TESTAMENT OF FAITH

She was a loving and happy wife, joyously content with her husband and baby. But then came September 1, 1939 and Nazi bombs shattered her peaceful life. Separated from her beloved husband, with her little son in her arms, she became a homeless wanderer across occupied Poland.

Hiding in cellars and haystacks, sometimes barefoot and frequently hungry, she took fantastic chances to outwit the hated invader. How this valiant woman survived for five years is an incredible drama of courage and cunning and hairbreadth escapes.

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As stunning a testament to courage and the will to survive as "The Diary of Anne Frank"

LET US NOT FORGET...

by Irene Teger

Edited by Dana Corum and Jean Glover

"My Dear Son. . . . .

"I went to a Gentile nursery. The leading sister told me that she would keep you from nine till five. She old me to give her your birth certificate. . . . I began to cry. When she saw that I couldn't stop crying, she put her arms around me with sympathy. 'Sister,' I said, 'I can't give you my child's birth certificate. . . . We are Jewish.'

"She didn't look at me with sympathy any more. She began to scream: 'Do you want to bring death to the whole nursery? If the Nazis find you here, they will kill all of us. . . . Please go away.'

"Slowly I went to the door, but she called me back. She told me to sit down and began to speak slowly and quietly: 'My poor, poor woman. I am over seventy. I hope they won't touch the innocent children, and if they kill me, I will sooner see Our Father in Heaven. . . . Leave your baby here.'

"It wasn't possible for me to thank her. In a dream I turned to the door and walked out. . . . . ."

Let us not forget . . .

A MOTHER'S LETTER TO A SON

by IRENE TEGER

Edited by
DANA CORUM
and
JEAN GLOVER

PYRAMID BOOKS • NEW YORK

With Love and Hope
For A Better Tomorrow
For All Mankind

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Let us not forget . . .

Irene Teger, the second of five children of Sala and Salomon Kleiner, was born on May 27, 1912, in the small town of Drohobycz, Poland. Born during an era of wars, epidemics and famine, Irene grew up with the taste of poverty on her lips and a prayer for "a better way of life for her parents" in her heart.

The memories of Irene's early childhood are few—and for the greater part unhappy. Not in the sense of her family life, but rather the life they had to endure because of the times.

In 1914, when Irene was two years old, World War I erupted and her father disappeared from her life for four years, leaving his job as a laborer in the oil fields to become a soldier. It was a difficult period for Salomon's wife and children, but Sala Kleiner was a woman of strong character and perseverance and she managed to provide for her children by sewing for the more affluent.

Feeding, clothing and keeping a roof over the heads of her children was not to be the most difficult obstacle Sala was to encounter during that time, however, for an epidemic of Typhus spread rapidly throughout Poland and the residents of the town of Drohobycz were hard hit by the dread disease.

The Kleiner's apartment building was soon put under quarantine as many of their friends and neighbors were taken away to the overcrowded hospitals—several of them never to return again—and Sala took immediate steps to protect her children: boarding up the windows of their ground-floor apartment; making arrangements with a woman who helped her with the children to bring them food each day; and disinfecting the apartment. Then Sala prayed for the lives of her children.

As the days passed Sala's friend continued bringing food as well as the news of entire families gone; of five and six children having been taken away to the hospitals with only one or two returning to their grieving mothers; and of still others dropping in the streets like flies. Sala continued praying.

Then it was over. The Kleiner household had been spared, but there was little time for happiness: the food supply in Drohobycz was low and much of it was contaminated; Sala's funds were exhausted from not working during the time their apartment had been under quarantine; and some of Sala's best customers had been taken by the disease.

Sala went back to work immediately, sewing in exchange for bread, eggs, milk and cheese to sustain her children. Then she traveled to the nearby towns to find new customers, and after many weeks of hard work and very little sleep their lives slowly regained some semblance of normalcy.

But the Kleiner family was not destined for a life without more than their share of struggle and heartbreak. Rose, Irene's oldest sister, became ill with Scarlet Fever. Sala took steps to isolate Rose from the other children, but it was too late. Irene's youngest sister, Niusia, contracted the disease shortly after Rose, and within a few days Irene also had it. And once again Sala Kleiner spent many sleepless nights as she maintained a constant vigil at the bedsides of her stricken children, her prayers echoing throughout their four-room apartment until the fevers broke.

Sala was grateful for her children's recovery but she was mentally and physically exhausted and didn't know how much longer she could stand up under the demands the past four years had made upon her. As she teetered on the brink of collapse

the war ended and Salomon returned home from the battlefield.

The walls of the Kleiner household reverberated with the sounds of joyous laughter, and rightly so: "Daddy" had returned to them safely; it was Christmas—the first one to be spent together in four years; and Daddy's old job was waiting for him, as were the jobs of many returning veterans.

This was the first real memory Irene had of her father and the impression it left was a lasting one. Salomon's hearty laughter filled his children's days with happiness and his tender and loving ways instilled Sala with a radiance the children had never seen in their mother before.

Joy, however, was to be short-lived: the war had broken the structural backbone of "Big Business" and in order to survive, companies had to steadily reduce the already low wages until a man with a wife and five children could no longer make ends meet.

But Sala Kleiner was not a woman to accept defeat easily and once again her faith and perseverance prevailed. Some of her wealthier clientele had expressed the desire to have her teach their daughters to sew so she decided to start a sewing school. The news spread rapidly and within two weeks Sala had twenty-five young ladies from the best families enrolled in her school for a ten-month course.

The Kleiner girls thrived on the excitement their mother's new venture brought. Each morning they stood at the door—noticing the eager faces of their neighbors peeking out their windows—as the handsome horse-drawn carriages pulled up in front of their houses to leave their graceful young mistresses for the day.

The school was successful and as the years passed,

"Sala's Sewing Course" became a household word in the homes of the wealthy and was often considered a *must* for the young ladies before they were thought to be properly prepared to manage their own households.

By this time Irene, who was blossoming into a beautiful young woman herself, was helping her mother when she returned home in the afternoon from school. But Irene, not really interested in sewing, spent most of her time studying her mother's students: their mannerisms and eloquent speech; listening to their tales of the rich and dashing young men who vied for their hands; and dreaming of the day when such a young man would come into her life, one who would understand and help her ensure her parents of a more comfortable life in their remaining years.

In the early twenties fate struck another bitter blow to the Kleiners when Salomon was laid off with a grim "I'm sorry" and a pay envelope containing several weeks' wages as compensation for his many years of loyal service. It was with a heavy heart that he returned home to break the news and, as always, Sala Kleiner refused to be defeated: "God will provide as long as we remain worthy."

Sala continued her school but without Salomon's income she had to trim her expenses to a bare minimum—one of the largest and most important was that of the patterns. At that time they were made of soft tin from France and were considered a luxury. She had to limit her class to one pattern to be used by all.

This caused a considerable delay in the progress of Sala's class as she would have to wait until each girl had cut out her material before she could proceed with the next step. Irene noticed the deep concern this caused her mother and displaying some of her inherited ingenuity, Irene got the idea of making duplicate patterns by tracing the outline of the tin onto paper and cutting it out. Sala was both pleased and amazed with her daughter's stroke of genius and it became Irene's permanent contribution to the class.

Month after month passed and Salomon was unable to find work. His pride would no longer permit Sala's being the lone provider for his family so he announced that he would take the remainder of his "compensation," buy a horse and carriage and obtain a taxi concession from the government.

Sala and the children were mortified: for though they were poor in material things, they possessed an untold wealth of love, understanding, togetherness, and above all, pride—a deeply ingrained pride that would not stand for "Daddy's" becoming a lowly taxi driver. To be a taxi driver in those times was to be at the very bottom of the ladder and Irene and Rose pleaded with their mother to do something to stop their father from causing them such embarrassment.

But Salomon went to the city to obtain his concession in spite of their protests. When he returned with his permit, Irene and Rose burned it, putting a temporary halt to his aspirations.

They were thoroughly reprimanded for their deed and even though Sala agreed with their father that they were wrong, Irene and Rose couldn't help but notice the twinkle of approval in their mother's eyes.

Two years later, in 1926, fate dealt still another unkind blow: Sala Kleiner died, leaving Salomon with five young children to care for.

This was Irene's first real test of womanhood and

she demonstrated her ability to meet responsibility with strength and courage as she ministered to her grieving father and shared the household duties with Rose.

The following years were painful ones for the Kleiner children—especially Rose and Irene—who fully understood their father's lasting grief as night after night they heard him pacing the floor of their four-room apartment with the words of the same song on his lips: "My heart cries, but not my eyes."

Well-meaning friends tried to encourage Salomon to take a new wife, but he would not hear of it: "As long as I have three daughters at home I have no need of a wife." But Irene could see the grief in her father's heart reflected in his eyes and she became even more determined to seek a better way of life for him. She enrolled in the State's Free College, putting aside her girlhood dreams of a rich and dashing young man and facing reality.

While Irene was in college Rose got married and in 1930 Irene, realizing there was no opportunity in Drohobycz, left for Krakow where she felt the opportunities for a young woman with a college background would be better.

Jobs, however, were just as scarce in Krakow. Irene had to move in with one of her mother's brothers and his wife, where she stayed until 1936, helping with the care of their children for her room and board. The desire to help her father still burned deep within her though, and she eventually started tutoring small children who were having difficulties in school. The pay was low and by no means enough to help her father. At times Irene felt herself giving way to fits of despondency as the years slowly passed without promise of a brighter future.

1936 marked the beginning of an upward trend

in Irene's life in the form of a young man named Dolek Markiewicz, whom she met at a nightclub while on a date with another man.

Dolek was sitting at an adjoining table with friends, but his attentions were focused on Irene who intentionally tried to avoid his steady gaze. Dolek was not to be ignored, however, and he asked her to dance.

Irene had never before encountered a man with such bold self-assurance and she found something in his mannerisms that brought to life girlhood dreams that had long since been forgotten. She found it impossible to refuse him, even when he announced that they would leave after the next show and go to a movie. After making their apologies to Irene's bewildered date they left.

The next few months were gloriously happy ones for Irene and she quickly learned the meaning of "being swept off your feet."

Dolek lived in the small village of Krzeszowice, but he came to Krakow two or three times a week, taking Irene to dinner, the movies, and dancing. Often they would just walk and discuss their future.

On one occasion Dolek called Irene and asked if she would mind if his mother attended the movie with them, explaining that she had come to Krakow to see the Rabbi.

Irene agreed, but for the first time since their whirlwind romance had begun she felt a twinge of uncertainty about her future with Dolek. She sensed that Mrs. Markiewicz had come to Krakow for something other than to see the Rabbi. Her suspicions proved to be correct—Mrs. Markiewicz's eyes remained on her throughout the entire movie. As they left, Irene's mind entertained the possibility that Mrs. Markiewicz might disapprove of her

because she was four and a half years older than Dolek and not of the same station in life.

She wondered what Dolek had told his mother to prompt her unexpected trip and as her mind raced with many unanswered questions she heard Dolek telling his mother which buses to take to catch her train to return home. Unable to believe he could be so inconsiderate, Irene turned to him, "Just a minute . . . and what about you? Why do you tell your mother how *she* should go?"

Somewhat surprised Dolek replied, "Because I am going with you."

"Never mind you are going with me," Irene retorted with a tone of authority that left Dolek speechless. "I am in my town, and I *know* my way home. Your mother is new here. You will go *immediately* with your mother and we will see each other some other day."

Dolek could only stare at Irene in disbelief. The sudden thought crossed her mind that she shouldn't have spoken to him in that manner in front of his mother, but before she could speak Mrs. Markiewicz smiled gratefully and invited Irene to come to Krzeszowice the following Sunday.

The week passed slowly for Irene and as Sunday arrived it took all the courage she could muster to go to the train station, even though she knew Mrs. Markiewicz must have liked her or she wouldn't have invited her to her home.

During the train ride Irene's stomach churned to the tune the heavy wheels sang against the seemingly endless miles of steel track. As the train goaned to a halt in front of the Krzeszowice Station Irene saw Dolek waiting and a surge of relief rushed through her tense and nerve-strung body.

As she stepped onto the platform her heart

seemed to stop, for curious faces were peering at her from every window of the station. "What is this?" she asked Dolek. "They act like I am a princess."

Dolek laughed and informed her that as far as they were concerned, she was. "Mother has spent the whole week talking about nothing but you." Irene looked at him questioningly and he continued. "She has raved until our friends think she has taken leave of her senses . . . 'I will get a daughter-in-law . . . ahh . . . such a girl no one has seen before.' So they have come to see."

Irene was so overcome by the reception she received that she could only nod faintly in acknowledgement to the smiling and well-wishing villagers they passed as Dolek walked her up the main street of the village to his house where Mrs. Markiewicz waited to greet her with open arms.

It was a day Irene would never forget, a day that opened the doors of a whole new world for her. A world she had never conceived in her wildest imaginings.

The Markiewicz house was filled with friends and family. Dolek's four older brothers and their wives and children had come for this very special occasion as had his only sister and her family. There was singing and dancing, and later in the afternoon the women spread the tables in the yard with a feast befitting a queen—all in Irene's honor.

It was a day Irene would always remember and when it ended there was no doubt in her mind as to her complete acceptance by the entire Markiewicz family.

Several weeks later Irene and Dolek were married and, after an extended honeymoon, they moved to Krakow where Irene found herself living in the lap of luxury. Dolek rented a large six-room apart-

ment, staffed it with servants, then took his new bride on a shopping spree to add such luxurious finishing touches to their new home as expensive paintings, Persian rugs and valuable statues.

Irene was in a daze. She knew Dolek was from a good family, but she never dreamed their wealth was so extensive. But this was just the beginning: Dolek's next step was to adorn his lovely wife with jewels and furs; all she had to do was admire something in a store window and within days it was delivered.

There was no description for Irene's happiness when she realized she now had the means to help her father. She discussed her lifelong desire with Dolek who was immediately receptive to the idea, and they started making plans.

However, it was too late for Salomon Kleiner. He died a few weeks later, taking Irene's lifetime dream and ambition with him.

Irene was grief-striken, but she remembered what grief had done to her father and she refused to give in to it, devoting herself to her new husband and his family. Dolek, realizing her pain, spent all of his waking hours trying to make her forget.

There were trips to beautiful resorts and weekend trips to his mother's house where the whole family would get together, serving as a constant reminder to Irene of how important she was to them. And in time the sharp pain became only a dull ache.

In April 1938 Irene and Dolek were blessed with a son, Stanley, bringing even more joy into their already blissfully happy lives and the following seventeen months were all Irene could possibly have hoped for.

When they went to "Grandmother's" Stanley was the center of attraction and the elder Mrs. Markiewicz was often heard to say: "I have five married sons, but only one daughter-in-law." This remark usually brought the color to Irene's cheeks because she felt the other wives would be offended, but deep down she understood what her mother-in-law meant. There was an unusually strong bond between them—Mrs. Markiewicz had become the mother Irene had lost at the age of fourteen.

Irene often thought of the drastic changes her life's path had taken and thanked God for her blessings: the joy of loving and of being loved; the assurance of lasting security; a healthy and beautiful son; and the knowledge that he would never have to endure the same pain and hardship as she did in her childhood. Irene's life was full and complete.

On Friday morning, September 1, 1939, at six A.M., Irene and Dolek's happiness ended with a crash that was heard around the world.

A Letter To My Son

CHAPTER I

My dear son:

You were born April 12, 1938, in Krakow, Poland. We weren't too rich but we had enough to make your life more than comfortable. A loving father, mother, a beautiful six-room apartment and a steady maid. It was a good beginning for a little, dark, curly-haired boy.

We dreamed that life would be happy for ever and ever, and maybe it would have been, if not for that one Friday morning.

It was September 1, 1939. A terrible crash awoke us at six in the morning. We heard running steps, cries, saw fires blaze, and then again and again, crashes one after another.

IT WAS WAR. German bombs kept falling and falling. I caught you in my arms. Horrified I looked into your father's eyes. They told me that they will take care of both of us, but somehow I knew something horrible was to come.

Till Monday, September 4, we stayed home without lights, without gas, and without water. Then we ran, thousands and thousands ran with us. The roads were full of men, women, children, babies in carriages, sick people in wheel chairs. On

the wagons were the very sick, the crippled, the paralyzed.

Young and old, everyone left home, no one wanted to die. Cows and pigs were tied to the backs of the wagons, which the horses had to pull with all their strength. We left everything; we wanted only our lives to be saved. We shared our wagon with Aunt Rose, her husband Meyer and their two sons, Kuba and Paul. Kuba was fourteen years old, and Paul eight.

We reached a tiny village after a tiresome day of riding. Whoever came first had at least a place on the floor in the house. The people that came later had to sleep in the stable on the hay.

We stayed near the little window and watched the road. About one P.M. motorcycles, cars, trucks and tanks began to drive by. It looked as though they would never end. The earth shivered.

In the morning we looked at the road. It looked as if there had been an earthquake. There were holes and stones everywhere.

We stayed in the village till the afternoon, then we went to the Center Place. There we saw the first Germans. They were tall and handsome. For a second, there came a question to my mind: "Is it possible that such nice looking men can hurt someone?"

And the answer came so suddenly, as though they had read the question in my mind. We heard them talk and laugh, and the talk was like a sentence of death, "Yes, we will kill. We will tear children apart. We will make human torches: We will cut them while they are still alive."

We couldn't believe we had heard this, it couldn't be real, it had to be a nightmare.

CHAPTER II

We didn't know what to do. We couldn't go any further because the Germans were there before us. To stay in the village—we couldn't do that either. There was no place to buy anything to eat. The peasants didn't want to let us in, they said they didn't have anything to sell, and even if they had food, they would hide it.

You could hear all over the cries of the hungry children. You could see sadness and tears in everybody's eyes.

After two days of starvation, we decided to go back.

We came home tired and hungry, I went out to buy something, but all the stores were closed. It was only the eighth day of war, but the black market worked at full speed. The prices of everything were five and even ten times as high as they were before the war.

I paid three dollars for a quart of milk, four dollars for a loaf of bread, two dollars for one pound of potatoes.

After a few days, we couldn't get even the high-priced products. It was a struggle over our strength. We had to change our standard of living. First we sent away our maid, then we disconnected

our telephone, we closed two rooms to save on fuel, and we even used smaller watt bulbs.

Daddy decided to go to Krzeszowice, the town he was born in, to try to find food there. He came back after two days, and we were really happy to see Daddy back with the few loaves of bread, milk and meat.

Very fast came the day when the Germans began their work. All Jewish stores had to put a star in the window. Jewish people had to wear an armband. Men and women had to go three or four days a week to work for the Germans, without any pay.

If somebody wasn't working fast enough, he was brutally beaten with a rifle, and very often . . . even shot.

Nobody knew when he would be chased out of his home. In December they came to our house and took over four rooms. We could use only the bedroom, and for two hours daily the kitchen. I didn't care, but the blood ran away from my heart, when one of them said, "You better keep your baby quiet, if he wakes me up in the night . . . I will shoot him."

The sleepless nights began. My baby, I couldn't explain to you why you didn't have the right to cry, I kept you only the whole night in my arms, and prayed . . . you should see the sun tomorrow too.

CHAPTER III

We were living this way till June, 1940. One day a German came in. He looked around, opened all drawers and closets and said, "This will stay, this you can take." And so he divided everything we possessed. He let us take only your crib, all our clothing and your toys.

We cried helplessly. We begged him, he should let us keep some statues, Persian rugs and pictures. Not for their beauty, only their value. We knew that in need we can change them for food. He didn't say a word, only touched his gun. To kill us would mean less to him than to light a match. The next day with tears in our eyes and horror in our hearts, we left the house where we shared our first few years of happiness.

Our exile was Krzeszowice. Your grandmother, Aunt Rose with her husband and her two sons, Kuba and Paul lived there. Another aunt, Fela, with her husband, and her baby, Paul. We were living there exactly one year. In the meantime, horrible things happened, everyday, every hour, every minute.

The blood from the murdered people was running and running.

CHAPTER IV

March, 1941. They chased us out of Krzeszowice. We went to a tiny village, called Szklary. We rented a small room, with a coal stove, and paid seventy dollars a month for it.

Near our window was a river with a wooden bridge. We used the water from the river to drink and cook. In the middle of the night we filled our pails with water, because in the morning everybody washed their clothing and bathed, and all the animals drank from the river.

In the whole village there wasn't electricity, gas and running water. Our lavatory was about a hundred yards from our house. In the village were living only the poorest people. As for now we had a lot of money from before the war, but we were afraid that someday it would finish, so we tried to economize. We spent only for the rent, food and candles. We would sit until midnight outside, because when the moon shone we didn't have to light the candles so that we could save them for the dark nights, when it would rain or when the moon wouldn't shine.

There was a boy, his name was Julek, we didn't have enough to eat for ourselves, but he was dying of hunger near our door. We took him in and from

then on he slept near the stove. What we ate he ate too.

He was sixteen years old, his weight was eighty pounds.

Aunt Rose was living across the river. Aunt Fela lived a few houses further away. Grandmother was living with Aunt Rose because her room had a place for one more bed.

We were living on a volcano. Every evening someone ran the two miles to the city and brought a newspaper, and after reading it we sat very quietly, and the tears would run long and bitterly.

CHAPTER V

And so came June, 1942. One morning the soldiers came to our room and said to Daddy, "Come." They wouldn't let him kiss you or even say goodbye to us.... I begged them, they should let me go too, but they said that Dad will be back about six P.M. He didn't come the same day or the next, or the next....

Together with him went Aunt Rose's and Aunt Fela's husbands. They didn't come back either.

Six lonely weeks passed. One morning the Germans came again. This time to chase us out. We had to leave even the poorest village. We went to Skala. There we rented a room, but not with beds anymore, not with wooden or stone floors. The room was very dark and tiny and the floor was made of clay. We bought sacks, filled them up with straw and once more began our tormented life.

Every night whenever a dog barked, we knew that after a few seconds we would hear a shot. I lay with eyes wide open and looked for the first sight of another day. And when it came, your grandmother and I rose together and ran to Aunt Rose and Aunt Fela, to see if the shot in the night cut their life, or someone else's.

We were living from one second to another with hope, always hope—maybe it was the last shot, maybe we will be happy again, as we were a long, long time ago.

CHAPTER VI

Three months passed very slowly. It was Friday in September 1942. People who worked in the *Judenrat* (a Jewish management) were called to the city, to the German settlement. We knew that it would be something new, something that wasn't yet.

They went with a wagon Friday about ten A.M. We looked after them with eyes full of tears, and with pounding hearts.

Cook? Eat? What for? Who could?

We were standing on the street, a few hundred of us. We weren't tired, we weren't hungry. Somehow even the small children didn't ask for food . . . Did they know that a black cloud would cover the beautiful blue sky?

Our faces were turned to the end of the narrow street. We were waiting for them, waiting for the old people from the management, thinking what they will bring. We prayed they should come right now, then again we begged God they shouldn't come so soon.

We didn't talk to each other, we looked at our watches and saw that the night was very near. Finally we saw them, we saw the wagon with the seven old men.

Had they been so old that morning, or had they changed so in one single day?

They weren't sitting, they were standing in the wagon. Their white shirts were wet and blowing in the wind. Their eyes didn't see us, or they made believe that they couldn't see us. We didn't dare to ask. We followed the wagon, and it looked like a funeral.

The men went into the building . . . Nobody told us to leave, somehow we knew we had to wait.

It went by, maybe one minute, two, maybe an hour. Who knows? There was a balcony, and the old Rabbi was standing there, with trembling hands, with tears in his eyes, he looked a few seconds, then began to talk:

"Jewish people, I am speaking to you. Listen to me . . . go home . . . it is Friday. . . . Go, light the candles, . . . and, . . . pray. Tonight belongs to you. Go my poor children. You have to be on the Market Place. Tomorrow. All of you. Tomorrow at noon, my dear children."

No one knew who began. Suddenly it sounded, not as from hundreds, but as one big cry . . . from one big heart. ONE PAINFUL HEART.

Mothers called their children, they squeezed them tight, tight. And maybe——for the last time.

I looked at you my dear son. Daddy wasn't here. Remember what I told you in the beginning of my story? Daddy's eyes promised to take care of you? But he wasn't here, and if he would be, would it be possible? When it looks that even God has forgotten us.

Come my baby, trust your mother.

I asked what Aunt Rose would do, what Aunt Fela? They said, they would go to the Market

Place. Grandmother said the same. They hoped, that they wouldn't be killed. That they would probably go to work. Then I asked what about small children? Again they said with hope, that the children would be kept in a day camp.

I tried, but I couldn't see such hope as they did. My heart cried, "Go." But where? I didn't know, I only knew that I had to run. I couldn't wait till the next day, I felt somehow, it would be the last "Tomorrow."

I went to a Catholic man, and after a long conversation, he decided to accompany us from Skala to the next city for two hundred dollars.

It wasn't dark enough, we had to wait for him at least an hour. We hid in the bushes. We were sitting there three hours but the man didn't show up. We heard screams, cries, shots. I knew that other people had decided to run from Skala too—but it was too late.

When I was about to lose hope, I saw two people coming in our direction. In spite of the darkness I saw a man and a woman. They saw us too. The man asked, "Who is here?" I said, "A woman with a child." "Are you Jewish?" he asked. I knew I didn't have anything to lose, I said, "Yes." "Did you run from Skala?" "Yes." For a while he looked and then said with sadness in his voice, "You poor woman, you are sitting about a hundred yards from death. Can't you hear the voices near the bridge? There are Germans. Whoever tries to go out of Skala is killed. Give me your baby, I will carry him, come with us."

While we walked I heard them talk. They were neighbors. She told him she couldn't take us to her house because her cousin came to her a few days

ago and would stay for a while. "Who knows" she said. "Maybe he is a *Folksdeutch* (a man who betrays his country to become a Nazi), nowadays everything can be possible."

The man decided to take us to his house, but when he went in and told his wife, I heard her scream, "Get out, right now, or I will throw you out together with the Jews."

He came out, put his finger to his lips, to show us he didn't mean what he said, and yelled, "Go away! Go away!"

Then he took my arm, opened the door to the stable, put a bunch of straw on the ground and whispered, "Poor woman, sleep here with your baby."

In the morning, about six he brought milk and bread, showed us a house where his sister lived, and said that she would help us. She was a good woman, she sold me a peasant's dress and a big can of milk and we began our wandering.

Both of us didn't wear shoes, like all peasants in the summertime. It was very hot, at least a hundred degrees.

We had to walk three miles. About four P.M. we arrived in Krakow. Our feet bleeding, our faces and hands burned from the sun.

The first soldier we met asked us where we are going. I said to the city to sell milk. He let us go, he didn't recognize I am Jewish.

I didn't know where to go. Suddenly I decided. We would find Daddy. We arrived at the camp about eight P.M. The German in the office asked what I wanted. I told him I came from Skala, and I had a letter for Markiewicz. I didn't tell him I was his wife.

He told me that that day was the end of the Jewish people in Skala. Markiewicz had gone to the main office for a pass to go there.

Then he laughed and added ironically, "To see his wife and child." When I heard this I screamed. He looked at me and asked, "Are you his wife?" Again I knew that I didn't have anything to lose, I said yes.

It must have been a miracle, he called the main office, and told them to send Daddy right back.

They couldn't find him. I prayed it wasn't too late. I knew if he would go to Skala they would kill him together with all the other Jews.

Finally, after about two hours he came. We didn't see each other from June 1942 (over two months). He looked like a skeleton. We couldn't speak . . . we only cried.

We were still crying, when the German said to Daddy, "Take your wife and child, go with them wherever you want, I won't ask you where they are, you will be back very soon. I do this only for one reason. Your wife knew that I am a Nazi, she wasn't scared, she told me who she is. Now go. All of you."

I looked at you, at Daddy, I didn't believe my ears, then I looked at the German, but in his eyes I didn't see pity or friendliness. I saw hate and bitterness. Then I knew, that he was being kind only momentarily.

CHAPTER VII

We went into the blackness of the night. It was about ten P.M. Except for the Germans, everyone else could be on the street only until six P.M. We tried to avoid them. We walked between bushes and through deserted alleys. We went to Daddy's friend Vladyslaw. He was astonished to see us. He decided to keep us as long as possible.

Daddy went back. We had a small room with a real bed. The maid brought us food into our room. We should stay in, and we shouldn't go out even for one second to a different one. We had to whisper throughout the whole time, no one should hear us. The wall between Vladyslaw and the neighbor's apartment was a temporary one, because of a fire a few weeks ago.

As for now we were happy, but as I expected, our happiness didn't last long. Vladyslaw had eight rooms. One time late in the night, the Germans came in and took over five of them; they had begun the persecution of Gentile people too. We couldn't stay any longer with the good Vladyslaw family. After six weeks of peace, we said goodbye to our dear friends, and with tears in our eyes, we left.

As we walked you whispered, you couldn't talk with your normal voice because you were used to whispering in Vladyslaw's house. It was very late. Again we walked only in the shadows and on small side streets. I didn't know what to do, where to go. I was so deep in my thoughts, that I didn't even look at you, but when I finally did, I saw that you walked with closed eyes. Then I realized it was midnight. I took you into my arms and we sat down on the church stairs. My mind was working hard but I couldn't find anything that would help us. I tried to think of someone, somewhere, who could give us a helping hand now.

And then when I was about to give up trying, a big hope came suddenly to my heart. I knew where to go.

When I was engaged, I lived with a very nice family. We had a lady janitor, Maria. She was very beautiful, and very poor. She had a four-year-old daughter. Many times I had helped them with food or money. When her daughter was sick I had called a doctor and bought medicine. Maria was always sorry that she couldn't repay us. Now I thought about her. She wasn't Jewish. She was probably still living in the same place. She would be happy to be able to help us now. But when we finally reached the place I found out that she had moved. The new janitor gave me her address and I was happy to know that she lived now in such a beautiful neighborhood.

It wasn't far away, but when we finally reached her house and I saw the light in the windows I ran with happiness and rang the bell. A maid in a pink uniform opened the door. I excused myself, thinking I had the wrong address. I asked her if she could tell me where the Novicki family lived, and was very happy when she told me that I was in the right place.

She let me in, into the living room. There, lazily leaning upon a pillow, was Maria. She ate grapes. Her fingers were covered with diamonds. Her now nine-year-old daughter was playing the piano. Maria looked at me, but she didn't rise from the couch, she didn't say a word to me.

I stood near the door a few seconds and decided there was no time for hesitation. I told her why we were here.

She didn't interrupt my talking. She didn't even stop eating the grapes, she didn't bother even to say the two words I was waiting to hear. No, she didn't say, "Sit down."

Her daughter stopped playing the piano. The silence was too long, too heavy. I moved nearer the door to lean on it. I was half aware where I was, I was tired and sleepy. And then like in a dream I heard a little sound of a bell. The maid came in. Maria told her to bring a glass of milk for you, my dear son. While you drank the milk I told her more about us. She asked where Daddy was now, and when she found out, once more she called the maid in. She told her that because it was dark and late and I didn't know how to find the way to Daddy's camp, the maid would walk me there.

I looked at Maria, maybe a little bit longer than I wanted to. I thanked her and said that I remembered how to get there. I said, "Goodbye," and we went out. Very quietly we entered someone's garden, and you slept in my arms.

Somewhere, a dog barked. He probably wanted to offer us his dog house. You slept and I cried long and bitterly and asked myself over and over:

"Are dogs better than people?"

CHAPTER VIII

Before dawn, before the people start their daily lives, we left the garden and now for the first time in my life, I saw the horrible truth—"homeless."

Where could we go? Whom did we know? Would we find somewhere a helping hand or another Maria?

We still had enough money, and to find a room was very easy, but nobody would rent it to me, unless I showed them my birth certificate. I didn't have it, and what good would it have done if I did?

I am a Jewess . . . an outcast . . . I didn't have a right to live. But you my dear son, you were only three and a half. Your life had only begun, what should I do?—Where should I go?—Oh! I knew. Thank God, I reminded myself about them. They were once our very good friends. Maybe we should knock on their doors now? Maybe they would let us in.

I rang the bell. She opened the doors and I saw surprise and fear in her eyes. For a second I was sure we would have to go, but how happy I was when she let us in and told us to take a seat.

She told me that her husband worked as a bartender at night. She would let us sleep for a while in her house, I could be there even during the

day, but you couldn't my dear son. She said her husband hated children, and now he was a *Folksdeutch*. She can't take chances.

At least we had a place to sleep for a few nights, but what was I to do with you? My poor baby, you were so small, so good and quiet, and so . . . UNWANTED. But Mommy loves her baby, and to try to save you, I will go to one more place.

I went to a Gentile nursery. They were only sisters in charity. The leading one told me that she would keep you from nine till five. All the other children had to leave at three.

I was very happy that it went so easy. She told me to give her your birth certificate, and then I saw I was wrong to think even that little something should be easy.

I began to cry. She looked at me with surprise in her eyes and when she saw that I couldn't stop my crying, she put her arms around me with sympathy.

I knew I didn't have anything to lose. I wiped my eyes, sat on the offered chair and said: "Sister, I can't give you my child's birth certificate, I can't . . . We are Jewish."

She arose from the chair, her face red, her eyes didn't look at me with sympathy any more. They were now half scared, half filled with horror. She came nearer and began to scream:

"With what right did you come here? What do you want?—Tell me, do you want to bring death to the whole nursery?—Death to me and all those children?—You know very well, if the Nazi will find you here, they will kill all of us. Don't expect what is impossible. Please, go away."

Slowly I went to the door, but before I reached it, she called me back.

I turned to face her, I couldn't see her clearly, tears blinded my eyes, I was suddenly tired, very tired.

She told me to sit down, and began to speak slowly and quietly; "My poor, poor woman, I am over seventy, I hope they won't touch the innocent children, and if they will kill me, I will see sooner Our Father in heaven. . . . Leave your baby here."

I hardly believed my ears. She saw that it wasn't possible for me to thank her. Like in a dream I turned to the door and walked out.

CHAPTER IX

Each morning before Mr. Synowiec came home from the night's work, I took you to the nursery. At five, when he left for work I brought you back. All the children had to leave at three, I knew that the two hours without them you were lonely, because whenever I opened the door, your eyes looked bigger. I knew why, I knew you didn't want to show that you were crying. You threw your arms around my neck, and held me tight and it looked as if you would never let me go.

On the fifth day I came to take you and was surprised to see you standing like pasted to the wall in the corner. This time you couldn't hide your crying. Your eyes and your face were swollen.

A young sister came in. When you saw her, you began to cry. Her face showed fear, but not with guilt only with helplessness. She looked at you almost with love and said to me, "Please do believe me, I don't know what is with your child, the bigger children locked themselves in the lavatory, they didn't let him in, so he wet his pants. I tried to help him, but it was impossible. He didn't let me touch him. When I tried to force him, he kicked me and bit my finger."

I excused you, I told her that it wouldn't happen again, and we went out.

Oh, I knew very well that it wouldn't happen again. She couldn't know the reason. She wouldn't understand, but you my dear child, *you knew*, you are a Jew, you knew, if somebody would see you, they would kill you, and your Mommy too.

"My dear little helper."

CHAPTER X

Even though it was only the beginning of October, the day was cold and rainy. I picked you up, I knew you couldn't go back to the nursery. Before we left, I saw that the young sister in charity looked at us longer than she had to, or it was only my fear. Maybe she would like to find something more about us? I knew, I couldn't take any risks.

I took you to Mrs. Synowiec, washed and dressed you, and told her that we would go for a walk.

Somehow I knew, that we couldn't stay with Mrs. Synowiec even one night more. I learned that in those days everyone could be the one with a pointing finger, everyone could say: "She is a Jewess and it is her little Jew."

Maybe the young sister in charity watched us where we went, or maybe she didn't even give us a thought. Who knows? We were living only with fear.

And again we had to go. Where this time? God only knew, and maybe again He would help us.

CHAPTER XI

Daddy was still in the temporary camp. As for now, it wasn't surrounded with electric wires as the Ghetto was. In the same camp on the second and third floor were living Gentile families too. And now I decided to go there.

It was a few blocks from Mrs. Synowiec's house, but I was scared to take the bus. The camp was located on the end of the town. I was afraid to walk there because it was still daytime, so we had to wait.

When it was dark enough, we went there. A German with a rifle ready to shoot, and eyes ready to kill, was standing near the door. Once more I thanked God, that I didn't look Jewish. He didn't even ask where I was going.

Instead of the second or third floor, we went into the part of the building where we would find Daddy. It was very hard. Some of them were sitting, some lying on the floor. They looked like living skeletons. They were so apathetic, they didn't pick up their heads to see who came in.

But I saw them. There was Daddy, Aunt Rose and Meyer with both their sons, and Aunt Fela with her husband and son. In the corner, leaning on the wall, was grandmother.

Except for Daddy, I hadn't seen any of them from the time I left them in Skala. It was three and a half months ago.

I don't know who was the first to see us, but when they did, there were tears, questions and happiness.

Aunt Fela was the first one to wipe her eyes and to tell me how it came about that they are all here now.

When we left Skala, they decided to run away too. It wasn't easy. Before they did decide, all the ways out from Skala were surrounded by the Germans. They ran to a tiny by-road and were happy to see that there weren't Germans, only three *Folksdeutchs*. They weren't better, but after they took a few rings, two golden watches and some money, they let them out from Skala.

Now came the question where to go. They couldn't take chances as we did. Aunt Rose had two sons, and all of them had dark hair and dark complexions. Aunt Fela the same. They decided to go to Krakow, to find their husbands. The poor grandmother went with them too. And now they shared hunger and misery all together.

I knew that we wouldn't stay long in this place. I tried to make them all see the way I saw the future here in the camp. But like there in Skala, the same was now here. They told me, they thought that hard work and hunger wouldn't kill them. And so they decided to stay.

But not me. I knew we had to go.

Four days we slept near one from the Gentile family. In the meantime Daddy looked for somebody who would make the false documents for us. He found a man who did it. When the papers were

ready we kissed each other, we cried bitterly and said goodbye to our dearest.

We went out. For a short time?—For ever?—God only knew.

CHAPTER XII

From then on, my name wasn't Irene Markiewicz anymore. I became a doctor's daughter "Irena Leszczynska, born in Warsaw." With this document I still wouldn't be able to get a room in the city, only maybe somewhere in a small village.

Now came the question: how to go there? All the trains were searched. All roads full with Germans.

But we had to go. We couldn't stay in the same city, where we got our false documents. We had to go at least for a while.

I found out, that four miles from Krakow, there is a tiny village named Kocmyrzów. Maybe there we would find some shelter. And so we began our fifth migration. We arrived there late in the afternoon. I went to a shoemaker's shop and asked maybe he knew where I could get a furnished apartment. I was very happy when he told me that he had a room for me.

He asked where I came from and when I told him from Warsaw, he asked about the situation there.

I had to lie good and quickly. I told him that the Gestapo had started to do with us the same as with the Jews, and that's the reason I came here

first to look for an apartment and my husband would follow soon. I said so, because I was sure he would fear about the rent money.

I didn't know what I would tell him when he would ask someday why Daddy didn't come.

I knew that I couldn't sit the whole day in the apartment. The landlord would start to wonder. I told him that I was a dressmaker and I would be happy to make some dresses for his wife. He didn't know that I hadn't learned to sew.

I prayed I wouldn't spoil the dress his wife brought to make for her a few days later.

God heard my prayers. I didn't spoil the dress, I made it so good, that from that day on, all the neighbors called me to sew for them too.

I had still enough money from before the war. I didn't have to work to earn it, but I had to work to avoid suspicion.

I tried to act very naturally, not to show fear. I made friends. On Sundays we went to church together. In the next house was a family who wanted to be our special friends. Their name was Gerhart. I knew it wasn't a Polish name, but I was afraid to refuse the friendship.

Before Christmas, Mrs. Gerhart asked me to help her with her shopping. She bought all kinds of presents for her family and a beautiful Xmas tree, for us. She helped us decorate it.

Her two sons were playing with you. All three of you were laughing and jumping happily around the tree. The Gerharts invited us for supper on Xmas Eve.

And so the year 1942 came to an end.

CHAPTER XIII

It was January 1943. I was cooking and you were watching the train through the window. Suddenly you began to scream: "Mommy, Mommy look, Daddy is coming."

I ran to the window, I couldn't believe my eyes, but it was true. We all cried and laughed a long time before Daddy told us the sad story.

The Gestapo had come to the camp last night. They shot children and sick men and women. Between all the others they caught Daddy, Aunt Rose, her husband and the boys.

Aunt Fela had run away with her son. God only could help her. Because of her looks it would be a miracle to survive.

Grandmother had taken a big chance. The Gestapo were all around. She didn't look Jewish, they probably thought she was one of the Gentile family from the second or third floor. She had come out of the building and said; "Excuse me," and they let her go.

The Ghetto was a few streets further. When the Gestapo brought Daddy and the other captives into it, they saw that all Jews wore white and black striped clothes and the whole Ghetto was encircled with electric wires.

Daddy knew that the next day he too would be a

black and white striped animal. He knew that he wouldn't come alive from the Ghetto.

This was the German's plan, to keep those unhappy creatures in one place, ten or even fifteen in one room. To make them work harder than possible. To starve them and . . . to make selections everyday. They would select who could live and work for a while, who would be shot, who would be burned in the stove. They built special stoves and brought Jewish people from France, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Hungary, Norway.

Daddy knew, sooner or later he was to be killed together with thousands—with millions—and so he took one and maybe the last chance. Before dawn, he found miraculously a place in the fence without electric wires, and . . . jumped over.

Daddy had the same false document as I had. He took the train. The conductor didn't have enough experience and he didn't recognize that the document was false.

Now that Daddy was here he had to be quiet, no one should hear or see him. He would stay home, I would go to work, and as usual you had to go with me. I knew you would prefer to be with Daddy. You were tired of always the same, always to sit on the floor and play by yourself. Every time in somebody else's house.

Whenever I let you out for a little while I looked after you through the window with my heart pounding, you were happy as a free bird, but every few minutes you came running back and you said: "Mom, I will play here, I know when I am outside you are scared." Again I have to say the same:

"My good little helper."

CHAPTER XIV

Daddy was with us two weeks, when coming home from work I heard our landlord talking about us. I couldn't understand very clearly. I moved nearer to the closed doors and . . . a shiver went through my body. He said to his wife: "Something is wrong with our tenant from the cellar. She hides someone, and I have to find it out very quickly."

I ran in and told Daddy about this. We couldn't eat supper anymore. We spoke about hundreds of plans and we knew that no one could be safe enough.

About an hour later someone knocked on the door. I opened and wasn't surprised to see our landlord. He saw Daddy. I couldn't help it, I had to tell him he was my husband. He asked how was it that we didn't go out together. I said that Daddy was sick.

He sat down. He spoke for a little while with Daddy about the situation in Warsaw, and went out.

The next day was Saturday. I worked only half a day. It was very cold and slippery. I was very sad, I couldn't forget our landlord's visit. I began to prepare supper. You asked hundreds of questions but I couldn't answer them. I was glad when you

turned to Daddy and he solved your little problems.

Outside the dog began to bark. I looked through the window and became pale. . . . The police chief Mr. Gabrys was coming to us. He was Polish, but now he had to work for the Germans. He knocked at our door. He asked Daddy to show him his birth certificate. He looked for a few seconds and said:

"You come with me to the police station, you will be back soon." I asked if I could go with them. I explained that Daddy didn't know the neighborhood, so he wouldn't know how to come back, and I looked full with hope into the police chief's eyes.

I saw the answer, and was very scared to see the strange look and the refusal in his eyes. I knew that I wouldn't ask anymore, but I would go.

You looked at us, you didn't ask if you could go. You knew that it was something horrible. Your eyes were big, bigger than ever. I lighted the kerosene lamp. Daddy and I, we looked once more at you and we went out.

It was a very cold and black night. The ground was hard and slippery. We had to hold on to each other. At the police station they asked a lot of questions, and when they couldn't find out Daddy was Jewish or not, they told me to go out for a few seconds.

When they called me back, I looked first at Daddy. His eyes were horrified, his face pale.

Now they knew for sure that Daddy was . . . Jewish. Like in a daze I heard the police chief say: "I have to call the Gestapo. You see, it isn't up to me. Someone will denounce you. If I would let you go, what will happen to my wife . . . to my daughter?"

Daddy begged him, but he didn't want even to look in his direction. I was more than sure that nothing would help.

And then, very suddenly a thought came to my mind. I came closer to the police chief and said: "Please, can you answer only one question?" And when I saw that he sat quietly, I continued: "Many, many thousands of Jews were killed, millions will be killed. How do you think Mr. Gabrys? If my husband, my son and I will be killed, will it save Poland?"

And then a miracle happened. He rose from the chair. He looked at me long, very long. He sat down again, and said with a tired voice: "Mr. Markiewicz, at five A.M. tomorrow, you will leave Kocmyrzów. You Mrs. Markiewicz, you will stay here till Monday. You will be notified of, and ... go, join your husband."

Our eyes told him everything. We could find no words to thank him. We ran out. I didn't know that my question would save our lives, at least for then.

I didn't know that Mr. Gabrys was such a big Polish patriot.

CHAPTER XV

The whole time we didn't cry, but when we came home and I saw what you were about to do, we cried long and bitterly.

When we had left home, you were in your pajamas. Now you had your shoes on, without stockings, the shoelaces hanging loose. You had one arm in the armhole of your coat and were trying to put the other in.

Where had you wanted to go? How would you have found the way in the blackness of the night? How would you have walked on the glass-slippery ground?

You poor, poor baby, you weren't even five and you had to suffer so much. I took off your shoes, put on your pajamas and put you to sleep. Daddy took you once more into his arms and he squeezed you tight. I knew that I wouldn't be wrong to guess what was in his mind. He kissed you harder and longer than ever and he turned his head to the opposite side of the room. He didn't know that before he did it I saw the tear that dropped on your sleeve.

I took you from Daddy's arm and put you to bed. Both of us were standing near the bed long after you fell asleep.

We didn't talk. We knew it was no use planning what to do.

I put more coal to the stove and we sat there looking into the fire. The night was very quiet and very long. It was January, and when finally came the hour we were waiting for it was still dark and the frost covered the window with white cold flowers.

CHAPTER XVI

Daddy went away. Where?—For how long?—For a while?—For ever?—Who knew?

It was Sunday. We couldn't stay home. Not to make anybody suspicious, we had to go to church. There I cried so hard and bitterly that people were looking at me. I was happy when the services were over and we could go home. The same day at noon, I was surprised to see Daddy's friend. He said that Daddy sent him to take our luggage, and he gave us the address where to go after leaving Kocmyrzów.

Next day I went to the population office, to notify them. I took the document and we ran to the station.

When we were about to enter the waiting room, I saw Mrs. Gerhart coming in our direction. She asked what happened yesterday. She had seen us walking to the police station with Mr. Gabrys.

I told her that Daddy had to sign a paper in order to be here in Kocmyrzów.

I saw disbelief in her eyes and wasn't surprised when she said: "Look, I know what it is all about. I know that your husband is Jewish, you better give him up and you will live happier."

And then I made my big mistake. I cried out:

"NO." And before the sound was over, I knew it was too late. I knew I shouldn't have said it.

She turned away, not saying even one word more. In the meantime the train came and slowly started its way to Krakow. There wouldn't be another that day.

What could we do now? I knew we couldn't go back to our apartment. My instinct told me it was our landlord who told the police about us.

While we were standing not knowing what to do, Mrs. Gabrys came along. She said that her husband told her everything about us. She said that now when the whole village knew who we were, she couldn't see a way out for us. And then she looked at you, my son. Your whole body was trembling. Your hands red and blue. She didn't hesitate any more. She picked you up and said to me: "Now come, what for do you wait? You know I won't let you stay here and wait till 'he' will see you again. Come, follow me. I will hide you in the cellar until tomorrow."

In the evening she brought supper for us and said that the train we had missed was searched and the Gestapo caught seventeen Jews.

Our destiny had kept us away.

CHAPTER XVII

We left the good family Gabrys Tuesday morning, and took the train to Krakow. When it stopped at the station, all of us were surprised and scared when we saw that all the doors were still closed. But we didn't wonder long. The Gestapo came in and looked all over. We soon found out that they were looking for young and healthy people, to take them to Germany to work.

I wasn't scared, I had you with me, and I hoped that they wouldn't take a mother from her child. But in a few seconds I found out how wrong I was.

Like in a horrible dream I heard: "To the right." It meant Germany.... I acted like crazy. I ran from one soldier to another. I cried, I begged them to let us go....

One of them had probably a human heart. He spoke a few words to the other one, and said: "Go to the left."

From happiness I began to cry and hug you in my arms, but not everybody likes happiness. One of them very suddenly picked up his rifle and . . . hit you over the head.

I ran away like a hurt animal. The blood from your cut head was running.

Someone helped us to the bus. Someone wiped

your blood off, and others took off your shoes and rubbed your feet to make them warm.

I found the address which Daddy sent with his friend. Here I washed off your dried blood and put you to sleep.

The friend's wife gave me a letter. It was from Daddy. I held it in my hand and couldn't find the strength to open it.

Daddy was supposed to wait for us here. But I didn't see him. I was sitting near your bed unable to move.

I didn't know how much time went by, I couldn't wait any longer. I opened the letter and began to read.

> My dear Irene, my dear son.
>
> I know that I am in your way. If we will stay together, all of us have to die. Without me, both of you will have a better chance to survive. I am going back to the Ghetto. There is no other way for me to do. God will take care of you, and our dear little son.
>
> Love for ever.
>
> P.S.
>
> *And please—be strong. Please—don't cry.*

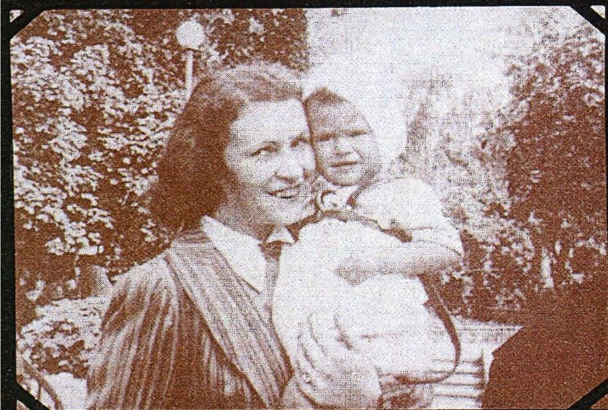
Should I tell you my dear son what was in my heart?

No—What for? I am sure that you know.

I came nearer to your bed. You slept peacefully. You looked somehow . . . smaller . . . forlorn . . .

Dolek c. 1936

Irene c. 1936



Irene and Stanley
Poland 1938

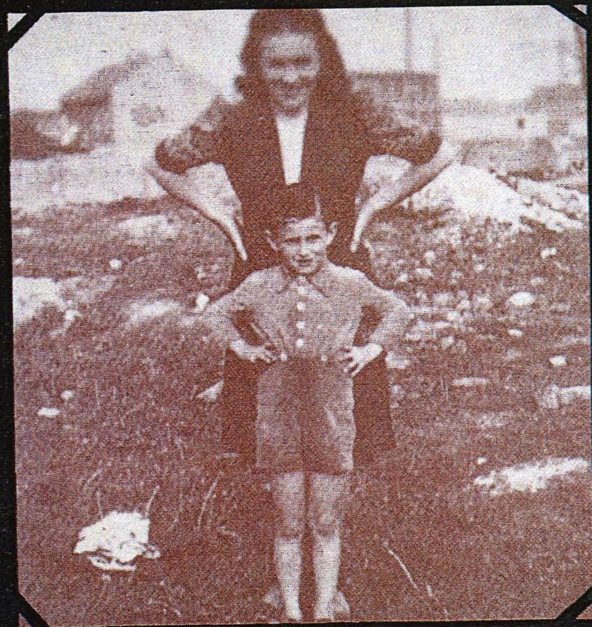
Together - Krakow 1938

Stanley - 1939

Stasia in the 40's

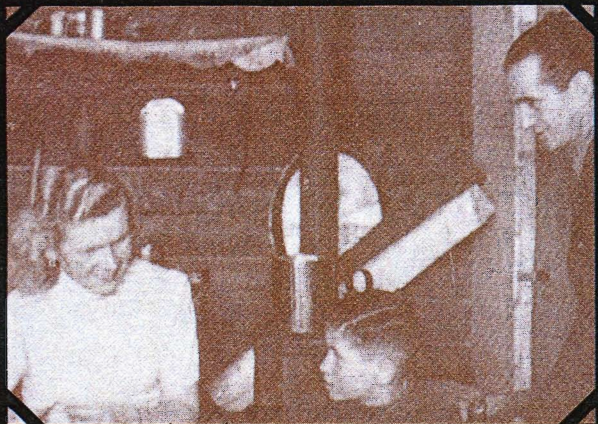
Stanley dressed as a little girl - 1942

Reunited with Grandmother in Poland - 1945

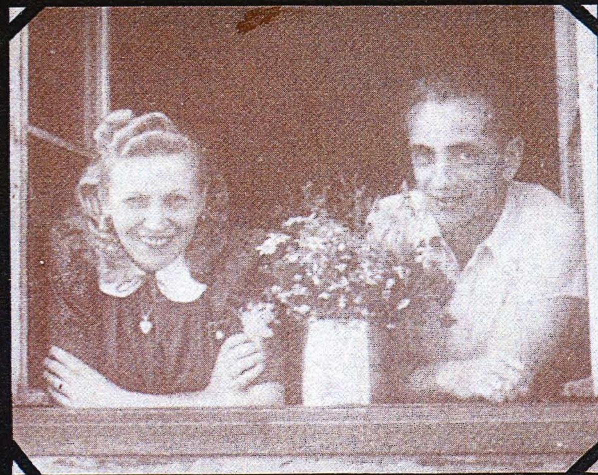


Summer of 1944

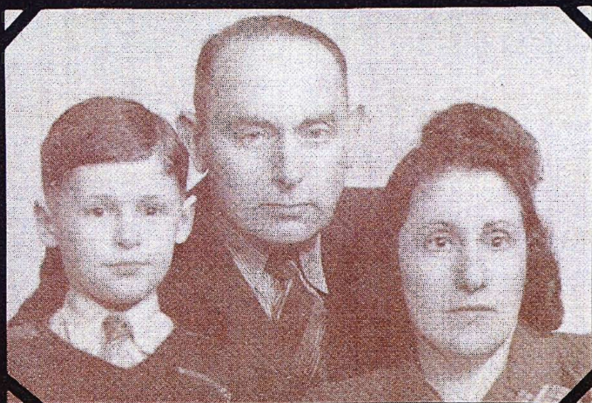
Grandmother Markowitz - 1951



Stanley, Joe and I
the DP Camp at Steyr, Austria - 1947



Joe and I - 1947
Steyr, Austria



Paul, Fela and Paul's new
Father, 1947-48

Ready to leave Steyr in 1949
with Stella, our new daughter

CHAPTER XVIII

We couldn't stay even for one night. A terrible law came out. If the Gestapo would find a Jew in a Gentile house, they would kill everyone. It was a warning for the others.

I thanked those good friends, and decided to go with the night train to a small village.

Once I had a friend there, maybe she would remain a friend. While we were sitting at the station and waiting for the train I looked to my left and a shiver went through my spine. Near the second bench was standing . . . Gerhart.

I wasn't sure whether he saw us or not. When the train came we jumped in. I squeezed your finger, it was our sign you shouldn't say a word.

I put you near me and shielded you with my big bag.

The trains weren't lit except for the headlights. I hoped the train would move very soon. But before it did the door opened. Someone came in and asked: "Where is the woman with a child?"

I recognized the voice. It belonged to Gerhart. He asked the same question once more but no one gave him an answer.

My heart was pounding so loudly I was afraid someone would hear it. Gerhart went out, but he

came back in a few seconds with a conductor's lamp and with a Gestapo. He looked at me and asked: "Where is your husband?"

The people were listening. I couldn't open my mouth. I went out with my deadly escort. I began to talk to Gerhart. I spoke in Polish so the Gestapo wouldn't understand. I begged him to remind himself how we spent Christmas, how our children were playing together.

He didn't know that I saw him wink at the Gestapo. He said to me: "Don't worry, this is my best friend, we have nothing bad in our minds, if you want you can go and join your husband."

I knew it was a trick. They knew that I wouldn't tell them willingly where he was. They had decided to let me go and meet Daddy, then they would catch all three of us.

In the meantime the train went away. I said that I would wait for the next one. He helped us find a bench in the waiting room. I thanked him and said that I would put you to sleep. I covered you with my coat and sat near you.

As soon as Gerhart disappeared from my sight I caught you in my arms, took my bag and coat and ran out through the other door.

Fast. . . . Fast. . . . As fast as possible we ran to the taxi stand.

I yelled to the driver: "Please hurry, my baby—my baby is dying." I gave him an address, but when we arrived there, I changed my mind and said that it wasn't that house, only the next.

My instinct told me that when Gerhart came back to the waiting room and didn't find me, he would run to the taxi stand and there he would learn where I had gone.

Maybe the one I came with would return with our killers. And so when the taxi went away, we came out from the next house and went into the house where Vladyslaw lived.

I wasn't sure he would let us in but I had to try. I rang the bell and when the maid opened the door, you fell from my arms and I fainted.

When I opened my eyes you were in bed drinking milk. You wore your pajamas and you looked really happy.

I told the Vladyslaws everything. They were crying. I should have been happy that we were in a warm apartment, with good friends, but I couldn't.

My God—How could I forget?—Gerhart . . . Gestapo. . . . Suddenly I screamed: "Hurry, please help me to dress my baby. They will be here very soon."

They tried to argue with me, but I told them that I had to go.

Finally they understood that I was right. They helped me to dress you and we went out.

CHAPTER XIX

It was ten o'clock. No one except the Germans were allowed on the street at that hour.

We walked two blocks when I saw a night patrol. I didn't wait till they saw me. I knew I should show no fear. I went straight to them and asked where I could find a taxi.

They asked what I was doing on the street at that hour. I told them that I had missed the train and showed them the ticket. But it wasn't enough for them. They asked about the document. With trembling hand I took it out from my pocket and gave it to them.

I didn't dare to breathe even. I put my head down and was waiting for the worst. Instead I heard: "You go first to your left and after two blocks turn to the right." And they gave me back my document.

Again I saw that God was with us.

There was always the same question: What to do now?—Where to go?—

Then I reminded myself that before the war I knew a very dear friend of Daddy's brother. His name was Jasko. He lived in his own house in the suburbs.

I again took a taxi and when we arrived there it

was about eleven o'clock. The house was surrounded with a six-foot-high fence. It was very dark, I couldn't see the bell so I knocked on the fence, but the house was too far for them to hear.

I knew that I had to decide very fast what to do. You began to cry and I was scared that someone would hear you.

I don't know how I did it. How I could, with you in my arms and with my heavy bag, climb over the high fence?

When I rang the bell, Mr. Jasko opened the door. He was surprised to see us, he let us in and ran to the gate.

When he came back, he was even more surprised and scared. He couldn't understand how I did it without opening the gate. He took it as a miracle and so did his wife.

She was pregnant. She cried with pity and said that we could stay with them for a while.

The next day her husband had to rush her to the hospital. I knew she went too early. Our arriving in the night scared her too much. I prayed, and when Mr. Jasko returned and said that they had a healthy son, I cried with happiness.

We stayed there three weeks. Her parents were very good but they couldn't take chances any longer. They gave me an address of their friends and told me not to tell them that we were Jewish.

I sewed for them for six days. They recommended me to others and those again to others. And wherever I sewed, we slept there. To everybody I said the same lie, that we lived very far and if they wished, we could sleep in their house so I could work a few hours longer. They all agreed.

From then on I knew only where we would sleep that night, but never knew where the next day.

While I sewed you played on the floor, usually by yourself. I was afraid to let you out too often. You were so understanding, like a big, big boy.

And then it came a time, that scared me even more than my heart could take. I found out something new . . . something horrible.

Your speech began to change, you couldn't hear as good as before. I couldn't go with you to a doctor, I couldn't show him your birth certificate.

And so one more misery was added to my life.

One day I met Vladyslaw, he told me that the night we had left his house, the house next to his was searched from the cellar to the attic.

Now do you see my dear son?—Again your Mommy had an instinct.

CHAPTER XX

The most terrible time we had was on weekends. We couldn't stay where I worked. I had to make sure everyone would think that we had our own apartment.

On cold or rainy days we went to a movie, on warmer days to a library or the zoo, but we couldn't stay the whole day in one place.

Sometimes on purpose I didn't finish the work in time on Saturday night, so they would ask me to stay over. Then Sunday morning we went to church together.

In some places they told us that it didn't pay to go home Sunday night either, because Monday morning I would have to sew for them again. And so again one weekend was taken care of.

But we couldn't do this over and over, because I was afraid that sooner or later somebody would find out that we didn't have our apartment.

Whenever we passed a backyard with a dog house, deep in my heart I envied the dogs.

It was Easter Sunday, I was walking with you and I was very sad. It was a holiday. I didn't have work for the next day. The day was sunny and bright. I took you to a park and we sat down on a bench. The birds were singing, the children were

playing and laughing happily. I heard them, but couldn't see because the tears blinded my eyes.

You were playing with little stones, forming maps and cars. I looked at you and then to my left. Suddenly I couldn't believe my eyes. There on the second bench was sitting . . . Grandmother.

I caught you and we ran to her. She looked at us for a few seconds, first with fear as she didn't know who we were, and then with tears and happiness. She couldn't stop hugging and kissing us. She took you in her arms, held you tight and murmured over and over: "My baby, my baby."

She told me, when she ran from the camp in January, she had slept in a deserted factory. After six days she had met a friend from her home town Krzeszowice. Stasia Puchacka had taken her to her house.

Grandmother said she knew nothing about Daddy, but she knew that Aunt Fela and her baby were hidden in an attic by a Gentile family.

After a while all three of us went to Stasia. She was glad to see us and so was her dear husband and their eleven-year-old son Tadziu.

From that time, some weekends we slept there. In those nights Stasia's husband was the whole night outside, watching for the Gestapo. If he would see them near the house he would knock on the window and we would run to the cellar. For this purpose his coat with a candle, matches and a piece of bread in the pocket was always hanging on the door.

Sunday when the bell rang, we ran to hide ourselves in a closet. There was a chair inside and sometimes we had to sit there an hour or two. But you didn't complain ever, you knew it had to be

this way—Sure, you were a big, big boy now, you were five a few weeks ago. You didn't complain that this time again Mommy didn't buy you a birthday present.

CHAPTER XXI

Every morning Stasia went shopping. But one day she didn't shop, she ran back and for a few minutes she was unable to speak. Suddenly she began to cry and said between sobs: "Irene—Irene —I saw your husband."

First I couldn't believe it and then I began to cry too. Grandmother was the one that didn't cry, but she was pale and her eyes were bigger than ever.

Stasia took us to the place where Daddy was working. We came to the gate and hid near a bush. After a few seconds we saw . . . Daddy. You looked at him with shiny eyes but you didn't run to Daddy, you knew you couldn't hug and kiss him.

I remembered our special whistle and I tried it now. It worked, because when Daddy heard it he turned his head and I could see that he hardly believed his eyes.

He kept looking in our direction but he knew that he couldn't come nearer. He would risk not only his, but our lives too.

From then on, Stasia was the one that made it possible for us to see each other.

Stasia's friend lived near the place where Daddy was working. Sometimes I took you there, and before we entered his house, I whistled. When Daddy heard it, he asked the watching soldier to let him go into the house for a drink of water, and for two or three minutes we were together.

Aunt Rose with her husband and both sons, and Aunt Fela's husband, Adolf, would be there too. One time we came there and we didn't see them.

Horrified I ran to Stasia and told her about this. It was too late to go there in the same day to find out what had happened, but the next day she went and brought the sad news.

All of them were in jail because somebody had betrayed us.

I knew that they wouldn't let them out until they found both of us. What could I do? How could I take all of them on my conscience?

Three days passed. Every day Stasia went there to find out if they were still alive. My mind was working very hard but I couldn't find anything that could help them.

Finally a thought came to my mind. I knew there was no other way. If I couldn't help them then we had to die together.

I decided to go to the Gestapo and give myself up. I didn't tell Stasia or Grandmother where we were going. I kissed both of them, I left the bag with all the money I had, and as fast as possible we ran out.

I didn't tell you either where we were going. Like all the time, you were happy then too. My poor baby, you couldn't know that the big building at the corner was a house of death.

We went to the second floor. I picked up my hand to ring the bell, but suddenly I heard something that put a new idea into my heart.

The Gestapo asked someone in the room how it was possible that they still couldn't find a masseuse. Then he started to complain about his big pain in his back.

I didn't hesitate anymore. I rang the bell and when the secretary opened the door and asked what I wanted, I said that I was a masseuse and I was looking for work.

The Gestapo was overjoyed. He said that I could begin my work right away, but I had to refuse him. I said that I didn't have all the creams and powders with me and promised to come the next day in the morning.

I didn't know anything about the work a masseuse has to do, so I went to one, watched carefully what she did, and the next day I began my work.

In the meantime Stasia went every day to the place where the Jews were working to find out if Daddy and the others were still alive. The fourth day I told the Gestapo that I couldn't work any longer, that I had to find a full day's job.

He looked at me with mad dog eyes and asked why I didn't want to have an additional part-time job. I told him it would be possible, but I would have to have a pass to buy old things from the Jews.

He didn't hesitate even a second. He gave me the pass. Again I asked maybe he knew where the Jews Markiewicz were working. I knew I was taking a big chance, but I saw that he didn't suspect anything. He said that he thought he knew them and he will let them out and I could buy there whatever there was to buy. He added that they were in jail because the Gestapo was looking for a

wife and child of one of the Markiewicz brothers, but anyhow sooner or later they would catch them.

The next day Stasia went to the place where Daddy was working and she said that all of them were back.

The Gestapo didn't see me anymore. He didn't know who I was and where I lived.

Two days later, I dressed myself as a peasant woman, made a small hunchback, left you with Stasia and went to see Daddy.

I risked a whistle. In the first moment Daddy looked in my direction and I saw that he couldn't recognize me, but after a few seconds he saw that I was going into the house, and this time I knew that he knew who I was. He asked the soldier if he could go for a drink of water and he followed me into the house.

My dear son, can you imagine how we felt seeing each other still alive? I was so happy that only after a few seconds I looked into Daddy's face, and . . . I hardly recognized him. His eyes were swollen, his chin and the right side of his face were black and blue.

And when I asked what had happened, Daddy said he fell from a ladder.

A few days later Stasia told me what she had found out from the others.

The Gestapo beat Daddy so hard, they wanted to know where we were, but Daddy wouldn't tell them, he loved us too much.

Daddy had money before the war started. Half he gave to me, the other half he hid under the shoelining. Maybe . . . maybe someday once more he would try to run away.

Almighty God . . . please . . . help him.

CHAPTER XXII

One of my best customers was Mrs. Zachuta. She was a teacher and so was her daughter Marysia. One of her sons was a priest and the other was in training. They were living in a factory building. They had one room on the first floor, and kept it as a store room. There was a china closet with dishes, a couch, and a big table covered with a heavy plush tablecloth.

On the second floor they had one more room. They slept, cooked and ate in the same one.

When I sewed for Mrs. Zachuta, I slept in the store room on the first floor, and she let me use it whenever I was sewing in the neighborhood. She even gave me the key for the room, not knowing how much it meant to me.

At this time nobody was allowed to be on the street after six P.M.

One time before I entered the factory building I heard somebody calling me. I turned and saw Grandmother. It was a quarter of six, and I was surprised to see her so late.

Grandmother was pale and for the first time I saw her crying. She told me that Stasia's janitor had become suspicious and had asked who the lady was that slept in her house. Stasia had told her

that it was her aunt, that she was living in a small village and had come here to a dentist and that's the reason why she had to sleep in Stasia's house once in a while.

And so Grandmother had to leave for at least a week and find a place where to sleep.

I couldn't leave her on the street. I had the key from the store room in the factory building. I looked around, to make sure no one saw us and very quietly we went in.

About an hour later I heard steps coming down the stairs. I was near fainting. Grandmother had to hide very quickly under the table.

It was Mrs. Zachuta. She came to take something from the china closet. She gave you some candies, asked how we were and went upstairs.

I was happy that Grandmother hid in time and that Mrs. Zachuta didn't see her. From now on, Grandmother slept a few hours with you on the couch, then she sat in the darkness and the rest of the night I slept with you.

Grandmother wasn't there in the daytime. Every morning she went out to wander around the town and came back before six. Every night she was more pale, tired and hungry.

After a few days Mrs. Zachuta told me to come upstairs. She took you on her lap, offered me a seat and asked suddenly:

"Mrs. Leszczynska, whom do you hide in the room downstairs? Don't worry—trust me. I know you are . . . Jewish—please tell me, who is it?"

I sat there and couldn't believe my ears. She knew? And she let us stay?—I tried but couldn't say a word.

She looked with friendliness in her eyes and asked again: "I am waiting, please—who is it?"

I couldn't stand it anymore. I burst into tears and told her that the one I was hiding, was my husband's mother. Then I said that I was sorry, and if she wished . . . Grandmother would go away right now.

Mrs. Zachuta was suddenly very mad. She arose from the chair and asked: "How could you do this?—How was it possible for all three of you to sleep on one narrow couch?—Let her come here, she will sleep with us. Our bed is twice as big as your couch."—Long, long after, my eyes were still burning.

Now tell me, who said that angels are only in heaven?

CHAPTER XXIII

A few other families were living in the factory building. Not to make them suspicious, we had to leave that place at least for a while. I tried to work more in such places where we could sleep. And that's why, Grandmother had to again take a chance.

She bought a few dozen eggs, a two-pound piece of butter, one quart of sweet cream, and went to Stasia. Then she called the janitor in, gave him those products and said that they came from her farm. Luckily he believed. And from then on, Grandmother had two places where she could sleep.

A week later she came again to Mrs. Zachuta's home. A few minutes before six, Mrs. Zachuta's son came in and was very frightened to see us there. He spoke very fast and fear was in every word.

"Hurry, maybe there is still time for you to go someplace. This night will be a raid, in this part of town."

We didn't have a minute to lose. We ran out not knowing where to go.

Not far from the factory was a big huge field. In it were hundreds of wheat-stacks. We had no other choice. We had to hide in them. Grandmother

made a hole in one and crawled in, I went into another one with you in my arms.

We sat there about three hours when you began to whisper that you wanted to go out. I could see the reason why you wanted to run from here.

I felt the same. Both of us couldn't stand the mosquitoes and other insects. Our faces, hands and legs were swollen from their bites.

By now it was very dark. I was afraid to call Grandmother loudly and my steady but quiet calls didn't help. She couldn't hear or maybe she had fallen asleep.

You were crying very quietly but without stopping. I decided to go without her. We ran into the hothouse. I laid you down on a bench and you fell asleep in seconds.

Half the night went by. I was almost sorry now that we had left Mrs. Zachuta's house, when suddenly I heard dogs barking, shots, screams and ... footsteps ... heavy ... too heavy to belong to anyone but the Gestapo.

Outside it was dark, and I rather felt him than saw him. Suddenly he was very, very near, and he lit the inside with a flashlight.

I caught you in my arms, covered your mouth so you wouldn't scream and ... I was waiting.

The little door gave one little squeak, and the very tall Gestapo came in. His flashlight began to dance all over the place. It was on the walls, on the tiny windows, on the flowers, and then ... near us.

I closed my eyes for a second, but feeling that the light didn't touch my face, I held my breath and slowly opened my eyes.

The Gestapo was there. He bent down, picked up

a beautiful red rose, put it into the button hole and ... he was gone.

Now I let them run. My tears were running over my tired face, they were falling all over your head, over your trembling body.

You fell asleep, but I didn't put you on the bench anymore, I kept you tight, tight in my arms until dawn came to the tiny windows in the hothouse.

CHAPTER XXIV

In the morning I went back on the field. One wheat-stack was turned over. I looked all around. I called: "Mother, where are you?—Mother." But there was no answer.

Where was she? Was she alive or maybe one of the shots in the night had ended her poor life?

I was afraid to go to Mrs. Zachuta, but I had to, because you were very tired and hungry and I left with her all my money the night before.

Like in a daze against my will, I went into the house. And there I saw—Grandmother. She was crying, but this time it looked horrible. She was sitting near the window, her head down and she was saying over and over: "It is no use—it is no use, I am too tired to live—I can't anymore—I can't."

Later she fell asleep in the chair. Mrs. Zachuta wiped a tear from Grandmother's eye, took off her shoes and with her daughter's help, put her on the couch. Grandmother opened her still wet eyes and outstretched her arms into your direction. She didn't have to do it twice, you ran to her and in a few seconds, both of you found peace at least for a while.

The next day I had to work near Stasia's house

and was surprised to find out that now the bus was to leave late in the afternoon.

And when asking everyone, and got the answer, I was even more surprised that I was still standing on my feet.

One of the bystanders said with horror in his eyes: "The bus won't go in this direction because the Gestapo is killing the Jews now in the Ghetto."

My brain was pounding, my eyes were blinded with tears. I screamed in my thoughts: "God . . . where are you?—Open your ears . . . open your eyes . . . Can't you hear the screams of your murdered children?"

"Almighty—Why are we forgotten?"

CHAPTER XXV

We stood there an hour—two—three, I can't remember. We went to Mrs. Zachuta, she was crying bitterly. Her son had seen unbelievable things. Eight killed babies in one baby carriage. One of them still had a bottle in its mouth. . . . He had seen two wagons going out from the Ghetto . . . wagons full with half dressed, killed people. He had looked with horror and saw . . . blood dropping to the ground.

Mrs. Zachuta made us stay overnight. The next morning she gave me an address to her friend in a village, to go there for a few weeks to sew. I was satisfied to disappear for a while. I thanked her very heartily and went to say goodbye to Stasia.

Before we went to the village I wanted to see Daddy.

We came to the place where he was working. I whistled and again he asked the watchman to let him in, into the house for a drink of water. After a few seconds we went in too.

Daddy was more happy to see us today, than any time before. He kissed us longer and with more sadness in his eyes. Then he picked you up, kissed you once more and turned his head, so I wouldn't see the tears in his eyes.

For a few seconds he tried but couldn't talk. Finally he said very quietly to you: "Be a good boy."—And . . . very fast he ran away.

We went to the village Zastow. The Gestapo was there too, but not as many as in Krakow. At least you could sleep undressed.

Very often there in Krakow you had to sleep in your shoes, because of the raids in the night. It could be ten or even more below zero, but when the Gestapo caught a Jew, they didn't let him even put his shoes on.

This shouldn't have worried me then, because winter was far away. Right then it was August. But the wonderful air, the beautiful soft grass, and the happy laughter of the children, didn't let me forget that the danger was still there.

I have to tell you again, that you were my dearest helper. The lavatory was in the backyard and the door was never closed tight enough. But you knew that I was sitting near the sewing machine worrying so much. Every few minutes you would come running and say: "Don't worry Mommy, before I go in, I look all around, no one should be near."

My poor good boy, you knew very well, that if someone would see you, it could mean death for you and Mommy.

Sundays we went to church with those people that I sewed for. I tried to act very good. And thank God, no one even thought that we are Jewish.

Sometimes they were speaking about the situation in the city. Whom they did see, who was killed or how the Gestapo found Jews, hidden through two years in cellars, stables and forests.

They spoke about the two boys from the next village. They were living with a Gentile family. Everyone was sure that the boys were related to them. They went to school, to church and to part time jobs. Everything looked so natural, yet they were found, they had to give their lives, because unluckily for them . . . they were born . . . Jews.

Three weeks later, I received a letter from Stasia. She wrote that Daddy worked now in Plaszow together with Aunt Rose, her husband and the boys, and with Adolf. That Aunt Fela with her baby was still hidden in the loft and when we came back from Zastow, I would have to pay for her. In case I would try to refuse, the women would call the Gestapo and she would give away not only Aunt Fela and her baby, but also both of us and Stasia with her family.

Yes my dear baby, very often animals are better than human beings.

CHAPTER XXVI

Six weeks passed very fast. We came back to Krakow. We went to Mrs. Zachuta. Grandmother was there and she was very happy to see us back. She had a present for you, two pair of socks and a beautiful jacket.

In those times it was impossible to buy anything. How could we? We didn't belong to the living ones. We weren't listed anywhere so we didn't have an assignment. I was happy with your presents, but at the same time, surprised. I asked Grandmother where she took those things from and she told me that Daddy gave them for you. Again I asked: "Did you see him?—When?—How does he look, and is he still working in the same place?"—Grandmother said that she saw him a few days ago, and that he was working in Plaszow.

You were very tired, so I bathed you in a wash basin and then took the pail with water, to spill it outside on the ground.

It was too heavy, so I put it down and wanted to pick it up with my other hand, when suddenly I heard Grandmother saying to Mrs. Zachuta: "My God—my God—my God—Irene is young, she will have a husband, but I won't have a son anymore."

I ran back into the room. I looked from one to

another, but they avoided looking at me. I caught Grandmother's hand and asked why did she say those words, what happened?

First there wasn't an answer at all, then she turned her head to the side and said: "What do you want?—I said, that you are young, you will see your husband, but I am old and tired I won't live so long, to be able to see him again."

I should have believed her, but somehow I couldn't. I took her hand into mine and looked into her eyes. She pushed me away.

I caught Mrs. Zachuta's arm and begged: "Please, what happened?—Please—tell me."

Only for a second she looked at me with sadness in her eyes, then she took my head into both her hands, squeezed with sympathy and said: "Yes, my dear child, you have to be strong now, from now on—you have to be a mother and a father to your baby."

I gave only one cry, it came from the bottom of my heart. A cry to God . . .

I felt fire in my eyes. I took a handkerchief and touched them. They were dry—I couldn't cry, the tears changed probably to very little stones.

I touched my heart—It was still pounding. What for? My eyes were dry—my body was dead.

Wouldn't it be better my heart should be dead too?

CHAPTER XXVII

In the morning I dressed you and we went out. You had to eat my poor baby. Mommy had to go to work . . . oh—my baby, the world is so big, but there wasn't enough place for Daddy. We wouldn't go to see him anymore.

The night was very long. We were sitting in the darkness, I kept you in my arms and Grandmother told us a story which she knew from Stasia.

Did you want to hear my dear son? I knew that you wanted to. And what you heard then, you would have to remember all your life.

Daddy and eighty-two other slaves left Plaszow and went to work, to cover the roads with stones. Some of them had a little money hidden in the shoes under the lining or sewed in, under collars or in the pockets, and when the peasants brought bread, they couldn't resist—they bought a loaf or two. And when after a whole day's work, they entered Plaszow, the Gestapo was by the gate and . . . they found the bread.

The machine gun worked only a few seconds. They were killed instantly. . . . They were killed, because they were hungry . . .

Eighty-three unhappy slaves . . . it happened:

SEPTEMBER 14, 1943

Do you remember my son? Your Daddy was hungry, and for such a crime . . . he had to die.

What else is there to say? Should I remind you how you looked at me?—How big were your eyes?—Should I tell you how you shivered even though it was a beautiful and warm September day?

I knew what I had to do. I had to tell you "Thank you" my dear son, because after I saw your bitter cries, at last I found relief in crying too.

I dried your eyes, did the same with mine, put a smile on my lips and we rang the bell at Mrs. Kowalofka's door.

When she saw us, she screamed with joy: "Oh!—My dear Mrs. Leszczynska, am I happy to see you here. My daughter's birthday is today, we will eat and drink, laugh and dance. You will sew until three, then you will help us to decorate the tables."

I couldn't show her my real face. I put a mask on, and told her that I was happy too.

And in the evening your Mommy . . . danced.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The days changed to weeks . . . to months. . . . The winter was colder than ever before. The situation got worse from day to day. People couldn't get enough materials for dresses to sew. It meant for me more sleepless nights, more fear where to go the next day. Where to sleep that night.

I had more money than we needed, but I knew that no one would let us in only for sleeping, unless I showed them our birth certificates, and this was impossible.

Mrs. Zachuta had to take the key away from me, because the Gestapo took over the store room, where so many times we had found shelter.

Grandmother was still sleeping in Mrs. Zachuta's room upstairs. Once, in the middle of the night, the Gestapo kicked their way into the house. They were looking for a young man, this time not a Jew. Everyone, who had a higher education, was taken to Germany. It was said that they were needed for work, but until then, whoever went—never came back.

Mrs. Zachuta's son was working with the underground. The Gestapo probably found out and came to take him. He wasn't home, but there in bed was Grandmother. One from the Gestapo picked up the

cover, looked at her, and said: "An old woman." And threw the blanket back. And like then, when she had left the temporary Ghetto, the same way now, she was one step from death.

Two days later, they caught the young Mr. Zachuta. Almighty!—Why didn't you make them blind, before they took him away?—The poor unhappy mother. She didn't cry. She sat by the window and asked over and over: Why?—Why?—

CHAPTER XXIX

In Mathousen, there was a special building with a hundred and sixty-five stairs. The ground was covered with big sharp stones. The German killers brought, from all over, the unhappy Jews, and they had to climb those stairs. There on the top of them was standing a beast soldier and . . . he pushed them down.

It was Saturday night. I finished my sewing but couldn't stay in the place for the night. I went to Stasia. Grandmother was there. I looked at her and saw that something horrible had happened.

She didn't turn to look at us. You kissed her but she didn't kiss you back. Not with words, only with my eyes I asked Stasia what had happened. She understood, and with tears in her eyes explained poor Grandmother's condition.

Her son Adolf had gone up the stairs in Mathousen. His life was finished only a few days ago. Her daughter Rose with her husband and two sons were killed the other day.

And now the poor old mother sat by the window, rocked her body and counted her dead children.

CHAPTER XXX

The room was dark, but I didn't want to make the light. We sat in the darkness and my thoughts went to those beautiful times, when we were all together. Like in a dream I remembered the first years of your life. There was happiness and laughter so very, very often. The memories crowded back, happy memories of the days when we planned your future. It seemed a hundred years ago, on the other side of a nightmare.

Where are those dreams?—What is it now?—Six million Jews were murdered. Daddy was one of the first in our family. Who would tell me someday—"You are a hero." Who would need me? And like an answer to my question, there came a moan from your bed. And then I knew—I knew who needed me. You didn't have to worry my dear baby. Mommy had a kerchief to wipe your eyes when they would cry and Mommy had a very, very warm heart, to help you when it was cold.

"Don't have bad dreams, sleep peacefully, my sweet baby."

CHAPTER XXXI

Every day we heard about the Gestapo's work.

In Majdanek special stoves were built to burn the murdered or half-living skeletons. From very far away we saw how the smoke rose to the sky. People walking near me, didn't know that I was Jewish, they looked at the smoke and said: "Will the human smoke cover the whole sky?—When and who can stop this horror?"

I began to lose more and more of my hope for tomorrow. When the day went away, and the night came, I kept forgetting that I had you. I began to pray—God should finish my suffering in any way He chose.

I began to lose my strength too. There wasn't a meal I could eat in peace. There wasn't a night I could sleep without fear. When I heard steps, somebody's voice in the night or a dog's bark, I would spring from the bed, shaking with horror. Through a second even I didn't think about myself, I shivered only when I thought what they would do to you.

To all the misery I had, one and the biggest was added. Your speech, your hearing was worse from day to day, I saw this, and I couldn't . . . I couldn't do anything. And you see?—that's why I wished

the Gestapo would catch us and again when I looked at you—I cried helplessly and knew that I had to fight . . . to beg God . . . please—please, help us.

And when you saw my eyes full with tears and asked why do I cry, you said: "Wait Mommy, wait, maybe when we will pray together, God will hear better."—And we prayed together.

CHAPTER XXXII

It was April, 1944. Only two days before your birthday. You woke up with a very high temperature. I couldn't go with you to a doctor. I couldn't stay in the place where I worked. When Mrs. Kloth saw you burning with fever, she said to me: "I am sorry to see your baby sick, but you know you can't stay here. Go home before it is worse."

I went with you to Stasia but found out from a neighbor that she had gone to visit her sister and wouldn't be back until the next day. The neighbor looked at you and said to me: "It is not my business, but I am surprised how could you think even about visiting Stasia when your child is so sick. Don't you see the same or, I wonder, maybe you don't even care."

I looked at her for a few seconds and thanked God that I didn't burst out with tears.

I said that she was right, that I didn't see that you were sick, then I turned and slowly went away.

You couldn't walk, I had to carry you. Every step seemed to me to be the last one. Finally we reached a movie house. We went in and soon both of us fell asleep. When I woke up and looked at the

time, I nearly fainted. It was only a few minutes before six.

Where to go now? Who would let us in? I began to think about everyone I knew, but it was no use. No one would let me in with a sick child.

And then suddenly like thunder a thought came to my mind—fast—there under the bridge, once there was a stream, now there was dry ground.

Probably God gave us wings, and blinded the Germans, because it was five minutes to seven when we reached the bridge. We spent the night there. I felt so hopeless, that when you cried, I cried with you. When a dog barked I shivered hoping he wouldn't come nearer. The night was longer than any other night.

It took me a few minutes in the morning before I could stretch out my legs and walk. I felt with my mouth that your temperature had gone down a little. It was too early to go to Stasia and we couldn't stay under the bridge either. It was daytime and anyone who would see us under the bridge would be suspicious. You were tired and hungry so I decided to go first to a restaurant. After breakfast I took you to a zoo. You looked at the animals with shiny eyes, not knowing that they were better than human beings.

CHAPTER XXXIII

Very slowly the summer turned to fall. The peasants where Aunt Fela was hidden demanded more and more money. They started to blackmail us. They said that they knew not only about us and Grandmother, but also about Mrs. Zachuta and Stasia. They began to threaten that they would tell the Gestapo about all of us. I couldn't take chances so I paid them much more than before.

Then I started to dream we should have our own room at least if not an apartment. A little room with our own bed, we shouldn't sleep in a movie when you were sick. But it was only a dream.

By then you were a big boy. You loved books and most of all maps. You were asking questions which were hard for me to answer. You wanted to know why you couldn't go to kindergarten. You too began to feel how good it would be, to have our own place and not to go every day or two, to somebody else's house. You asked when you could play with your own toys, and why the other children could stay in bed even for a whole day if they wanted to. You spoke about it with sparkles in your eyes. You said how good it would be to be able to play with the children outside, not to sit

the whole day home and play on the floor with somebody else's toys.

My poor baby, I thought—it would be wonderful.

CHAPTER XXXIV

Christmas Eve, 1944, we went to Stasia. The Christmas tree was decorated very poorly but the candles and colorful crepe paper kept your eyes wide open. On the white tablecloth was a very poor supper, but all around the table were our dear friends with their warm hearts and love for each other. Stasia's husband said to me with tears in his eyes: "You poor woman, you know that we not only pity you, but we also love you so. You belong to our family. We wish it should be the last bad year for you. God help you and your baby."

We spent two days there. They were very sweet to us. Their son Tadziu didn't want to go out and play with other children because he knew that I couldn't let you go outside with him. How could I? We were supposed to be in our own house, at least on a holiday. Again memories came running one after another. Memories that made my heart beat louder, and my eyes full with tears.

And so came January, 1945. Somehow a new hope came together with a new year. Somehow our hearts started to beat faster and we started to believe that the end of the war was . . . nearer and nearer.

But in the meantime horrible things were happening, every day, every hour, every minute.

It was January 14. Near the factory building lived a poor peasant with his wife and children. Through Mrs. Zachuta's window, we saw the Gestapo all around the peasant's house. Marysia went there to find out what was happening and came back with tears in her eyes. "The peasant had built a special wall in the cellar," she said. And there in a tiny room were thirty-six Jews hidden. They had been in this place since the beginning of the war. This morning, the peasant had gone to the hiding place with a pail of hot soup and a neighbor had seen him. He called the Gestapo and . . . they took them away.

Men, women and four children. The Gestapo took them for their last trip. To Majdanek into the stove, to Mathousen with the hundred and sixty-five death-stairs, or to some other place, where the machine gun worked . . . for only a few seconds.

And the next day . . . it started. It came the beginning of something that froze the blood in our veins.

Fire . . . bombs . . . screams of the murdered, and blood—I think rivers of blood.

Five bitter and long years ago, September 1, 1939, it was the beginning of the long horror, and now again the start at something that never existed—something inhuman. Victory or failure, LIFE OR DEATH.

All the tenants from the factory building ran into a small chapel. A day before I had worked with one of them, and when I saw them running, I caught you into my arms and wanted to go into the chapel too. And suddenly, those people for whom I

had worked two and a half years, tried to push us away. I begged them they should let us in, but they said that the chapel was too small and would hardly have enough place for their own families. It was again Mrs. Zachuta. Like in 1943 she saved Grandmother's life, she did the same for us now. She forced them to let us in.

Three horrible days and nights went away. It was like a nightmare. The few loaves of bread that the tenants brought with them from the factory, were finished long ago. We didn't mind at all, but the small children were crying for food and water. One of the older boys went out, he wanted to bring something for them. Later they still cried, because the boy never came back, and when after a few days when we found him, the small children didn't know that he had died for them.

Some of the children fell asleep, but the older ones were looking at us, maybe . . . just maybe we could explain when it would stop. But we couldn't. The bombs were louder and nearer with every minute. The chapel shivered when one of them fell near it. . . . We stopped praying—we stopped waiting for a miracle—we began to wish it would be over.

And yet, the miracle came.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 19, 1945. It was still dark outside but when I looked through the tiny window I saw something unusual, someone was coming nearer and nearer. Then suddenly someone was running near the window and I heard somebody yelling in a strange language. First I couldn't understand a word, then . . . Oh God . . . no, I didn't dream, it came out very clearly:

"Death—Death to the German killers."

I couldn't believe my ears. The happy tears blinded my eyes.... The tiny cellar under the chapel was suddenly too big, it became a ballroom, the crumpled dresses turned to beautiful gowns, the unhappiness in everybody's eyes changed to a sparkling glory.... We hugged each other, kissed and cried.

Then again the cellar became too small. I was suffocating. I wanted to run—to yell, my screams should be heard in all cellars, in all attics, in all hiding places. My voice of happiness should fly high—high—to the gray and cold, but beautiful sky.

And then someone began to knock on the door. I wasn't scared now. I was the first to run to open the door and moved quickly away. Somebody brought in a wounded soldier. I didn't see his face or his uniform. I didn't know who he was. I didn't care, he could be an American, Chinese, Russian or Indian, but he wasn't a German killer.

I cried and kissed him, and someone said: "Are you crazy? What do you do? How do you know who it is, maybe a new killer?"

Somehow I felt that he wasn't, and I said with happiness: "You are right I don't know him but I know that from now on I don't have to hide anymore. Now I can even tell you who I am."

It became very quiet in the tiny cellar. They all turned to look at me. But when I wanted to speak, my words wouldn't come. They began to choke me and tears began to run down my cheeks. Finally, between my hysterical sobs, I yelled out:

"I am . . . I am JEWISH."

We still could hear the bombs falling, but I

think if one of them had fallen into the chapel's cellar, between all those astonished, horrified people, there couldn't be more confusion. Some of them moved nearer and some moved to the dark corners, and looked at me with scared eyes. Maybe they thought that it was too much for me and I didn't know what I was saying.

They didn't look even at the wounded soldier, they started to ask questions. They were wondering how could it be possible. I worked for them two and a half years and they didn't know that we were Jewish. And they said over and over: "NO—no, it can't be, we can't believe you."

But finally they had to, because they didn't see fear, only happiness in my eyes.

I took you into my arms, squeezed you tight and whispered again and again: "My baby . . . my baby.

"WE ARE FREE . . . WE ARE FREE."

And when the day began, I opened the door and very slowly climbed the stairs. The sun was shining bright, but our eyes couldn't see much because we were too long in the darkness. After a while we got used to the light and we saw the horror. The houses were still on fire. All around were corpses. The snow was painted red.

The bombs didn't touch the factory building but half the roof was gone and all the windows broken.

We went into the house and you started to look for old newspapers, and when I asked why you needed them, you said that you wanted to cover all the dead people. But when we came out once more, and we looked around, you said sadly: "Oh Mommy, we will never find enough newspapers."

They were all alike now. Soldiers in uniforms,

civilians in their clothes were lying together. The flakes of snow began to cover them softly—to cover them for their last sleep.

CHAPTER XXXV

We went to Stasia's house, and there, together with all of them . . . was sitting Grandmother.

I would like to describe our happiness, that we were finally free—that we weren't hunted animals anymore. I would like to describe our despair, our bitterness after the killed ones, after those whose ashes were gone with the wind . . . but I can't . . . I can't . . .

Grandmother was worrying about Fela and as weak as she was, she didn't want to wait any longer and she decided to find out about her and the baby. She said that she would go the next day in the morning. After an hour or so, Stasia made her go to bed and rest.

A few days later we went to Krzeszowice too. I decided to go first to our house which I was sure would be empty, but before we went in, I looked up and saw Grandmother standing near the window. We ran up and . . . there was Fela and Paul. I tried very hard not to show them my pain, but it wasn't possible. They looked like two skeletons. Paul couldn't walk, and when later he wanted to go with you downstairs, he had to sit on one stair, then on the second and third, and it took

him a few minutes before he could reach the ground.

Fela's hair had to be cut completely because it wasn't possible to comb it out. For two and a half years she didn't have a comb in her hand, she didn't wash the baby or herself. She didn't sleep in a bed, she didn't walk on the ground. They were sleeping in a loft under the roof and they were living like animals, burying themselves in hay. When the peasants went to the church on a holiday, Aunt Fela went down and stole a little bit of food the peasant's wife had cooked for the pigs.

And now we thank you Almighty—that Grandmother didn't go too late. Fela and Paul went through pain and horrors, but at least they are alive.

Paul was playing with you downstairs, and when Aunt Fela looked out, we saw that she would like to go outside too. Grandmother and I took her very carefully down and we sat near a tree where, so many times, we used to sit with our husbands, with Aunt Rose and her family.

Now my dear son we have to try to forget the horrible time. Don't cry my baby.... We have to learn to sleep without fear.... We have to learn to eat in peace....

Come.... The nightmare is over....
"COME BABY... COME HOME."

CHAPTER XXXVI

In the meantime, we were living in Grandmother's own house. Aunt Fela, Paul, you and I lived upstairs in a six-room apartment, Grandmother had three rooms downstairs. Paul's Daddy and yours were killed brutally. Your Mommy had now only you. Your Daddy couldn't help us anymore, but you didn't have to worry my poor baby, you wouldn't be hungry. This Mommy promised you.

I bought a sewing machine, took in five girls, and began to teach them to sew. From Krzeszowice and all small towns and villages around, people came with work for us. We made for them dresses, skirts and blouses. I was happy that I had learned this in the war time. It was so very useful for us. I made enough money not only for both of us, but for Grandmother and Aunt Fela too.

Now you were free, you were happy, Paul was not only your dear cousin, but also your best friend.

I had a lot of work, money, long desired peace, but I still wasn't happy, and my nights started to be sleepless again. Very soon I discovered why.

Your hearing and speech were worse now than ever before. More and more often I began to think,

that someplace, somewhere there had to be a special school for you. And one day I said first to myself then to Grandmother, that the time had come for us to leave. Her pain was horrible. She loved us very much, but she also knew that we had to go. She locked herself in her room downstairs and when after a while she came up, she took you in her arms and to cover her tears, she said with a smile: "Oh—my big boy will go to school, aren't you happy?"

That evening she didn't come up and for the last days that we were together, she was more quiet and though she tried she couldn't hide her big pain.

I found out, that more to the West, more would be possible to find the school that I was looking for.

We went to Waldenburg. There unexpectedly, I found my cousins and stayed with them for a few days. In the evenings, we would talk about our dear wiped out families. Between all the unhappy victims, between the six million Jews, my whole family was killed too. I lost my father, my older sister with her husband and two children, my two brothers, and a younger sister with two children. No one heard what happened to her husband.

My cousins and their few friends helped me to look for the school, but very soon I discovered that it was no use. I was disappointed and began to wonder where to go now, when suddenly, everything changed.

One evening, one of my cousin's friends came in and said that he saw my sister's husband. The friend took a letter to him and the next day . . . I saw my brother-in-law.

We cried long and bitterly. Those that we

grieved over, we loved once so deeply—they belonged to both of us. And now we tried to forget the past. It was very hard, and in the beginning we made believe that we had succeeded.

Then destiny made the decision. My brother-in-law said that he would love you the same way, as he would love his own children if they were alive.

I knew that I had to trust him because I knew him very well and for a long time.

We were married June 27, 1946.

And very soon we left Poland. Then we had only one desire—to go to America. We began to realize our plans. With very big difficulties we reached Austria. We lived in different camps all the time.

On August 24, 1947, your sister Stella was born. From the first day I married him, he did everything to make our life as happy as possible. He helped us forget the past, the horrible nightmare.

I had lost my courage probably there, in Poland during the cruel war, and to make any decision now was very hard for me. He took care of everything. He is the one, that helped us to come here, to our dear

FREE COUNTRY AMERICA

CHAPTER XXXVII

With tears in our eyes and with hope in our hearts, we greeted our new country on December 22, 1950.

I am rather proud and happy to admit, that when we made our first step here, I bent down and kissed the ground. And if sometime you will hear about someone doing the same, don't wonder, my dear son, only be sure that they did this, the same way as I, from the bottom of my thankful heart.

We are very happy now. We have love, understanding and admiration for each other.

We started to help as much as we could afford, and as often as possible, we sent packages to Fela and Grandmother.

In the meantime odd things happened there in Poland. Poor, dear Grandmother who refused to leave the place where the blood of her murdered children covered the ground—died in 1955.

Fela remarried a lawyer, but became a widow after thirteen years. Paul, the sick baby from the attic, is now a handsome young doctor and lives in Sweden, with his beautiful lawyer-wife. They are dreaming to come here, to America someday and I pray it will be possible for us to help them.

I wish also, we should be able to do more for

Stasia than we have till now. In 1951, she lost her dear and kind husband and she is now more in health sanitariums than at home. Tadziu, her son, who so many times stayed home because you couldn't go out and play with children, is now a married man and a father of two little girls.

Mrs. Zachuta and her daughter Marysia moved from the factory building and even though I tried very hard, I couldn't find them anymore.

Your new father kept his promise. He loves you very much. He worked hard so you could have everything possible. You went for a few years to a special school for the hard of hearing, and later to a printing school. You graduated with very high marks. Wearing your hearing aid, you improved your speech too. After your graduation, you went to Baltimore, found a job and you worked there for five years. In 1958, you met Ruth and married her in the same year. Our dear Ruth can't hear at all, and she speaks only a little bit, but with our big love, we all are trying to make her as happy as possible.

When in 1961, our grandson Frankie was born, we cried not only because we were so very, very happy, but we cried in thankfulness to God, that he was born here in America, that he was born—FREE.

In 1963, in February also, Frankie's sister Donna was born and in the same year you moved from Baltimore and you are now living not too far away from us.

In 1965, July the tenth, your little sister Stella was married. I told you, "Your little sister," because she was only seventeen then. Her husband, Martin, is twenty and he is still in college.

Now my dear son, we have to say: "Thank you Almighty God for all the happiness that we share together."

We pray that there should be no more unhappiness and that your babies should never have such a childhood as you had there in Poland. We are really happy that they were born here, in our beloved country America.

Did I tell you everything Stanley?—No—I have to add something.

Almighty God—Teach us how to live with love for each other.—Teach us to be good.—Teach us to forgive.

And . . . Please . . . Almighty God . . . Give us

PEACE
FOR
EVER
AND
EVER.

EPILOGUE

Though the terror of the war ended for Irene and young Stanley on Friday, January 19, 1945 it was only the beginning of a new fight for them—the blow to the head Stanley had received from the German soldier's rifle butt had caused extensive brain damage and he was beginning to show signs of total deafness. Irene's first concern was to seek medical aid for her son; something she couldn't do during their six years of hiding from the enemy. To have shown Stanley's birth certificate—as was required for medical attention—would have meant imprisonment . . . or worse.

Irene knew Dolek's mother had survived and not knowing where to start she returned to "Grandmother's" house in Krzeszowice where her deepest fears were realized: three of the Markiewicz sons were known to be dead, as was their sister and the wives and children of three of them. Their tears of sorrow, however, were mixed with tears of joy, for Fela and her son Paul had also survived.

In the days after as Irene and Fela discussed their experiences they both agreed that their good fortune was "because a woman with one child could get help, but with two or more it was almost impossible."

The year 1945-6 was spent at Grandmother's, where Irene supported the five of them with her sewing. It was a year of heartbreak and blind alleys for Irene: a search for schools for the deaf which did not exist; unanswered letters and prayers about her own brothers and sisters and their families; and no medical encouragement for Stanley's progressively worsening condition.

In 1946 Irene heard of still another school for the hard of hearing in Waldenburg, far to the west, and once again she and Stanley left Grandmother's.

There was no school, but perhaps destiny had sent Irene to Waldenburg, for while riding a bus she met a man who knew some of her cousins "who are living here in Waldenburg." Allowing her hopes to soar Irene got their address and went to their house where she waited on the steps until they returned home in the evening. Her mind raced with the unanswered questions of the past year. Were her sisters Rose and Niusia alive? Her brothers? Their children?

Irene and her cousins shared tears of joy at finding loved ones still alive, then they wept bitterly when her cousins told her of the extermination of her whole family—with the exception of Joe Teger, her younger sister Niusia's husband. No one knew what had become of him as he had been taken away to a work camp by the Russians in 1941.

Several nights later destiny once again played a role in Irene's future: a friend of her cousins' was visiting and when Joe Teger's name came up in the conversation he told them "a man by that name lives near me." With the fear of past disappointments weighing heavy on her heart Irene

asked her cousins' friend if he would take a letter for her to this man named Joe Teger. He replied that he would be happy to and waited while she wrote a short note.

At five A.M. the next morning Irene heard hesitant footsteps outside, then a light knock on the door. She opened the door to meet Joe's disbelieving gaze. Unable to speak she motioned for him to come in. They stood staring at each other in silence for long moments. Joe's swallowed tears answered any questions she might have had. All that remained were burning tears for the loss of their loved ones.

Joe came every night after that and at the end of a week he asked Irene to marry him: "'I will make the best father for Stanley because I will love him as I would love my own children if they would be alive . . . and I will be a good husband as I was to Niusia."

Drained mentally and physically Irene knew she had to put her trust and faith in this man because her courage to face whatever the next day might bring was wearing thin. She also loved him as a person and knew in her heart that a stronger love would grow as their mutual wounds healed.

Irene and Joe were married on June 27, 1946 and soon after they left Poland on the first leg of their journey to America—a journey which took more than four years, most of it spent in Displaced Persons Camps in Austria.

On August 24, 1947, while in one of the camps, Joe and Irene's daughter Stella was born and they faced a major decision: the quota for America was full and they were very far back on the waiting list, but there were openings for Israel and

Canada—an immediate chance to start their new life. But Stanley's hearing was their first concern and they had been told by several doctors that he would receive the best treatment in America, so they chose to wait.

Joe was able to find work at his trade as a butcher and he and Irene managed to save enough money to buy some furniture for their dreary camp quarters. Irene added the finishing touches by making some colorful curtains from some leftover scraps of material.

Two more years passed before their number was selected and they were told to report to the American Consulate. Their prayers had finally been answered. They were scheduled to go to America on the next ship.

AMERICA! How the word filled their hearts with joy the next few days as they prepared for the voyage to their new homeland. Joe quit his job, they sold their furniture, packed their meager belongings, and bid their friends goodbye. But fate dealt them still another unkind blow. The day before they were to leave they were once again summoned to the American Consulate where they were informed that Stanley's deafness—the very reason for their desire to go to America—would prevent their long-awaited journey: "There are already too many crippled and handicapped refugees in America. You will have to wait until the restrictions are lifted."

With heavy hearts the Teger family returned to their now empty quarters to wait once again. "Surely it was a mistake. In America they would not condemn a little boy because he could not hear. The man at the Consulate would realize his mistake and call them back." And so the Tegers waited for the Consul's call, literally living from day to day.

Joe tried to get his job back but the position had already been filled and to replace their furniture would cost three times the amount they had sold it for so they doled their small savings out sparingly as the days turned into weeks, the weeks into months and the months into a year. (The only extravagance Joe and Irene allowed themselves during this period was English lessons three nights a week the last two months of their confinement in Austria.)

Finally, with the assistance of HIAS, a Jewish organization, the Teger family arrived in America by ship on December 22, 1950, with ten dollars, tears in their eyes and hope in their hearts. After disembarking from the ship they spent three of their remaining ten dollars for their first American meal—hot dogs—then proceeded to their first home in America, the Madison Hotel in Manhattan.

Through HIAS they were able to locate twenty-two cousins already in this country who offered to help with what little money they could spare. Joe, a proud and sensible man replied: "Don't give me money, please. Try only two things if you want to help us . . . a job and an apartment. Then the money will come."

Joe's cousins did manage to find an apartment for them, but New York was saturated with refugees from the war-torn countries of the world and jobs were scarce—even for a man with a skilled trade. However, the Teger family now had their first permanent home in their beloved America and most important, they could now seek the long-

awaited medical attention for Stanley, attention that had been too long in coming.

After a succession of doctors Irene had to succumb to her innermost fears: there was no hope of Stanley ever hearing normally again; he was totally deaf in his right ear and eighty percent deaf in his left, which would progressively get worse. "But there are schools," she was consoled. "And your son can be fitted with a hearing aid that will enable him to discern some sound." These words were of little consolation to her; how could a boy who knew no English and could not hear, hope to learn from someone who did not speak his language? "They will manage," she was assured, so they enrolled Stanley in one of the recommended schools in Manhattan.

Meanwhile, HIAS assisted the Tegers financially with thirty-nine dollars a week and Irene helped sustain her family with her sewing while Joe continued his relentless search for a job. In the evenings Irene and Joe spent their time learning English from magazines and books and helping Stanley with his lessons. Then, after nine lean months, Joe finally found work and five months later they moved to a larger apartment in Brooklyn.

Once again Irene knew the meaning of the word "happiness": Joe had lived up to his promise to be a good father and husband; they had a nice home; a steady income; Stanley was doing very well in school; and they were now in a position to help those they loved who chose to remain behind. And throughout the years the desire to help never waned. (Joe and Irene sent packages and money to Grandmother until her death in 1955; to Stasia

until her death in 1965; and their one remaining desire is to help Fela, her son Paul and his wife, Krysia, fulfill their dream of coming to America.)

After their move to Brooklyn the Teger family's lives were slowly reconstructed to the first semblance of normalcy since 1939. Irene continued sewing and Joe worked long and hard hours, saving all they could to ensure their children of a good future. Their efforts were rewarded when Stanley graduated from the school for the deaf and enrolled in a printing school where he passed with high grades. In 1958 he accepted a job with a printing firm in Baltimore.

1958 was a year of mixed emotions for Irene, however, for though she knew the time for Stanley to make his own place in the world must come she regretted the fact that his choice would take him so far from home. But because of the role destiny had so often played in her own life she knew she must not do anything to try to change her son's mind.

Stanley's absence was greatly felt by Irene, Joe and Stella alike. The empty chair at the dining room table, the closed door to his bedroom, and his favorite chair in the living room all served as constant reminders that a very important and loved part of their family was missing. But Stanley's thoughts were with his family and there were frequent letters from him telling of his job, his apartment and of new friends. Then his letters began to dwell on one subject: a beautiful young deaf girl named Ruth, and Irene believed that Baltimore, indeed, had been her son's destiny.

Irene's beliefs were confirmed several months later when Stanley married Ruth, and it is because

of Ruth that this letter was written: Stanley found sign-language insufficient when he tried to describe the events of his childhood to Ruth so he wrote a letter to his mother asking her to write her recollections down whenever she thought of them.

To reopen the slowly-healed wounds of the past and relive the terrible nightmare of those six long years was a painful task for Irene, but something within her compelled her to do it for she felt it was something that should not be forgotten, lest it should happen again.

The writing of the letter took several months and there were times when Irene felt she should stop and leave the past buried—though it would never be completely forgotten—but Joe and their daughter Stella shared the burden with her and encouraged her to continue.

Upon the completion of the letter Irene still had certain reservations as to her right to disturb the bitter and unspoken memories that lay dormant in their hearts like festering sores, but she also felt a strange new inner peace developing within herself. The reactions of her family and friends to the finished product were enough to erase any remaining doubts from her mind, and although it was an unpleasant task, Irene now realizes that the opening of those wounds has saved her family from the bitterness of a gnawing hatred that has destroyed so many others that have shared similar experiences.

With the memories of the past fresh in her mind Irene went through a period of mild depression as she thought of the countless millions of innocent people who had suffered and died so needlessly, but Joe would not allow her to carry the burden alone

and together they closed the gap between the past and the future in time to recount their blessings in 1961 when Stanley and Ruth had Frankie, their first child. A beautiful little boy who filled his grandmother's heart with the memories of another little boy some twenty-three years before. Irene gave thanks to God that this little boy was born free.

1961 was also the year Joe opened his own butcher shop, and in 1962 Joe and Irene bought a lovely two-family house in Brooklyn where they still live today with their daughter, Stella, and her twenty-one month old daughter, Melissa.

1963, however, was the year Irene's happiness reached its peak. Stanley and Ruth had their second child, a little girl named Donna, and a few months later they moved to New York, taking an apartment near Joe and Irene. For Irene it was as if she had been granted the privilege of two lives in one lifetime, for once again she knew the joy of a family united by faith, love, understanding, and the security these things bring.

Today, if you were to drive by the Teger household you would more than likely see a scene not at all unfamiliar: a family playing with their children; the family dog yelping with glee in chase of a wildly-thrown ball; a garage door being painted; chicken or hamburgers cooking over an outdoor barbecue; the careful construction of a nesting place for birds beneath a corner of the awning; or a child with a skinned knee running to its mother or grandmother for comfort.

A familiar sight to those of us who take these things for granted? Yes. But to the Teger family they have a much more significant meaning. These

are precious moments to be cherished rather than taken for granted, because to the Tegers they represent the most important thing in their lives . . . FREEDOM!

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