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The Memoir of Doctor Chaim Einhorn, a Physician from a Warsaw Ghetto Hospital

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The Memoir of Doctor Chaim Einhorn

Chaim Einhorn's memoir and diary are stored in the Yad Vashem Archive as file O.3/1836. According to the attached introduction, the author began to record his experiences while in hiding on the 'Aryan' side in April 1943, shortly before the outbreak of the uprising in the Warsaw ghetto. Together with a few other Jews, he was sheltered by teacher Romana Hanke in the Grochów district of Warsaw. Einhorn wrote in detail about the deportation campaign in the ghetto and the selections conducted among the physicians in September 1942 and January 1943. He also described the conditions in which he was hiding, the liberation, or actually the arrival of the Soviet troops, when the Jews were unable to leave the flat for several days because their lives were in danger.

Einhorn's memoir is composed of recollections of the ghetto, particularly of the last great selection, known as 'the kettle operation', while the diary consists of a series of entries, which are discontinued shortly after the liberation.

A note attached to Einhorn's text by a Yad Vashem archivist reads:

Doctor Ch. Einhorn's memoir discovered by accident. Doctor E. contacted Yad Vashem [in May 1961] to use this institution's help to testify regarding the war criminal SS-man Hantke, who acted with extreme brutality in the Warsaw ghetto. During his testimony about Hantke and a longer conversation regarding topics connected with the period of the extermination of the Warsaw Jewry it occurred that Doctor E. was in possession of his memoir written in hiding on the 'Aryan' side of Warsaw after his escape from the ghetto.

According to Doctor E., the memoir was written almost *in promptu*, so it has great documentary value, as it is characterised by a degree of immediacy difficult to achieve for some authors in their retrospect of events. [...] Doctor E. gave me two notebooks, with pages densely covered in writing in pencil and ink. His handwriting, though very fine, was still legible (only in some places the pencil was slightly smudged, but the conversations I had with the author helped me recreate the text. Only the chronology was faulty, as the notes written immediately under the impression of the experienced events were scattered over various pages in the notebook. They discontinued in one place only to find their completion in a totally unexpected place, in the middle or at the end of the notebook. The conversations I had with Doctor E. proved helpful also in this case as they facilitated my orientation in the text. [...] The memoir covers the period from April 1943 to December 1944.

While preparing the memoir for publication, I was seeking information about the postwar lot of Doctor Einhorn and his family. I managed to find his niece, Rachel Levitan, in Israel, who provided much valuable information, for which I am truly grateful. It occurred that the family was unaware of Einhorn's notes. I wish to thank Agnieszka Haska for her help in finding information about Warsaw physicians.

Barbara Engelking

The Memoir of Doctor Chaim Einhorn,¹ a Physician from a Warsaw Ghetto Hospital

I have often considered beginning to describe the final days of our martyrdom. Particularly, recently when I spend my days trying to make as little noise as possible, lest our neighbour, Miss Kołodziejska, hears us.

But the fear of recalling those inhuman experiences has always stopped me from writing. One refuses to relive them even in one's thoughts. They are too horrible. Looking at various combat injuries (of the face, stomach, etc.) in the hospital, we often said that man's physical endurance was beyond belief. We would have never thought it so. I have concluded that nobody would have ever believed that one could suffer so much and stay alive (not to mention the physical suffering).

What finally pushed me to writing was the recent German propaganda trick regarding the Bolsheviks' murder of 12,000 Polish officers. With what great indignation those inhuman Inquisitors, the first and greatest murderers and oppressors of innocent people in history, wrote about the 'slaughter at Katyń'.²

One would wish to shout before the whole world: how can they lie like this, pretending to be innocent while committing crimes difficult to describe,

¹ Chaim Einhorn was born in Warsaw on 6 November 1910. In 1935, he graduated in medicine in Nancy, France. His diploma was recognised in Warsaw in 1937. Until the outbreak of the war he worked as an assistant in the university clinic of the św. Ducha Hospital in Warsaw and then in the Czyste Hospital. He participated in the research on the hunger disease. He lived at Niska Street 59 until September 1939, and after the building was bombed he moved to Miła Street 32, where he lived until April 1943, when he left the ghetto. After the liberation, he was called up and he took part with the Polish Army in the capture of Berlin. During 1945–1946, he was the director of the military hospital in Szczecin and a pulmonologist in the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jewish Population in Poland (*Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej w Polsce*, TOZ) in the Szczecin region. In 1946, he left Poland via Czechoslovakia. In Austria, in a DP camp in Halein near Salzburg, he became the director of the lung diseases hospital. In 1948, he immigrated to Israel and settled in Tel Aviv, where he worked as a pulmonologist. He died on 19 January 1978. The original usage of capital letters was retained in the translation.

² The first news about the discovery of the mass graves of Polish officers at Katyń was published in the *Nowy Kurier Warszawski* rag on 14 April 1943. Writing about this topic, the German propaganda emphasised the anti-Jewish and anti-Bolshevik themes. Initially, many people thought, as did the memoir author, that the crime had been committed by the Germans.

sophisticated in terms of the suffering inflicted on the victims before their death.

One must admit that the Germans made use of culture and civilization, because none of us (and we have had many a discussion about it among ourselves) would ever be able to achieve such a level of barbarity and ingenuity in the details of the plan, prepared in advance, of sending millions of people, children, women, and men, regardless of their sex or age, to death along a long path of torment.

A manifestation of how little these criminals care about the opinion of the Poles (besides, they treat them as another future element for Treblinka)³ is that they voice their indignation about Katyń, at the same time murdering people in the ghetto.

For the last two days the SS and the gendarmes, of course with the help of the Polish Police, have been trying to kill off the last Jews remaining here. Everybody realised that these beasts were not to be trusted and [decided] not to participate in any moving of the workshops along with the people. Consequently, they decided to use the few revolvers they had and not let the Germans take them alive.

I wish to emphasise that one day attention should be brought also to the fact that despite our pleading, they did not help us even in that, that is, in the matter of weapons.⁴ This is why most of those Jews went to the slaughter like sheep, completely unarmed, and thus psychically devastated, so as to end their suffering as soon as possible.

So during the previous campaign,⁵ several armed boys started shooting when the masses of the brutal SS-men and gendarmes stormed into our homes, searching every corner, and the boys did kill several Germans, while this time the Germans are completely safe during their hunt. According to the news from the city, the Germans drove into the ghetto in tanks and, just as one would expect of them, they are blowing up buildings or setting them ablaze, burying alive the people inside, and where the buildings are too large to be blown up they set them ablaze, burning the people alive.

Using these excellent methods they achieve a double objective: they are safe, because not even one German should die during the extermination of seven million Jews in Europe, whereas the other objective is that by blowing up and burning the building they liquidate also the Jews who made some shelters for themselves and buried themselves underground without access to fresh air, light, or food, just to survive.

³ In the original, the author wrote "Treblinka" (plural form of Treblinka), which was common in the sources produced during the occupation or immediately after the war.

⁴ Despite the Jewish underground's requests, the Polish underground was able to deliver only several dozen firearms.

⁵ A reference to the act of self-defence on 18 January 1943, when the Germans entered the ghetto to deport a few thousand Jews to Treblinka. That occasioned the first act of armed resistance. After three days, the Germans retreated from the ghetto. The number of the Jews deported ranged from four to five thousand.

Consequently, every sound of explosion when they blow up a building curdles my blood. Particularly, that Sawek⁶ and Hela's parents stayed there.⁷ The news about the fighting which Miss H.⁸ brings us from the city is romantically embellished. A 12-year-old boy purportedly slipped under a tank with a grenade and destroyed it. There are three destroyed tanks on Leszno Street.

Leszno Street has been closed to traffic. Trams do not run along Miodowa Street. Fire glows and clouds of smoke are rising from the ghetto. One can see banners reading: Poles, help us; the Soviet help is to come in three days.

I record these rumours being perfectly aware that reality is completely different. It is horrible, this hunt for people with a blood-thirstiness one would never see during a hunt for animals. And not only the SS-men do this, but even ordinary gendarmes.

It seems that every German is capable of this because I have seen what those civilians from *Transferstelle*⁹ (they are elderly men) do on the guard posts, not to mention the directors of all those workshops. In short, all Germans are responsible for this bestiality.

* * *

At 4.30 a.m., still during curfew, we heard a violent knock on our front door. We were deep asleep after a horrible day of roundups. We often woke up and remembered our horrible situation, which pained our soul so much that we wished to return to oblivion. I jumped out of bed and opened the door.

Anka¹⁰ storms in, uncombed, undressed, wrapped only in a coat. When we saw her we immediately understood that there was some new misfortune. We thought that it was about her Staś.

Our first question was: Is Staś alright? Without answering this question Anka told us to dress quickly because there was an ordinance that all Jews had to

⁶ Engineer Sawek Kaszub – the author's brother-in-law, died in the ghetto. The author's sister and Sawek's, Franciszka [here referred to also as Franka or Frania], who was Sawek's wife, writes in her testimony (YVA, O.33/166), that after the campaign in the summer of 1942 he worked in a facility for delousing German uniforms; he died most probably during the uprising.

⁷ Helena Engel (1918–1968) – the author's wife; her parents died in the ghetto. The Einhorn married in the ghetto on 22 July 1942. [In the text referred to as Hela or Heluś]

⁸ Romana Hanke (Mrs Hanke) – the Polish woman who sheltered the Einhorns.

⁹ *Transferstelle* – the Transfer Office (Królewska Street 23), which controlled all trade (import and export) between the ghetto and the 'Aryan' side. Until May 1941 it was a part of the *Umsiedlungsabteilung* (the Department of Deportations) and it was headed by Aleksander Palfinger; in mid-May that year it became an organ of the Office of the Commissar for the Jewish Housing District and it was headed by Max Bischof.

¹⁰ Anna Birnstein, the author's sister, and her son Staś survived the war and then lived in the United States.

move to the tetragon marked out by Gęsia and Niska Streets.¹¹ The Jewish Police are already escorting the people and this is why it is allowed to walk all night long. The deadline is ten o'clock in the morning. They were told so on Kupiecka Street by an Auxiliary Service functionary.¹²

Hela and I sat stunned. At that moment I felt as if everything inside me was breaking. All I was able to say was that all of us were nearing our ultimate end. Or maybe that was not true? In the final throes of our survival instinct, we tried to defend ourselves against that news. "If only this were not true," said Anka. "Well, go out and see for yourself. Meanwhile, I have to pack the most necessary things and I am off to Mum."

I asked her to bring Mum and I was already thinking about where to put her so as to protect her from that move.

Anka left, bidding us farewell. We burst into tears because we thought that we would never see each other again. I was doing my best not to completely break down because all I wanted to do was lie down and sleep, sleep, sleep.

We dressed. Meanwhile, everybody in the flat was bustling. Baraban, his son, and sister-in-law were packing the most necessary things into small suitcases. Hela and I decided to walk to the hospital and from there go with the entire personnel to where they would tell us. Whatever happens to my colleagues shall happen to us.

The chaos on the streets defied description. Everybody was running half-dressed asking one another whether it was true. At the same time, when we were passing the Pawiak prison on Więzienna Street, we had to be very careful because those guards were shooting at us as if at sparrows. The only thing we saw clearly was the bike carts of the Auxiliary Service, which was moving to Wołyńska Street. Meanwhile, notices began to be posted on the street. They announced the following, more or less: "By order to the authorities, the Community orders all the Jews to move to the tetragon marked out by Gęsia, Zamenhofa, Niska, and Smocza Streets by ten o'clock in the morning. One is to take food and drink for three days. The objective: registration and selection. Those who fail to comply will be executed."¹³

¹¹ Between 6 and 12 September 1942 the Germans conducted a great selection of all the remaining residents of the Warsaw ghetto assembled in the tetragon marked out by Parysowski Square, and Smocza, Gęsia, Zamenhofa, and Szcześliwa Streets. The Germans distributed 'life numbers' which authorised their holders to remain in the ghetto during the selection. Those who received them were allowed to remain in the ghetto and work, whereas the rest (approx. 50,000) were deported to Treblinka. That was the last 'chord' of the great liquidation campaign, known as the 'kettle operation on Miła Street', 'kettle operation on Niska Street' or simply the 'kettle operation'.

¹² Auxiliary Service, Order Service, that is, the Jewish Police.

¹³ The following announcement was posted on the ghetto streets:

"By ordinance of the plenipotentiary for the resettlement, the Jewish Council in Warsaw announces the following:

There was no doubt. Everybody was thinking about the registration and selection. Is it yet another way of tricking us into going where they want us to go? But in the general chaos and despair everybody decided to comply. What if I survive and have a right to live? Everybody thought that.

Today, when I am writing this I can clearly remember the psychological condition of those 150,000 people (the Germans have already murdered, that is deported, more than 200,000 people). We were completely stunned by the earlier events and that ordinance devastated us completely. It turned us into animals led to the slaughter.

In the hospital we had our most precious suitcase as there was food in it, and another one with Anka and Staś's most necessary things. I did not want to lose them because everybody was thinking that even if they deport us, they will let us live there. Even we, who had already had so much contact with the Germans and witnessed their bestiality, did not suspect that they could kill hundreds of thousands of innocent people only because they were born Jewish.

Consequently, I went to the hospital¹⁴ after I asked Hela to run to Franka¹⁵ and Sawek and find out how they were.

On my way I met Irka. Frantic, she was weeping and sighing. I felt sorry for that child and I sent her to her parents, to Szulc.¹⁶ On the way to the hospital there was unbelievable uproar. The scenes I witnessed might be compared perhaps only to what was happening during the Flood. The people were running in all directions, on the pavements and on the roadway. There were mothers with babies and children in their arms. Everybody was weeping. Carts and rickshaws with the Auxiliary Service's packages and the first packages of civilians were

1. By ten o'clock on Sunday morning, 6 September 1942, the Jews staying in the large ghetto are to assemble, without any exceptions, for registration in the quarter marked out by Parysowski Square and Smocza, Gęsia, Zamenhofa, and Szcześliwa Streets.

2. The Jews are allowed to go to the designated place also on the night of 5–6 September 1942.

3. The Jews are to take food and water for two days and drinking cups.

4. Locking flats is forbidden.

5. Those who fail to comply with this ordinance and stay in the ghetto (except for the area specified above) after ten o'clock in the morning on Sunday, 6 September 1942, shall be executed.

The Jewish Council in Warsaw."

¹⁴ The Czyste Hospital remained in its building at Dworska Street 17 until February 1941. After the move into the ghetto its wards were transferred: the surgical and laryngological ones to Leszno Street 1, the gynecological and maternity ward and the ophthalmological one to Tłomackie Street 4, the infectious diseases ward to Żelazna Street 86/88, and the infectious and internal diseases ward to Stawki Street 6/8. During the deportation in the summer of 1942 all hospital wards were transferred to Stawki Street 6/8 by the Umschlagplatz.

¹⁵ Franciszka Kaszub, then Rosenkrantz (after she remarried) – the author's sister. She survived and after the war lived in Israel, where her only son Alexander died in 2012.

¹⁶ A reference to Schultz's workshop.

squeezing in through those crowds. The pavements were strewn with pillows, underwear, and other packages dropped by the running people. As soon as SS cars appeared everybody became silent and ran to the walls or into gates. One of those beautiful limousines drove by in front of me carrying four higher-rank SS-men. Smiling, they were taking photographs of those crowds' despair, and when they turned from Dzielna Street into Karmelicka Street they shot and killed a rickshaw driver who was heading in the opposite direction. On the corner of Nowolipki and Karmelicka Streets lay a boy with his head split open. It occurred that two SS-men on foot had shot him for fun several minutes earlier. Next to him were pieces of bread and other things the boy had been carrying.

The hospital, which we finally reached, was sheer hell. It seems that only somebody who experienced that or saw a sinking ship can understand what was happening there. Right by the entrance, strewn around, lay parcels, suitcases, and things, which had slipped out of poorly tied bundles carried out in haste. Downstairs in the hall I heard hysterical shouts of the hospital helpers, the personnel, and particularly the patients.

As soon as I entered the building I was informed that Director Doctor Stein¹⁷ and the Department of Health Director Doctor Milejowski¹⁸ had been called to the Community by the SS authorities. I gathered from that that the hospital was in danger too. Anyhow, I decided to wait for a message from the Director and irrevocably tie my fate to the hospital.

Meanwhile, I peeked into the patients' rooms. The news that the deadline was ten o'clock had already reached even the sick. Those less severely ill who could walk on their own went to the storerooms, dressed, and escaped...

Where to? That was the question I was asked at every step by both the healthy and the ill, because they could see that I was returning from the city. All I could do was tell them what I intended to do: stay in the hospital.

It was horrible to watch the severely ill, the more severely injured, and those in fever begging to be taken away, rescued, saying that they wanted to

¹⁷ Doctor Józef Stein – Catholic of Jewish origin, director of the Czyste Hospital, anatomopathologist; before the war worked as anatomopathologist in the Dzieciątka Jezus Hospital and he performed that function until the final liquidation of the hospital during the uprising in the ghetto (he died in Treblinka in May 1943). A fragment of a postwar testimony of Doctor Stanisław Waller, who also worked in the Czyste Hospital: "Doctor Stein was an excellent anatomopathologist. Despite his professional qualifications he lacked moral fibre and I had the impression that in the administrative affairs of the hospital he obeyed his wife, an ambitious and energetic person" (YVA, O3.2358, Relacja Stanisława Wallera [Stanisław Waller's testimony]).

¹⁸ Doctor Izrael Milejowski – physician and social activist, belonged to the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia. In the ghetto he was the chairman of the Department of Health of the Jewish Council, a participant of the medical courses ('Zweibaum's courses', which were in fact the clandestine Faculty of Medicine of the Warsaw University, and one of the organisers of the research on hunger. He died during the January campaign (18–21 January 1943).

live, begging not be left in the hospital, for they already knew about the posters threatening death to those who would not leave that quarter.

As always, we had many heroic people there, particularly among the nurses who dressed the patients and packed their bundles even though each nurse had her own bundles and members of her own family to take care of. The thing that had the best influence on the patients was that they were not left at the mercy of fate.

Meanwhile, time was passing. Suddenly, we received the final message from the office that the Director had phoned in and [said] that the hospital would be deported too and that it was to report with its personnel and patients to the *Umschlagplatz*.

That news stunned us completely; so all of us were about to walk to our deaths *today*. What happened later in the hospital defied description, hell, sheer hell. The patients were crawling on their stomachs towards the entrance to be as far from the hospital as possible. Those who were bedridden and could not move were desperately begging for rescue. That sight broke our hearts. The first cars arrived to transport the sick and the wounded to the *Umschlagplatz*. I realised that there was no longer any point in staying in the hospital on Leszno Street. We needed to think about rescuing ourselves.

It was almost ten o'clock. During the final minutes, Hela ran to Frania with an instruction for Mum to be put with her parents on Kupiecka Street. They had a shelter there and once we freed ourselves we would take Hela's parents and Mum out of there.

We did not go into hiding because on the way to the hospital we heard the news that the hospital would not be deported but would continue to operate on the *Umschlagplatz*. Consequently, the personnel would be needed and the hospital employees were to gather at Zamenhofa Street 19,¹⁹ where there was to be a selection into those who would stay alive and work and those who would be... destroyed.

Meanwhile, Hela returned with the news that Mum was with Anka and Staś and we went from the hospital to Zamenhofa 19. On the way there were less people. Every few moments carts with patients from the hospital caught up with us heading for the *Umschlagplatz*.

The streets were strewn with everything imaginable: clothing, bedding, boxes, food, canned foods, children's toys, books, tefillin, etc. The few people walking towards the tetragon were bathed in sweat, burdened with parcels, and they had to rest at every step because they were already exhausted. Dead tired and psychically exhausted, we too dragged along, supporting one another. Making matters worse, the weather was beautiful: the sun was beating down and the light breeze brought no refreshment.

¹⁹ On 10 August 1942, the *Judenrat* seat was moved from Grzybowska Street 26 to Zamenhofa Street 19.

We reached the corner of Dzielna and Karmelicka Streets opposite the Pawiak prison, when suddenly several groups of SS-men spilled out one after another from the gate of that place of torture. Smiling from ear to ear, they pointed fingers at us, who could barely walk, and they made fun of us. I shall never forget those horrible 'mugs' laughing at our misfortune. They spread out in extended order and began to flood all those streets.

I looked at my watch and I realised that it was already ten o'clock. After a moment they began to shoot at us, laughing again, when we, utterly exhausted, broke into a run following our survival instinct. And that was how we reached Zamenhofa Street.

There, the human current carried us to building No. 19 and we stormed into the courtyard, where we threw ourselves onto our bundles, panting. After a moment, when we realised that for the time being we had avoided the danger posed by the SS bullets, we began to orientate ourselves in our new situation. The courtyard was packed with people such as us. I knew most of them because it was a gathering point for the hospital and the Department of Health. The crowd was the densest by the water tap, because carrying the bundles and the fright had made our mouths completely parched.

Our friends gradually began to join us and we debated our fate and future. Doctor Poznański²⁰ joined us too. The Germans had taken his wife away three days earlier, leaving him completely devastated, out of his mind with worry over his extraordinary child, whom we all had pampered. Unable to cope with a six-month-old baby, he sent it to the 'Aryan' side by the agency of his brother-in-law. But due to the recent events Poznański had lost contact with him because he did not return to the ghetto. We consoled him as best we could, as people sentenced to death would console one another that it makes no sense to worry as these are their final hours anyway.

Doctor Milejkowski has informed us on behalf of the Community board that we would stay in that building for two or three days until the selection. Consequently, I decided to find some room for us for the night, because I was worried that because of her earlier excellent living conditions Hela would not endure those hardships.

All the rooms in a five-room flat in the first-floor front side staircase were occupied and in the middle room, which used to be a dining room, we saw manual labourers from the hospital who immediately invited us in and made room for us on the floor because they liked me. We ate breakfast: we looked out the windows onto Zamenhofa and Kupiecka Streets. I fully realised how tragic our situation was when I looked out onto the street.

We were cordoned off by SS-men, standing one metre away from one another, and there were also patrols walking beyond the cordon. The cordon surrounded

²⁰ Doctor Nikodem Poznański – born on 9 November 1909, internist, before the war worked in the Czyste Hospital.

our entire tetragon. The functionaries were standing along the tram lines, separating the buildings on this side from those on the other. I sank into despair – we were trapped. Dragged out of our homes, where we still had a possibility of finding some shelter, here, in a strange building, we were easy prey for those thugs. They could easily pick us up like rats and strangle us. The despair and helplessness were suffocating me. I unbuttoned my collar and my shirt. I could not forgive myself for letting myself fall into such a horrible trap, and, making matters worse, for leading my beloved wife so thoughtlessly to her death. Why, she could have gone with her parents and hidden on Kupiecka Street, which was beyond the cordon and was perfectly peaceful. My thoughts, which I did reveal to Hela, in an attempt to protect her against the horror of the situation, did not allow me to sit still. I ran to the cellars, to the attic, I checked all the apartments expecting to find some shelter but to no avail. Besides, apparently everybody had understood the situation because the people were frantically running around to the same end but without success.

Devastated, I returned to the flat and told my wife partial truth, at the same time consoling her that we would not let them take us like that and that at night, in the darkness, we would try to sneak through the SS [cordon] to Kupiecka Street. I made her aware that it was almost suicide because there was little chance of them not seeing us, but Hela immediately agreed, preferring to die like that than be captured and suffocated by the Nazis without making an attempt to survive.

Meanwhile, hours passed. I could barely sit in the room because my heart was breaking at the sight of the playing children, who were happy about the change of the situation. Particularly the children of two nurses, two beautiful six-year-old girls, were constantly asking their mothers where they were going with those bundles. The girls consoled and kissed their mothers so that they would not worry because they would see their husbands soon.

One of those two nurses worked in our ward and I knew that at the beginning of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union she had made her way across the front line under a hail of bullets to fetch her child who was staying with its grandmother on the Soviet side. All of us wept quietly as we watched those children.

After a modest lunch (dry bread with tea) I went out onto the street for some news. There were few people on the street except for the functionaries of the Jewish Order Service, as the sight of the SS cordon and the frequent firing at the Jews who went out discouraged everybody from taking a walk. But I decided to go to the Community, which had its premises in the neighbouring building, No. 17, a former military prison.

My heart pounding, I somehow managed to reach the building, where I met Director Stein and many other physicians and I learnt that a list of hospital employees who would continue to work was to be compiled the following morning. Made redundant, the rest of the staff would lose their right to live. It remained unknown how long that hospital list was to be but it was clear that the number [of survivors] would be catastrophic.

Disillusioned about the future, I returned to the flat. But after a discussion with Hela I decided to revise our plan for the night, should there be a chance of escape, we would not wait for a selection, but we would not commit suicide by rushing at the SS as there would always be time for such a step.

A new blow came before the evening. We saw a group of about 30 SS-men, armed from head to toe in grenades, machine guns, etc., as well as with axes, pickaxes, and iron bars, go from Zamenhofa Street to Kupiecka Street.

I immediately understood what it was about – they were to search Kupiecka Street to check whether anybody was hiding there. But there were our loved ones: my mother with Anka and Staś (I suspected that Anka would hide together with Mum instead of going to the selection, because then Staś would certainly be doomed) and also Hela's parents.

We stood there, as if nailed to the window panes, watching what was happening on the street right in front of us, almost out of our minds. A senior thug blew a whistle and the others spread out, running into the buildings and after a while we heard the thud of the doors that those thugs broke open to enter the flats. It was so quiet that we could even 'make out' the calls and laughter of those beasts.

At some moment we heard louder desperate shouts of the discovered Jews, whom those beasts were torturing, and after a moment, after several shots, everything became quiet again. We were as if glued to the windows even though people were trying to lead us away almost by force, because the Nazis were leisurely shooting at the silhouettes appearing in the windows.

With every cry and every shot it seemed to us that they were shooting and torturing my mother or Hela's parents. That lasted nearly two hours, when they assembled at another whistle, now burdened with the things that had now been looted. And they walked away, laughing and telling one another funny details of the final moments of the people they had just murdered. After a short while we were approached by an Order Service functionary, who was on duty on the corner of Zamenhofa and Kupiecka Streets. He told us that they had captured and murdered 16 people, but they had not found anybody on Kupiecka Street, where our family members were hiding.

The night was horrible. None of our companions in distress could sleep. Only the children, who did not sense anything bad, were sound asleep on their mothers' laps. We, the adults, were either talking quietly with one another, asking for the thousandth time: Why? What do they want from us? Where is fate taking us? Or we sat engrossed in our own sad thoughts.

I made a makeshift bed for Hela and me on a low cupboard covered with a thick glass pane. And we lay there, tired and constantly plagued by our hopeless thoughts. We could see the street from the windows. There, the Nazis made several bonfires in the light of which I saw that my day plan to sneak through the cordon was completely unfeasible, because they would have shot us dead as soon as we would have stepped out of the gate.

The only people walking on the street were Order Service patrols, who kept calling, "Ordnungsdienst – Nachtdienst," so that the SS-men would not open fire at them. Nonetheless, in the morning we learned that the SS had leisurely shot several Order Service functionaries, including a higher ranking officer, simply because they had such a whim.

In the morning, we washed ourselves and afterwards we ate our modest supplies I went to the Community thinking that I should be where our fate was being decided. As crossing the street was dangerous, Hela initially persuaded me against it, but I explained to her that during the preparation of the list by the Director he would probably take into consideration not so much his own preferences as his wife's. Consequently, it was necessary for the list to be controlled by the physicians. Therefore, we, the delegates, should be there. Indeed, it seems that my presence at that time saved not only Hela and me, but also three other physicians with their wives and children.

The commission, which was in session on the ground floor of the building at Gęsia Street 17 (former prison), was composed of Director Stein, Doctor Milejkowski, the Director of the Department of Health (but he was absent when the list was being compiled), Doctor Braude-Heller²¹ (Director of the children's hospital), and Colonel Kon²² from the Department of Health.

As the windows overlooked the courtyard, we had a good view of the Commission from afar. Several other physicians and I stood in the distance, watching. We were immediately negatively surprised that the Director's wife was sitting with the commission (as a secretary, as we later found out) and that the Director, who was usually on good terms with us and always greeted us in a friendly way, was then reluctant to notice us and did not even look at us. Apparently the situation of us, physicians, was not good in there.

Consequently, Kahan²³ went to talk with Milejkowski and I took his place (Ratner²⁴ was absent).

²¹ Doctor Anna Braude-Heller – paediatrician and social activist. Before the war, in 1930, the Bersohns and Baumans Childrens' Hospital resumed its activity on her initiative. From then on until its final liquidation in August 1942 Braude-Heller was the head physician and infant ward head. In the ghetto she chaired the Health Commission and participated in the research on hunger disease. She died during the uprising in April 1943 in the last ghetto hospital at Gęsia Street 6/8.

²² Doctor Mieczysław Kon – colonel of the Polish Army, during the siege of Warsaw one of the sanitary inspectors of the city, in the ghetto worked in the management of the *Judenrat's* Department of Health.

²³ In the Warsaw ghetto there were three physicians named Kahan: Doctor Aleksander Kahan, born on 20 February 1898, internist; Doctor Izaak Kahan, born on 31 March 1905, dental surgeon, and Doctor Dawid Hirszt Kahan, born on 11 April 1912, internist, who worked in the Czyste Hospital before the war. This is probably a reference to Dawid Hirszt Kahan.

²⁴ Izidor Jerzy Ratner – born in 1910 in Warsaw, graduated in medicine from the Warsaw University in 1934, internal medicine specialist, before the war worked in the Czyste Hospital.

At some moment, Doctor Kon from the Department of Health enters with the apparently ready list of the Department of Health members and begins reasoning with Doctors Stein and Braude-Heller. A dispute ensues and after a moment they call me over and the Director's wife begins to explain the following issue to me.

As the Germans have allowed for 3,000 employees to remain in the Community, the hospital quota is approx. 120 people (I cannot remember the exact number). Consequently, a great, deadly reduction must be made. Every person, be it a child, woman, or man, is to receive a life card with a number, and during the selection conducted by the Germans those able to show such a [life] number will be allowed to stay.

The Department of Health solved that problem by putting on the list only those physicians and employees who were already without their families. Consequently, the Department had only actual employees on its list.

The situation in the hospital was different as most of the families there had remained intact, because they had survived in the hospital building. Consequently, the following was proposed: the physicians and the helpers who agreed to give up their wives and children were to put their names on the list in return for a number. Alternatively, listing wives and children would reduce the number of the actual employees, at the same time saving the children and wives.

The mission to find out how the hospital employees wished to solve that problem was assigned to me. I thought that the matter was simple: nobody or almost nobody would agree to send their wife and children to death for the purpose of saving themselves. And I did say that but some of the commission members believed that such a list could be produced and then it would be possible to make the SS-ordered decision about who would stay to work and who would be given into the Germans' hands.

I walked to Gęsia Street 19. I gathered everybody around me, presented those two alternatives, and said that by order of the Commission I was to make a list of those who would survive by giving up their relatives. I gave them about ten minutes for a reflection and discussion and I took a piece of paper and a pencil and I stood in a corner waiting for the set time to elapse. I looked at Hela, who approached me, asking me to put my name on the list as she would purportedly cope without me. She was well aware that it would be final, that those without a number would die. I smiled because I had made up my mind at once and, teasing her a little, I said that I would certainly put my name on that list. Meanwhile, the courtyard was a hive of activity. It seems that the people had just realised that we were doomed and that only a handful of the selected would have a right to live.

The atmosphere defied description – bottomless sadness and despair. When the time passed everybody surrounded me. A pencil in hand, I was ready to start writing. And then something happened that I am proud happened among Jews in such circumstances. I was requested to speak my mind first. I openly announced that I would not put my name on that list, because what happened to my wife

would happen to me too. And... nobody put their name on the list except two individuals who were single.

I returned with that result to the Community. I told the commission about the people's reactions to those proposals, which made some of the members very satisfied, particularly Doctor Braude-Heller, who was happy that the people had taken such a stance.

There was nothing else for the Commission to do but compile the lists on its own. On the occasion of that conversation with the Commission I saw the draft of the list lying on the table. When I scanned it, I had a shock; the list comprised the surnames of only the Director and his wife, his family, heads of hospital departments, and people liked by the Director[or/the Director's wife]. Except for Kahan and his wife, there were no physicians who were not department heads.

I realised that if I did not fight and stopped monitoring the preparation of the list, I would be doomed same as the other physicians.

So I went with them to the first floor, where they were to make the final list. The only people working there were the Director, Sztabholc,²⁵ and, of course, the Director's wife.

I sent my colleague to I notify my other colleagues about the draft of the list and I began to convince and beg the Director to be as kind as to save us too. Unfortunately, I was wasting my breath. The Director was justifying himself saying that he had a quota and would not include any more names on the list.

I knew that I would achieve nothing. Meanwhile, the time of the distribution of the 'life badges' was nearing. I went out devastated and partially resigned. Other colleagues who had already learned about the list were already there. Doctor Milejkowski happened to be passing by at that very moment. We that is, Franio Fliderbaum,²⁶ Cygielnik,²⁷ and I rushed to him and told him about the Director's handling [of the situation]. Outraged, he promised to intervene immediately. He went upstairs with us and ordered the Director to include our names on the list and [he promised] to make sure that they would assign several more numbers for us.

Consequently, we were to remain alive too, doing no harm to anybody. Director Stein reacted in a strange way (it seems that he intended to allocate those additional numbers to some of his converts) and he refused, explaining that there would be no full-time jobs, etc. Consequently, we interfered and, to appease the situation, Doctor Milejkowski told him to write [our names] and said that the full-time jobs would be found. In the end, the Director's wife took the list and entered our names.

That was how Doctor Milejkowski saved us. We left the Director's office with very hard feelings toward him.

²⁵ Doctor Ignacy Sztabholc – engineer, head of the administration of the Czyste Hospital and then on Gęsia Street.

²⁶ Franio Fliderbaum – born in 1898, internal medicine specialist.

²⁷ Abram Nusym Cygielnik – born in 1911, ob/gyn.

The next day Doctor Milejkowski handed the 'numbers' to most of the physicians. I returned to Hela. Meanwhile, when I was at the Community, the march began of the groups, which had survived the selection. Escorted by the *Werkschutz*, they were walking in fours from the *Umschlagplatz* towards their tenements. Looking at them marching, it became clear to us what a horrible and thorough selection the Germans had conducted.

There was the group of C. Toebebens – the ghetto company with the largest number of employees. The returning group was small, with a handful of women and no sign of children. Only the men had remained and, making matters worse, very few of them. Apparently, when the mothers were to be separated from their children they preferred to die with them. The Germans' humanitarianism manifested itself in their eager compliance with the wishes of those who wanted to go to Treblinka.

During that period in the ghetto there were actually no elderly people or children because they had all been captured. The same applied to most of the women.

Hela watched those marching groups with great anxiety, because Irka was supposed to be in one of them. Unfortunately, we did not notice her. We even rushed out onto the street to learn what had happened at the workshop on Leszno Street where Irka worked, but nobody had any information. We did not see Anka with Staś or Ewa²⁸ among the marching people either. We were consoling ourselves with the thought that they might have been marching along Nalewki Street but the despair over our loved ones added to our fear for our own lives.

And we stood like that until it became dark. In the evening everybody was sitting sad and devastated in their own corners, without any desire to talk or eat anything. But once in a while somebody would utter the only sentence which everybody had thought a hundred times: how good it would be if Soviet aircraft flew over Warsaw and bombed the city and us with it. How sweet death would seem to us if we knew that our oppressors and the hyenas from the Polish community were dying with us.

But as if in defiance, the SS and the Ukrainians were making fires, readying themselves to spend the night, not fearing any air raid.

The night was horrible. I doubt whether anybody slept a wink. All I could hear was people twisting and turning and sighing frequently.

The next morning I went to the Community again. There had been frantic commotion since the early morning. The lists had been prepared and sent to the SS staff,²⁹ which was conducting the campaign to exterminate the Jews.

²⁸ Ewa Lessing (1904–1998) – the author's sister, pharmacist, ran a pharmacy in the ghetto. During the deportation campaign she lost two little daughters: Elżunia and Zosia. She survived; after the war immigrated to Israel, where she gave birth to her son Yossi.

²⁹ The deportation campaign in the Warsaw ghetto was directed by the *Befehlstelle* – the staff of a special formation called *Einsatz Reinhardt*, headed by SS-Sturmabführer Hermann Höfle. It came from Lublin and had its headquarters in the tenement at Żelazna Street 103.

I learned extremely important details – the Germans had decided to preserve only ten per cent of the ghetto population, which meant that only about 35,000 people would remain.

The rest, that is, approximately 150,000 people were to be liquidated now.

So it is true that 350,000 people were tortured to death or murdered from 21 July to 8 September.

This matches the number we had, because throughout 6 weeks 6,000–8,000 people were loaded every day, and sometimes there were 2 transports, not counting the people murdered in the Jewish cemeteries, on the streets, and in flats.

We could not catch our breath; our throats were parched, which made swallowing painful. We did not feel like talking, living, and particularly thinking. How is it possible to murder 400,000 innocent people in 6 weeks? Children who trustingly clung onto the arms and uniforms of those German beasts before they smashed their heads?

Where is the world? Where is that famous morality? Where is Christianity? Why do they let them do something like this and for what sins?

We were suffering spiritually, but there was no trace of any hope whatsoever.

Meanwhile, the Director ran out of the building and ordered us, that is, those who were on the list, to assemble quietly and without attracting the attention of the rest who were to die. We were to move to the Community building, because the final selection was to take place there between ten and eleven o'clock.

We returned to Zamenhofa Street 19 for the rest of our people, and I returned for Hela. Even though we were discreet everybody guessed what it was about and the scene that ensued could be described perhaps only by Dante. They had just realised that they were doomed because policemen had come to the gate and let through only those on the list. If those people had been crying, I would have been less moved than by their silent despair. They walked to and fro, kissing their children as if during a final farewell. Spouses consoled each other that apparently such was the Jewish fate. Some were pulling their hair out, while still others were praying. One could also hear people cursing the management, particularly when whole families of hospital department heads walked by, escorted by the Order Service.

Hela and I could not bear to keep on watching and listening in to those scenes. Besides, an Order Service functionary ran to us every now and then to say that he was about to close the gate for good and we left.

Columns of six people in a row, arranged according to the institution they worked in, were already forming on the Community square (former military prison yard). We, people from the Department of Health and hospitals, were to go as the last. So only now did they begin to give us the life numbers according to the list. Those were yellow cardboard cards 15 by 8 centimeters with one's individual number, full name, the institution where one worked, and a Community seal with a signature.

The fact was that in the Community the selections were left up to its authorities, which meant that it received 3,500 life numbers and it could decide how to distribute them.

Consequently, [it was] the only institution that retained children, women, and even the elderly, because when somebody was given a card, so was their wife, children, and entire family, as in the case of the Director's family. Around eleven o'clock, the SS arrived on the square and the distribution was accelerated. Led by the Order Service, columns began to form and there was a thorough selection among the Order Service.

Its functionaries were also the most disappointed about the Germans, because the latter had often promised them that they would be safe in return for their help in the campaign to capture and trace the Jews and that they would survive with their families. Back in late August the Order Service functionaries received the first blow when their families were deported (their wives and children were allowed to stay). Now, during this selection, they were handled without kid's gloves, as any other Jews, because the SS no longer had any use for them.

Granted that some of those excluded were put on work details, but most of them went to their death, cursing themselves for helping the Germans.

It was almost eleven o'clock and the SS took charge of the square. Every now and then I could hear a shot and the cries of the murdered, mostly among those who had tried to squeeze themselves into the columns to save their lives in that way. An increasing number of SS-men and Gestapo functionaries were running between the columns, knouts and revolvers in their hands, chasing away the people without the cards onto the square in the direction of Gęsia Street. It was excruciating to watch the people (among them our physician colleagues) begging us for rescue in between the Germans' heads.

Doctor Janowski's wife³⁰ in particular took leave of her senses. She would not leave the courtyard even after a tussle and the kicks from the SS boots. In the end, covered in blood, she was carried out onto the square by several Order Service functionaries.

Now began the parade of death, reviewed by the SS staff of the campaign to exterminate the Jews, with participation of the representatives of the Warsaw Gestapo. They stood on both sides of the gate, which led out of the prison to Zamenhofa Street, and we went through the gate in sixes. They looked every person in the face and checked whether he or she had the 'life number' and at the same time counting us so that God forbid one Jew extra would survive.

The columns began to walk through the gate. As the last ones, we saw them enter the gate one after another, escorted on the sides by the SS-men holding

³⁰ Doctor Ilja Janowski – born in 1904, internal medicine specialist, paediatrician, also did medical tests, before the war worked in the Czyste Hospital and during the war also in the Community's laboratory.

whips and revolvers. In the silence we often heard the swish of a whip falling onto the passing people's heads.

Our columns eventually moved too and we were approaching the gate slowly, step by step. In the gate we were welcomed by the laughter of the SS-men and Gestapo functionaries standing there. The way we looked – like desperate and hunted animals, was apparently very amusing to them.

The aspect of the appearance of those murderers' that struck me and actually almost everybody else was the impression we all had when looking at them. During the entire recent extermination campaign, constantly pursued and in hiding, we almost never saw a German from close by, because otherwise we would have already been dead. But seeing and hearing about these murders and the bestial torture, we created an image of the Germans as people with horrible faces, whereas now we saw a group of those oppressors – young and old, smartly dressed, clean, some of them looking relatively 'pleasant', "like professors," as some of the people said. The only thing that testified to their true function was the revolvers and whips they were holding and... the blows we received. Walking by them, one elderly Nazi, white-haired and with golden pince-nez, counted every row and gave a signal to walk through, whipping the people on the head. As I was on the side of the row with Hela closer to the middle I also received such a blow, which reminded me about my rightful position.

When our entire column walked through [the gate] we were ordered to march to our block of flats on Pawia Street. On the way, as always, there were corpses or heaps of corpses every couple of steps, and traces of blood all along the way.

The flat was completely rummaged through. A number of more valuable things were gone, which proved that the 'new order' heroes had been there acting in the name of the *Führer*.

Now came the reaction to our last painful experiences. We felt completely powerless and exhausted, and after a modest meal we threw ourselves on the beds and we lay there awake even though we were tired.

In the late afternoon we went to Pawia Street 4, where the Director and other [Jewish] Council members were living, because I wanted to learn of any news. As soon as the immediate danger to our lives passed the issue of our loved ones came to the fore once again in all its awfulness.

At the Director's we learned that the selection came to an end and that all the others were driven to the *Umschlagplatz*, where wagons were already being loaded and from where the transports of death departed. As for our people from the hospital, as soon as we were escorted out the SS commenced a hunt and escorted everybody out. Some of those who were in hiding and were captured were brutally murdered on the spot.

Our car was used to rescue our hospital people from the *Umschlagplatz* – it pretended to take the sick to the hospital on Stawki Street and on its way back it took the rescued posing as members of the hospital staff.

It was strange that the gendarmerie and the SS let our ambulance through with people in white smocks, which saved a few dozen people, mostly physicians and counsellors' family members, but then the Germans forbade it to come to the *Umschlagplatz*. Apparently they had received no order to deal with the hospital yet.

I returned from the Director to find an order from the Community to report to it at seven o'clock in the morning on the next day with all the men and a certain number of women. From there we were to go to *Werterfassung SS*³¹ to be at the disposal of the SS, which was to employ us there. As far as physicians were concerned, it was to be more or less once every two days, because it was assumed that apart from our work as physicians in the hospital we, the Jewish physicians, should work physically for the SS. We arranged it so that the hospital sent us to work every other day according to the list.

In the morning we went to the designated place from where a group leader escorted us to Niska Street, where one of the SS-men selected ten younger healthy men from our group and we drove by cart to Żelazna Street to the post-Jewish residential buildings. There, supervised by an SS-man with a whip, we had to carry out furniture, clothes, and supplies, in short, everything [that was there], and load those things onto the carts, which took them to the storehouses. We worked, often hurried with a whip, without a moment of rest and when we were loading the things onto the carts we often had encounters with the Polish population because the street was divided into the Polish side and the Jewish side (the ghetto).

There, we once again saw what our fellow countrymen were like. There was an SS-man with us who upon our request let us buy bread, because we were starving in the ghetto. Besides, we had not eaten anything since morning. So we asked the Polish pedestrians to do nothing more than take our money and buy us bread in a shop on the other side of the street. The SS-man encouraged them and... not even one Pole volunteered. On the contrary, they stopped, looking at us and making fun of our clothing (most of us were wearing ragged clothes), because of our labour, and particularly of our being Jewish, and it amused them greatly when the SS-man hurried us with a whip.

Pushed around, hungry, and with heavy stones thrown at us, we could do nothing else than work until one o'clock in the afternoon, which was lunch hour. After an hour break, when we received 200 grammes of bread and watery soup, we worked until the evening. In the evening, after work, we received 300 grammes of bread from the Community and we returned home.

The next morning I went to the Director and there I accidentally met a nurse from the hospital on the *Umschlagplatz*. When she learned my surname, she ran to me with news that on the *Umschlagplatz* there were two children with some lady, begging their uncle for help.

³¹ Actually *Werterfassungsstelle* – the SS enterprise that assembled and sold property left by the murdered Jews of the Warsaw ghetto.

I was thunderstruck. I completely lost my mind. I was running from place to place, asking myself what to do. Even though I had recently been living with that fear of receiving this news at any moment, I was in a dreadful shock. My colleagues around me were consoling and advising me. But I could not understand what they were saying to me and I only turned to my neighbours for them to lend me their documents so that I could go to the *Umschlagplatz* and try to get them out. Besides, I could not understand how the children ended up there without Ewa. As the nurse explained, the children were there with their teacher.

Where is Ewa? What is happening with Dziutek?³² I could not find answers to those questions. In that situation my colleague Makower³³ approached me and said that he was in a similar situation, because his sister's children had been taken away too and he was going to the *Umschlagplatz* to rescue them and he said he would take our children too. He forbade me to go, because I had little chance of getting the children out and I would die myself. As a police physician in a uniform, he was authorised to go through the SS and gendarmerie guard posts and he would do everything he could. He took from me the documents for the form tutor and he left in an ambulance. And I stayed and... waited. Hours passed, but colleague Makower was not coming back. It was already dark when the ambulance pulled up and I learned the truth from the way colleague Makower looked... The children were lost.

The fact that I did not lose my mind and that I was able to comprehend what he was saying to me was perhaps because we and I were fated to suffer even more.

So Makower arrived on the *Umschlagplatz* and after a long search he found his and our children. They were happy that their uncle had sent help and that they would be able to get out of that hell. They cried with joy that they would return to Mummy and their family. He managed to put the children and Miss Ewa in the ambulance and they drove towards the gate guarded by the Jewish Order Service functionaries, who let them through. After an intervention with the gendarmerie [when he said?] that in the ambulance were helpers returning from duty (the children were hidden under tarpaulins) they drove safely through the gate. It seemed that they would survive. Suddenly, comes a group

³² Dziutek – the author's brother-in-law, Ewa's husband.

³³ Doctor Henryk Makower – born in 1904 in Kalisz; before the war graduated in medicine from the Jagiellonian University in Cracow; until the outbreak of the war worked in Łódź as an internist; in the Warsaw ghetto became the head of the infectious diseases ward in the Bersohns and Baumans Children's Hospital, lectured at medical courses, also an Order Service physician, lived at Żelazna Street 58; after the January campaign crossed to the 'Aryan' side with his wife, who was a physician too; in hiding in Stara Miłosna near Warsaw, where he wrote a memoir about his stay in the ghetto; after the war associated with the University of Wrocław, where he earned his postdoctoral degree, the director of the Laboratory of Virology of the Immunology and Experimental Therapy Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences (*Polska Akademia Nauk*, PAN), died in Wrocław in 1964.

of SS-men and they look into the vehicle. They find the children and whip the adults, who are shielding the children from those thugs. The SS-men kick our poor terrified children with their boots and order the ambulance to return to the *Umschlagplatz* with a bestial cry to quickly load "*solches Dreck und Scheiss*"³⁴ for they do not want to see a trace of this Jewish shit left. That was how those scoundrels referred to our precious children, Elżunia and Zosia, whom we loved so much.³⁵

Before Makower finished his story, our ambulance returned empty because the Germans were already loading the wagons, so nobody else could be saved that day.

It is horrible, simply horrible. What are these innocent children to die for? And making matters worse, in such an atrocious way. And this is supposed to be the age of culture, the 20th century.

The blow dealt by that news and that desperate rescue attempt was not the last. Besides, we were constantly thinking about our other relatives. Hela was in particular despair because there was no news from Irka or her parents. Devastated by our recent experiences and my concern for Mum, Ewa, Anka and Staś, and Franka with Sawek, I tried to console her, albeit with difficulty. Not believing myself what I was saying, I stopped the conversation.

So we lay awake throughout the night, with Hela breaking into a stifled sob every now and then. That lasted until morning. As on the day before I was readying myself to go to the Director to obtain news about the *Umschlagplatz*. Suddenly, the door opens and... Ewa storms in. The sight of her was so horrible that at first I could not believe that my sister could look like that. It seems that nobody could describe such a shocking sight: her hair was let loose, her look blind, her clothes scruffy, and her lips constantly moving in a quiet whisper, barely audible: "Give me back my children... Mummy."

She let out a louder cry only when she stormed in, and in a voice hoarse with constant weeping. "Heniek, they have taken my children. And Mum too. I will

³⁴ *Solches Dreck und Scheiss* (German) – This filth and shit.

³⁵ A fragment of Henryk Makower's memoir:

On Saturday I was in the hospital [on the *Umschlagplatz*] as early as at 5.30 a.m. [...] The cart for the children was to arrive later. Nurse R. arranged it with Szmerling that he would let six children leave. Meanwhile, incredible things began to happen with the cart – aside from that group of children who were on the list, including two children of my Ema's colleague, a lot of people, including adults, began to push their way onto it. [...] After a long while the cart finally pulled out, but it went only a short distance. The number of passengers was larger than the amount of money Szmerling had been paid for them. [...] I ordered the driver to pull out. [...] The cart started rolling and I walked beside it. As it was approaching a turn leading to the gate suddenly an SS-man dressed in a leather jacket arrived on a motorbike. He looked at the cart and the children lying on it and shouted: '*Nieder mit dem Scheiss*' [German – Away with this shit]. [...] The children alighted from the cart (Henryk Makower. *Pamiętnik z getta warszawskiego, październik 1940–styczeń 1943* [Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1987], pp. 132–133).

never see them again – my Zośka and Elżunia. Save them for me. You'll do it, won't you?"

So I am losing Mum too – our angelic Mother, whom we put in the shelter at the św. Ducha Hospital almost by force. She preferred to give herself up into the German murderers' hands so as not to cause us trouble or put us in danger. That person, dearest to us, who sacrificed her entire life for her children. Initially, when we were still economically dependent on our parents they denied themselves everything so that we, the children, did not lack anything. Dying of typhus fever, our father said at his last conscious moment that he was leaving this world calm because he knew that his children loved him and would take care of their mother. And now we are losing her, and, making matters worse, in such a horrible way.

Meanwhile, Ewa told us what happened to her and to Mum and the children. Sobbing, she could not speak fluently. When we last saw Mum she was with Anka and Staś. That was in the ruins of the św. Ducha Hospital.³⁶ I decided back then that Hela and I would go with the hospital staff and that Anka, Mum, and Staś would go with Hela's parents to Kupiecka Street 8 to their house, where there was a very safe shelter. After the selection, which they were to survive, we planned to take them from there.

Meanwhile, persuaded by our friends who worked at [...], Anka changed her plan. She believed that she and Staś would be given a life number so she decided to go to the tenement on Miła Street and report for the selection. She would take Mum to Ewa, because Ewa mentioned that under their pharmacy (on the corner of Smocza and Niska Streets) was a small hidden cellar, where they would take shelter, and those who wished to hide there could join them.

And that she did. Ewa took Mum in even though her companions were protesting heavily because the cellar was already overcrowded. Mum was already devastated physically after the six weeks she had spent in a dungeon without sleep or food except some hot soup we brought every early morning. She broke down because of all that and the awareness that everybody was looking daggers at her because she was taking up place for somebody young, and the concern for us, her children and grandchildren. Purportedly she only sat in a corner, weeping quietly. Ewa took care of her as best she could, but she was busy in the pharmacy almost all day long, because pharmacists wished to show that they were working as they still believed that they would survive if the Germans left them to work.

The pharmacists' children, including Ewa's, were hidden with Miss Ewa on the third floor in a perfectly masked shelter under a window. That was how they survived the first and the second blockade and then began the third one, that is, on the last day of the selection when the rest of the people were taken away. The blockade was conducted by very large and heavily armed group of SS-men, Ukrainians, and Jewish Order Service functionaries.

³⁶ Elektoralna Street 12.

The pharmacists from the pharmacy already knew that the selection had sentenced them to death, because those who were conducting it came to the Community on Gęsia Street, where they put on the list predominantly their people and those present there, but they did not notify the pharmacy. Consequently, the pharmacists decided to stay in hiding all the time, with only one person staying outside to inform the rest about a nearing blockade.

During that third blockade the person outside was a man who always behaved in a suspicious way towards his colleagues. He threatened to denounce them to the Gestapo and according to professional information, he was never a pharmacist and was probably a Gestapo informer in their group.

That day that man stayed outside. The rest believed that he would not denounce them because his family member was hiding with them in the cellar. Besides, they were at his mercy with a line of SS-men stretching by the pharmacy door.

The blockade began and... the children were the first ones to fall into those German thugs' hands, because on the ground floor by the window there was a hideout identical to that on the third floor and somebody escaping from the Germans hid himself there, but the SS-men noticed him sliding the boards shut and began looking for such hideouts on the other floors.

Of course, the children and Miss Ewa were beaten up. The pharmacists could hear the children crying and weeping. As a matter of fact there was constant weeping, spasms, shots, and the moaning of the murdered and tortured people. Then there was the sound of the SS trying to force their way into the pharmacy and the voices of the SS-men talking with their 'colleague' who was keeping guard, shouts, and... the moving of the buffet which covered the hatch to the cellar, and... the dragging out of the victims.

I am unable to write because the thought about what my Mum suffered is too dreadful. Dragged out by her hair, Mum was kicked with their boots, whipped on her face, trunk, stomach, and head, and yet she was only quietly weeping and moaning. Ewa could not even shield her, because she was already separated by a whole cordon of the SS and Ukrainians. She only saw our mother's torment and the Germans' laughter.

May you be cursed forever.

They never saw their children again because as soon as they were dragged out of the hideout, they were transported to the *Umschlagplatz* because there were already very large groups of the captured. In the end, Ewa was to be escorted [to the *Umschlagplatz*] too, but then came a Jewish Order Service officer who always bought medicine in their pharmacy and luckily he knew Ewa so he tried to intervene with the Ober SS-man to obtain their release but to no avail. But when the group was being escorted from the courtyard onto the street, he arranged it so that almost all of the pharmacists escaped as agreed earlier and they hid themselves until all the SS-men and Ukrainians left. The next day the whole extended order of the SS was removed because the cleansing was over and Ewa came running to us.

Dziutek was in the brush makers' workshop, hoping to be exempted as the Director was his good friend. He did not know about the children yet. We had to finish our tragic conversation because it was almost eight o'clock in the morning and there could be new blockades. Consequently, Ewa had to return to her burrow and I jumped onto my feet to run to save [my relatives].

First of all, I went to the Management, where I learned that the last groups of Jews were still on the *Umschlagplatz*, awaiting the departure of the last transport of wagons. The last time that our ambulance left was in the morning but that time it was not allowed to enter the hospital grounds. All they managed to find out was that the hospital was now guarded by the SS, who were deporting the hospital that is liquidating everybody in it. The severely ill were carried on stretchers by other Jews into the wagons, the helpers were doing that under whip blows. As soon as they finished the loading of the patients they were also thrown into the wagons.

The physicians assembled in the Director's room were in despair because a liquidation of the physicians present could be expected, particularly that the SS were running amok there, murdering, beating everybody without exception, not sparing even the Jewish Order Service functionaries who had been helping them.

That was when I said that I was going to the *Umschlagplatz* to rescue my mother. Everybody attacked me as if I were a lunatic, saying that I was walking to my death, that it was pointless, because everybody had already been deported, besides, I would die before reaching the *Umschlagplatz*. I did not listen to them. I only asked them for a white smock and cap for my mother to put on so that I could try to escort her out as a nurse. If I found the children, I would try to put them in some hideout in the hospital and rescue them later. One of the nurses, who had just approached me, told me that when she was on the *Umschlagplatz* yesterday Mum begged her to give me her last regards.

I felt dizzy. I took her nurse's ID from her and the other nurses gave me the smock and cap and I left. In front of the gate was a cart from the *Transfer[stelle]* where Sawek worked and I asked them to notify him that Mum had been captured and that he should try to rescue her. They pulled out at once too. As I was walking down Pawia Street, I was joined by my colleague Doctor Finkelsztajn.³⁷ His parents had also been captured and he too was walking to... the *Umschlagplatz*.

At the last moment we were notified by a female director of a sanitary group, who was going to the *Umschlagplatz* under the pretext of changing the personnel, while in fact intending to rescue a few more people at the last moment. She hoped that she would obtain permission to enter and leave the *Umschlagplatz*, particularly that she had the support of the Order Service commander, whose parents she had rescued by escorting them out.

³⁷ Lejb Leon Finkielsztejn – born in 1911, internist, before the war worked in the Poznańskis Hospital in Łódź, during the occupation in the Warsaw ghetto, where he died.

I cannot remember her name, but blessed be her memory for she had saved dozens of people, children and elderly, always risking her own life if the SS had discovered what she was doing. So she told me at the last moment that on the *Umschlagplatz* I should join her group, and then I might be able to leave. And we went. There were Ukrainian and SS posts from Pawia Street to Gęsia Street. They let us through when we said that we were volunteers for the 'deportation'. There was not a living soul in sight except for the Germans and Ukrainians. The sight was horrifying. That was the first time I understood and saw what the expression 'blood-drenched soil' meant. Those who use such expressions perhaps have seen nothing like it: the weather was beautiful and sunny, while all along our way there were literally pools of blood. Blood mixed with sand flowed in the gutters. Here and there it was already clotted. And all of it was Jewish blood. The number of corpses was relatively small compared to the amount of blood spilled. That was because the oppressors, who disliked unpleasant sights, had groups of cemetery workers follow them to collect the corpses immediately after the Jews were shot or beaten to death.

There must have been a lot to do because there were still some corpses lying around despite the large number of the gravediggers with carts. Besides, the blood testified to that.

On our way, we encountered two young people in smocks with Red Cross badges who were walking in the same direction, pushing a stretcher.

Surprised at the sight of us they spoke to us and when they learned what we intended they told us to walk by the stretcher pretending to be medical staff, but they also stressed that while it was easy to enter the *Umschlagplatz*, there was certainly little chance of our getting out.

But those warnings did not discourage us either. We kept on walking. We finally walked through the guard post by the entrance and entered... hell. Beside the guard post with additional gendarmes there were whole groups of the Jewish Order Service functionaries who kept order in that human mass. Of course, they were outside the crowd, that is, beyond the wires, which was a precaution as at that time it was already dangerous to be an Order Service functionary. Unable to reckon with the German beasts, the dying Jews could direct their hatred at least at the Nazis' Jewish lackeys.

At one of the tables on the square by the entrance to the fenced-in section, on a soft-cushioned chair, sat the commander of the Order Service,³⁸ surrounded by a band of his officers. I knew him in person, because he had put his parents in the hospital on Leszno Street during a roundup for the elderly. They pretended to be sick and I was the one taking care of them.

³⁸ Mieczysław Szmeling – Jewish police officer, during the deportation campaign the commander of the *Umschlagplatz*, generally hated, brutal, cruel, and corrupt. The Jewish Fighting Organisation (*Żydowska Organizacja Bojowa*, ŻOB) sentenced him to death, but the assassination attempt conducted in August 1942 failed.

Assuming that I had to do with a humane individual, I turned to him to facilitate my rescuing of Mother, meaning that, he should not disturb me in my escorting her out once I find her. I would negotiate with the Germans myself. That thug replied that rescuing anybody was out of the question because he was vouching for it with his head, besides, he too had also lost his parents (apparently, after the liquidation of the hospital on Leszno Street, the Germans murdered his parents with the other elderly people). I understood that I could not hope for anything from him and that I was wasting my time because, out of kindness toward me, a physician, he revealed some official information to me in secret, that is, that the SS were about to come to liquidate the whole hospital. I stepped within the wires. It was horrible. It was difficult to walk through the human mass. Most of the people were wearing fine clothes and looked intelligent. That was the result of a hunt among the intelligentsia: pharmacists, physicians, clerks, and specialists from the German factories. It was incredibly quiet for such a mass of people. Perhaps everybody was subconsciously preparing for death, because they certainly knew what awaited them.

One could hear only the weeping of the children, comforted by their mothers or by strangers if they no longer had mothers. The terrible tragedy taking place on that square, unprecedented in human history, moved me too, even though I was focused on one thought only, finding my mother and perhaps the children too.

As I was walking among those people, not weeping only because they were not either, I kept repeating one question under my breath: For what sins? For what sins? For what sins? At some moment a little girl who saw me in the white smock with a physician's armband came running to me to ask me to help her sick mother. I went with her. Her mother was fainting from weakness and exhaustion and also, perhaps predominantly, from fear of death, though not her own but her daughter's. She asked me again and again: "Doctor, are they going to kill my child?" I answered and ran away to avoid listening to any more of her questions.

I met acquaintances and friends at almost every step. Some only nodded at me from afar. Others approached me and asked whether I could help them. I asked for information about my mother. They helped me look for her in that human mass. In the end I encountered a group of my cousins by the name of Gobl-Montlik.

They, that is, the father with his son, a 12-year-old darling boy, told me that he could get out to a work detail, but they would not go unless they rescued the wife and mother too. When they learned why I came there, everybody dispersed and as the search on the square eventually failed I decided to enter the building. But I was hesitant because on the square I could hope for the Order Service's help in escorting me out, whereas nobody could leave the building because the door was locked.

I succeeded in calling the turnkey over and he let me in upon my insistent request. There were some of my friends there too, among whom I encountered

Palej, an Order Service functionary and our administrator. I also saw a lot of other functionaries of the Order Service but now already as material to be loaded into the wagons.

Palej told me that I was too late because my dearest Mum had been loaded into a wagon the day before and he added 'for consolation' that she had left accompanied by his mother, so at least she was not alone. Until the last moment she bemoaned the fact that she could not see her son. She believed that her son would rescue her from the wagon.

My poor mother was beaten up. Why did she suffer so much? All her life she did no harm to anybody. She would not let us, her children, hurt even a fly, whereas those German beasts tortured her so brutally.

I could not stand listening to him any longer. Besides, Palej understood that in the state I was after learning that I had no mother anymore, I would be unable to make any effort to escape from that hell. He escorted me to the door and luckily the turnkey recognised me and let me out. After his return Palej ordered me to save myself because the children were not there either because they had been taken away from there a day before Mother. Palej died, but he behaved like a friend of our family.

I recognised nobody else on the square. Besides, having learned about the outcome of my search, my friends no longer approached me.

I met Doctor Finkelsztajn and he told me that he had met his parents and that they joined the line of the hospital employees about to leave the square. Barely conscious, I stood on the side and I would have died if it had not been for the nurse,³⁹ the director of the sanitarian group, who came for me to the square. When she learned from the Order Service chief that the hospital would be liquidated, she decided to return immediately. She remembered me, and she sent her female paramedics to fetch me and we were escorted out in a group of several people with a special pass. I can still hear the voice of the people calling after us... "Rescue us." Particularly Mentlik's pleading, but what could we do? Why, we were powerless. Arranged in a row, the group from the hospital, which was to leave with us, did not manage to because the SS pulled up and everybody, including the physicians and Doctor Finkelsztejn, died.

* * *

We, that is, those with 'a right to live' began a period of difficult, hopeless life. By order of the Germans, we had to organise the new hospital, that is, perhaps

³⁹ Probably Nurse Fryd – a matron in the Czyste Hospital and then on Gęsia Street, deported to Treblinka on 18 January 1943 during the selection in the hospital. During the 'kettle operation' it was authorised to drive the ambulance between the Umschlagplatz and the ghetto, which was how she transported Doctor Waller's one-year-old son out of the hospital on the square (YVA, O3.2358, Relacja Stanisława Wallera [Stanisław Waller's testimony]).

for the fifth time, transport the beds, furnishings, machines, etc., to the new building.

Of course, some of it became damaged during the transport, but most of it was looted by the Poles in the meantime, because we could transport those things using Polish transport only. During the move of our personal belongings, we personally witnessed the derision, jokes, and outright blackmail on the part of the Polish coachmen. We could not defend ourselves, because the Pole could approach the escorting SS-man and say that we had offended an 'Aryan', which, in the best case scenario, resulted in a severe beating by the SS-man with participation of the Polish coachman, as it often happened. The Poles whom we encountered at that time usually played a similar role to the thus maltreated Jews.

Only once did I see pity, from an old wagoner who was outraged at that barbarity. Let me stress that while staying in the ghetto, those Poles were eye witnesses of those crimes, so they could experience that first-hand. Nevertheless, almost all of them offered us the following word of 'consolation': "They are going to kill every last one of you anyway so it will be better if this... (jacket, watch, camera, etc.) falls into our hands than into the Germans' hands." This is perhaps how a hyena consoles its dying victim.

I can remember that one day around mid-September, when the weather was beautiful and sunny and we went by cart to the Community square, that is, there where the last infamous selection took place. There, we were supposed to...

* * *

21 April

Hela reminds me that the massacre of those 80 people, including her uncle, took place on the night of 17–18 April last year.

Andrzej⁴⁰ returned in the evening and said that there was a glow of fires over the Ghetto. When it became dark, I looked out. Indeed, there was a great fire with huge clouds of smoke over the rooftops, probably somewhere in the Praga quarter. The only comforting news is the invasion of Novorossiysk⁴¹ (the Germans are probably taking a beating but we shall see). Anyway, this portends some activity in spring.

23 April

Today Hela has been crying all day long. We have had no news from her parents from the ghetto. She has been reminding me once in a while that I was

⁴⁰ Andrzej Hanke – Romana's son.

⁴¹ Novorossiysk – a harbour at the Black Sea. The article "Ożywiona działalność bojowa pod Noworosyjskiem" [intensified fighting at Novorossiysk] was printed on the first page of the 20 April 1943 issue (94) of *Nowy Kurier Warszawski*.

often unfair to her parents. Now, looking back, I think that she is partly right, but let us not forget in what a tense situation all that happened.

The news about the ghetto is like rumours: the Jews had taken captive a thousand Germans and Ukrainians; they have released prisoners from the Pawiak prison, who are now fighting with them; the Bolshevik prisoners-of-war are joining them, etc.

The only, unfortunately true, information, which indicates to me how utterly tragic the situation is, is that the Ukrainians, those murderers, are taking part and that one train with 'elderly Jews who had surrendered voluntarily' has already left.

As far as politics is concerned, nothing is happening. They [the ghetto insurgents?] have no consolation even from there. Oh, how horribly dismal everything is!

* * *

1 December

I am leaving the dungeon. The alarm was caused by two lorries with cabs pulling up on the corner. Gendarmes alighted and it looked as if they would begin a search for *Banditen und Partisanen*, as these thugs say.⁴² The conditions in which Hela and I sat in are such that dungeons in maximum security prisons are luxurious in comparison: the ceiling's height is 60 centimetres, which was why we had to squat, and there was no backrest so we had to sit on the damp and dirty ground, in the dark, of course. At some moment, after about an hour of sitting there, Hela asks me to let her out, because she cannot endure it any longer, but we sat there for about three [more?] hours until the arrival of Miss R. I decided to go downstairs to the cellar, while Hela went home.

I intend to descend every day when it is still dark and return to the flat in the evening so as to avoid crossing the street in broad daylight, which obviously greatly upset Miss R., on whose mood my life depends.

It is interesting how habits become one's second nature. At such a dangerous moment, when we were convinced that those thugs were conducting a roundup, [the only thing I could think of?] was that I felt bad because I had not washed myself or combed my hair. So the first thing I did in the cellar was to comb my hair, and now I walk three hundred steps once in a while when my legs become too cold.

Fortunately, the alarm proved false, because the lorries with cabs pulled up there only because they needed some repair work and they left after the repair. We were so anxious because the situation in the city is extremely tense (by the local standards). Moreover, during her visit to a dentist yesterday, Hela learned that before her arrival there was a blockade of that entire tenement.

⁴² *Banditen und Partisanen* (German) – bandits and partisans.

It is obvious how that news affected us because we had thought that roundups were conducted only on the street. She was also told about the arrest of the directors of various institutions and the municipal council, the power plant, the gasworks, etc., which inspired new panic because the Poles knew what that entailed. In short, the Germans are using the same method as in our case, that is, gradual intensification of terror. Meanwhile, the war proceeds very slowly.

3 December

Yesterday I sat in the cellar for half a day, planning and beginning the construction of a hideout. As I was there alone, different images kept appearing in my mind, changing like in a kaleidoscope, causing ever new pain and hopelessness. I was furious with the German murderers and their collaborators.

Today I stayed at home. I did not feel like sitting in the cold and I was pestered mostly by loneliness and... mice. I hardly slept a wink at night because I kept envisioning ever new hideouts, and, most importantly, I woke up rapidly every couple of minutes, because I took some murmurs for the arrival of the oppressors. Besides, this happens all the time, during the day, in the evening, and at night.

Today in the morning I suddenly felt such acute psychical pain that I felt like ripping my clothes and pulling my hair out because I remembered Sawek when I put on his shoes. I cannot believe that I will never see him again – that darling, sweet boy who was as good as an angel. And such people were murdered.

I came to love him even more during the last days before leaving the ghetto.

* * *

Hela and Ewa crossed to the other side. As soon as I stepped back from the ladder they had climbed I felt a certain relief that I had finally taken a step towards survival.

The night was dark, it was raining, and the large puddles of mud from all the ruins made it difficult for us to walk. My father-in-law was silently weeping and it seems to me that he was praying for Hela's survival. Under the pretext of having difficulty walking, he took me by the hand and we silently walked home like that.

It was cold, sad, and awfully silent in the flat. Unable to eat, I went to sleep. In the morning I finally felt Hela's absence, but when I saw the people keeping guard and watching out for the Germans the fear of a blockade (death) returned. I dressed quickly as one always thought that those several minutes wasted on getting dressed, washing oneself, or a different activity would occasion one's death because one would come late onto the courtyard and the Germans would take [one?] by surprise in the meantime.

As always, everybody was in the courtyard having the same conversations and asking the same questions: "Is it safe? Have the work details passed through?" Because when the murderers organised a blockade the gendarmes by the gates

did not let the boys pass through on their way to work so that those victims did not slip out either.

That was also the first sign of a nearing deadly blockade.

And the constant question: What is going to happen? Everybody was certain that we were doomed, and even the remaining handful of 'no-matter-what optimists' had been aware of that since the January blockade when from six to eight thousand people were taken away, with a large percentage [of them?] executed on the spot. From then on everybody had been devastated. We had become a group of animals wild with fear – people whose every thought and action was oriented towards one issue only: what to do to survive (at least for the time being).

... conversations in the hospital: Ratner, Braude-Heller, Doctor Markusfeld,⁴³ Szpak.⁴⁴

Dinner, and afterwards I went to Sawek; Hela phoned; the hideout at Sawek's, their work; I spent the night at Anka and Franka's; home for breakfast in the morning, still before the blockade. Keeping an eye on the things in the attic. Doctor Goldsztejn.⁴⁵

Conversations and Erlich's plans.⁴⁶ The work in the hospital. Disorder. A shooting beside the speaker.

The issue discussed at Sawek's: hiding or crossing to the other side. Decision. Looking for ways to cross.

Difficulties: money, revisions, etc. Sawek's protection.

Epidemic of hideouts. The Polish police and the hideouts.

* * *

13 December

We are living a 'joyful' life. No doubt about it. Let us take yesterday. Sunday. We arose early to a daily argument with abuse of the first order. Of course, such a situation makes us feel extremely uneasy. Then came 'brother' Mietek, and we had to stand in the wardrobe for about two hours. Then came the most pleasant time of day – dinner.

Before we managed to eat the first several spoonfuls in comes the sister. I was so anxious that an undigested piece of meat stuck in my stomach. I was [still] as hungry as a wolf but I had to return into the wardrobe.

⁴³ Doctor Stanisław Markusfeld – dermatologist, venereologist, head of the dermatological ward of a hospital in the ghetto. In September 1942, he "did not receive a life number due to his advanced age. [...] Doctor Stein thought that there was no longer any point in the elderly holding on to their lives so tightly" (YVA, O3.2358, Relacja Stanisława Wallera [Stanisław Waller's testimony]).

⁴⁴ Probably Herszel Szpak – paramedic.

⁴⁵ Probably Doctor Paweł Goldsztejn (Goldstejn) – surgeon.

⁴⁶ Probably Doctor Bernard Erlich – obstetrician and gynecologist.

It occurs that she has come to learn how to knit. Andrzej has gone and we are standing totally motionlessly because when one knits, one does so in silence, so any murmur would give us away. The wardrobe is closed shut. Hungry, we are standing entirely motionlessly and one hour passes, then an hour and a half, and then two. I am feeling worse and worse due to the lack of fresh air. At some moment my forehead breaks in cold sweat and I feel pain and buzzing in my head. I can see spots before my eyes and at my last conscious moment I feel that I am fainting and I realize the consequences: revealing our presence to the sister and, consequently, probably death, because it is not so easy to find a new hideout.

I am pulling my hair out, pinching myself, rubbing my palms with the last of my willpower. Hela reproaches me for making too much noise. The sister does not understand and asks to be taught a different stitch. I begin to slump. Hela realizes what is wrong with me when fortunately the sister concludes that it is rather dark, buttons her coat, and... leaves. Before she closes the door to the terrace I open the wardrobe door and sit down. I gradually regain my consciousness.

What is more, Andrzej once offended Hela and despite our tragic situation I could not bear that and I gave him a reprimand. In the evening, when he returned from a bad date, he insulted me for the second time. Why, our lives depend on those people's moods, so it is just 'peachy'. We very often wonder whether it makes sense to hang on to life so tightly.

Hela was downtown and she reported to me on the conversations she had. One woman she knew explained to her why so many Jews are captured.

Every individual who denounces a Jew receives five hundred zlotys for his head. So it is no wonder that, as that woman said, a lot of people had made that their source of livelihood and that a large portion of society would not object to such an easy and innocent profit.

I knew about that because there were posters saying that those who deliver a Jew to the Germans would be rewarded.

Hela returned moved from the shop. Still on the doorstep, she told me the following: "Imagine that I have spoken with G., the same as I speak with you. That was the first time that I saw a Pole with such an attitude towards the situation. As regards the current roundups, G. says that only the Russians can repay those German barbarians for their crimes. 'The English will start trading with them right away. Besides, what do they care about others? But think about the Jews, Miss.'" When my wife wanted to say something, G. interrupted her saying: "I know very well what you are about to say. Why, everybody says that it is not bad, that the Germans had a right to do that with the Jews and that it has even come in useful, but think about it in humanitarian terms. What a great crime it is to murder so many perfectly innocent people and so many thousands of children."

28 December

Our life is really nothing to be envious of. We live in constant fear for our lives. It seems that we might be told to leave at any moment.

29 December

Franka visited us on the first day of Christmas. The first impression I had when she opened the door was that I saw my father. The upper part of her face – the eyebrows, the eyes, and the nose, resembled his so much that I felt hot. Franka had to leave for Christmas to show that she still had a place to go. As all of us are, she is going through hell. Edzio, a 22-year-old whelp, is the one who gives her a particularly hard time. He digs pits for her and poisons her already difficult life. She works in their house as a servant, a groom, an illegal forest worker, and a candle maker. She toils away, cuts herself, and sweats while working, but all this is nothing. One day they went way too far, because D. brought Franka Edzio's soiled long underwear for washing (Edzio has a wife and a mother), which she refused to do. Even though Edzio did not pay her for the candles (normal exploitation of the Jews), he also insulted her and said: "You should serve not only me but six men like me, because I know that you are Jewish."

Franka also told us that the Polish police had murdered a Jewish family there. When those people wanted to bribe the policemen, one of them said that he would kill off every last one of them. The policemen watched the Jews so closely that not even the six-year-old child managed to survive. Then the gendarmerie came and murdered everybody.

Several days ago we went through some difficult moments too. We thought that that was the end. When we were dining Hela suddenly saw gendarmes. There were about ten of them walking, two in front, two on each side of the street and several in the back, all of them with rifles pointing forward and ready to fire.

Of course, we were completely petrified. It took a while before the last of them went through the gate. We thought that we were already safe when suddenly one of those in front fired and the rest of them ran to the side of our building.

I saw the faces of those murderers. It seems that only hunters hunting wild animals look like that when they spot an animal. They leapt up, their faces rejoicing. It occurred that somebody walking towards them saw them and managed to escape. Meanwhile, we took advantage of that and went there for two hours.

We are feeling very bad psychically. It is already January and there is no hope of an improvement of our lot: no major changes on the front line. The English and the Americans, nothing. And the heat is on us. When Franka was leaving she said to console me that somebody from our family would survive because we all lived separately and that she suspected that Ewa and Dziutek would survive. Every passing day brings new Jewish victims to the Nazi and Polish ruffraff. This is not surprising at all when one is between the Nazi hammer and the Polish anvil.

Every day we wake up with a sad feeling: what will happen today? What next? Particularly that our inner life is becoming less and less cheerful.

15 January

Thank God that they have finally crossed the border. Of course, the Poles are very anxious. Particularly those whose conscience is too dirty, be it due to their collaboration with the Germans or their murdering or robbing of the Jews, and there are quite a number of them.

Anka said what G. (who is close to the Polish Socialist Party [*Polska Partia Socjalistyczna*, PPS]) told her: "Actually the rest of the Jews should be murdered too so that there are no witnesses of our actions left. This is how the Poles reason. The thing to do is not to condemn those who tormented the Jews, sucked everything they had out of them, and then threw them out onto the street where the gendarmes killed them, or those who simply denounced them to the gendarmerie right away. No. The ones to be liquidated are the remaining Jews – witnesses and future avengers."

23 January

I am sitting in the cellar where I am supposed to sort potatoes. These are appearances of course because in fact I use every opportunity to descend to the cellar because I feel relatively calmer here. Particularly as there are always gendarmerie patrols in the area. There are plenty of them because one gendarme walks with a group of six or seven Latvians or other bandits. I have often wondered why Latvians have always been used whenever some crimes and murders were to be committed.

Now I can hear the eight o'clock train.⁴⁷ I can also hear a dog barking on the street and sometimes a goat will knock on the door with its horns. A hen laying an egg clucks more quietly. When my feet become cold I stand on my toes two hundred times or take a walk (carefully so as not to make a noise) to warm myself up.

We have sunken into despair again. It seemed that salvation was close because the Soviets easily and quickly marched almost up to Kovel, but then they stopped the offensive and began in the north where it is purportedly going less smoothly. Hela and I constantly calculate when to expect salvation. We have concluded that it would be around July or August (without England's help). Meanwhile, for us every minute is like a hundred years of hell.

This morning I relived the scene of looking for Mum on the *Umschlagplatz*.

⁴⁷ A reference to the narrow-gauge Jabłonowska Railway (also known as the Karczevska Railway), operating during 1896–1961. From 1942 to 1944 it was officially called *Warschauer Eisenbahnen Ost*. It ran from the Warszawa-Wisła station, which used to be called Warszawa-Most, to Karczew, with some of its route parallel to Grochowska Street.

The notification by a daughter of a hygienist, a nurse, from Stawki Street 9, that Mum had been on the *Umschlagplatz* for two days and that she was begging to inform me.

I set out. Doctor Finkelsztajn joins me. Passing through the SS guard posts. We join a sanitarian group with stretchers on wheels. One can enter but as far as leaving is concerned... one is alone.

We enter. Hell. Conversation with the *Umschlagplatz* commander. The search. Encounters with my friends. The search. The nurse from the Department of Health saves my life. Leaving without Mum. Colleague Finkelsztajn finds his parents but does not manage to leave.

26 January

Yesterday I stayed in the flat and of course there were patrols in the area. And one of them even entered a building on Prochowa Street. So today I am sitting 'downstairs'.

Anka visited us yesterday. She returned from Józefów, where she had spent a week at Franka's. They went through some horrible moments there, which only someone in our situation can understand. There were the gendarmes and they were looking for 'bandits'. They executed a few people on that occasion. Luckily, they did not approach their villa. Frania lives in constant fear, though Mrs Dom's attitude could not be better now. She is afraid that the mother-in-law and other Poles who know that she is Jewish might denounce her. Crying, Anka told us about some of her 'joyful' moments.

She returned to the Jabs'. Drunk as usual, Mr Jab was saying some 'smut' and eventually got down to 'touching her up'. Anka told him delicately that God forbid he should feel hurt but such things disgust her and she does not feel like it in her situation. Besides, he should know that even though she endures various forms of humiliation and he can kill her at any moment by denouncing her to the Germans she is not his friend and she cannot agree to this.

Mr Jab, who staggered on the stairs and climbed them on all fours, with saliva gluing his jaws, felt hurt: how dare she, a Jewish woman, say no to such a trifle and, Anka is looking for a new shelter.

Another story: Miss Genia accused her of stealing a thousand zlotys when she was cleaning her bedroom. (When Anka comes over she pays 50 zlotys per night and she serves her. Before the war, Miss Genia was a helper, a fitter, in Anka's [workplace?]). This seems a trick to get rid of Anka. But she has nothing more to give. Everything Franka and Anka had they gave to Genia and the rest she took herself. At the same time they feel grateful to her because she has taken care of them. When Anka phoned her yesterday, she told Anka to come over because Mr Leszek (her lover) needed his socks darned. Such are the facts.

It seems that the Soviets have broken the front line in the north. They might move forward along our sector. For our situation is unbelievably difficult!

28 January

On the front page of yesterday's *Voelkischer Beobachter* there were photos of the English arresting and torturing Indians in India. The captions read: "It is barbarous to murder defenceless people only because of the brown colour of their skin." And that was written in *Voelkischer Beobachter* – the official organ of the greatest and vilest murderers in history. And to speak of justice in the world!

This is how my daily routine is now: I wake up at 4.30 and keeps guard until 5.15 because this is when I rise, make the fire, and shave and wash myself. I make breakfast for An[drzej] (he has not thanked me even once because it is my duty to attend to him) and I go 'downstairs'. There, I sit still until seven o'clock so as not to make any noise because this might wake up the residents. Then I alternatively walk three hundred steps or sit to read newspapers or a book. I have breakfast at eleven o'clock and then I alternatively walk or read and watch the sparrows and hens. The worst thing is that I have nobody to talk to (now I understand the solitary confinement cells) and I await the sunset to be able to return to the flat.

That is how it is. I cannot speak out loud even with myself because they could hear me. I have come to like the goats and sparrows, because I can show myself to them without fearing that they might denounce me.

Meanwhile, we are sinking in despair. God is clearly helping the Germans.

There is no winter at all. It just rains all the time. Consequently, it is impossible to wage war. All the odds are against us.

* * *

15 September, 1944. Józefów, at Franka's

We are free. It is difficult to believe but the Germans are gone. The Soviets have even already captured a part of Warsaw. But the last seven weeks were the utmost hell.

We are devastated by the break in the Soviet offensive. Salvation is two kilometres away from us (Rembertów and Wawer) – so close yet so distant. The constant danger of death posed by flying shrapnel, the daily blockades conducted by the SS-men and Ukrainians, the constant threat of the Germans rushing in to loot or, in the worse case scenario, rape the women, as they did in the neighbouring houses.

The climax of that hell began with the arrival of the news that the Germans were conducting a deportation, beginning with the streets in the Praga quarter on the River Vistula. We were consoling ourselves that it was just to clear the way for the retreating Germans. But the next day we wake up in the morning to find heaps of leaflets dropped overnight from aircraft where 'Warsaw inhabitants' are called on to leave the city with white handkerchiefs, purportedly to protect them from the consequences of the fighting against the insurgents. It was an ultimatum with a deadline, of course, a heavy moral blow to everybody, while to us, obviously, a harbinger of death.

Where shall we go when everybody leaves their homes? So we console ourselves that this pertains to inhabitants of Warsaw and not [the] Grochów [quarter]. Besides, all we can do is stay at home and wait for death. I feel sorry for Hela who could try to save herself. That poor consolation did not amount to much because the next day brought the beginning of the deportation from Grochowska Street, that is, from the area close to us and not on the River Vistula at all.

Of course, the Poles, who had criticised us, Jews, for going like lambs [to the slaughter] when there was one gendarme for every Jew, running out onto the street in panic as soon as they are ordered to leave. Completely demoralised by the fear of the Germans, thousands of men walk surrounded by several Germans.

Initially, the Germans expected some resistance so they arrived by cars with machine guns but after several days when they became convinced of the Poles' cowardice they sent only small groups of 20–30 gendarmes to block the quarters, driving out several thousand people from each of them. Having learned the lesson coming from the Jews' experience, some people prepared hideouts, but as soon as a blockade began they disgracefully chickened out and gave in to the Germans, not to mention the frequent instances when they denounced one another.

I observed all that myself during the blockade of our street. Knowing their methods, I arose at dawn every day to watch from the window if they were perhaps surrounding us. And then one day I see a gendarmerie lorry with a cab pull up and then Grochowska and Kobielska Streets are cordoned off. I quickly order an alarm. Half-dressed, Hela and Andrzej jump into the hideout, I follow them and we wait. After a short while a Polish policeman comes with an SS-man and they order everybody to come to the assembly point by eight o'clock in the morning. Mrs Hanke tells him that there are no men or young women. They leave and after a moment three other SS-men storm in from the terrace. Two of them search the flat and one stays by the door, standing over our heads. If only he knew over whose heads he was standing.

We hear everything in the dead silence. We hold our breaths. On the first floor, where the aunt lived, they ask where these people are. Distressed, Mrs W. says that they have gone to Warsaw (even though I warned her against mentioning the word 'Warsaw') and they go... "*Ach so, Banditen in Warschau.*" Almost crying, Mrs Hanke explains to them that they are old people. They finally give up. They descend and look into the cellar but they prefer not to take the risk as it is dark in there and one of them says: "*Finster.*"⁴⁸ And they leave. The blockade is over.

Days go by; a new blockade every day. They have been two or three times in some of the places. Here and there they take everybody, which is something new. We are sinking into the depths of despair. Our supplies are running out. The sight of burning Warsaw, which I watch from the roof in the evening, makes us even

⁴⁸ *Finster* (German) – dark.

more depressed. And there are non-stop air raids of the German Stukas, which are dropping the heaviest bombs nonstop from dawn to dusk. At moments of break, the artillery bombards this luckless city. Why, there are my dearest ones: Anka with Staś and Ewa with Dziutek.

Nothing at all is happening on the front line.

17 September at Franka's

These Poles are such a mean, barbarian, bloodthirsty nation. Just think about what they are doing with this handful of miserable survivors. Everywhere, at every step, they hurt and torment us with words, now when they no longer can denounce us to the Germans for them to kill us. Even now, when we have survived such suffering, they often shoot at us from behind the wall. This is the Polish nation. Even the official organ of the PKWN, *Rzeczpospolita*, wrote the following on 13 September 1944: "Enough of tainting Poland's good name with those bandits' attacks on the defenceless Jews who have survived the five years of the Nazi hell."⁴⁹

Yesterday, we intended to reach Grochów but we did not go even as far as Wawer because the road was under fire. I returned completely morally devastated. On the way I was eyed as if a wild animal. Outraged, a smartly dressed man even said, "The Jews are crawling out already." I could easily sense that he strongly regretted that he could not call a German to liquidate that Jew.

Not only I, but also Hela and Franka have felt that acutely. Making matters worse, it is embarrassing for them to appear with us on the street and I have to sit hidden in the flat again so as not to embarrass our hosts. It is horrible, simply horrible.

* * *

Five days before our liberation, everything was going the usual way – a blockade, the fear of resettlement, the constant standing by the window,

⁴⁹ The editorial entitled "Dość tego" [enough of this] read: "The thugs and murderers who killed innocent people in Warsaw during the occupation are running free on Polish soil, shooting from around the corner, murdering socialist activists and Polish soldiers and officers, making proscription lists, and wishing to build the Polish life the way they see fit with the use of 'ponce' Horst Wessel's methods. [...] Enough of tainting Poland's good name with those bandits' attacks on the defenseless Jews who have survived the five years of the Nazi hell. Enough of the provocateurs' intrigues, rumours, and the Gestapo propaganda. The blood of the people tortured to death at Majdanek and in Treblinka, executed or hanged by the Gestapo, the blood of the Polish soldiers spilling on the streets of Praga, on the outskirts and the walls of Warsaw is calling: 'Enough!' (*Rzeczpospolita* 42, [an organ of the Polish PKWN Committee of National Liberation (*Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego*, PKWN)], 13 September 1944, p. 1).

watching if perhaps the Germans were about to storm into our house, etc. As always, we went to sleep in the cellar so that we would manage to hide in case of an emergency. Suddenly, when it got really dark, we heard the whirr of aircraft, whose characteristic rru rru told us that they were Soviet. Quickly, hell broke loose. The German anti-aircraft artillery on one side (it was very close to us and [we heard] the crack of numerous falling bombs). Particularly terrifying was the whirr of the aircraft flying relatively low over the roof, as that involved bomb explosions near our house and... waiting for death.

And that lasted nonstop from two to three o'clock in the morning because that squadron was constantly bombing our section of the front line near Rembertów, two kilometres from us, and also the area behind the front line, including our house. Luckily, we survived until three o'clock when everything stopped. Hela, Mrs Hanke, and Andrzej went to sleep, but I was afraid to fall asleep, even though I was totally exhausted, because it was almost five o'clock, which was when I used to arise to look out for the SS detachments conducting blockades.

Indeed, they came in the morning and luckily they blocked Grochowska Street but from the other side. At the same time I noticed the German infantry along Grochowska Street heading for Wawer. As it appeared for the first time I concluded that it would probably start at any minute then.

Around nine o'clock the hurricane Soviet shellfire began. It is difficult to describe because it was one constant hiss, similar to the sound of a rotating mangle or roller. I watched the people on the street. They were congratulating one another on the beginning of the offensive and on the fact that they would soon be rid of the Germans. And the ones who had hurled the worst abuse on the Soviets two weeks earlier, denounced communists to be killed, etc., – they were the ones who shouted the most.

But the offensive did begin because as soon as after two hours everything stopped and there was silence, interrupted by the sound of the grenades and bombs dropped on Warsaw. At night, the same as on the previous day, the same hell began and we, squatting in the cellar, were waiting for death. But that bombing lasted from nine o'clock to dawn and as soon as the aircraft left the Soviet heavy artillery began its activity. We were so psychically devastated by that night that we rejoiced when we heard the shellfire because there were sometimes breaks in it when one could have a moment of rest and Hela even fetched water from the neighbouring street. In the evening, the shellfire became so intense that there was not a moment of rest. At night there were aircraft and the artillery again, alternatively or even simultaneously, and that went on nonstop.

As for us, we became completely deafened and torpid because the bombs and artillery shells falling around us and the constant animal like fear of death stifled everything in us. We stopped eating or drinking. With the Germans storming in every now and then, I tried to stay clean and I washed and shaved myself upstairs in cold water. But on the last day I gave up shaving after I had ascended from the cellar to the ground floor to gauge the situation and suddenly a shell had fallen

in. I survived only by some miracle. On the last night, when at a quiet moment we lay down on the benches to sleep, we hear a band of Germans storming in. We, that is, Andrzej and I, grabbed our clothes in panic and jumped into the hideout 'under the corner'. Hela, who was dead scared of those German thugs, particularly that not long before they had stormed into shelters and raped young women, rushed to hide with us but Mrs Hanke, mad with fear, did not want to be left alone and she pulled her back.

They both managed to put on bandages – Hela on her head, pretending to be wounded, and Mrs Hanke on her leg – when suddenly somebody knocked on the cellar door, shouting, "We are Polish!" [But it was] the Germans. Asked what they wanted, they said that there were ten of them and that they wished to stay the night. Mrs Hanke told them to use the beds upstairs. But those two insisted on sleeping with the women in the cellar. Although when the door remained locked, they went upstairs after a short discussion.

Later we learned why it ended so peacefully. The men proved a group of SS-men who arrived with carts transporting looted things (men's clothing, carpets, and particularly women's clothing, etc.), which they put in the neighbouring house. They left one of them to keep guard and with him was Andrzej's friend Kazik, who told us all that. They were waiting there for lorries to transport all that loot. The rest of the SS-men went to our house to sleep but as they were constantly checking in on those treasures, they did not want to bother with the women, particularly that they purportedly distrusted one another.

Kazik told us what treasures those were. One of the SS-men removed from all of his pockets whole handfuls of gold, diamonds, watches, pearls, etc., and he said jokingly to another SS-man that he was ten marks short of a million. At the same time they shed the SS uniforms and donned the ordinary *Wehrmacht* ones, explaining that now nobody would recognize them and that they would buy a house in Berlin for that money.

Scared, listening on to the Nazi boots stepping over our heads, we sat there until morning, and it struck us that that night was extremely peaceful – no aircraft or shellfire. The Germans left early in the morning and we could stretch our legs. Suddenly, at eight o'clock in the morning of 13 September, out of the blue, begins such a horrible bombing that only somebody who experienced it can have any idea about it. In a constant dive, swarms of aircraft were dropping innumerable bombs, with the simultaneous hurricane fire of heavy cannons, field artillery, and Stalin Organs, and all that over our heads and hitting our walls.

With that incessant air raid, the Germans storm into the shelter every now and then, but now they are devastated, completely demoralised, and in tattered uniforms. They wait for a moment of break and then they run from our shelter to another one, further back.

We, that is Andrzej and I, were lying in the shelter 'under the corner' again, listening in to the exploding shells. Every now and then the house shook in its foundations, with pieces of plaster falling on us. The deafening cracks of the

shells hitting our walls added to the horror of those moments. And then again what I had often noticed, meaning that when one is waiting for death, one does not think about anything and feels that one's mind is empty, perhaps except for something booming in there: I'm going to die in a moment. One no longer feels any fear.

One feels unpleasant in some strange way but at the same time empty.

Suddenly, two Germans storm in. As my wife later told me, they looked utterly miserable: dirty, unshaven, limping, and in tattered uniforms. They took shelter from the airmen and they were fleeing from the broken front line. They were so devastated that Hela, who had her entire family murdered by such Germans, took pity on them and gave them her portion of milk (having eaten nothing for two days).

One of them gulped it down, while the other one said in French (for she was pretending not to speak German), "*j'ai mal*."⁵⁰ Pointing at his stomach, he explained that he was feeling so sick that he could not put anything in his mouth.

Then they said, "*Schrecklicher Krieg*,"⁵¹ and upon their departure, when the aircraft fell silent, he added for consolation, "*Heute Ende*."⁵²

I still refused to believe that salvation was really so close. Then came several moments of silence, when the shellfire ceased and we heard music to our ears, for which we had been waiting for so long: the sound of anti-tank cannons and tank guns.

We understood that there was a battle of tanks very close by. Hela and Mrs Hanke obeyed us and lay down on the ground, while we put our ears to the shelter's walls to better make out the sounds. At some moment we hear the whirr of engines and the ground shaking from the rolling tanks.

The decisive moment is nearing. The first tank is rolling, followed by the second one, then the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh, and they stop... around our house, because its location was convenient for hiding the tanks: it was a two-story building on a space with 30-metres of free space on its left and right side.

Our hearts trembled because we were certain that the German tanks were readying to fight by our house. But we were in despair for only a few moments, because after shooting several shells and from machine guns, the tanks left because apparently the Soviets were already pressing on hard. And then silence again... when suddenly we hear a patter of feet above us and the sound of opened wardrobes and doors and then everything grows so silent that all we can hear is our heartbeats in the hideout. After a short while the heavy artillery and machine gun fire resumes and we can hear the rumble of an approaching tank, that time... a Soviet one. At the same time through the walls we can hear vague

⁵⁰ *J'ai mal* (French) – I am ill.

⁵¹ *Schrecklicher Krieg* (German) – damn war.

⁵² *Heute Ende* (German) – Today [will be] the end.

and then positively loud, cheerful and joyful: "Hurray, hurray, hurray!" and... the stomping of the Soviet soldiers storming into our ground-floor flat. Smiling and shouting, "*Job twoja mac*,"⁵³ they call out, "Get out, krauts!" They search the wardrobes and... in the one where we always hid they find... a German who begs them to take him captive.

Then the Red Army soldiers descend to us, into the cellar, and I get out of hiding for the first time. Half conscious, I greet them like a human being and I can look at people and walk across the yard without fearing the Germans or that a Pole might see me and denounce me. My wife and I were too weak to rejoice but the Red Army soldiers spoke with us so cordially and shook our hands so much that we felt like human beings right away. When they learned that we were Jewish, each of them opened his eyes wide as if right on cue, asking with excitement: "How did you survive?"

Today, when it has already been five days since our liberation from the Germans, I still cannot comprehend that we have truly survived. Besides, this feeling is violently suppressed by the Poles' murderous attitude to us. They let us feel at every step how devastated they are that even one Jew has survived and that that the remaining handful cannot be murdered.

But it is not exactly so, as they do shoot Jews dead, which is why I sit all day long in the flat, afraid to reveal that there is a Jew in that villa. I do that at Franka and Hela's insistence that I sit in the stale room while the sun is shining so beautifully. I am still not allowed to breathe the 'Polish' air. It is a disgrace.

* * *

19 September 1944 in Józefów

Today in the morning Hela went to Grochów to fetch Mrs Hanke with Andrzej and bring some underwear to change into, as the Grochów and Praga quarters are still under heavy German shellfire. The fighting in Warsaw itself has ceased because, as I suspect, the Red Army is trying to attack the Germans behind the lines in the north. Of course, this is used by the Polish fascists from the National Radical Camp [*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*, ONR], National Democracy [*Narodowa Demokracja*, ND], and Camp of National Unity [*Obóz Zjednoczenia Narodowego*, OZON], etc., and at every step one can hear: "The Bolsheviks have betrayed us by not capturing Warsaw." We only ask them: "What exactly did the Soviets promise you that you think that they have betrayed us? Why, you started the uprising in Warsaw without consulting them. On the contrary, all of you claimed (the official factors from the AK and other parties) that it was against the Soviets' will, because you did not need them, and it was even said that after seizing Warsaw and driving away the Germans we would attack the Soviets using the weapons taken away from the Nazis.

⁵³ *Job twoja mat'* (Russian) – fuck your mother – *trans.*

And now you have a grudge against them for not dying for you." The Bolsheviks must be angels if they still reply to those Poles politely, consoling them that they will soon capture Warsaw and that everything will be alright. Others, already thrown off balance, say, "Why, Warsaw is your capital. We established the Polish Army, which is heavily armed, but when we call on you to enlist to capture Warsaw for yourself, most of you 'hole up' and tell us to fight for you."

Indeed, all young people are pulling the meanest tricks, ones that "even the Jews could not do," that is, they change their date of birth, falsify papers, pretend to be ill – everything just to avoid joining the army, because it is the perfect time for profiteering and usury, and one can earn a fortune.

Why, the Bolsheviks are well aware that several weeks ago communists and paratroopers were denounced to the Germans on a par with the Jews, and that before the war being a communist meant at least six weeks of maximum security prison, and in Galicia it often brought death.

And now you, communists, are dying for us, while we are profiteering and when the time comes we will simply dupe you.

This is yet another interesting Polish phenomenon. Let me quote *Gazeta Lubelska* of 17 September 1944: "They (the Jews) are welcomed with the following shouts: 'Why should they be allowed to enter the city? Shoot them dead! Some have survived!'"⁵⁴ And so on, and so on. This is what Poles are like.

⁵⁴ The column 'Readers' voices' included a text signed 'Reader' entitled "Kwestja która już nie istnieje?" [An issue which no longer exists?] read: "What I mean is the Jewish issue. Just a handful of survivors has remained of the Jewish nation – splinters from a felled tree.

Hidden in forests, burrows, and cellars, plagued by fear and despair, they awaited the moment of liberation just as their ancestors had awaited the legendary Messiah. The longed-for day came. Lublin was liberated.

Jews have been arriving since the first days. Haggard, ragged, with measly bundles and a timid stare, they take their first steps on the city's pavement. Here, they expect to find support and a possibility of rebuilding their broken lives. And what happens? They are often welcomed with cries: "Why should they be allowed to enter the city? Shoot them dead! They're still alive!" And so on, and so on. In the best case scenario they are cast a contemptuous look or sneered at.

This is a scandalous lack of ordinary human compassion. Just think! These people have gone through all degrees of hell during the five years of the German thugs' rule. Despised, humiliated, hounded, burned, and murdered, they marked their life's path with tears and blood.

Why, the Nazi beast did not spare us either. Our husbands, sons, and brothers also died in prisons and camps. We too knew 'roundups', night arrests, and being thrown out of our flats within half an hour, etc.

So why this lack of compassion? Has the German race's venom poisoned our blood to such an extent? The weak are to be sympathised with and not hated. The Germans could hit the defenceless, whereas we should not imitate them in that. It is our duty to show that the captivity has not debased us and that suffering has ennobled us" (*Gazeta Lubelska. Niezależny organ demokratyczny* 41, 16 September 1944, 3).

* * *

24 September 1944

Yesterday, the four of us – Hela and I, Franka, and Mr Zygm[unt] went shopping to Otwock. At the market, where the women were making purchases, I was approached by several soldiers. It turned out that they were from the Kościuszko division. Only they could understand our lot and empathise with us. They advised us to go with them to the hospital where I could speak with Jewish physicians. There, I met Captain Eisen and Lieutenant Blam from Warsaw.

Interestingly enough, when they heard about our story in a nutshell, they said that even though they were Jewish they could not believe that something like that might have happened. They had thought that perhaps the propaganda was exaggerating but when they arrived in Poland and found none of their friends and family they understood and they felt... One of the soldiers said that since he had set foot on the Polish soil he had been suffering and despairing, because he had constantly had the impression that he was walking on the graves of his family, his brothers.

He was not wrong by much as actually Otwock and that railway⁵⁵ were characterised by the fact that, knowing it well and living there, the Jews thought that they would be able to hide there in the homes of their Polish ‘friends’. And that led to a most terrible tragedy because not a day went by without those ‘friends’ denouncing us, and when the gendarmes found Jews they killed them after beating them unconscious, while the Poles, as one Pole told us, followed them with spades to bury the Jews and level the grave with the ground, of course, after robbing the corpses of footwear, clothes, etc.

The Polish police played a particularly criminal role there, as everywhere else. Their main purpose was to make a killing, so knowing the local population, they agreed to share the loot, and when they came to the Jews in hiding, the Jews, in utter despair and in an attempt to save their lives, gave them everything they had, and then, once the policemen had taken away everything they had, constantly threatening the Jews to call the gendarmerie, and when they realised that they would extort nothing more from those victims, they stated that it was their ‘ideological’ conviction that the Jews were to be liquidated and they brought the gendarmerie or escorted the Jews to the gendarmerie.

Such instances were common. Besides, it was well known in Polish society that all the policemen had made a killing on the Jewish corpses.

The soldiers received us with warm hospitality. They even treated us to dinner. In short, I felt [wonderful?] during those several hours, in the atmosphere I had lacked for two years, among people who understood me and felt and suffered same as we had. I felt fine even though we were sad in the way

⁵⁵ A reference to the Otwock railway, which was a commonly used name for the Warsaw–Otwock railway and the localities along its tracks.

only Jews can feel sad now. During our return journey we read an article in *Rzeczpospolita*⁵⁶ that polemised with certain English periodicals, which were delighted that the English troops were fraternising with the Germans. The English-Norwegian commission to investigate the German crimes purportedly stated that the German nation was not responsible for the crimes committed by Hitler. This is so outrageous that it is difficult to respond. Besides, one could expect that from the English, who did not suffer at all from the Germans' hands. As long as their own political and economic interests are not hurt they care little that seven million Jews, a few million Russians, Poles, and others were murdered and tortured.

Is the entire German nation to blame?

It seems that anybody who lived under the German occupation can answer this question. Any individual who saw German women slapping not only Jews, but also Poles, and children spitting on people. As for the Jews, the ghetto was visited by Germans who beat and tortured the Jewish pedestrians even though they were not Nazis. Two Germans (who were not party members) executed six Jewish boys because they went beyond the wall. They not only executed them, but also tormented the fatally wounded boy who did not die at once. I saw all that from our windows on *Szczęśliwa Street*.

22 October 1944, Lublin, 'Bobolanum' hospital⁵⁷

Injured in my right foot, I have been in military hospital for two days. I was mobilised on 7 October and a week ago our commander, Major G., a physician,

⁵⁶ A fragment of Józef Tergonde's article *Opiekunowie morderców* [murderers' guardians] about the Allied armies marching into Germany: "On 16 September this year the English press published a photograph [...] of American soldiers fraternising with the German population. Even the Londoner with the stiff upper lip was outraged. The editor's office received a number of letters and telephone calls expressing its readers' outrage. They demanded an official ban on the soldiers' maintaining any relations with the Germans. [...] The London correspondent of *PM*, a New York newspaper, reports on the activity of the Allies' commission to investigate the war crimes. Giving in to the influences of the English and Norwegian delegates, the commission deals with theoretical legal disputes instead of investigating hard facts. A number of members of the Commission intentionally retard its operation, as a result of which after eleven months the Commission has compiled a list of as many as... 350 names of criminals, whereas the public opinion estimates their number at hundreds of thousands. Making matters worse, these 'experts', insist that Hitler, as the head of state, Himmler, Goering, Goebbels, and other members of the government, and also the Gestapo as the 'state police' [...] cannot be included on the list. The arch-murderers have been almost excused. [...] A number of influential members of the Commission share the opinion that the German state as such cannot be regarded as the organiser of the mass crimes. There can be only talk about Germany's breach of the 'customary ways of waging war', disregarding the responsibility for starting it" (*Rzeczpospolita* 51, 23 September 1944, 3).

⁵⁷ The official name was the Second Surgical Hospital. It was organised in the Collegium Bobolanum building on Al. Racławickie Street. Now called the First Military Hospital in Lublin.

gave me leave and I went with Hela to visit Mrs Hanke in Grochów and find Mietek.⁵⁸

It seemed that the journey would be wonderful and I was feeling great: when I was wearing my uniform Poles did not dare point their fingers at me at every step, saying: "A Jew," etc. I was driving the car in the beautiful sunny weather. I was breathing deeply, enjoying the freedom and movement. That was how we drove from Czemierniki to Lublin. There, we left our things at Franka's and we set out to Mietek in the direction of Krasnystaw, where he was purportedly stationed.

And that journey was wonderful too – the roadway was superb, the soldier helped us get in and took care of us – an officer and his wife (his every other word was "sir"). But unfortunately before reaching the place where Mietek was stationed we learned that his staff had left the day before.

Without thinking too much we got in the car again on the same day and returned to Lublin.

The next day we set out for Grochów with a plan to visit Mrs Hanke first, in the hope that in the meantime the place where Mietek was stationed would become known. The vehicle happened to be loaded with hay, on which we travelled with a certain degree of risk because we touched on the crosswise telephone wires, but the vehicle did not reach Grochów and stopped before Wawer and we had to use a different one. And then the accident happened: our vehicle overtook a lorry transporting cows. The driver of that cattle lorry, clearly drunk, felt aggrieved by that and he hit the accelerator pedal and began to overtake over. And he drove to our side, with my leg in between the boards of the two vehicles, each speeding at 60 kilometres an hour. I felt agonizing pain and when the vehicles drove apart I looked at my foot – the smashed boot and the excruciating pain convinced me that it was crushed.

Hela was in despair, seeing me all pale and barely conscious. I should mention the reaction of the Soviets. One of them sitting beside me embraced me, rested my head on his chest and began kissing and consoling me that I would be perfectly fine, that I was their man, that I belonged to the family, and he asked Hela to calm down.

In all that misfortune, that human impulse of a strange soldier moved me so much that the pain really became less acute. Other Soviet officers wanted to give the driver a beating for not being careful enough. And that was how I was taken to the hospital in the Veterinarian Institute in Grochów,⁵⁹ where they cut my trousers and took off my boot. It occurred that I was lucky because the heel had protected the leg from becoming crushed.

⁵⁸ Mieczysław (Abraham Moshe) Einhorn (1914–1969) – the author's brother, a lawyer, lived in Israel since 1948.

⁵⁹ In September 1944, some of the wards of the Praga Hospital were moved into the buildings of the Veterinarian Institute at Grochowska Street 272.

The next day after the bandaging, Hela put me in a hansom cab and took me to P. K, where we took a car and drove to Lublin with a stop in Garwolin.

Now I am lying in an officers' room with a 21-year-old boy, a major, who participated in the Warsaw uprising, and after Bór's capitulation swam across the River Vistula and joined the army. My other neighbour is a sub-lieutenant who fell off a horse. A keen enthusiast of the Soviet regime.

25 October, Lublin, 'Bobolanum'

Heluś returned with Franka from Mietek from Radzyń. Their meeting made a strange impression on her. Mietek had changed a lot – had "become boorish," as she put it, both externally and psychically. What upset me the most was that he was drinking vodka, which purportedly was all he was thinking and talking about. We shall see if I have the same impression when we meet. Anyway, I am glad that I have found my brother.

Today my leg was put in a cast.

31 October – Franka's flat – Lublin

Today I left the hospital. Hela picked me up. I could not bear lying in the hospital any longer. I am continuously plagued by anxiety. It constantly seems to me that it is better elsewhere. In the hospital I was offended by Waksman,⁶⁰ who pretends to be 'Aryan' and avoids those who knew him before. As for me, he walked by me a number of times, pretending not to know me. Moreover, in order to justify his boorish behaviour in his own conscience and to others he claimed to hate me and that I was antipathetic, and he said that particularly in front of Doctor Warman, because he knew that I was dependent on him. Let us have patience. Perhaps I will have a chance to take revenge on him.

4 November, Czemierniki

I have been in my lodgings since the day before yesterday. Hela and I are feeling fine because we are at our own place, under our own roof. I brought dry supplies from the storeroom and Heluś is cooking, happy to feel a housewife again. Of course, I am very happy too. We make plans all the time: of inviting Mietek or the major and his wife.

Franka made gefilte fish for us in the evening before our departure from Lublin. We had not felt as good as during that evening for a long time. In the morning we left in a medium jeep. The driver did not want to transport us, because we were from the military, but he eagerly took civilians, because he expected to be paid. So he stopped before P. K. and ordered the civilians to get out, and after passing P. K. he ordered them to get in. At one [P. K.] a regulovshchik [functionary, 'regulowszczyk'] noticed the civilians getting in, caught up with us, and took the driver with him to check his ID.

⁶⁰ Doctor Bronisław Waksman, after the war Wiśniewski – internal diseases specialist.

Sitting next to the driver was a man in an army uniform but with a civilian cap. He said that he was delegated by the Polish Workers' Party [*Polska Partia Robotnicza*, PPR] to conduct the Landowner Reform. And that 'communist' made an anti-Semitic speech that that 'regulovshchik' was a Jew and that was why he stopped that driver and that luckily the Germans had murdered the Jews, but [still some of them] were returning and taking back their shops. And that seemed to pain him most because he had looted the post-Jewish property like a hyena and now he had to return his loot.

Even though Hela was calming me down quietly I could not take that any longer and I told him that I was a Jew too. Very abashed, that jingoistic hero says that there is an underprivileged proletariat in every nation and that I seem to be from the Jewish proletariat and that he loves me, and similar nonsense.

As a matter of fact he should have been brought to justice, but I was hurt and could not move, so I hope that he falls into somebody else's hands.

A Polish attorney sitting beside me rightly observed: "Such people are sent by our democracy as trusted men to conduct the landowner reform. So it is no wonder that this is what democracy in Poland is like."

12 November

Yesterday we celebrated the 'Independence' Day. A special party was organised for the officers' corps of our unit. All dressed up, we were waiting in the palace for a sign that the major had entered, which was when the event was to start.

Waiting with me was a Polish physician from Warsaw whom I knew from the years 1939–1940 when we were physicians and he was the district sanitarian physician of the Fifth Health Centre. That period was also an episode in the suffering of the Warsaw Jews. That was the period when there were all possible infectious diseases, particularly typhoid fever and typhus. According to the rules of epidemiology, infectious persons and those in their immediate vicinity are to be isolated. That was used by the Polish physicians and disinfection workers as a special way to extort, blackmail, and threaten the Jews to squeeze as much money from them as possible.

For instance, *primo*, under the pretense of a precaution, [disinfection] baths were ordered for entire residential buildings but most of the selected buildings were not the dirtiest ones but the most densely populated and richer. The purpose was that those who had money could buy themselves out from such [disinfection] baths.

Secundo: during the disinfection, the workers entered the richer homes, even the visibly clean ones, and they selected the most expensive things and decided that they had to be disinfected, that is, destroyed, burned, or, in the best case scenario, smashed.

Of course, the purpose was for the Jews to buy themselves out. The disinfection crews spared no abuse, beating, or harassment, for, due to Hitler, the Poles were

allowed to beat the Jews. *Tertio*: [a sanitary crew member?] would learn by chance or, more often, in cooperation with a Jew, that somebody had suffered from typhus fever in a given flat. The person who had been ill was allowed to walk freely but the men from the Centre threatened that they would notify [that institution?] about the typhus fever and they extorted money from the Jews, most of whom were starving. The latter gave away their last resources to avoid isolation (simple prison).

In fact, those who had been ill should not have been bothered because their infectious period was over, but the Jews were well aware that anything was permissible with regard to them, and the Poles used that in every possible way.

Coming back to that physician, that was what we were saying about the Home Army [*Armia Krajowa*, AK]. One of my Polish female colleagues claimed that the Home Army and Poles in general had an 'exemplary' attitude towards the Jews, to which I protested violently and I even stated that I was furious with the Jews in London who supported the government in exile knowing that the AK in Poland was continuing the Germans' work by assassinating the Jews.

That physician supported my stance, claiming that he did not know much about the AK's attitude towards the Jews. "I must admit that the Poles' attitude towards the Jews was bestial and that it probably will not be praised anywhere in the world. It brings us no honour," he added.

I was surprised by those words but I immediately understood that he must have experienced something that made him that compassionate. Indeed, he told us the following story.

He swears that he is telling the truth. Besides, the whole village can attest that it happened, but he has not used that because he is afraid that they will kill him and his pregnant wife. After the arrival of the Soviets, in late August or September, one night at midnight two individuals armed with revolvers came to his cottage (he lived in a small town near Siedlce) and they escorted him to the cemetery in the presence of the entire village population.

They stated that they were to execute him there by order of the AK given only because the Catholic priest had notified the AK that he was Jewish. Luckily, one of the two men was less drunk and my colleague managed to convince him to see that he was not circumcised, which saved him. If he had been a Jew, he would be dead.

This story is the sum of the factors, which played a significant role in our martyrology: the Polish clergy and the Polish organisations subordinate to the Government in Exile in London.

The end of the memoir

Translated by *Anna Brzostowska*

Abstract

Written on the 'Aryan' side, Doctor Chaim Einhorn's diary contains recollections of the ghetto, particularly the deportation campaign period, and a few passages written during hiding in the Warsaw district of Praga – Doctor Einhorn and his wife were hiding with a few other Jews at teacher Romana Hanke's home.

Key words

diary, Warsaw ghetto, physicians, hiding, 'Aryan' side, help to Jews