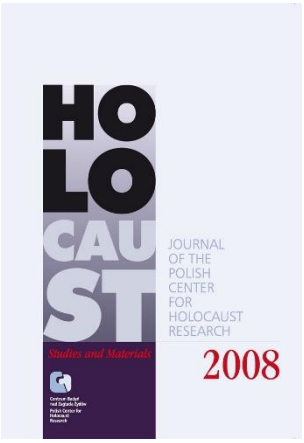


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The Diary of Hinda and Chanina Malachi

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Jan Grabowski

The Diary of Hinda and Chanina Malachi

Hinda Malachi's testimony is an introduction to an extensive diary, written by her and her husband, Chanina Malachi. The Malachis' testimony is an important, shocking document that makes one ponder – for a number of reasons.

The author writes about her experiences "in the heat of the moment", in the hideout on the "Aryan side" in Warsaw. She writes to preserve the memory of her own suffering, the agony of her beloved ones and the destruction of her people. Her writing is fraught with brachyology, as if she was afraid of the impending, inevitable end. Even among wartime diaries and notes, the Malachis' text stands out because of its extreme vividness, almost tangible concentration of content and painfully accurate remarks. In the light of German persecutions, round-ups and deportations, it is not the indifference of many Poles to the tragedy of the Jewish nation that is striking; it is their growing hostility to the victims of genocide. Hinda Malachi feels like a hunted animal among the Poles. Her incorrectly pronounced "l" sound, dark hair, sad eyes, slow motions, quick motions, stooped posture – all those seemingly insignificant features could very easily lead to her death. And the harbingers of death are not the German gendarmes (who do not have the slightest idea what distinguishes a Jew from a non-Jew), but the Poles: fellow passengers on the train, co-tenants from the [same] house or ordinary passers-by.

The commonness of the anti-Jewish attitudes, the torrent of human meanness, avarice and the greed for Jewish and former Jewish property, and the absence of any Christian charitable imperatives, are among the observations that (at least from the point of view of the Polish reader) add special importance to the Malachis' testimony. The gathering of vultures and hyenas starts even before the transports to Treblinka leave from the nearest station. In Ćmielów, on the day of deportation of the Jews to the death camp, the author writes: "I saw Poles dancing round the gendarmes so they could get something from the Jewish houses. On the pavements and the roads there were dozens of tattered prayer books." A Polish woman asked a Ukrainian guard to pull off the scarf from the head of a Jewish girl driven to the train. For why should a good scarf be wasted? The husband of a Polish acquaintance the very same day wears a Jewish suit given for safekeeping. For the few who manage to escape (like Hinda), new traps lie ahead: "my incidental fellow-travellers started to suspect me and prattle that they could earn money now." Earning money at Hinda's expense (and also thousands of other Jews, desperately looking

for a hideout), became a source of income for an enormous group of blackmailers (*szmalcownicy*), prowling with impunity.

If we make an attempt to explain the phenomenon of blackmail (*szmalcownictwo*), the Malachis' account is of fundamental significance. Apart from the "ordinary" blackmailers, who simply seize the Jews from the railway stations, streets or near the ghettos, there are more sophisticated bands and gangs that play the cat and mouse game with their victims. Why would the criminals be satisfied with what a Jew has with him, when they can trap him (including all his friends and relatives) in such a tight net of "protection" that a Jew will part with the last ring, dollar or zloty? Although, as a rule, blackmailers themselves did not kill the Jews with their own hands, they directly contributed to their destruction, because "a Jew had no chance to save himself later on, as without the money no one wanted to let him in their home" – as Hinda recalls. Jews who have fallen once into the hands of the "specialists" are blackmailed (*szmalcowani*) many times and in a number of ways. Hinda, her husband and their friends were blackmailed by people they knew, by people they did not know, by the friends of their hosts, their hosts themselves, the "Blue" policemen, Kripo (criminal police) functionaries and other agents. Soon they become "cats," passed from one criminal to the other. Even if several weeks pass without blackmail, the hosts charge such a high rent that the question arises: where does help end and blackmail begins? How should we categorise charging from 2,500 to 5,000 for a room per month in 1943? Is it already extortion or still help? One should bear in mind that an "Aryan" Pole paid from 250 to 400 zloty. . . . The author quotes one of her "protectors", not without reason: "You cannot die yet, because everything needs to be taken from you."

Hinda Malachi's testimony, like all the other sources of that kind, is individual and unquantifiable. However, it does not mean that the impressions, emotions and statements it contains lose their significance. On the contrary – the great store of testimonies kept in Yad Vashem is a rich source of information about the Jewish fate in occupied Poland. Those testimonies mostly are consonant with the record of the Malachis' ordeal.

Lea Balint

About the authors

Chanina was born in Ostrowiec in 1918. His parents, Szmuel and Fajga Szerman, ran a textile wholesale store and were relatively rich. Chanina's father died of cancer in 1938 and his mother (née Tanenbaum) died in the ghetto in 1942. Mr and Mrs Szerman had two daughters and five sons. The eldest daughter, Ita, a widow

(her husband died of natural causes in 1938), died in Treblinka with her two children. Ester and her three children also died in Treblinka. Lejb Leon, his wife Rywka and his son Szmuel were murdered by the Poles who hid them for money. Their daughter, Pnina, hidden by a Polish family, Krasa, survived the Holocaust. After the war, Pnina emigrated to Israel and was adopted by a family in a kibbutz. Another of Chanina's brothers, Szaja, was accidentally killed by the Americans when they opened fire on a train transporting prisoners from one camp to another shortly before the end of the war. His wife Dwora and their two daughters died in Treblinka. Dawid died in Auschwitz, his wife Rachel and daughter Zlata died in Treblinka. Chanina, the sixth of the brothers and the author of the diary, was hidden for money at Mr and Mrs Piskorski's place. During the Warsaw Uprising, he passed himself off as a Pole – Jan Wójcik. His wife Hinda, the co-author of the diary, survived the occupation hiding in Warsaw on "Aryan papers". Szlomo, the youngest of the brothers, was a bachelor. He was murdered by members of the Polish underground, falling into a trap when a group of young Jews tried to join a partisan unit.

Hinda's parents also ran a textile shop in Ostrowiec. They specialised in textiles and cloths for domestic use. They both died in Treblinka.

Hinda had three sisters. The eldest one, Frida, worked as a treasurer of the Keren Kajemet foundation before the war. She died in Treblinka with her son. Her husband survived the Holocaust and emigrated to the USA after the war. Her second sister, Bluma, died in Treblinka with her daughter. Her husband also survived Auschwitz, emigrated to the USA and died there. The third daughter, Hinda, and her husband Chanina, the authors of the diary, survived the Holocaust. Hinda was the most talented child in the family, especially at mathematics. Her beloved sister was Frida. It was Frida who obtained for Hinda the "Aryan papers", thanks to which she managed to leave the ghetto. Frida did not want to go with Hinda. She claimed that with a circumcised baby she had no chance to survive outside the ghetto. The youngest sister's name was Ester. She was unmarried. She survived the Holocaust thanks to the "Aryan" documents in the name of Janina Sipińska. She was hidden in Warsaw by an Armenian family, Mr and Mrs Dabadgian, who liked her very much and also wanted her to stay with them after the war.

Chanina and Hinda met in a youth organisation when they were both fourteen. They got married during the war and although Jewish property had already been confiscated, they both had enough money to organise their wedding. The ceremony took place in the ghetto on 14 February 1941 and the wedding was organised the next Friday in the Judenrat's hall. On Saturday evening, all the friends from the youth organisation, family and acquaintances danced the Horon and sang Zionist songs. Some time after the wedding, Chanina started to talk Hinda into escaping from the ghetto using false documents in the name of Halina Stawiarska that her sister Frida had obtained for her. Chanina understood that because of his Jewish appearance and accent he had no chance of surviving outside the ghetto. Hinda hesitated as she did not want to part with her husband and family and she postponed the escape for several months. With the help of a Pole, who promised to find her a hideout for money, Hinda left the ghetto for the first time on 9 October 1942, only one day before the first deportation.

A few months later, Hinda, who was already living on the "Aryan side" of Warsaw, helped her husband to organise his escape. Their Warsaw experiences are described in the fragment of the diary published below. In the other, unpublished part of the diary, both spouses wrote in turns about the current events, their emotions and reflections.

When the [Warsaw] Uprising broke out, Chanina was still living at the Piskorski family's place and was separated from Hinda and his friends, who stayed in touch with him for all the time he was hiding. With the residents of Placówka and other villages, he was sent to the transit camp in Pruszków. He then left the diary near the house in which he was hiding: he put it away in the rabbit warren.

Hinda with her sister Ester were still living in Warsaw when the uprising broke out on 1 August 1944. They survived it in the same way as the other inhabitants of the city – in the basements and under the ruins. After the evacuation and getting through the camp in Pruszków, they were directed to the village of Wolbrom, whose residents had to receive the refugees in their houses. There, Hinda learnt that Chanina was in Pruszków and left to find her husband.

On 14 January 1945, Chanina with his wife and friends went to the liberated city of Lublin to organise their emigration to Palestine. After an unsuccessful attempt to depart from Constanta, they settled in Vienna, where Chanina worked in the Bricha organisation. He took care of thousands of refugees living in a transit camp, at the Rotszyld hospital in Vienna, in very difficult conditions. At that time, they went to Poland to collect their surviving niece, Pnina, from the Poles who had been hiding her. Chanina used this opportunity to visit the Placówka settlement near Warsaw and found his diary there. Unfortunately, it was damaged; the first and the last pages had rotted and the notes there could not be deciphered.

In April 1947, the Malachis and Pnina emigrated to Israel. Initially, they settled in a kibbutz. In 1949, they settled in Hader, where they live to this day, in a small house with a garden. Chanina worked as a road worker and on a poultry farm. Hinda took care of the house and three children – their son and two daughters. They changed their surname to Malachi, which means "angel" in Hebrew and derived from Hinda's maiden name.

The Malachis' diary was written in Polish, in a notebook with squared paper used for accounts. It described the period from 9 October 1942 to 30 August 1944. On the first 22 pages, the author relates the events following 9 October 1942, i.e. after she left her home at Ostrowiec, until 3 August 1943. The retrospection finishes with the sentence: "I here cease to write about what we experienced during one year. Now, I am going to write down the important events every day." The daily entries start on 5 October 1943 and end on 30 August 1944.

The original of the diary is kept in the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem.

Translated from Hebrew into Polish by *Magdalena Sommer*

Hinda and Chanina Malachi

Diary[1]

Tuesday, 5 October, 1943

. . . for a long time I've been intending to write something down, because it is a scandal not to write anything having so much spare time. But I simply don't have these abilities. However, I think that one doesn't need abilities as I write for myself not for print. I want to save it as a keepsake for our children, if we survive this horrible war. Indeed, I am starting it quite late (or maybe the war is just starting); I should have started writing at least as soon as we arrived in Warsaw. First of all, I will try to recall what has happened since 9 October 1942, i.e. [since] the day of my journey into the unknown in order to avoid the deportation.

It was Friday, when I was suddenly taken away from cooking and baking and already at 4 p.m., thanks to Frania's efforts, I left with Mrs Bram as Halina Stawiarska for Ćmielów, from where we were to travel further on a night train to Skarżysko and from there to Czerniecka Góra. I will never forget leaving my parents' flat. I wanted to say goodbye to them (only Heniek kissed me on the forehead) to avoid tears on my face, but as I was leaving, I felt that everybody cried and thought the same as me at that moment: will we ever see one another again in this lifetime? Unfortunately, I will never see Frania, Kubuś, Blimcia and Dorka again. For reasons unknown to me, Mrs Bram decided to leave next morning, and for the night she put me up on recommendation of a dentist she knew at some people's place in Sandomierska Street. I was introduced as a Warsaw citizen escaping from the round-ups. On the second day, the dentist came for me announcing that Mrs Br[am] had left Ostrowiec to reconnoitre, because she wanted to take Frania with Kubuś as well, so that we together left for Czerniecka Góra.

That Saturday, I spent at a smuggler's (*szmuglerka*) place. She locked me in and went to the village. I lay in the bed all day, did not eat anything and thought about my sad fate, trying to excuse myself that I had left alone to save myself, but I desperately wanted to go back. In the evening, Mrs Br[am] came for me, bringing from Ostrowiec some apples from my mum. As it turned out later, my mum also gave her woollen pants, an elastic set, bath towel and similar things, which came in extremely handy, as I had left in a summer outfit, and it began to get chilly. Mrs Bram did not mention that. She complained that my mum did not trust her, because her husband wanted to offer several lengths of fabric, but she did not want to. This

[1] The text published here is the first part of the diary written together by the Malachis in hiding on the "Aryan side." This part, concerning the period from 9 October 1942 to 3 August 1943, was written by Hinda. Later, they both made notes, wrote down their impressions, and commented on current issues; these form the second part of the diary. Efforts have been made to retain the style of the original.

time, I did not leave Ćmielów either. Mrs Bram put me up again, at No. 11 Zamkowa Street, at a place of a woman with a little son, whose husband was sent to do forced labour in Germany. Then, I lost all trust in my guide, whom I addressed like my mother, and who only wanted to know how much money I had with me. I was there until Thursday morning, the day before the deportation in Ćmielów, and my hostess was afraid to keep me without a registration. For these last few days, Mrs Bram came to see me, postponing the departure for one day after another and taking from me various petty sums for her trips to Ostrowiec and for reconnaissance. The news that came from Ostr[owiec] was very sad. Deportation started on Sunday morning[2] and people had been sitting for three days in "Stalag" square without food or drink. I realised that now it made no sense to expect Frania, because since Friday she had not managed to have the necessary papers produced. As I have already mentioned, I had to leave the flat on Thursday. Mrs Bram sent me then with her charwoman to the dentist to the nearest village to find a place to stay, but nobody wanted to receive me. We came back, only to find Mrs Bram's door closed. I spent that night at the charwoman's place. The next day, deportation in Ćmielów began and I did not have a place to stay, because the charwoman's mother-in-law told me to leave, afraid to keep anybody in the house, and I stood all the time near the railway cars where poor people were driven in. Right after that, I went to the city, seeing some dead bodies in the street, and I saw Poles dancing round the gendarmes so they could get something from the Jewish houses. On the pavements and the roads there were dozens of tattered prayer books. I went to a shop to buy a fine-toothed comb, but I was told that "all the fine-toothed combs were bought by the Jews for their train trip to pick their lice," and it was told with such exultation.

When I finally got in touch with Mrs Br[am], she advised me to leave for Cracow for the time being to find out the address of Marysia Michalska, who worked in Radom. And if that didn't work out, I should come back and she would help. I had to accept that because I had nowhere to go. She took Heniek's suit for the lodging. I knew that I could not count on her anymore, but I remembered Heniek's words he said to me before I left: "Remember, do not rely totally on her, rely on yourself." Before my departure, she wangled 400 zloty from me, supposedly for the attempts in Ostrowiec, as the police had been sent to Starachowice, so she could get Heniek out.[3] She gave me the address of her friend in Konin, Mrs Celina Barańska, and we said goodbye affectionately, also with her husband, who was already wearing Heniek's suit. So, on Friday evening on 16 October, I went, travelling alone for the first time and so far away, to Cracow. I recalled my beloved dad and his warnings: "do not get out before the train stops properly," "stand clear of the car's door," and so on. And in these warnings he always gave me a travelling companion. At the station in Ćmielów a railwayman joined me, with whom I talked for quite a long time.

[2] About 10,000 Jews lived in Ostrowiec before the war. In the ghetto (closed in February 1941), about 16,000 people lived due to an influx of deportees and refugees. The deportation from the ghetto took place on 11 October 1942. Several hundred people stayed in local companies and factories working for the Germans.

[3] Chanina (Heniek) Szerman, the author's husband, was a Jewish Police member.

Finally, he started to suspect me, because I did not pronounce "ł" properly, but when after a long hesitation he asked me if I was Jewish, I answered "Holy Jesus, what are you thinking of?!" and this suspicion was dispelled. And as far as the letter "l" was concerned, I explained to him that I came from Vilna and that people talked that way there.

I reached Cracow on Saturday afternoon. It was pouring with rain, but I had my umbrella, my inseparable companion, which I have to this day. I turned to the first constable to show me a tram to Twardowskiego Street and it turned out that he was going in the same direction and would gladly accompany me. Celina, to whom I went after staying at Marysia's parents' and getting the address, was very kind to me. She took me to dinner, because she knew I had not been eating for a long time and that I was starving. Her housekeeper, a very intelligent woman from the Cracow elite, also wanted to treat me to a dinner. Finally, I ate just a stew. At the end of that day, after we mourned our parents and close friends, we went to the cinema. It was already very dark after the film, [so] she saw me off to the station and we parted warmly. On Sunday morning, I was already in Radom. The first thing I saw in the city, after leaving the station, was [Jewish] workers, escorted by policemen to work. I got in touch with Marysia, met her fiancé and we went together to church. On our way back, we went to dinner, and the fiancé went to rent a room for Marysia and me. I was to maintain Marysia for letting me stay. But it was impossible to arrange, because the housing commission and police assign flats, as Marysia's fiancé claimed. I left Radom for Ćmielów again on Monday evening. I have to add here that spending Monday alone, as Marysia was at work, I thought that it would be good to meet (Semky?) (a very loyal SS-man from Ostr[owiec], who had been transferred there); I must also confess the whole truth – maybe he would tell me what was going on in Ostr[owiec] and advise me what to do. On my way to the station in the evening, I saw him, but I didn't have the courage to approach [him].

On Tuesday morning, I arrived in Ćmielów, but to my great disappointment Mrs Bram with her husband had left in an unknown direction. My former housekeeper from the house in Zamkowa Street did not want to put me up. She only told me that she was very lucky, because when the Jews were being driven to the trains, she asked a Ukrainian for a scarf of a Jewess and he pulled the scarf off for her. Rejected, exhausted and without any plans for the future, I went to the station again to leave for Skarżysko – perhaps there I could spend the night at some railwayman's place, because I was already extremely tired and just wanted to go to bed. I got a ticket for a night train, which departed only at 4 in the morning. I sat on a bench and started to doze, when a young man joined me. He was dark as a Gypsy, and I immediately recognised he was not a Pole. He was Hungarian. We talked about various things, and when he started to say bad things about the Jews, I could not stand it, the more so that I did not care for anything anymore and I started to defend the Jews. He obviously guessed who I was, because who would defend the Jews now? On the contrary: every Pole was satisfied and said [bad things about the Jews] on every occasion. I admitted I was a Jewess, to which he reacted by standing up suddenly, showing me a paper to the effect that he was a German Gestapo officer. Later, he ordered me to go to the platform with him, and there he demanded that I surrender

myself to him and he would spare my life, because his duty was to escort me to the Gestapo. I answered that I didn't care about my life and that I would never surrender myself to anyone. Somehow he took pity and took [me] to the waiting room again, because I trembled from the cold. I told him everything about myself there. He advised me to forget my husband and family, because even if they had survived after the first action, they would eventually be finished off anyway. He advised me to leave for Cracow, to report to the Arbeitsamt as a volunteer for Germany. He also drew my attention to the pronunciation of the letter "l". Later, he treated me to some candies and said goodbye, because his train arrived. I, at the same time, regardless of his advice, went to Skarżysko to get some rest and find out what was going on in Ostr[owiec], and had no further plans. On Wednesday morning, I was already in Skarżysko, where I found lodging at a railwayman's place at No. 113 Kolejowa Street. First, I went to bed. I dreamt that my mum came to my flat and brought me meat, bought especially for me. I asked her: "Mum, you are still alive, I thought you were gone?" My mum answered: "As you can see, I am still alive." This dream cheered me up a little bit. Before my housekeeper, I pretended that I had come to buy some junk, but I had to wait a day or two, because the new winter transport was to come. I bought myself a coat, gloves, shoes and stockings, because I was getting cold. Accidentally, as I was crossing a bridge, I met Mr Grosman from Ostr[owiec]. He recognised me and informed me that the action in Ostr[owiec] wasn't over, but on the next day, he told me to come to his wife on work detail, because she would have detailed information as they had sent a man [for it]. So, on Friday morning, I came to the agreed place and learnt that the situation in Ostr[owiec] had been and still was terrible; that there were a lot of dead, including a few policemen. Thus, I decided to return to Ostr[owiec] to know the whole truth and, if it was possible, to join Heniek. I knew one thing: I hated Poles too much to stay in their company. I spent the Sunday at the railwayman's place, accompanied by Mrs Kandel from Sandomierz. She was fed up with travelling as well and also wanted to get to Sandomierz. On Monday, 26 October, in the morning, I arrived in Ostr[owiec]. On the corner of Kolejowa Street, I saw a policeman, Flajszer, escorting workers to a factory. However, I could not approach him as there were many workers outside. I went to /Sunina/ [?] to p. She was scared when she saw me, but she gave me a very warm welcome. I learnt from her that no woman remained [in the town]; [she said] that people were still being pulled out from the shelters; the Jews had made shelters from the market to the river and gathered considerable supplies in there, even a living cow. On my request, she agreed to go to the city with a letter to hand it to the first [Jewish] policeman she met. She did it for me and, most importantly, learnt that Heniek was alive, because the policeman who took the letter for him said that. When [her] husband returned from the factory, he told us that the factory workers had slept for two weeks in the factory yard, that 3 of them were shot to scare the rest so they would give everything [they had] and that huge fortunes were taken; and most importantly, that Heniek was alive. Mrs Kr. complained that my mum did not give her anything for safekeeping as she would not take away anything and so on. Later it turned out that not only my mum, but Frania as well gave her linen and other things. Unexpectedly, at 5 o'clock, Mr Głuch[owski] came with an instruction for me to turn

up at 6 o'clock at Polna Street. My joy was boundless. I set off immediately and saw a female work detail in Polna Street, led by Wilk. Dazed by the joy, I rushed into their midst, and quickly put on a little scarf, imitating an armband. I gave . . . a box with candies, saccharine and cigarettes to hold, because I thought that there was starvation in the ghetto. I have never seen the box since then, but it was nothing; I was to see Heniek. The group I joined was Jeger's work detail; I went to the Brickyard only with them and came back to the ghetto after 8 o'clock, when it was already dark. The first person I met was Pinek Alterman, with whom I exchanged cordial kisses, and we went together to look for Heniek. When we finally found Heniek, he was so happy that he carried me home. Our new home was a flat shared with seven other policemen: Ber, Alkichen I and Sz. Politański, Zyngier, Zajfman, [and] Bronzajt. I did not recognize any of my former friends: their faces were changed by the hard and horrible events they had experienced. I felt that each of our married flatmates was looking at Heniek's joy with jealousy, because they had all lost their wives. I spent only one night in the ghetto and despite my best efforts I had to part with Heniek again, because he wanted me to, afraid of further deportations. I learnt that from my family only my parents, Estera and my in-laws survived. From Heniek's family – all the men, and Regina with her children, who had left Ostr[owiec] before me. They (Heniek and Leon) sent me to her; she was supposed to be working and to be registered, and she with Mrs Mania /Sztajwo/ would also take me in. They talked me into it and on Tuesday evening, after spending the whole day at Kr.'s place, I left for Warsaw. The address I had been given was wrong, and after a long search, I came across Mr Leszczyński (he found lodgings for Regina), who informed me that Regina with Mania were in Świder. In the evening, when I was about to go there, we met Regina with Stefanek and went with her to Świder, where I learnt that it was not as Leon informed me. On the contrary, they intended to leave town, because a policeman was pestering them. On Thursday morning, Mr Leszczyński came, he took Mania and her daughter to Warsaw, and Bronka left for Ostrowiec to contact Leon about what to do next. I was going to come back, but Regina asked me to wait for Bronka to return, because she could not cope with two children on her own. In the evening, we both went with the children to the station to return to Warsaw and book into a hotel. However, how great was our terror when at the station we saw the policeman who was pestering them. He was at our place in the morning, noticed that there were no sheets or baggage and must have twigged that we were planning to escape. Without thinking, we immediately started to flee to Otwock and there we jumped on the train, which was already pulling out. We booked into the Amerykański Hotel in Chmielna Street and waited for Bronka to come back. It was already 30 October; I decided to return to Ostr[owiec] to spend the Sunday and my birthday with Heniek, also because there was no future for me there. Fortunately, Bronka returned on Saturday morning, and I left Warsaw at noon.

When we were approaching Skarżysko, my casual female travelling companions started to suspect me and talk that they could earn a lot now. Luckily, we were already in Skarżysko and I had to transfer to another train to Ostr[owiec]. The train waited for about an hour more at the station and each time the door opened I was sure it was a gendarme to pick me up. However, I luckily arrived [in Ostrowiec] and

again met the work detail from Rzeczki with whom I entered the ghetto. This time Heniek was not glad [to see me] and again started thinking how to send me away. On Sunday, it was a very sad birthday; my parents came and we could not hold back tears. I could not look them in the eyes, I was so guilty that Franka and Blimka were not [alive] anymore. The whole day Heniek ran around trying to send me again and he was again successful. But this time, I was to leave for good. Mrs Rostkowska, Mrs St.'s relative, took me with her to Warsaw and was to lodge me at her or her friend's place. We arrived in Warsaw on Tuesday, at 8 in the morning. Mrs Rostkowska had to go to school, so we arranged to meet at 1 o'clock at the Main Railway Station. I went to the hotel to see Regina. She told me that there had been a robbery in the adjacent room at night, so we'd better leave as the police were all around. When I came from the street at 12, they were gone. The porter explained to me that they had been taken for investigation. I was sure that I would never see them again. I started to wander in the streets like a lunatic, because I thought I was being followed. I had to be at the railway station at 1, so I went there. How great was my joy when I met Bronka there. It turned out that that they were agents (now I know that they might have just been blackmailers), who took the 10,000 I brought them, and now they were sitting at the East Railway Station and did not know in which direction to go. I promised to see them after I finished with Mrs Rostkowska. When the lady finally came, I learnt that it would not work out. She had thought it over; in Ostr[owiec] she intended not to involve her husband in it, but she arrived at the conclusion that she could not lie to her husband, who would never agree. Also her friends were afraid, but we went together to one more place. Again, it didn't change anything as it was closed. She advised me to go to Poronin, near Zakopane, and she even gave me the addresses of some boarding houses and saw me to the East Railway Station. I did not catch Regina there. Later, I found out that a woman from Radom took them to her place, even though she figured out who they were. I returned to Ostr[owiec] again on Wednesday morning and decided not to leave it anymore. Heniek arranged a work detail with Estera at Menda's for me. I had there the very nice company of the Wajsblum sisters, and the "victim" was Miss Klajman, who entertained us with songs and humour. When we returned from work, it was always cheerful at home, because everyone joked and tried to forget what had happened. We ate and drank to indulgence, as if there was no tomorrow, to use up all the goods of this world before it ended. I visited my parents very rarely, something I will never forgive myself. Whenever I was at their place I cried, recalling our loved ones. My father strongly believed that we would survive and our loved ones would return and then everyone would relate their experiences sitting together at the table. Their only source of happiness was Abram, who took care of them and arranged what he could, as he was a policeman. Mum promised to treat him like her own son, even if Blimka was never to come back, because unlike [my] father mum harboured no illusions about it. My heart was aching when I saw my constantly ill mother going through frost and snow to work on the road. I remember that once, in the morning when we took our places, when our group separated from father's group in Sienkiewicza Street, my father suddenly approached me and just smothered me with kisses. Later, my mum

told me that he told her about it. It was a madness of longing for the lost children and also making sure that he still had me.

Despite all those happy moments and revels, people started to whisper about the impending deportation. Heniek had already in advance found two places where I could go in case of danger for me. On 10 January, the second deportation started, in which I lost my beloved parents. During the deportation, I was for three days at Mr S. Jabłoński's with Regina, Bronka and Stefanek, who had some trouble and finally returned to Ostrowiec as well. Madzia had already been given to Mr Kr., who even demanded that we transfer the house to him. Actually, I was to have spent the three days at a Mr /Jałosy's/, who had already once come for me to the ghetto, to take me to his place, so that I knew the exact way in case of danger. But when I came at the critical moment, his mother told me that he did not know about anything, although her son was in the adjacent room, and she did not want to let me in. I had to look for the way to Gienek's through the snow in the dark. They kept us there willingly one day, but when the action was underway he was afraid that perhaps "Heniek was no more" and literally chucked us out. Only the highlander helped us. On Monday evening, that is 11 January, I returned to the ghetto. Only Eścia was there for me, miraculously saved by Heniek. My father could also stay, but he did not want to without my mum. Later, I learnt about the tragic journey of my parents. Tochterman and Gertner escaped from the train and told us that my mother was very thirsty, [and] she asked for some snow. My parents did not speak a word to each other throughout the entire journey. Gutholc's mum [Mamcia] also jumped out of the train then. She lay in the snow for some time and both her feet were frostbitten and later amputated. When we left Ostrowiec, she was lying in bed after the operation.

In the ghetto, we again returned to our normal "life". I moved with Heniek to the second floor, where we shared a room with Marian Psajgielwan and his wife Hanka Wurman. Our neighbours, who had to cross our room, were the Sztajnbaums with their wives and Szlamek Rubinsztajn with Bronka Landau. I did not go back to work, so the place was fairly clean and I cooked myself the best things, because it was all we were left with. From time to time, I met my girlfriends and read letters from Stefcia, who had been in Warsaw since October. The "attractions" were the virtually daily victims of Peter and his colleagues, killed in the square, near the cemetery. What struck us most was the shooting of Gutek Goldwas with his wife and child, victims of a Pole, their good friend. Those scenes spoilt our good humour only for a short time; later, playing cards or in restaurants we tried to keep our minds off it. However, just after the second deportation, people started to whisper about being placed in barracks. That is, we knew that the work detail "Zakłady" and perhaps also Jeger would be barracked in the factory yard, which threatened us with starvation, illness and hard work. So, those who could were looking for a solution.

We were approached by a Pole who organised a gang that was to join the normal Polish sabotage army in future. The boys willingly joined the band, including our nephew, Dudek Grojskop, Szl. Cwajgman, I. Keinig and others. A Swiss from Kunowo, who came to see them, brought some bulletins and similar materials. Finally, the group left for the Kunowo area and spent there two winter months, until 12 February, in a forest. On that day, representatives of the army reported to their

cell demanding to see the weapons, and announced that they would now set off to join the main army. But it was a mere pretext that only Poles could come up with. When the boys put the guns away, they were all shot. In the morning, Nasielski [?] and Szl. Cwajgman came back and told us what happened. I quarrelled with Szlomek about it so many times, because I did not believe in it. I read their bulletins [advising] to recruit people who had money, as much as possible. The boys went to great expense, and Heniek also covered the lion's share, sending large food parcels. And I am amazed, there were smart boys there and they did not see through this insincere game. They still believed that a major was coming from England by airplane to lecture or things like that. From that tragic day, Heniek started to get drunk systematically every day. Usually, his drunkenness ended in tears, as was the case with everybody else. When he was drunk, M. Zyngier used to wallow on the floor and, crying, reminisce about his loved ones. Estera was with us, she slept on the first floor, because she cleaned it as a member of the police kitchen. Leon and Marta came often to our room mates, the Bajgielmans. Eścia caught their eye as a Polish face and on their recommendation she went to Warsaw to work as a servant for the Pers. It cost about 10,000, which Antek Siedlecki took for the lodging, and Leon (who produced fake IDs), who directed us to Antek, also got his pay. The letter we got from her was very good, so it was clear that we could trust Antek. Heniek insisted that Leon arrange a job like that for me as well. First of all, he produced another ID from Ostrowiec for me. We copied personal details from a girl who brought bacon to our place to sell. Heniek went with her to weigh [the bacon], she left the purse and Leon Hercyk and I copied all the personal details from her ID. Before my departure to Warsaw it was really up-to-date, and I experienced joy mixed with jealousy. At that time, 100 telegrams from Palestine arrived in Ostrowiec, among them many from people who had escaped to Russia. Most of the telegrams were sent to families who had been burnt in Treblinka a long time ago.

On 25 January, it was said that the "barracking" would take place the next day. Marian Krycia, Heniek's schoolmate, put me up for a night. At first, I did not want to go, but when Heniek said that he would be in trouble because of me as well, I did not oppose him any more. On Friday morning, Heniek came for me to Marian's. On our way back, two gendarmes stopped us and demanded our passes. Heniek had his and in my brown bag they found black wool for a dress. They did not take it and let us free. We were incredibly lucky, because I had all our fortune on me in my leather purse. That evening, I was to leave for sure. Renia Niskier had already been in Warsaw for several days, Stefcia wrote for her. Everyone who could, scrammed. That day, we had a farewell dinner together at the Wajnworzls' place. I can still feel the taste of those cutlets in my mouth. In the evening, accompanied by Marian, I left for Warsaw. Just before leaving the ghetto, I got a telegram from Szańcia: "Come to our wedding." I treated it as a good sign, that I really should go. On Saturday, at 1 p.m., I was already at Antek's place and met his friend, Heniek, supposedly an officer. I met Stefa in the afternoon; she wanted to do everything for me. But I was already involved with Antek. He had already told me to have a photo taken for the real ID. On Sunday I met up with Jasia, who told me that she was well. Antek and his wife were kind to her and were really decent people. However, I did not feel well in their com-

pany. I met Stasiek Paskud, the only Jewish doctor, Irka with Janeczek, Genia and Loda with little Marysia, and their conduct and language shocked me very much. I much regretted that they talked me into the departure, especially as the time was flying and they did nothing for me, postponing the departure from one day to another. After a week, I moved to Loda, because Marycha, the lodger of Antek and his wife, was arrested in Sandomierz for hanging contacts with Paskud's sister. Antek was afraid that he would be involved in it as well, so he put me in Loda's place and left for Ostrowiec. I lent him some money, and Bronek (Loda's "husband") assured me that one could give anything to Antek without being afraid, because he was very reliable. I spent the whole day only with "cats"[4]: Bronek, Leon, Zygmunt, Irka. Different people also came there, even from the ghetto. They all talked about the need to arm, and they were doing something about it. Among those who came from the ghetto, my attention was drawn to a doctor-advocate (Szyfrys if I'm not mistaken), who was very interesting because of his good looks and eloquence. He crossed to this side to get in touch with a Polish party to transport people to the woods and to print articles from the ghetto in their newspaper. Was it successful? Probably not, because very soon there was a terrible slaughter.

When I came back to Antek's place, I found, but only after two days, that 100 dollars were missing from the coat. I do not know whether it happened at Bronek's or Antek's place. Antek had already come back from Ostr[owiec]. He brought me some underwear and 120 dollars, from which he gave me only 80, because he said Heniek allowed him to borrow 40 dollars. It was a lie, just like the claim that the wool Heniek gave him for me was taken from him on the train. He told me that they were expecting deportation any day now and everyone wanted to come to Warsaw. I got very pessimistic letters from Heniek, full of resignation, and I decided to bring him there at any price, especially as I missed him very much and I knew that I could not live long without him. Besides, the people who came there also said that you could only survive in Warsaw, but you needed at least 100,000 zloty.

All of a sudden, on Tuesday morning, 23 March, Marta arrived with news that in Ostr[owiec] the heat was on them and that we had to send a car for them at any price. After various negotiations with Antek, Heniek and their new acquaintance Stach, the car was sent. On Thursday evening, Heniek, Mrs Judkiewicz and her daughter came. The rest who asked for the car (Najman, Lipszyc, Hania and Leon) were afraid to take a chance and stayed. I was happy when I saw my man safe and sound, because I took such responsibility when I told him to come immediately. I was sure that now we would certainly survive the war, because here, in Warsaw, money could buy anything, and we did have money. This was confirmed by Heniek's experience on the way, when his life was hanging by a thread, but all ended well. So, we were bound to survive. Near Radom, the gendarmerie stopped the car, asking if there were any Jews there. They went straight to Heniek and asked him whether he

[4] The hiding Jews were called "cats" in the occupational jargon. It stemmed from their stories that "before" they were rich and had God knows what. From what a person "had" once, was the jargon term coined ["had" in Polish (*miał*) is a homonym of the onomatopoeic "meow" (*miau*) of a cat – trans.].

was Jewish. He denied it, of course, and showed them the ID they demanded. They asked him about the details, his name, where he lived and so on. By chance, Heniek knew all the personal details of his surname and gave precise answers, while in his thoughts he was looking at the forest where he would be buried.

Now, the period of our common experiences began, thanks to which we had a chance to get acquainted with our alleged "friends": Antek, Stach, Hanka and others. All the meanness of the Poles and their taking advantage of the Jews whenever they could. If it hadn't been for them, many could have been saved. They were the obstacle, every step of the way. Either they informed the Germans, or took everything for themselves, and the Jew was left without the possibility to save himself, because without money, no one wanted to let him in.

So, we were at Antek's place. Friday and Saturday passed rather quietly. Antek promised to give us hideouts, assuring us that in his house nothing wrong could happen to us. Heniek felt obliged and paid an additional 5,000 apart from the car, so it cost him 15,000 altogether. On Saturday morning, there were more "cats", because Marian Bajgelman came by train. That evening we were disturbed by a loud knocking on the door. There was only Antek's wife with her child at home with us. She opened the door after some 15 minutes of knocking. They were "agents", who said that they had come to search for weapons because that was what Antek dealt with. We had become involved "accidentally", and, unfortunately, it was their duty to take us in. Besides, "the gendarmerie was already on the way." We were sure that it was all true and we begged for mercy – it was our first time we'd been blackmailed (*szmalec*) and we were not experienced yet. We were really sure that this time we were going to die. I only asked Heniek for forgiveness that I had brought him there and he said that we were destined to die together. [In] the meantime, Marta, who was the calmest of us all, negotiated with them and finally, when they got 20,000 zloty and Heniek's ring [as] a voluntary gift, they went away, ordering us to disappear in half an hour. One of them wrote down Heniek's real address so that we could pay him back after the war for letting us live. Some 15 minutes after they left, when we stood dazed with nowhere to go, our "saviours", Heniek the officer and Stach came. They were "petrified with what they heard" and they, of course, had to save us. Heniek, the officer, took Mrs Judkiewicz with her daughter, Marian B. went somewhere alone, and we went with Marta to Stach's house. When we arrived there, his wife was scared by this surprise and she left for the night, afraid to be under one roof with Jews. In the morning she came back in a better mood and she seemed to be very nice. In the afternoon, our future landlord, Mr Liwiński, came and we agreed to stay at his place for 2,500 zloty a month per person. Stach collected his 3,000 zlotys for acting as a middleman. Stach was very kind to serve us a square meal. In the evening Leon unexpectedly came together with Stach's friend, Beniek, who assured us that we had come to the right place because Stach was very honest and when a man like him offered a hideout, it was guaranteed. We were happy to be with such an angel. We went in the evening with Mr and Mrs Więckiewicz to the Liwińskis. Of course, we threw a drinking party that lasted until midnight and, tired, we went to sleep to our new beds in a beautiful sunny room, which was at our disposal. The days until 26 May, the memorable Wednesday, were pretty good, although we were

afraid a number of times. It was the time of the Warsaw ghetto liquidation. Bombs, shooting and the glow of burning houses filled the days and nights. Every day we received news from this battlefield, about the bravery of our women, who fired machine guns and threw grenades. Tragic events occurred, among them the one when parents threw their children from the balconies and later they jumped themselves. The tragedy of the ghetto started on the Eve of Passover [Erev Pesach] which fell on 16 April (I don't know if that is the exact date[5]).

We baked matzos under Leon's "command" for the holiday. Those were really tragic holidays, filled with tears when we remembered our days at home. On the second day of the holiday, which coincided with the Catholic holidays, we threw a party for the Więck[iewiczs], who visited us often and seemed to be real friends.

The party was very elegant. Home-made buns, sausage, vodka, sweet boiled fish, etc. This time we were indulgent, but our life was generally very modest, even poor. During this feast, we were scared for a moment, because a few people escaped from the nearby Jewish work detail, and the gendarmerie was looking for them. On the second day it was worse, because they went from house to house. They skipped our place, but we spent all the time in the hiding place, each praying as one could.

Another important event was the air raid on the night of 12/13 May. Of course, we did not go into the shelter, and nor did our landlord. I held onto Heniek, who was very composed and calmed me down. During our stay at their place, the Liwińskis were very kind to us and so were we in return. Their son, Filutek, often went to Antek's place to collect things for Marta and money for me – the debt was about 20,000. In the meantime, Mrs Judkiewicz was thoroughly "blackmailed out" (*wyszmalcowana*). We lent her 20 "soft ones" (*miękkie*)[6]. She gave them back to Antek in Ostrowiec, because she returned on her husband's request, leaving her child in her last hideout. She also owed us 4,000 for the first blackmail at Antek's place, which she also gave him. But we did not receive anything. Finally, Filutek could not get to him at all. The place was closed and it turned out that he had left because Bronek (who was said to have Antek's ID) and his family had been shot. Stach, as I have already mentioned, often came to visit us and brought news and political information from the Warsaw ghetto. He assured us that we would survive the war. However, to cool things down and cover our tracks, he told Antek to write that we had changed the hideout. "After that," he added, "there is no need to worry, nothing wrong will happen to you, because even Heniek, the officer, knows that you are not there any longer." I must add that Heniek visited us at the beginning because of Leon's intervention (who wanted money for his running around to Antek). This boy had probably the best character of the whole family. He slept at his grandfather's place in Chmielna Street, and came to see us only on Sundays. Once, when he was drunk, he spilt the beans that in the attic at his grandfather's house his friend Abramek was hiding and he could not manage to get enough food for him. He would take it from his home, saying that it was for his grandfather, and give it to his friend and so on. We intended to do something for this boy Abramek, but the plans were frustrated.

[5] Not exact. Fighting in the ghetto broke out on 19 April 1942.

[6] Paper dollars in the occupation jargon.

Still, in the first days of our stay at Litwiński's place, I went to Antek for the debt and met there Gienia Lipszyc, whom I gave Stach's address because she wanted to find a hideout for Najman, Hania and her husband. Stach went with her to take a look at the hideouts, but she did not like any of them and stopped coming to him. Suddenly, Stach came with a letter from them [which said] that everyone at his place had been "blackmailed out" and they asked for a loan. Heniek of course gave them 1,000, and on the second day Stach came for me because Hania desperately wanted to see me. I did not want to go and the landlady did not let me, insisting that whoever goes out never comes back.

On the next day, on 26 May at 11 in the morning, when we were still in bed, the blackmailers came, taking 15,000 zloty and Heniek's golden watch from us. They came back one hour later. They said that there were five of them, that they got too little, because the man who sent them to us expected us and especially Leon to be worth millions. The man demanded more goods, or money, diamonds – Leon started to negotiate with them to come every month for a fixed fee. They agreed but said that they must get something now. Finally, when we did not want to give them anything, he started searching and found in my sewing purse 80 dollars, 1 "hard one" (*twardy*),[7] my ordinary watch, a "dancing pin", then the underwear, my dress and Leon's wife's dress, and all that they put in the suitcases and left, assuring us that now we did not have to worry because nothing would happen to us anymore.

When we alarmed Stach he came and it turned out that he knew those thugs and they were Heniek's men. "This son of a bitch will spoil my hideouts?" He demanded a precise list of things [taken] and went with our landlord to Heniek's place to make sure that they would not bother us any more. Heniek's companions were drinking, celebrating the robbery. The landlords heard through the door that Stach was furious. They did not want to give back anything but they promised that we did not have to worry, because it would not happen again. Stach had a deal with Heniek to come the next day to an agreed place, because he wanted to confront him with the landlord as they were very anxious and wanted to hear it from Heniek himself that nothing would happen. Heniek did not come, so Stach and Liwiński agreed to rub them out. Stach asked us what "lucky charm" to bring us, to which Leon replied "moustache" and Stach promised an ear. "Which ear do you want, Leon, left or right?" We were so naïve as to believe in it and we feared the consequences, but we bore in mind the words of one of the blackmailers: "You cannot die yet, because everything needs to be taken from you." He kept bullying us, saying that we had earned a fortune from them and that now their time had come to take everything back. I couldn't help replying, because I could not forget him hitting Heniek in the face, so I told him that he might one day be in our shoes and someone would surely demand payback. Confrontations, lucky charms, improvisation, etc. came to nothing and in early June our "moustache" came again. He demanded a fixed monthly fee of 6,000 zloty. He complained that he had been tricked, because the watch was worth only 200 and the pin was encrusted with glass beads, not diamonds, as he had thought. We promised him 3,000 zloty monthly, which enraged him. He said it was too little

[7] Golden dollar coin in the occupation jargon.

and that he had five partners. Finally, he came and demanded 6,000, adding that he would come in a few days and the money should be waiting for him on the table. So we started to look for a new hideout. Mr Maciak came. He was the landlord of Wilk with his mother, who had already arrived in the meantime, and who, thanks to Stach, were already lodged with this Mr Maciak, who was Stach's brother-in-law. He promised to find us a hideout, but only in a few days. Mr Liwiński was also making efforts when suddenly, on Sunday, 6 in the afternoon Mr and Mrs Więckiewicz came with a new figure – Mr Przeździecki. His pronunciation, body language and appearance told us that he was Jewish. We found out that he was a convert and was in the Polish Police before the war and his pseudonym was "Gatuś".

We got a hideout at Gatuś's sister-in-law in Grochów, at No. 8 Paca Street. Our new landlords, Mr and Mrs Chmielewski, got 4,000 zloty for us four, while Stach and Gatuś, the middlemen, got 6,000. Our stay there lasted only one month, but it was full of surprises. First of all, on 9 June I had an abortion, for which Stach's wife with another midwife took 1,000. We were very sorry to lose our child whom we wanted so badly, but we couldn't have it. Although Liwińska and Stach's wife said that the war would be over in less than 9 months, we couldn't rely on it.

Another very important event was to be Leon's and Marta's departure to Germany. Stach and Gatuś were to take care of it. They had already taken the first half of 10,000 and they kept coming with the news. Every few days they would say that things were getting done, they would leave in three days, in a week, on Friday, on Monday, and thus they kept deceiving them. In the meantime, Stach brought us the lion's share of [our] things from Liw[iński]'s, but he claimed that Mrs Liwińska gave it reluctantly and he had to force her to give them back. So, the following week I went to collect some more things, especially our underwear, which she washed for us, and I gave her 100 zloty for that. Marian was at their place at that time, and she pretended that she wanted to give everything to me, but I only took as much as I could pack in my brown bag. Marian asked me then for our address and I stupidly didn't want to give it to him, afraid that he would pass it to the Liwińskis, and I knew that she wanted it very badly, because as soon as I came she said "Now you have to give me the address." She told me that she knew for sure that Stach was the one who had sent [them to us]. They knew it from the very first moment and we did not want to believe it, because the "moustache" came to her and wanted to give her some millionaire who could be robbed later and he revealed that he had quarrelled with Stach about the "hard ones" the moustache said he knew nothing about.

She really frightened me saying that we were in the gang and who knows if we would leave the place alive. She proposed that she would save us by a stratagem and give us a nearby hideout. I promised to give her my answer in a letter, after discussing it with Heniek, Leon and Marta. I also learnt that Najman, Hania and Lipszyc had been blackmailed out again. Hania had spent one night here and left in an unknown direction. Worried, I went back to Grochów. I told them everything and now we were sure that it was Stach's fault.

The food in Paca Street was much cheaper, because the landlady would not earn on our shopping, but Liwińska ripped us off. But it was worse there, a lot of people came and we had to be very quiet, while in Hrubieszowska Street only Misiek, the

Italian, came once a week or the Więckiewiczes, whom we identified after they knocked 3 times.

Time was flying by but Leon's and Marta's case was still unsolved. Meanwhile Marta bought the whole gear for the trip, which frustrated Heniek, who claimed that no worker would ever take such big luggage as they had. The landlord Mr Czesław mocked them, claiming that they would have to sell all these things because they would eventually not go anywhere. He did not trust his brother-in-law and claimed that he was a "cop" and thus he was [capable] of anything, even the worst things. He warned us that he couldn't keep us more than a month, because his room was too small and his tenants would find out. A woman called Janina came there often. Her husband was lodged by our landlord, but Mr Czesław had all the important documents. This lady had to come there to talk Czesław into taking her husband to his place. From that we concluded that Czesław could be trusted and we asked him to arrange a hideout for Heniek. He had already found [for me] a very good job as a servant and he also had something planned for Heniek. For whole days we were busy rolling cigarettes, sewing and cleaning. We knew that they got only 4,000 and they seemed very decent. So, we tried to help them as we could. There was also a very good hideout under a coat hanger, a recess in the wall. We used it only once when the gendarmes pulled by a nearby house.

Meanwhile, the time flew by. Leon spent almost all the money on the trip, but nothing happened. So, one evening, he sent Marta to Stach and Gatuś to find out whether it would be arranged or not. She spent the night there and, in her absence, on the morning of 2 July on Friday a gendarme and a policeman with guns woke us up. I was not really scared and I even said "thank God, it's over". This time we knew it was not blackmail, but death. But it was not like that. It was a new kind of blackmail. This time we were literally stripped bare, we were left only in our night gowns, that is what we wore. They even took my stockings. They took all the rings, a cigarette case, 30 dollars, 300 zloty and one hard one. They took Leon's entire luggage bought for [the trip] to Germany and also the parcel that he was to send there; the landlord had advised him not to do it yet. Leon, totally unconscious (he claimed that he only pretended), trembled and cried all the time, didn't move and didn't answer any questions. Before they left, they told us that they would come back at 8 o'clock and we should be gone by then. I was glad that at least Heniek's coat was left, because it was hanging in the hall. Heniek often lent it to the landlord, but to our great disappointment, we discovered that there was no coat on the hanger and we knew that they had not taken it. We realized then that our Mr Czesław was also involved. We recalled that the day before in the evening he told Leon to take things from the hiding place, saying that it had to be taken for us to hide in case of danger. Anyway, their behaviour confirmed our suspicions. They were not scared at all, they were not afraid and did not tell us to leave right away. And the landlady was doing her makeup and combing her hair as if she was already used to scenes like that. We started asking their child and learnt that there had been a lady with a child here. A gendarme came. She was in despair and ran away. Characteristically, they also told Heniek to run away during this action and they even wanted to open the door for him.

I forgot to mention that the gendarme searched each of us individually. He made me strip. He searched Leon but he did not find two diamond rings in his sock, and Heniek managed to hide 100 dollars in the toilet.

When Marta came back with Stach in the afternoon, she did not want to believe that something like that had happened. She convinced one of us that Stach was innocent this and the previous time. She spent the night at his place and his wife swore by God that Stach was hurt because we suspected him of the previous blackmail, but he was innocent and the truth would out after the war. Leon had reasons to call her *cydajkis* because she could not do without God and St. Anthony.

We spent there one more night from Friday to Saturday. Actually we were only lying down, because who could sleep? Still late in the evening, the landlord was still absent and when I saw him coming back in the distance, I thought it was the same gendarme coming to check if we were still there. I panicked a bit, and Leon wanted to jump out of the window. The landlord came back thoroughly drunk – apparently they were celebrating the fat loot. On the second day on Saturday morning Marta went with Stach to his house. Stach was to come back to Leon's while Heniek and I were to go to Chmielewski's hideout. Unexpectedly, in the afternoon Stach came back and told us to pack because Leon was going to his place, while Heniek and I were going to a new hideout by car for 3,000 zloty. Some Warsaw Jews had already stayed there, but they had gone to the Hotel in Długa Street.[8] There were rumours that an exchange of Jews was being organised. The Jews reported themselves to the Hotel for the exchange. They were supposed to go to the Swiss-German border to be exchanged. Probably they went to Treblinki [sic]. We heard that Chairman Rubinsztajn with his wife had gone there as well. The action was organised by a Jew, Stefan Rejzner, who was to be a "Gestapo" functionary. The Jews were said to pay 100,000 per head to be accepted. We also wanted to do that, but we did not have enough money. Only the "sharks" did, Stach said.

Heniek dressed as a tram driver and we went by car. Our new landlord, Mr Piskorski, waited for us on the way. His grey hair made him look trustworthy, also because we knew that Mrs Judkiewicz had left her daughter there and she wouldn't have done it if she hadn't been sure that those people were decent. We got the upstairs room. Actually, it was very austere, but the fresh air from the forest, which came through the window, was nicer than the Warsaw comforts of which we were tired. But, immediately on Friday, we had another accident. When we were playing cards with Heniek, suddenly, Piskorski's daughter, Henia, came and said "Hide!" Hardly had we closed the door of the hiding place when we heard heavy soldier footsteps on the stairs. This time there were four of them, one in uniform. We were sure that our suffering would finally end. We heard a conversation in German, we saw through the cracks that they were looking everywhere, shining a torch, and we were not locked. But, apparently we were not destined to die yet. They lit a torch in our direction, but they did not notice anything. It was a real miracle. It rained all night

[8] I.e. in the Hotel Polski, where foreign Jews were gathered to be exchanged for German citizens interned in states which were enemies of the Third Reich. For details see Agnieszka Haska *"Jestem Żydem, chcę wejść." Hotel Polski w Warszawie, 1943* (Warsaw 2006).

and we sat in the hiding place holding each other without a move. Tereska, Mrs Judkiewicz's daughter, was with us, because the two of them were staying for the night. Early in the morning, they left with the landlord, who went to work. Tired, exhausted physically and mentally, we left our shelter wondering who sent them this time. We learned that it was not about us this time, but about our predecessors, Mr and Mrs Bader and Tereska, as they knew exactly how much her mother paid for her and generally all the details. When I asked about my purse that Piskorski had taken, it turned out that my mother's golden watch and 215 zloty were missing. The Piskorskis said that it was they who took it during the search and they also took 2,000 zloty from underneath the pillow from them, but we knew that those were lies, because if they had searched the purse they would have found my two IDs and they wouldn't have ignored them, because – "where is this person?" – and they checked the identity of each of the children. We had to pretend that we believed them. Again, the suspicion fell on Stach, because who knew about everything in detail and who brought here the Baders and Tereska?

The landlord told us that Stach was the chief blackmailer, that his home was the blackmailers' hideout and that he wanted to engage Piskorski as well, but he didn't "do things like that." When Stach came on Sunday, as he had his summer lodging nearby, we told him about what had happened and that we spent the night in the forest. He was simply terrified and his wife as well, "and only Gatuś could have done it" because he knew about everything in detail. They trusted him, because he was a convert and he was always "interested" in the Jews. The landlord and Stach decided to rub him out because it was not a problem for Piskorski, he had already done bigger things than that, etc. Later, however, Stach advised us only to send a warning letter. According to our landlord he was afraid, because he was involved in different dirty tricks with Gatuś. We knew very well from the very beginning that it wouldn't happen because we knew them a bit better now and we knew that at home they were all strong and brave, but when the time came they were "very far from it".

Later, for almost two weeks we all three slept on the hay in the shelter until the fleas and ants from the hay started to bite us all over.

On the next Monday following our arrival, we went with the Więckiewiczes to town to collect the rest of the things from the Liwińskis and see Leon and Marta, who still lived at Stach's place waiting for the promised trip to Germany. When I saw them, especially Leon, I could hardly recognise them. The whole tragedy was written on their faces. No wonder, they had paid a fortune and Przeździecki didn't turn up. And here I must admit that later, when they left on 17 July, I think, it was only thanks to Stach, who kept going to the Labour Office (*Arbeitsamt*) a few times a day to inquire when the transport would leave and he finally got it done. Of course, he did not get it done for their good looks, because he collected 2,000 zloty for their fortnight stay at his place and he also earned from the trip itself. Apart from that, Leon kept deceiving him that if they manage to leave, half of Ostrowiec would go and Stach would earn a fortune then. But I'm losing the chronology. So, when that Monday I went to the Liwińskis' place to collect the things, Mrs Liwińska told me that she had given everything to Stach's boy, who came with a letter from Heniek. I knew it was a lie, but what I could do when I had no right to live and one word by

her to a gendarme could cost me my life. I learnt then that there was not even one decent Pole and that every one of them could kill a Jew with his bare hands. This mean hag got 10,000 monthly from us. Marta lent Jadzia dresses, we helped them when we could, and after we'd left we felt obliged to give them 1,000 zloty and decided to help them from time to time, because we were convinced that they were really devoted to us. She scared me stiff again [saying] that we would not escape alive from Stach and that instead of Germany Leon and Marta would go under the ground. So, we suffered another loss: the blanket, Heniek's jackets, my boots and some underwear. And thus, everyone who could, ripped us off and we had to keep quiet and hope in vain that the time of revenge would come.

In the meantime we had to think about convincing Stach and our landlord that we really did not have anything left, but we systematically received money from Ostrowiec. We were left with 3 "hard ones", 180 "soft ones", pounds and pearls. Actually, we believed that it would get us to the end of the war. But we had to pretend that we did not have anything. Apart from that, Heniek wanted me to go to Głuchowski's to collect part of our property that was in his hands. So we started to plan a trip to Ostrowiec with Stach's wife, who wanted to recruit people to Germany. We had to wait for the landlord's daughter's wedding and also wait for Leon's letter informing that he had arrived [safely]. I was present at the wedding as the Piskorskis' summer tenant and Stach's relative. Heniek and Tereska spent the whole day in the hiding place. Stach even wanted to lend me a dress, but I had to buy one anyway, because I did not have more than one. It was summer and I just couldn't breathe. I bought a black dress for 280 zloty and wore it for the wedding.

On 30 July, we were with Stach's wife at the Main Station, planning to go to Ostrowiec. But my plans were frustrated again. Perhaps I should be grateful to the thief, because some misfortune might have befallen me on the way, but for the time being, I had already been unlucky, because I was robbed of 1,000 zloty, new stockings and, most importantly, two IDs that were in my stolen purse. Of course, the trip did not materialise. Stach's wife went alone a couple of days later. When she came back, she brought a letter from Marian that he would be coming soon and he would bring money. That's what happened. In a week, he came and brought 5,000 zloty. We learnt that only he was really devoted to us and, so to speak, disinterested. After his departure we started to live normally, knowing that once in a while he would come and bring some money.

We would spend the days reading, doing puzzles, talking about politics and writing letters to Germany. We'd been through quite a lot with Leon and Marta and we were really close like a family, so Heniek took to writing to them and we wrote to them about all the events that had happened and all of our impressions. I, on my part, took care of their financial matters. In Stach's stove, they left a golden chain and other things to sell. So, I could buy and send them underwear and things like that. I felt a bit uncomfortable when I went to the stove in the Więckiewiczes' presence to get the "treasure", but I had to, because Leon presented us with a fait accompli, and he could have handed it over himself because we saw each other a couple of days before their trip. We managed to sell everything and I sent them these things. But Stach could not sell the chain for the price Leon had fixed. Stach claimed that

the hallmark of the chain was forged and they wanted to buy it as cheap gold. I even went with him once and it turned out to be true. Leon, however, still claimed that Stach wanted to deceive us and I believed in it honestly. He could have talked to the jeweller before our arrival. To this day, Stach has the chain and we cannot risk that Stach, if he feels like it, would blackmail us because of the chain. We have a lot of trouble because of that, as sometimes we think that Leon suspects us of having a deal with Stach and that we are trying to cheat him together. From time to time I sent letters to Leon which I signed as his aunt, in which I mention Jesus, baptism, the church, etc., because Leon worked with a Ukrainian who suspected him. Lately, we rarely receive letters from them, because we don't want to receive them at our address because it is in the country and it is known that Piskorski never receives any letters, so they are to be sent to Stach's address. Meanwhile, we haven't seen Stach for 2 weeks and we can't get any letters.

What keeps us busy is also catching countless fleas – even today we catch about 5 a day. We found out how clean an occupation it is. At Liwiński's, there were swarms of louses [sic]. In the morning we picked them from our slippers, sheets and clothes. Fortunately, there was a bathroom there and we often took a bath. Here, however, there are no urban comforts like that and I got abscesses all over my body. I don't know whether it's because of the fleas, malnutrition or scabies. The fact is that I had to use Inotid for a long time. Once, together with Heniek, we even used Nowoscabin and, thank God, the blisters are coming off. Now we spend a lot of time reading books that the landlord brought us from the Power Station for 5 zloty a month. Heniek's favourite was Sinclair's *Oil!*, in which there is the sentence: "The war is inevitable and will lead to the Bolshevisation of the entire world." It is of course about the current war. Every Friday we also buy *7 Dni*[9] and we receive clandestine newspapers quite often. Almost once every two or three weeks on Wednesday (as I found Wednesday to be my luckiest day) I go to Warsaw to "improvise" or to do the shopping. "Improvisation" means that they send money to Żolibórz [sic] and I go to collect it. Once, we even improvised in front of Stach that we received a letter from Heniek's brother (who is in a gang) to scare Stach, and he is soon coming to visit us.

When we came from Ostrowiec we were literally starving. When we didn't have any dough, Marta was in charge and we ate dark bread and radishes or rhubarb; fried onions were a luxury. Sometimes we ate beef or horse-meat cutlets, smoked horse meat, etc. Today, when our supplies are running out, we have concluded that meat is cheaper than pork fat. Anyway, whatever we eat is ours. On the other hand, now that we get better food I still pay less than at Liwiński's place for only bread and soup.

When I was in Warsaw one Wednesday, I dropped in by Antek's and found Witka and Loda there. The latter was in tears after losing Bronek. She told me how it happened. The blackmailers came to them and they wouldn't pay. They killed one of the blackmailers and the other one went to the Gestapo. The men were killed on

[9] One of the "reptile press" titles, published by the Germans in Warsaw. The first issue of the fortnightly *7 Dni* was published on 11 May 1944 with a circulation of 40,000 copies.

the spot and the women were arrested. Marysia was with her on a stroll and she survived. When I turned to Witka for my debt and Marta's things, she told me that the things are in Praga at her sister's and the money is put aside for us. But she can neither send them nor bring them. But I did not go there in vain, it was worth it, because there was a letter from Szajńcia, written as early as June, in which she asked for financial help for Motek and his wife Marysia Kac. I immediately replied that I'm in no better conditions now and I asked where we should meet. She replied at Stach's address and on 22 September, also a Wednesday, I met up with her. It turned out that she is babysitting for a very decent couple and generally she met only honest people on her way. The same day I met up with Eścia on the stairs of the house, where she lived. She was happy that we were still alive and she said she wanted to see Heniek. Of course, I invited her and also Szajńcia, whom I gave one "hard one" to sell. She was alone in Napoleona Square and she had almost sold it, but the gendarmerie started to search the people in the street, so my client and I also split, each of us in a different direction. I preferred to take less money for that and not to be so scared. We agreed to meet the next Wednesday, again in the same place, in Fracsati Avenue.[10] On the same day I had one more "adventure". As I was crossing Hoża Street, looking at a shop window, I noticed a familiar face. I looked inside through the door to make sure that I wasn't mistaken. But I wasn't: I saw Motek Fefer and Marysia Kac. She noticed me and came out to talk to me. I learnt that they were both working for 1,000 zloty monthly including the flat and food. Renia worked in Włochy, Basia Halbersztat in Warsaw for a dressmaker, and Lesiek Klajman on an estate near Warsaw. Also the Czernikowskis were still in Warsaw. They even took care of registration, change of address and IDs. Mrs Szotland with her daughter were in Warsaw and Fela Kac as well. She didn't trust Antek from the very beginning and she even talked about that with Leon and Marta, but they laughed at her. However, she went to his place for Motek's ID. They told her to come the next day and when she did, some blackmailers were waiting for her. She did not give them anything, because she had nothing. I also learnt from her that Marian Bajgelman was shot by them and that they were to arrange it for the party to send him to Germany. This is what Stach said, that Heniek would take care of him. But finally, he got in touch with his mother and uncle and he is doing well. The truth will out after the war.

That day, I came back home late, because Stefa stopped me and when I entered our room Heniek looked like a ghost with eyes red from tears and pale as a sheet. He was mad at me because he thought that he would never see me again: "How can you come so late?" It was in the time of round-ups for Germany. Apart from that, we needed to pass the guard post and I already had my third ID, forged from Marta's ID, in which the fingerprints were messed up.

I had already been called Janina Ciechocińska. The ID from Ostrowiec issued to a real name, Halina Stawiarska, the ones forged in Warsaw, both stolen with my purse. The first thief sent them back to the right address in Ostrowiec. The true Janina Ciechocińska gave it to the gendarmerie. In fact, Pracownik wanted to buy it, but why it didn't happen I don't know.

[10] It is a street not an avenue [trans.].

Currently, I'm Marta Morawska, born in Vilna, and I want to return to my real name and surname as soon as possible. On Sunday, on the 3rd of t[his] month [October 1943] Szajńcia visited us. When Heniek saw her, he burst into tears. The visit was, one could say, the only happy moment for the first time since we came to Warsaw. She told us her story. Unlike us, on her way she met only kind and honest people, who helped her a lot. When we claimed that the Jews were morally superior to the Poles, she was simply indignant. Janina[11] helped her most, not only her but also Renia [Niskier], Basia H[albersztat] and Cesia [Kleiman] and she did that almost for nothing. This Janina also wants to help us, offering us two a hideout for 1,500 zloty a month. So far, we've paid until 3 November. We might decide to move, because it's a huge difference in price. Perhaps the war will end by the end of the month.

So far, I have not written anything about politics, but I must mention it as well. During my stay at Liwiński's and Chmielewski's, I didn't care for politics at all, but here I follow the events eagerly. At that time, Tunis was taken. Later, the newspapers were full of news about the discovery of mass graves at Katyń, as well as letters of Polish readers not to help the Jews, because they are hostile elements and whoever helps a Jew deserves to die himself, etc. When we were at Chmielewski's, Pantelleria and Lampedusa were taken and the Allies were already landing in Sicily. Now, Italy has surrendered. The Bolsheviks have crossed the Dnieper in several places and the Reich is being bombed on a mass scale. One can almost feel that the war is coming to an end, but who knows how much time it would take. The good news lifts our spirits up, but we are still vulnerable; every passing day is our victory, and who knows if we will make it to the end. We are fed up with our landlords' boorishness, the alcoholism of the landlord and the quarrels triggered by it. They even had a fight once and their screams could be heard all over Placówka.[12] He comes late at night, drunk, claiming that nothing would happen to him. But where's his responsibility? Because we are staying at his place, he has to be "correct". What if he was killed after curfew and the gendarmerie came. It's easy to get into trouble. They are virulent anti-Semites, which is evident in whatever they do, be it their attitude to Teresa or when they mock the way Jews talk in Polish. Most of all, they laugh at the way the Jews say "Kurwi twoja moja mać".[13] Heniek is right to say that he knows how to say

[11] Mrs Janina Grundgand, according to the affidavit sent to the Jewish Historical Institute in 1943 by Basia Folkman, Hinda Malachi and Renia Szewes (301/5970), lived during the occupation at No. 53 Łowicka Street and helped a lot of Jews including a few Jewish women from Ostrowiec. She involved in the help action her sister, Mira Merson (No. 42 Madalińskiego Street) and her acquaintances Mr and Mrs Dulski (No. 20 Odolańska Street). At Mrs Grundgand's place a few Jews lived. She arranged accommodation, jobs and birth certificates for others (Hinda got the birth certificate of the late Apolonia Szybowska and on that basis she received a real ID). She also helped in a critical situation. Hinda worked initially as a housekeeper for another acquaintance of Janina's and later, when she had a daughter, as a babysitter. They survived the Warsaw Uprising together.

[12] Placówka is a settlement near Warsaw between Wólka Węglowa and Młociny. Currently, it is a part of the city.

[13] Reference is made here to a very strong and very popular Polish obscenity including a grammatical mistake that completely changes the meaning of the whole phrase and offends the speaker.

this correctly and many more expressions worse than that, and he can pronounce them clearly and pithily. We do not like them at all. And despite the fact that Stach did us a lot of harm, we prefer him as a person with whom we can talk and you can hear the wisdom from his every word. When the Więckiewiczes were living here, they were trying to tighten our friendship, bringing some home-made delicacies and they made a point of seeing us every day. We were a bit uneasy that they stopped coming but I believe that this time they are no threat to us. Everybody says that the Bolsheviks are coming, so they will surely want to be on good terms with us.

On Sunday the 3rd [of the month], we received a letter from Marian from hospital, [saying] that he is ill with abdominal typhus. Apart from that, everything in Ostrowiec is fine. We were sure that something happened there in the barracks. Brother-in-law Pracownik is interested in us most. He arranges everything we need with Marian. We told them to collect some of our things from the Głuchowskis and Janiszewskis and leave them with Marian. I also wrote to Abram to give Marian my dowry in kind.

We learnt that Wilek was back in the barracks. According to Stach, he is in Warsaw, in a hideout and comes to Maciak, asking him to take him back. They were sent away, because when Mr and Mrs Maciak were absent they lit the stove without opening the baffle and smoke kept coming out through the doors and windows. The neighbours rallied and they couldn't stay there any longer. I don't know if it's true or not, because this is what Stach said. Lipszyc is also in the barracks. We turned to him to give us back the 1,000 he owed us. He didn't want to, and claimed that he took it for Najman. Also Mrs Judkiewicz refuses to return 20 "soft ones", [saying] that she had already given them to Antek. She has loads of millions, she could at least give the linen back. She has already been in our shoes, but still she doesn't feel obliged to give it back. Tereska is suffering because of that, because we wouldn't let her starve like that. So, from time to time, she gets something from us. But it's useless. She's terribly emaciated. The diet she gets is what Hitler offers for food coupons. She sleeps without bed sheets. Her parents sent [bed linen] to her, but the landlady claims that it was torn in the wash, because Stach's wife got worse linen instead. It pains me to watch how they treat her for 30,000 zloty!!!

On the other hand, we don't sympathise with her. She's a she-devil. She's foolishly devoted to the landlords who treat her like a dog. We cannot say anything in front of her, because she immediately goes downstairs to repeat it. They wear all her clothes, they don't even want to give her a sheet of writing paper and she's had scabies since we came here, that is almost 4 months. Heniek often jokes with her, flirts out of sheer boredom or laughs at her family and the whole of Konin. Apart from that, we often remember our loved ones, the times of childhood and youth, our life in our parents' home and our life together before and after the weeding. As we recall our loved ones, who died so tragically, we wonder if we are any better than them.

Heniek claims firmly that he feels the end of the war is coming, soon, soon, soon. . . .

We often count how many of our Jewish acquaintances are in Germany apart from those that are in the barracks. These are: Lesi Hercyk, Maria and Bina Rembiszewska, Kisel and Lajka Goldblum, Tuszer, Bronia Landau, Zygger from Iłża,

Leon [and] Marta, and those we only heard about: Antoni, Hanka and Jadwiga, Szm. Bleiche's wife and also Mrs Bram who left with me a year ago.

In Warsaw are: Hela and Dorka Klajman, her husband with the child, Rózia Piekarczyk, Wajnworchówna, the Czernikowski family and Marek Obwarzanek, Chaim Langier, Kacówka Blondynka, Motek Fef[er] with his wife, Renia [Niskier], Basia [Halbersztat], Cesia [Kleiman], Szajńcia, Eścia, Szerówna, who sends blackmailers and Genia Lifszyc, who is said to be involved in it.

We concluded that we couldn't survive without [other] Jews, only among Poles. We pray to God to leave us a small handful of Jews in the barracks. I write as if I was sure that we will survive. I believe in it, although we are exposed every step of the way.

This concludes the description of our experience from the last year. To write normally about things worth mentioning, it is really the minimum of what we have been through and I couldn't describe our spiritual condition, because you need to have talent to do that.

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