, about 70 Jews, survivors of the holocaust, were killed and more were injured. After a couple of days the boy was found safe and unharmed at his grandparents’ home. He ran away from his parents afraid of punishment for a minor offence. No action was taken by the local and central authorities in order to discover who was responsible for this crime.



POLAND, 1939

SEPTEMBER – NOVEMBER 1939

At the outbreak of the war a building company in Warsaw where I lived since 1938 employed me as a resident engineer. On the second day of the war, 2nd of September 1939 I was sent to a small country town, 100km south west of Warsaw with the payroll for workers engaged in initial works constructing grain silos to which my firm was commissioned. The aim of sending me to this place was also to enable me to get familiarised with the conditions of the work. I was designated to be the resident engineer and representative of the company on site.

The departure from Warsaw by bus went smoothly and without hitch. The return however was a nightmare. The bus originated its return journey in Lodz, some 50km from the place where I was supposed to board it. Lodz was, before the war, a city recognised as having a large German population. Hence the fear amongst Poles and Jews inflamed by German propaganda evoked such panic that everybody with a chance to leave the city was on the move. They all headed mostly to the eastern part of Poland, especially to Warsaw. All means of transport, trains, buses, horse driven carts were full of refugees. The bus on which I was booked for a return trip was very late and already full of passengers. As I did not have any luggage, I was dragged inside. I returned home late at night, tired and hungry but glad to be at home.

The next day, Sunday 3rd of September, I went to head office as it was the usual practice to report to my superiors and to settle the account of my expenses and the payroll. To my astonishment I learnt that the director of the company left Warsaw with his family. At the same time I was overjoyed to learn the Great Britain and France declared war with Germany in defence of Poland.

On Monday the 4th I went to the office for instructions. I noticed that everything was in disarray and no one knew what to do. I decided to go home and await a telephone call. At home I found a letter from the military command of Warsaw that the next morning at 7am I was to report to a place for auxiliary military service. I arrived on time, awaiting some instructions. There were hundreds of people gathered in a small area, a perfect target for German bombers, who shortly appeared in the blue sky. After hopelessly waiting for some hours, I approached one of the men in charge and asked him what was the purpose of keeping us there. He explained that according to his knowledge we would be used only in case of bombs falling and damaging the buildings. The damaged parts will have to be propped, debris removed and we would have to assist with the evacuation of the inhabitants of the buildings. I could not work out how in these circumstances one could do such a job without any transport facilities, machinery and materials.

Noticing the increasing mess and lack of any organisation as well as the fact that from the number of men gathered in the morning there were a few left, I decided to go home and await further instructions. While walking home (the city communications were already disrupted) I had an unpleasant feeling of being a deserter from military service. I turned the radio on and my feeling of guilt increased as I learnt that the German army was beaten on all fronts and the British started to drop bombs on Berlin. I then heard that despite big successes of the Polish army everybody who was fit had to assemble at night in the centre square of Warsaw with shovels and spades to dig anti-tank trenches. Later on I heard the voice of the President of Warsaw through the

loudspeakers urging all young people to leave Warsaw in eastern direction and to join the army wherever possible.

The next morning together with three of my friends, taking only a small rucksack with me containing few necessities I was set for a journey on foot to catch the Polish Army. Our first destination was a small health resort some 30km south east of Warsaw. We thought we could stay there for a few days and return to Warsaw after the situation was cleared and “our brave army would repel Germans”.

The road leading south east was already packed with refugees. If it were not so sad, one could laugh seeing horse driven carts, loaded up to top with furniture, pianos, pets including canaries etc. These vehicles blocked the road and gradually the congestion brought the traffic almost to a standstill. Even those refugees like ourselves had to stop and make way for vehicles running in both directions.

After walking for 4 or 5 hours we noticed a standing passenger train which was from time to time moving very slowly in the direction of our planned destination. The train was almost empty. We boarded it in the logical assumption that even at the small speed it was moving we would arrive faster at our place of destination than on foot. To our surprise the train did not stop in the place we wanted to go. From then the train became our home for the next week. Wherever it stopped we tried to buy some food, mainly bread and milk.

On the 12th of September we arrived in Chelm², some 200km south east of Warsaw. We decided not to go further. We were tired, dirty and most of all we wanted to find out what was the situation on the front line and when we were able to return to Warsaw. The only source of information would be the radio. But we only heard martial music and half of the time there were no broadcasts at all. As refugees, an empty house was allocated to us. It was left by its owners who probably fled the town.

Although my friends decided to stay in Chelm as long as possible, I was fed up with the uncertainty. I did not know what happened to my family whom I did not see for the last 6 months. Somebody told us that the local council begun registering the refugees in order to enable them to return to their homes. I also heard that Germans occupied almost the whole western part of Poland and that it would not be long before Warsaw surrendered. The council could not give any information about the trains running westward to Warsaw. I waited from day to day spending hours in council chambers but to no avail.

On 17th September we heard on the radio that the Russian army crossed eastern border of Poland after signing an agreement with Germany. Initially we could not believe this. The opinion of the population was mixed. Some accused Russians of stabbing the Polish Army in their back, others were happy that the worst was over. Those who saw salvation in communism were overjoyed. Our radio was broken and we were desperate to find out the true story. I noticed a radio repair shop not far from the place we were staying. I took the box covered in blanket and as I stepped out from the house, an artillery missile hit the pavement only a few metres from me. I fell over

² Fate of Jews during WWII: Starting with German occupation, Jews were forced on death marches, deported in massive "Aktionen" to Sobibor death camp. Only 15 survived.
Source : The Simon Wiesenthal Center (Ed.)

and for a while I lost consciousness. Gradually I recovered from the shock. With the radio completely smashed, I returned home to be informed that Russian tanks were on the outskirts of the town and by sending a few missiles they wanted to advise everybody about their presence.

The first encounter with the soldiers and officers of the Russian Army was encouraging. They were friendly and outspoken. They told us how easy and beautiful was life in Russia and promised us heaven on earth. After a few days we learned that the trains were on the move but only in the eastern direction. In these situation I had to abandon the idea of returning to Warsaw. We decided to move further east, myself to Lwow and my friends in the direction northeast to Bialystok.

At the end of September we boarded a train and shortly we arrived at a country town called Kowel³. This was a stopover for refugees going north and southeast. What we saw in Kowel surpassed our imagination. Thousands of refugees coming from every part of Poland, wandering aimlessly in the streets, sitting in restaurants, pubs and cafeterias. There were endless discussions what to do and where to go and the most important was how to find families with whom some parted forever. Here I met one of the directors of our firm in Warsaw. He told me that he was separated from the rest of his family when he left them in the train in order to search for some food. This separation from his family which lasted about 3 years was a blessing for him and all of them. Being an excellent specialist in his profession, and a good businessman in private life he was helpless in difficult situation. Would he go back to Warsaw with his family? He would be a burden to them in these difficult times under German occupation.

In Kowel I learned that my three brothers were seen there by a mutual friend and that all of them were heading north in the direction of Wilno (now Vilnius). Wandering aimlessly on the streets of Kowel I met many people, friends, schoolmates and acquaintances. Everybody had something to say about what they were going to do, Some of them jubilant that their dream to live in a Communist governed country came through, some others sceptical about their future, as their profession was not suited to the new regime like lawyers, teachers etc. These meetings and discussions became after a time boring and not providing any solution.

One day I met three of my old friends. They were in company of another fellow who looked pale and miserable. I enquired what happened to him and I was told an unbelievable story:

"Trying to evade German bombing of civilian population from every direction", one of my friends started, "we used trains, horse driven carts and mostly our own feet, to reach eastern part of Poland. We were moving mostly by night in order to avoid German planes. We slept during the daytime in woods or desolated houses where we could find not only shelter but also some food. After leaving Lublin we were heading east and we met on the way a peasant who was returning home in a horse driven cart. He agreed to take us for a payment to the nearest country town. It was a beautiful sunny day which for the German forces was a blessing and a curse for the refugees.

³ Jewish Pop. in 1939: 17,000. Fate of Jews during WWII: were forced to live in ghetto in 1942. By the end of 1941 thousands of Jews had been murdered in the forest. Some tried to escape but were caught. Source : The Simon Wiesenthal Center. (Ed).

At the daybreak the German planes appeared on the blue skies. They bombed mercilessly everything moving on the road. We were going slowly and from time to time we had to leave the cart to take cover under the trees or in trenches. Suddenly I noticed that one of our friends was uncomfortable. He was sitting in a leaning position holding his belly with both hands. I asked him if he was in pain and as I did not get any answer I awoke Henry. He was a young doctor. He tried to catch some sleep in a not very comfortable position. We stopped for a while and Henry, after a short examination diagnosed that our friend had typical symptoms of appendicitis. We reached the country town before sunset. Immediately we made enquiries about the nearest hospital. We found a small building not far from the main road, two storeys high, a typical country town clinic destined in the first place to give the local population first aid before sending them to a larger hospital in a bigger country town. We were introduced to the doctor in charge, an older man, who was mobilised for 24-hour service in case of an emergency. He confirmed Henry's diagnosis and assured us that the case was not acute but he advised us to have the operation performed next day and we agreed with him. He argued that in our circumstances any delay might bring a catastrophe. We decided to leave our sick fellow in hospital to his great delight. After so many days of sleeping in woods, trains or on benches in parts he could enjoy a clean bed and a bath. The doctor in charge promised that he would perform the operation the next day, as soon as possible, because he could not foresee the situation in the nearest future.

The next day in the morning everything was ready for the operation. The clinic had a small surgery room for this type of surgical intervention. We were waiting nearby in a park enjoying the sunshine and peace. Suddenly we noticed a German bomber heading in our direction and in no time we heard a big bang. As we were accustomed to this kind of noise, we immediately realised what happened. A bomb was dropped on the clinic. Our thoughts were with our poor friend. We ran towards the clinic as soon as the dust settled down. We noticed two nurses carrying our friend on a stretcher. He was still under anaesthetic. One of the nurses told us that the bomb fell through the window and killed the doctor and one nurse just when the doctor took a scalpel into his hand.

With the help of some kind people we were transported to the nearest town where the operation was performed by the local surgeon with an excellent result."

I did not see my friends after that.

LWOW, 1939

There were two directions towards which the refugees headed mostly: north to Wilno (Vilnius) which was annexed by the Lithuanians with consent of Russia and south to Lwow. Jewish people reasoned correctly that in Lithuania, a country still enjoying independence and with all embassies working normally they could obtain entry visas for Palestine or other free countries. The Lithuanian government wanted to get rid of the large number of refugees which created nuisance and economic chaos. A majority of refugees headed towards Lwow, a city which before the war was one of the largest in Poland. They expected that the new Russian government would organise repatriation trails back to Poland. Some of the refugees organised themselves the return journey to Poland.

The first possibility was via Przemysl situated on the river San. Here was the border established by the pact between Germany and Russia in August 1939. It was one of the few crossing points over a bridge guarded by the Russians on one side and Germans on the other. There were thousands of people mostly Poles, who waited hours and even days, to be allowed to cross the bridge and to get to their country towns or cities where they came from originally. The German guards tried to control the crowd, looking specially for Jews to prevent them crossing the bridge. The other way open to Jews towards crossing the borders was some clandestine way under guidance of peasants living on both sides of the frontier between the occupied lands. I decided to go to Lwow. I was looking for my brothers and found them through our mutual friend. They just returned from Wilno. According to the information they received, the Lithuanian government was considering deportation of all refugees and handing them over to the Russian authorities. This is why they decided to return to Lwow voluntarily. They could not give me any news about the rest of our family.

It was middle of October. One of my brothers got a job outside Lwow. The other one enrolled into the university to study economy, the third was waiting for an appointment as a lecturer in mathematics on the same university. I was desperately looking for a job. Despite assurances of the Soviet authorities that everybody will get employment, as guaranteed in the Russian constitution, there were plenty of people, particularly among the refugees, who could not find any work. They lived from day to day in very difficult situation waiting for permission from Russian and German authorities to return to their homes. I was one of them. My three brothers did not wish to go back especially the eldest one who was a journalist before the war and was now warned that he would be immediately arrested once he stepped on German soil. After lengthy discussion we decided to stay in where we were. I looked everywhere for some work. It was not easy. Russians established offices for those who could not find any work themselves. Everybody was obliged to fill in questionnaires with tricky questions. In this way Russian authorities obtained excellent information of all applicants. They referred these informations to NKVD⁴. The top positions were reserved in the first place for Russians. Less important jobs went to the local population and refugees. These were usually with little pay, temporary or outside large cities where shortage of commodities made life less attractive and even miserable.

⁴ NKVD - Peoples Commissariat for Internal Affairs. Communist secret police. Ed.

As my savings gradually run out while prices of food increased, and I could not find any proper accommodation in Lwow I decided to look for a job in smaller towns. After wandering from one to another, I finally was engaged temporarily by an organisation to reconstruct plans for existing cinema buildings in different country towns. I had to finance the whole operation myself. No advance payment, only a return ticket stamped "*Not refundable*".

My first assignment was Sniatyn⁵, a small country town on the border between east Poland and Romania. Provided with temporary identity card, special permission to travel by train and the border pass, I arrived late in the evening at my destination. I was warned that all the hotels were booked out by Russians and the only possibility of obtaining any accommodation was through the station master. May be he would accommodate me in his house or recommend me to another person. After embarking from the train I was immediately surrounded by the border guards and they let me go only after interrogation and some telephone enquiry with another authority. The station master apologised that for some reason he could not have me in his house. He directed me to a nearby house where the landlady agreed to take me for the night. She was a young woman in her late thirties with two children. She did not wish to talk about herself and her husband but she was rather curious to know something about myself; how I came from Warsaw, what am I doing here in Sniatyn, where is my family etc . I was sure that she was forced by the NKVD to examine everybody whom she boarded in her house. She was very nice to me and after she found out that I had nothing to eat for the past 6 hours she offered a bowl of soup and home made bread. It tasted like the best delicacy I ever had.

About 8 pm she prepared my bed, gave instructions as to how I should find the outside toilet and told me to wash myself in a bowl of water in the kitchen. It did not take long for me to fall asleep. I woke up about 6am. It was pitch dark and as I tried to turn round in the bed, I noticed that somebody else was lying next to me. From the smell of the skin I gathered that it was a woman. She was deeply asleep. I got up and went to the kitchen where my landlady was already preparing breakfast and warming water on the stove. She asked me how I slept and as I told her that a woman slept next to me. She asked me: "*What do you mean a woman? This was your wife*". "*My wife?*" I said. "*I never had a wife.*" She looked at me as if I were still asleep and did not know what I was talking about. She told me that shortly after I went to bed this woman knocked at the door and asked if she could find a bed to stay overnight. As the landlady told her that she only had one bed available and this was already occupied by a man, the woman said : "*That must be my husband*". "*If that is the case*", said the landlady "*then you can perhaps share the bed with him*".

As I had to leave early in the morning to begin my work, I did not bother finding out how this woman got into my bed. On the way back to my office I was wondering what I would have done if I awoke in the middle of the night and found a woman next to me. I recalled the conversation which I had with a Russian soldier who was drunk and frank and open in his opinion about some aspects of life in Russia. "*You will live but your life will be so miserable that you will even not feel like making love*". As the Romans used to say "*In vino veritas*" (The truth is in wine).

⁵ Sniatyn: Now in Ukraine. Fate of Jews during WW II: all were deported to Belzec death camp
Post-war: the community was not rebuilt after the war. Source : The Simon Wiesenthal Center (Ed.)

MORSZYN

After 6 weeks wandering again from one place to another and having temporary odd jobs, I finally got a proposal to go to Morszyn⁶ some 80 km south of Lwow. It was a health resort famous in Poland for its mineral springs helpful in stomach diseases. The conditions offered to me were like a dream. Free accommodation and meals and a monthly salary sufficient to cover my limited expenses.

My task was to prepare quotations and specifications for renovation of the desolated small hotels and guest houses and to get them ready for the coming summer season. There were two other engineers engaged for this work. I did not know either Ukrainian or Russian language so the specifications were prepared by us in Polish and then translated into Ukrainian by our secretary. Except for the Russian alphabet, no one of the Russian employees could understand the meaning of the words used in the specifications. There was a big difference between Ukrainian language spoken in Russia and the kind used in upland. The Ukrainian spoken in Poland was under the influence of Polish words and in Russia it was influenced by Russian language. With the help of a Russian engineer we somehow managed to send the quotations to higher authority for their approval. I worked in Morszyn for about 9 months. The perfect weather; work and nice company could not have created for me a better place to survive the war.

At the beginning of January 1940 my two brothers decided to leave Lwow voluntarily for Russia. Russians established in Lwow a recruiting centre for specialists who were willing to go voluntarily to Russia to work there in their specialities. Some of the volunteers were sent to the coal mines in Donbas⁷ where they never saw the light of the day and never returned home.

Although everybody was against my brothers' decision, they both reasoned correctly that the war between Germany and Russia was unavoidable and would finally break out sooner or later and they preferred to stay some 3000 km away from the front line. They also argued that if somebody would approach them with such an idea while they were under bombardment of German planes, they would have grabbed the opportunity immediately. Shortly after they left, bad news began to circulate. The Russian authorities decided to deport refugees who registered with the local authority to return home and also some of the local residents who - according to informers or other sources - were capitalists, Polish policemen, demobilised Polish army officers and other "class enemies. About 1 and 1/2 million people were deported to Russia. About half of them never came back, some went with the Polish Army re-established in 1942 to Middle East. Some survived despite hunger, cold and harsh working conditions. My older brother who was a student at the university was saved from the deportation and he often came to visit me in Morszyn.

In August 1940 my good luck and ideal conditions for survival came to an abrupt end. The Russian authorities ordered the registration of the whole population in the territories occupied by them. The reason for the registration was to provide everybody with an identity card so called "passport". This identity card contained almost every

⁶ Morszyn: Also part of the Ukraine. Situated in the foothills of the Carpathian mountains. Ed.

⁷ Donets Basin, abbreviated as Donbas [dunbäs], industrial region East Ukraine. Ed.

detail of your existence. One could not move without it, lack of passport was synonymous with you being a spy or at least a suspected individual. Some of the refugees and local people lamented that accepting a passport was equivalent to acceptance of Russian citizenship.

In the beginning of September 1940 I was summoned to the local representative of the NKVD to collect my passport. As I was handed it, I also received a short letter telling me that I was dismissed from my job on account of paragraph no.11 noted in the passport. The full wording of the note was: "*Paragraph 11. Not to be allowed to live beyond 100 km from the border of the state and in district capital cities.*" I learned shortly afterwards that almost all the refugees not born in this part of Poland occupied by Russia were considered to be suspected element. I also learned that this paragraph was applied in Russia mostly to prostitutes, thieves and those convicted for crimes against law and order. The dismissal took effect immediately and I only had 14 days to leave Morszyn. I was shocked and devastated. My job opportunities were limited to big cities and with the coming end of the building season the prospect of obtaining work in my profession looked grim.

In desperation I turned for help to a friend. He was a Russian Jew and a doctor. He was appointed to be the head of medical staff in Morszyn. He was in his late fifties and still remembering the old czarist days. Often he was frank in criticising conditions of life under communist regime. At the beginning we were only listening to him but gradually we also expressed our own opinion: "the shortage of basic commodities, primitive medical instruments and lack of basic medication." He always had one unchanging answer: "*Do not you worry, you will get used to it*". I did not have much hope that he would offer some solution but I tried. He listened to me, shook his head and said: "*Do not you worry, you will get used to it*" "*You know.*" he continued, "*it is a Russian: if you do not get used to it you will die.*" And he added a Russian joke: "*There were some grave tombs which beside names, dates of birth and that of death have at the bottom of the stone two letters: N.P. It means in Russian: Ne pryvykl (He never got used to it).*"

My situation was hopeless. I was prepared even to go to Russia and join my brothers. But in their letters I could read between the lines that they were very disappointed with the way of life to which they could not get accustomed. Besides, how to go there with my passport which condemned me even before any interview.

I went to Lwow to my brother for a few day, then to another friend in other towns but I felt like a hunted animal. Any confrontation with the police could land me in prison. At the end of September 1940 I went to Tarnopol a district city situated north east of Lwow. In search of work I wandered from one office to another. I could not believe my luck when after interviews at most of the local authorities I finally received a proposition to work for a government insurance office in Brzezany . It was a country town some 100 km east of Lwow. It had approx. 8000 inhabitants before the war but the number of population swelled after the outbreak of war to some 12000. This was due mostly to the fact that local authorities admitted refugees with paragraph 11 in their passport. In effect the population consisted mostly of Jewish and Ukrainian nationalities.

I boarded a bus late in the afternoon and shortly we arrived at the centre square of Brzezany. It was dark and cold. I found temporary accommodation in the local hotel the only one in town. It had very primitive facilities. I was offered a clean bed in the common hall. The hotel had its own restaurant with limited meals. As I waited in the evening for my first meal I noticed a familiar face behind the service window or the kitchen. I recognised it immediately. It was the cook who used to work in one of the guesthouses in Morszyn. He was, like me, expelled from Morszyn on account of paragraph 11. He promised to find some accommodation for me but I did not pay any attention to his words as he was known as a bragger and not keeping his word. However, next evening to my astonishment he offered me accommodation, a bed in his own room, which he shared with his wife. It was rented in a small two-storey house on the outskirts of the town. He also offered to share meals with them, as his wife used to cook. He pointed out to me that in restaurant one saw only meals coaming on a plate outside kitchen service window and one does not know what happens inside the kitchen.

After few days as I organised my life, I contacted the local representative of the insurance office. He introduced me to a team of three co-workers: Mr. Leuchter, a man in his late fifties, a civil engineer, his son Victor and his nephew Fred both about 13 years old just after the high school examination. I was designated to be the leader of the team on account of my knowledge of Russian which I acquired in Morszyn. Our task was to reconstruct the plans of existing dwellings and buildings and to establish their value for insurance and taxation purpose. The manager of the office, a local man, was nominated for this position because before the war he was a member of the clandestine Communist party in Poland. He was a complete layman in respect of his duties and he was happy to get any professional advice.

I was quite happy with my work and conditions of my private life. Brzezany was a beautiful country town situated on the shores of a large lake and surrounded by hills and forests . Very soon I made friends with some of the locals. In winter I used to ski. From time to time I went to Lwow or Stanislawow. Stanislawow was a district city in south of Lwow. I met there some very helpful people during my search for job and made friends with them. I was in correspondence with my brother in Lwow and the two brothers in Russia but only a very limited contact with the rest of the family in German occupied Poland. The time passed working even late into the night because our remuneration was based on "piece work" although Russians officially condemned this type of payment. According to Marx "piecework" was the biggest exploitation of the workers by the capitalists.

At the beginning of spring 1941 rumours started circulating everywhere about Germany preparing herself for war with Russia. Every night we were listening to the BBC and small facts emerged which convinced us that the war was imminent.

In the middle of June 1941 I received a letter from Wisia⁸ a girlfriend in Stanislawow inviting me for her birthday party which was to take place in her parents flat on the 20th of June. I gladly accepted the invitation. She was a very nice girl in her twenties. I met her in Stanislawow through our mutual friends, also refugees while I was wandering from town to town in search of work. She was very helpful in every

⁸ This is not Wisia, my late mother's sister and father's future sister-in-law. Ed.

respect, devoting her spare time to the refugees trying to find for them, accommodation, work and all other necessities connected with everyday life. Although she was very handsome I felt that I could not fall in love with her. May be she was devoid of the type of attraction called 'sex appeal'.⁹

I bought for her, as a birthday present a pair of stockings, which at that time were a luxury available only on the black market. On the 20th June, Saturday afternoon I boarded the train in direction of Stanislawow. I arrived at Wisia's home late in the evening when the party was already in full swing. All the guests, mostly young men and girls, were under watchful eye of the father of the birthday girl. He was ready to intervene in any circumstances, which according to his view might be detrimental to the good name of the young ladies.

About midnight, when the party was over, I was shown my overnight accommodation. It was a surgery room on the 2nd floor, belonging to a doctor, father of one of the party participant. My bed was a surgery table with a sheet, blanket and pillow. I fell asleep immediately. About 6 AM Wisia rushed to my room: "*Get up immediately and get ready. The war with Germany begun at 12 midnight.*" She switched the radio on and I heard the famous voice of Joseph Goebels, Nazi minister of propaganda and information. The cliches and the speech were not new to me. It was full of invectives and accusations of the 'wretched Communists and Jews who were always responsible for every calamity in this world.' Wisia prepared for me sandwiches for me and about 7 AM I left for the railway station. I was fortunate because I caught the only train that left this day in directions of Brzezany. It took about 6 hours instead of the normal 5 to reach my destination.

I arrived in Brzezany late in the afternoon. The whole population of the town was on the move. People tried to buy everything that was available in the shops. The local council ordered all shops to be open on Sunday so that any panic was avoided. It did not help much. Within few hours the shops were empty. I managed only to buy a large loaf of bread and couple of tins of crab meat which were available in abundance.

I went back to my room. I changed some months earlier my accommodation to a self-contained attic room in one of the family houses. I used to prepare my own breakfast and supper taking my midday meal at a private household where hot meals were provided mostly to single people and refugees. The situation changed from hour to hour. Our office was in disarray, our manager disappeared and so did the majority of higher-ranking Russian officials. On Saturday the 28th of June I had my last hot meal. The owner of the "restaurants" declared that he was unable to cook more and told me to look for other possibilities.

About 2 PM the three Leuchters and myself whom I befriended almost from the very beginning, left our "restaurant" situated not far from the town square. We came to conclusion that the situation was ripe for making decisions. We decided that the best thing would be to follow Russians and take the evacuation train, which was supposed

⁹ In 1943 while in Warsaw I met a girl from Stanislawow. She was Wisia's friend. The first question I put to her was what happened to Wisia and her parents. She told me that one day in 1942 Gestapo gathered all Jews the local Jewish cemetery and shot them. Poor Wisia - I thought and that was the reward for her kind heart?

to leave Brzezany the next Sunday morning. I gave Leuchters the address of my brothers in Russia in case we were lost somewhere in transit inside Russia. As we were ready to say good bye, we noticed a low flying German bomber approaching the town square. We took shelter in the basement of a 3-storey house. The Russians did not provide any air defence for the town although it was a very important communication artery for the retreating Russian army, linking west, south and north towards the Russian frontier. The German plane dropped a bomb on one of the buildings destroying it completely.

After a while, as the situation cleared, my friends decided to leave the shelter and to go home as they lived not far from the town square. As I lived a bit further out, I decided to remain longer until it was completely safe to make my way home. I was not more than a few hundred yards away going towards home when I noticed a wave of German bombers approaching the town. I ran as fast as I could towards my home, Shortly before I arrived there, I heard several detonations and I saw a huge pile of dust and smoke coming from the direction of the town square. The bombing of the town and the retreat of the Russian army consolidated my decision to join my friends and other people who decided to evacuate the town.

The next day, Sunday morning, I packed the most necessary belongings in a rucksack and made my way towards the railway station. I did not walk far when I met an acquaintance from my home town Krakow. On seeing that I had a rucksack on my shoulders he asked me where I was going. As I mentioned my decision, he said *“Are you crazy? Is it not enough that you were a refugee for almost 2 years ? Do you know what Russians did to refugees from Poland? Stay here and wait until the situation is stabilises, then you can go back to your family and be yourself, not an undesirable refugee”*. I felt his remarks were quite reasonable but I still wanted to go to the railway station to meet my friends and to ask them to write to my brothers informing them about our family and myself.

On the way to the railway station I passed by the town square . I could not recognise it. Several houses were completely destroyed, among them the house where we sheltered. Some people digging in the rubble, some crying hysterically. There were some 20 people unaccounted for in this house alone. It was an enormous task to remove tons of brick, timber and twisted steel. Judging by the lack of machinery and labour force, there was no hope to dig out the buried people. The railway station was completely deserted. After looking everywhere I found one of the railways workers who told me that the evacuation train left the night before and he did not think that Russians will be able to organism another one. The only hope was to get a lift from the retreating Russian army. I went home with mixed feelings. I had no possibility to support myself remaining in Brzezany, neither did I have any intention to join my family in Krakow as much as I wanted to me them. I did not wish to be a burden to them until such time as I were able to organise my life in difficult and hostile environment.

My dilemma was solved by my landlord. He was, before the war a secretary of the local law court , one of not many Jews employed by the Polish authorities. During the Russian occupation he worked casually in different jobs. He had a wife and two children, a boy of 16 and a girl of 18. On seeing my despair, he put to me a clear suggestion: *“You will stay with us as long as you wish, you will be treated as a*

*member of our family. If you are able to pay for your food and accommodation, that would be a great help for us. If not, may be the good Lord will reward us in the future.*¹⁰ I was really touched by his attitude and I tried as much as possible to help them in running the household. I used to bring wood from the forest for cooking, carry water from the water well, queue long hours for bread and limited food supplies available in the shops. I handed them over some money, which practically was useless to me.

At the beginning of July the German troops arrived. First tanks and then tanks with German soldiers. They were moving south without any resistance from Russian army. From time to time we heard some artillery shots but this did not last long. Soon afterwards the military command took over the temporary administration of the town. To begin with they called the Ukrainian elders and asked them to organise the local municipality council with full responsibilities for providing delivery of food to the shops, maintenance of electricity and water supply. Then they called the elders of Jewish community and asked them to organise the council for Jewish affairs, "Judenrat". Judenrat was told to be on 24 hours call. Their responsibility, among others, was to organise labour force whenever the need arose. The members of Judenrat were responsible for any default and offence committed by Jews. The penalty will be death. The members of the Judenrat were terrified. The alarming news about German and particularly Ukrainian authorities in Lwow assured everybody that Germans were serious. Soon I came to conclusion that the war of atrocities started by Germans was entering into everybody's life.

At the end of July I received a letter from Lwow. I did not know what happened to my brother¹¹ there. He was studying at the university. I expected a letter from him any day as the postal services gradually went back to normal. The address on the envelope, which I received, indicated that it was written not by him. As I opened the letter and read the first sentence I knew immediately that something wrong happened. I was correct. The letter was written by my brother's girlfriend. She informed me that he was arrested by the Ukrainians while on the way to a date with her. She was trying very hard to find what did happen to him but to no avail. I wrote to my brother's landlady, a Ukrainian asking her for help. I did not receive any reply. The reason for her silence was most probably caused by my queries about my brother's belongings some of which were very valuable and useful to me.

Later on I learned from the people arriving from Lwow about the circumstances of the action in which my brother and hundreds of other young Jewish men perished without trace. The 21st July was chosen as the date to commemorate the 15th anniversary of the assassination of the Ukrainian hero Semen Petlura¹². The Ukrainian nationalists received permission from the German authorities to organise a pogrom of Jews in which some few hundreds Jews were murdered in Lwow. The Germans did not

¹⁰ Unfortunately they did not survive to obtain the reward either from me or from the good Lord. They perished in Holocaust like thousands of other Jews from this country town.

¹¹ Joseph Ed.

¹² Semen Petlura was an Ukrainian leader who organised pogroms of Jews in which about 17.000 Jews were murdered in Ukraine. He was assassinated in 1926 in Paris (in revenge for the pogroms he organised) by a Russian Jew who was acquitted after a sensational trial. Ed.

intervene and were quite happy to have one of the dirtiest and bloodiest jobs to which they were committed, to be done by somebody else¹³.

In the middle of August I was called together with my colleague, a local civil engineer to the Judenrat for an urgent consultation. The military commandant summoned the chairman of the Judenrat and told him that he expected that the German civil administration will arrive shortly and he demanded that the Judenrat immediately begins cleaning up the local high school building which is to be headquarters of the district administration. The second task was to renovate one of the country houses as a residence for the Kraishauptman the district governor: Both jobs were to be completed within two weeks.

The first task ie. the cleaning of the high school was not a problem. But the other one was really of great concern to us. The country house belonged before the war to the last Field Marshall of Poland General Rydz Smigly. It was situated on a vast block of land, beautifully kept by gardeners and landscapers. It was a holiday retreat for the Polish Marshal and his retinue. The Russians converted this house into several flats occupied by the officials and their families who left the house and garden in a very bad state of repairs. As we inspected the house, we came to conclusion that we were not able to guarantee that the renovation could be completed not only in two weeks but even in two months. We had no building materials and no skilled workers especially bricklayers and carpenters among the Jewish population. There were only Jewish painters, joiners, glaziers and plumbers but their work was the last one needed to complete the restoration. We conveyed our remarks to the Judenrat who promised to hire specialists not available from among the Jewish population and to pay for their work.

By the end of September the house was ready for occupation. We hardly finished this job working 12 hours per day including Saturdays and Sundays, as the deputy of the Kraishauptman came to the Judenrat with his demand. He requested one of the houses belonging to a Polish family situated opposite the residence of the Kraishauptman . He demanded that the house should be fully renovated again in two weeks time. We were dead tired from overwork and undernourished. The Jewish Holy Days were approaching and we knew that on these days nobody would come to work.

The Judenrat hired some Polish workers and the work went uninterrupted. On Friday midday the day preceding the Day of Atonement I was summonsed to the deputy Kraishauptman. He told me that the Gestapo issued an order to the Judenrat to assemble all the Jews on the grounds of the local fire station the next day ie. Saturday the Day of Atonement. This order applied to Jews between 18 and 50 years old. "*Listen to me you Jew*" he said to me - "*you will collect all your building workers who are employed in the renovation of my and the Kraishauptman's residences and form a separate column and under no circumstances join the other Jews*". I mentioned to my colleague the conversation with the deputy and in no time the news spread

¹³ Some time after the war the girlfriend of my brother visited me in Warsaw. She survived the war, like many others, on false papers pretending to be an Aryan. She told me that she was very happy to learn through our mutual friends that I survived. She came to apologise for my brother's death and to obtain from me an absolution without which she could not have peace of mind. My answer was short: "*Obviously that was my brother's fate and destiny*".

through the anole Jewish community. The Judenrat received similar instructions. The next morning we assembled as we were told, at the exercise grounds of the fire brigade in two separate columns. Our column ie. the building brigade - as we were called - which normally consisted of some 20 - 30 people swelled to some 120. The second column of approximately 700 people was immediately separated from us. After waiting some half an hour and listening to constant yelling, shouting and brandishing of a machine gun by the leader of the Gestapo, we the building brigade were ordered to leave the grounds. The other 700 men were loaded upon Gestapo trucks and shortly disappeared. Nobody knew what happened to them. There were speculations that they were taken to some special works for Germans. As they did not come back that evening, the fear for their safety and life grew from hour to hour.

The next day, Sunday, I met on the way to work a carpenter known to me as he did some work for our office while I was working for Russians. He was an Ukrainian, a man in his late sixties a decent worker and human being . *"I am glad to see you alive"* he said to me. As I asked him why I should not be alive he said *"Don ' t you know what happened to the people taken by Gestapo? They shot them in Ray¹⁴. Everybody who lives there knows about it."* I could not believe it. The Day of Atonement became "dies irae" (the day of wrath). Did the good Lord wish to punish the Jews for their sins or, as some rabbis later said *"the good Lord wanted to put to a test his people"*, who knows?

As German administration took over their activities it was hardly a day in which the members of the Judenrat were not summoned to the local German authorities with some demands. The: were related mostly to the private matters of German staff. Some of the Germans wanted furniture, the others repairs to be done in their houses. On the top of these demands Gestapo or SS blackmailed members of the Judenrat coaxing Jewellery or Americas dollars.

In the middle of October 1941 I was summoned to the local Municipal Council and informed that I was appointed as a civil engineer by the district building department one of the departments of German district administration. According to the Nazi regulations, a Jew cannot be a member of the German public service, so nominally I was an employee of the Municipal Council paid by them but delegated to the district building department. I was more than happy although my remuneration hardly covered my living expenses. But with my job I was entitled to a certificate issued by Germans which stated that I was working for the Kraishauptman and as such I was exempted from forced labour.

The next day I reported to work. I was briefed by the head of the building department (Kraisbaumeister), a local Pole with limited intelligence and knowledge of building and architecture. He had a diploma of building and before the war worked for the local council in the capacity of a council builder. He outlined to me the program of activities as demanded by the Kraishauptman, who had a vision of a new Brzezany, as a holiday resort for Germans after the war.

Our first task was to find out which buildings in the town square and its vicinity were damaged during last bombing and make submission as to their repair and renovation. I

¹⁴ Ray was a locality about 4km outside of Brzezany. It was famous for a beautiful forest and bushes.

met in the office another Jewish engineered local who was very helpful from the very beginning of my stay in Brzezany. He and his family have shown me cordiality and hospitality seldom expected and never experienced before. His name was Herman Neuschuller After a few days working together on our assignment we came back to the office with our report and conclusions. Having limited knowledge of German language, still much better than this of our boss, we outlined what should be done to preserve and repair the damaged buildings.

As the Kraishauptman read our report he became furious. *"Call immediately the Judenrat he told our boss. I wanted all the buildings around the town square to be demolished and you are personally responsible for this work. The Jews will be shot one after another if the work is not accomplished within the next two weeks"*. The bad news spread like a thunderstorm through the whole Jewish population. Some of the buildings, mostly blocks of flats, belonged to Jews but a few belonged also to Polish or Ukrainian landlords. Nobody could believe that such atrocities would happen. What to do with the tenants? Where to find for them substitute accommodation? Where to find people and machinery to do such a work?

The Judenrat tried by different ways and means to avert the Kraishauptman's decision. They tried to bribe him offering money and the most precious jewels. However to no avail. At the end of November the first buildings were demolished. The Jewish and non-Jewish workers were told by the Judenrat to work slowly. By adopting this way of work, the owners of the buildings were hopeful that the Kraishauptman would change his mind.

The winter came earlier and thick snow covered the roofs and pavements. It was an impossible task to work in such conditions, But the Kraishauptman was obstinate and by threats of arresting or shooting the whole Judenrat and their families, persisted that demolishing should proceed uninterrupted and despite hard winter conditions. We were surprised that he was satisfied with the buildings being demolished not completely, ie up to certain level up the ground and the rubble not removed. Altogether about 15 buildings were demolished in such a way.

In the middle of January 1942 a new tragedy fell upon head of Jewish population. Gestapo came to conclusion that Brzezany had too many Jews. Judenrat was informed that within two weeks they should prepare a list of unproductive and unemployed Jews in order to resettle them in other country towns. The Jews whose names were on the lists together with their families were to assemble at 5 AM in certain place and the Judenrat was responsible for organising the transport facilities. The destination - a small country town Podhajce - some 30 km east from Brzezany was mentioned.

In order to avert the deportation Judenrat decided to collect a few thousand dollars in order to bribe Gestapo. They imposed a levy upon every Jewish family including single people like myself. I almost burst into laughing as I received the notice from Judenrat to contribute 100 dollars to the bribery fund. Failing to deliver money on a certain date would autocratically put me on the list of deportees. I explained to Judenrat that my monthly salary amounted to 1.50 dollar (1 dollar and 50 cents according to black market rate) and I had no savings whatsoever as my salary was hardly sufficient to support myself. From the time I begun working, I paid to my

landlord almost my whole salary for food and accommodation. In addition to this in winter time I used to bring in my bag some coal which was kept in the basement of the administration building . I used to steal this coal with the full knowledge of the caretaker a decent Ukrainian who felt obliged to me for some favours shown to him during Russian occupation.

Two days before the date of assembly I received a letter from Judenrat asking me to appear at 5 AM with all my belongings at the town square. I did not know what to do. My first thought was to run away. I already made contacts with my friends in Warsaw who promised every help in case I did come to Warsaw. But I had no documents which would allow me to travel by train or even to leave Brzezany. I was not prepared for any escape although I decided to do it as a last resort if my personal plea to the German authorities would fail. .

A day before the assembly I went to the Arbeitsamt (Department of labour) as I learned that both the Kraishauptman and his deputy were out of town and the head of the building department refused any intervention. As I stood before the German official in the office of Arbeitsamt and outlined my plea, he looked at me as if I committed a crime and said *"You bloody Jew you will come as usual to work but you will be shot the next time you behave like this"*. I could not understand what was wrong in my behaviour. A few days later I learned. The chairman of the Judenrat was summoned to the deputy governor and was warned in harsh words that Jews did not show respect to Germans. They did not stand in attention while talking to German officials, did not step down from the footpath when coming across a uniformed German, did not greet them by taking off their hats or caps and did not wear properly the arm bands with the star of David, which should be worn high up on the right and not left arm. Guilty of not respecting these requirements will be shot on the spot. I understood my offence. I did not stand in attention while talking to the official of the Arbeitsamt.

The resettlement started with German precision and organisation. At 6 AM the horse driven carts delivered by Judenrat moved from the assembly place. The Judenrat was in constant contact with the Judenrat in Podhalce where, according to Gestapo order, the resettlement should take place. Judenrat in Podhajce assured Judenrat in Brzezany that everything was prepared to accept the resettlers, modest accommodation, food and even medical help if necessary.

The journey to Podhajce should not have lasted more than 4 hours . The first telephone contact between Judenrat was made about 9 AM. Judenrat in Podhajce could not give any information about any arrivals . The O.D.¹⁵ from Podhajce Judenrat after travelling on a bicycle for some 10 km did not see any traffic on the road. Fear of uncertainty and dark thoughts started to seize the imagination of the resettlers' relatives and of both Judenrat. The events of the Day of Atonement came back to their memory. As the evening came, and Judenrat in Podhajce still could not give any information about resettlers, rumours started to spread. Nobody wanted to believe that another Day of Atonement came upon Jews.

¹⁵ Every Judenrat was obliged to organise a O.D. - Jewish Order- service. It was some sort of internal police. They used to wear caps similar to those of normal policemen but with a blue band only. As a sign of their authority they were equipped with clubs. In some major cities they had even ranks.

The next day about 8am, as I was going to work, I met one of the Jewish O.D. He was leaning against a building wall. As I approached him I noticed that he was crying like a baby: I asked him what happened to him. He replied: "*Don't you know what happened?*" What he told me was unbelievable.

Approximately half way between the destinations a German truck with SS troupes stopped the convoy. They asked everybody to leave the carts, place all their belongings on the edge of the road and to follow them. There was a dense forest on both sides of the road. "*You can imagine what happened after*" he said. "*I will not forget it up to the last moment of my life. The crying of children and women and the panic which overtook everybody. Two of us were assigned to the convoy. One had to follow and the other to be at the front of the convoy. I was lucky to be at the end. As I saw the approaching German truck I run away and hid under the bush behind the thick tree. I could not see anything. I heard only screaming and crying. They could pierce the most obdurate heart but not those of German SS. Then I heard shots one after another. I thought they would never stop. After half an hour or so everything was quiet again. The OD who was at the front of the convoy perished with the rest of them. Germans did not wish to have any witnesses. They ordered empty carts to drive home situated in the surrounding villages between Brzezany and Podhajce. After sitting for a few hours in my hiding place I came back home but I do not know what will happen to me.*"

His story which shortly was confirmed by some of the owners of the horse driven carts shook everybody to the bottom of their heart. Did not the good Lord hear the screaming of the children? They did not have time in their short life to commit any crimes. Did the good Lord wish to test them also? The most erudite rabbis could not answer these questions.

NEWCOMERS

At the end of March 1942 two elderly civilian German arrived at our office. They were introduced by the Kraishauptman as professor Otto Schubert, an architect and Karl Sirks, an architect and town planner, both of them from the university of Dresden (Germany). Both of them were in the early sixties. We learned that they were commissioned by the Kraishauptman to prepare new plans for rebuilding Brzezany, and to transform it into a true German holiday resort.

While prof. Schubert was discussing matters with our Kraishauptman, I was assigned to Herr Sirks to show him around the town square. He was moved by the devastation he saw. After a while he asked me why some of the buildings surrounding the square had a different pattern of destruction. He could point out the ones that were damaged by bombing but he could not understand why some of the buildings looked like destroyed by human hand. I was afraid to tell him the true story. He noticed my hesitation and after a while said *“Do not be afraid, you can trust me that whatever you tell me will stay only between us”*. I told him that these buildings which he pointed out and which were only partially destroyed survived the German bombing and were destroyed at the Kraishauptman's order. He shook his head in disbelief. *“Now I will have an easy task to prepare a new layout and master plan of the future town square”* That was the end of our discussion. Then I also understood why the Kraishauptman ordered demolition of the remaining , otherwise sound buildings.

As I came to the office , I was informed that prof. Schubert would prepare drawings for the buildings surrounding the town square. In the mean time he was asked by the Kraishauptman to design a hunting lodge for him and his retinue somewhere in the forest. After two days prof. Schubert came with a sketch of a lodge and asked if we could prepare - according to his sketch - plans and specification within two or three days. It was quite a reasonable request - we worked very hard and after three days everything was ready for his approval.

Shortly after both of them left Brzezany and promised to return in two or three months with more specific drawings of the master plan and sketches of the most important new buildings around the town square. In the meantime we could proceed with the construction of the hunting lodge. Obviously the cost of the building was to be borne by Judenrat. One of my colleagues Mr. Neuschuller was nominated to set out the building and to supervise the construction of work. The team of specialist workers was formed and paid by Judenrat. Obviously the Jews working as auxiliary were unpaid and the only remuneration they received was an additional loaf of bread once a week. From time to time the progress of work was inspected by the Kraishauptman himself and as he did not express any demands or objections, we assumed that everything was progressing well and according to plan.

In March 1942 three newcomers appeared in our office. First was Mr Otto Lenz. He was a Jew and, as all of us he was also appointed by the local Municipal Council and delegated to work with our office. Nobody knew him before and nobody knew where he came from. He was in his late fifties, with a wife and a boy of three. Before the war he used to live and work in Warsaw. His appointment coincided with the establishment of the finance department at the office of the Kraishauptman. The head

of this department was a Reichedautche (a citizen of the Third Reich). He spoke fluently Polish but never admitted it.

Very soon Mr Lenz was familiar with everybody. He had an easy access to all departments and even to both the Kraishauptman and his deputy without any previous appointment. We learned that his job was to provide everything needed by the departments and was difficult to obtain locally. He would often go to Lwow in company of head of finance department and even at times, to Warsaw if some goods were not obtainable locally. They travelled to Lwow or Warsaw always by trucks with German crew. Shortly he established himself as a liaison between Kraishauptman and his officers and the Judenrat. He was fluent in German both written and spoken. We were always wondering where did he get his income because he never bothered to collect his monthly salary from the Municipal Council. We thought it was probably only a pittance in comparison with the commission he received for his dealings for and with Germans.

In no time he got acquainted with all of us. I have to admit that apart from his clandestine dealings with Germans he was honest and frank with us. Often he sat in his house discussing the situation on the Russian front. He always had the most recent and true information.

The second newcomer was a German architect .Mr Schulze. He was in his thirties, handsome and elegant always in civilian clothes . We learned that he was on the Russian front but was released from the military service on account of scurvy which he incurred due to lack of fresh vegetables while on the front line. He had no teeth and he looked always very embarrassed once he opened his mouth. He took over the management of the building department to our great satisfaction because the present Kraisbaumeister was indulgent and looking firstly after his own interest not mentioning his lack of intelligence and professional ability In time we became very fond of our new Baumeister Mr Schulze because he always would show us some discreet sympathy and help as far as possible, without evoking any suspicion on the part of German authorities.

The third newcomer was a Jewish architect Mr Henry Schwarz. During Russian occupation he used to work in Lwow in his capacity but after Germans occupied Lwow he run away to Warsaw assuming a Polish name and Aryan documents. While in Warsaw he was involved in some brawl with Polish police and being afraid of the consequences he came back to Brzezany where he had his parents and some other family. He was fluent in German because he graduated in the faculty of architecture at the German Technical University in Prague, Czechoslovakia. He was a likeable man and easy going. He was appointed to our office on the same conditions as all other Jewish employees. Having support from his the family he did not rely exclusively on the miserable salary which we all received. He was very helpful and cordial towards everybody and in no time we befriended him and accepted him into our circle of friends.

It was July 1942. Both the German architects arrived with some drawings. Prof. Schubert was most interested to see how did the hunting lodge, which he designed, looked. After inspecting the almost completed work he came to our office with a grim face. Some of the architectural details were constructed not according to his design.

He asked who was responsible for the supervision and why the changes were made without his knowledge and authorisation. Mr Neuschiller, who was responsible for the supervision tried to explain the reason for the changes but he could not convince prof. Schubert that they were justified. Prof. Schubert mentioned something concerning our responsibility which could have unpleasant consequences if the mistakes were revealed to the Kraishauptman. Finally he promised not to discuss the matter with anybody and if the Kraishauptman as happy with the building everything would be forgotten and forgiven. We were all terrified. If the Kraishauptman would noticed or be informed about the unauthorised changes not one of us Jews would be safe. Luck was on our side. We came to conclusion that some German could also be decent human beings.

The next day I had another unforgettable experience. I used to spend my lunchtime in the office. I was afraid to go out because there was hardly a day without any actions on the part of Germans affecting Jews appearing on the streets. As I was sitting in the office alone, the door opened and to my surprise Herr Sirks entered the room. He said to me that he was looking for some chance to speak to me but every time something prevented it. He apologised for asking me some personal questions but he wanted to help me. He asked about my family and myself - was I married or had some dependents in Brzezany. I explained that I was alone and the rest of my family was in Poland.

He told me *"What for are you waiting? Do not you realise that sooner or later Hitler will kill every Jew. Recently"*, he continued, *" I was coming home by train. I was sitting in a compartment with a German officer who was returning home for a short leave from the eastern front. He was somewhere in Ukraine where just before his departure about 20,000 Jews were shot. Men, women and children. He heard about such actions in some other Russian localities. So what for are you waiting?"* As I expressed my opinion that I could believe that one can shoot 20,000 people but how to shoot 3 millions? He told me *"You will be surprised. If Hitler promised to solve the Jewish problem once for all would do it. It is only a matter of time and method"*. He and myself did not know that the crematoria were already in full operation in the concentration camps. *"So what should I do?"* I asked him. *"Look"* he said *"I remember what happened in the first world war. I know that some soldiers survived by exchanging their own documents for papers belonging to the killed people. Perhaps you could obtain from somewhere Aryan papers belonging to a deceased person. You do not look like a Jew. I am going tonight by a car to Lwow. If you like you can come with me. For sure you have some friends who can help you in this respects."*

I thanked him but I also told him that I had to consider the whole situation, which I did not find for the time being as desperate. Although he sounded frank and sincere, I did not trust him or any other German. Long before this conversation I have already made first steps towards my future escape.

My friends in Warsaw who promised to help if I found myself there, were living as Aryans outside Warsaw ghetto. It was the family of one of the director of the construction company for which I used to work before the war in Warsaw. He was the man whom I met in Kowel and he was separated from his family during a short stop over in a railway station. He went to the east of Poland and settled in some small

country town where he had relatives. His wife and two daughters returned to Warsaw and after acquiring Aryan papers they left for a country town, a holiday resort called Milanowek, west of Warsaw.

I wrote to them asking if it were possible to procure for me a birth certificate to prove that I was an Aryan. Not long after I received a letter from them with a birth certificate belonging to a dead man. It did not suit exactly my age but this did not really matter. This certificate was a basis for preparing of all other necessary documents but still, I was not quite ready and prepared to escape although some bad news and rumours begun to circulate. In Lwow and some other cities the ghettos were already organised. The conditions under which Jewish population was forced to exist were beyond any human comprehension. Actions organised by Gestapo took thousands of men, women and children to unknown destination. I started to believe Herr Sirk's¹⁶ opinion. Rumours about imminent creation of ghetto in Brzezany were also more and more on everybody's mind. There was even a place mentioned which was suitable by its location for this purpose and some foresighted Jews begun to move there either by renting or swapping their houses or flats.

Some weeks before that my landlord was removed from his house. Automatically I was also deprived of accommodation. I found accidentally a house in the location of the planned ghetto which consisted of two large rooms and a kitchen. The house belonged to a Ukrainian but was empty because it was in a very bad state of repair. Through connection with some building contractors I was able to bring the house to habitable conditions. My landlord and myself were happy that at least we were able to avoid any rush when all others will be resettled. In the meantime my living conditions and financial situation improved tremendously. There were plenty of building activities in the town, Germans delegated to the service in administration were looking for accommodation, hence demand for plenty of renovations and repairs. The quotations submitted by building contractors to our department had to be written in German with which the Ukrainians were not familiar. For every quotation prepared by me in German I received either food like bread, milk, potatoes or money exceeding several times my monthly salary.

I was also in steady contact with the rest of my family. Prior to establishment of the ghetto in Krakow they moved to Jaslo¹⁷, a town some 100km south east of Krakow. Before the war it had a population of some 12.000. As I understood from correspondence with my mother the reason for moving from Krakow was mainly to

¹⁶ In 1956 my brother was invited by the Technical University in Dresden (at that time in East Germany) to deliver some lectures in mathematics I asked him to try to find out what did happen to prof. Schubert and especially to Herr Sirks. My brother found prof. Schubert who was an emeritus professor in architecture. My brother asked prof. Schubert if he remembered Brzezany and me. The old man pretended or really had not any recollection. My brother was under impression that he suffered from senility and lack of memory. He did not even know the name of the Nazi minister of propaganda Joseph Goebels. But he remembered what happened to Herr Sirks. During the heavy bombing of allied forces they were in an air shelter somewhere in Dresden. Seeing the misery of the children, women and old people Herr Sirks could not resist criticising openly Germany for starting the war. He did not realise that Gestapo had informers in every place. He was arrested and shot. He did not survive to be recorded in favour for his approach to humanity.

¹⁷ Jaslo : Fate Of Jews during WWII: in Summer 1941, a ghetto was formed. It was destroyed in August 1942 and its inmates were deported to Belzec, and murdered.
Post-war: No Jews settled there after the war. Source : motlc.wiesenthal.com Ed.

avoid the resettlement to the ghetto in Krakow. Besides that in Jaslo was a family of my brother's wife and as usual the provisions in small towns was much easier to obtain. Every Jew was obliged for his own safety to work in some enterprise working for German army. My eldest brother, a lawyer, worked as a painter and my brother's wife and my mother in a workshop repairing uniforms and shirts for German army.

In spite of the situation the letters which I received were full of optimism. My mother could not find any consolation after the disappearance of my second oldest brother in Lwow. She still believed that he was alive and working somewhere in Germany. From time to time I tried to send her some money by mail but I stopped doing this because the money did not reach her. One day I received a letter in which my mother mentioned that the situation in Jaslo was deteriorating every day. Hundreds of Jews were deported and nobody knew where to. She asked me if it were possible for her to come to Brzezany. She could organise the journey by train with the help of a local Pole. I discussed the matter with my landlord who, although hesitantly, agreed. As my financial situation improved I promised to participate in keeping our household on the same level without any additional expenses on his side. Alas one day at the end of July 1942 I received a post card from my mother with only a few words: "*We are going to an unknown destination. The girls - my eldest brother's twin daughters¹⁸ - were told that we were going for a picnic. May God help us and keep in his mercy.*" He did not although the girls were only six years old. Judging from the postal stamp I came to conclusion that the place where the transport with my family was heading for was Sobibor¹⁹, a concentration camp situated on the railway line between Jaslo and Lublin. The Germans with their perfect organisation and precision established the concentration camps in places to which transports of the so-called resettlers would not interfere with those supplying goods to the front line. I was completely broken. I did not know what happened to my brothers in Russia. I was alone.

One day in the evening as we were sitting as we often did in Mr. Lenz's house discussing the latest events, somebody knocked on the door. A man in his twenties with the Jewish armband entered the room and asked if he could talk to Mr. Lenz. He also asked if he could talk freely in the presence of two other colleagues and myself. He was assured that we are all OK. He outlined the purpose of his arrival. He came from a country town not far from Brzezany. He was very concerned by the alarming rumours circulating every day about the deportation of Jews and about some horror gas chambers operating in the concentration camps. He urged us to do something and not allow ourselves to be slaughtered like sheep. There were already some young Jews who fled from his country town and joined partisans operating in other regions. It was easy to say but difficult even to begin organising such an escape. How to get in touch with organisation who could help in this respect. It was easy for a single man but what to do with families like Mr Lenz's. Anyhow the young man gave us something to think about. He left after spending an hour or so with us because he wanted to make his way home before darkness.

The next day, as we were again in Mr Lenz's house and discussed the events of the previous evening another knock at the door interrupted our conversation. A young boy, maybe 18 or 20 entered the room. He looked miserable and tired. He had a heavy

¹⁸ Lily and Isa, born in Krakow, 1936, children of Abraham (Roman) and Rosalie Ed.

¹⁹ This appears to be in conflict with footnote 15 which suggests that the Jaslo Jews were deported to Belzec. Research on the Internet suggests that no Jews were deported to Sobibor from Jaslo. Ed.

rucksack on his shoulders, which he took off and asked for something to drink. He would be grateful if this could be something hot even a glass of water. He did not eat anything for the past 8 hours. Mrs Lenz brought him a cup of soup. To our great astonishment he took out from his rucksack a loaf of bread and cut a big slice. The bread was of a quality, which we have not seen for a long time. He ate like a hungry animal. After he finished his meal he began to talk: *"I was in a labour camp with some hundred other young men some 10 or 15 km from here. We repaired the road on which there was a constant traffic of German trucks heading for the Russian border. The road was in a very bad state of repair and only proper maintenance could keep it useable. As material for repairs we used small stones or tombs from the graves of Jewish cemetery. We had to grind by hand these stones, delivered every day by trucks and we levelled the road by means of heavy drums filled with water."* He showed us the palms of his hands. There was no necessity to convince us any more. *"One day - continued the boy - I had enough. I decided to run from the camp despite the warning of the camp commandant that if anybody would try to escape ten people chosen at random would be shot. I did not care, I had enough"* he repeated. *"Yesterday morning before the roll call about 6 AM I decided to have a go. The camp was not watched. It was only surrounded with posts and barbed wire with one gate facing the road. I slipped away unnoticed. It was still dark as I started to walk along the road. From time to time I rested in the trenches running along the road. I do not know how far and how long I was walking. It started to be light. Suddenly I heard a noise coming from a motorcycle. I realised immediately that it was a German sent by camp commandant. I began to run and as I looked behind me I noticed that the motorcycle was following me at the same speed as I was running. Shortly I gave up, tired. I stood in the middle of the road and waited. The German who kept a distance about 30 or more metres did not draw nearer. Suddenly I heard a shot in my direction. I ducked and after a while I heard one shot after another. I jumped from one side of the road to the other. Not one shot hit me. Then the shooting stopped and I heard again the motorcycle approaching me. I knew that my situation was lost. I have seen myself beaten in front of all the camp inmates and shot. It was the commandant himself coming across me. He asked me to sit on the back seat of the motorcycle and shortly we arrived back at the camp. He called one of the capos (camp police) and asked him to translate into Polish what he had to say - "I was the best shooter in my regiment" he said. "If I did not hit you this means that you should stay alive". Then he took me to the camp larder with food only for the German staff, and asked me to pack into my rucksack as much food as I could fit in . Then he put me on the backseat of his motorcycle and drove to the same spot where we met. "Go on" he said. "I do not want to see you again"*.

We could not believe this story. As a proof he showed us a big sausage, a loaf of bread superior quality, a few German made tins of meat, a packet of cigarettes and something else which we did not see for a long time - a small packet of chocolate. He asked us to show him the direction for the small town where he was heading to join his family. We never heard or seen him again. The story was unbelievable.

We were still thinking about the discussion, which we had with the man who advised us to save ours and our families life. With the bad news coming every day from different parts of Poland, we came to a conclusion that something had to be done. I promised Mr Lenz to enquire for him, his wife and child about some Aryan birth certificates through my friends in Warsaw. Within a short time three birth certificates

were posted to me. There was a difficulty to obtain or even to find birth certificates for a family of three already dead with details matching Lenz family. In this case my friends decided to buy 3 blank birth certificates, signed duly and sealed by the priest or head of the parish. This type of birth certificates was easily obtainable. My friend not knowing what Christian names and surnames to put into the appropriate columns invented some herself. It did not matter as far as Mr and Mrs Lenz were concerned. The boy however who was 3 years old and whose real name was Richard objected strongly to be called John. He cried as if somebody was trying to tease him. We realised that the child should be introduced to the new environment, which he had to face in case of escape, and his name should match the one, which was in his birth certificate.

The time for the departure of Mrs Lenz and her son was set for the first days of September. Mr Lenz was to follow his wife a few days later once she was settled down. The destination, as the first step, was Lwow. We realised that Mrs Lenz whose new name was Mrs.Sobolewski, had to have some other documents. To get a document confirming her identity I went to the local manager of the state health insurance and I asked him whether a lady who just arrived in Brzezany could join the scheme. He agreed and I paid the subscription fee and was given an identity card for her. As she was going to Lwow we decided to procure for her a letter of recommendation from the Kraishauptman. We were just in the final stages of renovation of a building for Germans. We could not obtain any glass for the windows. I mentioned to our German Kreisbaumeister that a Polish lady knew somebody in Lwow who had in store window glass. As she was going to Lwow on her own business she could also buy for us the necessary glass. However, she needed a letter of recommendation signed by the Kraishauptman in case she would have any trouble with the Ukrainian or German police. In no time the letter was signed by the Kraishauptman and brought to me.

We thought that we had everything ready for Mrs Lenz' departure. At the beginning of September 1942 Mrs Lenz and her son boarded the train and the next day in the morning Mr Lenz received a message by a secret code that his wife and son arrived safely in Lwow. They already rented a room with a Polish family. Unfortunately the joy did not last long. After a few days the contact with her husband came to an abrupt end. Mr Lenz alarmed by his wife's silence immediately left for Lwow and learned from the landlady of the flat rented to Mrs Lenz that the previous day two Ukrainian policemen appeared in the flat and accused the landlady of hiding Jews. She explained that she rented the room to Mrs. Sobolewski just a few days ago "*Do you know that she is a Jewess*" they asked her. "*Mrs Sobolewski's son must be a Jew because he is circumcised and as the boy is a Jew so is his mother.*" She was arrested on the market while she was trying to buy some food. Mr Lenz was desperate. He tried through some contacts in Lwow to bribe the Ukrainian police but before he got in touch with them he learned that the Ukrainian police handed Mrs Lenz and her son to Gestapo. Although the situation of Mr Lenz was hopeless he did not give up. He had good relationship with some influential German officials both in administration and Gestapo. He mentioned to one of them his misfortune and begged him for help. But the help although promised, did not materialise.²⁰

²⁰ Some months after I escaped to Warsaw I met on the street a lady whom I knew well while I stayed in Brzezany. She was a wife of a local Jewish doctor. At the outbreak of the war between Germany and

Some weeks later the German ordered that every Jew in Brzezany should leave his house and move to ghetto. It was in a completely new location not the one anticipated by us. A new struggle for obtaining some accommodation in the newly established places begun to dominate the lives of the remaining Jews.

Russia he was enlisted into the Russian army as a medical practitioner and retreated with the army to Russia. Mrs F. was very well provided for but worked occasionally only to satisfy the Judenrat and German authorities. I was happy to see her alive. After hearing from her how did she escape, I asked her what did happen to Mr Lenz. His efforts to save his wife and child were all in vain. A German high ranking official who promised him to intervene with Gestapo to release his wife arrested him after the whole affair came to life. One morning the official took him to the Jewish cemetery in the presence of two Jewish OD men, placed him on the edge of previously digged grave and shot him at the back of his head. The German left the cemetery asking the OD men to cover the grave with soil. My feelings not to trust Germans even the honest among them were justified. A day before the escape of Mrs F. Gestapo surrounded ghetto early in the morning ordering every Jew to leave his house, to form themselves in marching order and they were loaded in railway cattle trucks. The rest was obvious for me. I have not seen Mrs F. again. After the war I accidentally met her husband who was repatriated from Russia and looking everywhere for his wife. He learned that she was killed by a bomb during the 1944 Polish uprising in Warsaw. Such was her destiny.

MY ESCAPE

The arrest of Mrs Lenz shook me to the bottom of my heart. I started to panic because I realised that if the whole affair came to light, I would be next to be shot. I was responsible for the Kraishauptman in obtaining from him the letter of recommendation for Mrs.Lenz. I realised that I had to disappear immediately. I was ready to go and well prepared for every eventuality.

A long time before the discussion with Herr Sirks the German town planner, I made the first move. Firstly I confessed my plan to our architect colleague Mr Schwarz. He advised me to prepare documents, which would justify my knowledge of German language. He explained that according to his experience while he was in Warsaw Poles were very suspicious of anybody who knew German language, unless he came from the regions of Poland which before the war belonged to Germany. If this was not the case, he must be a Jew because only Jews spoke German. Mr. Schwarz also warned me not to settle in any part of Poland where the Ukrainians formed a major or even a large part of the local population. *"You will have to do with a third partner who hates Jews. Germans could not distinguish who was a Jew unless he had a distinct appearance wearing a beard side locks or typical Jewish attire. Ukrainians and some Poles had a sense of a tracking dog and they would recognise a Jew from a distance. So try to get to Warsaw. You will easily get a job as an engineer. You have to work and earn money for living. Try to avoid as much as possible your old acquaintances, Poles or Jews. Do not trust anybody. I have a certificate stating that I graduated as an architect from the German Technical University in Prague. If you could make any use of it without damaging it, I can lend you this document."*

It was a touching gesture. I started to think how to use this document for my purpose. I found in the office some special drawing paper hard like a cardboard. It was used by architects for presentation of their architectural ideas. The paper was extremely durable and one could write or draw on it and then erase everything without any trace. I copied on this paper in printed letters the exact wording of the graduation certificate of Mr Schwarz and legalised it with the Ukrainian notary who duly sealed and signed it. Now I erased everything that did not conform with my new name and particulars stated in my Aryan birth certificate. It looked excellent and nobody could question its authenticity. The next step much later, was to obtain an identity card with my own photograph and my assumed name and date of birth.

A few days before Mrs Lenz's departure I approached my German Baumeister and asked him whether it were possible to obtain a few days leave because I was not well and I wanted to see a specialist. *"It seems to me"* I said to him *"that I have troubles with my kidneys and the local doctors advised me to seek specialist' s help in Lwow"*. As a Jew I needed also a permit to travel on the train. He looked at me with a friendly smile and asked me to write an application, which he was going to refer to the Kraishauptman for approval. He mentioned that a positive opinion of the head of the local health department would help to speed up the approval. The head of the health department, a Ukrainian doctor in his sixties did not ask any questions. He signed the application without the slightest hesitation and handed it to me saying: *"You are doing the right thing. May God help you in your journey"*. I was sure he understood my intention. Within a day the permit to travel to Lwow and back was issued.

The next step was to obtain an identity card. The Germans did not introduce as yet the so called "Kennkarte" ie an identity card different for Jews from that for non-Jewish people. I prepared again temporary card on this special paper with my photograph and



Identity photograph taken in 1942

original data and after legalising it with the local council I altered all the particulars in the same way I did it on my architectural degree. I put all my best clothing in a small suitcase and took it to Mr Czerwinski whom I asked to try to deliver it to Warsaw. Mr Czerwinski was a local Pole in his sixties, a decent human being. He was a civil engineer working for the department of roads. I knew him almost from the very beginning of my stay in Brzezany. During the German occupation he often showed me his sympathy in different ways like providing food and moral support and advice. He encouraged me to escape at any time when we met: but always in a very discreet manner

Shortly before the tragic events of Mrs Lenz we had a sincere talk. I confessed to him that I was ready to run away and that my destination was Warsaw. I gave him my new name and the address of my friends in Warsaw in case something happened to me. He revealed to me his plan for my escape. *"Would you like to cross the border and go to Hungary? I have a friend, a station master in Potutory"* - (this was a junction where all trains heading in different direction had to be re-arranged) - *"I will arrange for you a meeting with him and you can be sure to get from him every help and assistance to cross the border"*. I was really touched by his sincerity. I liked the idea and was prepared to follow his advice. I knew that there were Poles and Jews who crossed the border, Jews obviously on Aryan papers only.

The misfortune of Mrs Lenz caused me to speed up the departure. It was Saturday. We worked only until midday. In the afternoon I went to the office already empty of employees, I took the typewriter and added on the permit to travel the word 'Warsaw' following the word 'Lwow'. In this way I could travel to either destination. The next day, on Sunday, at 6 PM Mr. Czerwinski escorted me to the railway station. Before we shook hands he gave me a small crucifix on a chain and said to me: *"wear it always on your neck in such a way that it is visible"*. He embraced me and as he said "goodbye" I noticed that he had tears in his eyes.

I boarded the train and within half an hour I arrived in Potutory. I immediately went to see the stationmaster. To my big surprise I learned that the stationmaster took leave and will not be back in his office before another two days. It was my first disappointment. I asked the man in charge when was the next train departing to Lwow. He showed me the platform and advised to take a seat in one of the carriages already set aside although the train was not yet due for departure. I did not take much luggage with me, a briefcase with the most necessary items. I placed myself in a corner seat and after an hour the train moved. The train was full of passengers. There was no light in the compartments. We travelled the distance of approx. 100km almost the whole night. The train stopped on every small station, waiting at times up to one hour for goods trains moving mostly eastward. About 7am we arrived in Lwow Central station. I did not know what to do. The next train for Warsaw was due to leave Lwow at 11 PM. I was not happy to wait almost 15 hours. It was not very safe to wander on the streets of a city unknown to me.

I wanted to visit the girlfriend of my brother but it was too early and, besides, I could not sit with her all the time I had to spare before the departure of my train. I was also unhappy to travel to Warsaw by this train because it meant changing in Krakow, a town where I grew up and was known to many people. As I discussed the journey to Warsaw with my Jewish friend Mr Schwarz, I was warned to travel via Lublin, another possible route, because this was very dangerous. Germans organised action very often on this line, took people out of trains and after selection sent them to labour camps in Germany.

I wandered aimlessly in the direction of the city terrified like a hounded animal. I remembered that Lwow had two railway stations: one central station and the other one where from some goods and passenger trains were heading north-west. I decided to go there and to find if there was an earlier train going in the direction of Warsaw. The luck was on my side. There was a train leaving in half an hour. I bought a ticket direct to Warsaw and was shortly seated in a train, which was supposed to take me in one direction only without any chance of return. Stopping on every smallest station, the train arrived early in the afternoon at a small town Rawa Ruska. I had a meal in the local restaurant, my first one since leaving Brzezany. I had to wait a couple of hours before boarding another train to Lublin before my last destination Warsaw. I spent the time window-shopping and was even allowed to stay and rest in one of the shops for an hour or so. It was late afternoon as I boarded my train.

The train was moving very slowly. Tired from lack of sleep during the whole night I fell asleep, Suddenly I was awake. I noticed a commotion among the passengers. We approached the station Belzec, the place where Germans established one of many concentration camps with gas chambers. As we neared the station I noticed German gendarmes standing along the platform. I began to panic. I ran to the toilet, took out all my original personal documents hidden under my shirt which I took with me as memorabilia of the past. Among others there was the last postcard from my mother. I tore away everything into small pieces and flushed down the toilet. By the time I finished doing all this, the train left the station with shout stopping. I noticed that I was not the only one to panic. Nobody knew if there was to be another action or whether the presence of gendarmes was to be a warning not to disembark at this station.

I was exhausted by distress and fear. The number of passengers gradually diminished and the compartment was almost empty. There were some young boys clowning and singing. I took a seat in the corner and after a while I fell asleep again. We arrived at some station where I was awoken by a loud noise. I looked through the window. The station was fully alight and hundreds of men and women gathered on the platform were crying and shouting. The boys in our compartment said only one word 'Action'. I realised that this was the beginning of my end. Suddenly the door of the compartment was opened and a German yelled: "*Alle heraus! Everybody out!*" One of the boys shouted "*Baudienst! Building service!*"²¹. An idea like a lightning came to my head. If they were Baudienst I was for sure the same. I shouted "*Baudienst!*" and the German soldier slammed the door. I recalled what my colleague told me about not travelling by train via Dublin.

²¹ Baudienst – building service was an organisation created by the German contractors working for the German government in occupied territories.

The rest of the journey went smoothly. I arrived in Lublin about 9pm. I was looking for a hotel where I could stay overnight until boarding the train leaving the next morning for Warsaw. I left the station. I noticed some women standing outside the station and offering overnight accommodation. I took advantage of it and went with one of them to her home. After a restful night and a healthy breakfast which I did not remember having for a long time, I went to the train station to continue the journey. It went smoothly. I arrived in Warsaw late in the afternoon. From there by a local electrical train I went to Milanowek where my friends were staying. They accepted me with open arms. They lived on Aryan papers, as Mrs Piekarszewski and her two daughters Irena²² and Ludwika. They changed accommodation and names for the second time, as they had to leave their first address blackmailed by Polish hoodlums. Those accused them of being Jewish. With the help of a Polish friend they found the present accommodation.

Milanowek was a holiday resort some 30km west of Warsaw. They had a flat consisting of two rooms and a kitchen. The bathroom they shared with other tenants. The house belonged to a family who left Poland in the first days of the war. The rest of the house was occupied by a Polish family resettled by Germans from northern part of Poland and incorporated in German Reich. It was under the administration of a Pole who was entitled to cash the rent for himself in lieu of a salary.



Milanowek house
Picture taken in May 1987

Mrs Piekarszewski mentioned that due to worsening situation of Jews in Eastern Poland she expected arrival of her husband and several members of her family at any time. She procured for them Aryan documents and as her husband could not bear the same name as herself, he was to be accepted as a friend. His name was Mr. Kalinowski*. The other reasons for such an arrangement was the fact that previously she told her neighbours that her husband was deported by Russians as POW to some unknown destination in Russia.

- assumed name of Joshua Oberleder

After a restful night I decided to go to Warsaw to legalise my certificate of degree by a German notary. I did not like the one I prepared in Brzezany. The new one prepared by the German Notary was typed on a proper paper sealed and signed and looked genuine. Then I went to be a girlfriend who fled from Lwow to Warsaw some weeks before. I wanted to ask her whether she knew of a room that I could rent, as I did not wish to occupy space in my friends place on account of the expected arrival of their family. We were utmost careful not to speak in her room afraid that somebody can overhear or wonder why we were whispering. We went therefore for a walk. She told me about her escape, an unforgettable experience.

²² Father's future wife and her sister known as Wisia Ed.

Her father joined the organisation 'TODT' a paramilitary organisation used by Germans to build railway lines, fortifications etc in occupied territories. He was sent to Norway. Her mother was transported to a concentrations camp where she most probably perished. She herself was lucky to be somewhere else when the action took place.

We were so busy talking that we did not notice the people in the street running in every direction. I realised we were in an action. German trucks blocked the street and the situation looked hopeless. By some miracle my friend escaped and I, in no time, was taken by some plain clothed policeman and led to an entrance hall of a house. I was asked to show my identity card. He studied it for a while and then asked in excellent Polish what I was doing in Warsaw. I explained that I arrived from Lwow where I was working for a building contractor. I wanted to explore possibilities of buying building materials, which were in short supply in Lwow. This was a story, which I invented previously for any eventuality. The policeman looked at me and returning the identity card said "*You better be careful, you know what is going on here in Warsaw*". I was lucky for the second time. I then remembered a Polish saying: "The luck can be only three times on your side". I was free but shaking like a leaf. I was looking for my girlfriend. In the last minute when I was caught, I saw that she turned into a side street and for sure escaped. In my shock I did not know what to do. I decided to return to Milanowek.

I was surprised to see her in my friends' home. All of them looked at me as if I was a ghost. They were all not only worried as to what was going to happen to me but their own situation also looked grim. They were afraid what would happen to them and their relatives on the way to Milanowek in case of my being interrogated and asked about the people and place of my residence. They were all overjoyed as I told them what took place. I realised that I could not remain with them and endanger their situation. I decided to look for a separate accommodation preferably in Warsaw.

Mrs. Piekarczyk offered a solution. She already rented a room Warsaw in a flat occupied by a Polish family. It was kept in case of her husband, who was on arrival to be introduced to her neighbours as a friend, could not stay with them in Milanowek. She offered this room for me to use until the situation of her husband was clarified. As he was no more a strung man, commuting between Warsaw and Milanowek would not be advisable. Soon after that Mrs Piekarczyk found in the house in which she stayed with her daughters an unoccupied room in an attic. After some renovations this could be a perfect accommodations for her husband. The deal with the administrator of the house came easily through.

My new landlords occupied a flat in an enormous block of flats at No.18 Nowakowski Street opposite the Technical University of Warsaw. They were a couple in their late fifties, both employed in public service. They came from a city in northern part of Poland, which was incorporated, into the German Reich. The flat had three rooms, a kitchen and bathroom. Except for Sundays and evenings during the week they were not at home. They were a nice and friendly couple. They did not ask any questions. I only had one problem to overcome. Every new inhabitant or lodger had a duty to register with the local population evidence office. On the top of it, every house was obliged to keep an evidence book of ell inhabitants. This was kept by the house caretaker. After filing a special application form in which all personal data including

names of parents religion and the previous address had to be given, the application form had to be submitted to the evidence office. The same data were entered in the house book, recorded and stamped.

With influx of Jews looking for shelter in the Aryan side of Warsaw, the registration was getting more difficult. After some time it was almost stopped unless justified by an important reason. A great number of officials working for the evidence office could always make such a registration possible obviously for a considerable payment. This was however connected with some danger because knowing the address of a Jewish applicant a scoundrel could easily blackmail him. The caretaker who usually took the application and the house book was always happy to do so because he knew he would be generously rewarded for his effort.

I did not have any difficulties in registration. I gave my previous address in Lwow which was false. I knew that under normal circumstances nobody was going to check it. I also gave my address in Warsaw where I lived before the war. I knew it could not be checked as the house was completely destroyed in the early days of the war. Everything went smoothly and I was accepted as a genuine Aryan citizen of Warsaw. The next step was to find a job. It was not very safe for me to work in building industry as I did so before the war in Warsaw and I could easily meet a worker who knew me under my real name. Mrs Piekarczywski who was a shrewd woman and who made her living by buying and selling whatever could bring a profit, found during one of her business trips to Warsaw that so called advisory office was looking for a worker with knowledge of German language. This office nominally engaged in typing and translating from Polish to German letters, petitions and other applications, suited me very well for the start. After a short interview I was accepted with a salary sufficient to support myself.

I was not very busy and I soon found out that this type of business activity was not the main source of income of the owner. He was not very interested in my work. Often he would not pay any attention to the amount of money I contributed by my work to his income. He always had customers with whom he had secret discussions without any witnesses behind closed doors. One day I overheard a conversation between him and a lady who was in tears. As he parted from her, he added : *"I will do my best. I have an appointment tomorrow with an influential man, I am sure he will be able to do something"*. It did not take long for me to come to conclusion that his main business was not typing letters and applications but intervening with Gestapo or German police in release of arrested Poles.

Although I was quite happy with my work I was still looking for a job outside Warsaw and in my profession. Reading 'positions vacant' in a German newspaper I found that a German building company was looking for a building engineer to work outside Warsaw. I applied and after a short interview showing my fake credentials, I was accepted with a salary exceeding my expectations. On the last Saturday before beginning my new job I was sitting in the office waiting for my boss to tell him my decision as a late customer arrived. He asked me to translate and to type some application to German authorities. As I handed him the documents he looked at me and asked *"Did we not meet before somewhere? - are you not coming by chance from Krakow?"* I recognised him immediately. He was my school mate. We have not seen

one another for 15 years but he did not have any doubt as to who I was. Before leaving he said to me *"Don't you worry I will not denounce you"*.

On Monday morning Mrs Piekarczywski rang my boss to tell him I was sick and most probably I will not come any more to his office. In the meantime I reported to my new office and after briefing about my new work and responsibilities I was taken by car 80 km east of Warsaw to Malkinia. This was a very important railway junction noted especially, as all transports of Jews packed in cattle trucks from all over Europe passed through it to their last destination ie. the famous Treblinka concentration camp. Germans did not bother to hide these transports and often one could hear during day or night voices crying for help or water. I was introduced to the local railway authority – Ostbahn - run by Poles and German management. The man in charge of the building department explained what I had to do. Along the railway line, some 50km north, Germans decided to build signal and small railway stations. The office in Malkinia was responsible for delivery of some materials unobtainable on the official marketplace cement, bricks and also vouchers for steel and timber. The contractor was responsible for hiring the work force and for obtaining the rest of the building materials.

I found accommodation in a house of a retired railway worker and everything looked very promising. The largest advantage of my job was that it entitled me to an identity card signed by the chief of Ostbahn. This identity card stated that I was working for this particular authority and I was 'Kriegswichtig' ie my work was important for the German war efforts. Later I came to conclusions that I could provide such identity card for my friends even though they had nothing to do with the work on the railway. Nobody controlled how many such cards were issued.

The second advantage was the fact that I had another accommodation, which, in case of some blackmail in Warsaw, could give me a safe shelter. In the meantime I acquired a new room mate in my Warsaw home. One of the relatives of Mrs. Piekarczywski who came to Milanowek later than I was looking for a room. I was more than happy to share my room with him. Every weekend I went back to Warsaw and from there to Milanowek where I spent the time with my friends.

Malkinia and the small villages around it were famous also for another reason. This was a place where traders from Warsaw were coming to buy country products mainly butter and meat, and then smuggled them to Warsaw black market. Although the prices were high for those products, this was an important way of providing supplies for the population: who otherwise would not survive on German rations. The smugglers, mostly women, would usually come Fridays or Saturdays. They carried the products in small suitcases or packets. The big smugglers loaded the products into large suitcases and located them in the railway engines with full knowledge of the engine drivers. Germans organised, from time to time, an action. Initially the punishments were severe but with time they were happy to confiscate the goods and divide them between themselves. As I was returning home practically every Saturday I knew almost all the traders and they knew me.

The organisation of smuggling was perfect. Two or three stations before Warsaw the families of the traders, normally older people, would warn the passengers about the presence of German police or gendarmes with words 'Warsaw is taking'. Sometimes

the action took larger proportion. The arrival platforms and the exits in Warsaw were full of German police. At the same time one could notice old people with small children waiting at the exits. At a wink or secret hand movement, the child would run towards the arrested woman and cry and scream "Mummy! Mummy" and hang onto the skirt for so long until German policemen would release the victim. Obviously the child had nothing to do with the arrested woman and hardly even knew her. The organisers of such children "lending organisation" got their reward either in money or products and everybody was happy.

I myself was always smuggling something like excellent homemade rye bread, butter and ham. The bread, which Germans rationed to the population, was not eatable and the ratio of butter or meat was almost non-existent. I developed a system to be immediately released if I was caught by Germans in action or during the search organised at times by Germans in trains. Before they would ask me any question I approached them first and would show them my identity card. It always worked perfectly and I was released without any further questions.

My financial situation was very good. I could not spend all my salary because I paid for my accommodation in Malkinia much less than in Warsaw. My roommate in Warsaw paid almost all the rent with my participating in only a fraction. The food in country towns was much cheaper than in Warsaw.

One day, as I finished my daily work, the station master of a little village station where we were building a new railway station asked me if I could come to his place for dinner. I did not wish to refuse because I was afraid that he would be offended. He promised that he will organise transport back to Malkinia before the curfews so that I would be there in good time. As I entered the dining room in his house I could not believe my eyes - the table covered with a white tablecloth was full of delicacies, which I did not see since the beginning of the war. He explained that for some time he wanted to invite me to his house because I was building for the village an important addition to the railway and he, his family and some friends felt they wanted to show me their gratitude. The time passed quickly in eating and drinking. I tried not to drink too much. As the time of departure approached, the secret of the invitation came out. "*You see Mr. R.*" the stationmaster began. "*My brother-in-law is rebuilding his house. It was partially destroyed during the war. He needs 5 bags of cement and about 20 bricks to finish the work. Could he somewhere obtain this material?*" I understood what he had in mind. I took a piece of paper and wrote a note to the man in charge of the storeroom where we kept all the building materials delivered by Germans. "Please allow Mr. X to collect 5 bags of cement and 20 bricks". I was sure that nobody will notice such an amount of cement and bricks missing.

A few days later we wanted to pour concrete for the floor of the building. I did not bother to check the amount of cement in store. The next day as I boarded the train for Malkinia the stationmaster called me in the last minute before the departure of the train and handed me an envelope. "*A letter for you Mr.R.*" I did not know who could write a letter to me. Definitely it could not be from my office or from any of my friends. I opened the envelope while the train was already moving. To my surprise it contained a 500 zloty banknote without any explanation. I accepted a bribe for the first and the last time in my life. I thought if this was for the 5 bags of cement and 20 bricks it was much too much.

The following day I went to the storeroom to see if we had enough cement to pour the concrete. To my horror I discovered that we had only a few bags left. I asked the storeman where was the cement gone. He showed me my note to him. Instead of 5 was 50 bags and not 20 but 200 bricks. I did not know what to do. First of all I rung the railway office in Malkinia and beg them to send me as soon as possible 100 bags of cement. 'No worries', they said. 'You will have it by tomorrow' One problem was out of my head. But how to justify such a usage of cement on a small building? I could not sleep the whole night. Come Saturday and before boarding the train for Warsaw I invited for lunch the officer in charge of the building materials in Malkinia. I wanted to find out how do other contractors on building sites around Malkinia settle their accounts for materials supplied by Germans. I was especially interested in cement. He started to laugh. After lunch he took me to a shed where they stored cement. There were hundreds of bags with lapidated cement. "*You see*" he said "*who is able to count cement?. Germans are happy to order and deliver any amount of cement that is required. The amount of cement, which they order, testifies their building activity. If they would stop ordering it would mean that no work was in progress and they would be sent to the front line. So forget about any account*". I slept like a log the following night.

In December 1942 I had to solve another problem. At the beginning of 1942 German authority issued an order to all district councils in Warsaw to provide identity cards for every Polish Aryan inhabitant . They were called 'Kennkarte'. Every district council announced the date when inhabitants living within its border had to apply for such a *Kennkarte*. The distribution of these cards progressed very slowly. The applicants for the *Kennkarte* had to submit his birth certificate, proof of registration as an inhabitant of Warsaw, the address of his permanent residence and two photographs. After four weeks the *Kennkarte* had to be collected personally and fingerprinted in presence of the council official.

For Jews living in Aryan papers this was a dangerous situation. The offices of the council dealing with issue of the *Kennkarte* were full of informers and hoodlums who sniffed like dogs any persons with Jewish appearance and, obviously, blackmailed them, coaxing out of them large sums of money and jewels.

There were some 'entrepreneurs' who for large sums of money would come to a timid Jewish applicant, take his application and in no time bring back the *Kennkarte* duly stamped and fingerprinted on the spot. This procedure was also dangerous because a Jew who decided to go this way for obtaining the *Kennkarte* put himself in the hands of the entrepreneur. Knowledge of the address of the applicants made it possible for the entrepreneur to blackmail him or to send home some other scoundrels to him.

There were also other possibilities of receiving a *Kennkarte*. From the first moment, as the idea of acquiring Aryan papers for Jews materialised, some smart and ingenious young people established offices registered as 'Advice Bureaus' practically occupied themselves with procuring false Aryan papers, accommodation and even jobs for the hounded Jews. They worked discretely and with full confidence. Their fees were much higher but at least the "customer" was sure that he would not be blackmailed. Later on some Polish organisations were very helpful in this respect.

The time of my application approached. I was warned by my friends not to apply personally although I had an excellent Aryan appearance and very good employment card. To satisfy my friends I decided to use another way for obtaining the *Kennkarte* without help of very expensive go betweens.

On account of my work I was registered as an inhabitant of Malkinia. At the beginning of December my boss asked me to go to Siedlce, a country town some 70km east of Warsaw. Our firm was commissioned to pull down existing timber barracks on the military airfield, take them to pieces and load on a train for Russian front. I had a golden opportunity to obtain my *Kennkarte* in a short time. I told my boss that obviously I would be happy to supervise this work but I did not have any *Kennkarte* without which I could not travel safely outside Warsaw. It was a different story going by train to Malkinia because I had a work identity card issued by Ostbahn. To obtain the *Kennkarte* in Warsaw where I was registered as an inhabitant would take at least 4 weeks or longer. If I could get a letter to the council in Malkinia signed by the German military authority who commissioned our firm to undertake this job in Siedlce, I would obtain the *Kennkarte* within one day. In no time the letter signed by the military commandant was handed to me. The next day I was a proud owner of the *Kennkarte* for which I paid only the nominal price, a small fraction of the one charged by the entrepreneurs.

In January 1943 I went to Siedlce. It was cold and the snow covered the countryside all over. The work to be done was very simple. One had to watch only that the barracks should be pulled down carefully, the parts numbered and one by one loaded upon the train. The workers responsible for this job were young Jews from Siedlce. They were forced to stay in a labour camp where the conditions of living were appalling. There were about 50 of them. The majority formed a building brigade and only few stayed in the barracks preparing food and doing some auxiliary work. It was a depressing experience for me, especially so that their supervisor, a young Pole, did not show any mercy to the poor people using at times a whip to force them towards more production work. I was disgusted. As I could not intervene against his cruelty because I did not wish to be involved in any argument with him, I found another way to pacify him. I approached a German foreman, a man in his late fifties. He supervised the work as a representative of the military authority. I explained to him that this cruel method of speeding up the work applied by the Pole would not bring any results, as the poor workers were already exhausted working 12 hours per day. To my satisfaction I noticed that the Pole did not carry his whip any more but he looked at me in such a way as if I were responsible for the reprimand which he got from the German foreman. After a few days I left Siedlce. I did not think that the Germans could reassemble the barracks again.

In spring 1943 we had new faces in our office. Firstly a new engineer was appointed. His name was Walenty Karnas. Seeing him I did not have any doubt that he was a Jew. His name was probably acquired in the same manner as my own and many other Jews who fled from ghettos and tried to organise their life on the Aryan side. He was supposed to assist me in completion of all works along the railway line in Malkinia. Due to lack of materials, especially steel and timber, we could not do anything and I did not see any way of speeding the work. I took him to Malkinia, introduced him to my landlord who agreed to accommodate him in his house. I did not wish to ask Mr. Karnas many questions except where did he get his diploma in civil engineering. He

said that he started his studies at the University of Lwow but the closure of the university by Germans prevented him from graduating. The story looked to me a bit peculiar as his age and knowledge of building science indicated: that he must have graduated before the war. I did not ask any more questions. There was no necessity for me to have any assistant. Without the basic materials we could not do much.

The situation on the east front, after January 1943 deteriorated. The German Army was surrounded in Stalingrad and was in full retreat. The building activities diminished. I reported to my supervising engineer, a Pole, that Mr. Karnas could cope with all problems on his own and I would be glad to obtain some other responsibility. The supervising engineer was not happy with this suggestion. I noticed that he was very angry because first of all he did not have any work for me and secondly his role as supervising engineer was also in jeopardy. He decided to get rid of me. I was given notice to quit work. I was rather happy to leave this office although I did not see any possibility of getting a new job. On the other hand my personal safety in the office was endangered. At the same time as Mr Karnas was appointed a secretary also joined the office. Her name was Mrs. Brzeski. She was fluent in German and excellent in shorthand and typing. With her appearance and behaviour I had no doubts that she was a Jewess. I said to myself: "too many Jews in one office".

The next reason why I was anxious to leave the office was a new commission, which the firm received from German authorities. After the Jewish uprising in Warsaw ghetto Germans set fire to all buildings in that area. Some of the buildings were in Such a state they could collapse at any moment. Our task was to demolish the buildings to safety and to make the roads clear from debris. One afternoon in July the German director of the firm took me and Mr. Karnas to show us what we had to do. The entrance to the ghetto was guarded by Ukrainians and Latvians in German uniforms. They took us inside of one of the houses and showed us how the ghetto's inhabitants prepared themselves for the long siege which they expected after the uprising. There were bunkers located in the basement of almost every house. Some were dug even below the level of the basement. All had been provided with electricity or kerosene lamps, water and sewerage²³. As I entered one of the bunkers I realised that I could not work on this assignment. The stench was unbearable and the spectrum of death which looked at me from every corner of the room was too much for me. Shortly after this inspection I was more than happy to leave my job.²⁴

²³ Most of them were not built by the Jewish resistance. A few years before the war the Polish government ordered that all the houses in larger cities had to have an air shelter, with reinforced concrete walls and ceilings, equipped with all facilities necessary for living

²⁴ In 1947 I came to Warsaw looking for a job as we decided to move from our present location in Gliwice to Warsaw. By chance I learned that Mr. Karnas, was a big snob and was working with the Ministry of Reconstruction in the capacity of a departmental director. I went to his office and asked the secretary if I could see him. I mentioned my name and in no time Mr Karnas embraced me like an old friend. He told me how did he survive after the Warsaw uprising with the help of our German director. I asked him if his wife also survived. He looked at me bewildered: "*How did you know that I had a wife?*" I told him that he was a bit careless to introduce his wife as his cousin, one day when she arrived at our house in Malkinia. To me she looked very Jewish and sharing the same room with him overnight was very suspicious. He told me that unfortunately she did not survive and she was killed during the Warsaw uprising. He also told me that although I looked to him to be a decent Pole who could not betray anybody, he had some reservations about my origin. This was based only on one fact: As many times as we stood against the fence to urinate, I tried always to be a few yards away from him. As I told him that I am also from the 'chosen nation' he almost fell over from his chair. He recommended me to some building organisation where I got an excellent position.

I had to look for a new job.

One day I noticed an advertisement in a Warsaw German newspaper that a German company had a vacancy for a building engineer with knowledge of German language. I applied and was immediately appointed. The name of the firm 'German Housing company'. The director of the office was an Austrian Nazi, a fat big man in his late fifties. His name was Mr. Jackel. He had a secretary, Mrs. Hagen, a young German lady. He pretended that he was a very busy man and needed always the assistance of his secretary, as somebody said, even in bed.

He explained to me the activities of the company. There were some buildings in Warsaw and particularly so in country towns around Warsaw which were constructed before the war but not fully complete due to the outbreak of war. These buildings with an unknown or Jewish owners were declared abandoned. They were taken over by so called commissioners appointed by the German authorities. My job would be to inspect the houses, prepare quotations and necessary drawings for the completion of the buildings. The majority of this type of houses was situated outside Warsaw and I had to travel from time to time. Obviously the travel expenses would be paid fully by the company.

The office of the company was situated not far from the centre of Warsaw, in a new four storey housing building. The house was classified 'Nur fur Deutsche - only for Germans' It consisted of one flat and a food store on ground floor and two flats, each on the remaining floors. The office and the private accommodation for him and his secretary were in one flat on the first floor and the second flat consisting of one room, kitchen and a bathroom on the same floor was nominally designated to be the staff office. In practice it was rented to a young Polish woman who occupied the kitchen and the bathroom only. The rent, as I found, was paid to the pocket of the director. I did not know who occupied the flats on the other floors. I never noticed anybody moving from these floors. The secretary showed me my working room, my desk and my drawing board. She mentioned that I could use this as my private accommodation whenever I wished to do so. It already had a bed and a cupboard where I could store my private belongings. I was more than happy with the arrangement. I now had four chances of shelter in case I was in trouble, two in Warsaw, one in Malkinia and one in Milanowek.

My first assignment was Ostrow Mazowiecki. It was a country town on a railway line situated some 30km north of Malkinia. I knew this town very well because of working with the previous company I sometimes visited the market there and bought food for myself and for my friends. The next day after I was appointed the director Mr Jackel took me in his car to Ostrow Mazowiecki and introduced me to the local German officials and helped me to find another temporary accommodation. To celebrate my appointment and - as he said - our cooperation, he invited me to a local restaurant for a dinner. As I noticed, he knew everybody and everybody knew him. After the dinner he left for Warsaw and I was left to begin my new work. In a short time I realised that I would be spending only a couple of days on the assignment. I tried not to work too

hard and to spread the work over a longer period. At the end of the week I returned to Warsaw to prepare the necessary drawings and specifications. I finished everything in a few days and handed the whole documentation to Mr. Jackel. He only glimpsed at it and without going into any details he said only one word 'Excellent'. I asked about my next job. I noticed that this embarrassed him. After a while he said "*Machen Sie weiter*" - *carry on*). I then recalled what did the Polish officer of the railway in Malkinia told me when I asked him how to settle the amount of cement delivered by Germans. If Mr. Jackel would employ only a secretary without any other staff, he would be asked by his superiors what he was doing. My employment was necessary to cover his and his secretary position.

From then on I did not ask any questions. I was sitting in my office at the drawing board pretending that I was very busy, studying some technical books or reading newspapers. From time to time I went to Ostrow Mazowiecki under the pretext that I had to check some measurements.

After sitting in my office for several weeks and doing nothing I found myself work. I learned that not far from our office there was a building built just before the war and not completed. I asked Mr. Jackel if this building was in his scope of activities. Without checking he said: "*Yes go on*".

I spent another few weeks preparing the necessary tender documents, and after handing those to Mr. Jackel I did not ask what to do next. In March 1944 I met one of the contractors who worked for the railway authority in Malkinia. His name was Mr. Marshal, a Pole one of those who knew how to deal with Germans in order to obtain a profitable job. His technical knowledge was nil, but he had a great ability to convince the German officials responsible for accepting tenders that his limited quotations were the best and the cheapest. Although he had a limited knowledge of German language, he could easily explain to all concerned that if he were happy all of them would be happy as well. I used to help him at times while in Malkinia, in translating his tender documents into German, obviously for good payment. He asked me what I was doing. I told him about my work without going into any details. He wanted to know what would I feel about joining his company. He was a partner in a Polish building contractors firm. They were commissioned by the railway authority in Malkinia to build a new railway track, 10km long, situated on the line Wyszkw-Ostroleka some 80km north from Warsaw. He promised excellent conditions and a good premium if the work were finished on time. I would be in charge as resident engineer. I was very interested in his proposal and after some discussion with my friends in Milanowek I decided to accept the job. But what to do with Mr. Jackel? I asked him if it were possible to obtain leave without pay for a couple of months. He was more than happy. He put only one condition - I had to come to the office at the end of every month to sign the payroll list. I knew what he meant. He would cash my monthly salary.

On Monday morning I went by train to a small village called Pasieki. There were only small local houses around the railway station. The stationmaster and his wife greeted me warmly. They were told y Mr. Marshal about my arrival and we soon became friends. I learned in time that both of them were on payroll of Mr Marshal for services rendered to his company.

There were some 60 workers, most of them unskilled, engaged on the planned railway track. I was sure the many of them were Jews under assumed Polish names. I could only guess due to small details – firstly their hands showed that they never before used a spade or a pickaxe, secondly, even before beginning to work they asked for an identity card. It was nobody's and definitely not my business to worry about that and I was glad to procure such cards for them. The work progressed very well and for the time being we hardly used any materials difficult to obtain.

Every week an Oberbau Inspector (high ranking building inspector) would come from Malkinia to check the progress of work because only after a successful inspection: the contractor could apply and receive advance payment. As a rule the inspector would first of all have his lunch prepared by the wife of the station master with plenty of vodka . In effect he would be half drunk when inspecting the work .He used to come and return to Malkinia on a railway trolley with a special driver from the railway authority in Malkinia. Everything looked well and promising. On Saturday I went by train to Milanowek always bringing with me something special in food, bought for me by the stationmaster's wife. The situation on eastern front *was* promising for us from day to day and catastrophic for Germans.

MARRIAGE

My friendship with the family of Mrs. Piekarczywski in Milanowek deepened. I spent every weekend with them staying overnight and leaving early Monday morning, to catch the train to my place or work. The part of the house not occupied by Mrs. Piekarczywski was used by a Polish family. They were parents, two sons and a young daughter. The elder son was a butcher and supported the whole family. The other one in his thirties was a typical 'bon vivant' - a lazy man who was only looking for pleasure and easy life. The butcher, who had connections with food smuggler, bought butter and meat in large quantities at wholesale prices and sold it all with considerable profit. His customers were only reliable people and among them my friends. Often at night or on a Sunday afternoon, the butcher visited us and discussed the war situation. He was a very simple man and unintelligent. We used to write down his most unusual expressions, which did not make any sense in context of the sentences spoken by him. We laughed but not in his presence. He was very happy to mix with intelligent people and tried to impress them whenever he could. He always used to tease me: "*Do not forget to invite me to your wedding*".

I was very fond of the oldest daughter of Mrs Piekarczywski. Irena was a nice girl, handsome and good looking. She had a master degree in physical education and just before the war was working as an assistant to a medical practitioner specialising in physiotherapy for crippled children. She was always good company in sport and social activities. Before the war, thanks to her father, I obtained an excellent position in a building company in Warsaw in which he was the managing director. Irena also helped me to escape from Brzezany by sending to me an Aryan birth certificate and she encouraged my first steps on the slippery ground on which I was walking during my first days in Warsaw.

The first months of 1944 were full of sensations. The retreat of German from western front brought hope mixed with worries to all of us. The situation of those on Aryan papers and hidden mostly in small country towns around Warsaw became desperate. During the uprising in Warsaw ghetto in 1943 some Jews succeeded in escaping through underground sewer canals to the Aryan side of Warsaw. They received temporary shelter in houses or flats of their Polish friends but they could not remain here for any length of time. Their Polish friends were afraid not so much of Germans as of their Polish neighbours or hoodlums. After acquiring Aryan papers the Jews tried to find accommodation outside of Warsaw in country towns spreads all over the land. Hence an acute shortage of housing in this area grew to all proportion. The remnants and survivals of the Warsaw ghetto were prepared to pay every price to obtain shelter. The end of the war was eminent and with it a hope of a new life. What was the value of money or jewellery compared with a hope of survival?

Mrs. Piekarczywski paid for the accommodation only a nominal rent. The real value on the open market would have been at least 5 or more times the amount paid. From time to time she increased the rent out of her own will but it still was far below the market value. With the friendship changed to love Irena and myself begun to talk about marriage. We were rather prepared to wait until the end of the war. However some events around us sped up our decision. There were rumours going around us about great number of Jews hiding in Milanowek. Mrs Piekarczywski was really worried because in 1940 when she moved with her daughters to Milanowek, she told all her

neighbours that she had no relatives at all and her husband was missing during the war. In 1942, as the situation of Jews in ghettos in eastern Poland became critical she prepared Aryan papers for her husband and relatives. At the end of 1942 about 16 persons arrived to Milanówek all of them pretending to be distant relatives of friends of Mrs. Piekarczyński. Among them was also her husband whom she introduced as an old bachelor and an old friend of the family, His assumed name was Mr. Kalinowski. Mrs. Piekarczyński found accommodation for everybody, mostly in Milanówek or in neighbouring holiday resorts. She was a brave woman and supported herself and her daughters by trading, knitting and selling handicraft work.

In order to convince our neighbours that we were 'pure sang catholic', and Aryans we decided to get married as soon as possible in the local church. The date was set for Easter Monday, 10th of April 1944. Banns were read thrice after Sunday mass and all other formalities were completed.

On Friday, the 7th of April, three days before the church ceremony Mrs. Piekarczyński was summoned to the local council. The Lord Mayor opened the drawer of his desk and handed her a typed letter without any signature or address. In this letter an anonymous person informed the council that a Jewish family were living in the house which Mrs. Piekarczyński occupied. She did not show any consternation or confusion. She burst laughing and said to the mayor: *"Look Sir, without any doubt somebody wanted to blackmail us. We have been living in this place for the past 4 years. My daughter is getting married next Easter Monday in our local church. You are cordially invited to this ceremony and to the reception in our house"*. The Lord Mayor looked at her and in her presence tore the letter to pieces and threw these into the wastebasket.

Mrs. Piekarczyński came home shattered. The whole family was waiting for her. Everybody suspected the cause of the summon. We had immediately a family conference, we were sure that after destroying the letter the Lord Mayor will not take any further action. But what to do if this anonymous scoundrel sends a copy of this letter to Gestapo? We did not know what to do, where to go, what to do with 16 other persons with whom we were in constant touch. We realised that our flight would have a chain reaction for all of us. Finally we decided to take the full risk and go on with our lives as if nothing happened. We were sure who sent the letter. It must have been the administrator of the house in which we lived. His idea was to get rid of all of us and to rent the house for much more than we were paying. But we did not have any proof.

We all had sleepless nights, always vigilant. On Easter Monday before 4pm we made our way to the local church in company of two witnesses: one was the sister of Irena and the second my room mate from Warsaw. The family was represented by Mrs. Piekarczyński only. The rest, including our friends stayed at home, preparing the wedding reception.

From time to time they peered through the windows to see if some uninvited and unwanted guest was not on the way. In the same atmosphere passed the whole reception.

It was already getting dark when we left the house heading for Warsaw.

A week before we were getting married, I went to Mr. Jackal to sign the payroll list, as I did at the end of every month. I told him and his secretary about the planned wedding and asked if we might spend the night after the wedding in my office room. Obviously they agreed without any hesitation. The next day after the wedding, taking our most necessary personal belongings we went to Pasieki. I rented before a room in a small house, modestly furnished but quite comfortable for both of us. Irena was in constant telephone touch with Milanowek and , at the end of the week, once we found that the air was clear, we decided to go home for the week-end. After a few weeks of the nerve wrecking experience we decided that nothing was going to happen and we were safe. The good luck did not desert us again. Every Saturday we went home to Milanowek for the weekend and everything there looked quiet.

In the middle of May my boss Mr. Marshal, arrived as usual for inspection of work in company of the German inspector. We had lunch together and after the German inspector left, Mr. Marshal took me aside and asking some personal questions said: *"Mr R., I wanted to ask you if you could do me a favour"*. Obviously I answered that if it only were possible I would do my best. *"You see"*, he continued, *"I have a friend living not far from my home in Milanowek. Before the war he was an associate professor in civil engineering in the technical university in Warsaw. As you realise he is an excellent specialist in this field and if you can find for him some work like preparing drawings, statements, payroll lists etc. he would be a great help for you. There is only one catch. He is a Jew. Far the time being he is staying with his wife and a young daughter. His wife is Polish and Christian and he converted to Catholicism before they were married. Now his wife refuses to live with him under the same roof because she is afraid that as a wife of a Jew she would be subjected to the same fate as the Jews. She asked him to leave their place. She did not care where he would go and what he will do. If you could hide him somewhere I would be grateful"*.

I agreed immediately. The next day , when Mr. Marshal arrived with his protege, I nearly fainted seeing him. He was short, bald, wearing spectacles upon a crooked nose, typical Jewish and had moustache. Mr. Marshall introduced him as Mr. Tylbor. With his appearance, I was not surprised, that his wife refused to live with him. Probably, as it usually happened she was more afraid of the next door neighbours rather than of Germans.

I knew about some accommodation not far from where I lived. We wanted to rent it in case of the sister of my wife or somebody' else from the family wanted to visit us for a short holiday. The trouble with Mr. Tylbor was that besides his appearance, he was so timid that he did not wish to go out from his room and even to meet other people. My wife tried to help him by buying some essential food so that he could prepare his own meals. At nights he came to us for dinner. From time to time I gave him some work to do which he always completed in time and with precision. Saturdays he would go back to Milanowek with us, trying always to sit in dark corners of the train compartment with his hat covering his face and pretending that he was asleep. We did not wish to ask him where did he stay during the week-ends but definitely he did not stay with his wife and daughter.

In the middle of June 1944 after successful landing of allied forces in Normandy German army was in full retreat. Russian army regained part of eastern Poland. Obviously I could not be more employed by Mr. Marshal. We decided to leave

Pasieki . The job was halfway finished. A few days later I reported to Mr .Jackel and asked him whether there was a job for me . He could not give me any positive answer. I signed as usual, at the end of the previous month the payroll list.

I spent the time in Milanowek helping to run the household. We moved to the attics room occupied by Mr Kalinowski. He in turn moved downstairs and nobody paid any attention to it. Everybody in the neighbourhood took his presence as a friend of the family for granted. From time to time I went to Warsaw to relieve Mrs Piekarczywski from her duties in delivering some goods to shops or collecting money due to her. We watched with satisfaction the retreat of German army. Troops marching day and night were passing in the western direction. Young soldiers dirty and tired or half-asleep did not resemble the victorious German army.

About the middle of July I went again to Warsaw to see Mr Jackel and to collect the money, which I thought, at least once I should be able to cash for myself. He was not in the office. His secretary Mrs Hagen told me to come back in a couple of hours. Wandering in the streets I met the German director of the first firm which I joined after arriving in Warsaw from Brzezany. He greeted me and in the course of conversation asked what did I intended to do once the 'Bolsheviks would come to Poland'. *"You will not stay with them"* he suggested. *"I have an idea for you: I was commissioned to begin a big job in south Germany and I would gladly see you working with me. If you are prepared to join our company, come next week to our office and we will arrange transport for you and your wife. I guarantee you excellent accommodation and good salary."* *"OK, I agree"* I said to him. We parted and he was sure that I accepted his offer.

I went to Milanowek and as I told my wife about this encounter, we laughed. On the 27th of July I went again to see Mr Jackel and to ask for my salary. He was again absent from the office. I entered my office room. A girl who used to clean Mr. Jackel's office was busy ironing men's shirts. She was always bitchy and very unpleasant. One day I noticed that a new shirt, which I just bought was missing. I was sure that she pinched it. She greeted me with an ironic smile: *"Somebody was looking for you"* she said. *"You do not know who was it"* I asked. *"No"* she said. *"He looked to me as if he were a plain clothed Gestapo"*. I was speechless and without further discussion I collected all my belongings and left the office as quickly as it was possible.

I was wondering who sent the Gestapo and what was the reason for the visit. To begin with I thought that this was done by my director who offered a job in Germany and as I did not report to his office he send Gestapo to force me to take the job. But this assumption did not make any sense. He did not know where I was working or where I was living. I then came to conclusion that the whole set was some sort of blackmail invented by the bitchy girl. Nobody was looking for me but by frightening me with the alleged visit of Gestapo she wanted to get rid of me from the office room, which I occupied. She reasoned that after Mr Jackel's and his secretary imminent departure, she will occupy my room with all the belongings and furniture. Her joy did not last long. Germans destroyed the house completely after Warsaw uprising. I was again fortunate. I was saved from an ordeal of living through the uprising which begun on the 1st of August 1944.

At the beginning of October 1944 Milanówek was full of refugees. They came after the general command of the Warsaw uprising decided to surrender. The local council appealed to the inhabitants to give shelter to the refugees far as possible. We knew that sooner or later we will be asked to accept somebody into our home. We were afraid that we might get a busybody or an unwanted person who could cause us trouble. One day - as I went with my wife for a stroll - we passed by a house converted into a hospital. I noticed among the patients sitting on a bench outside a familiar face. I recognised him immediately. Before the war he was a lecturer of French language at the university in Krakow, a very popular person among students for his elegant appearance and French accent when talking in Polish. He looked miserable. We approached him and asked if his name was Henri Bernard. He whispered to me: "Yes, but my name is now Glowacki.". He told me that he was evacuated from a hospital in Warsaw after undergoing a small operation but the conditions in which he was living now could not contribute to his quick recovery. After a short discussion we promised to take him to our house. We knew that from His side there would be no trouble. He stayed with us until the beginning of February 1945 when I took him by train back to his wife in Krakow.

At the end of October 1944 I had an unexpected visit. Mr. Marshal, my boss from Pasięki wanted urgently to see me. He made a proposition asking me to prepare final accounts for works, which we did in Pasięki. I mentioned that I had no documents at all or drawings on basis of which I could even begin preparing the accounts. It was almost 4 months since I left Pasięki and from my memory I could not re-create what we did. I only remembered that the job was half finished and in such stage that it could not be of any use at all. Mr. Marshal told me not to worry. My task would be only to prepare a final statement as if the work were finished in 80%. "*Leave the rest to me*" he said. He promised a large amount of money for my work with a premium if I would finish the whole account in two weeks time.

After the Warsaw uprising the head office of German railway authority was relocated to Lowicz, a town about 100 km west of Warsaw. I had to go there for a few days with the final statement and to assist in checking it, Mr. Marshal explained that the inspector and some other top German officers of the railway authority were very interested in accepting the final statement because, as I understood, they were all in favour of the old saying "I will scratch your back if you will scratch mine". Besides, the war was coming to an end and who would bother to re-check this account. "*If they would question any figure of the statement you could always tell them that if they did not believe you they could always go and check it on the site.*" Obviously I would not dare to suggest such an eventuality.

Russian army recaptured some months ago the whole eastern part of Poland and were sitting on the left bank of Wistula in Warsaw. For this reason also German were anxious to settle final accounts as soon as possible. I worked very hard day and night and after ten days I was ready. We went with Mr. Marshal to Lowicz. For two days I was sitting with one of the inspectors checking every figure. I did not oppose his crossing out some items even if they represented the true picture of the works. I understood that by crossing some of the items, he could convince his superiors that he checked conscientiously the final statement. After two days the checking was finished. We celebrated this occasion in a local restaurant. A few days later I received my remuneration and I understood that Mr. Marshal was very happy with the outcome

although, as he told me, we could ask not for 80% but for 90% of finished work. The main thing was that everybody was happy but the happiest were German inspectors.

On the 21st January 1945 Russian army entered Milanowek Two months later on 17th March my son was born. We called him Adam, the first man for us born free.

Late in 1943 Mrs. Piekarzewski received a letter from a relative who was the niece of Mr. Kalinowski. She lived not far from Krakow in a small country town. The Jews from Krakow, who tried not to be resettled to the ghetto, moved previously to small country towns or villages where they could find accommodation and food easier than in Krakow. The niece did this as well as some of her family. Her husband went a few months before the outbreak of the war to United States where he was invited as a prominent chemical engineer to work on a research in a large chemical factory. He even obtained a permanent residency and he planned to return to Poland and to take his wife and daughter to America. The outbreak of war destroyed completely his plans.

The letter of the niece was short and to the point. The situation of Jews was desperate and she begged Mrs Piekarzewski to save her daughter. She had a chance to send the girl with a Polish man to Warsaw. She reasoned that if her daughter were safe, she herself as a single person would have more chances of surviving. It was a usual way of saving Jewish children.

Mrs Piekarzewski agreed immediately. She consulted the rest of the family but they decided that it would be much safer for all concerned if Mrs Piekarzewski could place her with some Polish family and in this way avoid any suspicion or fear of curiosity on the part of our neighbours. Through Polish friends she found an old woman living on the left bank of Vistula, the river which divided Warsaw in two parts. The woman was single without any family ties. She gladly agreed to give shelter to the girl, obviously for a monthly fee for which she and the girl could live quite comfortably. The old lady told all the neighbours that the girl was a relative and an orphan who lost her father during the war and her mother passed away recently. The girl was 10 years old and could easily understand the situation.

The first weeks of her life in hiding were full of misery. She cried day and night missing her mother but gradually accepted the situation. Mrs Piekarzewski used to visit her once or twice a month, bringing her clothes and sweets and money for the upkeep. The old lady made most of the girl, teaching her how to help her in the household, bringing water from the well and doing all sorts of domestic chores. Everything looked promising and we were sure that at least the girl would survive. The correspondence with her mother came to an abrupt end. It was not difficult to find out why.

A few days after Russian army entered Milanowek, the local Russian commandant announced that whoever wanted to go to Warsaw could do it on their own risk. Warsaw was only 30 km from Milanowek. Whoever was strong and healthy could walk the distance. It took only 5-6 hours to get to the outskirts of Warsaw but the majority of people carrying their personal belongings or being accompanied by children hired horse driven carts. The road to Warsaw was completely crowded with people walking, driving on bicycles and using different means of transport, After a

few days Mrs. Piekarzewski decided to go to Warsaw herself. Nobody among us could do the job for her because she was the only person who was in touch with the Polish woman and nobody else knew the address. Besides, Mrs. Piekarzewski wanted herself to pay for the upkeep if the girl outstanding for the months when she could not send any money.

Early in the morning Mrs Piekarzewski set on her journey. She joined a horse driven cart and we knew that at least she would not walk all the way. We waited for her return with the girl very excited. The expectation of the fulfilment of another human saved from the horror of holocaust made us happy. Late at night Mrs Piekarzewski returned home alone completely heart broken. In the middle of July Russian army started to shell with heavy artillery eastern outskirts of Warsaw where the woman used to live with the girl. As the shelling stopped the girl went to get some water from the well. She did not come back. She was found lying next to the well dead. An artillery shrapnel hit her in the head.

After a year the girl's father arrived from America with the first available possibility. His search for his family took him to Mrs Piekarzewski. He could not understand and forgive Mrs Piekarzewski that she could save 16 people and not do anything for his daughter. May be that he did not believe that this was the destiny of the girl.

The war was almost over. The Red army was fighting inside Germany but the life begun gradually to become normal. I decided to look for a job. One night late in March 1945 Mr. Tylbor unexpectedly came to visit me. He joined his wife and daughter and they lived together in Milanowek. He told me that he was appointed chief of so-called 'Operation Group' aiming at protecting all building materials and equipment left by Germans in different places in Poland previously occupied by them. One of these places was Bydgoszcz, a city some 200 km north-west from Warsaw. This city was incorporated by Germans into the Third Reich and was called Bromberg. Mr Tylbor was looking for professionals who could cooperate with him in this task. He promised excellent conditions: an accommodation or my own choice and a good salary.

There were plenty of vacated flats and houses due to flying Germans and I could chose whatever I wished. This idea was specially encouraging because we were forced by Russians to leave our present home and the new one which we rented was too small for a family of six. I agreed immediately. My wife could easily cope taking care of our baby with the help of the rest of the family.

One afternoon at the beginning of April 1945 Mr Tylboe and I boarded a train in the direction of Bydgoszcz. The train arrived a few minutes before the curfew. It looked as if we had to spend the night on the station among a crowd of people who arrived by the same train. The prospect of this did not look encouraging. I already spend some sleepless nights because our newborn son was not very well. He had some blisters on his back due to lack of napkins and other sanitary aids.

I talked to the man sitting next to me. He asked me what for did I came to Bydgoszcz. As I told him that besides a lucrative job I had an opportunity to get a fully furnished flat, one of those left by Germans, he laughed. "*It is not so simple*" he said. "*The city council sealed off all deserted flats and houses and they will, in the first place, be*

given back to previous Polish tenants or owners who were resettled to other parts of Poland after Bydgoszcz was incorporated into the Third Reich. They had the priority. So forget about your dream of obtaining easily a flat or home".

That was the last straw that broke the camel's neck. I told Mr. Tylbor this conversation. I did not wish to listen to his arguments. I took my small suitcase and run from the waiting room to the station platform. The train back to Warsaw and further along to Milanówek was due to depart in a few minutes time. I boarded one of the last carriages. The compartment was almost full not as much with passengers as with suitcases and luggage packed in bags or rucksacks. These belonged to people who came from different parts of Poland looking for abandoned properties. They plundered houses, flats or shops taking everything that they could carry with them. Then they sold all mostly in Warsaw where after the uprising everything was in short supply. There were even entrepreneurs who emptied flats or houses of furniture which they mostly loaded on Russian trucks and delivered same to any destination requested by the buyer. The trade was flourishing like never before.

I found an empty seat. I felt uncomfortable. It was dark and smelly. I decided to look for another place in the train. I went further to the first carriage next to the engine. The compartment was almost empty. I did not had time to put my suitcase on the shelf when I heard a loud bang. The carriage rocked and in no time I heard screams for help. The passengers begun to panic. Everybody was running for cover in different directions. Shortly I heard the familiar siren of an ambulance. I left my carriage.

What I saw shook me to the bottom of my heart. The last three carriages of the train were lying on their sideline of the completely smashed. I learned that a bomb fell upon the carriage in which I was sitting before I left it. Probably some mad German bomber pilot wanted to revenge the defeated German army for the last time. There were a few dead and a few severely wounded, all of them in the compartment where I was originally sitting. I was really lucky. On returning home I did not mention my experience to anybody. I only told my wife that I did not have any chance to get proper accommodation and that this was enough not to accept the job in Bydgoszcz.

Shortly another chance happened. I was offered a similar job as in Bydgoszcz, this time in Gliwice. This was a town which belonged before the war to Germany and was called Gleiwitz. It was situated in Silesia, some 300 km south of Warsaw. It was an industrial city in proximity of coal mines. The town was not damaged very much. There were some burnt out buildings as a result of Russian action not of any bombing. Russians wanted to show how hard the fighting was when they were conquering the city. The town was completely deserted. There were only old people, women and children left. The remainder fled with the retreating German army. Empty houses were all over the place. Some opulent and beautifully furnished. One could chose whatever one wanted. Germans fled in such a hurry that in some instances they left on the table unfinished meals. There were flats in new housing estates with two or more bedrooms with modern facilities and accessories. My wife asked me to find a flat of no more than 3 rooms with a kitchen and bathroom. She did not wish to be tied up cleaning and maintaining of a larger accommodation.

After a long search I finally found what my wife wanted. I prepared everything for arrival of my family. I even succeeded in engaging a domestic help, a local German

woman who was a qualified children nurse. She could help my wife not only in running of our household but also and first of all in taking care of our son.

I was not very busy. The job for which I was engaged ie to protect building materials and equipment left by Germans, was almost impossible to fulfil. Long before our "Operation Group" arrived Russians emptied all store rooms, took the best of equipment available and sent it to Russia. Whatever was left was useless. Thanks to UNRRA²⁵ we had plenty of food which was a great help because with my salary I could not support my family.

After a few months I was introduced to a local engineer with whom I established a building contractor company. We had a good prospect of success in our business but lack of money and materials did not allow us to develop our potential to full satisfaction.

In October 1945 I received a surprising call. My room mate from Warsaw who was working in Katowice, a city about 60 km east of Gliwice, rung me to tell that he met Jan²⁶, one of my twin brothers who just came back from Russia as one of the first repatriates. I did not see Jan for the last 6 years. He was not looking for any member of our family as he learned in Russia that not one Jew was saved from the Holocaust. Not long after the telephone call Jan arrived. Looking at him I could see a picture of life in Russia . He could not believe that I was alive. After telling him what happened to our family I heard from him about him and my other brother, his twin Stefan²⁷ and their life in Russia.

Jan asked me how did I manage to get out from the ruins of a shelter in Brzezany? Late in 1941 he received a letter from one of the Leuchters who used to work with me in Brzezany and who went on an evacuation train to Russia. In this letter he informed my brothers that unfortunately I was killed by a bomb while staying in a shelter. The letter was full of praise for my character and gratefulness for help which I showed them in our work. The bad news saddened my brothers. Then came a reflection: Stefan, who was a mathematician and as such was used to logical thinking, asked Mr. Leuchter a simple question: "*did you see the body of my killed brother?*" Obviously the answer was "No". But judging by the destruction of the house in which I was supposed to take shelter, nobody could have stayed alive. Stefan said that there was still hope. We talked through the whole night. I was happy that I had a family even though it was decimated.

I stayed in Gliwice only two years. I did not see any chance of organising a prosperous life there and we decided to go to Warsaw. My wife missed the rest of her family who moved from Milanowek to Warsaw. They renovated a flat in a house which was badly burnt during the last retreat of Germans. I found another flat in the same house, which I also renovated with the help of my father-in-law. He did not have to live any more as a friend of Mrs Piekarczywski and he joined his wife officially as Mr & Mrs Kalinowski. Thanks to Mr. Karnas with whom I used to work in Malkinia I found an excellent job.

²⁵ United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. This organisation was founded in 1943 to aid refugees in the liberated countries of Europe and the Far East. *Ed.*

²⁶ Jacob. *Ed.*

²⁷ Samuel. *Ed.*

In 1948 my brother Stefan arrived. His wife and son of 6 arrived from Russia in 1947. They moved to Wroclaw where Stefan was appointed professor of mathematics at the local university. He left Poland in 1959 for USA after waiting and struggling for about 3 years with the Communist authorities who did not wish to let him go. Jan escaped also to USA via India. In 1952 we were blessed with a daughter, Alice Eve. We stayed in Warsaw for 13 years living through thick and thin of the life in communist Poland. In 1958, as the Iron Curtain was a little lifted, sufficient to slide under, we decided to take the advantage of it. We had a chance to go to Israel. My wife's younger sister and her family went already there. We both wanted to follow them but we hesitated to leave my wife's parents, not young any more alone. And then an opportunity to go to Australia presented itself. My wife's auntie, who was already there with her family wanted to apply for entry visas for us.

Australia was a country, which always was on my mind. As a young boy I had a friend, Sigmund Danziger, only son of scripture teacher in Krakow. His mother passed away after a short illness and his father could hardly cope with his duties and taking care of him. At a suggestion of the boy's uncle, who before the first World War emigrated to Austria, the father sent him there.

Sigmund used to write to me once a year describing the beauty of Australia. I often studied the maps and I knew by heart how to get there. I did not know that one day my dream would come through.

At the end of 1956 we obtained the entry visas for Australia and after two years efforts to obtain passports for foreign travel, we finally received them and the ticket credited to us by HIAS²⁸. We arrived in Australia at the end of December 1958. Wandering through the streets of Sydney, a city which appeared to me like a large country town, I entered one day the Great Synagogue in Elizabeth Street. At the entrance hall there was a memorial plaque to honour the Australian Jews who gave their life in the second World War. In one of the first lines was the name 'Danziger, S'. If his destiny was to die in prime of his life, I thought, it was better that he perished on the battlefield and not in a gas chamber.

²⁸ Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. The oldest international migration and refugee resettlement agency in the US. *Ed*

PART II

The Leuchter Story

While in Gliwice we went often to Krakow. It was not far, approximately 100 km east. We had friends there, the 'remnants' of survivors from Holocaust. In autumn 1946 we were invited by our friends to spend the Jewish Holidays with them. On the Day of Atonement I went to the Temple, a liberal synagogue just cleaned and renovated. During the war Germans converted it into storerooms. I did not go as much for prayers, as to meet people who came back from Russia or those who survived either living on false Aryan papers or by some miracle.

The first man whom I met was Fred Leuchter. He, his uncle and cousin worked with me in Brzezany. They were the people who wrote to my brothers in Russia that I was killed by a bomb in an air raid shelter in Brzezany. Seeing me he could not believe his eyes. I explained that I already knew the whole story from my brothers but I was curious to learn what happened to the Leuchters once they left Brzezany. He did not tell me much except that his uncle died in Russia of typhoid and his cousin came back with him and enrolled at the university to study mitring engineering. He himself decided to go to Prague, Czechoslovakia, to study at the local technical university mechanical engineering. He received a scholarship from HIAS and after gaining the degree he planned to settle in Palestine. This was one of the conditions of his scholarship. Besides, he did not wish to stay in Poland for various reasons. He asked me how did I survive the war and what happened to our friends in Brzezany. After mutual best wishes he left.

In 1981 I visited Israel. It was not my first visit to this country. I always had on my mind finding out what happened to Fred but on previous occasions it escaped my attention. This time I decided definitely to meet him. I received Fred's telephone number from a mutual friend 'a walking history of Krakow'. In no time Fred arrived at our hotel. Although 35 years passed by, I recognised him immediately. As he told me, he was a very successful and well-established mechanical engineer in Tel-Aviv, running his own business. I reminded him that when we met last time in Krakow, he spoke to me very cautiously.

"Yes" he said. "After my experiences in Russia I did not trust anybody. Now I am living in a free country and I am not afraid any more to speak openly. You remember" he continued "our last meeting in Brzezany on Saturday afternoon. We left the shelter and you stayed there for a while. At night we boarded a train going to Russia".

The story, which he told me of his life in Russia, was typical for stories, which I heard from my brothers and some other friends who came back to Poland.

"As far as our meeting in Krakow was concerned", he continued, "I was in a hurry because I had a very important appointment and I did not wish to be late. A few days after arriving from Russia to Krakow I met my auntie. She was more than happy to see me alive because not many members of our family survived the war. She told me that according to her knowledge, my parents buried some valuables in the cellar of the house where we lived before the war. I was very excited, first of all on account of obtaining some money, secondly because I did not know how enter the cellar, which

belonged to strangers now occupying our old flat. I decided to approach them, explaining the situation and promising that if a 'treasure' was found, we would share it 50/50. They agreed immediately. I entered the cellar and after a short inspection I gave up. There were heaps coal and potatoes left there for winter in the usual manner. Where to start to dig and how far to go? I understood that I could not do the job myself. After a few days I met an acquaintance who came with an idea: he could borrow from one of his Russian friends a metal detector used by the army for detection of mines. The next day we again came to the cellar. Whatever we touched we heard a beep. I realised that the cellar had walls and ceilings built in concrete, with steel reinforcement, and the metal detector re-acted immediately after touching the walls or floor. This time I really did not wish to do anything more. I still could not forget about the treasure. I consulted some of my friends, but nobody could offer any idea except suggestion of removing the coal and potatoes from the cellar and digging point by point.

Then a friend came with an unexpected solution. He knew a rabbi who was very successful in detecting of this type of hidden treasures. I met the rabbi and he agreed to solve the problem for a fee of 10% of the value. He insisted on confirming our agreement in writing. On Sunday morning the rabbi appeared. We entered the cellar. The rabbi looked at the door, then upon the ceiling and the floor and said, "dig here". It was almost in the middle of the cellar. I removed only a few centimetres of the topsoil and suddenly I was flabbergasted. I immediately recognised the lid of a bowl in which my mother used to serve soup. It was not difficult to dig out the rest of the bowl. It was full of golden coins, mostly American dollars, and Russian golden five rouble coins, some precious stones and golden bracelets and chains. We shared the treasure as agreed.

After giving to the rabbi his share I asked him how did he arrive at this solution. He explained that after entering the cellar he looked at the door from inside. He noticed a line made by a smoking candle and beginning at the top of the door. This line continued on the ceiling up to a point where it stopped. This was a sign where he assumed that the treasure would be located. And who said that the rabbis are not clever?"

"Are you married" I asked "and if so who is the lucky girl?" "Yes", he said "and this is another proof of one's destiny. As you perhaps know," he continued, "typhoid decimated us refugees in Russia. We were not used to such harsh conditions of life, besides lack of proper food, medicines and the most primitive personal hygiene did not help in fighting this disease. One day I felt sick. I was lucky to be admitted into a hospital. No beds, only sheets on the floor, no medicaments and the food consisted mostly of soup which was so liquid that one could eat it without a spoon. The meal given to us was handed over a small opening between the hospital kitchen and our room. I could not even see who was serving it. I only saw the hand and the arm of a young lady. Then the war was over, as I told you before, I went to Prague where I graduated. Shortly afterwards I went to Israel. I got a good job and being a bachelor I used to stroll with my friends along the streets of Tel-Aviv. We had fun picking up girls. One evening walking home I heard some giggling and laughter of two girls. They spoke Polish. I approached them and as usually when starting conversation, I asked them where did they come from. They mentioned some country town in Poland. Then I asked where they were during the war. One of the girls mentioned a town in Russia, which was well known to me, as that was the town where I was hospitalised.

"What did you do there" I asked. I worked in a hospital as a kitchen hand, the girl replied. From other details, which she gave me, I realised that this was the girl whose arm and hand I saw through the kitchen opening in the hospital. She was as much surprised as I was. It was not long after this meeting that we got married. And who would know that the life in Russia could not bring you happiness?"

Lucky cousin

The arrival of the Red Army into the eastern part of Poland was received with mixed feelings by the populations. The Poles were unhappy because the presence of Russians on Polish territory was synonymous with the loss of independence and, more over, with introduction of communism, which the population of Poland hated. For the Jews it was a salvation because they thought, that finally they will be equal among equals and that they will not any more be subjects of discrimination. The most unhappy were the Ukrainians. Their dream was a free united Ukraine without Poles or Jews and without any interference from outsiders. They wanted their own government and as a final stage wanted to join the rest of Ukraine which was part of Russia. Hence the first days of Russian presence were marred by Ukrainians attacking Russian soldiers, robberies and killings. These attacks took place especially in small country towns where the Red Army could not as yet introduce sufficient protection for themselves and some law and order for the local populations.

At the end of September our cousin, a lawyer, found himself and his family in a small country town not far from Lwow. One day, early in the morning, shortly after finding accommodation, they were awoken by shooting. The bullets came through the timber walls of the house from one end of the room to the other. My cousin asked everybody to lay flat on their beds. Two of the sons took cover under the bed. The shooting lasted only a few minutes but for them it was an eternity. After all was clear they got up and prepared themselves to take breakfast. It did not take long before they heard some noise coming from an approaching heavy army truck. In no time the house was surrounded by Russian soldiers with machine guns and pistols. Suddenly the door opened with a big bang and three Russians armed like for combat, entered the room. *"Who was shooting from this house and where are your guns"* one of the officers asked. *"Nobody was shooting and we have no guns whatsoever. We are refugees and, as you see, we are a family"* said my cousin in his broken Ukrainian language. The Russians started searching to room and the rest of the house. My cousin was sure that in order to find the 'bandits' they would implant a gun or a similar weapon. But they did not find anything.

The search lasted for an hour or so. Then they ordered my cousin to dress himself, they tied his hands and put him at the back of the truck under heavy guard. He was brought to the local military command. It lasted hours before the army commandant appeared. After the initial enquiries - what is your name, nationality, where are you coming from, what is your profession etc. – came the accusation: - On the morning of such and such a day my cousin was shooting from his room in order to kill the soldiers of the Red Army. Although no weapon was found, the crime committed was without any doubt. My cousin tried, as much as he was able to express himself in broken Ukrainian, to say that he did not shoot, that he never had any gun. More every-he said - that as he had a family to look after he could not do it for the sake of his wife and three children. His arguments did not convince the commandant.

The commandant left the room leaving the poor fellow under heavy guard. After an hour or so, he returned and read to my cousin the sentence: he was to be put on trial under the marshal law.

As he finished reading the sentence somebody knocked at the door. A man in civilian clothing entered the room. He looked at my cousin and asked – *“Mr. S, what are you doting here?”* Seeing my cousin's hands tied up, he turned to the commandant: *“Comrade commandant, I know this man, he defended me in a trial in which I was accused by the Polish government of being a communist. Thanks to this man I was acquitted. I do not believe that he could have committed any crime against the Russian Army. I guarantee that he is an honest and trustworthy man.”*

My cousin could hardly believe that he was free. It did not make any difference to him that he even got a special allocation of food. What was the value of this comparing with his life?

He did not survive. Three years later an Ukrainian peasant in whose house he was seeking shelter, handed him, his wife and a boy of 8 to the Gestapo. In 1941 the two older sons were enlisted into the Russian Army. They both survived the war, and as we met they told me the unbelievable story.

True Christian

It was already end of April 1943. The liquidation of Warsaw ghetto was in full swing. One Friday afternoon I was returning to Warsaw from Malkinia, as usually, by train. In the compartment there was besides me a railway worker. As the train left the first stop past Malkinia, I heard a commotion in other compartments. Everybody run to the windows. My travel companion opened the window and called me: *“Look what the sons of the bitches have done! At least they should show some respect for a dead human being.”* What I saw shook me. Both sides along the railway track there were naked bodies of men, women and children. Most probably they tried to escape from the railway trucks once they realised that they were heading to the gas chamber in Treblinka. Germans, who guarded the transport seeing Jews jumping from the train, shoot them without mercy. *“You see”* my companion continued *“what our lovely compatriots have done. They stripped the dead bodies from top to bottom. This is not the first time I have seen this bestiality.”* He was looking at me as if he wanted to hear my opinion. *“You see”* he continued, *“I know that the Jewish problem should be somehow solved. But what Germans are doing is cruel and inhumane. It will bring up on them the curse of the whole world that will never forget what they did to innocent people. And our fellow countrymen, - look what they do. Are they really so poor that they have to strip clothing from dead bodies? How for God's sake can they wear clothing stained with innocent blood even after washing it out. You see”* he continued, *“a few months ago my father brought to our house a man, his wife and a boy. They were all Jews. He wanted to save them from the gas chambers”*. *“As a Christian”, he said to me “I urge you to find shelter for them”*.

They had Aryan papers and they did not look Jewish. I got in touch with some other people and we found a room for them. I told the landlady from whom we rented the

room that they were friends of my father and had to leave their home as they were suspected by Germans of connection with the Polish 'underground.

I visited them regularly on Sundays and everything looked fine . One day as I came to see them, I noticed that the man looked depressed. He told me a story difficult to believe:

The man went to Warsaw on some business. He was just going to board a tram when a fellow approached him. "Do you recognise me?" he said. "Yes I do - we were schoolmates". "You remember", the other man continued," that I hated Jews. I did not stop hating them up today and I have sworn myself to denounce every Jew whomever I came across". In this moment a uniformed German passed by. "This is a Jew" the fellow said to the German. The German looked at my friend, took him by the arm and asked to follow him. "I know", said my friend," that this was not only mine but my family end. We were going in the direction of Gestapo headquarters. As we went some distance the German begun asking me some questions: - are you single or married, what happened to the rest of your family etc. Then what he told me I will never forget in my life: "You see", he said, "to me it is totally indifferent whether you are a Jew, a Gipsy or a Pole. But I have my orders and they are to deliver every Jew whom I met to Gestapo. This is an order you understand. But if I were in your shoes I would not let myself to be led like a sheep. I would try to run away. But you better be careful - if you will run away I will shoot at you. This is my order"'.

"I got the message", my friend said "If I will run away, and the German will shoot in my direction, the worst that could happen would be that he would kill me but may be my family will be saved. We were approaching one of the cross streets. Now or never, I thought. I started to run as fast as I could. Once I was some distance away, I heard a shot, probably into the air. The German fulfilled his order but I was safe."

I did not know what to say. I tried to gather my thoughts. The man left the train in a hurry on the next station. Was he afraid that he told me too much? If only he knew to whom he made his confession!

ANTISEMITISM ALIVE AND WELL

“In 1945 I was convinced that Auschwitz contributed to the disappearance of antisemitism. But later I had to admit that in this death camp only the Jews perished, not the antisemitism”

Professor Elie Wiesel. Nobel Prize winner, in an interview with the German weekly magazine ‘Der Stern’ (No 40, 1989).

In the middle of February 1945 I decided to escort our French houseguest, Mr Henry Bernard, to Krakow, where his wife was living during the wartime. The travelling conditions were far from normal but more and more trains were running from the temporary railway station in Warsaw, in different directions.

The train, which arrived late at night to Milanowek in destination of Krakow, was almost packed with passengers to its full capacity. We succeeded to get inside because we were pushed by other passengers. There were broken windows, dark and smelly which, in winter, did not contribute to the pleasant voyage. In side of the compartment I appealed to the passengers to make one seat available for a French POW who was returning from the camp home. In no time Henry was sitting. The journey took about 12 hours, almost double of the normal travel time. In the morning of the next day we embarked on the Central Station in Krakow.

I have not been in Krakow since March 1939 when I have seen for the last time my family. Krakow was almost untouched by the war activities. The same streets, the same houses but not the same people and in this respect the face of the town changed completely. I remember the Central Station from the days when it was lively and colourful, full of people coming and going. Jews in their characteristic attires and appearance, peasants with sacks and baskets hurrying to the markets to sell their goods, to buy whatever they needed and leaving the town again on the way back to their homes.

We left the station heading towards the direction of the house where Mr Bernard’s wife was living. Before the war it was part of the town inhabited mostly by Jews. Now the whole town was almost without Jews. There were some survivors of the Holocaust who tried to find their families, belongings and houses. It was not easy to begin life again.

The first familiar face whom I encountered was an old schoolmate. I have not seen him for a long time but he and myself probably did not change much during the last years as we recognised immediately each other. He was a Pole, not a brilliant scholar as I remember. I expected that he would greet me with joy that I survived the war. Alas, how I was disappointed!. He looked at me with a grim face and said “*You are alive – what a pity*”. I was shocked. Mr Bernard, although he was fluent in Polish, did not understand what my ‘friend’ said otherwise I would have been embarrassed as Mr Bernard was convinced that my family and I, who gave him shelter in Milanowek were Poles and Christians.

I could not resist to visit our flat and house where we grew up and shared the same ups and downs of our life in prewar Krakow. I walked from Mr Bernard's house almost automatically through the same streets as I used to walk in my boyhood. I stood in front of the house where I spent almost 30 years of my life. I remembered the

food shop to the right of the entrance to the house. The owner, Mr Itzhack Rumstein run his business every weekday, except Saturday, from early morning until late at night, bribing the police to let him open the shop outside the trading hours. Sundays the shop was officially closed but the entrance to it was through his private flat, only to the faithful clients. In the middle of the house there was a Polish butcher, Mr Ciesielski. We used to buy there ham and sausage. To the left of the entrance was a stationery shop belonging to the Jewish family Hoffman. No trace of anybody.



45 Starowislna 3rd fl apt 9
The Djament apartment block.
Picture taken in 2000.
The Djament flat windows.

I entered the staircase where as boys we used to run up and down making such a noise that everybody in the house knew who was entering or leaving. I had no guts to see our flat. It was occupied most probably, by a Polish family, after my mother left for her last time Krakow for Jaslo. I knew that my visit would not be welcome. Perhaps the tenants would suspect that I would ask them to vacate the flat. No, I could not do so. I could not stay in a place where from every corner the memories of our struggle to live would remind me of the past. And, perhaps I would have to apologise to the new tenants that I was alive? I had a look at the right hand windows on the second floor of our flat and suddenly I had a feeling that I have seen my mother looking through the window. It was only a mirage.

The sad memories of my prewar life in Krakow were deepened by the encounter with my schoolmate after we left the railway station. On the way back to Mr Bernard's flat I tried to understand where from came such hatred, what wrong did I do to my 'friend' or anybody. Should I have said to him "*sorry that I am alive?*".

Two months later I understood his way of thinking. In March 1945 I met in Warsaw an acquaintance from Krakow. He was an engineer who before the war occasionally gave me work. As it was usual at such a meeting the topic of discussion came always to the same theme. How he survived the war, what was he going to do, did his family survive also etc.

The beginning of his story was unusual. Moreover, the end was completely unexpected.

During the war he was living and working, obviously as a Jew in Lwow. One day, after the situation for the Jews became critical he met a Polish friend. Both of them studied at the same faculty of engineering at the University of Lwow. This friend, after learning that his Jewish colleague was considering to acquire Aryan papers and to escape from Lwow came with a suggestion. "*I would like to help you*", he said. "*I will give you my Aryan birth, marriage and degree certificates and any help you may need. The best way for you would be to leave Lwow , so if it came to the worst , you would not endanger my family and myself*" It was a touching gesture. "*If not for him, my escape from Lwow would have been much more complicated. The war was over*"

he continued. *“My Polish friend found me accidentally in Warsaw and the first words which he said were: “I forbid you to use my name and all my personal documents which I gave you. If I had known that the Jews would help the Communists and Bolsheviks to occupy Poland, I would betray every Jew whomever I would meet”.*

“So, you see”, concluded my acquaintance, “the Jews are responsible for everything that happened to Poland. I could not live in such a surrounding. I am leaving in a few weeks time for England”. Lucky him! I came to the same conclusion 13 years later.

At the beginning of 1946, after the repatriation of Jews from Russia there were approximately 250,000 of them, including those that had miraculously survived the holocaust in Poland.²⁹ There were no official statistics in this respect, the figure was based on the information given by the ‘Jewish committees’ established in every larger city and town in Poland. The aim of those committees was to enable survived families to find themselves and to help them as much as possible.

The number of Jews gradually diminished. The first large exodus occurred in the middle of 1946, particularly after the pogrom in Kielce. This exodus, which amounted to some 180,000 people, lasted until the end of 1950 when the Polish communist government closed completely the Iron curtain. Most of the Jews went to Israel, some to the USA, Canada or Australia. The Iron curtain was lifted again in 1956 when after Stalin’s death Krushchev came to power and the new Polish government led by more liberal communists allowed the Jews to migrate and to join their families in Israel or other countries. It was estimated that at this time about 40,000 Jews left Poland. The last exodus was in 1968 when the antisemitism, under the cover of antizionism sponsored and supported by the government forced even the hard line communists of Jewish origin to leave Poland. Despite their loyalty to government and communist party, they were branded as enemies of the international communism and workers. Consequently they were sacked from their work and left without any prospect of life.

There are now about 4000 Jewish remnants in Poland. But this tiny number, mostly in their seventies, are still responsible for everything wrong that happens in Poland.

Since the outbreak of war the 3rd generation of Poles grew up. They do not know how a Jew looked like, but still the name of a Jew alone evokes hatred. In no other country in the world, except in Poland, there is such a controversy and discussion about how the Poles behaved towards the Jews during the World II. Obviously the Poles try to defend themselves against the accusations that they did little or nothing to help the Jews to survive. It is true that the Polish intelligentsia behaved like human beings; hiding or organising help for the Jews living on Aryan papers. Even some furious antisemites changed completely their attitudes towards the Jews, condemning the Polish hoodlums and scoundrels for helping the German by betraying the Jews living on Aryan papers. The arguments how the Polish community behaved will last as long as the last survivor of the biggest homicide in history of mankind will descent out of this world.

May be, may be not.

²⁹ The number of Jews living in Poland from 1946 is based on an article written by Irena Nowakowska in a Polish monthly “Wież” (Tie) No 4, April 1943.

PROLOGUE

My father arrived in Sydney in December 1958 with the princely sum of 5 pound sterling, no job and no knowledge of the English language. After initial help from our cousins, he was hired as a draughtsman in a small construction firm in North Sydney. He lost his job two years later and eventually found employment with the Maritime Services Board³⁰ as a structural engineer. He worked there until his retirement in 1976.

His wife and my mother Irena died suddenly from a stroke in March 1968. My father remarried a few years later and lived in Sydney until his death in July 2005.

Ed.

Why Australia ?

When the Polish government relaxed its hold on Polish Jews in 1956 and allowed them to migrate, my father considered resettlement in Israel, Canada, the USA and Australia. By chance, a friend of my father's brother Stefan was an employee of the Israeli government on a visit in Poland actively recruiting migrants for settlement in the newly founded state of Israel. As friends, they met one night for dinner. My father asked him: *"If you had to decide between Israel, Australia, Canada and the USA where would you go?"* The honest reply was *"Anywhere but Israel"*. As my mother had relatives in Sydney (her aunt settled here with her family in 1952) we were able to obtain sponsorship for emigration. After a two-year wait for exit visas from Poland we eventually left in November 1958. After a train journey we boarded a migrant ship the 'SS Roma' in Genoa and after a 6-week sea voyage arrived in Sydney on the 23rd of December, 1958.

Ed.

Early childhood

My father's earliest recollections date back to the first world war³¹, when the family lived in a one room apartment in Krakow. When he was about 6 his father came home and announced that the government ordered all families with young children to evacuate fearing that Russia would invade Krakow (at the time Krakow was part of the Austrian empire). They packed up their belongings and gathered at the railway station for a journey to a small village in Czechoslovakia. (My father recalls the journey as very comfortable, with their own compartment and sleeping facilities). My grandfather, grandmother, their 5 children and a housekeeper³² lived in the village for

³⁰ New South Wales government body responsible for construction and maintenance of all port facilities.

³¹ 1914 1918 On the 28th July, 1914 the Austro-Hungarian empire declared war on Serbia following the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the throne of Austro-Hungarian empire, in Sarajevo, Bosnia. On Aug 1st 1914 Germany declared war on Russia. Declarations on France and Belgium followed. Soon afterwards Britain declared war on Germany. Japan declared war on Germany and Turkey joined the fray on Germany's side in October.

³² It was very common for even the not-so-well to-do to employ the services of a domestic. These were invariably poor peasant women from the country. Each week they would come to the town a square where they were paraded before prospective employees. This was referred to as the 'slave market'.

a few months before returning to their flat in Krakow. My father remembers plentiful fresh bread, milk and butter, lots of peace, just like a holiday. He was too young to attend, but he remembers that Joseph and Roman went to the local primary school. In no time at all they all learnt the German language.

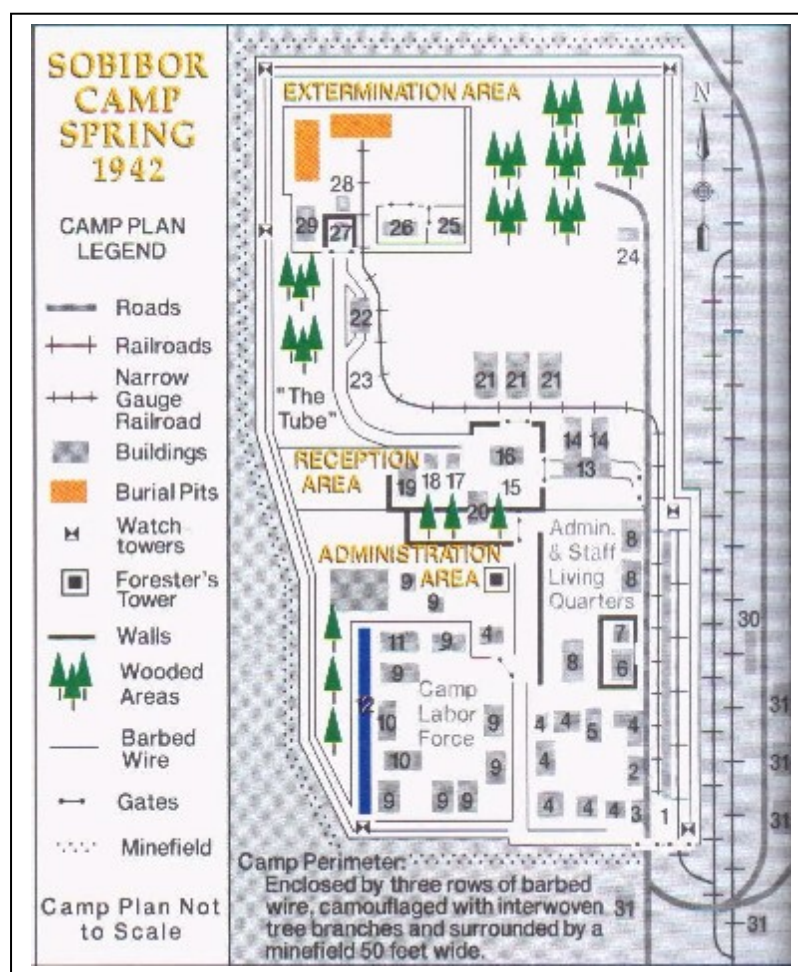
On return, they found that someone had moved into their one room apartment and for 2 years they were forced to share this accommodation. When a larger, 3 room apartment across the hallway in the same building became available they paid over a substantial amount³³ in key money and lived in comparative luxury until the outbreak of WW2.

When my father was about 9 years old, he contracted scarlet fever. He remembers the doctor coming to the house and ordering his immediate transfer to a hospital. This hospital was on the outskirts of Krakow, a long journey by tram followed by a 2km walk. His mother would visit him every day to bring food. He was hospitalised for 6 weeks.

³³ Following the conclusion of WW1, there was a building boom in Krakow. My grandfather Itzhack was a timber merchant. Every week he would journey to the countryside, ask the local woodchoppers to cut down selected trees, deliver them to the mill where they would be cut to his specifications and delivered on his behalf to the local timber yards. Building materials were in great demand and the family prospered. He died in 1932 from a heart attack.

APPENDIX A - SOBIBOR

Source : the Nizkor Project (www.nizkor.org), motlc.wiesenthal.com, holocaust.umd.umich.edu



Sobibor was established in March of 1942, near the village and rail station of Sobibor, not far from the Chelm-Wlodawa railroad line, in an isolated, wooded and swampy area.

SS-Obersturmführer Richard Thomalla, a staff member of the SS Construction Office in Lublin, was in charge of construction, but was replaced a month later by the first Camp Commandant, SS-Obersturmführer Stangl, who was responsible for completing the job.

Sobibor was designed and constructed in the form of a rectangle, 400 by 600 meters in size. It was surrounded by a barbed wire fence 3 meters high, which had tree branches intertwined with it in order to disguise the camp. It was divided into three distinct areas, each

independently surrounded by more barbed wire. These areas were:

- The Administrative area - it consisted of the Vorlager ("forward camp, closest to the railroad station"), and Camp I, and included the railroad platform, with space for twenty freight cars, and living quarters for the German and Ukrainian staff. Camp I, which was fenced off from the rest, contained housing for Jewish prisoners and the workshops in which some of them worked.
- The reception area, or Camp II. This was the place where the Jews from incoming transports were brought. Here they went through various procedures before being killed - removal of clothing, cutting of women's hair, and the confiscation of valuables.
- The extermination area, Camp III. It was located in the northwest part of the camp, and the most isolated. It contained the gas chambers, burial trenches, and housing for Jewish prisoners employed there. A path, 3 to 4 meters wide and 150 meters long, led from Camp II to the extermination area. It was enclosed with barbed wire on both sides, and was camouflaged with intertwined branches to conceal the path from view. The path, or "tube", was used to herd the terrified and naked victims into the gas chambers after being processed. There was also a narrow-gauge railroad which ran from the rail platform directly to the burial trenches; it was used to transport those who arrived too ill or too weak to make it on their own, and for those who had died in transit.

The gas chambers were inside a brick building. There were initially three of them, each 16 square meters in size, and each capable of holding from 160 to 180 persons. They were entered through doors on a platform in the front of the brick building, and a second door was used to remove bodies after the killing was finished. The gas, carbon monoxide, was produced by a 200 horsepower engine in a nearby shed.

Burial trenches were nearby, each 50 to 60 meters long, 10 to 15 meters wide, and 5 to 7 meters deep. The initial test of the killing system occurred in mid-April, when 250 Jews, primarily women, from the Krychow labor camp, were killed while the entire SS contingent attended.

Three additional gas chambers were added during a brief halt in camp operations which occurred in August-September, 1942. During this period, Stangl was sent to Treblinka, and replaced by SS-Obersturmführer Franz Reichleitner as Camp Commandant.

At the end of the summer of 1942, the burial trenches were opened, and the bodies burned in huge piles. Subsequent victims were cremated immediately after death, instead of being buried as had been done previously.

On July 5, 1943, Himmler ordered the camp closed as an extermination center, and converted to use as a concentration camp. Camp IV was built in order to store captured Soviet ammunition.

After the uprising at Sobibor, Himmler abandoned the idea of a concentration camp and ordered the camp destroyed. The buildings were destroyed, the land plowed under, and crops planted. No trace remained by the end of 1943. The area is now a Polish National Shrine.

APPENDIX B - DOCUMENTATION

~~Województwo Warszawskie~~
 Województwo Warszawskie
 POWIAT BŁONSKI
 Archidiecezja Warszawska
 Rz. Kat. parafia Św. Jadwigi
 Poczta, tel. 100000

Do metrykacji i ksiąg ledności
 Nr 8 aktu
 z roku 1944

Świadcstwo o zawarciu małżeństwa

wydane na zasadzie ksiąg metrykalnych.

Zaświadczam, iż Stanisław Rutkowski mający lat 35
 z ojca Piotra z matki Józefa z domu Klados
 i Irena Piekarska mająca lat 25
 z ojca Stanisława z matki Marjanny z domu Sobolewskich
 zawarli związek małżeński
 data dwunastego miesiąca kwietnia
 tysiąc dwunastego czterdziestego czterdziestego roku

Z oryginalnym zgodnie:
emitowane w dniu 8-go kwietnia 1944 roku.
 Prowadzący akta Stanu Cywilnego
 Sekretarz: [Signature]

ORIGINAL MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE.

Nr aktu 1113
 Rok 1915

Rzymsko-Katolicka Parafia
 Św. Michała Archanioła i Św. Floriana
 Warszawa-Praga

Wydane do aktów ledności i
 ksiąg i Urzędniczej Rezerwy
 Według odwołanej metryki

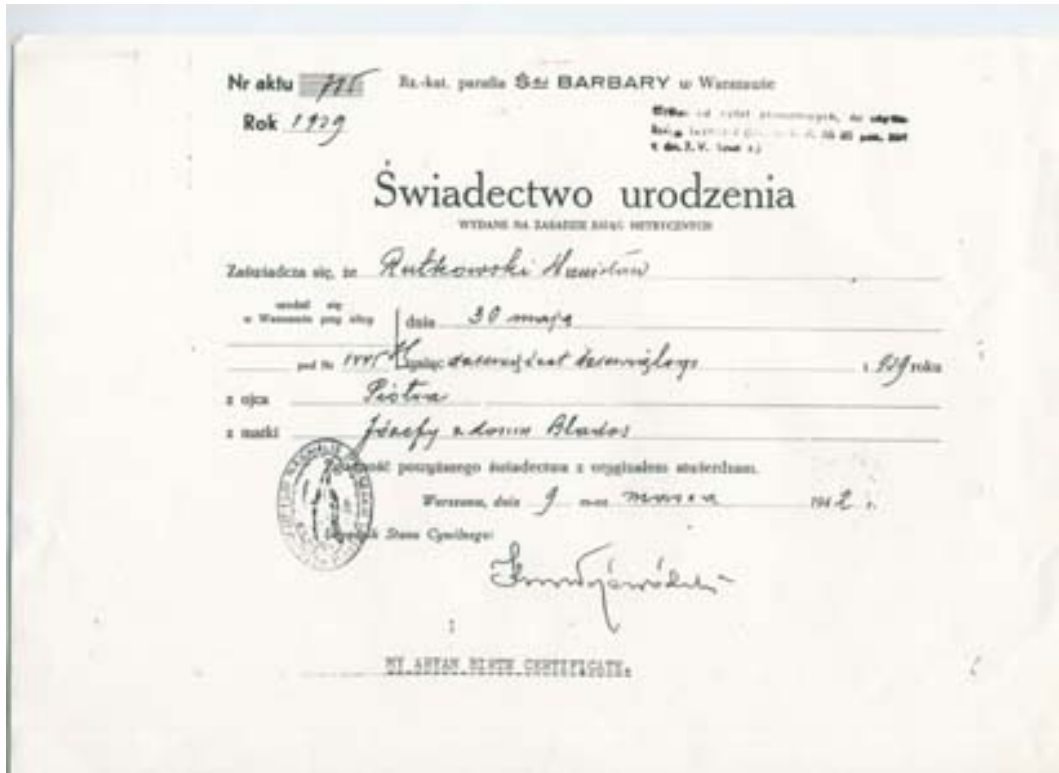
Świadcstwo urodzenia

WYDANE NA ZASADZIE KSIĄG METRYCZNYCH

Zaświadczam się, że Irena Piekarska
 urodziła się w Warszawie przy ulicy Brodzińskiej dnia 22 października
 pod Nr 49 | tysiąc dwunastego piętnastego 1915 roku
 z ojca Stanisława Piekarskiego
 z matki Marjanny z domu Sobolewskiej

Wierność powyższego świadectwa z oryginałem stwierdzam.
 Warszawa, dnia 17 m-cia III 1915 r.
 Urzędnik Stanu Cywilnego [Signature]

RYAN BIRTH CERTIFICATE OF MY LATE WIFE.



My father's fake birth certificate.

The date of birth is shown as 30th May, 1909.

In fact my father date of birth was the 17th of May, 1911.



Stanislawow, 30th of October, 1938

Certification

We hereby certify that Mr. Eng. Stanislaw Rutkowski born 30th May 1909 in Warsaw worked in our office from the 1st of March 1937 to 30th of October, 1938 as an engineer and manager of works.

In relation to his work Mr Eng. Rutkowski exhibited sound technical knowledge, dedication and diligence with regard to his duties and earned our complete trust.

He leaves of his own accord.

Kraków dnia 1 lutego 1937.

Zawiadzenie.

Zawiadzany niniejszem, inż. inż. Stanisław
Rutkowski u r. 1909 zatrudniony był w naszym
przedsiębiorstwie od dnia 1 października 1934 do dnia 31
stycznia 1937 jako konstruktor i kierownik budów:
a/ Gmach Komunalnej Kasy Oszczędności
w Krakowie
b/ Rekonstrukcja i przebudowa Szpitala św.
Łazarza w Krakowie
c/ oraz szeregu budów domów czynszowych.
P. inż. Rutkowski wykazał w swej pracy pilność
i doskonałe przygotowanie fachowe.
P. inż. Rutkowski odchodzi za skutek ukończenia
robót.

INŻYNIER
Stanisław Rutkowski

FAKED CERTIFICATE OF WORK STATING THAT
BEFORE THE WAR I WORKED AS A CIVIL EN-
GINEER UNDER THE NAME S.J. RUTKOWSKI.
THE CERTIFICATE WAS WRITTEN ON A BLANK
SHEET OF PAPER WHICH MY FATHER-IN-LAW
HAD IN HIS POSSESSION.

Krakow, 1st February, 1937

Certification

We certify hereby that Mr. Eng. Stanisław
Rutkowski born 1909 was employed in our
office from 1st of November, 1934 to 31st of
January 1937 as construction manager of
buildings

- a. Communal Savings Bank in Krakow
- b. Reconstruction and building of St.
Lazarus hospital in Krakow
- c. and other residential buildings

Mr. Eng. Rutkowski showed in his work
dedication and excellent technical knowledge.

Mr. Eng. Rutkowski leaves on completion of
work.

Belegte Abschrift.

Abschrift. Deutsche Technische Hochschule in Brünn.
Prüfungsprotokoll Nr. 163 vom Jahre 1933 Bauingenieur-
wesen-Abteilung. Ergebnis über die zweite Staatsprü-
fung. Herr Stanislaus Rutkowski geboren in Jahre 1909
zu Warschau in Polen hat in den Studienjahren 1927/28,
1928/29, 1929/30, 1930/31 und 1931/32 die Deutsche Tech-
nische Hochschule in Brünn als ordentlicher Hörer be-
sucht, in der Zeit vom 6 Juni bis 13 Juni 1933 die
praktische Prüfung und am heutigen Tage vor der unter-
zeichneten Prüfungskommission die theoretische Prü-
fung abgelegt. Auf Grund der Studienerfolge hat der
Kandidat gemäß Staatsprüfungsordnung vom 24 März 1912
R.G.Bl. Nr. 59 die zweite Staatsprüfung aus dem Bau-
ingenieurwesen-Fache bestanden, und ist nach auf Grund
des § 1 der Verordnung vom 14 März 1917 R.G.Bl. 150 zur
Führung der Standesbezeichnung "Ingenieur" (Ing) berechtigt.
Brünn am 16 Juni 1933. Prüfungskommissare: acht unles-
bare Unterschriften. L.S. Kommission für die zweite
Staatsprüfung aus dem Bauingenieurwesen-Fach an der Deu-
tschen Technischen Hochschule in Brünn. Der Vorsitzende
der Prüfungskommission: Unlesbare Unterschrift. L. rep.
1930/32. Die Übereinstimmung dieser Abschrift mit Original
vom 16 Juni 1933 wird bestätigt. -Wreschaw am 8 April 1942 J.
L.S. Dr. Gregor Steciuk Notar-Vertreter in Wreschaw. Unles-
bare Unterschrift.

Verbleibende Abschrift stimmt mit der Abschrift überein, die
mir vorgelegen hat.

Nr. 1556/42

Wreschaw, den 17-September 1942.

Notar/Notary

Belegabgabe: 4.--Zl.

Gregor Steciuk
deutscher Notar
in Godesgraben

COPY OF CERTIFICATE OF DEGREE IN CIVIL ENGINEERING FOR-
WARDED BY ME FROM THE ORIGINAL BELONGING TO MY FRIEND
AND LEGALIZED BY A GERMAN NOTARY.