« Previous Page Table of Contents Next Page »

Schesslitz

Summer 1946 - Summer 1947

Translated by Selwyn Rose

Came the long-awaited day. Heavy, American army trucks pulled noisily into the camp and parked in a row, as if for an inspection. Ze'ev had told us a few days earlier to prepare ourselves, so we were all packed and ready to move. We made a little ceremony of officially lowering our flag from the mast, and climbed, one by one, with our suitcases, onto the trucks. We started out with all of us happily singing a song but without knowing our destination. Ze'ev had told us about training farms that the pioneering Zionist movements had created throughout Germany, but it had never been explained to us just what was meant by 'training'. One thing was crystal clear - we had taken another step forward on our way to Palestine.

On the day we were informed that we were leaving Berlin I met Schneider and tried to convince him to leave his business and join us. He wasn't even willing to listen, saying that he'd leave Berlin only when he had made enough money to last him the rest of his life. Now, at the last moment before I left Berlin, he came to say, 'Good-bye', and he stayed there, not leaving the place until the convoy began to move. I saw him standing next to the truck, his perpetual smile on his face, seeming, nevertheless, like an unhappy man. I felt that if I had said to him at that moment: “Come with us, now, just the way you are!”, he would have left everything and jumped on the truck..... I felt sorry for him and blamed myself for leaving him in that damned place.

The convoy crossed the metropolis and reached the open country. I didn't turn my head to look back once. I hated that city from which had emanated all evil, even though, at times, I had felt a great sense of revenge in being there as a free man, while the Germans were there, beaten and conquered.

We passed by fields and lakes, crossed streams and rivers, drove through peaceful villages, their church spires piercing the horizon above the roof-tops and it seemed as if the war had simply passed over these places. One can't destroy lakes and fields. Later, we passed through a large, dense forest and the bright noon darkened suddenly and the world became dark and gloomy, as if it were twilight. On both sides of the road, extending for miles, were massive stock-piles of crated ammunition. No one was guarding it; no one had any use for it any more.

The journey in the bosom of nature, through the beautiful scenery, intoxicated me like wine and yet again strange and different thoughts and pictures began to crowd in on me, each one replacing the one previous to it; this one cheerful, that one depressing. Suddenly in an instant the streams and rivers disappeared, as did the fields and I awoke from my day-dreams. We entered what had been a densely built-up area but one whose buildings had all been bombed - the skeletons of tall buildings, walls standing in isolation, chimneys scattered here and there. We crossed the industrial zone of Frankfurt and entered the heart of the city, which had also been severely damaged. The sight of the destruction inspired terror; it was as if we were caught in a city standing in hell. Most of the exterior walls of the houses were standing, but the insides were missing - all of them empty shells with all the windows missing, row upon row of house-fronts, four- and five storeys high and behind them - nothing, the whole giving the appearance that at any moment the whole thing was going to collapse. Berlin had also been destroyed, but there, there had been parts of streets still standing, still vibrant with life. Here, in Frankfurt, I couldn't see one complete house. In spite of the fact that I took pleasure in the sight of Germany destroyed, the journey was, nevertheless, depressing.

We left the city and continued our journey and once again before us the beautiful open country-side with its villages. But the images of the destruction of the city continued to accompany me for a long time. At the end of many hours of almost non-stop travelling, we arrived at a Jewish refugee camp in the town of

Bamberg, in Bavaria. It was already evening and darkness had begun to fall. Tired, we got down off the trucks and were immediately surrounded by Jewish inmates, firing their questions at us: “Where from...?” “Where to...?” “Perhaps you've seen...?” “Perhaps you've heard of...?” Completely confused by exhaustion, I answered automatically: “No, I haven't seen...” “No, I haven't heard...”

The people on the convoy who were not part of the Kibbutz were taken by the camp administrative officers. We remained where we were, at the place we had climbed off the vehicles. Night fell. It seemed as if we waited endless hours, but in fact, after only about half-an-hour, a truck stopped alongside us and the two men who climbed down from the cab, told us to get on the truck. It was a smaller vehicle than the others and we managed to cram ourselves in only with difficulty. The driver who had come for us told us that the journey wasn't a long one and our discomfort only temporary; there was nothing to do about it, we would just “...have to suffer a bit”, he said.

Again we started to drive and Yisrael, who was standing next to me, whispered that he had the feeling that we were being taken to Auschwitz - the crammed truck reminded him of how they had all been similarly transported, he and his family, during the 'Aktzia' in Lodz....I shouted at him to stop comparing everything to that period. While we were still in Berlin I was beginning to tire of his regular habit of comparing everything to the ghetto and the camps; when he wanted to say something about someone who worked in the administration of the camp, he spoke of him as “..working in the *Judenrat;* if it was someone he hated he referred to them as 'SS-men'. I detested these expressions and would argue with him over them while he would claim that “...the war had done nothing to you,” and in spite of everything that had happened to me, I had remained “...mummy's little boy”. But before a minute had passed, I also saw before me the picture of the wagon carrying me to Sobibor, heard the cries “Air!”, “Water!”, “Help!”, and in my nose the stink of sweat and urine and again I experienced the anxiety of that journey into the unknown. I felt a choking sensation that wouldn't leave me and when the truck stopped, I truly expected to hear the shouts: “*Raus! Raus! Schneller! Schneller”.*

The house at which we stopped was brightly illuminated and for the moment I thought it was the only house in the vicinity with only darkness and emptiness around. But when my eyes became accustomed to the dark, it was possible to see that we were in a street with small houses on either side, some of them with lights in the windows. We entered some kind of a yard and the smell of cows and hay mingling together was wafted into my nostrils. We went into a building, up to the second floor and into a hall where there were tables set. A pleasant warmth enveloped me. We were welcomed by a group of men and women speaking Czech, Hungarian, German and Yiddish, who had arrived two- or three-weeks before us and had prepared the houses ready to receive us. Hungry, we fell upon the hot, tasty food which was offered to us in abundance, and later we were conducted, group after group, to the various houses in the village.

Sunlight and the sound of some kind of work activity going on in the nearby yard, woke me from my sleep. For the moment, I couldn't remember where I was. From my window, I could see a church spire with a clock set in it and the yard of the adjoining house, with chickens strutting around it. Hammering could be heard from a work-shop. A woman came out of the house, crossed the yard and about a minute later returned. This is not the training farm I imagined to myself that was spoken about in Berlin. I expected a lonely, agricultural farm, set in the middle of fields and here, we were in the heart of a village, among German farmers.

Someone came to take us to the central building, where we had eaten the previous night. To get there we had to cross almost the entire village. Unlike Polish villages, where most of the houses - huts even - were built of wood, each one some distance from its neighbour, around each a dirt path and a wooden fence on each side of the dirt road stretching to the next home - here, in the German village, a paved, stone road ran the length of the village and on each side, pavements and two-storied, brick houses. On the way, I saw two pubs, a barber's shop and a few small business establishments of one sort or another. The war had left no traces here in this village. All the houses were standing, not a brick had been dislodged. We passed a few Germans in the street wearing short leather trousers held up by braces - the sort I had used as a child - who greeted us with a “Grüss Gott!”.

We now discovered that we were in a village named Schesslitz, not far from Bamberg, the city which had been a centre of the Nazi Movement and in which the Nazis had formulated the anti-Jewish Nuremberg Laws of 1935. In Schesslitz there had been a few Jewish families before the war, all of whom had been exterminated. Their homes had been confiscated by the Nazis. At the end of the war, the Nazis had abandoned the Jewish farms and disappeared. The houses remained abandoned and the farmers took the livestock and some of the equipment which they found there and distributed it amongst themselves. The various Zionist and youth movements leaders, searching throughout Germany for convenient locations to set up training centres for displaced youth, and prepare them for Kibbutz life and agricultural work in Palestine, hearing from the few Jews who survived in Bamberg, that there was Jewish property in Schesslitz, approached the American authorities. The Americans sequestered the property and turned it over to UNRWA and 'The Joint' for use as an agricultural school for training Jewish refugees. The property comprised four houses within the village, and a large agricultural farm on which was a large two-storied house, a cow-shed, stable, barns and fields surrounding the village. The agricultural equipment, the horse and cattle that had been taken by the Germans villagers from the Jewish farms were returned and only a German woman and her two daughters remained temporarily in the central building of the farm, in two rooms which the American military command granted them.

Two groups of people, in effect, were formed in Bamberg, as a nucleus to a Jewish agricultural school and both came together in Schesslitz - the one, a consolidated group whose aim was to emigrate to Palestine and bring into being a Kibbutz, and the other a group of refugees, fed up with the idle life of the camp and who had found a way that enabled them to live there productively, and perhaps even earn a little money from agricultural produce. The second group - resembling the members of the Kibbutz before their arrival in Berlin - had no Zionist background and although they intended emigrating to Palestine, had no intention of living on a Kibbutz; some members of this group came from the Carpathians, an area on the borders of Hungary and Czechoslovakia, a rural area, where many Jews were engaged in farming, so they already had the necessary expertise.

All interested parties were eager that our Kibbutz - known to the authorities as 'The School of Agriculture' - should succeed. UNRWA, who administered the refugee camps, was eager to prove that the refugees in its care, were not just existing with its help, but also training themselves for a return to normal life. 'The Joint' was keen to turn Jewish refugees into productive workers, as well, while the Zionist leaders saw us as an especially positive nucleus within the midst of the camp populations and sought our advancement. UNRWA and 'The Joint' extended generous, material help. The Zionist administration and leadership sent emissaries from Palestine to preach Zionism and the Kibbutz. All of them, each in their own way, assisted considerably towards the success of our group but the main ingredient for our success was concealed within the human resources - the members of our group. We were a mosaic of different people, all of whom contributed, from his own personality and skills, towards the common end. The older ones among us had been active, before the war in the Zionist youth movements and a few of them even knew Hebrew. Some of these also had experience in managing businesses from an economic aspect, and some, who had been born in rural districts, the children of farmers, perhaps, quickly absorbed the knowledge and expertise required for the successful handling of livestock and agriculture in general. We had sports instructors, as well and girls and boys - young adults - who commanded no fully trained skills but were eager to learn everything and do anything.

The Kibbutz also hired an agricultural instructor, a young agronomist, the son of a Jewish father and German mother, who instructed us in field work and taught us a little theory. We worked energetically at rehabilitating the abandoned farm and turned it into a viable economic unit. All of us were imbued with the ambition to be the best Kibbutz and to prove to the German villagers that we could manage a farm better than they. We quickly gained an excellent reputation and became a recognized stopping-place on the itinerary of many visiting dignitaries.

The UNRWA manager, an elderly British officer, used to visit us frequently and because no one in our Kibbutz knew English, I became his interpreter by right of the vocabulary of English I had gained with Ignacz and somehow we managed to understand each other. He told me that when he became totally exhausted from all the distressing problems surrounding him in the camps that he has to deal with, and his

nerves are at breaking point, he comes to visit us on our farm to relax and draw fresh strength and inspiration.

In addition to our farm work we also interested ourselves in extensive cultural and sporting activities - we learned Hebrew, folk-songs and dances; we listened to lectures and had art-evenings. Whoever they were who gave thought to, and troubled to carry forward and create these training groups throughout Germany after the war, cannot conceive to what degree they had hit the target in supplying the needs of fellows and girls like me. In no place, immediately after the war, did I feel as well as I did on the training Kibbutz. I took part in every activity - work, culture and sport; I was protected and exempt from having to cope with the daily life of a world I didn't know; I owed nothing to any man, but most important of all - in that place I was not unusual nor was I an object of pity.

Life in the country and work in the fields, in the bosom of nature, the communal life, the common aim, the sports which were an integral part of the daily round, all of which had been denied us in our youth - now helped us to rid ourselves of the burden of the war years and its images and had thrust adulthood upon us before its time. In the German village of Schesslitz I knew happy days and to a limited degree became freed from the terrible events of the past. In that place, too, I continued to dream of Sobibor and to awaken at the moment of death, my heart pounding for an hour afterwards, but the dreams didn't chase me interminably; In that place also, the reality of the world around me interchanged with pictures of horror from the past but these, too, didn't control my thoughts as they had done, they appeared as flashes of memory and disappeared as quickly. It was unbelievable that I, a Sobibor prisoner, was now living in a German village, among German houses, meeting Germans every day in the street the moment I left my house, and exchanging with them the daily greeting of “Gröss Gott”, I was treated by a German doctor and, if need be, was hospitalized in a German hospital, bought necessities from a German, had my hair cut by a German, drank beer in a German pub with German customers sitting around me. But I kept myself as much as possible at a distance from them. I didn't want to have any contact with them. We discussed in our Kibbutz meetings our attitude towards the Germans among whom we now lived, and the guiding principle that we settled upon was simple: since we were in a temporary position where we had no alternative other than to live in a German ambiance, we must treat our neighbours in a reasonable fashion, not to demonstrate a sense of vengeance towards them but under no circumstances were we to forge any kind of friendship with them - we were forbidden to forget for one instant, what this German people had done to us. Most of our members acted according to these guidelines. We lived in the midst of the German village, but we remained isolated, by choice, within our own community, ignoring our neighbours and making contact with them only in essential matters. But, nevertheless, there were those among us who behaved differently, some by openly showing their vengeful feelings and contempt, and some who approached them too closely or even openly fraternized and made friends with this one or the other, who always declared, of course, like many others, that he 'loved the Jews' and had absolutely no idea of “...what Hitler had been doing to the Jews!”. But very slowly a new phenomenon appeared among us, which began to spread rapidly, from one or two in the beginning to more and more as time went by - fellows began disappearing in the evenings, after dinner, and were even absent from meetings. They had gone out to stroll in the fields, or visit in the houses of the girls living in the village. It was possible to imagine that our chaps had conquered the hearts of the local girls but to me it seemed the other way around - that the girls had captured the hearts of our boys. They would chase after our fellows everywhere, all the time. In the evening, many just vanished, each to his own girl friend. On Friday evenings, when we had the usual Sabbath evening ceremony and continued on with the community singing of hymns, a community meal and perhaps even a cultural programme of sorts, the girls from the village would wait outside patiently, until it had finished and their boys came out to them. Not only was all this against our stated Kibbutz principles and agreement, not to make friendly attachments with the Germans but it also damaged the Kibbutz itself since the fellows chasing these girls were taking less and less part in the life and decision-making processes of the Kibbutz and even, in some cases, swiping foodstuffs belonging to the Kibbutz, for their girl-friends. The Kibbutz leadership decided to fight this phenomenon by all possible and necessary means. Special meetings were called to debate the subject at which severe criticism was laid against those who were befriending the German girls; they were also warned and threatened with punishment - even expulsion from the Kibbutz.

One of the reasons for chasing after the German girls was the small number of girls in our own group. It was clear, that if we intended to create a Kibbutz in Palestine, then the number of girls in our group had to be somewhere reasonably near the number of fellows, and so it was decided to make an effort to induce some girls to join us: a chap who knew a Jewish girl at some place or other was sent out to try and bring her to join us; others were sent to other Kibbutzim and to refugee camps in order to bring girls. We asked our head administration office in Munich to direct female newcomers to us. The success of the attempt was only modest. Only a very few girls came to join us, whom we brought together with their families, all of whom had come from Russia. My friend Yisrael and I succeeded in bringing a girl from a Jewish children's home which we had visited. When we didn't manage to balance sufficiently well the numbers of boys and girls, Ya'acov - the Kibbutz secretary, and I went on a special mission to the arrival-point of the *Escape* convoys for Poland and from where the arrivals were dispersed to different destinations. We were directed to the Secretariat of the camp, where they knew in advance that we were coming and Ya'acov announced:

> "We have come for the fifty girls we need for our Kibbutz! We don't want children or middle-aged women and certainly not men!"

The man in charge of the dispersal point, sitting opposite, listening quietly to Ya'acov's words, jumped to his feet as if bitten by something and shouted:

> "What the hell is this? A cattle market? You come here thinking you can choose what you 'buy' and what you won't 'buy'? Perhaps you'll examine each one of them to see whether they meet your standards, or not?"

The atmosphere was tense. The aura taken on by the dialogue and negotiations was very much not to my taste. In the end, the man said we could have half of them girls and the rest of the group 'various people'.

In Berlin a group had formed comprising people who seemed likely to be able to live together communally, in a Kibbutz framework - and here we were ready to accept members without even having seen them. I whispered in Ya'acov's ear that I was going to 'inspect the goods' and he shouldn't agree to anything until I'd returned. I left the room and went to the large hut where the arrivals were congregated. I looked at their faces - both men and women - listened to their conversation, and took note of their behaviour and attitude. I didn't like what I saw and sensed; they didn't seem to me to be suitable for our Kibbutz: I couldn't see pleasant-looking or even open-faced girls among them. A little shocked and disappointed, and a little concerned at what the reaction of our colleagues would be if we arrived back with these people, I hurried back and called to Ya'acov, telling him what I had seen and expressing the unequivocal opinion that under no circumstances should we take these people.

Ya'acov was unconvinced from what I had said. "What did you expect to find here, film-stars? I've already agreed for the first stage, to accept thirty boys and girls, who will be coming in the next few days. If everything goes O.K. then we'll accept a second group.

On our way home to the Kibbutz, I was rather down-hearted. I felt that I had failed in my mission and was angry with myself that I hadn't been able to prevent us bringing this new group to the Kibbutz. What foolishness was it of mine to dream of bringing a group of girls, each one more beautiful than the other! But as the journey progressed I came to the opposite conclusion - on what basis and by what authority had I taken it upon myself to decide that the men and women whom I had seen in the building were 'unsatisfactory' and 'unsuitable' for the Kibbutz? Perhaps the agent in the transit camp had been justified in likening us to 'cattle-dealers'. What, in any case did I know of the qualities of the people? Who knows what hardships and sufferings they had endured before arriving in the west - and isn't it reasonable to suppose, that after they've rested, washed, combed and dressed more normally, that they'll look entirely different?

The group arrived a few days later. But my fears were only too well justified. The newcomers behaved very strangely, showing no inclination whatsoever to integrate themselves into our group. Arguments and fights broke out between 'them' and 'us'. Thefts appeared and increased alarmingly. Food and clothing

disappeared. The situation became intolerable and after about a fortnight we were compelled to send the whole lot back.

At that period, something happened which upset me very deeply. Among the 'founding members' of our Kibbutz in Berlin, was a married couple, Marysie and Izio - she came from Warsaw, he was an ex-officer in the Polish army. While we were still in Berlin, I had become friendly with them, almost as if I were a member of the family. From several aspects we actually were - all the members of the Kibbutz saw themselves as one of an extended family which celebrated every event together. When a son was born to Marysie and Izio there was much rejoicing among all of us and I, particularly, felt as if a child had been added to my family. Everyone began to prepare for the circumcision ceremony and the W*eiberlech* - the married womenfolk - mobilized themselves to prepare a festive meal which would take place. But the joy came to an abrupt end when it was discovered that the baby had been born with a heart defect and died after ten days. Heavy mourning fell upon the Kibbutz. The coffin of the baby was laid in the dining-room on a special table, draped in a black cloth, with lighted candles on either side. All the members participated in the funeral which took place in the small Jewish cemetery in the village. The death of the baby deeply disturbed me. I, who had seen so many thousands of dead, whose whole family was dead, whose friends had died before his eyes one after the other, until I was sure that there was nothing in the world could ever shock me again, was completely broken by the death of that little baby, just a few days old, not even, after all, a kinsman - flesh of my flesh - and whom I had seen only once or twice at the very most, when I visited Marysie in the hospital. Had all my experiences not changed me at all? I was embarrassed by my reactions and tried to hide my feelings from everyone.

One day a woman of about thirty-something arrived at our Kibbutz. She had with her a daughter aged sixteen and her son, thirteen. When I returned from work they told me that a beautiful girl had arrived at the Kibbutz and like all the other bachelors I was eager to see her however she was reported as being ill and confined to her room. In the evening, the man in charge of the stores came to me and asked me to take a paraffin lamp up to the new family's room, since there was no electricity there and so I was among the first to see her - and she was pretty. All the fellows, me among them, chased after her. She knew to sing and dance and had a bubbling personality. Although I didn't push myself forward nor made special efforts to seek her company, secretly I wanted very much to be near her. In the struggle for her my friend from Berlin, Nahum was the 'winner' - tall and handsome he was and, as the owner of a motor-cycle and camera, he had, by the standards of the day many more 'points' than I, which sealed matters.

The summer passed quickly. Our farm prospered and bloomed. We harvested the wheat we had sown, we filled our barns with hay and other produce, we picked our potatoes, beets and other vegetables. The store-rooms and cellars became filled. During the summer we continued to dedicate ourselves to sport and other various entertainment activities. Sometimes to the point of forgetting other things, like children. We felt good in Schesslitz. Almost cut-off from the outside world, we forget, sometimes, why we were there and what our final target was. But with the coming of autumn and the endless rains, when work in the fields came to a halt, the emphasis of our daily lives moved towards studies, to cultural activities and debates on the future of the Kibbutz, which became more real, especially as we had been promised by the Movement's leadership that our turn to immigrate to Palestine under the illegal immigration activity - *Aliyah Bet* - would soon come.

Again emissaries were coming from Palestine to fill us with theory and ideology and one of them, a singing teacher, formed a choir from among us . As usual, joining, as I did, every activity, I joined this too. The members dedicated many hours to learning the songs in all their different voices. Very soon we were in demand to appear at all sorts of events but our teacher-conductor steadfastly and stubbornly refused to allow us to appear publicly until he was satisfied that we were sufficiently competent to sing a number of songs, perfectly. Our début took place on *Hannuka* - the Festival of Lights - when we had a party at the Kibbutz, to which had been invited many guests, among whom were members of the Zionist Movement leadership, officials from UNRWA and 'The Joint' as well as Jewish officers from the American armed forces. The catering, as at all our Kibbutz functions, was excellent both in quantity and quality. It was an unwritten law in our lives, which clearly sprang from our need to compensate ourselves for the years of hunger we had all endured - food had to be on our tables in abundant quantity and of the

best quality. In the kitchen, for all these events, contests took place in culinary arts among the '*Weiberlech*'.

The *Hannuka* party opened with a sing-song and speeches by our important guests and our own Kibbutz secretary from around our heavily laden tables. After we had satisfied our appetites with the excellent food and drunk copiously of the available 'firewater', when everyone was in good spirits, the programme began in earnest. Our member, Yehudit, recited literary passages, showing great talent and our member Anschel read a few comedy sketches but their repertoire was known to us. The choir took to the stage. The audience sat tensely awaiting this first performance. Concentrating on our conductor, tense ourselves, like taut wires, we opened our programme with the emotional melody 'Oh, Until When Must Our People Live Without a Country, Without a Homeland?'. As we were singing we got over our nervousness and our singing improved. We finished to a thunderous round of applause. After that success the choir was invited to appear in other Kibbutzim and in the camp in Bamberg.

At one of the Kibbutz meetings a proposal was brought forward for debate, suggesting that we lead a completely full communal life, in which there should be no privately owned property whatsoever. Thus, every member who possessed money or jewellery, would be obliged to transfer it to the Kibbutz treasury. The proposal provoked a stormy argument among us. Members who had no property or valuable articles, supported the proposal enthusiastically while those who had objected with equal fervour. Three evenings were given over to the debate and in the end a compromise decision was reached: for one month members would be permitted to purchase with their money personal articles - afterwards no one among us may retain money of his own. Those members who had possession of financial resources were required to transfer their money to the Kibbutz for the purchase of necessary, basic equipment for the Kibbutz, in Palestine. As one who saw his future in the Kibbutz, I considered the purchase of equipment to be of prime importance and without hesitation, I withdrew my gold coins from their hiding place in the heels of my boots and handed them over. It transpired that I was the only one to do so; others bought jewellery, clothes or just hid the money.

The financial situation of the Kibbutz was good. The excess money that we had to our credit, the Secretariat wanted to invest in further equipment for the Kibbutz, but there were those who suggested that the money should also be used for buying clothes and other items for the members. The general meeting decided to purchase equipment and machines for the welding shop and carpentry, to be forwarded to Palestine, to Kibbutz Mishmarot, with which we were in contact via our Movement leadership.

At the centre of interest for the members, during the winter months, when work in the fields was, perforce, virtually at a standstill, were the chess and table-tennis tournaments. But that was not enough - very quickly, another penetrating topic was found to which we could dedicate our evenings - 'Members' Trial' - on the behaviour of Jews during the Holocaust. The trial was organized and managed by two members of the Secretariat, Zalman and his friend Yitzhak, both of whom, during the war fought side by side in the partisans, Yitzhak Fischman, who had been an officer in the Polish army and Ya'acov, our training officer - both of them older than we by a few years and with experience in the Zionist movements. The initiator of the idea, Zalman, was born in Lithuania, had immense knowledge and great clarity of expression. The role of prosecutor, Zalman placed on the shoulders of his friend, Yitzhak who also was a talented orator and who also acted as our Hebrew teacher. After he had spoken with me about the importance he perceived in the trial and the psychological difficulties involved concerning its participants, he asked me if I would be prepared to take an active role. Something inside urged me, from a moral or social obligation, to agree and I volunteered to be the defence counsel. Zalman said that in his opinion I was suitable for the task and that the inevitable ferreting in the terrible events of the past wouldn't, he thought, oppress me too much.

The decision to hold the public trial spread throughout the membership like wildfire and immediately gave rise to debates and even angry arguments, accompanied by mutual accusations which, in one or two extreme cases, led to the exchange of blows. I, whose peaceful village life had now removed, somewhat, from the forefront of mind the hateful memories, returned and lived again my past in all its deepest horror. From the moment that I opened my eyes until I closed them at night, I was sunk, throughout the whole

day in recalling the war years. I felt deep within me, and with the utmost reality, that the honour and memory of every single Jew who had perished, was hanging on my success or failure in this trial. From the arguments I heard being spread about among the members, I learned, more or less, the claims of the opposition with which I would have to contend. One very strong claim said: that in his own book, '*Mein Kampf',* Hitler wrote of the need to destroy the Jewish people and in the first years of his power, proved his intentions to carry this out; that the Jews of Poland already knew of the disturbances that the Nazis carried out against the Jews of Germany, on the denial of their rights as citizens under the Nuremberg Laws and their degradation by different means, actions which later recurred in Austria and in Czechoslovakia - but that they had failed to learn from all this; their anxiety wasn't sufficient to force them to reach logical conclusions; they didn't foresee the Holocaust.

The prosecution's claim also accused the various streams of Jewish leadership with remaining dumb and tongue-tied from the first day of the German invasion of Poland - not only did the leaders not warn the people of the approaching danger facing them, but when it actually arrived they simply stood by helpless, without knowing what to do, how to lead a people totally lacking in advice, and not telling them what they should do - whether to escape or to fight for their lives. There were also accusations regarding many Jews who collaborated with the Germans and helped them in their policy of 'The Final Solution', but the main, central accusation was concerning the rank-and-file Jews themselves and how they walked to their death, like lambs to the slaughter, without any attempt to resist or fight.

My thoughts returned to the war years, but now I tried to visualize the events from the point of view of the Jewish leadership. Before me, I could clearly see the beginning of the war and the rapid conquest by the Germans of Poland, which gave no time for the Jews to escape before the onrushing enemy battalions. I remembered that same night, in Lodz, when no one considered for a moment that it would come so quickly - that within a few days only of the invasion, the Germans were standing at the gates of our city, the beaten remnants of our army nowhere to be seen, the streets of the city full of Jews, all moving eastwards out of the city, so that they shouldn't fall into the hands of the Germans. Two days prior to that, when we had come out of the shelter after an air-attack, our father said to us that if the Germans come any closer, he will not remain under their control but escape eastwards with our older brother Mottel. “There is no danger to women and children,” he said. That same anxious night, without thinking twice, he took Mottel and joined the thousands running away. But they didn't get very far: the Germans conquered vast stretches of Polish territory with the speed of lightning, caught the escapees and that same day shot my father to death together with two other Jews and three Poles. As it was with my father, so it was with thousands of other innocent people during the first days of the conquest, but everyone thought that these were victims of the first heated days of battle and that under these circumstances, soldiers tended to feel that certain things were 'permitted' that would otherwise be unthinkable. Quickly the new German authority became consolidated, a people known, for all that, as highly cultured. Life will return to normal and a man's life will no longer be forfeit for nothing but a whim.

Later, came the first period of the conquest, which was typified by the daily, non-stop humiliation and persecution. Every decree promulgated by the Germans was worse than its predecessor. Wasn't the general paralysis which gripped the Jews inevitable - given the heavy punishments meted out for the slightest infringement or disobedience, in the face of the disappearance of the Jewish leaders and Jews in general, without anyone knowing where they had disappeared to, and especially in the face of not knowing what the next day would bring forth? What were the Jews supposed to do? Declare war on Germany? During that same period, thousands of Jews, most of them young, escaped eastwards, intending to cross the Russian border. Indeed, some of them succeeded in so doing, others wandered around the border area many weeks until eventually they returned home. In everyone's heart nestled the hope that the Powers who had declared war on Germany - Great Britain and France - would rapidly defeat her and that, equally rapidly, peace would return and settle on Poland.....

My thoughts took me to Warsaw. When I arrived there the city seemed like Paradise compared to Lodz. There was no ghetto, neither was there talk of a ghetto. Jewish shops were open. The streets were as full of Jews, as they were of Poles. But it soon became Warsaw's turn. the days of the ghetto arrived in Warsaw, as well. The fight for survival got worse and worse. The money, which in the beginning, we had

supposed would suffice to sustain the family until the worst days had passed - for surely the allies would not take long to win - dwindled away and we soon had to start selling all other items and assets that could possibly find a market. The same fate fell upon everyone else. People shrank from hunger and turned into living skeletons, or became inflated like balloons - then they died. In the beginning 'Mutual Help Committees' were created in all the ghetto and whoever was able to do so gave help to the needy; later, many of those who gave, themselves joined the ranks of the needy, but for them there was no one left to help.....

Parents who sacrificed themselves for the sake of their children died of their hunger and their children now destitute, abandoned orphans, roamed the streets until they, too, died from hunger and the cold at night - during the nights I could hear the crying of these children: “I'm hungry...I'm hungry...” Nevertheless, still everyone clung to the slogan - 'Hang on!' - the Germans want to kill us? Don't give up; we won't surrender! The situation was desperately hard, but still no one dreamed for a moment that the Germans were going to exterminate us all. With that as a background, what could we do that we didn't do? What did we do, that we shouldn't have done? Of what is it possible to accuse us?

In Turobin, one of hundreds of similar Jewish towns spread throughout Poland, and to where I had escaped from the Warsaw ghetto, the heavy hand of the German wasn't felt. The approach to the town was difficult. It was far from the railway and the road and in the winter entirely cut off from the outside world. While Jews were dying in their thousands every day in Warsaw, in Turobin, the Jews continued living as they had for generations - cobblers made boots for the farmers, tailors stitched coats for them, my uncle Michael went his rounds of the villages, his stick in his hand to shoo away the farm dogs, selling, as before, haberdashery. The Jews of the town sat in their homes and continued to pray every day in their synagogue. The poverty was great, but no one died for the want of a piece of bread. From time to time the Germans demanded that the towns pay 'taxes' of this amount of gold or the other, or supply goods of such and such, skins, furs or whatever, threatening dire punishments if there were any refusals - the rich cried, and paid. On other occasions the Jews were conscripted for forced labour and at a later stage the SS came and simply shot tens of Jews for no reason, and for all that life returned to normal. No man in Turobin was able to conceive for one moment, that his days were numbered, that the Germans were standing ready to kill all the Jews without exception - is the mind of a normal man able to conceive of such an idea?

When we were already crammed under impossibly inhuman conditions in the cattle trucks, on the way to Sobibor, somebody said: Thank God! We're going eastwards! They're taking us to the Ukraine and not to Lublin, where Majdanek is; I've heard terrible stories about Majdanek - that it's a terribly cruel camp.....” and on the way, when people fainted from asphyxiation, confused to the point of fear about the future, still no one could imagine that within only hours they would kill the women and children in gas-ovens.

And in Sobibor, when the wagon doors were opened and we could at last breathe, how the Germans stunned us with their shouts and blows, how they took the women and children from our midst and disappeared with them into the forest.....and for the following few days we still hoped that they were alive, we still weren't able to believe that we were in an extermination camp. Our people, who were working in the forest, told us that they had heard the sounds of people and the crying of children coming from the forest which we interpreted as meaning that they were indeed alive - only later did we learn that all these sounds and the crying were the voices of the men engaged in burying the corpses.....

The more I thought about those days and the situation in which I found myself then, without the benefit and wisdom of hind-sight, without the knowledge of what we later came to know; the more I returned myself to the scene and relived those events, the more the idea of holding a 'trial' seemed to me a foolish act. Jews in their millions were murdered during the Holocaust for absolutely no reason whatsoever - and we're going to probe, discuss, examine and decide if their behaviour was 'appropriate'? Who is the man, today, that has the right to decide what they should or should not have done? Who can judge how a man, who is at starvation point for months on end, day and night, is supposed to behave. Who can tell how a man, on the point of crossing the threshold into the gas-chamber, or standing before the firing squad as the rifles are being raised, should or should not act. What are the measuring-rods of heroism? Which is the greater heroism - to escape to the forests, to the partisans, and fight against the Germans, at the price of

having left one's wife and children to their fate, or to walk calmly with them, hand in hand, into the gas-chamber?

From the arguments that broke out between me and other members, I became aware of a wall between us. In vain was every attempt at explanation - he who had not been there, he who had not lived those events would not understand. All my attempts to explain failed to be absorbed - was it my lack of ability in formulating my thoughts? How can I explain, that the norms and laws existing under normal conditions, just didn't exist 'there'? In the ghetto and in the camps, norms were formulated which were suitable to the conditions there pertaining, and people acted and behaved according to them. It was perfectly clear to everyone who behaved according to the 'rules' and who not - and society judged each according to his deeds.

The day of the trial came closer, but the closer it came the less people seemed inclined to want it. They were tired from the internecine quarrels and tried to have it indefinitely postponed. But to cancel a debate that we had, of ourselves, agreed to have was impossible. So, on the evening designated. We all met in the dining-room, including some invited guests. The opening speech of the prosecutor, Yitzhak, was very restrained. He particularly stressed the point of the possibilities for the Jews of the Wolin ghetto to escape from there and join partisan groups operating in the area, and the fact that very few of them had exploited those opportunities, while on the other hand he referred to incidents of Jews fighting in partisan units. When it was my turn to speak, I again felt the barrier which stood between me and the audience. I felt with all my being that what had happened to me was meaningless to them - that there was no point in telling them of that world. I couldn't find the right words, I found difficulty in deciding which of the incidents, in which I had been involved, I should tell them. Everything that came into my mind seemed, of a sudden, drained of importance and significance; my colleagues would be unconvinced by my descriptions. I gave a brief survey of the situation of the Jews in Poland at the outbreak of war, but then suddenly I jumped to another topic and hence began to move from one topic to another without bringing each one to some sort of conclusion. My instincts told me that my listeners almost certainly were not understanding me and that their attention derived from, and was evidence of, their tolerance towards me..... I described quickly, in a few words, as if being pushed to finish, the war years, and only when I got to the attempts at revolt and the escape from Sobibor, did I begin to expand my description and detail of events. Suddenly I was aware of a different atmosphere - some kind of contact had been made between me and the audience, as if I had begun to speak in another language - a language understood by all of them. On the revolt I dwelt at length, going into great detail and at the end there was a round of applause.

In spite of the fact that I received many compliments from the members, I knew that I had failed in the mission that I had placed upon myself. I was angry with myself that I had been unable to explain the suffering of the thousands - millions - nor of their exemplary behaviour at the most appallingly difficult moments and decided that from now on I wouldn't accept responsibility for tasks that were beyond my capabilities.

The trial finished. The distressed, heavy atmosphere, the result of digging deep into the barely-healed scars of that most awful of tragedies became exchanged with days of light-heartedness, for *Purim* was coming and preparations for that happy festival were already in hand. All spoke about the dance which would be held and were busy preparing their fancy-dress costumes. The Culture Committee decided that the centre-piece of the artistic performances would be a comedy by Shalom Aleichem. I was designated to play the lead role, that of the Matchmaker and although I had no idea of acting whatsoever, I acquiesced. Intensive effort and tens of rehearsals were held and at last the day of the party arrived. As was usual with our parties, many guests were invited and the hall was filled to overflowing.

After a good meal and plenty to drink, the audience heard the opening announcement from Yankeleh, the producer and then the curtain went up. I appeared on stage as the village Matchmaker, dressed in a caftan with a hat on my head, an umbrella in my hand and a pointed beard on my chin, all of which amused the audience. I stood in my appointed place, drew my watch from my inside pocket and stared at it as if waiting impatiently. I felt the expectation and tension that I had aroused in the audience. Then there was a knocking on the door. Into the room marched Paula, who was playing the role of the servant and was

supposed to say six words: “Reb Schadchan, the Groom has arrived!” But someone in the audience made Paula laugh and she collapsed in mild hysteria, which spread to the audience. The Groom, Yoash, who entered the room, saw Paula laughing and he, too, unable to control himself, also began to, laugh. Sarah, the bride, who was now supposed to make her appearance, deserted the scene in anger, running behind the flats and that was the end of our première. We refused to give up. After some time we appeared with great success before several other Kibbutzim in the area.

Life in an isolated village, in a cooperative society with members whose situation was similar to my own, had a good effect on me by filing my life with positive elements. At the same time I felt as if I was living a somewhat cloistered life, in a cage almost, a life I had chosen as if out of a fear of being exposed to the need of coping with reality. Members of the Kibbutz occasionally went to visit friends and relatives in different places in Germany. I had nowhere to go. When the secretary of the Kibbutz came to me and asked me to travel to Munich to arrange a few things at head-office, I jumped at the chance. Early in the afternoon, I left Schesslitz on the local train for Bamberg. It was stormy weather and on the whole train of four carriages were less than ten passengers. Outside, snow was falling, mixed with heavy rain and a strong wind swayed the tops of the trees in all directions, bowing them over towards the ground. Through the window, the little train seemed to be travelling in a maelstrom in the centre of a void. From Bamberg, I continued on to Nuremberg by a regular train. The strangers, in whose company I travelled, and the scenery passing before my eyes, had no effect on me. On the contrary, they created a sensation of isolation which allowed me to remain within myself, to muse and dream without interference.

Thus, in a train full of Germans, on the way to Nuremberg, I took account of myself. I thought of all the loved ones whom I had left behind in Poland. How they had flown from my heart? Syrchuk, who, at the time, I was so sure that I would never part from him, what was happening to him? And what of Semen? Will the three of us ever meet again? Harry and Ula appeared before me, Mrs. Schumanski, Maria, from the factory, Zosia of the flashing eyes and Halina, the wonderful country-girl. I loved all of them and they all loved me - but I had left them behind and now they have almost flown entirely from my mind. When I thought about the girls that I loved in Poland, I came to the conclusion that since the Liberation and until I started my journey to Germany, I had always loved somebody, and now, look, almost a year had passed by in Germany and I hadn't fallen for a single girl of all those that I knew. I had become acquainted with some and had good relationships with all of the girls in the Kibbutz, and I had even gone out with one or two of them - I also felt, sometimes, that they wanted me and were chasing me, but not one of them captured my heart.

But there was one who did, in fact, affect me deeply and even caused me some sleepless nights - Sarah, the beautiful girl who had arrived at the Kibbutz with her mother and brother - except that my friend had won her affections and I had accepted the fact in my heart and stopped trying to approach her. At the same time, every time I saw her, my heart used to go pit-a-pat. Recently I had felt that the friendship between them was lessening. Nahum had been informed that his father was alive, living in Poland and was thinking of emigrating to the United States. Consequently, Nahum was thinking of doing so, as well. As a friend of Sarah and Nahum, I had heard from them of the problems facing the two of them in wanting to emigrate to the United States. I tried to help them overcome the problems and while doing so, and without noticing it, Sarah and I came much closer to each other and now, on the train, it became clear to me that we were on the brink of something more than just friendship.

The train arrived at Nuremberg where I changed to a train to Munich and found myself in a carriage crammed with passengers. I sat between a 'healthily large' lady on one side , something over thirty, and an elderly man on the other. In the narrow space between the two facing seats, stood as many people as could get inside the compartment and there were so many, that I couldn't even move my legs. At first, I enjoyed the warmth of the bodies around me wrapping me in comfort as if I'd just climbed into bed between the blankets. Soon, however, I began to feel cramped and hemmed in from all sides. I could only move my head from side to side. Strange, nauseating smells assailed my nostrils. I was afraid to move. I felt like a block in a pyramid - if I move I'll shake the entire structure. My fatigue began to overcome me; I dropped off and woke up alternately. A few times I managed to change my position, slightly, as did my neighbour. His head drooped, now and again, onto my shoulder and the weight of his body pushed me onto my

neighbour on the other side.. In vain I pushed him back - he just sank back in my direction. In the end I fell into a deep sleep and apparently slept a long time. I woke up when the train stopped at some station or other and found myself leaning on my neighbour, my head on her shoulder. I sat up immediately, looking at her. I thought she, too, was asleep, but she was sitting with her eyes open and was looking at me affectionately. Before getting of the train she asked me if I was an '*Ausländer*' - a foreigner.

"Yes," I answered - "and a Jew".

She looked at me and invited me home for coffee. I politely refused.

When I got off the train in Munich, it was still dark. I had two addresses, one the Movement's central offices, to where I had been sent, and the other that of Bereleh, the guy from Berlin who didn't want to join the Kibbutz, but came to visit frequently and invited me to stay with him. Because it was too early to go visiting, I hung around the station, watching the city gradually wake up and come to life and eventually I went into a café. A waitress came over to me and I asked for a coffee and cake. "With fats or without fats?" I was asked, and she explained that if I wanted with fats then I had to present a ration ticket for fats. I said that I didn't have any but I was prepared to pay. She thought it over for a moment or two and said O.K. The coffee was tasteless and the cake inedible. All the events of the journey, from the time I started out in stormy weather until the moment I awoke leaning on the woman's shoulder seemed like one long nightmare. What a stupid thing I had done to agree to undertake this mission!

The central offices of the Movement were like a bee-hive, with busy people running around non-stop, from room to room. A few of the operatives, who had visited our Kibbutz and recognized me, welcomed me warmly and invited me to breakfast. I heard from them that things were happening and beginning to move, and not frozen immovably as appeared to us from the Kibbutz. Group after group was leaving Germany on its way to the southern Italian and French ports where the people boarded refugee ships sailing eastwards, trying to break the naval blockade of the British along the shores of Palestine; those ships which the British managed to trap were boarded and the refugees imprisoned in arrest-camps on Cyprus.

In order to receive the material for which I had come, I had to wait until the afternoon and because I didn't want to make the long journey home again at night-time, I decided to spend the night with my friend Bereleh. When I arrived at his home, which was in an old residential neighbourhood, all the houses of four stories, the door to his apartment was opened by an old, sour-faced lady, who told me that he hadn't arrived home yet. I went down to the street and considered whether it was worth waiting for him, or whether to make my way, after all, to the railway station. In the meantime, night fell and while I was still wandering up and down, I heard the husky voice of Bereleh calling to me from a distance. He was coming towards his house accompanying a young girl of about fourteen- or fifteen-years of age and, on seeing me ran towards me and hugged me, afterwards introducing me to the girl. The three of us went up to his rented room which was in the apartment of the old lady. The room was not large and was packed with furniture, pictures, various tools and a wide iron, nickel-plated bed.

The girl spoke to Bereleh in a whisper, so that I shouldn't hear, and seemed angry, but then they both laughed. Under the electric light, from close up she seemed older, perhaps seventeen. She was pretty but neglected, her short dress tight on her, was old and cheap, her shoes dirty and worn-at-heel. I could understand that I hadn't done wisely in coming unexpectedly and said to Bereleh that I had only come to see him and that it was my intention to start on my way home that same evening.

Bereleh burst out laughing. "You're not going anywhere! You're spending the night here. The bed is wide enough for the three of us. A moment ago I had a problem with her! Now you're going to give me problems with you?"

Bereleh's sleeping arrangements didn't seem very acceptable to me - he and I will sleep in the same bed, and between us the girl? After a short argument on the subject Bereleh suggested to me that we arrange somewhere to sleep on the floor. He prepared a meal for the three of us and placed a bottle of vodka on the table. The girl ate rapidly and consumed an impressive quantity of food, convincing me she had been

hungry for a long time. The vodka, she drank like an old trooper, while it affected me much more than usual, perhaps because my accumulated fatigue had caught up with me. When we had demolished the contents of the bottle, the three of us were quite drunk and kept breaking out into fits of laughter. Bereleh offered the bed, the girl went to the toilet while we two undressed and climbed into the bed. When the girl returned Bereleh told me to go to the toilet and come back when he called me. When I returned at his call he got up and went out of the room. The girl came towards me, her body as hot as a furnace. For a few moments the whole world was forgotten as we gave each other everything that it was possible to give. Afterwards an exhausted sleep came upon me in one fell swoop, but the girl clung to me and wouldn't let me sleep, wanting me the whole night.

When I awoke, Bereleh and the girl were both already at the table eating breakfast. The girl said to me in German: “Good morning, my love,” and the German words were like a sword jabbing in my heart. I felt like a traitor..

All the way home from Bereleh's house I was troubled by thoughts of the previous night. How could I forget everything and make love to a German girl, and with such sincerity, and feeling? I, who had denounced all my colleagues for fraternizing with the German girls, I who had sworn to myself that I would have no contact with German girls, suddenly forgot everything, laid in the arms of a German girl and took from her all the pleasures she had to offer! I tried to find within myself something by which I could justify myself - that I had been drunk, but I had to admit to myself that even though my head was not at it clearest, not one detail of the night's activities was forgotten, I remembered it all. On the other hand - I asked myself - why do I want to be different from all the others? The others, whose experiences were just like mine, or very similar, whose families the Germans had murdered - just like mine - make friends and spend time with German girls and their consciences don't bother them...or perhaps they do? One way or the other, I was ashamed of what I had done and promised myself that I would never go near a German girl again.

After the journey to Munich I went out several times on other missions for the Kibbutz, either to Munich or to other cities and even though the journeys were not easy and made me decide, at the end of each one that it was the last time, I accepted each new assignment that came along, there was something adventurous in the journeys which captured my imagination and excited me.

Spring came. Nature awoke from her enforced hibernation. People soaked up the beauty of life reinvigorated and starting anew. The heart became filled with joy and gaiety. One year after the war the people who knew from it only suffering and destruction, had built a new, energetic life, removed the ruins, and raised in their place new houses, more beautiful than the old, certain that no one will destroy them in the near future. The defeated Germans, whose country had been divided into four zones among the four Allies, had rebuilt their lives, not a little with the help of the conquerors, and they, too, also sat on their land and in their homes with nothing to fear from any man. Thousands of refugees and displaced persons, who, at the end of the war, found themselves spread across the length and breadth of Europe, returned - many of them - during the year, to their homes. Only for the surviving Jews - the few people out of the whole of European Jewry which had wiped off the face of the earth - the suffering had not yet ended. The remaining Jews sat in camps, most of them on German or Austrian land, in the midst of their murderers, not far from those same concentration camps in which they had spent the war years, living in sub-human conditions, with no privacy, without the possibility of even beginning to rebuild their lives, waiting for the day when they could go to Palestine.

But the British had locked the gates of Palestine in our faces. Their great wartime fleet had just one mission - stop the refugee ships from getting to the shores of Palestine. And on the British Intelligence Service was laid a new mission - to discover when and from where the next refugee ship was going to sail.

The heavy hand of the British and their banishment of the refugees whom they managed to catch, to camps on Cyprus, deterred us not one little bit. We didn't have anything to lose. We were determined to fight to the end. The remainders of the refugees, instead of sitting in camps in Germany, moved eastwards - to the Cyprus camps, where the conditions were far worse than in the German camps and there, the

refugees became, overnight, prisoners of the army of Great Britain and under their control.

In the Kibbutz, we continued to care for our livestock and tend the fields. The emissaries from Palestine continued to teach us Hebrew songs and tell us about life in Palestine, while at the same time, our preparations for immigration to the country increased in tempo. We acquired machines and equipment for our carpentry - and welding shops, which we would open on the Kibbutz in Palestine, and with money that we had earned with the sweat of our brow we had clothes made for our members, and suitable boots for heavy farm-work. It all made us feel that our day was really getting closer.

My friendship with Sarah rapidly strengthened and we soon became lovers. Our nights were insatiable and we began to dream about raising a family in Palestine. For the first time in my life I felt that I was loved by a girl who was devoting all her attention to me, constantly. It was nice to come home and to discover the signs of her affection - a few flowers in a cup, clean laundry, neatly ironed and folded in a pile on the bed, the shirts without buttons missing, all my socks darned. But Sarah, from the moment that she was all mine, demanded that I should be all hers and that, I discovered in the wonderful heady days of love, meant that suddenly, I began to feel that I was losing my freedom - I began to feel apart from my friends, I stopped taking part in all the different activities that I loved so much and every evening, after dinner, Sarah and I would leave the dining-room, in order to be alone together. But I wanted both love and freedom. I loved the relationships that I had with so many people, I wanted to be involved in everything. Time after time, I tried to break down the very walls that I had myself had willingly erected but always at the cost of friction. One evening, in the dining-room, when I was sitting playing a game of chess, Sarah came over to me and suggested that we go and I said to her:

“Wait just a few minutes the game will be over.” But I was so deeply involved in the game that time passed without me noticing it. Sarah came and reminded me that she was waiting and again I said “Just a few minutes more” - and again I lost myself in the game. Her patience sorely tried, Sarah left the dining-room angry. When I finished the game I rushed to our room and found her upset and disappointed about what had happened. It took me many hours to pacify her and for the two of us to find happiness in each others' arms.

During one of our enchanted evenings, when we were sitting together on a bench, under a tree, Sarah told me about her family. Their town of Brysk, held at first by the Germans, was quickly transferred to the Russians, with the division of Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union. Sarah's father, a Zionist leader, was imprisoned by the KGB, with other Jewish leaders, both Zionist and non-Zionist, and all of them were sent to some place or other. After a short time the Russians gathered the families of the prisoners together and sent them all to Siberia , where they were settled in a lonely isolated village, knowing nothing of the whereabouts of their men-folk. After two years, all the men, except one, whose disappeared without trace and may have been killed in the Holocaust, were released and rejoined their families. A short time later the men were again imprisoned and this time a few of the women. At the end of the war, the families were allowed to leave Russia and return to their homes as repatriated Poles.

I, and another friend, Eliezer, were chosen to attend a seminar for leaders of the Movement in M?nchberg. I was pleased to have been chosen. I couldn't give up the opportunity, but the separation from Sarah was difficult. We were both tense and sad as if we would never see each other again.

The seminar was held by soldiers of 'The Brigade', Zvi Gershoni, from Kibbutz Nir-Am and the poet, Micha'el Deshah, who spread among us all a warm atmosphere of friendship, and several other lecturers and emissaries, all of whom gave us extensive explanations on the history and ideology of Zionism, in all its aspects. In addition to this we also made surveys and trips of various kinds during which we learned to manage in open country and improve our fitness as well. When I returned from the seminar my meeting with Sarah was one of great happiness - and again we spent wonderful days together, during which our love for each other reached new heights.

But not for long. Quite quickly, I was designated, together with another friend, Anschel, to travel to the town of Buchholz, in the British zone - near the Dutch border - where there was a transit camp for holders of visas to enter Palestine. The camp also functioned as a transit and inspection camp for equipment and

other effects sent to Palestine. We had been told that our task there will be to help in the dispatch of equipment from the Kibbutz and its safe conveyance through the various procedures of inspection by the British. I didn't know exactly what it was that we could do to help, but I didn't ask questions; we were told that 'somebody' there would tell us what to do and that same person would tell us when we can return home.

Near Buchholz stood a British army camp and over the gate was hung a large sign saying: “Palestine Transit Camp”. In the compound were many warehouses and offices. In a small adjacent camp, were some huts in which dwelt the Jews who were waiting for their turn to go to Palestine. We found the man to whom we had been directed and he bunked us down there. The man questioned us rather carefully as to who we were and then told us that from then on we would be porters and work under his orders. I explained to him that we had come to send our equipment to Palestine and he replied that he knew perfectly well why we were there but our dispatch date of our equipment hadn't yet arrived and in the meantime we had to work as porters. If not, the British would employ Germans and that would not be very desirable because the work was very important, and the less said the better.

The atmosphere in the camp was tense and formal. There were British all over the place and I had the feeling that we were being constantly watched and followed. Even though I wasn't alone there, I felt alone and strange. The conditions were terrible, the food awful and there was little of it into the bargain, maize-bread that gave us nausea. I missed Sarah, the Kibbutz and its happy atmosphere, the different activities, the members, the good meals. In the evenings, I went crazy missing Sarah and I had nothing to read and night and couldn't fall asleep.

Twice a week, British officers came into the camp and demanded that we open packing-cases so that they could inspect the contents. Goods which had been inspected were placed at the other side of the warehouse, beyond a partition, which separated the goods from equipment which had not yet been inspected. Later, the goods were loaded onto trucks. It quickly became clear to us that we were involved in a smuggling operation for the 'Hagannah', at the head of which was the man in charge of us, although we didn't know exactly what was involved. Our man had learned well the method of checking used by the British and thus, while they thought that they were checking the goods according to their own free choice, they were, in fact checking the goods that we wanted them to check. We learned to recognize the slightest hint that our chap gave us to indicate which packing-case to present and which to move aside. Our chap told us that we were indeed engaged in smuggling, for the sake of our community in Palestine and at the end of a successful day would bring us good cigarettes and sometimes we would raise a self-congratulatory glass of 'Le-Ha'im' in honour of our comrades in Palestine, to the success of the 'Hagannah', her strike units - the 'Palmach' - and to the success of our work.

One evening our man took us to his room where he told us that he wanted to talk to us on a secret matter. “Up until now,” he said, “you've been a great help in smuggling weapons for the defence of our people in Palestine and I'm very satisfied with your work. It's most important that you do what you're told without asking questions. Up to now, we've been smuggling arms on a small scale, because we didn't want to jeopardize this important route. But the situation in Palestine is getting difficult; the struggle between us, and the British and the Arabs is getting worse from day to day and we just haven't got enough good weapons. Every weapon that we manage to get to Palestine increases the strength of the Jewish community. Therefore, it has been decided to transfer as a matter of urgency a relatively large shipment. I have already planned how to do it and I need your help. But first, I have to warn you that there is a certain amount of risk involved in this, to all of us. If we are caught by the British we are quite likely to find ourselves in prison. So you have to decide if you want to help, or not.”

Silence fell in the room. I lit a cigarette to gain a bit of time. I'd 'dropped myself right in it'. I'd read somewhere, that the British send their prisoners to prisons on isolated islands somewhere. Instead of getting to Palestine, I might well find myself stuck somewhere in a jungle on a forgotten island off the coast of Africa.....I felt a shudder run through my body. Why did this have to happen to me? But on the other hand, how can I refuse? They chose us for the job and trusted us to do everything we had to. Could I really return to the Kibbutz and say: “I've come back because I was afraid to do what they asked.”?

I looked at Anschel. His face was a study in agony, as if he had been attacked by severe stomach pains. His eyes were gazing at me appealingly, begging for help. I knew him well. I knew he would follow my lead. Eventually, after a long silence, which could no longer be borne, I said: “I agree.” Anschel looked at me and said, “So do I.”

> “Excellent,” said the man, “I knew you would.”

The tension disappeared immediately. Self-confidence replaced the fear I had felt only moments ago. We smiled at each other. Our commander explained his plan to us in detail: we have to transfer several crates of agricultural equipment, but inside will be hidden some arms for the 'Hagannah'. “On Sunday,” he said, “the warehouses are closed. The British are not here, only one soldier remains on guard duty for the warehouses and offices. Saturday night, we'll sneak into the warehouse; that's not difficult, I've already done it a couple of times. We'll get in through a window which will not be closed. We won't do anything at night because it's very quiet and the slightest sound will be deafening. We'll wait until morning and then we'll open up part of the partition between the two sides of the warehouse, move our packing-cases over to the other side and mix them up with those that have already been checked, put up the partition again - and in the evening, under cover of darkness, we'll get out. Any questions?”

Anschel asked what would happen in the British caught us. The man smiled and said:

> “It'll be bad. You don't know much, in any case, because you didn't ask questions, so you won't be able to tell much. Tell them that you don't know anything. You worked with me, under my orders and you did whatever I told you to do....I hope that there won't be trouble. Today's Friday. We'll start tomorrow evening.”

We went back to our rooms. Through the thin wall I heard our neighbours in the next room making *Kiddush* for Friday evening, to a tune that was familiar to me; it reminded me of the *Kiddush* that my father used to make. I remembered the Friday evenings at home in Lodz, all of us round the laid table. Only now did I sense, with all my being, the same holy atmosphere which used to envelope all of us then, the feeling of the Divine Presence hovering above us. I saw my mother and father, radiating happiness; I wanted to hold the mental picture for ever, that it shouldn't disappear, to experience more and more that happiness flooding me, but my thoughts led me on a journey of misery and pain through the war years. My efforts to return to the mental picture with the warmth of those Friday evenings, were in vain. My memories drowned me in the abysmal depths of the Holocaust. So little time had, in fact passed since these things had happened and yet, for all that, I had some difficulty in believing that it all really had been true - and how much more impossible to believe that I am the only one remaining alive; and I can't understand how I am able to go on living on my own, alone, without anyone from my family. Apparently I simply don't understand anything of the nature or essential quality of life.

My thoughts quickly jumped to what was due to happen tomorrow evening and my heart began to pound. Fear stole into my heart, that the operation would fail and I already saw myself caught by the British and sent to one of their colonies, to disappear there into a prison.

The following evening, we went to the warehouse. We stopped near the fence close to our objective, where our commander told us to lie down. There was an opening in the fence which he had apparently prepared in advance, sometime. We heard the measured footsteps of the guard. When we saw him getting further away, our commander told us to crawl through the opening and get into the warehouse through the window. A minute later I was inside. Anschel came after me and last of all our commander. We arranged ourselves a place among the packing-cases and I was pleased that, in the darkness, no one could see my pale face. Outside I could hear the soldier pacing up and down. Slowly, as time wore on, the voices from outside became less and quieter until eventually, I fell asleep.

The world awoke. In spite of it being Sunday, we heard all sorts of noises from outside getting stronger and louder - the noise of motors and equipment, the crying of a baby, the singing of children, all mixed up together into a ceaseless, cacophony of sound.

We started work. Two worked and one kept watch. We dismantled the ply-wood which was nailed to the wooden framework of the partition and then some of the members of the framework itself by removing some of the screws and nails holding it together. Some of the crews came out very easily, others were more stubborn and remained embedded deep in the wood. We couldn't use a hammer, of course, so we dug round the heads of the crews with a knife until we had a pit sufficient to allow us to grab the screw with pliers and thus we withdrew them. We collected every little shaving that fell, so as to leave no traces that something untoward had been happening.

Time flew passed. After a few hours work, we had managed to remove part of the partition and could move whatever we wanted from one place to the other. The hard work, which continued without let-up was carried out in total silence with every effort on our part to make no noise whatsoever. We transferred all 'our' packing-cases and placed them in position between those that had already been examined. Then began the work of rebuilding and replacing the partition. Only when we had finished did we realize that we had worked throughout the whole day without a break and without noticing the passage of time. Tired and hungry, we got out as we had entered, under cover of darkness, parted from our commander and returned to our room.

I fell asleep with the wonderful feeling that I had done something for our country.

During the night, I dreamt that Anschel and I were working in the warehouse. All around us are many British. One of the officers calls to me and orders me to open one of the packing-cases. I am afraid that he will find some weapons inside and look round for some way of escape. While the British are talking among themselves I jump through a window, but I can't find the opening in the fence. I run round the back of the warehouse and I see that I am in Sobibor, next to the Ukrainians' barracks. I hide so that the Ukrainians won't see me, because they know me and will surely ask me where I had been. I can't understand what I'm doing in Sobibor. It is clear to me that I have to get out and I run into the camp. The air is filled with smoke. I can smell the stink of cremated bodies. I see friends from the Kibbutz digging a pit and ask myself if the Germans succeeded in bringing them as well to Sobibor. I run, and suddenly find myself next to the gas-chambers. I turn right and run straight to the fence. There, Wagner appears in front of me, as if he had sprung up out of the ground. Seeing him, I know that it's all over. All my strength is gone. I stand petrified, my legs fail me. I can't move from the spot. Wagner stands in front of me, his eyes flashing with anger. With a slow movement, he draws his pistol from its holster and cocks it. I want to run but I can't move. I want to tell Wagner that the Germans have been beaten, that the war is over, that his own end is near and will not be easy for him, but I can't make a sound. I see how he aims the pistol at me and shoots.....

At that moment I awoke, my heart going like a trip-hammer. I was trembling like a leaf. I sat up in bed and looked round me to assure myself that I was not in Sobibor. That I am alive....Like on the other previous occasions, I was afraid to fall asleep in case I dreamt of Sobibor again. The dream clouded my mind. Even though I knew it was only a dream, it had a tremendously powerful effect on me. The images of the dream wouldn't leave me. Again, I interpreted them as coming to remind me that I 'belong there'; my place is among the dead; I survived by a mistake. I was again attacked by a sense of shame that I was alive while all the others were dead, a feeling that I had betrayed them. Again I was maddened by doubts on the point of living. I imagined that death was waiting for me just around the corner.

One morning I was woken up by someone knocking on the door. At the door was Schmelke, the German driver of the Kibbutz. He told me that that very evening the whole Kibbutz was leaving Schesslitz and he had been sent especially to us, at Buchholz, to take us back to Schesslitz immediately. He had driven all night to get here and asked to sleep - just for an hour, because we had to start on the long way back, otherwise we'd arrive there too late and they would all have left without us.

Our joy knew no bounds. The day we had longed for had at last arrived - the day that we shake the dust of German soil off our feet in order to travel to Palestine.

We ran to tell the our 'Hagannah' commander that we were leaving. He thanked us for our work and hoped that we would meet soon in Palestine. Schmalker put his foot down and the little antiquated Kibbutz car

galloped forward while all the while the driver exhorted it, in a coaxing voice, as one tries to convince a child to behave nicely, so that we should get to the Kibbutz in time. Even so, the day was hot - and of course we had to stop a few times to let the motor or the wheels cool down a bit.

We drove into the Kibbutz yard late in the evening but as we got out of the car we heard shouts of "They've arrived! They're here!" and afterwards a general shout of pleasure from everyone, who fell on us in greetings, hugs and kisses. It was a wonderful feeling to return home, to people who were in your heart. I went into the dining-room, accompanied by the group, my eyes searching for Sarah and not seeing her. Suddenly she appeared in the doorway of the kitchen. She glanced at me and disappeared again inside the kitchen as quickly as she had appeared. I slipped through all the people surrounding me, rushed into the kitchen and saw Sarah, standing by the window with tears in her eyes. I held her tightly and we stood like that for a few minutes, without moving, pain and happiness flooding every fibre of our two beings and uniting us as one. The colour returned to her cheeks, her faced relaxed and a smile appeared in the corners of her eyes. I was captivated by the expression on her face and forgot the rest of the world, but Sarah herself, brought me back to reality, reminding me that in a very short while we were leaving the village; she had already packed all my things in the kit-bag, all my clothes laundered and ironed. She sat me and Anschel at the table and placed a wonderful meal in front of us - the remains of the banquet which the members had enjoyed as a final meal in the village, before the journey, slaughtering all the last chickens in the coop and emptying the food larders of everything that remained. At Buchholz, we hadn't had one good meal.

We were soon called, and told to board the trucks which were waiting for us. We were all dressed in dark green and wearing identical boots, everyone with his ruck-sack on his back. The convoy moved out to the groaning of the engines which shattered peace and stillness of the village. As we had arrived at Schesslitz at night, while the village slept, so we were leaving - it was night and in the main street not a soul was seen. Only Rocksi, our dog, ran alongside us for a long way, before giving up.

A period of calm, a period of spiritual peace, of no worry, of release from the nightmares of the past and anxiety of the future, of an unashamed return to the embrace of childhood had flown and ended. The Kibbutz at Schesslitz had been like a convalescent home after a hard illness, a way-station on the approaches to the struggles of the new life awaiting us. Now we knew that this was not an excursion we were commencing, but that the way ahead would be hard, long and even sown with dangers. We knew that life in Palestine will be difficult. But the overpowering desire to be and to live in Palestine strengthened us, our faith in the justness of our cause, the fact that we were convinced that we had no other way to go - all these strengthened our confidence that no obstacle will stop us from getting to Palestine.

« Previous Page Table of Contents Next Page »

The Last of the Freibergs Yizkor Book Project JewishGen Home Page

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