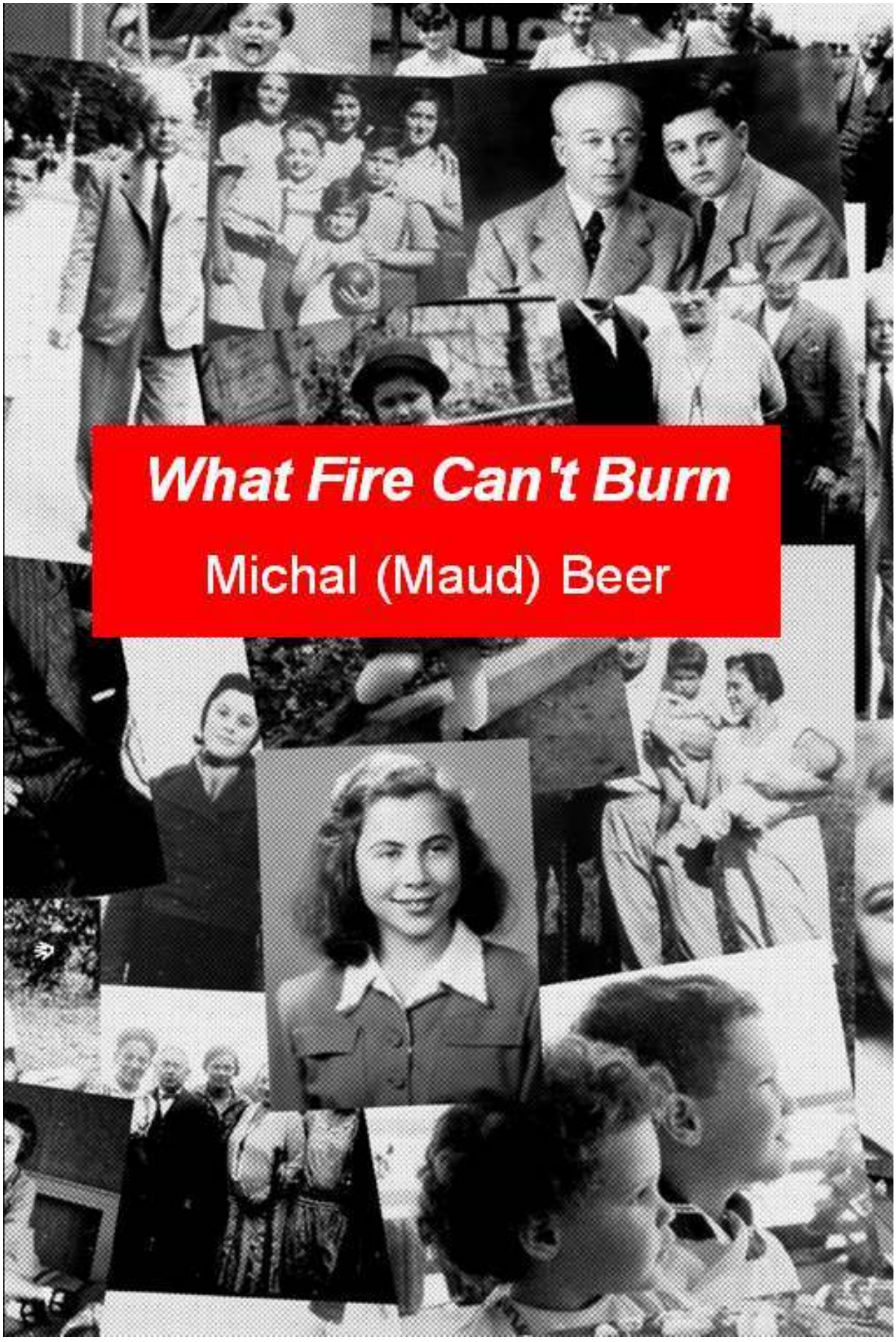

What Fire Can't Burn
Michal (Maud) Beer

What Fire Can't Burn

In memory of my dear ones who

perished in the Holocaust,

To my father, grandmother, grandfather,

all my relatives, my childhood friends,

and the members of the Jewish community in Prostejov which no longer exists.

I have known hunger, cold and death.
Have been deprived of all human rights,
have known boundless pain.
I have been driven from my home,
have lost my family,
all my friends - our community.

I'm thankful for every good day,
am grateful that I sleep in my own bed,
that I have good food and am satiated.
That I'm a free person in my own land.

How beautiful the sea,
how good the air!

Every drop of precious water is dear to me,
it hurts when the streets aren't clean,
when people aren't kind.

I'm afraid that we'll lose again
everything that seems so self-evident
to our children and grandchildren.

Maud Beer.

A Life Full of Dramatic Events

Many years have passed – I am getting old. I could have taken my memories to the grave with me – with the dry flowers, the letters and the photographs. Yet, like any human being I would like to ensure a little bit of eternity for myself and for those whom I love … the people who were dear and close to me, about whom I wrote - for myself, for my family, my friends, the members of my community, who were annihilated and who left this life long ago. It was not easy to create a continuous book from all the snippets and the notes that I have written over the course of thirty years. I hesitated, but life has taught me, that those who don't dare, lose, and those who dare, have a little bit to hope for – in my case that I and those whom I love will have a bit of eternity. I have a good, almost photographic memory, and a lot of incidents that I witnessed are engraved in my mind. The first motivation to put my memories down on paper arose in 1977 when I was looking forward to becoming a grandmother for the first time. I started writing, in Hebrew of course; throughout the years I translated those writings into English with the help of my husband Shimon. After the revolution in Czechoslovakia in 1989, I translated them into Czech. Czech is still my strongest language, although my mother tongue is German. As I matured and became older, it became more and more important to me to record my memories, the desire came up on holidays, birthdays or other such occasions. I mainly wrote about the time of the Holocaust that changed our lives completely. One of my purposes in writing this book was to commemorate my childhood friends and some members of the Prostejov Jewish community, who perished under the Nazi regime. Mother, Karmela and I, the three of us stayed in Ghetto Theresienstadt until the end of the war. Miraculously, we returned from the concentration camp: my mother, my younger sister Karmela and I. The two of us were the only Jewish children from Prostejov who survived. Children from mixed marriages survived – the Nazi laws applying to them were different from the ones applying to us. A few older girls survived too, but they were no longer children.

My parents gave me the name Maud. They chose an English name because Israel was then a British Mandate, and my parents were hoping and assuming, that I would live in that country. I was not happy about my parents' choice – I do not like to stand out, to be different.

In 1949 I immigrated to Israel; at the registration I was asked what my Hebrew name was. I knew that my Hebrew name was Sarah, but I wanted to start my new life in my beloved land of Israel with a young and modern name. I chose the name Michal (King Saul's daughter in the Bible). For family members and those who knew me before I moved to Israel - in Prostejov, in Czechoslovakia - I am still Maud, for those who got to know me in Israel, I am Michal.

My parents – Kaethe and Fritz Steckelmacher

My Credo

Instead of sitting under the blow dryer at the hairdresser's once a week, instead of lying on the cosmetician's couch, instead of going everywhere by car – I work out, swim, walk. I try to eat healthy food, to get as much sleep as I need. I watch my health. To this day I do not have a single false tooth in my mouth. I want to be healthy from the inside; I don't think that there is any point in putting color on my face. It may sound funny, but it seems dishonest to me. Because of the way I live, I feel good and I don't suffer from any pain. I don't think that clothes are meant to adorn me; their purpose is to protect me from cold, heat, sun, wind and water. They have to be comfortable and allow me free movement. My shoes are comfortable, they don't ruin my feet and my back, and don't make me lose my balance. I am unwilling to throw away a piece of clothing that I like, that I am used to, just because somebody in Hollywood or in Paris has decided on a new fashion. Comfort is important to me; I do not want to depend on a hairdresser, on cosmetics, without which so many women cannot move one step. I would not want to be so dependent on those things, that I would be completely different without them. I once asked my husband which dress suited me better; he replied that he loved me without clothes; I don't need a bigger compliment. I was told that my grandchildren would love me if I wore beautiful clothes and put on makeup, yet I swim with my grandchildren, dive with them and go on the slide with them. I think that makes them happier than if I were sitting on the couch, gorgeous and beautiful, taking care not to smear my lipstick, not to wrinkle my clothes.

Reading Books

When I was a little girl and my sister was a baby, we used to go to one of the beautiful public parks in our town with our nanny. On the way I asked her what was written on the signs of shops and banks; so I taught myself how to read even before I went to school. Daily reading has accompanied me throughout my long life. At home I had books that I read over and over again. I was registered at the library and when I was twelve, my parents allowed me to read adults' books, books that they read themselves. My parents mainly read German and English; they hardly read Czech. I on the other hand, have read almost only Czech. Even in Ghetto Theresienstadt, under the most difficult conditions, as one of twenty-four girls in one room, lights out

at eight or nine, suffering from hunger, and haunted by fear when transports were dispatched, I read. In Theresienstadt I succeeded in reading Madame Curie, Microbe Hunters and other books by Paul de Kruif about medicine, which I have been interested in all my life. Since I only completed five years of elementary school, I was unable to learn more about medicine, beyond a medical secretaries' course that I attended when I was forty-seven years old and my first grandchild was on the way.

When I arrived in Israel at the age of twenty, I needed to decide, what language would I choose to read. My companions in Kibbutz Ginegar had brought books in Czech and Slovakian with them from the Diaspora. One of the kibbutz members, Yehudit Salomon, whom I worked with in the vegetable garden, allowed me to read books in German from her large library; but I did not like to read in that language! Later I met my future husband Shimon, and with his help I began reading English. At first, Shimon was my walking dictionary, but after less than a year I was reading English without any help. American books (paperbacks) were abundant and cheap in Israel; Shimon's English was perfect and his taste exquisite.

When he went to the city, he brought back books, mostly second hand (that was the only luxury we allowed ourselves). Thanks to Shimon, I read the best of English, American, South African and Australian literature for more than sixty years. In this way I was able to supplement my abruptly curtailed education.

Being a Jew in the Czech Republic

I feel the need to write about a sensitive subject; the phenomenon of anti-Semitism was relatively moderate in Bohemia and Moravia. But I always felt foreign – as though I did not belong there. We were strangers, our customs were different, our religion was different and even our looks were different. Even after 2,000 years, the Christians blamed us Jews for crucifying Jesus – although it is known, that crucifixion was never a Jewish custom. It was the Romans who crucified their enemies and opponents. The Jews punished criminals by exiling them to the desert or stoning.

In the course of my journeys through Europe I once stayed in a monastery. On the wall in my room was a crucified Jesus. I feel close to him, he is a son of my people; he is surely closer to me than to the Christians. Jesus was born in Nazareth, the town which I saw from my window in Beitlehem Hagalilit, where I lived for many

years and where my children were born. Jesus died in Jerusalem, my son lives there with his wife and my three grandchildren; I visit them often.

Our neighbors in the Diaspora did not like us, because our financial situation was often better than theirs; and they ignored the fact that the Jews had played an important role in the financial development of most of the places where they resided. They resented the fact that we had German names. In the Middle Ages, our forefathers had Hebrew names like Yakov Ben-Avraham. In 1787 Kaiser Josef II ordered the Jews to assume German names.

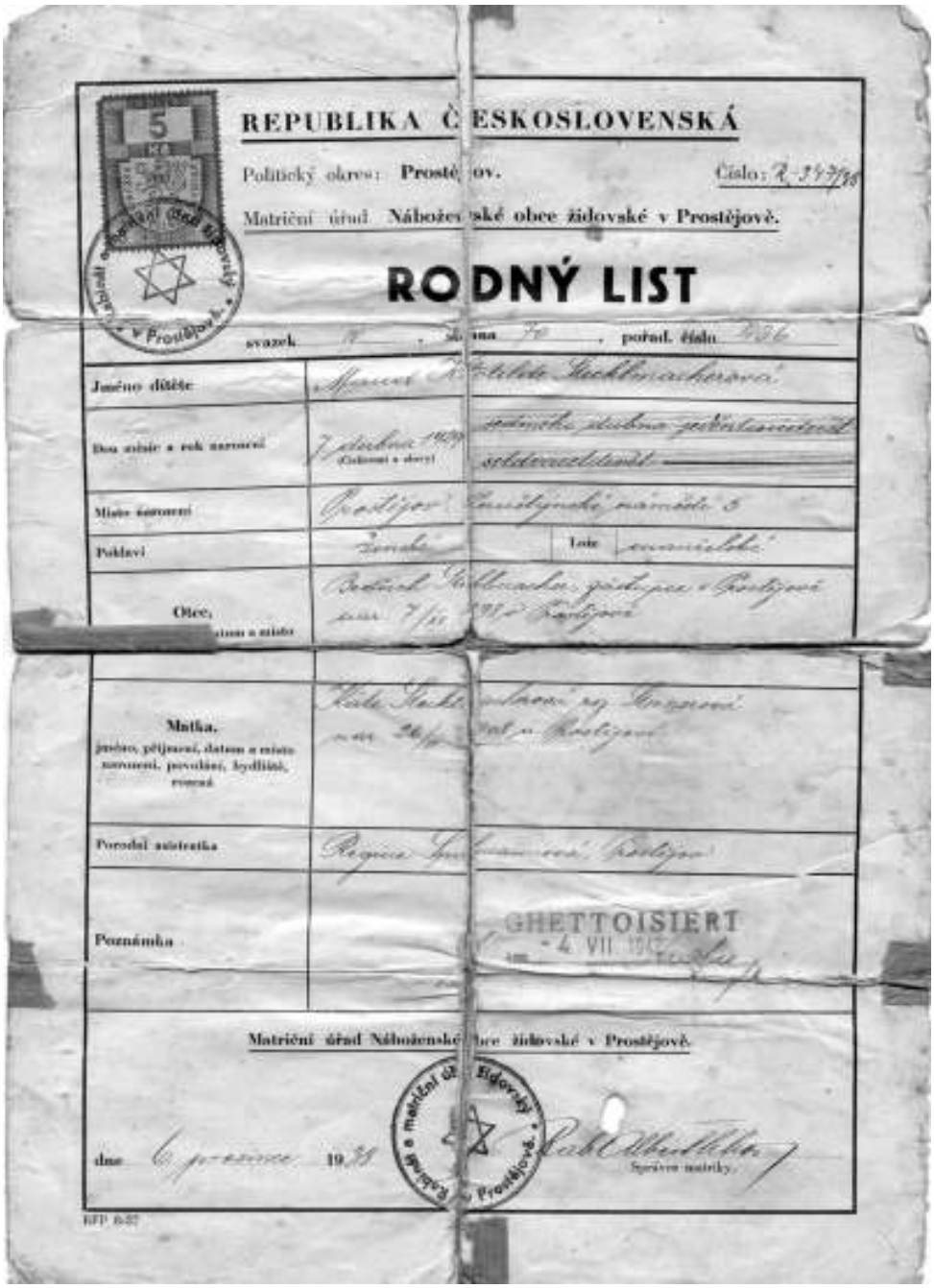
Generations of Jews who were born in Bohemia or Moravia (which were then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), did not feel the need to speak Czech like the Czechs. My mother tongue was German. When I was five years old, before I started going to school, my parents hired a Czech nanny for the first time, so that I would learn Czech from her. At first I refused, but I learned Czech quickly and from then on I behaved like all the Jewish children and youngsters in Czechoslovakia: We always answered our parents in Czech when they spoke in German to us.

In first grade during our religious lessons we learnt the Hebrew alphabet and to read Hebrew prayers. We had German lessons at school – in the third or fourth grade we learned the German script with its letters that sometimes resemble strange and complicated drawings. When I was eight years old I began learning English in private lessons with my mother's cousin Litzi. I am thankful, that my parents made this possible for me; although at that time, of course, I would have preferred to play and to read instead of learning English.

Although German is my mother tongue, I am still more fluent in Czech. During my visits in the Czech Republic, it is hardly noticeable that I left the country about sixty years ago!

My Birth Town Prostejov

I was born in 1929 in Prostejov in Moravia. The city's nickname – "Jerusalem of Hana" (Hana is the region), apparently stems from the presence of its magnificent Jewish community. As in many European cities, the "Jewish streets" of Prostejov were in the center of the town - a sign that our forefathers had settled in the city soon after its establishment.



REPUBLIKA Č ESKOSLOVENSKÁ

Politický okres: Prostě ov. Číslo: R-

Matriční úřad Náboženské obce židovské v Prostějově.

RODNÝ LIST

svazek , strana , pořad. číslo

Jméno dítěte

Den, místo a rok narození

Místo narození

Pohlaví

Otec.

Matka.

Porodní ústavka

Poznámka

GHETTOISIERT

Matriční úřad Náboženské obce židovské v Prostějově.

dne

Správce matriky.

Maud's (Michal) birth certificate, stamped with a Star of David indicating the religion of the child.

I was aware of the fact that I was Jewish from a very young age, even though my family was not religious; they had a strong Jewish awareness and they were Zionist. My grandfathers and my father were members of B'nai B'rith (an organization of Jewish men).

My grandmother and my mother were members of WIZO (Women's Zionist Organization). Despite the fact that we did not maintain most of the Jewish traditions, I still remember our holidays, especially the high holidays – Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur – when, together with the entire community, we went to the beautiful big synagogue. On Simchat Torah, our young men paraded with blue and white flags with the Star of David and esteemed members of our Kehilah danced with the Torah scrolls; Tu Bishvat (the festivals of the trees) was celebrated with fruit from the Land of Israel. Among my first books were the "Stories of the Bible" by Joachim Prinz, edited for children, through them I experienced the Bible and the Land of Israel from the youngest age. From age four I exercised at the Maccabi (Jewish sports movement) sports club at our community center.

At the girls' school I was the only Jewish pupil in my class. I was different from the rest of the girls: my name and my mother tongue, which was German and not Czech like the other girls. Among all the blond Slavic girls I looked quite dark. It was obvious that my parents' financial situation and their cultural level were higher. I surprised my first grade teacher when she asked us, what we would want to be when we grow up. I answered: "A farmer in Palestine." When I was seven years old I joined the Zionist youth movement T'helet Lavan (blue-white).

A group of the T'helet Lavan movement in Prostejov in 1940.

From left to right standing: Hana Weil, Emil Altar, Eva Jahoda, Erna Hollaender. From left to right sitting: Joshko Fraenkel (survived), Mania Sperber, Yehudit Fuchs, Dita Heilig (survived), Edith Pasternak.

My T'helet Lavan group.

From left to right standing: Lydia Banda, Ruth Weiss, Ruth Oppenheimer (survived).

From left to right sitting: Eva Fuhrmann, our leader, Dita Heilig (survived) and me.

In the youth movement and in the Jewish religion lessons I met Jewish children. My friends were almost all Jewish. We sang Hebrew songs, learned to read Hebrew, discussed and learned about the Land of Israel and what life was like there.

We listened to our leader in awe, when she told us about the Spanish Inquisition. We had no idea what awaited us in the near future.

The Nazi Occupation

I remember the 15th of March 1939, the day the German army occupied Czechoslovakia. The city was full of German soldiers; some of them even arrived on motorbikes. And so it started, first with minor prohibitions. At the entrance of the public parks were signs 'Entrance prohibited to Jews and dogs'.

We could no longer enjoy the public park, in which I had spent so much time with our nanny and my little sister. It was forbidden to enter the movie theater, the café, the city swimming pool; it was forbidden to skate on the public ice-skating rink, to use public transport.

We were lucky that our community had the Maccabi sports ground outside the town. Most of the Jewish parents bought their children bicycles so that we could ride out there and enjoy what was still allowed. During the winter, the warden sprinkled water on the tennis court; it froze up – now we could ice-skate on it. We played ping-pong and other ball games. We felt good because we were among ourselves, all Jews.

Maud and Ruth at the Maccabi sports ground 1940

We were no longer allowed to use the public transport – so we used our bicycles.

From 1940, we, the Jewish children, were not allowed to attend public schools. In the big cities, in Prague, Brno and Ostrava, they had Jewish schools, so that no problem was involved there. We too, the Prostejov Jewish children, did not have

much time to enjoy our forced vacation. The Jewish community organized lessons for us. After the Germans took the synagogue and the Community center from us, our lessons were held in the small old school house, in which my grandfather had learned when he was a child. Later the Germans also prohibited these lessons in the old school house. We then learned in small groups at pupil's homes; five pupils and a teacher; in compliance with the orders given by the Nazis. The quality of the teaching in these groups was very high. We had amazing teachers, people with excellent education like doctors and professors who had been expelled from their work places and students who had been expelled from the universities. It was wonderful to learn in this way with such distinguished teachers! The lessons became a pleasure, and we enjoyed and loved learning!

In 1941 we were forced to wear the yellow Star of David – I was proud of it. Slanderous writings were published against us, caricatures of ugly Jews and more prohibitions: We were forbidden to leave the city bounds, or to leave our houses after 8 pm. We were prohibited from walking in certain streets and speaking to non-Jews. Jews were forbidden to walk on the sidewalk and to leave their houses on Sundays.

Like most Jews we were ordered to leave our beautiful, big house and move into a small building with two other Jewish families. The businesses of my grandfather and my father were confiscated; the Germans froze our accounts at the bank, we were ordered to hand in our radio, jewelry, warm clothes, furs (for the Germans in Russia), carpets and valuables. We, the children, had to hand in our bicycles as well. We began to feel that there was a shortage of food (not yet severe). Men and young people were sent to labor camps, and rumors came from other cities that transports were sent to concentration camps. In the summer of 1942, the Czech underground

movement assassinated Reinhard Heydrich. This act was followed by numerous prohibitions and commands for all citizens but especially for us, the Jews.

Emigrants and immigration to Palestine and other places

I want to write about the people, members of my community, who left before the Second World War broke out, between 1938 and 1940. There were families who had the opportunity to immigrate to Palestine; there were those who managed to escape to the United States, to England and to Chile.

The entire Sborowitz family was saved in this way.

The following families received immigration certificates to Palestine from the British government:

Lawyer, Judr. Max Lasus, his wife and their children Reuven and Hana.

Lawyer, Judr. Kleiner, his wife and their daughters Stella and Miriam.

Lawyer, Judr. Loeff, his wife and their sons Erwin (Israel) and Jiri.

Jiri returned to Prostejov after the war, with his parents, and lives there till today. He is the only Jew living in Prostejov now.

The pediatrician, Mudr. Huber, his wife and their sons Pavel and Stephan.

The dentist, Mudr. Platschek, his wife and their daughters Greta and Ruth.

Max Sborowitz, his wife and their children Karel, Rosa and Kaethe.

Liesel Frank married the lawyer Judr. Eisinger. They immigrated to Israel with their baby son Peter Michael.

Under the auspices of the Youth Immigration organization, the following people left for Israel:

Max Bleichfeld, Pavel Bobash, Oskar Boehm, Erwin Gruenhut, Eva and Laci Kemeny, Ruth Suesskind, Tzinka Stern, Ella Sternberg, Greta Neumann, Hana Deutsch, Lotte Pershak, Mimi Kobler, Jenka Saelzer, Shishi Yurman, Pinchas Mueller, Peter Sonnenmark.

Albert Sternberg succeeded in escaping to England. Esthi Fischer-Lustig, ten years old also went to England on one of Nicholas Winton's Kindertransport trains.

The illegal ship on which Hans Grabscheid sailed to Palestine, ended up on Mauritius – the British stopped the ship and deported the immigrants to that distant island. The young couple Anni and Bruno Greif and Steffi Manuel and her husband Ero Huppert emigrated to Palestine. Esther Mandl married Mr. Nachman, and they succeeded in escaping to Chile. The Hechts escaped to England with their son Ernst. The families of Fritz, Hans and Bruno Sborowitz with their wives and their children, Ruth, Gusta, Pavel, Tzili and Meli escaped to America, mainly to South America. Despite the European Jews' predicament, the United States only issued a very few immigration licenses.

The Holitschers and their son Heinz, who was my best friend when we were small children, escaped to Hungary. The father and son were both killed. When I was sent to Prague by the youth movement after the war, I met Mrs. Lotte Holitscher who survived and was alone; I was embarrassed that I was still alive.

Family Marle left for Canada with their three beautiful daughters. At the beginning of the third millennium, for more then a year I was in touch with their granddaughter Emma, who was born in Canada, but is a European at heart and therefore she lives in Vienna.

The Fraenkels, who were originally from Slovakia, found a hiding place in Slovakia and survived; after the war they returned to Prostejov. Their son Joshko passed away a few years ago and was buried at the Jewish cemetery in Prostejov. A few members of the Ballek and Holz families managed to escape and to survive.

There were a few other people who escaped and survived, out of those who had arrived in Prostejov as refugees from the Sudetenland, like the Oppenheimers with their daughters Lisa and Ruth, and the family of the lawyer Neufeld with their daughter Doris.

It is important to mention that my father Fritz invested serious efforts to try to leave Europe. He even considered leaving to China. He applied for immigration certificates to Palestine, among other things through Irma, the aunt of Ruth Federmann (Steklmacher). Unfortunately he did not succeed.

The Rabbis and the Jewish Religion lessons

When I was a little girl, Rabbi Goldschmidt was the Rabbi in Prostejov. He lived in Havlichkova Street like us, so I knew him and saw him often - an old man, wearing a dark coat and a high brimmed hat on his head. The Rabbi passed away when I was five years old.

That was the first time that I was confronted with the concept of death. I was already able to think and the beloved and respected Rabbi's death left a strong impression on me.

Rabb. Dr. Leop. Goldschmidt.

1935 Rabbi Goldschmidt funeral. My uncle Josef is one of the pallbearers

At that time, Rabbi Schap also officiated in our community; he was also a shochet (religiously-qualified butcher) and a mohel (who performed circumcisions). I remember the chazan (cantor), Arpad Marmorstein who came to us from Slovakia, whose beautiful voice we used to hear in the synagogue.

After Rabbi Goldschmidt's death, Rabbi Schoen, only twenty four years old, came to Prostejov. Despite his young age he was wise, educated and serious. He was so good and popular, that he was moved from our small community to the big city of Brno, where he officiated until the deportation to Ghetto Theresienstadt. During the time when Rabbi Schoen was active in Prostejov, he became friendly with my father and used to visit our home. The Rabbi and my father discussed religion, Judaism and Zionism. Rabbi Schoen attended my father's funeral at Ghetto Theresienstadt. Funerals were common there, every day a few dozen people died in the Ghetto…

Rabbi Albert Schoen

During Jewish religion lessons we were sometimes taught by Rabbi Schoen and sometimes by Rabbi Schap. Usually, the young teacher Pinchas Broessler taught us and we liked him very much. He was nice and he knew how to behave with children.

I had the luck to meet him again in Israel, when he was almost eighty and I was sixty years old. He was saved thanks to the fact that he returned home in time, to the eastern part of the Republic. He joined and served with the Red Army until the end of the war.

1936 In our Jewish religion lessons, first and third grade with teacher Pinchas Broessler. At the back from left to right: Etelka Seliger, Gisela Stiasni, Litzi Kemney, Etelka Somogyi, Karl Beamt, Shani Klein, Paul Butschowitzer, Yehudit Sperber. First row from left to right: Ella Kleiner, Maud Steckelmacher, Regina Weitzenhof, Pepinka and Stella Brenner, Esti Lustig, Otto Deutsch, Erwin Loeff, Margit Bellak, Eliezer Kreiner (in the yard of the Rejsek school).

The teacher Spitz also taught us. In my understanding as a child he did not know how to relate to children, and he did not know to deal with naughtiness. I was no angel, but I behaved maturely and decently; I was sorry for our teacher, and even more so for his little son, Pavel, a small child in our religion lessons.

Rabbi Schap

Today, when we are unaware what awaits us and our dear ones, I can't help remembering and thinking of the fate of Rabbi Schap's family. I remember the colorful personality of the rabbi, the shohet and mohel, very well. Among the modern Jews of Prostejov, shaven and bareheaded, Rabbi Schap always wore a long black coat, a high black brimmed hat; he had a long grey beard and maybe his side-locks were also hidden behind his ears. A well-known story was told about Rabbi Schap. When Rabbi Schap presented himself to the leaders of our community, he was

asked: "Do you have any children?" The Rabbi replied: "Nein". Nein, in German means - no. Afterwards it became clear that the rabbi had nine children. Nein, in Yiddish is – nine. I was a child then and I got to know seven of the children in the Schap family. The Rabbi and his wife probably worked hard and lived in very modest conditions, in order to grant high education for most of their children. Ilona became a medical doctor; Motke, the only one who did not study, emigrated to Palestine, Julia was a professional nurse. In Ghetto Theresienstadt, I met the handsome tall dentist Mudr.Felix and his beautiful young wife when they came to the Ghetto from Uhersky Brod. I was close to the three younger boys, although they were much older than me. The three of them were still students then: David, Leo and Karel. Only the rabbi's elderly wife, Julia, Motke and Felix survived the holocaust. I also found out that Felix opened a dentist's clinic for children in Prague after the war and that he later left Prague in 1968 probably for Switzerland. Many years have passed. I am now older than the Rabbi was then. The pain and the sorrow have not lessened….

The High Holidays

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur – in Czech they were called the High Holidays, by the Jews and also by the Czechs. When our Christian neighbors saw us walking around the two synagogues in festive dress, they said: "The High Holidays of the Jews are here, winter will soon arrive." My family was not observant, but on the High Holidays all of us went to the synagogue. My grandmother and my mother sat in the women's section upstairs. My grandfather, my father and I, as long as I was still little, sat among the men downstairs – in the big and spacious synagogue in Prostejov. When I grew up I had to sit upstairs in the women's section, I did not like it, I felt better among the men. From the first grade on I learned to read Hebrew, I understood almost nothing, but at the synagogue I made an effort to read the prayers together with the rabbi and the community. During the breaks we walked around the square next to the synagogue and in the narrow streets of the former Jewish ghetto, we wished each other a good year. The generation of our grandmothers and grandfathers said it in Ashkenazi Hebrew: "leshauno tauvo" we the young people used modern Sephardic Hebrew: "leshana tovah".

On Yom Kippur we brought our mothers and grandmother apples with fragrant cloves for them to smell to make it easier for them to fast. At the entrance to the

synagogue stood the attendant, Mr. Bleichfeld, and although some children were naughty, he was always nice and goodhearted to us.

Prostejov had a good solid, active, large Jewish community – I knew almost everyone. From March 1940, we were forbidden to pray in the big synagogue, and only permitted to make use of the small old study house, 'Beit Hamidrash' which was always very crowded. I remember walking to the synagogue in 1941 with the yellow Star of David on my chest, like all the Jews.

The High Holidays of 1942 we celebrated in Ghetto Theresienstadt. Luckily, the weather was good, it was not cold and it was not raining, the narrow streets of the Ghetto were filled with groups of praying people. I was under the impression that the prayers and songs went up to heaven. It left a very strong and deep impression on me; I felt that the people prayed with their whole heart and soul. In the Ghetto there were Jews who had arrived from Germany, some of them were much more observant than we were.

I still remember a letter that my friend Hermann wrote to me, in which he asks me why I, a pure and sinless young girl, fasted on Yom Kippur in the ghetto, where we were hungry all the time. In the same letter he describes the holiday atmosphere in the barracks of the men, the prayers and the sermon.

So many years have passed since then, but the thoughts and memories of our wonderful community, of all the people that I knew and loved, who were so close to me, have stayed with me. Almost all were wiped out, they have no continuation, and they have no descendants. I think of the children, my own and my sister's friends, of the youths in the Zionist youth movements, of the children with whom I exercised at Maccabi. On the holidays we met in the synagogue, we walked in the narrow Jewish streets that no longer exist. One by one they appear before my eyes, and I am sad and full of pain, as if it all happened now and not more than sixty years ago.

Members of our Community in Prostejov

I remember people from our community who were killed, "who did not return", as we used to say after we returned from the camps. I especially remember the children and the youths – I was closest to them. More than sixty years have passed – I still see them in my mind. With whom should I start? With Katchka Altar the red-haired fifteen year-old? With Katharina Gelb, tall and thin with her green eyes? She was

seventeen years old; her brother Robert was my age, a handsome and sensitive young boy, and their cute cousin Pavlichek, five years old. Lia Beamt and her little sister Pavla; their cousins Karel and Pavel Beamt, stayed in Ghetto Theresienstadt until October 1944 – I would sometimes see them until they were sent to Auschwitz with their parents shortly before the end of the war. Family Brenner with their many children, they had come to us, to Prostejov, from Poland not long ago. Mr. Brenner and his adult son Max, in dark suits, both of them with beards, you never saw them bareheaded. Mrs. Brenner, short and round, ruled over the house, where their old grandmother usually sat in an easy-chair. I have photographs of Pepinka, Stellinka and Miriam; little Rutinka was born just before the war broke out. Mrs. Brenner was so happy and proud that she had such a beautiful and adorable baby. Mr.Brenner and Max were arrested by the Nazis immediately after the occupation, apparently because they did not have Czech citizenship. During this period our friend Miriam Brenner was very sick and she died a short time before the deportations. Mrs. Brenner with the grandmother and with her daughters were sent to Ghetto Theresienstadt with the rest of our community. Within two weeks they were sent to the Maly Trostinetz extermination camp in Poland. There were no advanced gas chambers there – they were pushed dressed, or naked into trucks, in which they were suffocated by exhaust gas, on the way to their burial. I read that the Nazis complained about this killing method because it took too much time.

I think about my good friends almost every day – I have photographs of some of them. In the Theresienstadt ghetto, we shared our room with Mrs. Somogyi and her daughter Etka, with Mrs. Pasternak and her daughter Edith, and the Seliger sisters with their sister's son Tommy Richter – all of them were sent to Treblinka. The Gestapo arrested Tommy's mother still at home, because she had talked back to some German. She died in 1941 in the Ravensbrueck concentration camp. Tommy's father escaped to the Soviet Union, served in the Red Army and survived. After the war he came back to Prostejov, did not find any members of his family and immigrated to South America.

My sister's friends, eight-year-old girls: Lotinka, Anitka, Renka, Trudi, Stella, boys her age: Tommy Reich, Milan Schreiber, the Czech brothers, Pavel and Willichek. Children who learned together with me in our Jewish religion lessons: Erwin Broll (Lya's brother), Erich Schwarz, Otik Deutsch, the cousins Walter and

Arnost Glueck (Arnost and I once had a row at the Maccabi sports ground), Maxi Freund, a handsome curly boy with blue eyes – an only child, like a lot of the Jewish children at that time. Margit Bellak, her brother Otik, cute little Pavlichek Heller, Willi Eisner, Walter Hochwald, Arieh Gottlob (with the nickname Ayush), his little sister and brother. Then there was Ruzenka Cohn with long black curly hair, who was a beautiful and happy young girl, the Drescher sisters from the Jewish streets. Cute little Pavlichek Platzer – his father had a kosher butcher shop in the Jewish streets. Beautiful Lotka Steiner – stayed with her parents in Ghetto Theresienstadt for a long time. In the end they were sent to their deaths to Auschwitz too. Erika Fried, sweet and quiet – she and her family lived across from my grandparents' house. The grandmother, old Mrs. Fried, would sit next to the window and look at the street. I would see her there every time I visited my grandparents' house. Such good friends, different from each other – Eva Meitner, shy and slightly strange, and Susie Gruenhut, beautiful and full of life, she looked like a young model; her cousin Hanka Gruenhut and her little brother Jiri. Evichka Schreiber, three years old, her sister Miriam was born in Ghetto Theresienstadt – all of them were sent to Auschwitz, Mr. Schreiber returned in 1945 alone. After the war, he re-married and immigrated to Israel on the ship Campidoglio like us, with his new wife and their baby son, about one year old. They held on to him with a leash so that he wouldn't fall from the ship's deck into the storming sea.

I remember the brothers Pavel and Jiri Butschowitzer; our fathers were friends. They worked together for a gardener and later for a farmer, in order to learn farming, hoping to immigrate to Israel (then Palestine).

My father Fritz Stecklmacher and Karel Butschowitzer learn to farm with the gardener Hajek in Prostejov.

The Bauer brothers, nephews of author Egon Hostovski – their family came from Bohemia. They were not Zionist. The two brothers, Peter and Zdenek, were not in the Zionist youth movement, they didn't learn with us in our Jewish religion lessons and they were not seen in the synagogue when there were holidays. Nevertheless, when the Nazis published the laws against Jews, the Bauer brothers had no choice, but to join us. During that time I was once invited to their villa.

In a picture of the Maccabi sports ground, there is the figure of Miriam Sonnenmark. Her father, the lawyer Judr. Sonnenmark, was one of the leaders of our community, and was therefore already arrested in 1939 and sent as a hostage to a concentration camp. No one ever saw him again. Her parents succeeded in sending Miriam's older brother Peter to the land of Israel. He was the only family member who survived. I remember Lilly Weisskopf and her brother.

I remember Litzi Kemeny – her sister and her brother came to Palestine, but Litzi was sent to Theresienstadt and was killed in Poland. I also remember Etka Seliger, a friend of Litzi's, both of them a couple of year older than me. I hope that those whom I haven't remembered will forgive me. Of the youngsters who came to Prostejov from

the Sudetenland, I know that Peter Beck, Rita Vogel, Beda Kulka and Walter Broessler survived.

In the 1930s many Jews joined our community. First there came refugees from Germany, after 1938 when the Nazis occupied Austria, refugees also came from Vienna. In 1939 refugees came from the Sudetenland. The community helped them to settle down. As far as I could judge as a young girl, well-educated people with a strong cultural background joined us. People from large cities came to us, among them academics and talented artists. The youths and the children joined our youth movements and enriched our groups with their presence. After the Nazi race laws against Jews were legislated, we were also joined by children from mixed marriages. Most of them, even if later, eventually arrived at Ghetto Theresienstadt; only a few of them were sent to Poland, most of them were left in Ghetto Theresienstadt and most of them returned to Prostejov after the war. Mr. Moritz Lang died in Theresienstadt. Mr. Ballek's daughter, Ricka, was married to a gentile. After she gave birth to their third child, a baby boy, she was deported to Ghetto Theresienstadt in 1944. She left her two small daughters and the tiny baby boy at home motherless. In Ghetto Theresienstadt, Ricka contracted typhus. Ricka recovered, thank God, she came back to her children and to her husband. For months Ricka wore a kerchief on her bald head, after she came back to Prostejov in 1945.

My good friend Ruth Weisz

Ruth Weisz 1941

We met in Jewish religion lessons. From third grade on we were good friends. I could never again, in my whole life, enjoy a friendship such as this. Ruthi's parents came to Prostejov from Slovakia. Mr. Weisz joined the garment industry, which flourished in our city. He was much more religious than my parents. He prayed in the

small old synagogue and not in the big new synagogue that my parents and our family went to on the holidays. Mr. Weisz also prayed at home, he wore a skullcap and looked like a strict man. Ruthi's mother was sweet and good; she managed a kosher home. Her parents spoke Hungarian to each other. In the picture below you can see that Ruthi was a beautiful girl. We both looked older than our age.

Ruthi Weisz and Maud on the Maccabi sports ground, winter 1940-41

Otik Hirsch took a picture of us while we were ice-skating. Afterwards, he and his friend Luisek Schwarz walked us from the Maccabi sports ground into the town. How proud we were that we, two barely twelve-year-old girls, were accompanied by two

twenty-year-old boys – and Otik was so handsome! How scared Ruthi was, that her father would see her!

Our friendship was beautiful. When we were not allowed to attend public schools any more, we learned in small groups that were organized at people's homes. During that time Ruthi and I saw each other every day. In 1941, Ruthi's parents invited me for the Seder Pesach (the Passover meal, in my house, we never had a Seder unfortunately), and since Jews were not allowed to walk on the street after eight in the evening, I slept at Ruthi's house. We visited each other every day, but as opposed to the children today, we would never have thought about speaking on the phone – if we had done that, our parents would have given us an earful! Ruthi's grandparents lived in Slovakia, and I saw her mother reading and writing letters. A young woman called Hermina came from Slovakia to help in the household. In about 1936, Ruthi's sister Eva was born. Shortly after the birth, she passed away, and Ruthi remained an only child. We used to ride on our bicycles to the Maccabi sports ground and all sorts of places. Maria, who worked in our house, once forgot her false teeth in her village Slatinki. I went with Ruthi to get them. Until this day I remember how we rode our bikes in the beautiful landscape of the area. God knows how we found Slatinki. Maria's sister gave us goat's milk to drink – we, children living in a town, did not know that kind of milk. We saw a small house, all modest and simple. Later, we were forced to give our bicycles to the Germans.

Ruthi and I were lucky to be sent to Ghetto Theresienstadt on the same transport and to spend the first period in the bakery together. I spoke to Ruthi about everything; only about Hermann I did not tell her. She knew him, and she probably felt something. Our last meeting was in the Theresienstadt ghetto, in July 1942, in the morning of a beautiful summer day. We went behind the "Dresden" barracks, where mothers with their babies were out in the sun and fresh air. That was a strong experience, touching our wakening maternal instincts. We spoke about the experiences of that day and about life in general; then Ruthi went to the room in which she lived with her mother. I stayed a little longer, I was thinking, developing some opinion, I don't remember about what, and until this day I feel, as if I have forgotten something important. Then Ruthi disappeared, she was sent to Poland with her parents. The transports left so fast, that we did not have time to say

goodbye. I think of Ruthi often and much, what she would have said if she saw a skyscraper, a jet aircraft…

She did not experience love, did not have children. She was not yet thirteen years old, when they shot her in Baranovitchi, or worse, perhaps they pushed her into a wagon called 'Dushegubka' in which people were suffocated by the gas from the exhaust.

A group of girls on the Maccabi sports ground Prostejov 1940. From left to right standing: Eva Fuhrmann, Lydia Banda, the group leader Dita Heilig, Maud (Michal) Stecklmacher, Ruth Weisz. From left to right squatting: Zdenka Berger, Regina Weitzenhof, Olinka Wassermann, Vlasta Haas. Dita Heilig and I survived (Olinka and Vlasta were children from the Jewish orphanage in Brno invited by the Prostejov Jewish community to spend the summer with us; probably because we could still use the beautiful Maccabi sports grounds. The Brno children were invited to live in our families, Vlasta was Ruthi's guest, Olinka was my guest).

Elvira (Eva) Fuhrmann

We called her Eva - a popular girl, a good friend and smart. She grew up in completely different conditions from most of my friends. Her mother, a laundress, had three extramarital daughters. In Prostejov, in one room in an old house in the Jewish streets, lived: grandmother, mother, Trude and Eva. The four of them slept in a big double bed, which took up almost the entire room. Over the bed, on the wall, hung a framed and decorated page with the remembrance dates of the deceased grandfather Fuhrmann. The middle child, Erna, lived with her father. She looked like Eva and her mother. There was no doubt that she was of the Jewish race, but thanks to her German father, Erna survived and maybe she is still alive today. Our parents were not happy about our friendship with Eva, but she was such an amazing girl that we did not want to give her up, and we spent many hours with her, which were never boring. We met in our apartments, at the community center or at the public park. Later, when it was prohibited for Jews to visit the public parks, we met at the Maccabi sports ground. Eva, her mother and Trude were sent from Ghetto Theresienstadt to Poland, and there they were killed.

Lydia Banda

They came to Prostejov with the wave of refugees from the Sudetenland: her parents, Lydia and her younger twin brothers, Helmut and Pavel. In their hometown their father had been a rabbi or a cantor.

It is not easy to be a refugee. It was very difficult for them, even though the Jewish community helped and took care of them. Lydia joined our group in T'helet Lavan; she did not easily make new friends. Her brothers were so different one from the other, that it was difficult to believe they were twins: one of them was short and round, the other one was tall and thin, but both of them made friends easily with boys of their age. We all belonged to a Zionist youth movement, which was also a social movement. The Banda family was sent almost immediately from Ghetto Theresienstadt to Poland, no one survived.

Zdenka Berger and Regina Weitzenhof

A few generations of the Bergers, including the very old grandfather, lived in a big corner house. Zdenka's mother was a professor; at that time it was very rare for a

woman to achieve that kind of degree. Zdenka had a little sister called Eva. When the war broke out, Mr. Berger, the father, was on a business trip in Switzerland. He stayed there and returned to Prostejov only after the war. I used to see Mrs. Berger and her daughters in Ghetto Theresienstadt. They were sent to Auschwitz with the last transport, at the end of October 1944. During the filming of the movie "What fire can't burn" in 1997, suddenly I saw Zdenka's suitcase in Auschwitz in a huge pile of suitcases.

The Bergers and Regina Weitzenhof 1938

Zdenka had a very good friend in Theresienstadt. Her friend survived, she lives in the United States, and today she is known as the cinematographer Suzanna Justman. Zdenka, a freckled bright girl, was popular among the girls. We pitied her because her nanny was very strict with her and allowed her almost nothing. Zdenka's friend in Prostejov was Regina Weitzenhof, they lived close to each other. Regina was an only child; her mother was a tall woman called Mitzi (Maria), a daughter of the Wagner family. In Prostejov all the Jews knew each other. Already, as a little girl, I felt and knew the status of each one – the Bergers were part of the elite. We knew the Weitzenhofs well, before we moved to our new house, we lived in the same building with them. We went on holiday together once, our mothers and us, the two

daughters; we went to Italy. Our fathers were not free to come with us, they were working. I do not even dare to think, of what happened to Regina and her parents and what they "experienced" in Treblinka.

Hanka Weil

She came to Prostejov with her parents at the end of the 1930s. Were they refugees? I do not know. Hanka, a roundish and sweet girl, with a friendly smile and pink cheeks, was younger than we were, but sociable, so we became friends. What does sociable mean? Not arrogant, not spoiled, courageous, quick-witted, you could talk to her about a lot of different subjects, and she did not spoil any adventures or practical jokes. That is what Hanka was like, and we liked her.

Emil Altar

The Altars – a known and respected family in our community. In a beautiful house with a garden, close to the former Jewish ghetto, lived a few generations of the family; in 1990, I saw that the house had been pulled down. Emil was the youngest of the family – Mr. Altar the father, mother Anni and sister Katharina – Katchka. In 1942, she was 16 years old, had bright red hair and looked as though she was going to become an interesting beauty. Emil was a sweet and bright boy, and although he was younger than we were, he was part of our group of friends. We spoke a lot about different subjects. Today I can admit that some of the conversations with Emil, a boy of hardly eleven years, were about sex.

Sometimes he invited us to his house, a relatively modern building. Tiny and thin slices of bread with a tasty spread would be sent to us in the living room on the first floor in a small elevator from the kitchen on the ground floor.

Emil would invite us into the garden, he had engraved his name on a pumpkin, and we would see how the name grew with the pumpkin. From their garden it was possible to see into the "Jewish streets" – a view that I particularly loved and that I remembered. Everything is lost – today no reminder of these scenes remains, but something of it appears in the drawing by Mr. Zdenek Horak hanging in my living-room. The Altars did not stay in Ghetto Theresienstadt and like most of the members of our Kehilah, they were sent to Poland almost immediately after arrival.

The drawing of Zdenek Horak, view of the Jewish Streets from the Altars' garden

The Pasternaks

The Pasternaks came to Prostejov, with the wave of refugees. I don't know where they came from; I only remember that the mother spoke mainly Hungarian and that the children had Hungarian names. Dejo was older than me, Tibor was my age and Edith was two years younger than me. The father of the family succeeded in escaping to Palestine, but he could not receive immigration certificates for his family. Mrs. Pasternak found a small apartment.

She impressed me, how strong she was, decisive, organized and tidy. The children were very well educated and incredibly clean. She tailored their clothes herself, their apartment was clean and tidy, and in addition to that, Mrs. Pasternak supported the whole family by herself. Dejo was a quiet and serious boy, Tibor was a little bit wild and athletic, and Edith was a nice girl; she was our friend although she was younger than us. The Pasternaks came to Theresienstadt on the same transport with us. After we left the transitory place in the former bakery, we lived together in the same room: Edith and her mother, my mother, my sister, me, and other women with their children. Altogether about fifteen people lived in one room (the older boys lived in the children's home for boys). We lay on the floor with our feet touching Edith's and her mother's feet, until the Pasternaks were sent to Poland – today I know that they were sent to Treblinka.

A photo of family Pasternak.

Erna Hollaender

Erna was a small girl, two our three years younger than we were. She would go everywhere with us, she was part of our group of friends. Her parents spoke Yiddish and were observant Jews. Her father wore a black cloth vest and a skullcap. He prayed in the old synagogue "Bet Hamidrash". They earned a living by selling wares in all sorts of markets, therefore, in their absence, the girls had to be independent and know how to take care of themselves. Erna was more independent and confident than we were, although she was a few years younger. If Erna were still alive, she would be mother, grandmother and aunt today. But she did not survive, neither did her sister Stella.

When I write about those whom I loved and who were killed, I am stricken with regret that I survived and did not make a particular effort to be a better person.

Miriam Stiasni (Mirka)

I think it was in 1939 when an unknown girl appeared at the synagogue on the High Holidays. She looked special to me, different from us, tall, thin, with glasses and an abundance of short curls and a sweet face. We, the children, did not stay in the synagogue for a long time, we preferred to walk around outside, in the nearby square or the narrow streets (which were called the 'Jewish Streets' – the former Jewish ghetto). This is how we met Miriam Stiasni. She moved with her mother from Brno to Prostejov. Mrs. Stiasni's father, old Mr. Sternberg, lived with his brother's wife and her daughter Klara near our house. Klara was a good friend of our cousin Lilly. Klara's brother Albert succeeded in escaping to England. We happily accepted Mirka, an intelligent and confident young girl, into our group at the Zionist youth movement.

We called her 'hedgehog' because of her rebellious hair. She came to Prostejov with her mother. Her father escaped to Palestine. Mrs. Stiasni was a modern woman – she had lived in the large city of Brno for years. We would visit Mirka at her home. The apartment was small, but it was more modern than most of the apartments. I noticed a picture on the wall – a flame in the darkness – suddenly, after sixty years it came to my mind. Mirka influenced us, often her opinion was accepted. In 1951, a short time after our wedding, we were in a taxi in Haifa – we were hurrying to some place. When the taxi driver heard us speak Czech, he introduced himself, said that

his name was Stiasni and that he was from Brno, like my husband. It was Mirka's father.

A group of exercising girls at the Maccabi sportsground in 1940. From left to right: Erna Hollaender, Miriam Sonnenmark, Hana Weil, Vlasta Haas, Miriam Brenner, a guest called Renate, Olli Wassermann, Edith Pasternak, Eva Fuhrmann, Lilly Bobasch, me and Ruth Weisz.

Lilly and I survived the Holocaust.

Eva Jahoda

Eva was a dreamy girl with big brown eyes. She had a little brother called Jiritchek.

In my mind, I can see Mrs. Jahoda busy, always hurrying, and pushing the baby stroller with Jiritchek and Eva trailing along behind her. Mr. Jahoda seemed like a nice and goodhearted man. Sometimes after work he would sit in a café house at the end of the 'Jewish Streets'. Eva – a shy and quiet girl. Who knows what was happening behind those dreamy eyes…

Mania Sperber

I did not know Manitchka very well, but I did not forget her. She was a girl with a pale, almost transparent face, and dark hair; a quiet girl who despite her young age inspired respect. Tall Mr. Sperber, the tiny mother who always looked worried during the war, and the sister Judith. Judith was said to be exceptionally intelligent and had independent opinions – she did not live more than fifteen years.

Mr. Sperber was Mrs. Greif's brother. Her two sons survived, her sweet daughter Manitchka Greif, who at age seventeen was already engaged, was murdered. Mrs.

Greif's son Bruno went to Palestine in 1939 with his young and beautiful wife Anni. I was present at their wedding. It didn't take place in our big synagogue which the Germans had already confiscated. It was performed in room which belonged to the Jewish Community, the Kehilah. Immediately after the wedding the young couple left for Israel (then Palestine).

The younger brother Fritz Greif survived all the horrors of the concentration camps, and moved to Ireland. He gave up Judaism completely, apparently so that his children would not have to undergo the terrible experiences suffered by his family.

The Knebels

The large clothing company SBOR, which belonged to the Sborowitz family, sent Mr. Knebel to Palestine in order to offer and sell their merchandise. Mr. Knebel arrived in Haifa – he liked the place. I do not know how he arranged it with the company owners. To his wife, who had stayed in Prostejov with their two young daughters, he wrote that she should pack up everything and come to Haifa with the children. At first, Mrs. Knebel was scared and refused; then she followed her husband's advice. Thanks to this fortunate development, the Knebels survived. Greta and Stella married, had children and grandchildren. Stella still manages the clothing store on Herzl Street in Haifa that Mr. Knebel established in 1934.

The Auerbachs

At one time, before the Second World War, Mr. Auerbach lived in Prostejov with his young and beautiful wife and their little daughter, Judith. Mrs. Auerbach was Christian, Mr. Auerbach was Jewish, Judithka was the child of their mixed marriage. At the end of the 1930s, Mr. Weissbart came to Prostejov with the wave of refugees from the Sudetenland. Mr. Auerbach and Mr. Weissbart both liked to play the violin. After they had met each other, they began playing together. Shortly afterwards the Nazis ordered the Jews to hand their musical instruments over to the authorities, including, of course, the violins. Mr. Auerbach's violin was a special and rare violin. He decided to give the violin to a non-Jewish acquaintance to keep, and to give a simple violin to the Germans. Mr. Weissbart advised and helped him. Somebody informed on them – both men were arrested immediately and sent to prison. Two weeks later Mrs. Auerbach received her husband's blood-drenched shirt with a notification of his death. It can be assumed that the same happened to Mr. Weissbart.

Judithka grew up without a father. At the end of 1944, the Nazis began sending children from mixed marriages to Ghetto Theresienstadt, not only from age fourteen, but also small children, even babies. Judithka was six years old; she was supposed to go to Theresienstadt alone. Mrs. Auerbach decided that she would not let that happen. Until the end of the war they lived in a hidden place in the village where her family resided. At the beginning of the 1980s I went to the Dead Sea with my Swiss friend Agnes. Our common language is German. In the dressing room I was looking for the number of the locker. I asked a tourist about it in German. Following her reply, I asked her: "Where are you from?" I recognized her German dialect – it was identical to ours! And she replied: "From Prostejov." She was Mrs. Maria Auerbach. I introduced myself and said: "You had little Judithka!" Next to her stood a tall (about 1.80m) middle-aged woman – Judithka. They told me that in the 1970s, each of them had travelled separately on an organized trip from the Czechoslovak communist Republic to the West. They met in Vienna. Apart from a small suitcase and a few dollars they did not own anything. They sat in Vienna on a bench in a public garden; with their last dollar they bought a bottle of Coca Cola, which they had never drunk before. When we met (at the beginning of the 1980s), they lived in Munich and could already afford a short trip to the Dead Sea …

The Family of my Father Fritz Bedrich Steckelmacher.

My father told me that his father, grandpa Jakob Steckelmacher, came from the small town called Boskovice to Prostejov at the age of 13 with his brother Solomon. Probably their parents came to Prostejov at the same time and died there a short time after they arrived. My mother told me that, in his younger years, grandpa Steckelmacher had worked for someone who sewed shirts. Grandpa married grandma Klotilde (née Eisler).

My grandpa, Jakob Steckelmacher

Grandmother Klotilde died a short time before I was born; therefore, I received her name as my second name.

Jakob and Klotilde Steckelmacher had five sons: Arthur, Emil, the twins Otto and Bruno and my father Fritz.

Arthur 1932 (Ruth Federmann's father).

The twins Otto and Bruno

The thoughts I had concerning my grandpa Jakob helped me to deal with the tragic loss of our daughter Yael that occurred years later. Grandpa lost three of his five sons during his lifetime. Emil died when he was a young child, Bruno died in World War I (his name is engraved on the marble board in the Jewish cemetery in Prostejov together with other Jews who were killed during that war). The eldest, most handsome and talented son, Arthur, died of an illness when my grandfather was already an old man. Despite his son's death, grandpa always walked erect and dressed impeccably in his dark coat, hat and walking stick. This is how I used to meet him on his way to play chess in the 'Deutsches Haus'.

I remember grandpa's store on Masaryk Square - the main square. The store was near the big church, close to the entrance to the 'Jewish Streets'. Grandpa started this profitable business that my father inherited. Father inherited it despite the fact that he was the youngest of the sons. Before my parents built the house on Sadky 4, my father had a store near another entrance to the 'Jewish Streets', on Komenska Street. I remember the store and its location.

My father Fritz Steckelmacher, officer in the Austrohungarian army.

What was their profession? How did they make a living?

In Prostejov, the main town of the fertile Hana valley, a garment manufacturing industry was established, mainly by Jews, some of them had arrived there, after they were expelled from Vienna. People from the city and surrounding villages took in ready-cut material pieces and sewed clothes from them in their homes; they returned the manufactured garments to the factories. Later on, the clothes were sewn in the factories.

I still remember people walking with great heaps of material or the completed clothes on their heads or on their backs. My grandpa and father were agents for factories from other areas (sometimes owned by Jews), which manufactured and supplied accessories like buttons, buckles, threads, lining etc. In the store there were samples of these items and father went with them from factory to factory by foot and took orders. Ruth, Gusta, Jirka and I played with these samples - my sister Karmela was still a small girl, I don't remember if she joined us in our games.

Uncle Arthur and my father were handsome men, uncle Arthur was talented and he learned to be an architect. Uncle Otto worked in the store after he stopped working in a bank. I think that uncle Otto was a bit shy and did not display much initiative; this may explain why my father inherited the agency although he was the youngest son.

Uncle Arthur and his wife Rosa - Ruza - lived in Prostejov. Their children, Hansi and Ruth were born there. Later, they moved to the capital city Prague.

Hans, Ruth and Maud Steckelmacher in our garden in Sadky nr. 4 in 1935.

The surname (Steckelmacher) of my father's uncle Salomon was shortened to Steckler, when he enlisted into the Austro-Hungarian army. Salomon was the father of five sons: Alfred, Robert, Emil, Leo and Felix. His first wife Josefine was my grandmother's sister. I don't know when Josefine died. I remember Salomon's second wife Ernestine; a tall, handsome woman with beautiful white hair. Near the big church in the vicinity of my grandfather Steckelmacher's store, aunt Steckler owned a small shop - she sold sweets. We, the children, came sometimes to greet our auntie knowing that we'd get a handful of sweets. Ernestine and the youngest son Felix (Puzzi) lived near the shop and very close to the church.

Puzzi had black frizzy hair, his skin was quite dark, he almost looked like a Negro. He was handsome, tall and erect like most of the Steckelmachers. I can hardly remember my great-uncle Salomon, he died when I was still a small girl. Emil, Salomon's son and my father's cousin was paralyzed after the Spanish influenza which spread through Europe after WW1. I used to see him in the street sometimes; Emil would sit in a wheelchair, pushed by his nurse. I never spoke with him.

Emil's son Hans, Honza was a very handsome boy. I remember his Bar- Mitzvah, although I must have been only about four years old at that time. Auntie Bertl, Honza's mother, divorced poor Emil. Some years after the divorce, Bertl married Mr. Weinberger.

They all, including Honza moved to Brno. From Brno they were sent to Minsk on the 16th November, 1941 and they perished there.

Hans Steckler.

Alfred Steckler left Prostejov to become a bank director in Iglau (Jihlava). Alfred immigrated with his family to the land of Israel before the holocaust. I met his daughter Edith Schnabel, who lives in Gan Hefer, a few years ago. The meeting happened incidentally, we have not maintained contact.

When my cousin Ruth Steklmacher-Federmann came to the land of Israel in 1939 she was only thirteen years old; sometimes on holidays she stayed with Leo Steckler in his Kibbutz Hefzibah. Leo had a son Josi, though he never married Josi's mother. Josi remained in Leo's care. Ruth told me, that Leo had only one leg. Josi is an old man by now, a father and a grandfather of many grandchildren.

In the Theresienstadt Memorial Book I found out what happened to Dr. Robert Steckler. Robert's family lived in Opava, after the Nazis occupied the Sudeten – they moved to Prague. Robert and his wife were sent on 21st October, 1941 from Prague to Ghetto Lodz and perished. Their daughter was sent to Great Britain before the war. Her name appeared after the war on the bulletin board in Prostejov's municipality building; she was looking for her parents and relatives. We have not met her, she didn't come to Prostejov by herself. She was called Inah, after her grandmother, Josefina.

In the spring of 1934, when my sister was born, one of my father's aunts came to Prostejov for a visit from Vienna. An old woman in dark winter clothes; she brought a present for the newborn, a rubber toy – I can remember its odor till today.

In autumn 1942, my father's aunt, aunt Loew arrived in Ghetto Theresienstadt from Vienna; an old woman with white hair and with thick black eyebrows. When we came to meet aunt Loew, she sat on the floor; I had the feeling that she was no longer able to walk. She was the sister of my late grandmother Klotilde. I met aunt Loew in Theresienstadt only once. Despite - or because of her old age and her condition, she was probably immediately sent to her death to Poland. Cousin Ruth Federmann told me, that aunt Loew's grandson lives in Israel – in Ramat Gan.

My grandmother Klotilde was born as a member of the Eisler family. Family Eisler's members used to live in Olomouc. I met the well known cameraman and film director Pavel Schnabel, a few years ago. He is a member of the Eisler family and was born after the holocaust. Pavel lives in Frankfurt in Germany and creates quite remarkable films.

My Mother's Family Steiner

I have always known since I was a little girl that my great-grandmother – grandfather's mother – originated from the Husserl family.

Charlotte Steiner, born Husserl, was the mother of my grandfather Max.

One of our relatives, Theresa Stark came for a visit to Israel in the 1970s from the USA. She was also a member of the Husserl family. Like many members of that family, she had lived in Vienna before the holocaust. Theresa contacted my mother, they met in Tel Aviv. There is a photo – Theresa and my mother – both blond, with blue eyes and wide Slavic cheekbones. Theresa brought a family tree for mother and related, that during the religious wars between the Catholics and the Protestants in Europe, the Protestant Bohemian Brothers used to put their children into Jewish families, to save their lives. Such children sometimes received the family name Husserl, (a small Hus – after the Reformer, Jan Hus).

Although all that happened a few centuries ago, all my grandchildren were blond when they were small, some of them have a very fair skin, my sister, her children and a granddaughter are light skinned and blue-eyed, and have Slavic features.

The well-known philosopher Edmund Husserl was born in Prostejov, he may have been a relative of ours. I never heard about him, neither from my parents nor from my grandparents; probably because he left Judaism and became a Christian.

Max and Steffi Steiner at their wedding in 1907

My grandfather, Max Steiner, was the eldest of five children in the family of Jakob and Charlotte Steiner. Jakob, their father bought the large and very beautiful house next to the castle, which belonged to nobility.

My mother told me that grandfather's grandmother had remained living within the 'Jewish Streets'. My grandfather lived with her in order to look after her and help her. He was then 17 years old. His brother Josef, who was 12 years younger than him, once asked, when Max arrived at his parents' house: 'Who is this man?' He did not recognize him and did not know that this was his older brother, because he had been living with his grandmother.

My grandfather loved his grandmother very much and as a young child he had often visited her. He loved to eat the noodles that she prepared for him – as we like it – the people of Hana – prepared with butter, sugar and poppy seed (not the bought noodles we have today). Grandfather told me that at the age of 78 his grandmother still had all her teeth – once he hugged her so hard that one of her teeth fell out –

how sorry he was! I think that this grandmother came from the Bruell family and was apparently the wife of Maier, whose name was hung over the shop in their house, together with the name of their son, Jakob Steiner and the symbol that then indicated that this was a leather shop.

Grandpa Max Steiner with sister Regina and with brother Josef

1922 family Steiners' house, above the store, my grandparents' apartment.

The house I was born in. I was born in the spring of 1929, the coldest spring in living memory, in my mother's childhood bedroom. In this beautiful spacious apartment lived my grandpa Max and grandma Steffi (née Steiner) from Ivancice and, when she was young, their only daughter Kaethe, my mother.

At the entrance from the square there was a big door, actually a gate made of heavy wood with a big key. This door led to a kind of entrance hall, paved with tiles of black slate that were cool in the summer and warm in the winter. From the hall, one narrow corridor led to the shop and warehouses and another corridor led to the

yard. In the floor there was an opening to the cellar, which was covered by a wooden board. Beautiful wide wooden steps led up to my grandparents' flat on the first floor. The flat had two front doors. The door that we usually used led into the kitchen - my grandmother's kitchen! It was bright and clean- smelling. In the ceiling there was a hook left over from the days when there was no electricity and gas lighting was used. My grandmother was the perfect housewife. Everything she cooked and baked was perfect. From the kitchen, there was a wide door with two lintels that led to the bedroom; it was such a wide door that grandmother could fatten a goose in its corner.

Kaethe, Karmela and grandma Steffi in the park in Prostejov 1935

There was a wide window in the bedroom from which we could see the city hall. In the huge living-room stood grandfather's grand piano, a shelf with his flutes and sheets of notes. There was a clock which was wound up once a year - grandfather showed me how it was done: he pulled one pendulum down and the other went up – you didn't have to do anything else to the clock for a whole year. There was a sideboard in which were the best dishes, tablecloths and cloth serviettes. There was a plant, which almost reached to the ceiling. In grandfather's bookcase there were books, atlases, encyclopedias that we loved looking at with cousin Gusta. There was a small olive wood utensil from the Land of Israel (then Palestine) that had earth from the Holy Land in it and something written in Hebrew. This utensil and two small

olive wood candlesticks were returned to me by Nadia (uncle Bruno's daughter) in 2006, when we were in Prague with my son Hanan and my youngest granddaughters, Noa and Dana.

On the living room walls there hung paintings and photographs; a photo of grandfather's beautiful sister Gisela who had died at the age of twenty during the birth of her first child. In the corner there was a round table at which we ate my grandmother's wonderful meals. There was also a long table in this room, which could seat many people. We ate there only on the Eve of Yom Kippur (before the fast of the Day of Atonement) or when guests came. In the corner there was a ceramic fireplace in which a fire burned the whole winter. Further on there was a narrow room – my mother's childhood room where I was born. There was another room where the maid Pepka lived at that time. On Saturday afternoons mother, father, Karmela and I used to come to visit our grandparents and we had coffee and grandmother's wonderful cakes and pastries.

On the top floor of the house lived uncle Josef with Gusta. Aunt Mela had died when her son Gusta was seven years old. One of my earliest memories is of aunt Mela née Sborowitz, who died in 1932.

In the store worked: grandfather, sometimes grandmother, uncle Josef and a few employees. Mrs. Mania who had beautiful handwriting worked in accounts. She sat in an office at the back of the shop - there was an old-fashioned, cumbersome black telephone there. On grandfather's desk there was a very thick glass paperweight. Every year factories sent the store colorful calendars with gold and silver shavings for snow. This amazed me when I was a little girl. Apart from leather the shop sold shoelaces, small metal nails, wooden nails, thin string, flat round pieces of brown, white and black wax and other shoemaker's goods which were purchased by shoemakers in and around the town. Gusta and I used to play with those colored pieces of wax. I don't know if this item is still used today.

Above the shop door there was an advertisement with a handsome young man on it and next to it the blessing "S Bohem" ("God be with you"). At the age of five I already knew how to read and I thought that the man in the ad was God. When I started to go to school and the teacher and the rabbi told us about God I was confused. I didn't know what to think.

Sundays and Thursdays brought the most customers – these were the market days – people brought produce to sell from the villages and farms and bought what they needed in town. After having sold their wares and bought what they wanted, they went to drink in the tavern owned by my grandfather's neighbor Mr. Vareka. Sometimes they got drunk and fell down in the street. I was very scared. Uncle Josef wasn't scared and helped to pick them up and put them back on their feet. Mr. Vareka's young son Emil remembered me, when I came to visit in 1994; he gave me a toy that Gusta had given him to look after when he went to Theresienstadt in 1942. Until today, Emil calls the neighbor's house 'at the Steiners'.

Thanks to grandfather's store, we always had the best shoes, sometimes made to measure – to this day I am fussy about shoes and don't have any corns on my feet.

On summer Sundays we went by train to one of the surrounding villages to stroll in the countryside; grandfather, grandmother, uncle Josef, Gusta and myself - sometimes we met acquaintances on the way – I have photos that depict these memories; we picked wild strawberries, blueberries, red and black raspberries. We looked for mushrooms, picked wild flowers. Sometimes uncle Josef would light a campfire. I learned how to swim in the waters of the Plumlov dam. During the winter we had to stay in town and on Sundays I would eat lunch at grandmother's. I felt better there than in my own home – grandma let me do more things and indulged me. After lunch Gusta came down from their flat, we "played" grandfather's piano, looked at the encyclopedias. Sometimes in the winter we would go out for a bit with the sledge.

Once I got a high temperature at grandma's and stayed there until I got better – how nice it was, how grandma pampered me, it was worth being ill! I didn't sleep over very often and each time I enjoyed it. The city hall and church clocks chimed out the hour– I'll never forget their chimes. It's all still there in my memory. – Afterwards, at Theresienstadt I slept on the floor among many other people. When I first arrived in Israel I lived in a tent and then together with our small family in a hut with no electricity and sometimes with no running water.

My grandfather, Max Steiner, once took me to a place opposite the botanical garden near St. Peter's Church in Prostejov, and he showed me the old Jewish cemetery. Today that cemetery no longer exists. Grandfather showed me the grave

of a relative whose name was Bamberger. He told me that one branch of the family had come to Prostejov from the German town Bamberg. In Israel, many years later, I heard that there had been a fine Jewish community in that town. Grandfather showed me the grave and I understood that whatever he told me, I should tell the generations to come. On one of our trips to Europe I went to Bamberg with my daughter Ednah. Of course, we found the name Bamberger there.

I don't recollect who told me my mother or grandpa Max, that his grandfather would sit in the small park Florianek when he was an old man and imagine that he was sitting under an olive tree in the Land of Israel. My children, my grandchildren, here is that connection – even after 2000 years of exile! If only he, my grandparents, my father could know, that my children and grandchildren were born in Israel and live here!

I recall another story – about that same wonderful grandmother of my grandfather Max, my great-great-grandmother. She dared to marry a clever young man – a scholar, against her parents' will. So it fell upon her to support the family, to enable her husband to study. The grandmother sold leather and in her accounts books were items like; "the old woman with the red headscarf owes me…." They say, probably about this grandmother too, that she was very frugal. Once on a Sunday, when the shops were shut, she suddenly felt severe pains. At that time a bandage with yeast was considered the best cure. Grandmother went to the nearby brewery (pivovar) where they gave her the yeast for free. From then onwards she never bought yeast – but got it free (Now you know where we got that characteristic from.)

Gusta

My grandfather Max and his brother Josef lived in the same beautiful old building (which had once belonged to nobility), which their father had bought. Gusta, the son of uncle Josef and aunt Mela, was only three years older than me and I felt as if he was my cousin. We were friends, we spent many hours and days playing together, talking, going for walks. Gusta, a handsome boy with black curls, big brown eyes and a slightly upturned nose, plump just like most of the Jewish children who enjoyed (or suffered) good food. Gusta's mother, aunt Mela, died when her only son was seven years old. Gusta lived with his father, uncle Josef.

Gusta with his father Josef Steiner

Theresienstadt, summer 1942, there was still a partial curfew. We were allowed to go out to work and only for a few hours in the evening. By chance, I meet Gusta and uncle Josef in the street. Gusta as always a kind-hearted boy, gives me a sweet; he brought it from home – in the ghetto one couldn't get such things. That was the last time I saw them, we didn't say goodbye. We didn't even know that they were deported on one of the eastbound 'transports', everything happened so fast. Many years later, I looked for their names in the archives and books and I found out that Gusta and his father left Theresienstadt on the same transport on which my good friend Ruthie was sent away with her parents. I didn't get to say goodbye to her either. The transport left for an unknown destination, nobody knew where it went to. It's only known that nobody survived. Since then, it was found out that instead of travelling to the Minsk ghetto which was full up, that transport was sent to Baranoviczi and all its passengers were shot in a wood not far from the railway lines.

Grandfather Max and aunt Mela (nee Sborowitz, uncle Josef's wife)

Gusta Steiner with his cousins Ruth and Gusta Sborowitz

The Glass family

On an outing with family and friends in the 20th: Steffi Steiner, an unidentified person, Kaethe Steiner, two unidentified persons, Elsa Glass, Karl Glass.

In the house on the corner opposite my grandparents' house lived Mr. and Mrs. Glass; they were both friends and relatives of our family.

Mrs. Glass fell down, broke her leg and after that could hardly walk. A few weeks before the transports started, Mr. Glass and his wife walked day in, day out, to the distant railway station so that when the time came they would know how long it would take them to get there and that Mrs. Glass would get used to it. More than fifty years later I met their granddaughter Ruth, my childhood friend. She had survived with her family in far away Chile. Ruth now lives in Israel, in Kibbutz Meggido. We met at a Prostejov reunion in Haifa. We both had grey hair already. When I told Ruth about those walks to the station she said "That's just what my grandfather would do".

Good friends of my grandparents were Mr. and Mrs. Himmelreich. Their daughter, Grete, was my mother's best friend. Their son, Otik, was Hermann's friend and the boyfriend of my mother's cousin Lilly Steiner from Ivancice (Bruno's sister). After Lilly's mother died, Lilly lived with my grandparents in Prostejov for two years. When the Jews of Ivancice had to leave their home and go to Theresienstadt, Lilly

went home to join her father, uncle Zigo. A short time after that Otik got a postcard which Lilly had thrown from the train on the way to Poland - the last sign of life from Lilly and all our relatives from Ivancice.

Today I know that they were taken from Theresienstadt to Rejowiec in Poland, where they were murdered in trucks by gas fumes from the exhaust pipe. I was told that a cousin to Lilly and my mother, Karl Steiner, tried to escape and was shot to death.

Other Family Friends

Among the family's acquaintances in Prostejov was the dentist, Dr. Loewi. His clinic was in a building next to my grandparents' house on Pernstein Square, the building belonging to the Varekas, the tavern owners. On the wall of the Varekas' building there was an old sign depicting three hares, this sign is still there. Dr. Loewi was an elderly gentleman; he treated my teeth, too. Dr. Loewi and his wife had two sons, one of whom had left Prostejov, while the one who stayed was a dentist like his father. He and his wife were in Theresienstadt for a long time, he learned Hebrew there with great resolution in the hope of emmigrating to the Land of Israel after the war. But the young doctor was sent to Auschwitz and his wife followed him. Both the young and old Loewi families did not survive.

My parents and grandparents were friendly with the Hirsch family, Mr. Moritz Hirsch and his wife Elsa. Elsa died while still at home. They had a son called Arthur, his nickname was Zaki. He was single, handsome with curly red hair. In winter he would go skiing in the mountains and would return tanned by the winter sun.

Mr. Ludvik Schnabel and his nice wife Hilda were my parents' friends. Mr. Schnabel contracted tuberculosis and went to recuperate in the Swiss Alps. Mrs. Schnabel perished in the holocaust. Mr. Schnabel sent us a few small parcels from Switzerland – things that were allowed to be sent to Ghetto Theresienstadt. Once each one of us received a tiny parcel with one tin of sardines and later each of us received a small package of dried figs. Mr. Schnabel was saved because he lived in a neutral country, Switzerland. He did not return to Prostejov after the war.

The Wolf family

Our family was friendly with the Wolf family. They lived in the house on the corner of Komenska Street, opposite our house in Sadky 4. Dr. Oskar Wolf was an old man during the Nazi Occupation but he had to work together with the other Jewish men, sweeping the snow from the streets. He had twin brothers and his only grandchild was Eva Meitner. His brother's grandson was Heinzi Holitscher, my childhood friend. Heinzi's family did manage to run away to Hungary before the Holocaust but only Mrs. Holitscher survived. Heinzi and his father perished. The second twin brother, Alfred Wolf, was Helenka's grandfather. Helenka lived with her divorced father Bruno. They lived in Vienna and would come to Prostejov from time to time to visit the family. I felt sorry for Helenka, a nice girl – she had a very strict nanny. I live under the illusion that they managed to escape overseas and survived. Bruno Wolf`s brother Otto survived in Ghetto Theresienstadt.

My parents used to set Helenka as an example for me: she's always clean, quiet and polite but I, with my disposition, could not be like those good obedient girls.

Outings

A trip to Stinava in 1933:Alice Steckelmacher, Elsa Wollisch, Steffi Steiner, Jenny Saelzer, Anni Wollisch, (both left for the Land of Israel in 1939), Jenny Grabscheid, (she came to Israel in 1948), Jiri (Georg) Steckelmacher, Mausi (that's me) and Gustav Steiner.

In the summer we used to go on outings. We would travel in the 'local' train to one of the surrounding villages, walk in the forest along paths indicated by markings on tree trunks until we reached the next village. In the forest we picked wild strawberries, blueberries, red and black raspberries. We looked for mushrooms and wild flowers.

A family outing: From left at the top: Josef Steiner, Ida, Otto and Fritz Steckelmacher, Rela, Bertl and Oskar Weinberger. Second row from left: Alice and Jiri Steckelmacher, Steffi Steiner. Third Row: Gustav Steiner, Maud, Karl Schap, Honza Steckler, Erich Marburg. All of those shown here perished in the Holocaust except of Maud, Ida and Rela (the non-Jewish nannies)

Grandpa Max would tell me that when I was three years old, I went on an outing with them for the first time. When we got to the station I sat down on the steps leading to the carriage and was ready for the journey.

On the way we would meet friends and acquaintances. We would meet Mrs. Elsa Wolisch, a good friend of my grandmother's. She lived in a small house in Kostelecka Street with her stepdaughter Aninka whom I liked very much. In 1939, Aninka and Bruno Greif got married – I was at the wedding in the synagogue – straight after the wedding they emigrated to the land of Israel (then Palestine) and so they were saved. They had two sons. Bruno and Aninka are no longer alive.

We would meet the Mandl family - Mrs. Mandl was a sportswoman. Her husband Mr. Mandl, an engineer, used to come into our store. He and my father were friends although Mr. Mandl was older than father. The Mandl daughters survived. The elder daughter Esther married Mr. Nahman before the Holocaust and went to Chile with

her husband. The younger daughter, Ruth, went through hell at Auschwitz and during the death march. In 1945 or 1946 she told me about it. After the war Lazi Kemeny came to Prostejov from Palestine in the hope of finding his father and younger sister. He never found them, but he took Ruth Mandl back with him as his wife.

A vacation in the Tatra Mountains 1936: A German tourist, Fritz and Kaethe Steckelmacher, Trude Lampl and her parents, Mrs. Shramek, the Shrameks' children, Hana Lampl, Ruth Steklmacher, Ruth Placzek and me.

On our outings we met the Steinschneiders and Mrs. Kamila Wolf who was a childless widow and lived with her elderly mother next to Hotel Avion. Once her engineer brother, Mr. Hofmann, visited them. For the first time in my life I heard that an engineer could be a chemist. Chemistry interested me. It impressed me a lot – I have a son who has a doctorate in chemistry.

Jenka and Manzi

The younger members of the Manuel family survived – Steffi married and emmigrated to Israel (then Palestine) with her husband. Manzi and his sweetheart Jenka Grabscheid married in Ghetto Theresienstadt. Jenka and her parents stayed

in Theresienstadt until the end of the war. Manzi was sent from Theresienstadt to a number of concentration camps; he survived, but fell ill with tuberculosis. All of them returned to Prostejov. In 1946 their first son Shlomo was born. The family immigrated to Israel, and joined Jenka's brother Hans in Kibbutz Naot Mordechai. Hans was in Mauritius during the war – the British had exiled an illegal ship of immigrants to that faraway island. The Manuel family lived in the kibbutz for many years – Mishko and Ron, Shlomo's younger brothers were born there. After the death of Jenka's parents, Manzi and Jenka moved to Nahariya. Manzi died in 1999. When I returned from the Czech Republic in 2003 they were sitting shiva for Jenka.

Lolli

In Prostejov near the castle there are two big old mansions. You can still see that they are well built and were once magnificent. One of the buildings used to belong to my family. The other one belonged to the Springer family, Jews like us. At that time, as far as I recall, the Springer family were not doing too well. Mrs. Springer was an elderly woman, thin and nervous, and her elderly husband, who had a white beard and pince-nez glasses, looked as if he were both physically and mentally ill. With them lived their daughter Lolli – Lollinka who was about the same age as my mother. She was single and an intellectual who paid no attention to her appearance. There was a word in German for such women – Blaustrumpf (a blue-stocking). For me Lollinka was first of all a member of the Jewish community, a neighbor of my grandparents a childhood friend of my mother's. In our house there were a few tiny photographs of the period of my parents' youth in a drawer: my parents with their friends, among them Lolli - playing tennis. My father: very handsome.

Suddenly in 1941 a short time before we were deported to Theresienstadt, my parents decided, that I should improve my knowledge of German. They sent me to private lessons with Lollinka to learn German grammar, which I wasn't familiar with, because I learned in a Czech school. I had German lessons twice a week with mixed feelings. Entering the square was forbidden to Jews at that time, so I had to go to Lolli through the back yard. Lolli, small, thin, bespectacled, usually wore a long, shapeless, old tennis dress. I felt her loneliness. Sometimes we would chat during the lesson. When the transports drew closer I felt Lolli's excitement in the face of a journey to an unknown destination. She would tell me about the preparations she

was making, and I felt that she was looking forward to an adventure, which would change her monotonous empty life. To this day I remember the pity I felt for her.

Lolli and her parents went with us to Theresienstadt. From there Lolli continued eastwards to her death.

Verushka

Summer's end in my native town of Prostejov - I was just over ten years old. In Mr. Samet's shop I was allowed to look after little Verushka Fehl, while her mother bought fruit and vegetables. Verushka was a baby a few months old, blond and sweet. I was happy that I could look at her closely and perhaps even touch her. Years passed, I grew up and Verushka became a little girl whom I would meet in the street or on the Maccabi playground. It was there that all the Jews met, when the other places were forbidden to us. In the summer of 1942 we were all sent to the Theresienstadt Ghetto: my family, our friends, the Fehl family with the grey-haired grandmother, aunt Lola, Verushka and her parents. I used to meet Verushka in Theresienstadt. We were hungry, ill. As in all families, the adults denied themselves food to give to the young children. Verushka looked about four. I think it is important to note that Verushka looked appropriate for her real age, thanks to her parents' sacrifices. Miraculously, they remained in Theresienstadt for about two years. In the transports of May 1944, the Fehl family was sent to Auschwitz, only the grandmother remained. Verushka couldn't survive that. She went to the gas chambers with her mother as did all the young children. After the war we returned to Prostejov: mother, my sister and I, old Mrs. Fehl, Mr. Fehl alone without his wife and without Verushka. Aunt Lola didn't return. If she had lived, Verushka would be more than sixty today.

Hubertus

My parents were aware that we were going to face hard times. On March 15th, 1939 we went with Karmela and with our nanny to the clothing factory "Gelb and Band" on Palacka street, in order to try on our new hubertus coats. That's what they called coats that were made from especially hairy cloth, with buttons and special pockets. Our coats were grey with detachable lining attached by buttons. They had a hood and a big hem, so that they could be lengthened as we grew. We were then aged five and ten. There were straps inside the coats, so that we could carry the coat on our shoulders. The coats were exactly suited to the fate that awaited us in

the future. When we left the factory and stepped into the cold and snow outside, the streets of our town were swarming with German soldiers. I especially noticed those riding bicycles and motorcycles. There were of course tanks and trucks and perhaps soldiers on foot, I don't remember. My hubertus coat came with me to Theresienstadt, but didn't come back home with me in 1945. It was in the suitcase that was sent to Auschwitz, when I at the last minute stayed in Theresienstadt. Afterwards I 'inherited' a jacket from Mrs. Bodanski from Prostejov, one that she had left behind in Theresienstadt and not taken with her to Auschwitz.

I brought that jacket with me to Israel. I wore it for many years. I wore it on a trip to Massada in 1961. Our children were already big then, aged eight and six. Shimon could manage without me and he gave me the trip to Massada as a gift for my birthday. Before we left on the trip I slept at my friend Miriam's house in Ramla. I went to Tel Aviv to see the well-known film "I like Mike". In the commotion in front of the cinema I lost one of the buttons of that jacket.

The spoon

My parents married on March 25th 1928 in our town Prostejov. My mother was twenty and my father was almost thirty years old. In their wedding photo, which somehow survived, my mother is wearing a white lace veil.

As a dowry my mother was endowed with tablecloths, kitchen towels and bed linen made of fine cloth, of damask and batiste finely embroidered, some monogrammed.

My parents' wedding picture 25.3.1928

Mother also received some beautiful dishes, both silver-plated and modern stainless steel cutlery. When the Germans invaded Czechoslovakia, we had to hand

over the silver-plated cutlery among other things; my mother was scared when she discovered that one teaspoon was missing. Afterwards, when we were sent to Theresienstadt, we were allowed to take 50 kilos for each person. Mother packed a stainless steel spoon, knife and fork for each of us. When the war ended we miraculously returned – mother, my sister Karmela and I.

Honeymoon - Kaethe and Fritz Steckelmacher – 1928

In February 1949 we immigrated to Israel. Mother once again divided our meager possessions into three. We knew that in Israel we would not be together in the same place. I was given a medium–sized spoon which came back with us from Theresienstadt. When my children were small they ate porridge and soup with this spoon. When they grew up I took the spoon for myself and I eat with this spoon only. When Inbal, my eldest grandchild was small, she ate only with this special spoon whenever she came to visit. I hope I will be able to eat with this spoon till the end of my life.

The doll called Olinka

At the time when we were driven out of our town and our homes, my sister was eight years old. My parents bought a tiny backpack for her and an aluminum chamber pot (at that time they still used heavy fragile porcelain ones). They put a few essential things into her small rucksack and tied the new light pot and her beloved doll Olinka on the top.

Karmela – Maccabi playground 1940

On a bright warm summer's day we were supposed to arrive at the railway station some distance away. We were ready with our baggage to go out of the house and leave everything behind us. At that moment Karmi cried to mother: "Olinka's hands have come out again." Mother with indescribable patience bent down and skillfully inserted the thin rubber band – and Olinka was whole again. Father locked the door behind us and we set out on foot for the station on our way to the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Three years later, after an eternity, we returned – mother, my sister and I. Father, grandfather, grandmother, uncles and aunts and cousins did not come back. We brought Olinka back with us and she came with us to Israel and

eventually reached the hands of Naomi, my Sabra niece. (The doll broke in Naomi's small hands).

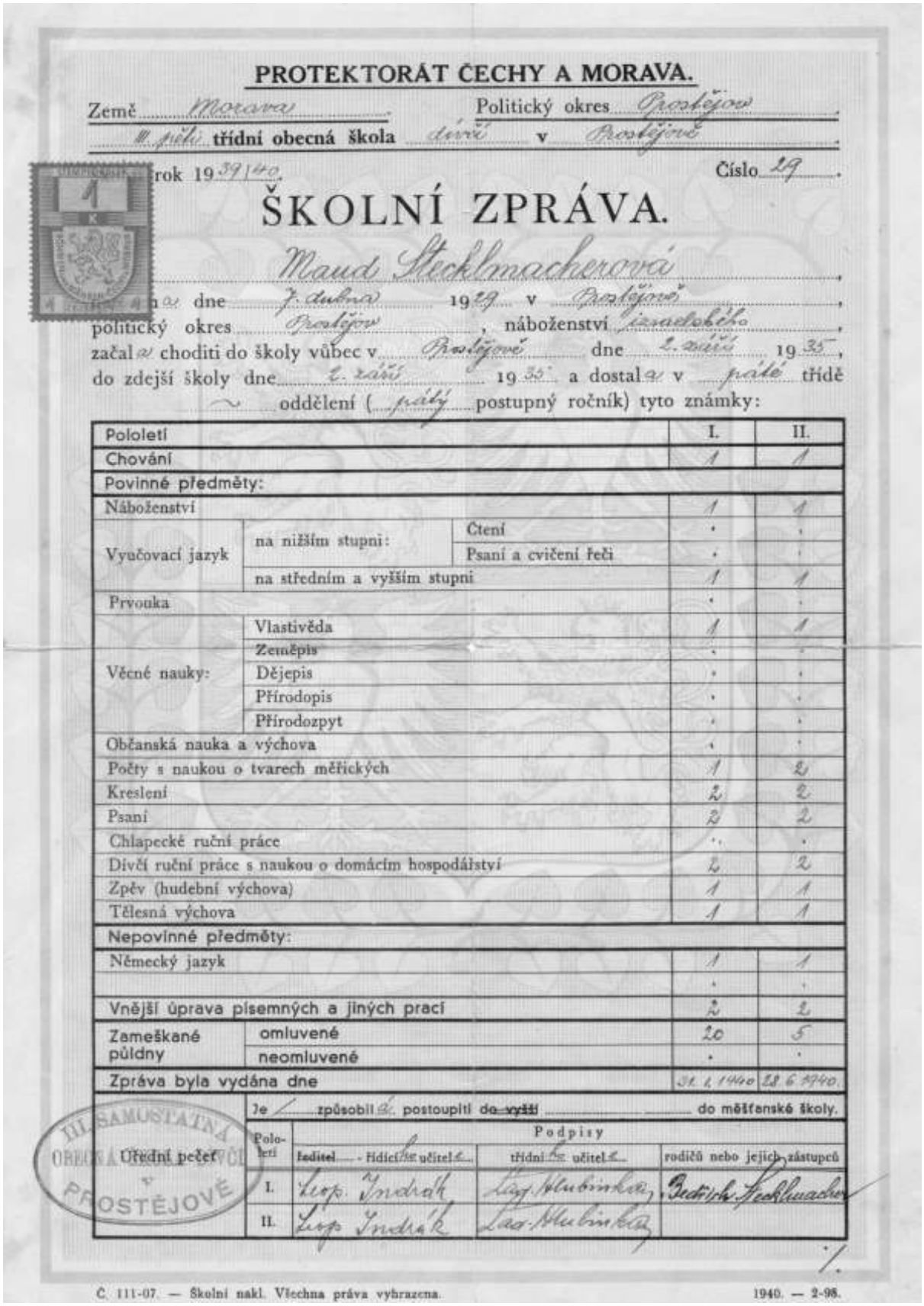
Maud Mausi (about one and a half years old)

Mausi (Maud) four and a half years old, 1933

Maud and Karmela in the apartment at Sadky 4, 1936

Karmela, Kaethe, Fritz and Maud Steckelmacher, 1935

Maud aged 7, 1936



PROTEKTORÁT ČECHY A MORAVA.

Země Morava Politický okres Prostějov

v přír. třídní obecná škola dívčí v Prostějově

rok 1939/40. Číslo 29.

ŠKOLNÍ ZPRÁVA.

Maud Stecklmacherová

narozen dne 7. dubna 1929 v Prostějově,

politický okres Prostějov, náboženství izraelského,

začal choditi do školy vůbec v Prostějově dne 2. září 1935,

do zdejší školy dne 2. září 1939 a dostal v páté třídě

oddělení (pátý postupný ročník) tyto známky:

Pololetí			I.	II.
Chování			1	1
Povinné předměty:				
Náboženství			1	1
Vyučovací jazyk	na nižším stupni:	Čtení	·	·
		Psaní a cvičení řeči	·	·
	na středním a vyšším stupni		1	1
Prvouka			·	·
Věcné nauky:	Vlastivěda		1	1
	Zeměpis		·	·
	Dějepis		·	·
	Přírodopis		·	·
	Přírodozpyt		·	·
Občanská nauka a výchova			·	·
Počty s naukou o tvarech měřických			1	2
Kreslení			2	2
Psaní			2	2
Chlapecké ruční práce			·	·
Dívčí ruční práce s naukou o domácím hospodářství			2	2
Zpěv (hudební výchova)			1	1
Tělesná výchova			1	1
Nepovinné předměty:				
Německý jazyk			1	1
			·	·
Vnější úprava písemných a jiných prací			2	2
Zameškané půldny	omluvené		20	5
	neomluvené		·	·
Zpráva byla vydána dne			31. 1. 1940	28. 6. 1940.

Je způsobil(a) postoupiti do vyšší do měšťanské školy.

Úřední pečeť

Pololetí	Podpisy: ředitel - řídící učitel	třídní učitel	rodičů nebo jejich zástupců
I.	Jos. Indrák	Lad. Hlubinka	Bedřich Stecklmacher
II.	Jos. Indrák	Lad. Hlubinka	

Č. 111-07. — Školní nakl. Všechna práva vyhrazena. 1940. — 2-98.

Maud's School report card – Grade 5 (the grades range from 1 - Excellent to 5).

At age three I already learnt how to skate on the ice. In the picture I (Mausi) and Heinzi Holitscher, 1932.

With my skates on the way to the rink, 1938

Arthur Steklmacher

(Arthur shortened his surname)

Ruza and Hans Steklmacher

(perished in the Holocaust)

Arthur and Ruza are the parents of Ruth Steklmacher (Federmann)

Otto, Jiri (Georg) and Alice Steckelmacher

(perished in the Holocaust)

My Father Fritz (Friedrich) Stecklmacher, 1938 (perished in the Holocaust)

Picture from the First World War (1914-1918). From left Steffi Steiner, Lutz Loschitzer (son of Regina), Kaethe Steiner, Josef Steiner (in uniform) and Max Steiner.

My first love – Hermann

1941. Two years ago the Germans occupied the Czechoslovakian Republic and our situation as Jews changed radically. New laws, orders and prohibitions were issued.

We, the children, were mostly concerned about the prohibitions that forbade us from going to school, to the parks, cinemas, theatres, playgrounds and swimming pools. We were not allowed to leave the town. We wore the Yellow Star of David; we were obliged to be at home by 8 p.m. We were not allowed to have any contact with Aryans; we could buy at certain hours in Jewish shops only.

The Nazis confiscated our new and spacious community hall; our salvation was the old and rickety Beit Haam, which was originally the Jewish school. My grandfather Max used to learn there before the reign of Kaiser Josef 2, when Jewish children were not allowed to learn in public schools. As I have already mentioned, we were still allowed to go to the Maccabi sports ground. There, we Jewish children met and were happy playing among ourselves. The Maccabi ground was far from the town center; our parents bought bicycles for us.

One day in spring 1941 my cousin Gusta and I were riding our bicycles. A group of young Jews were coming towards us, also on bicycles. We stopped, dismounted and talked. Gusta introduced me to Hermann. I didn't know him because he and his mother had only recently arrived as refugees from Sudetenland. Gusta told me that as we had to leave our house – according to the Nazis' order - we would live together with Hermann, because his family had to leave their apartment too. So we met, Hermann and I. I was a little over twelve years old and Hermann was almost twenty-four.

Hermann Tandler 1941

Hermann moved with his mother and aunt to Sadky 9 before us. We continued living a few more weeks in our house at Sadky 4 - just opposite. There was a curfew concerning us Jews so that we had to be at home by eight o`clock in the evening. I lived in an orderly family, we sat down to eat our supper exactly at 8 o`clock. Before the meal I went to wash my hands. With the towel in my hands I stood by the window and looked, till I saw Hermann hurrying home at the last moment on foot or on his racing bicycle in order to get home by 8.00 in accordance with the Nazis' orders.

Our house Sadky 4

The house in Sadky 9 into which we were ordered to move.

Mother calls me to come to the table; I excuse myself, explaining that I'm washing my hands. Till today I can still feel the pleasant soapy smell of the freshly

laundered damask towel. It was obvious, that Hermann interested me and that I liked him before we got to know each other.

In summer, 1941 we moved from Sadky 4 to Sadky 9. Downstairs, in the small villa at Sadky 9, lived old Mrs. Wolf, the original owner of the house. In another two rooms downstairs lived Hermann with his mother and aunt. At the top of a carpeted wooden stairway we received our dwellings: father, mother, my sister Karmi and I.

At first, our maid and cook Mary still lived with us, later she was forbidden to work for Jews. The common bathroom was upstairs next to our rooms. The common hall, kitchen, and laundry were downstairs; there was a yard and a nice garden too.

The first day there a formal introduction was made between the occupants of the house. Mrs. Wolf was an old acquaintance of our family. Hermann and his mother were refugees from the borderland, from Moravsky Krumlov. They had come to Prostejov, to his mother's sister, the independent unmarried Miss Lagodzinski.

Families Tandler and Stecklmacher in the garden of Sadky 9 in 1942

It was summertime, beautiful weather, after eight in the evening we used to stay in the garden. My seven years old sister was no company for me. I was well

developed for my age, a girlish soul in a female body. I was serious - although Ruthie and I were sometimes overcome by bouts of typical teenage giggling. I engaged in much thought and meditation. It was natural that Hermann and I spent much time together. We were in the garden once, and very innocently and childishly I combed and smoothed Hermann's beautiful wavy hair. Suddenly I understood that I was doing something erotic. When Hermann would come home from work in the afternoons, I looked forward to his ring and ran to open the door. He kissed my hand on one occasion; I was angry, but I was pleased too. We gave each other small gifts. Once in the midst of winter Hermann brought me a rose. What could I do with it, I could not show it to my parents. So I dried it and I still have it till today.

Early in the morning before Hermann left for work, he moved about in the hall downstairs. I left my room, stood above the stairs and we both made the sound "sssss", instead of saying "good morning" to each other. I, the truthful and honest girl, learned to be evasive just to enable me to be with him.

One afternoon in October my parents and Karmi were not at home and Mary was in the kitchen. Hermann and I met by chance near our common bathroom – Hermann embraced me and kissed me on the lips. My heart raced, I was flabbergasted, ran to the mirror to see whether there was any change in my appearance being afraid that my parents would recognize what had happened to me.

Once mother found a note that Hermann left for me under the rug in the hall. Mother told father – there was a scene – father talked to Hermann and in the end I promised that I'd try at least for the time being, to end my relationship with Hermann. I'm an honest person who keeps her promises even if it is very difficult. But one day about two weeks later I came home from Ruthi's house after our lessons (at that time, our studies were conducted privately in the pupils' apartments, that day we had studied in Ruthi's flat) Hermann was walking towards me. He was waiting for me near a passageway – and so I broke my promise to father. By the way, the brown ceramic tiles covering that passageway were still there in 1995.

Once I made the excuse that I couldn't go with my parents to visit my grandparents because I had a lot of homework. After I had completed my homework hastily, I went on a bicycle ride with Hermann to Plumlov. Sometimes Hermann left the house as if he were going to meet David or Otik. Afterwards I would leave the

house; we met and went for a walk as far as Jews were allowed to go. I didn't want people to know 'about us'. I even kept our love secret from my best friend Ruthie.

Mrs. Wolf invited some children from the neighborhood to come and play in our garden, since Jewish children were forbidden to play in any of the parks and playgrounds. It was a nice summer's day. Eva Meitner, Susie Gruenhut, my sister Karmela – Karmi, her friend Anita Bruch and perhaps some other children came to play in the garden. They wanted to play hide-and-seek, and although it was a childish game, I joined them and went to hide in the currant bushes. Hermann saw me, and followed me and I was glad he did. We picked some berries I took a tiny bunch and said: " ...one for me, one for you, one for me, one for you and the last together" which, of course, meant a kiss...

My mother's cousin, Litzi, taught me English. Once I came to the lesson and Litzi decided that we would hold a 'conversation' and then we would go for a walk. When we approached her house at the end of the lesson, I turned down her invitation to come up and have afternoon tea with her because I was "busy and didn't have time". At the entrance to her house we saw Hermann - we had agreed that he should wait for me. Litzi realized that it was not pure chance and a few days later she came to our house and informed on me to my parents. My parents made a scene and I cried helplessly.

At that time, I lived a full and busy life, I enjoyed private lessons with 5-6 Jewish pupils and excellent teachers most of whom were academics and very well-educated; they were very intensive. Hermann who had been studying at the Technology Institute in Brno before the prohibitions, had almost finished a degree in engineering, and he helped me in arithmetic and geometry. We seriously considered that when I'd be older we would get married. We called our future children-to-be "Cihlicky" (little bricks), hoping that nobody would understand us.

Once we intended to go for a long walk. At home, I told my family that I was going to Dr. Loewi the dentist and then to Ruthi's house to learn. I told Ruthi that I had to go to Dr. Loewi. I did indeed go to Dr. Loewi, near his house Hermann and I met and we went for a long walk along Urchitzka Street and we came back through Brnenska Street. On the way we were caught in heavy rain – to this day I can still see how the raindrops dripped down Hermann's nose. What happiness that was -

simply being together. We walked along holding hands; the boyfriend of Hermina, the maid in Ruthi's home saw us. He didn't keep quiet and the next day, I squirmed with embarrassment at Ruthie's house; I had to make excuses to Ruthie and to her strict father Mr. Weisz. I was never good at that and even today I don't know how to get out of embarrassing situations.

Winter arrived and with it, long cold dark evenings, which were spent by the residents of our house around the big oval table, which we had brought with us from Sadky 4. My parents allowed me to stay up with the grown-ups during the evenings, but at 20.30 or 21.00 o'clock I had to go to bed. Father used to open our huge atlas and he informed us about the political situation. I heard names of faraway places like Charkov, Tobruk. Afterwards we played a card game 'The Black Cat'. Hermann and I often sat next to each other another on a small bin – we spoke in whispers and wrote each other notes, hoping that no one would notice. Sometimes one of us entered the toilet, the other one went into the corridor to the toilet window, through which we talked very quietly with each other.

On the high holidays – Rosh Hashanna and Yom Kippur, we went to the small old synagogue because the large and new one had been confiscated by the Germans. I read the prayers in Hebrew without understanding what I read. I tried to read quickly to keep pace with the Rabbi and with the congregation.

Later on there was 'Sylvester' – the Christian New Year, which we celebrated together with all the members of our household in the hall. We hung up a picture of the 'Black Cat' and everyone brought something good to eat. It was the first time in my life that I had tasted peas cooked with salt and black pepper – an east European delicacy, which Hermann's family brought.

The Nazis continued to rage. In addition to jewelry, silver, gold, furs and radio sets we had to hand over our bicycles. In the spring of 1942 the Jews of Prostejov – young people and men were sent to the work camp at nearby Zarovice. Father and Hermann were sent to this camp. I missed Hermann very much. On Saturday afternoons they came home for the weekend, tanned, dirty and bringing a lot of dirty clothes with them. I sent letters to Hermann in Zarovice in secret and received his replies with the help of his mother. With Ruth, we took long walks, as far as Jews

were permitted to go; now following a new prohibition we walked along the sides of the roads because Jews were no longer allowed to walk on the pavements. We made plans about what and how things would be when we'd be adults and have families of our own – but I didn't say a word about Hermann. On these walks by the railway tracks (we were allowed to walk up to there) we found four-leafed clovers – a lucky sign. I picked them and attached them to my letters to Hermann, wishing him luck with all my heart. On Saturday afternoons while waiting for 'our men' from Zarovice I listened intensely for the front door bell ring, so that I could be the one to open the door for Hermann – he always came in before my father.

At the age of twelve - thirteen I already looked like a young woman, rounded in all the right places, but in my soul I was still a tomboy. I never used to read romances for young girls; I had no idea about love between boys and girls. Whatever happened between Hermann and me was completely unexpected, for this reason it was so special and beautiful for me.

One of my granddaughters watching a tele-novella, I felt very bad about it. Although she was still only a child she already knew what to expect, what would come next. What a pity, that she lost her inocence so soon! Nothing would ever be new and unexpected for her and for the youngsters of her generation when their time arrived.

I remember a beautiful spring evening, I missed Hermann very much. I went out into the garden – it was already dark, the sky was full of stars and the old pear tree was blossoming, wonderfully fragrant. I embraced its rough trunk, looking up at the almost full moon and hoping, wishing – perhaps Hermann is also looking at the moon at that moment and our glances, feelings and thoughts may meet. I experienced such strong feelings, such as I had never felt before and rarely thereafter.

June 1942 arrived and with it the departure of transports AAf, AAg, AAm, AAo from the town Olomouc and its vicinity, which included Prostejov. The transports were sent to Ghetto Theresienstadt. At home there was much baking going on, preparing noodles, homemade condensed milk and other things. Like all the Jews, my parents ordered rucksacks, light aluminum kitchenware, and had sewn colored bed linen and track suits. They had taught me how to use the sewing machine; I

sewed little bags in which to put sugar, noodles, dried bread to take with us to Theresienstadt. Hermann and his family were ordered to leave with transport AAg, which was leaving four days before our transport AAm. I went to the railway station to take leave from him. I saw my friend Eva Herrmannova's family there: grandfather, grandmother, Heinz and his father were all leaving. Eva's father, from a mixed marriage, stayed behind and wept. It was the first time in my life that I had seen a grownup man cry. I took leave from Hermann. To this day I remember how I went back home from the station. What sadness ... Until that day I had never felt such sadness and pain.

The Theresienstadt Ghetto (Theresienstadt)

Transports

In June and July 1942 four transports left the city of Olomouc to the Theresienstadt Ghetto.

On July 2nd 1942 my family and Mrs. Wolf also left the house at Sadky 9. In Olomouc they herded us into the school building – it was summer vacation. We lay on the floor, crowded, one next to the other. We were not used to this, it was very difficult. It was there in that school that I noticed Willy Groag and his beautiful wife Madla for the first time.

We, the children, peeled potatoes. I missed Hermann, I didn't know if we would meet each other in Theresienstadt. I got to know girls of my age from Olomouc and nearby towns.

Early in the morning, in fact it was still night, the Germans rushed us to the railway station. We had backpacks and suitcases, the SS men shouted at us, hit us, kicked us. We were stuffed, tightly crammed into dark cattle cars and transported to Theresienstadt. I was put in the same car as my family, but during the journey I was alone with my thoughts and feelings and my longing for Hermann. I found a tiny hole in the side of the wagon through which I watched the beautiful summer landscape pass by. I saw children splashing in the river and felt so envious of them. Eventually, I dared to stand on the connecting 'bridge' between the train carriages and I breathed fresh air again - luckily, the gendarme didn't say anything to me. When we arrived in Bohusovice I left my family behind and joined the long line of people with backpacks heading to Theresienstadt.

Mr. Samet

All my life I continue to think about people, members of the community of Prostejov who have not been among the living for a long time, but whom I still remember well.

I traveled to the Theresienstadt ghetto in the cattle car with my family: my parents, my younger sister, my grandfather and grandmother. But I kept to myself so that I could be alone with my thoughts and feelings.

When we arrived in Bohusovice, I took my backpack and joined the line of people walking on foot to the Theresienstadt ghetto. I walked behind Mr. Samet; I saw his bent back with a backpack and suitcase in front of me. Blue veins stuck out of his large hand because of the strain. In Prostejov, Mr. Samet had a store in which he sold beautiful and exotic fruit. In the winter my father bought big, beautiful apples from his store; they were covered in a fine layer of wax and came from distant California. Once Mr. Samet even imported grapefruit from the land of Israel and sold them in his store. No one knew how to eat them – how to get rid of the bitterness. I remember that my mother and grandmother kept adding more and more sugar, but it didn't help; we didn't know we had to remove the thin membranes between the sections! There were rumors in Prostejov that Mr. Samet had even been in America!

In the Theresienstadt Book of Remembrance I learned that Mr. Samet and his wife Fanny were sent in a transport from Theresienstadt that ended in Baranovichi. They were shot like my friend Ruthie and her parents, like cousin Gusta and my great-uncle Josef. They are among the many people I knew, loved and respected. They continue to live in my memory and will live there forever, until my last day.

'Schleusse'

'Schleusse' was a generic name for the transition stations that were set up in different locations at different times in the ghetto. All the transports entered or left from a Schleusse. Our Schleusse, when we arrived at Theresienstadt, was in the former military bakery.

There was a curfew in the ghetto, as always when a transport arrived. In the windows of the Hanover barracks I saw head upon head – full of people. I threw my heavy backpacks down on the floor of the bakery, and broke out into bitter tears. Luckily, nobody noticed. My family had not yet arrived. They brought out a vat of soup, and I, as shy as I was, took the ladle and dished out the portions. An old man from my town apparently couldn't find his mess tin and so he came to get his soup with his chamber pot in hand. It was new and unused, but still, it was a chamber pot – yet we had just left our homes three days ago!!

We learned to adapt to all kinds of things in the bakery. We slept on the floor in an enormous hall that was infused with a sour odor; we used a foul-smelling latrine with no privacy; we felt hunger and were not allowed to leave the dwellings. Luckily, I

went through all this with my friend Ruthie. I longed for Hermann, I didn't know why he didn't come. I didn't know if we would meet, if he was in Theresienstadt or was sent to Poland. During the night I dreamt, I saw Hermann's coffin placed on a retaining wall and covered in black cloth. A young rooster with long colorful feathers sat on the coffin. The next day I overcame my shyness and stood by the entrance to the bakery and asked a young man from my hometown, who happened to pass by, to send a message to Hermann that I was waiting for him. On the following day, Hermann came to see me at dusk carrying a mess kit. Although it was forbidden, I took the opportunity to join Hermann and leave the Schleusse. We walked together to the 'Magdeburg' barracks, to his mother. I refused to accept potatoes from his mother who worked in the kitchen; I came for Hermann, not for food.

Wherever we looked there were crowds of people swarming about. Finally we saw a place near a staircase that seemed empty – at last we could kiss – just then there a man and his wife from Prostejov arrived – I wished the ground would swallow me up!

Our aunt from Brno, Lotte Senski, who had been in Theresienstadt for several months already, came to visit us in the Schleusse and warned us not to be surprised if we didn't menstruate. She said the Germans put chemicals in our food so that we wouldn't be able to have children.

Eventually, we all left the Schleusse. The men were transferred to the Sudeten barracks; the old people to the block for the elderly. Mother, my sister and I were moved to Q802 where mothers with children were accommodated. We lived on the floor and it was horribly crowded. The adults were sent to work. In the summer of 1942 there was not yet a crematorium in the ghetto, and my father worked during this time digging mass graves. My mother distributed mattresses; sometimes I took her place. The mattresses had a bad sour smell from disinfectant, but I enjoyed going out on the streets of the ghetto; during this time there was still a partial curfew.

New transports arrived all the time. There was a partial curfew, during which it was forbidden to leave the buildings. We were only allowed to go to our work and spend two hours outside in the evenings. Transports heading 'to the East' left the ghetto at a dizzying pace … we were unable to keep track of these movements and

didn't know who from among our family and friends had been sent, the transports were so quickly organized and frequent that there was no time to say goodbye.

We all were very worried, frightened and sad. From a happy, laughing girl I had become sad and serious; I only learned to laugh again many years later in Israel.

Q802

After grandfather's death in the autumn of 1942, grandmother, mother, Karmela and I 'lived' in a corner, i.e., we slept on the floor or on a suitcase in a corner of the room. Later on we were given some old mattresses. Living in a corner has its advantages; there are two walls, meaning there are sides with no neighbors and room on the walls to hang belongings. We had no closet, so we sat and slept on our things, or hung them on nails on the wall. The Seliger sisters - professor Stella and lawyer Judr. Berta – 'lived' in another corner. Their nephew Tommy Richter joined them after he recovered from scarlet fever. Mrs. Pasternak and her daughter Edith 'lived' in the third corner, and the fourth was occupied by Mrs. Somogyi and Etka. Truda's place was in the middle. In the first few days we were all from Prostejov, and we were so crowded that when we lay down, the feet of those across from us touched our own.

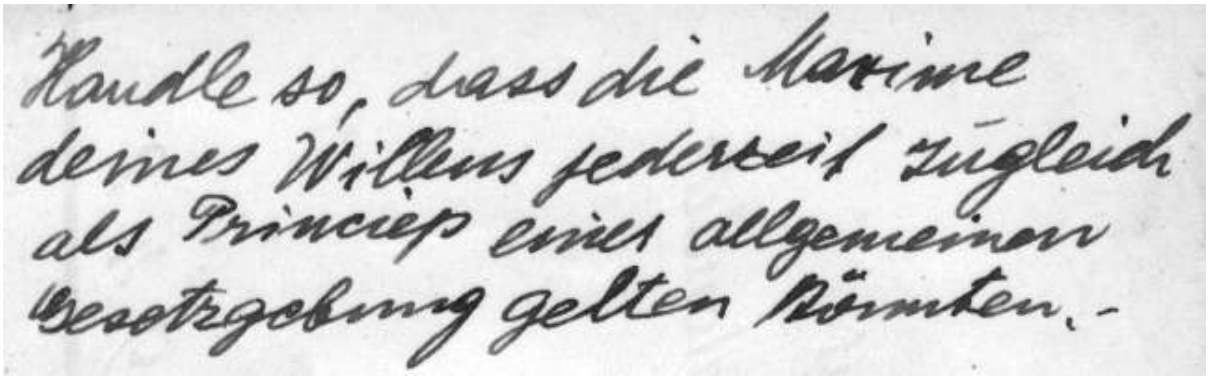
Each day at noon Truda Ober-Goldreich and I brought coal to the cellar. Afterwards I would wash myself there in a bowl with cold water. During these occasions I met Mrs. Stein, who prepared cups of 'coffee' there for herself after lunch using some kind of substitute and smoked her 'cigarettes' made of leaves and herb tea and a piece of paper.

For some time the women from Prostejov and their children were sent to Poland, but the room soon filled up with women and children from Prague, and afterwards women from Germany also crowded in. As in the words of the Theresienstadt anthem "…from place to place, each and every day, we move." Ultimately, we, too, moved to other lodgings. First I left. I moved to the girls' house L410. Grandmother, mother and Karmela moved later to block L308 to a room for mothers and children.

One nice summer morning, Ruth and I went to the "Holzplatz" – an outside timber depot just behind the Dresden barracks. There in the sun were some mothers with their babies; our developing maternal instincts were strongly aroused.

I lived a 'double life'. In the mornings I walked in a long line of children to the 'Bastion' – a place on the ramparts where we exercised and played. I spent my evenings with Hermann. Sometimes, in the dusk, we sat on the logs behind the Dresden barracks and were happy just being together. My parents were more permissive; they probably realized that they could not continue to prevent my meetings with Hermann forever. At that time there continued to be a partial curfew – we were only allowed to leave our dwellings for two hours in the evenings – and, of course, to go to work.

My grandfather, Max Steiner, died in Theresienstadt lying on the floor among a mass of other elderly people. Luckily for him, grandmother was at his side. I still have a pocket calendar from 1942 that my grandfather brought to Theresienstadt with him; on one page it says in his handwriting:



Categorical Imperative – this is the categorical imperative of the German philosopher Emmanuel Kant: Act only according to that maxim that you would be able safely to transform into a universal rule.

The Felt Hat

My grandmother was a good woman. Shortly after she arrived in Theresienstadt she was widowed and was transformed from a chubby woman to become mere skin and bones. After my grandfather's death she came to live with us in Q802. Grandmother was pained at seeing her only daughter, my mother, and us, her granddaughters, living in such terrible circumstances in the ghetto. She became accustomed to sleeping with the rest of us on the crowded floor and living with the constant hunger, illness, and fear of transports to the East. She never found her sisters and brothers who were taken to Theresienstadt from Brno three months before us. We discovered later that her two brothers Ernst and Zigo Steiner were

sent to Poland with their families. Her two sisters Klemi and Gisela had died in Theresienstadt before our arrival. In spite of all this, grandmother still found a place in her heart to care for others who were worse off. She took an elderly gentleman, who came alone from Germany, under her wings. When he contracted dysentery, a common malady in the ghetto – 'Terezinka' we nicknamed it – she cooked cereal from the food we had brought from home for him. Once, towards evening, the gentleman came to my grandmother on some pretext, and asked her to guard the one precious thing he still had – a light grey felt hat. The next day this man was found hanging in the attic of our building. He had been living there with hundreds of other elderly Jews from Germany, all of whom had come to Theresienstadt in the summer of 1942 believing they had come to live out the remainder of their lives in a health resort.

In October 1944 my beloved grandmother was sent to Auschwitz, and went straight from the train to the gas chambers. We missed her so! She had been with us in Theresienstadt for over two years.

A Day of Bliss

It is the fall of 1942; we have been in Ghetto Theresienstadt several weeks by now. It's a beautiful day, the sun is shining in a blue sky. Hermann and I are not working today, we spend the morning in the Dresden barracks. In a long queue of the elderly who had recently arrived from Germany stands an old woman with the marking of the blind on her sleeve. [I think it was three black dots] She holds a receptacle with a few small moldy pieces of bread waiting for the 'coffee' to be poured on them – a dark, bitter, watery but warm liquid – so she can have her breakfast.

We're leaving through the huge barracks gate and strolling down the main Ghetto street. I feel young, healthy and utterly happy. As we walk together, hand in hand, an elderly man, one of the new arrivals from Germany, looks at us and asks if we are brother and sister. We laugh as we walk on. Happiness and laughter come naturally, because we are in love.

We go to the 'Small Bastion'. There are fallen autumn leaves on the ground, but the grass is still green. Many couples have come here to enjoy a few hours of this wonderful day bestowed on us, despite all adversities.

But our bliss soon ended with the sudden appearance of an SS man in a black uniform and shiny black boots who screamed at us: "Get out of here, quickly, quickly!" We return with haste to the crowded streets of the ghetto.

Many years have passed since, but I have not forgotten. In fact I still hold the memory fresh in my mind of those blissful feelings I experienced as a young girl.

Eating with the Same Spoon

Each of us, at great frequency, was beset by one illness or another. Hermann, too, was often sick and so there were evenings when we couldn't meet. As a result, I have in my possession a number of letters from him. Once, when Hermann couldn't come to see me because of illness, the Seliger sisters, who lived in the room with us and were from my hometown, invited me to join them on their visit to their mother in the hospital. I saw terrible things there!

Hermann was ill for a long time and my parents wouldn't allow me to visit him alone. I so missed him. One evening, I went out with Trude and Etka to the L400 'promenade'. I ran to the large Sudeten barrack for a short visit to Hermann. In the large room there lived several hundred men (including Hermann's friends David and Otik). I returned hastily to the 'promenade', joined Trude and Etka again and came back with them to our room in Q802. My mother did not know about my visit to Hermann and she was happy that I had gone out with the girls for a walk.

In one of his letters, Hermann asked me to visit him together with his mother. In this case my parents had no objection. I brought a cabbage to his mother that I had received that same day in the vegetable garden and I went with her to visit Hermann in the large 'Sudeten' barracks.

During this period transports were being sent eastwards all the time. Uncle Edmund went with his family, Litzi was sent with them of course. Ruthie was sent with her parents as were uncle Josef and Gusta. Everyone suddenly disappeared, and there was no chance to say goodbye. We only found out that they had been sent to the east, once they were already gone from Theresienstadt. Today we know they were all murdered.

My little sister Karmela became sick; she got scarlet fever and was transferred to an isolation hospital. Because of her illness we were not sent to Poland. Hermann's

aunt was summoned to a transport. His mother wanted to join her with Hermann too, so the three of them would go together. I remember as we – Hermann, his friend David and myself – spoke about this when we were in the large courtyard of the Hohen Elbe barracks. I couldn't control myself and cried terribly at the very thought of the idea that Hermann would leave. Hermann went to his boss, the engineer Mr. Weiss, who promised to list Hermann as his employee; this way Hermann and his mother would not be sent away from the ghetto. Hermann's mother was now convinced that they should not join her sister and they remained in Theresienstadt for the time being.

In his free time Hermann built some small shelves from leftover wood. Shelves were very valuable and in great demand in the ghetto. People would pay him with a piece of bread, a little margarine or a spoon of sugar, so one evening his mother was able to prepare a 'pudding'. Although she used water as the base, since there was no milk, it was wonderful, eating it from the same pot – a spoonful for Hermann, a spoonful for me – in the room where his mother lived with other women in Q209. I felt I was part of the family. In the evenings, before the curfew, Hermann walked me to Q802. In the courtyard there was a corner in which we parted, afterwards I would run to my room, my heart beating with hope, that tomorrow we would meet again. There were some evenings when we would sit together on the steps of a hut behind the Magdeburg barracks.

The Parting

In October 1942 they began sending transports of the elderly. Hermann, an only son, was born when his mother was 40. She was 65 when she was called up for transport Bx. Hermann volunteered to go with his mother.

A piece of fabric on which I embroidered the number of Hermann's transport from Theresienstadt to Poland

This was the only thing he could do for her, we both knew, that it was his duty to go with his mother - nothing would stop him. We spent that last evening together, Hermann asked me not to cry. Afterwards, as he wrote in his letters, he packed and went to the Schleusse. My mother said she would accompany me to the Schleusse to part from Hermann. Mother brought them a can of preserves for the trip. We promised to wait for each other, and Hermann gave me an address where I would find him after the war. To this day I remember the exact address: Berlin, Wilmersdorf, Ahrweiler Strasse 3.

We parted, in the Schleusse in the Bodenheim barrack, across from our place at Q802. They announced that those who were not due to depart on the transport must leave. I went back to our room and sat in our corner, miserable and inconsolable. On a sudden instinct, I ran out to the street, pushing my way through the crowds that were standing behind the rope barrier that separated the onlookers from those leaving. At that moment I saw Hermann go past, dressed in a coat with a backpack on his back and his suitcase tied to a cane (his own invention). This is how I saw him for the last time. He surely didn't see me. The next day Turek Schreiber gave me Hermann's last letter from the train. I became ill that day and had a high fever. When I was able to go out again, transport By had been prepared to be sent to Poland. I wrote a note to Hermann, overcame my shyness, went to the Schleusse and asked Zita Bleichfeld from Prostejov to pass it on to him. She put the note in a safe place on her body and promised to try and to give it to Hermann. I had never before spoken to Zita, she was twenty one, from a very religious family; she had certainly never spoken to a young man before.

In about 1975 I learned by reading the Czech book named "The Town Behind Bars" by Pollack and Lagus, that transport Bx was sent to Treblinka and all the deportees were killed. Transport By (on which Zita went with my note) was sent to Auschwitz! Richard Glazar, who was sent from Theresienstadt to Treblinka before Hermann and his mother, survived and wrote a book about Treblinka. He lived in Switzerland and visited Tel Aviv. When I spoke with him he told me, that everyone on Transport Bx had been murdered as soon as they arrived at the camp, not even one young man was selected for work.

From October 1942 till 1950 I still hoped to meet Hermann again. Throughout all those years - my best years - from fourteen till twenty one, I had no boyfriend.

It was not until 1977 a short time before the birth of our first grandchild I learned, that Hermann and his mother were sent to Treblinka - and what Treblinka meant: directly from the train into the gaschamber.

They suffocated you, they burned you,

they scattered your ashes.

Where? How can I find you?

Even now, as I write these lines, I can dimly feel the old sadness and pain that I could not share with anyone. My parents, and even my good and clever grandmother, acted as though nothing had happened. I couldn't cry, because I was never alone. Until then I had adamantly refused to move to the girls' home. If I had lived there I would not have been able to meet Hermann. After he was gone, I became apathetic and let my parents transfer me to L410. Father made sure I would be in room 25 where Gerty Gelbkopf from Prague lived, the daughter of good friends whom I knew. The day father brought me to L410 was overcast, dark and rainy and I was completely depressed. No one had any idea in what mental state I began this next phase of my life. Everyone said it was for my own good, that I would be able to learn and maybe get a bit more food. Thus I began to live in a room populated by twentyfour thirteen year old girls.

Letters from Hermann to Maud (Mausi)

Dear Mausi!

Yesterday, alas I couldn't come as I had to help out in the kitchen and there was a lot of work to do. After a quarter to nine I came running to the gate, but it was too late. Today I will come certainly if not in the afternoon, then at six o'clock for sure. I am told that for the time being that I'll work as a bricklayer, that's surely better than to drag coal. I don't know how things will be, perhaps it would be better to move after all into permanent lodgings.

How are you? How are your parents? What does David do, is he working by now? Do you work already?

See you (I hope).

Many greetings to you all from Hermann.

(This letter was sent to me when I was in the Schleusse in the bakery.)

Dear Mausi!

Too bad we could only talk for a short time yesterday, but I hope that soon we will have a work assignment near you. There was no opportunity to speak to your father and others. I believe … work place … and that … about all … aware of … (parts of the text are illegible).

As for you, I heard that children can remain with their mothers or move to live in a home for children up to age sixteen. What is preferable, I don't know. Apparently … with mother. I hope you are pleased you are together with Ruth. Ruza lives … she comes to take food from here … did you manage to rest after your journey two days ago … dinner … (also Mrs. Wolf) … but I didn't see. My aunt from Brno … every day here … perhaps you can come here once … I have gotten used to it here, I am just afraid of Poland, they say a number of transports will be sent this month. If you want, write to me at the address below, in case I can't come to you. In the meantime lots of warm wishes to you … to your honorable parents and to Ruth,

sent from Hermann,

H.T. Magdeburg barrack

Shl. 61, No. 620 AAg.

Dear Mausi! 12.VII. 1942

I have completely forgotten to thank you again for the yellow Star of David* you lent me. What that means you know. I'll bring it to you on Tuesday at half past six. I hope we will be as lucky as we were today, and will be able to go out to our place [Hermann meant the place where he lived with his mother and aunt still in the Schleusse in Magdeburger Kasserne] ....if your mother will not object. This evening I met your father and uncle near the Sudeten barrack … when I was waiting for Otik.

I had such an unlucky day …. you know of course what that means for my mood. Let's hope that tomorrow will be a better, with the paint work too. It'll be better for me not to come at noon for reasons of which you are aware, although I would like it very much. I would like to read a little too, but it's almost impossible … because of the noise ... I have to .... some things … it drives one almost to despair. I must finish now, sleep well and let us hope ... See you tomorrow.

My respects to your mother and … Karmi.

Many greetings,

Hermann.

*the star: the yellow star of David we were obliged to wear all the time ... a Jew who did not wear the star was severely punished, sometimes even killed.

Mausi,

Ruth is sick, so yes this evening!

Yours Hermann.

Please write if we can meet tomorrow afternoon. Write today or tomorrow morning so that it can reach me by lunch time and so that I can know if it is yes, or no.

We have a lot of …

Kissing you, Hermann.

Arrange it somehow. Please!

It doesn't matter what time.

* This letter is written in Czech, a man who worked with Hermann brought it to me. Letters which we sent in the Ghetto's internal mail had to be written in German, because of censorship. That was the reason we could not usually write intimate letters

Dear Mausi,

Many thanks for your letter, in the future, I will try to take its contents to heart. I see ...There is no benefit in all of this, only disadvantages, but not doing anything would have caused me as much harm as carelessness. My temperature has gone

down and I am hoping I can see you again in a few days. The illness is not so serious when we meet I will have something important to tell you about that, but only to you.

Today we received goulash, it was very tasty, and it would be lot better, if we got meals like this one more often.

Next time tell me in detail the story about Etka.

The man who gave you the letter yesterday, he is not an ox, he is a big 'nebbish' [one to be pitied], he can barely hear and sees very little.

Did anybody say anything? I hope nothing bad.

Write soon please, best wishes from Hermann.

Otto Himmelriech sends his greetings to you.

Dear Mausi! 20.9.1942

You surely heard from your mother that I am ill again. I would like to know what has caused this. Since we'll not meet for some time, I wish you in this way all the best for the coming holidays and hope that you shall bring much joy to your dear parents. Everything else (shall be said) by word of mouth. Yesterday afternoon I was a bit late so that I met your grandma and mother already in the yard. I could not come up at a later hour any more.

In the afternoon your parents came to see me, Ida (Swartz), Felix and my mother too. I was at the infirmary and I got a note saying that I don't have to go to work and the doctor told me today I have severe bronchitis. He gave me some pills and asked me to be careful not to catch pneumonia. I don't believe that it is so bad, but I have to stay in bed for a week. What a pity to waste time being ill instead of spending it in a better way. I hope that you'll write to me sometime, about what you are doing. Now you'll be able to go to sleep at seven o'clock at last. Again, all the best to you, to your parents, your grandmother, Karmi.

Your father just informed me that you also have a fever. What happened? Are you aching? I hope not. Get well soon!

Please write and tell me how you are doing. Best wishes from Hermann.

Dear Mausi,

I hope you have received all my notes, more will follow. The doctor told me today that if my health does not improve within two to three days, he will send me to the infirmary. I feel a bit better but I can't sleep at night. Yesterday I was awake from 1:30 in the morning. If you want to and you can – since you have a day off tomorrow, go at four o'clock to Q209, to my mother, and come to see me. Otto is also sick so I am not bored. I have plenty to read but I still miss you, so please come tomorrow with my mother if it is possible. Best wishes, Hermann.

Dear Mausi!

Thanks for your note from yesterday. I could hardly read it … it was already dark and I was interrupted all the time.

I heard that you, who are innocent, fasted. [It was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement] I who am in a far worse situation wanted to fast, but the doctor told me that I must eat. I feel a lot better, no more fever, just a little shortness of breath and a cough. Sometimes I walk in the room and sometimes out in the courtyard. The doctor allows me to do that. My mother comes twice a day, but I miss you. How are you? You don't write about yourself, why? Mausi, it's a pity that yesterday, on Yom Kippur you were not here. The table was set, candles, prayers, later we ate, and it was very nice. I am not religious but I really liked it. On Monday, Karmi will be back from the hospital, your father told me that. Don't annoy her again and keep an eye on her. Best wishes, Hermann.

Dear Mausi!

Yesterday, after I sent you mine, I received your long letter so I am writing again. I also heard about the Rabbi's sermon, which was excellent. He also talked about the small man, who now, when he is at last in the position of giving orders, even when bones are being broken, and ... About the one who is in charge...About conscience which seems to be superfluous here, and about the egotism which is expressed here. The Rabbi is certainly right, but I believe that even he, like everyone else, does not always do only what is right. Sometimes, selfish reasons overcome the command of a person's conscience. It can happen even to people who seem to be honest. You are too young to know human nature; you believe and trust everyone,

because you think they are all as honest as you are. You … In life … that's enough for today. To be continued next time.

Best wishes to you and to your mother and your grandmother. Hermann.

Dearest Mausi!

I am writing these lines to you just before leaving for the Schleusse around midnight. Alas these are the last ones here in Theresienstadt, but it is my hope that we will sometime meet again. I hold fast to this thought and it gives me strength and courage to go through all this with my mother. There were some disagreeable things here to contend with at work or elsewhere, but the fact that I could see you almost daily, made it easier for me. Those are unforgettable hours for me, which I spent in your family circle.

My thanks again to you and to your esteemed parents for everything,

Be blessed by your friend Hermann.

My greetings and respects to Grandma.

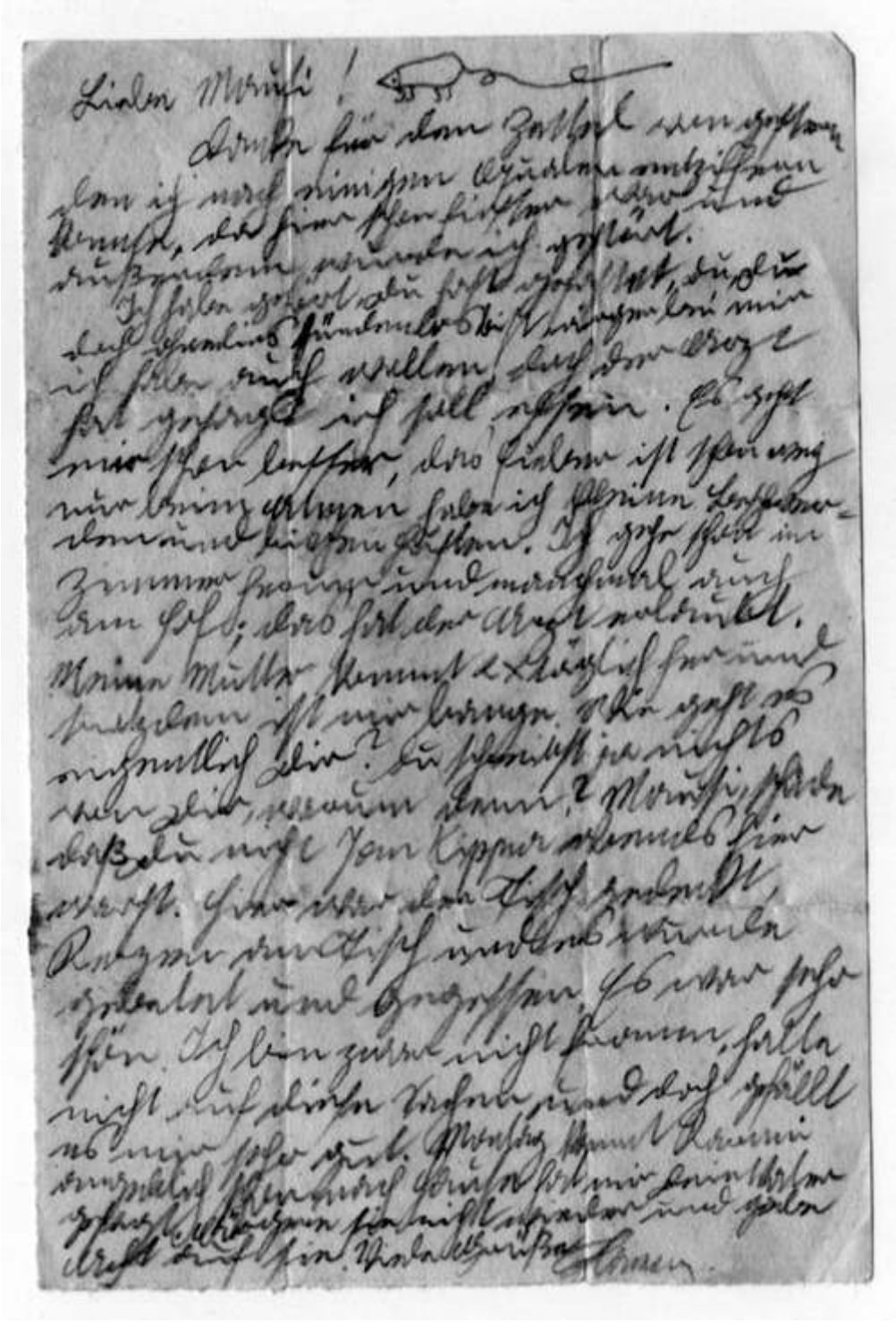
P.S. I brought the suitcases at 12 o'clock with David to the Schleusse and I have to go to the office in Sudeten. Only after that I will finally go to the Schleusse.

As I have already noted, the last letter that I received from Hermann was brought to me by Turek Scheriber from the train station.

Mausi my love!

We arrived safely at the train station, at a quarter to two and we have a good seat by the window. We are missing three suitcases, which are in the cargo wagon and we were told we shall receive them. We have enough space. It is already 6:00 p.m. and work is going on. Every one of us is being given a can of food, a bit of sugar, salt, 60 grams of margarine, one half of a loaf of bread and a little water. When we left the Schleusse, we left ... and it was brought to us. I don't know where we will be sent, the rumor is to Ostrovo. It is far, but my thoughts will always be with you. Thank you and your mother for making the effort to come and take leave from us and I hope that you will be spared this journey. Warm regards to you, to your distinguished parents, to your grandmother and Karmi. Hermann.

We are in the third wagon of the train. The Somogyis are in a cattle wagon. It is not sure when the train will leave, probably tonight. See you soon, truly. Hermann



The letters were usually written with a pencil on small pieces of paper. They were written with tiny letters without a break because paper, like everything else in the ghetto was rare and precious. We were ordered to write in German.

Girls Home L 410, Room Number 25

Our room Room 25 L410, Theresienstadt - preparing for a film by the Nazis.

In the winter of 1942 I moved from the room where I stayed with my mother, Karmela, grandma and other women with their children to the girl's home L410 room number 25. A few days earlier Hermann and his mother had left Ghetto Theresienstadt. They were sent with Transport Bx to the East. As I have already noted nobody paid any attention to my frame of mind, while starting this new phase of my life; they said that it was for my good – I would be among girls of my age, I could learn, perhaps receive a bit more food. Depressed, hurt, sad and indifferent, I went with my father to the girl's home L410. I have never been so miserable; I was never so sad, distraught, hurt and helpless as I was at this time. Only in 1986, when I lost my beloved daughter Yael did I feel more pain. Father arranged for me to stay in room number 25 where Gerti Gelbkopf lived; she was the daughter of his good friends from Prague and I knew her. She had a nick-name 'the Broom', because she was tall and very thin. Danka and Dasha welcomed me nicely and invited me to see their bunk on the third deck under the ceiling. Later I was assigned a bottom bunk instead of Gerti Taenzer, a popular girl who was sent in a transport to Poland (a destination we knew almost nothing about).

I surrounded myself with a wall of silence, I did not tell anyone about myself or about Hermann. I missed him terribly but I had no choice, I had to integrate within the daily life of 'the girl's home'. I worked in the vegetable garden and participated in classes, which were held secretly. In the evenings I visited my mother's room, where the family met, but my thoughts were with Hermann.

My bunk neighbor was Shoshi Kraus. She was already 15 – more mature and serious than the rest of the girls. Despite my silence and lack of interest in my surroundings, she treated me nicely. Many transports were leaving Theresienstadt. Shoshi with her mother and her younger brother were sent to Poland too. When Shoshi packed her belongings before her departure, she remembered her nightgown in the laundry. I gave her mine and instead I received her nightgown when it returned from the laundry. So it happened, that the nightgown with the delicate embroidery that had been part of my mother's dowry arrived to Auschwitz with Shoshi. The white flowered gown we called 'Shoshi's gown'.

Shoshi, her mother and brother Hanush were sent to Auschwitz on September 6th 1943 and perished. All the people who arrived in Auschwitz on this particular transport, except those who had died there because of hunger, or disease and excluding the physicians and nurses were sent to the gas chambers six months after their arrival, on the night between 7th and 8th March, 1944. They sang Hatikvah and the Czech national hymn in the gas chamber.

My Father's Report on the Girls' Home

It seems to me that I was sent by mistake to Room 25, which was managed by the communist caretaker Magda Weiss. Magda was able to convince all the girls that the communist doctrine was justified, even those girls who had arrived from the Zionist orphanage in Brno and those who came from Zionist families. I was not persuaded.

Most Jews of Bohemia and Moravia, followed a rather 'lukewarm' version of their religion, even my father, my grandfathers and uncles, the Moravian Zionists, only went to the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur; we the children went on Purim, Simchat Torah and Shavuot too. We celebrated Hanukkah with a beautiful Hanukiah (a nine-branched candelabra), we children receiving presents like the Christian children on Christmas. The Jews in Bohemia who mostly were not Zionists

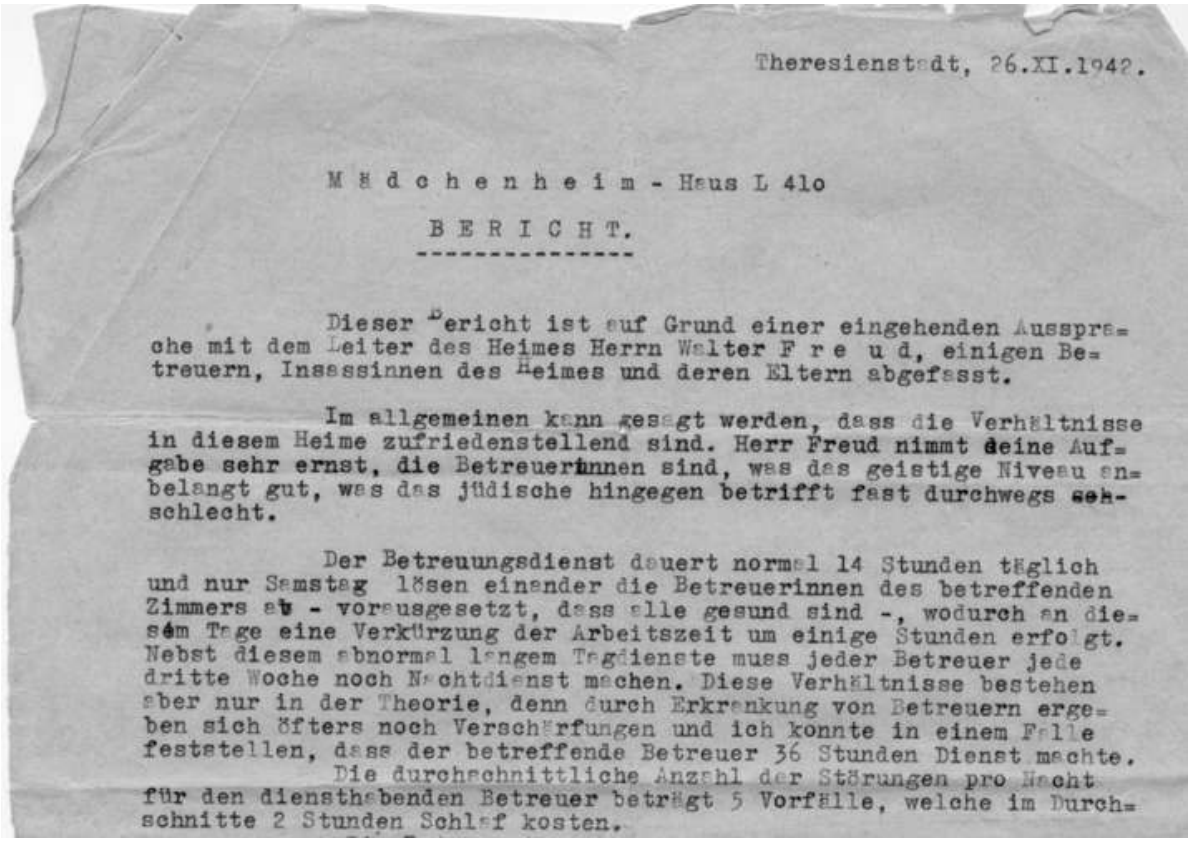
went so far, that they had a Christmas tree in their homes, some families also lit the Hanukiah, some did not. Most of the girls who lived with me in room number 25 used to have a Christmas tree in their homes. When Christmas was celebrated in our room, which included a feast of food, I waited outside in the corridor till it was over. Magda ignored me. I sensed her hostility towards me even more, after my father wrote that most of the teachers and caretakers were communists, in his Report to the 'education department', which was part of 'the self leadership' of the ghetto.

The Report my Father wrote about the Girls' Home L 410:

Theresienstadt, 26.XI.1942.

Girl's Home – House L 410.

R E P O R T.



Theresienstadt, 26.XI.1942.

M ä d c h e n h e i m - Haus L 41o

B E R I C H T.

Dieser Bericht ist auf Grund einer eingehenden Aussprache mit dem Leiter des Heimes Herrn Walter F r e u d, einigen Betreuern, Insassinnen des Heimes und deren Eltern abgefasst.

Im allgemeinen kann gesagt werden, dass die Verhältnisse in diesem Heime zufriedenstellend sind. Herr Freud nimmt seine Aufgabe sehr ernst, die Betreuerinnen sind, was das geistige Niveau anbelangt gut, was das jüdische hingegen betrifft fast durchwegs sehr schlecht.

Der Betreuungsdienst dauert normal 14 Stunden täglich und nur Samstag lösen einander die Betreuerinnen des betreffenden Zimmers ab - vorausgesetzt, dass alle gesund sind -, wodurch an diesem Tage eine Verkürzung der Arbeitszeit um einige Stunden erfolgt. Nebst diesem abnormal langem Tagdienste muss jeder Betreuer jede dritte Woche noch Nachtdienst machen. Diese Verhältnisse bestehen aber nur in der Theorie, denn durch Erkrankung von Betreuern ergeben sich öfters noch Verschärfungen und ich konnte in einem Falle feststellen, dass der betreffende Betreuer 36 Stunden Dienst machte.

Die durchschnittliche Anzahl der Störungen pro Nacht für den diensthabenden Betreuer beträgt 5 Vorfälle, welche im Durchschnitte 2 Stunden Schlaf kosten.

This report is written on the basis of a long and profound discussion with the manager Mr. Walter Freud and other educators as well as the girls who reside in the house and with their parents.

In general we can say that the conditions of accommodation in the house are acceptable. Mr. Freud is taking his job very seriously. Spiritually the level of care

given by the caretakers is good, but on the Jewish level it is insufficient. The caretakers work 14 hours a day and they only receive replacement staff on Saturday; as long as they are in good health - a fact which can reduce their shift on Saturday by a few hours. In addition to this long shift every caretaker (metapelet in Hebrew) is obliged to work on the night shift once every three weeks.

These conditions are only valid in theory, since they are often ill and then there is a worsening of the situation and once I found a certain caretaker who was forced to work 36 hours in one straight shift. The average number of interruptions during the night shift is 5 and this on the average subtracts about two hours of sleep.

The caretakers whom I have mentioned, male and female, emphasized the fact that their job is very difficult, they work long hours, because of their concern and attention for the children, usually out of idealism. The average age of the caretaker is 25. The youngest ones range in age from 18 -20. My impression was that they are mature enough. It is interesting that most of the younger caretakers are Zionists, which is not the case in the older group. There is friendship between the young women and the girls, but it doesn't interfere with the girls having respect for those very young caretakers.

The house is partially equipped with stoves, with the promise of seven more stoves. We'll need seven more and it would be helpful to receive them as soon as possible. I have noticed that when it is cold, there is too much ventilation during the night so that some of the girls complained about the cold. This is true only in those rooms in which there are no stoves. The light in the hallway and the staircase is insufficient and Mr. Freud has no solution due to the difficulties created by the Jewish ghetto police. (This was due to the fact that from the beginning of the war in 1939 a blackout was imposed on Germany, including the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, because of eventual air-raids.) There is a draught in the stairwell because one window is missing. Lice are common among the girls, but the number of those affected is diminishing. There were no complaints about the medical care. The girls wash in the rooms in the evening and Mr. Freud assured me that they take care and make sure the girls wash every day,

Suggestions:

1. To obtain more stoves as soon as possible.

2. To improve the lighting in the stairwell

3. To repair the windows in the stairwell.

4. To add more caretakers with Jewish awareness – young mothers if possible, in order to alleviate and reduce the long working shift of the current caretakers.

5. If the new workforce is given responsibility for washing, dressing and morning routine, when the girls are dressed for breakfast and then pass on responsibility to the next shift, their workday will be shorter. It is preferable to end the day at 18:00 p.m., so when the second (night) shift starts, the children can be helped with dinner, washing and going to bed. The two groups of caretakers will alternate their shifts every few days or every week.

P.S. We realized later, that the infirmary has no waiting room, girls who have a fever are sometimes forced to wait in the stairwell, (which is open and draughty) sometimes for two hours before their turn.

A comment regarding my father's report:

We washed ourselves in a bowl of cold water every evening; we only received a ticket for the bathhouse with hot showers in the Hohenelbe barracks once in three months.

Life in L410 Room 25

In the room which was 4 meters by 6 meters - resided twenty-four girls aged thirteen, sleeping in triple-decker bunk beds. The beds were made of coarse wood.

On each bed which was 70 cm wide we stored all our 'belongings' and of course ourselves. For breakfast we were given 'black coffee'- a black bitter liquid. For lunch 'lentil soup'- Linsensuppe - a brown liquid which I doubt had ever been near any real lentils. For lunch we received potatoes with a sort of sauce. At best we received a dumpling and 'cream', which was made from the morning coffee, saccharine, flour and margarine. Occasionally we received a small amount of jam usually one tablespoon, sometimes a bit of Leberpastete or Blutpastete - which is a kind of sandwich spread. We received our food from the children's kitchen, the food was a little better than in the huge barracks' kitchens. Once a week we children got a little milk. Sometimes for the evening meal we received a slice of yeastcake. We were hungry all the time. There was too much food to die of starvation, but too little to live.

We, the children especially, had to learn how to contain ourselves, not to eat all our food at once, so as not to be left without any food in the days to follow. We learned to eat our bread in thin slices and when it was dry, we could chew it slowly. Sometimes we fantasized: 'now I am eating bread with butter - or some other fancy spread.'

We had a recipe of our own in the girls' home: you take a little milk and a bit of sugar, whip it with a fork and then lick the fork. We called it 'sladke nic' - a 'sweet nothing', and you could make it last a long time. We stole food when and wherever possible, but there was an iron rule that we never broke: you never steal from your fellow inmates. You steal only from the Germans or from an impersonal source (the food train – a storeroom).

I stayed in the girls' home for two and a half years. During the first few months Walter Freud and Karli Hutter managed the girls' home. Later Willi Groag and Mrs. Englander managed it most of the time. The caretakers were wonderful women, who gave up the little that was left of their private lives and devoted themselves to us. They were our mothers, teachers, advisers, helpers and friends. They organized us to fetch our food together from the kitchen, they looked after our cleaning and tidying of our rooms.

We worked and although it was strictly forbidden, we learned. We learned eagerly and we liked it. There was neither paper nor pencils; if you had not brought something with you to Theresienstadt from home, you just did not possess it. Transports were coming and leaving all the time and it wasn't easy to learn and to teach. In every lesson, a few girls were missing and several new ones arrived. We all were exited, frightened and nervous, because of the transports, and it was necessary to repeat the lessons again and again. Despite this inappropriate 'learning environment' we learned a lot.

The girls from room 23 used to visit us in the evening in our room 25. Despite the crowded space we had fun! As we were getting ready to go to sleep we would sit on the bunks and chat. Kunie, the red head was in love again, she rolled up her hair with pieces of cloth to give them a curl and she danced with a broom. Suddenly there was a rumor: Moehs and Eichman were on the ground floor; they were inspecting the building. Within seconds, the books and the notebooks were under the

mattresses (we were forbidden to learn!), the room was tidy and all the girls were lying down 'asleep' – in darkness.

Mrs. Salus

Who doesn't remember Mrs. Salus who took upon herself the thankless task, of examining our hair for lice. So every two weeks: "Girls, Saluska is coming!" And the girls, instead of being thankful, made fun of her. And Mrs. Salus checked us seriously and meticulously. Hanka from our room stood once in line and was diagnosed as having caught a clothes' louse, (which affected only the elderly and neglected). Hanka was sent to the disinfection, which was an unforgettable experience. I am not sure what this involved: there was an institution called Entlausung in the Hohen Elbe barracks. I was never there, thank God. I understand that the people who had to be "deloused" had to remove their clothes, so that their clothes could be deloused. In the meantime the person took a shower, his body hair was probably shaved (our vain Hanka did not lose her beautiful blond hair, it was probably only cut shorter, (don't forget we were in Theresienstadt - not in Auschwitz!).Their body was smeared by some disinfecting ointment. From than on, everything which happened to Hanka started with '…it was before (or after) I had a clothes louse.'

On the bunk above me lived a well liked girl. Her nickname was 'Kobyla' (the mare), her real name was Sonia Schultz, she wasn't a tidy girl. Don't ask what fell on me from her bunk every day! If Sonia was alive today – she would probably be an excellent actress; she was very talented. Sonia died a few years after the war; she was survived by her husband and her tiny baby son.

We were eager to learn and acquire knowledge. My friend Lilly Hochner's father arranged for both of us to receive private lessons in Physics and Chemistry from Professor Salus. He was a sad, emaciated man; we would go to him to his lodgings in the 'Hanover' Barracks.

'Hehalutz' and 'Yad Tomehet'.

'The Pioneer' and 'The Supporting Hand'.

As I have already mentioned, Magda Weiss the educator was able to persuade all the girls in the room that the communist doctrine was the true doctrine; but I was not convinced and Magda totally ignored me, especially after my father's report.

There were a few girls I was friendly with, but no more than that. After a few months two Zionist girls came to live in our room 25: Hana (Mimcha) and Lenka. We organized a group in the Hehalutz (The Pioneer), the Zionist youth movement, including: Renee Lichtenstern (Teddy) who joined us from room 23, Eva Pick and Gita Stein from room 24 and the three of us from room 25. Our guide (madrihah in Hebrew) was Magda Kapp from Brno (she lives in Israel, her name is Barnea now). Magda was wonderful. I loved and respected her very much, so did my friends. We participated in the Zionist (Hehalutz) movements' activities, we learned Hebrew eagerly, and we helped the elderly and the ill through 'Yad Tomehet' (Supporting hand) group. My life was filled with content and hope again. We, boys and girls organized in small groups and visited the elderly in order to help them. Hana, Lenka and I took care of Mrs. Boehm, the widow of the writer who wrote a series of books about the history of Zionism. She was an old and ill woman; we cleaned her corner of the room in which she lived on the bare floor with many other elderly people; we washed her clothes, we were even able to bring her some vegetables which we stole from the garden where we worked. When she wanted to express her gratitude, she gave us a spoon of jam she received once in a while. It did not happen often that we got a spoon of marmalade. Each one of us took merely a lick from the spoon as we passed it to each other and left most of the jam for Mrs. Boehm.

I did not tell my new friends about Hermann, I saved a private and sacred place for him in my heart. The pain was not so sharp anymore, but it never completely left me.

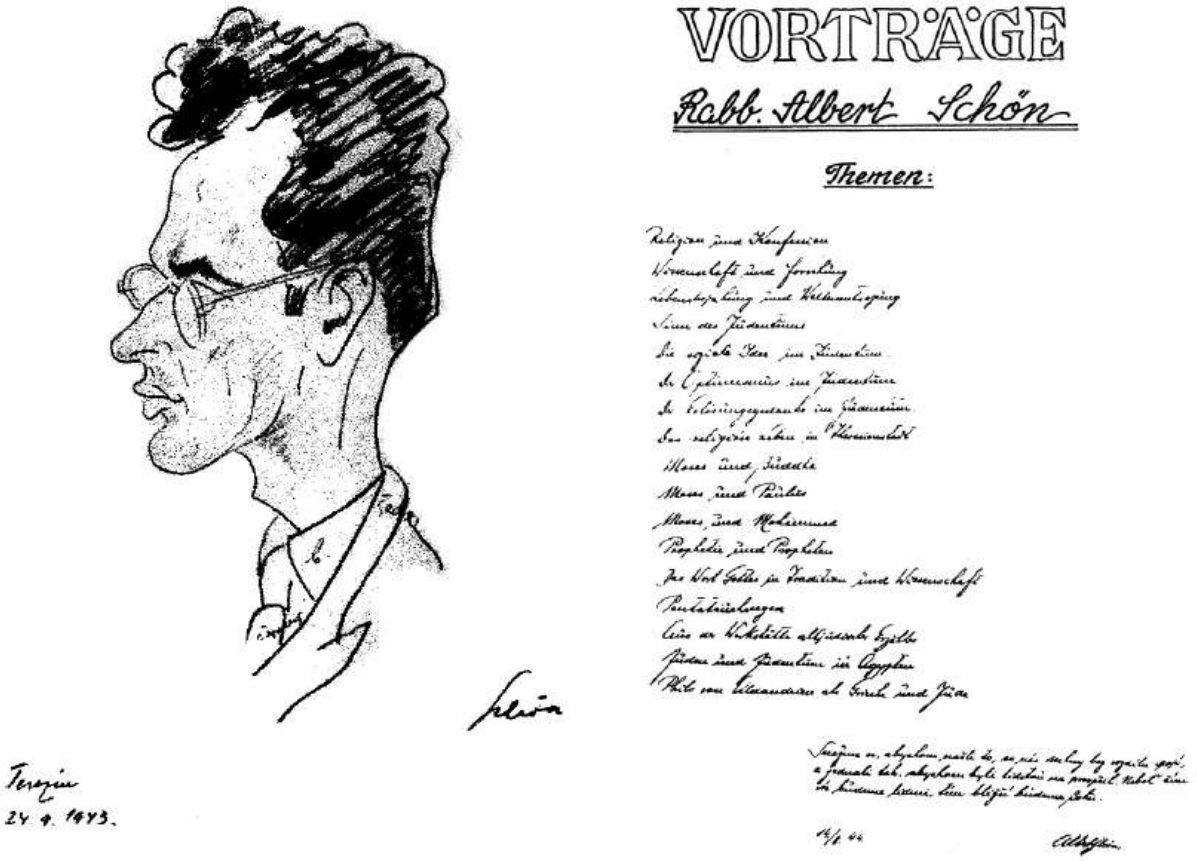
In Room 25 the girls were constantly changing, many were sent to the east, to Poland, there was a typhus epidemic. Most girls recovered, charming beautiful Lilly Fluss, an only child of elderly parents, died of typhus in the hospital.

New girls arrived. We matured; we were already 15 years old. The girls began to express an interest in boys. Our educator Magda Weiss was sent from the ghetto

with the 'children from Byalistok' and our new guide Laura decided to organize a dance party with boys from the boys' home, in our room. I had a problem: how to avoid this party. Sixteen years old boys didn't interest me. In fact, I was not interested in boys at all. I kept my vows to Hermann. I was waiting for him hoping, that we would meet after the war.

The Cultural and Spiritual Life in the Ghetto

I mention with respect and awe the spiritual, cultural and moral life, which we led in Ghetto Theresienstadt. Wonderful, dedicated people organized lectures, opera, children's theatre, without costumes, without decor with a minimum of musical instruments - in attics. We also organized sporting events. I'll never forget the 'high holidays' in the ghetto.



Caricature of Rabbi Albert Shoen in Ghetto Theresienstadt

My father was given the task of organizing cultural events in the ghetto; among his belongings this note was found with the following remarks:

Workshops –seminars:

a. The history of Judaism.
   Eugen Weiss, Professor Kastenbaum (Rabbi Shoen, Dr. Kapp, Rabbi Freda)
b. Jewish literature:
   1. Classical: (bible, Talmud, Mishnah, The prophets, Midrash etc,) Eugen Weiss, Profesor Kulka, Rabbi Shoen, Professor Kastenbaum; (Mesmer).
   2. Modern: Dr, Neuhaus.
c. Pertinent questions:
   1. Is the Jew a coward?
   2. Assimilation versus Zionismus: Dr. Khan, Rabbi Schoen, Professor Dr. Drachmann.
d. Hebrew conversation classes:
   1. Beginners.
   2. Advanced.
   3. Lectures for very advanced.

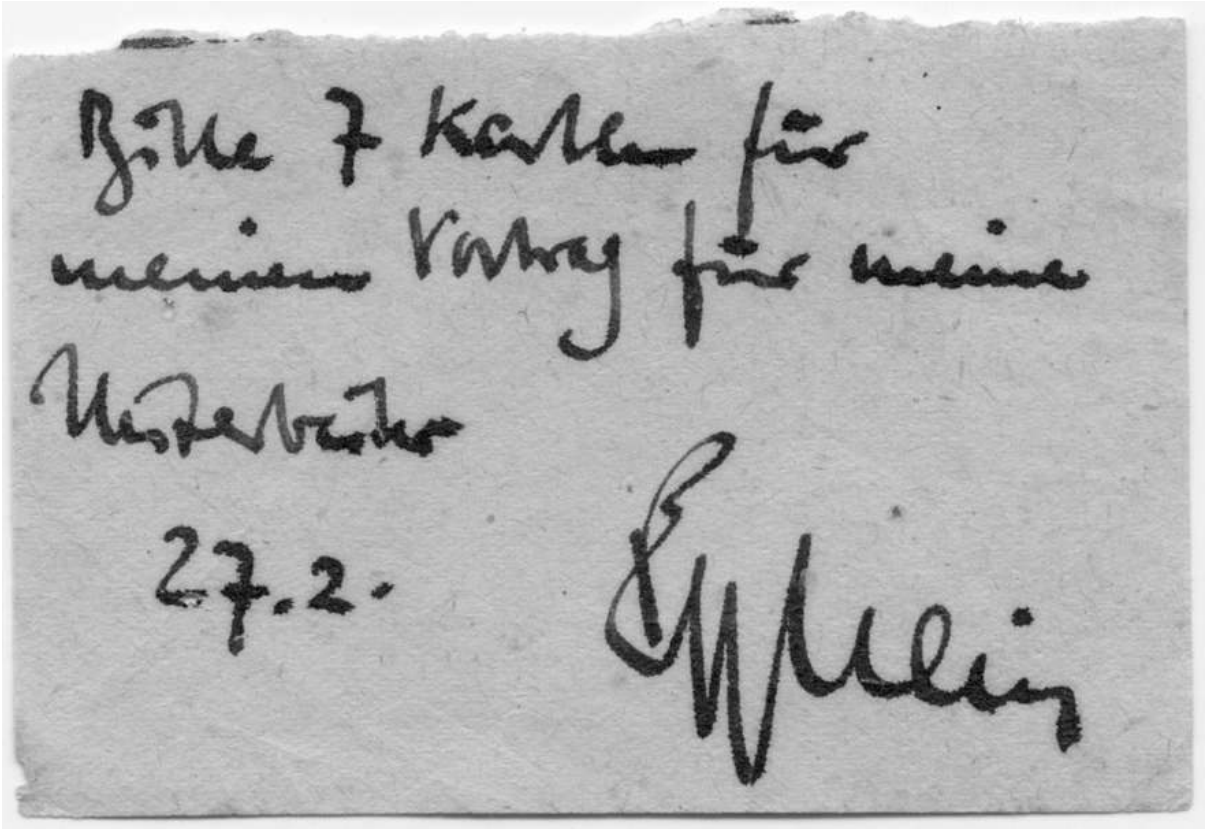
Methods of tickets distribution for cultural events:

a. The distribution of tickets in direct proportions to the residential areas
b. Ticket subscribers:
   1. Chamber music (quartette)
   2. Arias from operas
   3. Lectures
   4. Lectures about Judaism
   5. Operas
   6. Musicals
   7. Plays and comedy
   8. Scientific lectures etc,

Bulletin Boards on each floor, each block, next to the kitchens. And the kitchenettes. Personal invitations proved themselves!

I have in my possession a note in Dr. Epstein's handwriting. He was The Elder of the Jews at that time.

'I would request 7 tickets to my lecture for my team. 27.2 Epstein.



An invitation to the Seder which was held by Rabbi Murmelstein on 29.3.1945

At 19:15 In the dining hall.

For Stecklmacher Maud L410.

Bring a spoon!

My Father

I used to meet my father at Ghetto Theresienstadt almost every evening in the room where mother, grandma and Karmela lived with other mothers and their children; on the floor of course because there were no beds. (we received old mattresses which were brought from our homes collectively, as I mentioned before, sometimes I distributed mattresses instead of mother) Occasionally, I would visit father at the Sudeten Barracks, where he lived in a very large room with many other men. Once we ran into each other on the street. It was cold, probably in the winter or early spring of 1943. We were standing in front of the girls home L410 where I lived; father said to me 'don't tell mother, but our relatives who were send to the East are not alive anymore'. Father asked me not to tell mother. I am writing about it today for the first time - since my promise, almost 70 years have passed. I didn't react to my father's words - in order to continue living, I didn't think about it, I did not dwell on it, but I didn't forget. I could imagine that my grandmother's brother, the older and beloved uncle Zigo was no longer alive. But I couldn't imagine that my cousins Gusta and Lilly were dead. I did not ask father where he had heard that news. Father knew some people from the ghetto's leadership. This testimony could change the commonly-held notion, that in Theresienstadt nothing was known about the extermination of the Jewish People in the east - in Poland.

In the spring of 1943 father became ill. He had pneumonia, usually a deadly disease in the Ghetto. My father was in the infirmary in the men's barracks Sudeten. He became very weak. I wanted to do something for my ill dad, I brought a few vegetables, which I stole from the garden and hid on my body, to my mother's room, she cooked it and brought the food to father. Once a week in the evening, we children, were given a piece of cake for supper. It was only a piece of sweetened baked yeast dough, but we anxiously looked forward to that evening, when we would get the cake. Anything that was related to food was so important, because we were hungry all the time. That evening I asked three girls: Sonia, Lilli and Teddy to let me have their piece of cake and promised that I would give it back to them in the following weeks. So I arrived at my father's sickroom called 'marodka' in which there were many sick people, with four pieces of cake in my hand - a gift for him. I sensed my father's emotion. He gave me a small and dry piece of bread, which he probably

was unable to eat. If my memory doesn't fail me, it was the last time I saw my father. For three weeks I returned pieces of cake to my generous girlfriends.

Lisa, who slept on the bunk above me, became ill and was hospitalized in the children's hospital for tuberculosis. One evening I went to visit Lisa, instead of my usual visit with the family in mothers' room. On that evening my father visited my mother for the last time. That night or early in the morning my father committed suicide. As I later found out, he had jumped from his floor in the Sudeten barracks.

The following afternoon, after work as usual, I went over to my mother's room, where aunt Ruza told me the bad news. I ran out, wanted to run away - but I returned to my mother's room.

Paul Senski (Lotte's husband, Ruth Koegel's father) was working as an engineer in the ghetto. He let my father store a few of his belongings in the narrow room which he used as an office. A short time before his death my father compiled a list of our belongings and wrote to my mother telling her what to do with them.

"In the office L206

1 spoon

1 pipe

1 pair of rubber heels "Berson".

1 brush

1 map with writing paper

1 box of shaving tools etc.

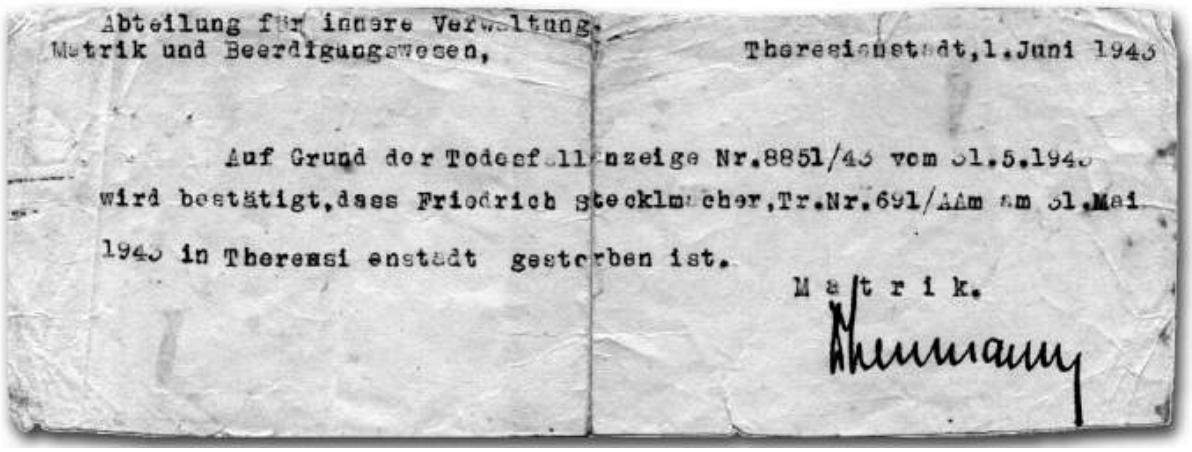
Inside the desk drawer aside from books

1 salt shaker

1 box with tea.

A white bag is hanging on top, containing various things (grandpa's medications, photos) etc. Put all these inside the black scroll which is up on the right, next to Paul's suitcases.

Also up on top there is a colored box tied with a belt, where all our medications are stored. You can ask Paul to lock it all in his suitcase or in his toolbox".


Abteilung für innere Verwaltung.
Matrik und Beerdigungswesen,

Theresienstadt, 1. Juni 1945

Auf Grund der Todesfallanzeige Nr. 8851/45 vom 31.5.1945
wird bestätigt, dass Friedrich Stecklmacher, Tr.Nr. 691/Aam am 31. Mai
1945 in Theresienstadt gestorben ist.

Matrik.

A print announcing my father's death.

A Child's Experience in Theresienstadt

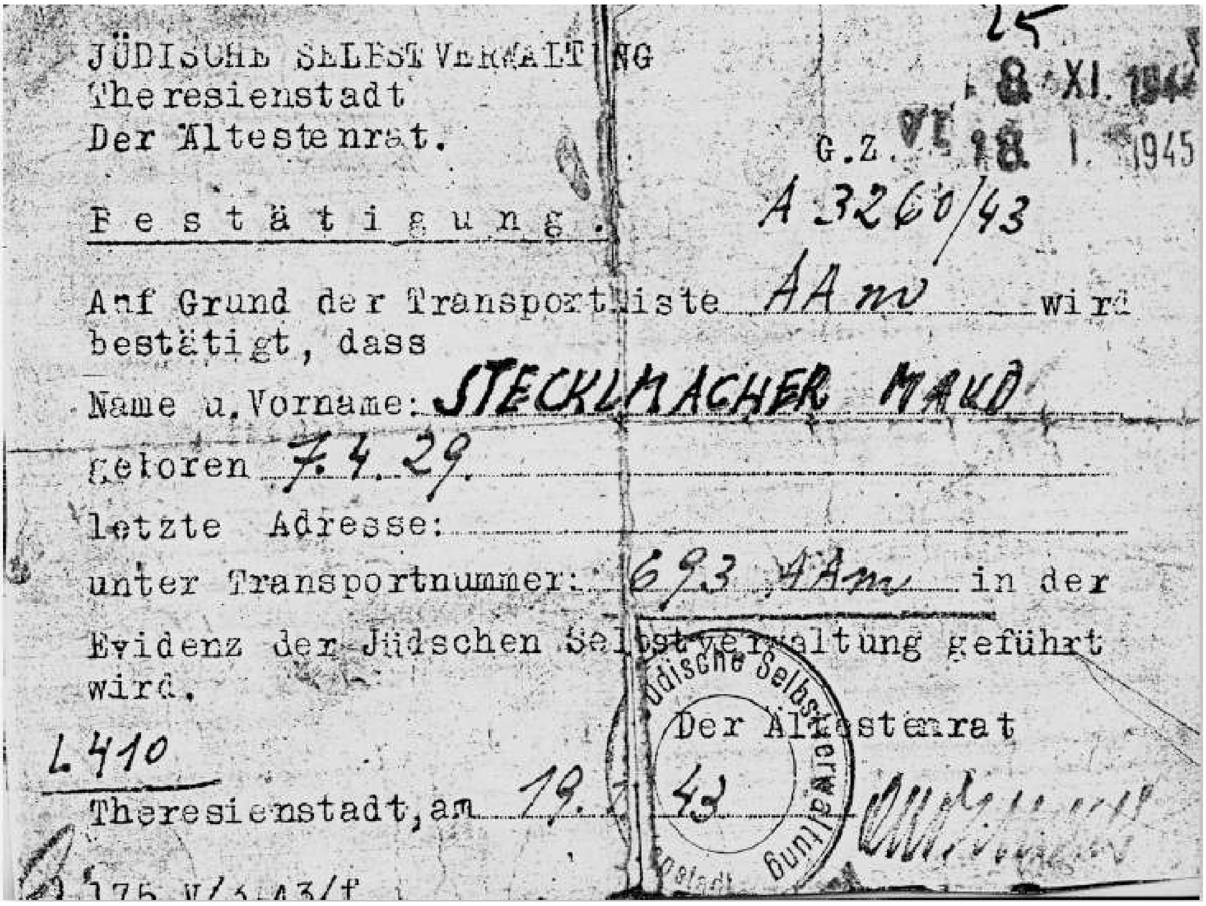
About two years after my father's death, towards the end of the war, very few people were left in the ghetto and even fewer were fit for work.

At that time the Germans wanted to erase and hide their crimes. Old people and children were called to report for work. They were told to stand in a long line from the Crematorium to the Eger River. They passed paperboxes from one to the other; those who stood on the banks of the river were told to empty the contents of the boxes into the running water. They contained the ashes of our dead. My sister who was ten and a half years old at that time came back from the river, pale and very quiet. Many years later she told me that the transport-numbers of the dead were written on those boxes and she had been looking for our father's number the whole time.

More on Life in the Ghetto

After the deaths of grandfather and father, my mother, grandmother and small sister lived in block Q308 in a room with other mothers and their children. In better days this house had been a bakery and this function had left it infested by cockroaches – big, fat and black. Every morning all the mess tins and pots were full of them. In the room there was a small stove nicknamed Vincek. All inhabitants of the room used it; my family was lucky because they 'lived' in the immediate vicinity of the stove. This made it easier for granny to use it and to warm up our 'Linsensuppe' - the 'lentil' soup - and she was able to improve the food we received from the kitchen. But what about fuel? In the early evening on a cold and windy winter day,

my sister (already a girl of ten) and I decided to do something about the provision of fuel. There was a building site where wooden barracks were being built. We stole some planks and pieces of wood – we were terribly scared – and with our last bit of strength we brought them to Q308.



JÜDISCHE SELBSTVERWALTUNG
Theresienstadt
Der Ältestenrat.

G.Z. VI 18 I. 1945

A 3260/43

B e s t ä t i g u n g .

Auf Grund der Transportliste AA nv wird bestätigt, dass

Name u. Vorname: STECKLMACHER MAUD

geboren 7.4.29.

letzte Adresse:

unter Transportnummer: 693 AAm in der Evidenz der Jüdischen Selbstverwaltung geführt wird.

Der Ältestenrat

L 410

Theresienstadt, am 19. 43

A document: My identity card in Theresienstadt Ghetto.

In the beginning, when we were not yet starved, we sometimes put aside some food – sugar – margarine – bread, to prepare feasts for a birthday or a holiday.

<u>A recipe for 'bread cake'</u>: a few thin slices of bread (it was dark and sometimes moldy), soaked in the black coffee we got for breakfast with a little sugar in it. Prepare a creme made of sugar and margarine. Put one soaked slice of bread on the flat surface of the mess tin. Spread the creme and add more layers. After a few hours the cake is ready. You would never believe it, but it was a very tasty cake indeed!

I lost my toothbrush once. In Theresienstadt you couldn't buy such an item. For a long time I didn't have a toothbrush. I didn't mind so much, but in a place with no privacy, everyone knew I didn't brush my teeth. I don't remember how or who

managed to get for me a used toothbrush. It must have belonged to somebody, who had in the meantime died. I was very happy when I acquired it, but I just couldn't stomach using it. Granny washed it thoroughly, boiled it and assured me, that after all this it was fit to use.

The clothing and the shoes we had brought from home became torn. On one occasion, some of my possessions went to Auschwitz, while I was fortunately left, at the last moment in Theresienstadt. I needed to do something about my 'garderobe'. There was a time when we could buy old clothing with the famous 'Ghetto-money'. I bought some clothes and Mrs. Flusser (Professor Flusser's mother), a good and fine lady, who worked at the sewing room in L410, altered them for me. I acquired a pair of shoes too - high black shoes almost to the knee which you had to tie every time; they were pointed and had heels, the type of shoe an elegant elderly lady probably wore. I used them till the end of the war. There was a kind of fashion in the ghetto: overalls were sewn from colored bed sheets. I had a pair of them with two large pockets.

A document: Theresienstadt Ghetto money.

Children and Young People in the Ghetto

There was a children's theatre in Ghetto Theresienstadt in which children were the actors and the singers. Wonderful, dedicated and talented people organized the children's opera 'Brundibar' and the play 'The Fireflies'.

In the barracks' yards, especially in the huge "Dresden" barrack yard, football was played. On the bastion, the ramparts, we held sporting events.

We the youngsters continued to learn even in the worst of circumstances. In the early hours of the morning, in darkness and snow, I would go with a few friends before work into the boys' home to hear lectures about the Bible given by Rudi Lieben.

Despite the difficulties and the anxiety there was never a day without reading; we usually read good literature. I occasionally visited the library, where I studied on my own, subjects of my interest.

Once when I arrived at the library, I found a display of prayer books and Bibles that the Germans had brought from Jewish communities throughout conquered Europe. It was amazing and interesting (the Nazis planned to preserve the memory of the extinct Jewish race.)

In Theresienstadt I read 'Madam Curie', 'Les Miserables' and 'The Diaries of Herzl'. Because of my interest in medicine, I read a few books written by De-Cruif. Medicine has interested me throughout my life, but it was only when I was forty-seven years old, a short time before Inbal, my first grandchild was born, that I was able to join a course for medical secretaries.

In Ghetto Theresienstadt there were a few libraries. Almost everyone brought with them in the 50 kg which we were permitted to bring to the ghetto – at least one book, which they especially liked.

From the age of thirteen and a half, I worked at Theresienstadt in agriculture. At the girls' home L410 we studied after work in our rooms, which were unbelievably crowded. At times we listened to our lessons while lying on our stomachs on our bunks, with our heads facing the center of the room. We made some changes in our room no.25, with Pavel Brandeis's advice and help; so that we had room for a table too. However there was not room enough for twenty-four girls to sit at the table.

Every few months we got a ticket for the public bath in Hohenelbe Barracks. This allowed us to get a hot shower; what a traumatic experience for a young girl, to share the shower with a lot of women, some of them skinny, old and sick.

Upon our arrival in Theresienstadt, the menstrual period of most women stopped. I was not yet fourteen years old, when I experienced menopause, including heat waves.

The children got used to the crowding and absence of privacy more easily than the grown ups. Sometimes I felt a terrible need to be alone with my thoughts and feelings; I could never cry, because I was never alone – and I was ashamed to do so in public. Today I think, that people didn't cry in the ghetto, because they wanted to maintain the morale. So I got used to waking up very early at four or five o'clock in the morning to be 'by myself' in a room full with sleeping girls.

Maud Steckelmacher

Born 7.IV.1929

Achived the following gardes:

Czech language: Excellent

Mathematics: Very Good

History: Very Good

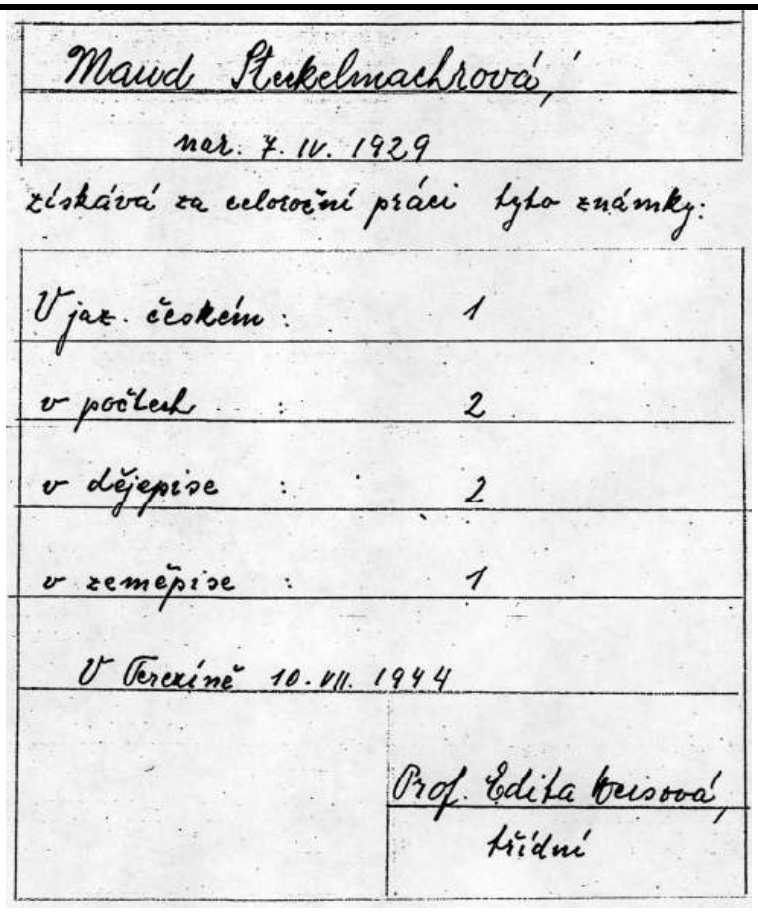
Geography: Excelent

In Terezin 10.VII.1944

Professor Edit Weise pedagogue

My "School report"

****Studies were forbidden in the Getto!***



Maud Steckelmachrová,

nar. 7. IV. 1929

získává za celoroční práci tyto známky:

V jaz. českém :	1
v počtech :	2
v dějepise :	1
v zeměpise :	1

V Terezíně 10. VII. 1944

Prof. Edita Weissová, třídní

Karl Berman gave us lectures about music. Professor Edith Weiss taught us Czech literature and was our educator. With Prof. Zdenka Brumlik we had very interesting geography lessons. If I know something in this field it is thanks to Prof. Brumlik. Mrs. Shaeffer taught grammar, German literature (I still have a notebook)

and English. Kurt Hatschek whom we called 'Kartatschek' ('a brush' in Czech) used to come to the girl's home L 410 to teach Hebrew; the non Zionist girls did not like it and used to interrupt him. Jacki Wurtzel was in charge of teaching Hebrew in the 'Hehalutz' movement. Shlomo Fuerth taught us Hebrew according to the Kaleko textbook. When I arrived in Israel I realized, that the Hebrew we had learned was somewhat archaic and not modern.

Some of the girls studied painting with Friedl Brandeis. Friedl Brandeis, (1898-1944) was Pavel Brandeis's wife. She was born in Vienna, studied art at Weimar. She had worked as an interior designer, textile designer and theatre designer. In Theresienstadt she taught children plastic art and painting. She perished in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

I did not study with Friedl. I painted on my own in a makeshift copybook, which I made by myself out of a few precious pieces of paper.

In the drawing the view is from the window of our room, in L410 looking out over the big central square of the Ghetto. We were not allowed to enter it. For a short period a big tent was built there for the production of wooden crates for the German arms production efforts. It was called **K-** production.

Transports

Many transports left Theresienstadt – going to the East - destination unknown. Everybody tried to stay in the Ghetto – we were all sure that in the East it would surely be worse. But there was one axiom: the family would do everything to stay together. When one member of a family received a notice to report for a transport going east, all the other members of that family tried to go with them.

In May 1944 we were in the 'reserve'; they called up more people than needed - the 'higher numbers' being in reserve. We came to the Hamburger barracks, with our possessions bundled together, Granny, mother, Karmela and I. Numbers on our necks and fear in our hearts. The big yard was crowded with people and belongings. Heartbreaking farewells, terrible sadness. The Germans began to be nervous and violent. The wagons did not fill up quickly enough they were searching for the reserves. My little sister ill, feverish, pale and shivering was left in the middle of night in the yard to look after our belongings - mother believed they would not send Karmela by herself - and we climbed higher and higher up to the loft to hide from the Germans. We met there, under the roof a few dozens of people, all of us hiding. I looked between the shingles and at last we heard the sound and the whistle of the departing train. I watched the train moving – a terrible feeling - this time we were saved with some bad conscience – and so much sorrow and a feeling of impotence and despair.

The Vegetable Gardens

A few weeks after my arrival in the ghetto I received an invitation to work in the vegetable garden, where young people aged 12-17 years worked under the supervision of Jewish instructors. The invitation was signed by Freddie Hirsch and I have kept it till today. Initially I worked in the garden under the supervision of Meda and Mausa. We were lucky to work in the gardens - we left the ghetto for a few hours, its depressing and stuffy atmosphere, and the crowded and smelly latrines. We were working in the fresh air; rarely we would eat a vegetable or bring a vegetable 'home' to mother. The head manager of agriculture in the Ghetto, a German by the name of Kurszavy noticed that we suffered from impetigo (infected ulcers with puss, a result of vitamin deficiency.) He allowed us to take nettles and orache (a sort of weed) into the ghetto. Our mothers prepared it as if it were spinach. Happy and wealthy were

the girls who worked in the beet fields thinning the seedlings. They brought sacks of seedlings back to the ghetto; they were cooked like spinach too.

I later worked in the garden under the management of Pavel Loev from Olomouc, with Ida Gottlob who was the instructor. Ida had attended school in Brno where she was in the same class as Shimon my future husband. In Theresienstadt, Ida married Pavel Friedman the author of the well known poem 'There are no butterflies in the ghetto'. Pavel was sent to Auschwitz; Ida volunteered to follow him and her parents and brother. After the war Ida returned alone. Her name in Israel is Adina and she lives in Kibbutz Ginnegar with her husband Moshe. They have four handsome and strong boys. How many grandchildren they have by now, I don't know.

In the fall of 1944 Pavel Loew, was sent to Auschwitz. His beloved wife Eva was pregnant. It was forbidden to be pregnant. It was the Nazis' plan that we, the Jews should disappear from the face of the earth, therefore our women were forbidden to become pregnant. Pavel left with a heavy heart; he asked us, young girls, to take care of Eva and to help her. On February 1945 a baby girl was born. With tremendous luck Pavel survived! After the war, the family emigrated to Australia.

Ria who was 17 years old also worked with us. Another important figure in our garden was Mautner - who was nicknamed 'The Beatle' – he was 17 years old, serious, quiet, wore glasses and was very knowledgeable. He worked at the nursery where he grew cabbages, tomatoes and lettuce seedlings, which we later planted in the garden. Also working in the garden with us were: Fritzek Gottlob Ida's brother, Harry the young brother of the author Otto Kraus, Franta Ticho, whom I believe was from Boskovitz like most of the people with that surname. I remember how he used to work in the summer barefoot wearing only shorts. There were also some 11 and 12 years olds working in our garden: a couple of clowns Jiri Munk-Munky and his friend Sonnenschein, Milushka, Mautner's sister, a very smart and bright girl, occasionally I talked with her there. Lya Sagher and Eva Loewidt, both arrived in Theresienstadt in the winter of 1941, they were the 'pioneers' in our group; nice, agile girls. They lived with their mothers, not at the girls' home. Eva survived; her name today is Eva Erben. She wrote a book about her experiences during the war. In the year 2000, Pavel Stingl from Prague produced a movie named 'A story about a bad dream', based on this book. In our garden more girls from room number 25

worked. At times a new boy or a girl would come to work with us - only to disappear after a few days – being sent to Poland.

In October 1944, Eva with her parents and Lya with her parents were sent to Auschwitz. The fathers left our Ghetto with the first two transports of men, the wives and daughters joined voluntarily on one of the next transports. The Nazis let us know, that the men were sent to build a new camp and that the wives and children were allowed to join them later. Most loving and faithful wives volunteered. They never met their husbands again, most of them were directed to the Auschwitz gas-chambers immediately; the stronger and better looking ones were sent to slave-work. This was what happened to family Loewit and to family Sagher. Eva Loewidt and Mr. Sagher survived. Eva told me, that when she was with her mother and a multitude of women prisoners on the 'death-march', somewhere in Germany, in the cruel winter of 1944 – 45, they met Lya on the road. Lya was crying bitterly, she asked them to help her mother, who was not able to march anymore and sat on the side of the road. Eva's mother was not much better off; they were unable to support Mrs. Sagher. Eva and her mother continued marching with their column – they heard a few shots – Lya with her mother and some other women, who were unable to get up and continue walking, were shot. Eva's mother, a young woman still, succumbed a short time later.

A Happy Moment in the Ghetto

When my children were not satisfied and not content and my patience was worn thin, I would tell them about my happiest time in the Ghetto. Once on a nice autumn day the Jewish manager of the vegetable garden, Pavel Loew said: "Children, we need some dung, who volunteers to gather some of it?" My friend Irenka and I said yes. We took a big bucket and some other tools and went out onto the "Aryan" road - the road leading to Leitmeritz – outside the Ghetto.

A blue sky, sun shining, on the road there were only the two of us!! We passed by a small lonely "Aryan" house and heard music from a wireless!! What more do you need, to be happy!? We even forgot our hunger.

Bedbugs

In the summer of 1944 the bedbugs multiplied on the three story bunk beds at L410 girls Home. We could not sleep anymore. Our bodies were covered with bites

which easily got infected. For about three years we had already suffered from malnutrition and vitamin deficiency. The braver girls got up at night, when the bugs attacked us the most, took their sheets and blankets, and went out to the corridor to continue their sleep on the floor.

The floors of the corridors were fully occupied – there was no more room. We found another solution, which no one told us was forbidden. The moment we returned from work, we took our bedclothes and ran out into the courtyard to secure a place to sleep on the earth. It was summer, warm, about four hundred girls slept in the courtyard now. The 'lovely' bugs also moved to the courtyard, along with us. I saw them climbing up the few trees which grew in the yard. Sonia Schultz (who was nicknamed the Mare) took advantage of it. She was very talented and well liked. Sonia was a born actress and she immediately gave a show in front of all the girls. We enjoyed ourselves and laughed, yes, even this was possible in the Ghetto. It was summer, for four months not even one transport had been sent away. During this period, all the trains were used to transfer Jews from Hungary to Auschwitz (unknown to us at that time of course).

When it is warm, hunger is not as annoying; in the summer everything is easier. Ultimately we were moved to the loft under the roof of the 'Hamburg' barrack. L410 was disinfected to get rid of the bedbugs.

Only now I dare to write about my miserable condition at that time. I had dysentery. Because of the impossible, intolerable overcrowding, the queues to the WC were always long. My mother got a tin can for me (I don't know where from), for time of need. The can was big, despite my shame I took it everywhere with me. Because of the dysentery I frequently went down at night from the attic to look for a WC in the huge Hamburg barracks; my loyal companion was Margot Loewi. In addition to her dysentery, Margot also suffered from impetigo. Her legs were always covered with iodine and bandages. In October 1944, Margot, her mother and her young brother Fritz were sent to Auschwitz. They perished all three of them.

Blood-Bread

Ghetto Theresienstadt was frightfully overcrowded. Despite all possible efforts, it was very difficult to maintain proper hygiene. We shared our lodgings with bed bugs, fleas and lice of every kind. We were undernourished and suffered from numerous

diseases: scarlet fever and T.B., various sorts of typhus, encephalitis and polio too. The health committee of the Ghetto decided that the best way to defend children against polio infection was to arrange a blood transfusion from a parent, hoping that the adults' immunity would thus be passed on to the child.

At that time, my bunk neighbor was Alice, a pale, thin and delicate girl, a talented painter. Both of us no longer had a father. Alice and I saved up some margarine and this we mixed with a little dehydrated soup powder we got somehow, into a spread of sorts. Each of us contributed a slice of bread and, after receiving from our mothers the rescuing blood infusion; we served them the two 'buttered' slices nicely arranged on a makeshift platter, as a token of appreciation and gratitude. It was not easy to persuade them to accept this gift, but we persisted and felt wonderful watching our mothers eat with much appetite.

Potatoes

Rumor circulated that a potato shipment had reached the Ghetto. Adults but particularly children were snooping around the supply wagon, attempting to filch a little something. I succeeded and brought my pitiful loot – a few spuds – to my mother's room which she shared with several other women and children. Mother cooked the potatoes with salt and a few dried bay leaves, which we brought from home.

I started to eat the aromatic, hot and tasty dish straight from the pot and unable to stop, devoured almost all the potatoes. Afterwards I was terribly ashamed, that I hadn't had the strength to restrain myself and let other members of the family also have a fair share from the unexpected booty. It was perhaps the only time in the Ghetto that I ate really and truly to satiety.

Several years later, after the war, while on a 'Halutz' (Pioneer) movement assignment in Prague to organize Jewish youth, I was walking with a friend along the narrow streets of the old city. We chanced to come upon a truck from which potatoes were being unloaded near a restaurant. A few potatoes fell and rolled down the curb. Immediately I hastily bent to collect them before realizing that I was in Prague, a free person and no longer a starving ghetto inmate.

The Census in the Ghetto

People who are interested in learning about the Theresienstadt ghetto have probably heard that on a winter's day in 1943, all the inmates went to the 'Bohusovicka Kotlina' – a small valley – to be counted. At this time I had encephalitis and was hospitalized in the Hohenelbe Kasserne. So I didn't go and we were counted in our beds. We were worried about our people who had left for the valley – in the late afternoon, we were very anxious indeed. We waited for a long time, it was already dark outside and after eight o'clock (in the Ghetto too we were forbidden to be out after eight). At last we heard thousands of tired, hungry and frozen people returning. – A sound like an earthquake, like the Flood.

An Embarrassing Story

I have not told this story to anyone until now, because for all those years since then I have been ashamed of my behavior. Now, when I am old, I am not ashamed anymore, I can finally tell it.

It happened in Theresienstadt, I was fourteen. A friend of my parents, Mr. Schnabel got tuberculosis before the war and was in a sanatorium in Davos, Switzerland. There he survived the war years. The International Red Cross allowed people to send small food packages from Switzerland to Ghetto Theresienstadt, a tin of sardines or a few figs. My grandmother, mother, and sister, (father was no longer alive then); each one of them received a tiny package of figs. When I visited their room I tasted the delicious figs too.

It was a cold day in late fall. I was sick, depressed and hungry; finally my package of figs arrived. I could not resist them; I opened the package and one fig after another disappeared in my mouth, till there was not even one left. I was so embarrassed and ashamed, that I was unable to tell my family about this. At the beginning of my encephalitis, which most of the girls in L410 contracted, I was transferred to the Hohenelbe hospital barracks. I was lying next to Eva Pickova, a member of my group in the Zionist youth movement. We decided to become a 'commune' - when our mothers brought us some food, we divided it among ourselves. My mother was able to save a few figs and she occasionally added a fig or two to the meager food she brought me. I decided to save those figs, so that when I would be discharged from the hospital I would bring them to my mother's room. This decision

caused me to feel guilty with regard to Eva – because I didn't observe the 'commune's' principles. It is a fact: one sin brings with it another one …I was so ashamed of my behavior, that I was unable to tell Eva and explain why I was keeping the figs.

Eva was transferred from the hospital directly to a transport on December 1943. I was left with a feeling, that I had not behaved properly and that I had betrayed her trust in me.

I kept the promise to myself, after my release from the hospital I visited my mother and said: 'Finally the figs for me arrived too - here they are'.

The Red Cross Commission

In 1944 a Red Cross Commission was due to come to Theresienstadt. Now we understood that our cozy and humane Ghetto, (everything is relative of course), existed and was created for this purpose only. Before the Commission came – the Ghetto was prepared for its visit – first of all old, sick people and orphans were sent away (to Auschwitz, we got to know about that place much later), to make more room and to create a better demographical status. Curtains were given to us, spreads for our bunks (made from used colored sheets). We were allowed, or rather ordered, to bring wildflowers into the Ghetto. The pavements were scoured, houses were painted. In the center of the Ghetto opposite L410, in the huge park which was always out of bounds for us, a stage was built and a group of musicians played all day and part of the night without stopping: 'Mah oz tsur yeshuati' and 'Hatikvah' in jazzy tunes. Near the Nursery a carousel and swings were built and the small children were being taught to say 'Sardines again uncle Rahm?" (Rahm was the commander of Ghetto Theresienstadt, a high-ranking SS officer, whom we all feared – the poor kids had never seen sardines in their short lives). When the Commission arrived at last, we got a very good dinner indeed.

Rumors

In Theresienstadt we lived off faith and rumors which we called 'Bonkes'. There was no radio, no newspapers, no telephone. There was no connection to the outside world, except for the news brought by those arriving on the transports. Fortune-tellers were in. What did we talk about? 'When would the war end?' That was our

sole wish. We did not know what had happened to our dear ones who had been deported to the East – we only received this bitter news a short time before the long-awaited liberation.

What was the content of our daily conversation? 'On the 15th of the month following our liberation, we will meet in Prague, in the Old City square by the clock.' We imagined what we would eat after we were liberated. How we would bathe every day in warm water and with soap, and change our underclothes whenever we wished.

After the transports in the fall of 1944, almost no men were left in the Ghetto. Then, men from mixed marriages began to arrive and they began to construct a 'duck pond'. Rumor had it that these were gas chambers for the prisoners who had remained at Theresienstadt; there were many jokes about this: No one could imagine gas chambers in which we, human beings, would be killed.

Towards the end of the War, a multitude of concentration camp prisoners came to Theresienstadt. Some arrived by rail, some came on foot with what were known as 'death marches' (very long forced marches over vast areas of territory with little or no food or water). On 20th April 1945, the first transport from the East arrived with several people who had left Theresienstadt five months earlier. We did not recognize them: their heads were shaved, they were no more than skin and bones, wearing striped clothes, wooden shoes, covered with lice, sick and weak. From them we heard directly about Auschwitz, about the gas chambers. We believed them – we had known them. Prisoners came from various camps, not only Jews. Political prisoners arrived, murderers and criminals of all types. They brought with them typhus and lice. Trains arrived in which cases of cannibalism had taken place.

The liberation was not the joyful event we had dreamed about for three long years.

My Aunt Alice

Somebody brought many photos of members of the Jewish community of my town of birth, Prostejov, to the Jewish cemetery. Our community no longer exists. Only one elderly Jew, as well as a few descendants from mixed marriages, now live in Prostejov.

Among these many photos, which Mr. Ivan Cech (a non-Jewish resident of the town) sent me from Prostejov recently; there was a very old picture of my aunt Alice.

We used to call her Alis. I had never seen auntie Alis so young and so beautiful. I am sure that at the time when the photograph was taken, she was not yet married. Alis became the wife of my fathers' elder brother, Otto.

I was a curious child and used to listen with much interest to the adults' conversations. I remember hearing once, that my aunt Alis wept on her fortieth birthday. That Alis cried, because she did not want to lose her youth. This happened in the year 1936, at a time when we still lived at home in peace and in comfort.

Aunt Alis and uncle Otto were the parents of an only son - of my cousin and friend, Jirka – George.

We were all deported to Ghetto Theresienstadt on the 2nd July, 1942. I learned to know aunt Alis better in Theresienstadt, when she lived with us and with other women and their children in the same room, where we lived on the bare floor. Like all mothers and wives, aunt Alis tried to save a little from her scanty food ration to give to Jirka and to uncle Otto. The families used to meet in the mothers' rooms in the evenings before the nightly curfew.

After a few weeks in Ghetto Theresienstadt, living with grandmother in a building for the elderly, my grandfather died on the bare floor in a crowded room. I loved my grandpa; nevertheless I was grateful that he was spared more suffering. After grandfather's death, grandmother came to live in the room where mother, aunt Alis,

my small sister, myself and other women with their children were accommodated. (I later moved to the girls' home L410).

Almost all our relatives were deported to Poland a very short time after our arrival in Theresienstadt. The transports to the east were dispatched so quickly that there was no time to say goodbye. We learned that they were sent away, when we no longer encountered them in Theresienstadt. We did not know that they were sent to their deaths.

After less than one year in Theresienstadt, my father died.

Aunt Alis, uncle Otto and Jirka stayed in Ghetto Theresienstadt more than one year. They left Theresienstadt with one of the two fateful September transports (1943). The fate of those two transports was especially cruel. For the people of those two transports, a Family Camp was established in Auschwitz. In those six months more than one thousand people had died in the Family Camp from hunger and disease; some committed suicide by touching the electrified wires. Six months after their arrival, those who were still alive were sent together to the gas chamber.

After the war we heard - I don't know from whom and how - that father's brother, Alis's husband, our uncle Otto, had died in Auschwitz from hunger and disease.

Aunt Alis and Jirka went with the others to the gas chamber on the night between the 7th and 8th March, 1944. From the gas chamber escaped the sounds of their singing the Czech national hymn, 'Kde domov můj' and the Jewish anthem, Hatikvah. They sang as long as there was breath in their lungs.

Our Uncle Moritz Samek

I must describe uncle Moritz Samek as I remember him from the last time that I saw him. His legs were swollen, his shoe laces untied, and he sat with many other old people on a funeral cart which was taking them to the collection place from which Transport Bx was to depart. Today I know that his destination was Treblinka.

My beloved grandmother

Steffi Steiner 1935

The 20th April was my grandmother's birthday. My beloved grandmother, the good and wonderful woman whom I had loved more than any other member of my family, was sent to Auschwitz on October 1944 at the age of sixty two. Until that moment the four of us grandmother, mother, my sister and I, had succeeded in avoiding the transport eastward.

But this time there was no choice, grandmother was sent away and we remained in Ghetto Theresienstadt.

We wanted to join grandmother but it didn't work out. Mother was assigned the task of Glimmerspalten – splitting mica; mother and other women worked in a shack outside the Ghetto. (the Nazis used split mica for electrical insulation). I worked in agriculture. We both were useful to the Nazis and not allowed to leave Ghetto Theresienstadt. Sometimes I have a vision of grandmother as she was the last time that I saw her. She was dressed in black clothes, thin after more than two years at Theresienstadt, somewhat bent over and gaunt. This was my memory of my last glimpse of her as she stood before the large gate at the 'Hamburg' barracks, and then departed directly into the train – into the cattle car of course. This was how I saw her for the last time and my heart breaks to this very day. I have missed her all my life. If only grandmother, wise, experienced, had survived along with us, our lives would have been different and better – mother was young, only thirty-six years old and unexperienced.

I wish so often that my grandmother could have survived to see the births of my children. When my youngest child, Yael was born in 1962, grandmother would have been eighty, but she was sent to the gas chambers at Auschwitz at the age of sixty-two years.

When the war ended, there were rumors that elderly women were being sent to work in a textile factory. When the ghetto began to fill up with people who survived the 'death marches', we stood by the side of the road and stared at the arrivals. I

tried to keep my eyes wide open, trying hard not even to blink, in order not to miss seeing grandmother, should she by chance be among those arriving at the ghetto. Of course, I very much hoped that Hermann, too, would be among the arrivals. Only thirty years later did I learn about Treblinka, and what happened to the people who were sent into this 'death factory'.

The Separation from Grandma

We were standing there, a few meters from the cattle-train. We were supposed to pass the control point before entering the train. Ghetto Theresienstadt was on German territory, everything was done there exactly according to decree and law. In October 1944, eleven or twelve transports left: every second day at least 1,000 people. What a rush – what panic – what mourning, despair!

I don't remember it exactly, but for our family it happened approximately like this: grandmother went before us; we tried to go with her (we had no idea about the gas chambers). They wouldn't let us go with grandma, because mother's and my work was essential to the Nazis. I can see before me, our beloved, already skinny granny at the gate to the train.

In October 1944 when every second day a transport was dispatched from Theresienstadt to Poland, we the young girls did not work in the vegetable gardens; we worked in the 'Hilfdienst', helping people with their luggage in the Hamburg Barracks, before they entered the trains.

A few days after my grandmother left I saw aunt Ruza in the Hamburg Barracks when another transport was leaving. Aunt Ruza was crying and she said: "I have to stay here with Hansi; I can't leave him here alone". But aunt Ruza had been ordered to go …

When I came to my mother's room in the evening, mother sent me to the Hohenelbe Barracks (hospital), so I could look in on Hansi. I found him somehow in the huge building. Hansi was lying on a stretcher in the corridor, tears running down his face. They sent him on the next transport.

A few days later I was on the list for a transport, mother and Karmela registered to go with me. Kurszavy reclaimed me and the other Landwirtschaft girls, and then I despaired again that I wouldn't be able to go with mother and Karmela, who were in the transport, because they had registered to go together with me.

At that moment Elinka Weiss came, took us aside and the train left without us. My suitcase left with the train in fact. Mother and Karmi then had to stay in the Hamburger Barracks in "prison". It was a room on the ground floor and people who had been registered for a transport, but who had not gone, were imprisoned there. The next day, Mrs. David from Ostrava passed by the window of that room. Mrs. David advised mother to jump out of the window, go to the Glimmer and ask to be taken out of the next transport. That's what happened. They reclaimed mother; Karmela was ten years old, so she stayed with her.

Recently in Beit Theresienstadt a man from Austria was sitting next to me. I didn't know him. He asked me: "Did your mother work in the Glimmer?" That's how it was, among the survivors were mothers who worked in the Glimmer and their young children; they were not sent to Poland, to Auschwitz, because their work was important to the Nazis. The split Glimmer was used as isolation material by the German army.

People whom I knew in the Theresienstadt Ghetto

Lilly

In the girls' home L410, my attention was drawn to a girl whose name was Lilly. Pretty as a china doll – white skin, pink cheeks, large green eyes and golden locks; her voice was cracked; she did not know Czech well because she came from the Sudetenland. She had lost her mother, and she directed all her concern to her blind father. Every day she ran several times to him in the men's barracks, saw to it that he had food, and looked after his health, everything that he needed. She did not have time to study with us nor to join us in our activities. She expressed her concerns to us in broken Czech and in a cracked voice.

I only knew Lilly for a short time. In the winter of 1942, she left our living quarters. Later, she was sent to Auschwitz. I hope that these lines at least will honor the memory of Lilly Hausschild.

Rita Krebs

Who remembers Rita Krebs? A young girl of fifteen; erect, dark-skinned, curly black hair, pretty and full of self-confidence – this is how she appeared to me. With diligence, together we hauled sewage water to irrigate cucumbers in the vegetable

garden. In addition to Rita, I see in my mind's eye Vera Lustig and Trixie Schild; Trixie was with me in the transport from Olomouc. Hanichka Benesch told us that she was born and lived in Theresienstadt before it became a ghetto! Marianka Bauer miraculously survived and she is with us in Israel; she forgot everything, even the ability to speak Czech. In the vegetable garden I made the acquaintance of Margit Porges, and I felt it was a compliment that a girl older than I sought out my company. She was a quiet girl, large brown sad eyes, dark skin and voluptuous lips. Margit was tall and beside me, who was thirteen at the time, she appeared mature. The girls disappeared over time, rounded up for the transports. A long list of young people, wonderful and good whose lives were cut short– what a pity. The heart aches.

Vlasta

In the summer of 1940, our community hosted Jewish children from Brno. Each youngster lived in a household where there were children. At our house we received Olly; my friend Ruthie hosted Vlasta, both from the Jewish orphanage in Brno. Vlastichka was tiny, with swift movements, and a sharp tongue. This was the last summer of happiness - the darkening clouds of the approaching Holocaust were already present. We were young adolescents, age eleven, spending most of our time on the Maccabi sport grounds with the rest of the Jewish children. This was the place where we all felt free together. Outside, in the estranged world, many restrictions had already been imposed on us.

Two years later, in the summer of 1942, we arrived at Theresienstadt. There I met Olly and Vlasta again. Olly was pale, thin and starving after the first hard winter in the Ghetto. Vlasta was vital as before. In the end, it came about that we were living in the same room of the girls' home L 410. Vlastichka, the orphan, had a much appreciated and admired brother whose name was Rudi. As his birthday approached, she decided to give him a present, something dreamlike, something out of this world – nothing less than an orange! She found someone who had received a package with such a rare treasure as this and was prepared to give her the orange in exchange for three loaves of bread. Every three days we received a quarter of a loaf; little Vlastichka lasted about five weeks without bread! I have no idea how she managed to do this, but on his birthday Rudi got an orange! In summer 1944, the Germans prepared the Ghetto for the visit of people from the International Red Cross. In order to improve the situation they sent the undesirable people to Auschwitz – the

elderly, the sick and the orphans. Vlastichka and Rudi were sent with the group of orphans. The fact that she was tiny, a girl from the orphanage, who apparently did not enjoy an abundance of food in her childhood, was to her disadvantage. When she faced Mengele she was unable, like other girls her age, to say that she was sixteen years old and thus be assigned to work, rather than be sent to the gas chambers.

Kamila Rosenbaum

A woman just over thirty years of age arrived at the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Good looking, erect, she had black curly hair – the dancer Kamila. She was accompanied by her little son Ivo and her husband Pavel. Kamila taught the ghetto children to dance. She adopted an orphaned child from the girls' home L 410. The girl's nickname was 'Cap', that is, 'stork' in Czech. She was a pretty girl, blond with her hair cut short, with long legs and she loved to dance. During the summer of 1944, the ghetto experienced several months of relative quiet, and despite the hunger and disease, Kamila taught, the girls danced, and there were performances.

All this took place until the Germans began to empty the Ghetto. Kamila's family was sent with one of the transports; 'Chap', of course, went with them. At Auschwitz, men were separated from women and children. They stood in long lines, in pairs before Dr. Mengele. Ivo and 'Chap' were a pair; Kamila with a friend or acquaintance were another pair. Mengele sent the children to the gas chamber – Kamila and her friend were spared. Pavel, Kamila's husband, did not survive. After the war, Kamila returned alone. Who knows how many times she was sorry that she did not stand in line with her son, Ivo. Who can know what pangs of conscience she suffered. She did not understand the meaning of the long line of pairs whom Mengele orchestrated.

* Author's note added in 2005

I correspond with Kamila's daughter, who was born after the War – Kate Rys. She lives in England. From her I know that the parents of 'Chap' migrated by an illegal route. They left their daughter at the Jewish orphanage in Brno in the hope that she would follow them through legal means, but the borders were closed . . . .

The Young Girl from Germany

One day a girl of about fifteen arrived from Germany at the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Her pronunciation of German and manner of speaking differed from ours. She came on a singles transport. Several days before her arrival, she was a proud, young German girl and wanted to join the Hitler Youth like all her contemporaries. Her parents, however, objected, but she registered; the authorities began to make inquiries, to check and to investigate and after a short period of time it was discovered that the girl was of Jewish origin. The German couple, bereft of children, had adopted her. The adoptive parents did their utmost to conceal this fact from their daughter and from the governmental authorities. When her Jewish origins were revealed, she was sent to Ghetto Theresienstadt.

Lilly Fluss

Lilly lived with us in room 25. She was a pretty and pleasant girl, the daughter of relatively elderly parents. Lilly contracted typhus and was transferred to the hospital where she died. I remember the grief on the face of her father when he came to gather her belongings. Several months later, Lilly's parents were sent to Auschwitz and perished. Lilly's grandparents returned to Prague after the liberation. The names of their eight children, their husbands and wives and four grandchildren, all of whom perished, are inscribed on their grave in Prague's Jewish cemetery.

Michael

During the course of the month of October 1944, more than 20,000 people were sent from the Theresienstadt Ghetto to Poland. Only later did we know that they were sent to Auschwitz. The Ghetto was emptied – everything changed.

Grandmother was no longer with us in Theresienstadt. Mother and Karmela transferred from block Q 308 to Block L 514. One evening, when I went to visit them, I saw a woman sitting on a large stone in front of Block L 414; beside her was a baby carriage, manufactured in Theresienstadt from a wooden crate and wooden handmade wheels. I could not restrain myself and despite my shyness I approached her in order to see the baby. The woman said to me: 'I am Grete Wiener. My child was born after his father was sent on a transport to Poland'. – Many years went by,

and this baby, Dr. Michael Wiener, became the chief medical officer of the Israel Defense Forces.

Fear in Theresienstadt

The poem 'Fear' was written by a talented and intelligent young girl, **Eva Pick** from Nymburg. At the time when she wrote it, Eva was fourteen years old. In December 1943, she was sent, with her parents and little sister, from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz where they were placed in the Familienlager. The Nazis, fearing that the Red Cross would request details concerning the whereabouts of Theresienstadt Ghetto residents sent eastwards, kept arrivals in a separate area of the death camp for a period of time. Eva eventually perished in the Auschwitz gas chambers in July 1944.

Fear

Today the ghetto knows a different horror,
Closing its grip, Death wields an icy scythe
An evil sickness spreads a new form of terror
The victims, in its shadow, weep and writhe

Today a father's heartbeat reveals his fear
And mothers bow their heads into their hands
For children choke and die with typhus here
A bitter price is paid that no-one understands.

My heart inside my breast still beats
While friends depart for other worlds
Perhaps it's better – who can say? –
Than watching this – to die today?

No, no my God we want to live
Not watch our numbers melt away.
A better world we want to achieve
We want to work – not die today.

In Theresienstadt

Should someone new in here squeeze,
He'll be shocked by what he sees.
How will I sleep in mud and waste,
Or eat my 'taters without taste?

How will I live here? So bitter my stay.
Here the floor is hardened clay.
How will I sleep on piles of mud,
Full of dirt, full of crud.

And so much noise and hullabaloo –
O my gosh, what can I do?
The flies alight.
The fleas do bite.
For Theresienstadt I have no yen,
I'd love to go home. But who knows when?

Author: Renee Lichtenstern "Teddy", age 14, from Ostrava

Renee is now an elderly woman like me and lives in Venezuela. Thanks to the computer, we occasionally correspond with each other.

Those Lost

They live in my mind and in my memory – my relatives, my childhood friends, my sweetheart Hermann, so many lost people who were wiped out. Their names are written on the walls of the Pinkas synagogue in Prague and in Pages of Testimony at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. Five thousand residents of the Theresienstadt Ghetto were sent to Auschwitz in September 1943. Those who survived the terrible conditions of Auschwitz were put to death in the gas chambers between the 7th and 8th of March 1944 (The birthday of President Masaryk). From the depths of the gas chambers were heard the Czech national anthem and Hatikva. A **poetess**, whose name is **not known**, sent the poem "We the Dead Accuse" from the September 1943 transport with the help of a Czech worker, Josef Moravetz, who was working on the building of a road in Auschwitz. He sent the poem to Prague by secret post.

We the Dead Accuse!

No, on our graves there are no languishing crosses,
No tombstones cover them,
No, there are no wreathes and no hammered railings
And no angels with bowed heads,
No willow trees, no wreaths entwined with golden cords,
No eternal lamp.
We are in cesspools – decomposing lime.
Through our bones the wind rustles.

Skulls whiten without hope
On the fences – the barbed wire quivers
And our ashes are tossed to the wind,
Scattered in thousands of jars.

As a chain we encircle the globe,
Seeds scattered by the wind,
Counting the days, months, years
Waiting – we have time.

We are here, below, our numbers growing,
From day to day multiplying
Until all the fields will swell
And the earth that is beneath you will crack open.

And then we will appear, an army great and terrible,
Skull to skull, bone to bone,
And into the ears of the world we will roar:
"We the dead accuse!"

Daily Life in L 410

The elderly women had duties in the Ghetto: to maintain the toilets, to ensure that everything was cleaned up, and to keep order in line-ups. My grandmother sometimes worked in these areas. In the girls' home, on our floor, an elderly woman from Germany performed these chores. We gave her the peels from the cooked potatoes, which we had obtained in the kitchen for lunch. The lady sat before the WC and with great patience removed what remained on the peels. In the evening, she brought the fruits of her labor to her elderly and starving husband.

Mrs. Sabat worked in the kitchenette in the girls' home. Sometimes, it was possible to heat up the food there, food which we had obtained in the main kitchen. In the evening we used to go Mrs. Sabat with a hot-water bottle (what a luxury!) and with the pretext that we were sick, we asked her to fill it with hot water for us. Later, in our room, we poured it into a bowl and washed ourselves in it, instead of the cold tap water.

Berushki (In Czech: Beatles, and also the root of the verb "to take")

Berushki – These were German women, Aryans from the Sudeten area, who were sent to the Ghetto to search through our personal belongings for 'contraband'. In other words, forbidden items, such as money, medicines, jewelry, cans of preserved food, candles, matches, and so forth.

My little sister was once sick when the Berushki arrived at Q 802. Everyone was ordered to leave the room; only my sister remained, lying on the floor with a high

temperature. The Berushki searched and searched, and did not know, that inside the doll, that Karmi was holding in her arms was money. With this money, my parents would buy bread – a loaf for 300 Kronen (the weekly wage of a worker).

Excerpts from my Diary and from my Notebooks

At intermittent intervals during my time in the Ghetto, I would give expression to my thoughts and feelings in my diary. Only occasionally did I endeavor to write on events, which happened during this so special period. My uncle Otto and my aunt Lotte both worked in Theresienstadt in a workshop in which various items were produced for the Germans from cardboard and paper. They clandestinely brought several scraps of paper to me, which I sewed together to make a small notebook. I then copied several passages from my diary and from the compositions that I wrote in L 410. I gave the notebook to my mother as a present on her birthday and it is currently in my possession. This is almost all that remains from what I wrote in the Ghetto.

I have another handmade copybook with drawings that I sketched in the Ghetto and another one entitled: "Deutsche Literatur"; yes, we clandestinely studied German Literature in the Ghetto, where learning and teaching were strictly forbidden.

I burned my original diary, which I had brought from Prostejov to the Ghetto, when I was attempting to cope with my experiences at Theresienstadt – when I was a young woman and mother.

15.7.1943

Where I would go for a Walk

I would walk by myself in the forest. I would pay attention to the surrounding nature, the very nature in which I had walked so blindly until several years ago. In the distance, blue skies merge with forests lit by the sun. I would sit in the soft weeds and look at the clouds racing by in the sky. With a little imagination, the cloud would turn into a ship rocking in the sea. Here is a dense forest, the trees rustle in the wind; there a small lake. I rise and walk and arrive at a meadow. Among the green weeds gleam splendidly-colored flowers; the stream flowing alongside me is adorned with 'forget-me nots'. Above it bends a weeping willow and in its crown birds nest and

chirp in joy. Slowly, the sun begins to set in the western horizon. Darkness comes and I return, enchanted by the experience of this beautiful walk.

10.11.1943

On Zionism and Life in the Land of Israel.

I do not wish to remain in the Diaspora; I must go to the Land of Israel where I will be able to say that it belongs to us. I am not a nationalist extremist, but I do not want to be a dependent, a stranger in a foreign land. It seems to me that the kibbutz is a co-operative form of life suitable for us. I think that only people who want to work for the good of all, who are prepared to sacrifice themselves for ideals, will go the Land of Israel and to the kibbutz. There, one can depend upon everyone else and trust everyone. The majority of people on the kibbutz will be laborers, but not automatons. They are thoughtful people who do not derive satisfaction from wealth or entertainment, but rather from higher education, intellectual stimulation, hard work, and good deeds. Life is worth more if a person tries to be good and useful. There should be no division between the intellectual and the worker. The task of the farmer is to cultivate the soil; the task of the doctor to cure people. Both are vital for humanity, both have a general education and many things in common in which they indulge in their leisure time. Thus, a relationship of friendship can develop between the farmer and the doctor.

The suggestion of Theodor Herzl for a seven-hour day and two shifts seems quite proper to me. In this way, much work will get done, and at the same time there will be enough leisure time. There is no need for coffee houses or beauty parlors. Their existence will bring about a dual-faced human society, falsehood, superficiality, jealousy and corruption. With regard to schools – I think that children over the age of fourteen should have the right to decide for themselves whether they want to continue with their studies. The economic situation of the family is unimportant because everyone's situation is equal, nor is any importance attributed to parental desires.

Advantages and disadvantages of the kibbutz, the collective settlement (kvutza), workers' collective of independent farmers (moshav ovdim), and the large village (moshava).

I think that a young, unmarried person can live in the kibbutz. For a family with young children the form of life of the workers' collective (moshav) is more suitable. I think that in a workers' collective, a person cannot realize his ideals in as intensive a manner as he could on the kibbutz or communal settlement. In a moshav, families live side by side and the interests of individuals focus on the life of their family. It is very difficult, of course, for the mother of several children to decide between life on a moshav and life on the kibbutz. The moshava is an ordinary village – I have no interest in living there.

1943-1944

Always try to be a good person.

The main thing is that a person should have a clean conscience.

It is preferable that a person should underestimate his self-esteem rather than having too great a self-esteem.

In every person there is something good.

We must be as useful as possible to our surroundings.

If a person works heartily and willingly, he will accomplish more than if he works under compulsion.

If children would only have an untainted education - people would be much better because the character of children is harmed by bad education.

A person will go much farther if he is honest, if he speaks the truth.

If all people were educated, there would be no difference between rich and poor.

Judge people by their character and not by their external appearance.

Pretentiousness is the worst thing.

14.3.1944

Alone

Evening – I am walking in the darkened Ghetto. Although, all the time I live among masses of people, I nevertheless feel isolated. I am a small young girl; I am alone.

Opposite me, an elderly man approaches, bent over, with a sack slung on his back. He is far more alone and miserable than I am. I have something that he does not have. I have my youth – hope, thoughts and ideals. These are things that this elderly man has lost a long time ago.

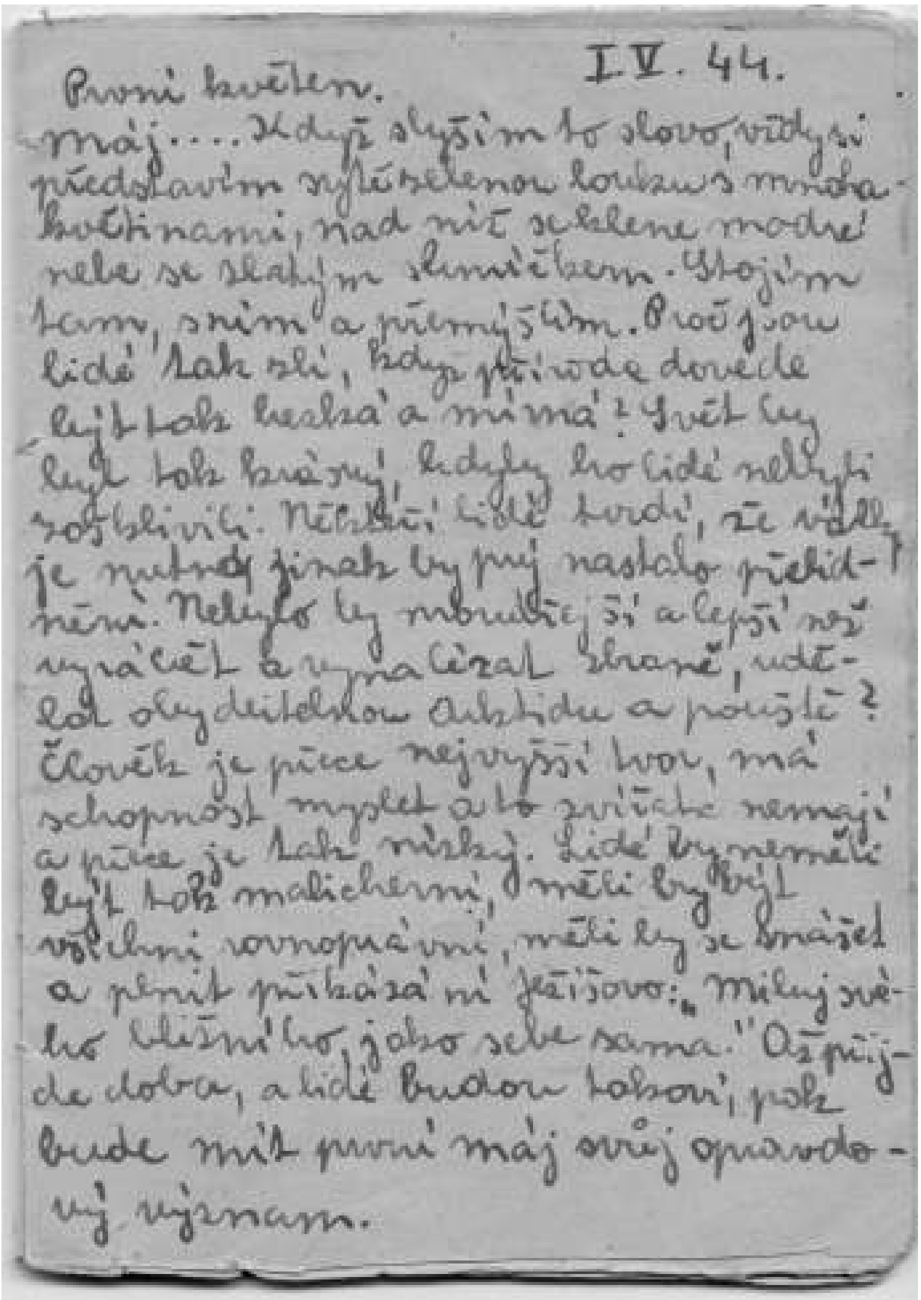
The Universe and Man

Within the universe, man is insignificant. He is only able to grasp the universe with the help of his senses - thus, for him the universe is full of mystery and its boundaries are unlimited. The universe – eternity – God – nature – fate – death – life, these are the questions for which I will never find answers.

The First of May

May – in my mind's eye I see a green meadow, wild flowers, a blue sky, the shining sun. I dream and wonder why men are so evil when the nature that surrounds them is so beautiful. The world would be better if people would not spoil it. Some people claim that there must always be wars so that there won't be a population explosion. It would be proper and better that, instead of inventing and producing weapons, the desert and the Antarctic should be made habitable so that they could be populated.

A human being is able to think, and nevertheless he steeps so low. People should all possess equal rights and live according to the saying: 'and thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'. If a time comes when people behave in this way, the first of May will have true significance.


První květen. I.V. 44.
Máj.... Když slyším to slovo, vždy si představím svěže zelenou louku s mnoha květinami, nad níž se klene modré nebe se zlatým sluníčkem. Stojím tam, sním a přemýšlím. Proč jsou lidé tak zlí, když příroda dovede být tak hezká a mírná? Svět by byl tak krásný, kdyby ho lidé nebyli rozbili. Někteří lidé tvrdí, že válka je nutná, jinak by prý nastalo přelidnění. Nebylo by moudřejší a lepší než vyrábět a vynalézat zbraně, udělat obydlitelnou Arktidu a poušť? Člověk je přece nejvyšší tvor, má schopnost myslet a to zvířata nemají a přece je tak nízký. Lidé by neměli být tak malicherní, měli by být všichni rovnoprávní, měli by se snažit a plnit přikázání Ježíšovo: „Miluj svého bližního jako sebe sama." Až přijde doba, a lidé budou takoví, pak bude mít první máj svůj opravdový význam.

Page from my copybook in Theresienstadt, the first of May 1944

16.1.1945

In the Sick Room (in Ghetto Theresienstadt Hospital)

On my bed, here, alone, I dream -
Look out to the distance,
I do not see anything
Except for a couple of elderly women
Their eyes bandaged,
Their voices grating,
Interrupting my dream.
The spirit wants to wander far
to the longed for freedom!
I close my eyes
And see another world.
But this is no more than a dream
To a distant world
To an ideal world,
Perhaps unrealistic.
It contains justice, goodness and beauty
Neighborly love, too, I see therein.
If you will it, I believe,
It is no dream.*

* A famous phrase from Altneuland , written by Theodor Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism.

17.1.1945

Why does sorrow so grip my soul?
Here we have no good life.
I pray to Him sometimes
Asking for a life of value,
But my faith in Him no longer lives,
then he surely no longer exists!

Perhaps, nevertheless, there is a God
Impervious to our prayers.
He is above and better than us -
But it is clear, it's just a dream,
people turn to him in their prayers
Hoping that He will hear them and respond.
Hoping that He will like their candles,
But he ignores them.

God is nature – God is everything,
We will never understand Him.

7.2.1945
Here I live – disappointed
But another land exists.
There things can be much better;
There everything is good.
Evil and ugliness and cruelty do not exist there.
That's my belief.
There a person is happy without money
There a man is free without handcuffs.

Toward the End of the War

We felt that the war was drawing to an end. After the transports of October 1944, which carried away more than 20,000 people, the Ghetto emptied. Almost no men remained.

Men, women and children from mixed marriages arrived. Transports arrived from Hungary and Slovakia. From them we heard the word 'partisan' for the first time. The men began to work constructing the 'duck pond'. There were rumors that this was in fact the facility in which they were going to put us to death – the word 'gas' was mentioned – all with macabre humor … one evening the men from mixed marriages, who were building the pond, rebelled. In order to calm them down the Germans ordered that extra soup be distributed among us all!

On the 13 February 1945, the Allied forces began the well-known bombing of the city of Dresden, about 70 kilometers from the Theresienstadt Ghetto. We heard the explosions quite well; I only learned about the exact date of that day and what occurred then, many years after the war. A short time before the bombardment we saw, and sometimes heard, airplanes flying over at a great height. Occasionally, pieces of aluminum foil descended on us; they were used by the Allied forces to deceive the enemy and to conceal their airplanes. We were not permitted to pick up the pieces of foil, but there were children who nevertheless did so furtively; for us, these pieces of aluminum foil were greetings from the Free World.

The 'Sudeten' barracks was evacuated and became the secret archives for the Germans. It was forbidden to us to go close to it. I recall that I would walk each day on a wooden bridge built on a path that by-passed this barracks. In the spring, the Nazis burnt the archives in order not to leave it after their defeat. Apart from the ashes, partially torn pieces of burnt paper blew away in the wind, and from them we could discern that they were card indices of names.

In February, a transport destined for Switzerland, set out from Theresiensdtadt.

In the spring of 1945, all the remaining girls from L 410 were moved to L 414.

In April 1945, although the Nazis were still in charge of the camp, the Danish Jews traveled home in white buses belonging to the Red Cross!! On the 20th April 1945, the first transport from the East arrived in Theresienstadt. Towards evening we

returned from work as usual; the girls who were on duty that evening brought us our meal, in a pail, as we were used to. That same evening we each got a piece of cake. We heard that a transport of starving people had arrived; we took the pail, and ran to the 'Jeger' barracks in order to see the new arrivals and distribute the pieces of cake among them. Among the arrivals were those who had left Theresienstadt in October 1944, some five months earlier. It was impossible to recognize them! Bare skeletons, dressed in rags with wooden clogs – sick, covered with lice and terribly starved. They were called Musulmen. They told us about the gas chambers - and we believed them. Later came more Jews from France, Germany and various other countries arrived; also non-Jewish prisoners, criminals, murderers, all terribly starved, covered with lice, sick with typhus, there were also instances of cannibalism in the arriving trains. The liberation was not as pretty and nice as we had pictured it to ourselves for many long years. . . .

Arrivals to the Ghetto, from death marches or by train, were directed to the shacks that were recently erected in the Ghetto. Groups of prisoners arrived daily. In 1943, young men, residents of the Ghetto built the railway track from Bohusovice that reached the 'Hamburg' barracks. On one occasion a coal train arrived piled with corpses. Starving prisoners who were still alive ate the flesh of the dead. I did not see this – only heard about it.

Among the arrivals were Mr. Robert Schreiber and Dolfek Perschak from Prostejov. If they recognized me or I recognized them, I don't recall. They said that they had not eaten in many days; that on the route they had marched to reach Theresienstadt not even weeds remained. I ran to my mother at the far end of the Ghetto; she cooked some of the little amount of semolina, which she kept for an emergency, in water, (there was no milk), and I immediately ran with a little pot containing the hot gruel and a spoon, and brought it to the two members of our community.

The Czech gendarmes, who over these years had accompanied us every day to work, and stood guard over us there, suddenly displayed greater humanity towards us. One of them gave us the mid-morning sandwich which he had brought for himself – each one of us took a bite.

In the girls' quarters, matters proceeded almost routinely; we prepared a performance of a selection of Czech folk dances with the name Beseda. We searched among the residents of the Ghetto for red kerchiefs, white shirts and boots, to be worn for the performance. On a beautiful spring day we dressed in the clothes designated for the performance and went out into the streets of the Ghetto. The mood was good; the end of the war was approaching.

Between the Ghetto and the Aryan world stood a roadblock where the Czech gendarmes stood. We went through the roadblock every day to work, a gendarme joined us there and went with us to work and stood on guard (we were 11-14 years old only about two youngsters were 16-17 years old). The gendarmes stood at the roadblock all the time, from inside of the ghetto it was allowed to go till to the roadblock. We got to the roadblock and with joy and cheekiness we asked the Czech gendarmes when the Americans would arrive. Before this time we had never dared to talk to them.

The End of the War.

The following lines, written in the Theresienstadt Ghetto, are from my diary. As I already noted, I decided to burn the diary when I was a young mother in Israel and was coping with the experience of the Holocaust. The lines were printed by Dov Quastler, the editor, in the monthly magazine HaMored in Bratislava in 1946:

Recently, when transports began to arrive at the Theresienstadt Ghetto from various concentration camps, we began to understand that Germany had been defeated. The arrivals were convinced that in another few days the terrible war would end. Three weeks ago strange things began to happen. German cars began to race around the Ghetto at a crazy speed. The Nazis began to flee. After some of their non-Jewish relatives entered the Ghetto, people from the mixed marriages began to flee; they were the only ones who had families and homes to return to in their communities.

Personnel from the Red Cross arrived. As we had done every day, we woke up early in the morning in order to go to work. Suddenly, a girl from the adjoining room entered and said that a transport from some concentration camp or other had arrived. We quickly jumped from our bunks, dressed in whatever was handy, and rushed to the Schleusse. Once again there was a sense of helplessness, a feeling that we

were incapable of helping these unfortunate people, and the knowledge that our dear ones, who had been deported to the East, would not return. We helped as much as we could and suddenly: boom – boom … the noise resounded from the Aryan road. What's this? Shooting? Those people who had come from the depths of hell to relative security in the Theresienstadt Ghetto, would they have to cope once again with the Nazis? The shooting continued all through the day. The Ghetto awaited its fate in silence. Would it be destroyed or would we be fortunate enough to survive until the end of the war? It began to get dark and with darkness the tension mounted. On the road a vehicle with a red flag appeared, other vehicles followed. The streets filled with people and there were shouts of joy; the Ghetto took in a deep breath and welcomed the liberator – the soldiers and the tanks of the Red Army. But the joy was not complete. We could not come to grips with the fact that so many people who had waited for this moment, were no longer with us. We girls assembled before we departed, and said amongst ourselves, that the future would depend upon us, the young. We must do everything so that there would be no need for such terrible wars with so many victims and misery.

Pictures of my Repatriation Document after Liberation

The Red Cross now managed the Ghetto and the Jewish administration continued to function partially. We, the remnants of Theresienstadt, had undergone three years of almost starvation, some children had TB. Some youngsters came really starved from Auschwitz and death marches. We were provided with food, we stayed in our cramped lodgings, but had no money, no clothes; we wore our old clothes from our homes, which we had brought to Theresienstadt a few years before.

After The Liberation

Mother looked after the sick – those with typhus. I feared for her health, for her life. The German women (the Berushkies), that used to come to the Ghetto in order to confiscate the little that we had, now came to the Ghetto to clean the latrines. In the beginning some people left freely, but then quarantine was imposed because of the typhus epidemic.

A small number of Prostejov people got together in the Ghetto, almost all of them women, but the gathering also included Mr. Grabscheid and the lawyer, Mr. Wald; we discussed whether we should travel directly to Eretz Israel. We decided first of all to go back to Prostejov on the chance that some of our relatives might return 'home' from Poland. We children traveled to the convalescent home of Mr. Přemysl Pitter. As a solider who had witnessed the horrors of the First World War, Přemysl Pitter had become a devout Protestant preacher and began to work with children in the 1920s when he saw the difficulties of war widows and their children. When the Nazis entered Prague he opened his Milíčův Children's Home to some Jewish children and helped them throughout the war, even after they have been deported. He sent food parcels to some of the children to Theresienstadt and to Auschwitz. At the war's end Přemysl Pitter was appointed by the Czech government to help Jewish children returning exhausted, starved and alone from the concentration camps. He managed to set up convalescent homes in a number of country houses near Prague. He was awarded the status of Righteous among the Nations by Yad Vashem. Swiss Olga Fierz worked with Mr. Pitter and helped him in his endeavors for many years.

Stirin - Přemysl Pitter

At long last this terrible war had come to an end. On the eighth of May, 1945 the Red Army liberated Ghetto Theresienstadt. This occurred a short time after the arrival of a death-march transport, which included several former prisoners from Theresienstadt. From them we heard about Auschwitz, about the gas chambers, about the almost total extermination of the Jews of Europe. I write about this again in order to clarify our frame of mind at that time. Transports like these continued to arrive and the Ghetto was overflowing with its human contents. They were in terrible condition and they were called 'Musulmen' in the jargon of Auschwitz and other extermination camps, where the people were really starved – skin and bones.

'Musulmen' were sick with typhus, covered with lice, thin, weak and terribly hungry. Given the deteriorating health situation, a state of isolation – quarantine – was declared in Theresienstadt; nobody could leave the Ghetto. There was a great danger that disease would spread to the civilian population.

Among the survivors of our family who were in the Ghetto were aunt Lotte from Miroslav, my mother, my sister Karmela who was eleven years old, and myself - sixteen. At last, I could show Karmela the vegetable garden where I worked for almost three years, the garden from which I occasionally brought her a vegetable, a carrot or a tomato. At the beginning of June, a rumor spread that the children would go to convalescent homes. First the youngest children left and later the older children. For us, it was of the greatest importance that the remnants of families should stay together. In the end, the mothers agreed to the children leaving first, mainly because of the danger of contagion from the diseases that were spreading in the Ghetto, and also because they thought the situation would be better for us in the convalescent homes.

Summertime and the weather was pleasant. The day arrived; they placed us on the trucks – and away we went!! Despite the heavy feeling, the fresh and terrible sadness that would accompany us for the rest of our lives – it was a wonderful sensation!! To travel in an open truck, at high speed, in the open countryside - freedom!!! We arrived at Stirin in the afternoon. We were greeted by pleasant young women. The house was actually a castle. The first thing – showers. After so many years - a bathroom with white tiles, hot water! Dinner – a dream – bread – perhaps even buns, butter, an egg, semolina porridge! Paradise on earth! Shortly after the end of the War, there was a shortage of food, but Mr. Pitter took care of us. We, starving children of the concentration camp, put a piece of bread in our pocket and at night we placed it underneath our pillow – who knew what would happen tomorrow?

We made the acquaintance of our benefactors, Mr. Přemysl Pitter, Miss Olga, Milushka, and other good people whose names I no longer remember; they took good care of us and administered to our needs. In the beginning, there were several girls from L 410 that had remained at GhettoTheresienstadt at Stirin. Later, girls who had survived Auschwitz and other camps arrived. I especially remember Renka Iltis who really looked like a Musulman - fourteen years of age, tall, thin, stomach bloated, and her head shaved.

We thought it important to learn, so that at the beginning of the school year (after a break of five years) we could return to the classroom. Professor Irma Lauscher came from Theresienstadt with her nine year old daughter, Mischenka, and several other counselors, teachers and a medical doctor H.G. Adler; they and Mr. Pitter's staff looked after us and taught us. We learned with great intensity and diligence. Our subjects even included Latin. Certain lessons were given in Kamenice, others in Oleshovice. We went to these places on foot, through the forest and meadows - flowers, butterflies, birds, and various beetles. On one occasion I walked from one castle to another with a Jewish youth from Poland – somehow we managed to understand each other because Polish and Czech are similar. The boy broke out in tears and told me that he had worked beside the gas chambers and removed the bodies; on one of the days, among the corpses were his parents and his brothers. I don't remember the name of this youth.

Life in the Castles

There were four castles Stirin, Olesovice, Kamenice, Lojovice. Life in the castles was as if we had returned to a lost paradise. The castles were beautiful - they contained art works; we discovered a German library with a rich collection of books; we read in our leisure time. There was a large and beautiful park, meadows, forests, wildflowers, strawberries, raspberries. We came upon a small lake; because of concern for our safety, we were not allowed to bathe in it. But after so many years, we could not deny ourselves the pleasure. One evening, in the dark, some of us, the older girls, walked with our counselor, Olga, herself a survivor of the death camps, to swim. We did not have bathing suits – it was dark – not a cause for concern. Olga was weak following her recovery from typhus. On entering the water, she began to sink beneath the surface. Fortunately, we were able to save our beloved Olga from drowning.

On one occasion, Willi Groag from Theresienstadt paid us a visit. He brought a letter from mother for my sister and me. I worried about mother a lot; she was still in Theresienstadt, looking after typhus victims. Karmela and I wrote a letter, I collected strawberries and raspberries, and Willi took the letter and berries to mother. The mail service was not yet operating properly; we had no envelopes or stamps, and no money.

Every Sunday we gathered together and Mr. Pitter gave a sermon – it was in fact a discussion; on one occasion he spoke about death – he tried to make things easier for us, to help us come to grips with what had happened to us.

One day, Mr. Pitter gathered us together and said that he would help all children, that children were never guilty. German children, too, were suffering now and were in need of a caring and safe place. And so German children came to the castle. I still remember a brother and sister, with fair hair and thin. We behaved decently towards them, but we did not talk to them. It seems that at that time, so soon after the war, our behavior was correct.

One day, the teacher stopped the lesson and told us that the Americans had dropped an atomic bomb on Japan. We did not know that the war was still continuing. There was no radio; we did not have newspapers.

There were also very young children at the convalescent homes. They learned, too. My sister and her contemporaries were eleven years of age, but they had never sat on school benches before. At the Lojovice castle there were young children up to age six. One day, several young women from England arrived; they were psychologists; they asked us strange questions, requested that we draw something, wanted to know what we dreamed about. This made me angry. After many years I learned that thanks to them the young orphans were transferred to England; perhaps this was to their benefit.

We - the girls of L 410 - organized a cultural evening. We recited poems by Nezval, Seifert, a translation of Chinese poems, and 'If' by Rudyard Kipling. The Czech counselors and the management personnel praised us a lot and were impressed by the high standard of our performance; they did not know about the cultural life of the Theresienstadt Ghetto.

Later, several girls arrived from Poland. They had apparently suffered far more than we. We Theresienstadt girls were, despite everything, still girls. The young Polish girls had aged before their time, they were quiet, frightened, dressed in long skirts.

The Return to Prostejov

At the end of August 1945, we (the children who were not orphans) traveled to Prague. We traveled by tram for free; people could tell that we had been in a concentration camp; we didn't have any money. Our mothers were waiting for us at Mr. Pitter's orphanage in Prague. Except for children from mixed marriages, there was not one among us whose father was living. Our mother came from far away Prostejov in order to bring us 'home'. All our family money had been deposited in the bank in 1939 or 1940, I am not sure if any of it remained but Mother bought me a new blouse in Prague!

Mother, Karmela and I spent an entire day going from office to office in the hope that they could tell us something about our relatives whose whereabouts were still not known to us. In these offices there were long lists of names of the missing. Before we left by train for Prostejov, the town in which we were born, we had to spend the night in Prague, since the train only left on the morrow. I can't forget the incident that occurred in Prague: in the Roxy cinema, lodging had been set up for people who had recently returned from the concentration camps. A large number of survivors were accommodated there under very crowded conditions. We were supposed to sleep there. A gentleman from the Jewish community took pity on us and invited us to sleep at his house. In the evening, when we arrived at his apartment, his Christian wife expelled us because we were Jews. For lack of any alternative, we returned to the Roxy and spent the night there. The next day we went by train to Prostejov. For a short time following the war, there was no coordination of the train schedules and we were forced to sleep in the waiting room at the Olomouc train station. The next morning we boarded the local train and finally we saw at a distance the familiar tower of Prostejov's municipal building rising above the Hana flatland. After three long years, we were again in Prostejov – but were we at home?

Mother had arrived at Prostejov from Theresienstadt earlier bringing with her our few miserable belongings. She managed to find single-room lodging for all three of us in a rented apartment containing four rooms housing other Holocaust survivors. One room was occupied by Mrs. Kobler, in another room Mr. Herzog, and in the third room was a couple from Slovakia or Hungary – seven people in all, the remnants of four families. There was no furniture. For several weeks we slept on the floor and the

few clothes we had were hung on wall hooks. Later, all three of us moved into Mrs. Kobler's apartment close to the train station. There I wrote the poem "Train".

Train

When I was a little girl,
I loved to look at passing trains.
From the windows smiling people are leaning out,
All happily waving.

But today,
When I hear the noise of the train
And the commotion of travel at the station,
I am reminded of the departure of thousands;
Their unknown travel destination was death.

The terrifying gate of the Hamburg barracks
Opens sometimes so often –
In the courtyard weeping, eternal separation, commotion!
It is a matter of life – the most precious gift.

Here a mother stands, her child must leave,
There – a son, appears caged,
He cannot travel with his father.
Orphans are sent away – forlorn children.

The wagons are crammed to the limit
The whistle blows – as usual,
But in our ears it sounds
Like a lament for thousands.
(Written in September 1945 in Prostejov)

After we returned to Prostejov, mother went to our non-Jewish neighbors and acquaintances; our family had lived in Prostejov for six generations. The upright among them (and they were the vast majority), returned our belongings to mother, the very belongings which my parents and grandparents had stored at their homes before we were deported. Our former household help, Mrs. Maria Koudelkova came running to us with a small milk jug, which she returned to us. Mr. Sevcik, who worked in our shop, was also honest. Thanks to him, I still have to this day the cupboard that belonged to my father, which uncle Arthur, the architect, had designed. Other people, old neighbors of grandma and grandpa gave us back our utensils and white linens. What was most important for me – the Michalovsky family from Holesov had stored a picture album that uncle Josef had prepared for me. He had given me the album for my twelfth birthday in 1941. They returned additional photos, mainly family pictures. I owe much thanks to my uncle, to my parents and to the Michalovsky family who, during such hard times, thought that it was important to preserve my childhood album and our family photos. In 1994, I visited the neighbors of grandpa and grandma in Prostejov, Emil Vareka went to a drawer and took out a toy which Gusta, mother's cousin, gave him for safekeeping, before the deportation in 1942. Emil gave the toy to me.

We continued to recuperate in Prostejov and we also learned diligently so that we could enter school in September. I went to school at the Gymnasia and for the occasion mother obtained a briefcase made of genuine leather. I am not sure, how mother obtained it. Her father's store, where leather was sold, was returned to her; perhaps one of the shoemakers, who were grandpa's customers, produced the briefcase. Karmela had to put up with a briefcase which mother had sewn together from pieces of cloth. For Karmela, these were the first days of school in her life – at age eleven – and she was placed directly in Grade Six!

We had practically nothing; my suitcase had been sent off to Auschwitz and by a miracle I remained in Theresienstadt. In February 1945, we had been about to travel with the only transport whose destination was Switzerland – sent in exchange for German prisoners of war. The train was full and we stayed in Theresienstadt but most of the few belongings we had left went to Switzerland. A number of months after the War, Mr. Berger, who had traveled on business from Prostejov to Switzerland before the War and stayed there during the War, sent us our measly

belongings. As I have already noted, Mrs. Berger and her two daughters, Zdenka and Eva, were sent from Theresienstadt to Auschwitz on the very last transport – they did not survive.

The Real Gymnasium for Girls in Prostejov

In September 1945, I began classes in grade ten at the Real Gymnasium for girls located on Jan Amos Komensky Street (named after the famous educator, Comenius, 1592-1670). The principal of the school, Mr. Letocha, said to me: "Stecklmacherova, you have completed five grades; now go to Grade six." Somehow, I convinced him to allow me to study in grade ten; according to my age group, I should have been in grade eleven. I promised to take examinations on the material that I had missed during the years in Theresienstadt. After a short time, however, I discovered that that the girls were learning French, Latin and from the beginning of May, Russian, and that it was unlikely that I would catch up with them. After some consideration and nights without sleep, I decided to ask them to return me to grade nine, where my age cohort and friend, Eva Herrmannova, was studying.

Eva spent two years at Theresienstadt, alone, without parents; her father was Jewish and her mother Christian. Under the Nazi regime, a child over fourteen from a mixed marriage was considered an adult, and thus she was sent to concentration camp alone. Eva's mother would send us food packages, and in each package she would add something for Eva. "Aryans" were forbidden to send us packages; Jews were no longer living outside the camps except for those in mixed marriages, and they could send packages -

Eva Herrmannova, age 16 – after the war.

– one package every two or three months. Thanks to Mrs. Herrmann, we managed to receive life-saving food and Eva received extra.

In the Gymnasia, when I went back from grade ten to grade nine, Eva and I sat on the same bench, and we both felt good together. In the early hours of the morning,

before classes began, I tried to learn what I had missed over the past five years. I was examined in physics, mathematics, and perhaps in some other subjects. Eva and I studied French together with a private teacher. Despite this study load, I asked my mother's permission to take English lessons with Mrs. Ambrose (an English woman). I had learned English before the Holocaust and even at Theresienstadt. In addition, I studied Hebrew in a group organized by Mudr. Lohr.

There was no man in the house; we had no outside household help. Since we had worked doing the most menial tasks in Theresienstadt, mother did not regard our house tasks as something exceptional and did not think twice about harnessing me to a cart in order to bring firewood home. I would then go downstairs to the cellar and split and chop the logs with an axe. Occasionally, I went to the National Theater with Eva to see a play or hear a concert. Despite the fact that we were separated by the Iron Curtain for almost forty years, the comradeship between Eva and me still continues. Now we correspond and have visited each other more than once.

A Dream

Despite the activity, I was sad, miserable and depressed much of the time. I missed Hermann terribly. We did not know and we did not grasp that almost all our people were annihilated. All the time we hoped that "they would return". From the depths of my memory … a dream, perhaps from 1945, after we returned from Theresienstadt: I dreamt that we met, Hermann and I, at the end of Brnenska street, where the Christian cemetery was located and beyond it the Jewish cemetery. What I strongly remember is – an alley of tall and thin poplars.

Survivors Saved from the Ashes

From my family, except for the three of us, only my aunt, Lotte Senski, and Litzi Schallinger returned. From among my friends, Eva Herrmannova returned to Prostejov. Rita Vogel and her mother, refugees from Opava, returned to Prostejov. A number of older girls survived and returned to Prostejov, too.

I thought about, went into, and examined the meaning of life. I considered suicide, but it was clear to me that after the suffering that mother had undergone, I did not have the right to cause her more tragedy and grief. Apparently, the healthy impulse to live won out and saved my life.

I corresponded with friends and acquaintances from Theresienstadt. Most of them lived in Prague, although they had originally lived in other towns. I corresponded with Dagmar Fantl (Liebl today). She had been in a sanitarium in Zamberk after she contracted a severe case of tuberculosis in the concentration camps from which she returned alone. Shlomo Furth, our Hebrew teacher at Theresienstadt, informed me that in the coming winter the Zionist Youth Movement 'Hechalutz' was organizing a camp in the Tatra Mountains in Slovakia. It was scheduled during the winter break from school and I traveled to this camp located in Kezmarske Zleby. For the first time, I met soldiers from the Land of Israel who had served in the Jewish Brigade. On their sleeves was the Star of David in blue and white! Only Anna Lenkwitz (now Shen) and I traveled from Prostejov to the camp. It was very cold and there was a lot of snow. Among acquaintances from Theresienstadt that I met there were Max, Ipik, Ida, Stella, Miriam, Anita and Lisa. Most were older than I. There were young people from Slovakia, from Carpatho-Russia. There were emissaries from the Land of Israel. The writer Hans Lichtwitz (Uri Naor), a cultural emissary, accompanied me on the walk from the train station to the camp. He also was dressed in a uniform with a blue and white Star of David on his sleeve – a contrast to our yellow Star of David …

I made the acquaintance of other soldiers: Reuven Zentner and Ephraim Shoen. I met young people of my age from Slovakia and I have maintained contact with several of them to this day. Following the camp period, there was a seminar for counselors in which I participated. I saw two boys writing in Hebrew letters – since I understood the letters, I read the words and I understood; it sounded similar to the German language, and this was how, for the first time in my life, I encountered the Yiddish language.

Zionist Preparatory Training (Hachshara)

After I returned from the winter camp and the Hechalutz seminary I decided, after much thought and mental indecision, to leave the gymnasium and participate in the Zionist preparatory training program organized by the

Gordonia-Young Maccabi movement (a Zionist youth movement that had begun before the war). The young people in these programs prepared for communal life and physical work in the kibbutz in Israel. The training – Hachshara was in Bratislava,

the capital city of Slovakia. There were no longer enough Jewish youth in Bohemia and Moravia to organize such a group.

The same conclusion was reached by a few other former prisoners of the Theresienstadt Ghetto. Max Lieben was already there, as were Lotka and the others, while Ipik arrived later. At the preparatory training center in Bratislava, I met several young people who had been with me at the camp in the Tatra Mountains. After I had lost the friends of my childhood, I was not disposed to establish new deep connections and all the time I was sad and depressed.

Nevertheless, at the Zionist training camp in Bratislava, I established friendly relations with Agi, Rahelka, and Sonia. I met my friend Zuzka when my training was transferred to Zilina. Because I knew Czech and had had experience as a counselor for groups of children and youth in the summer and winter camps, I was sent to Prague where I stayed for almost a year organizing Jewish youth in preparation for their aliya (immigration) to the Land of Israel. During this period important events took place. The Communists won the elections for the Czech parliament in 1948. Following the Communist takeover of Czechoslovakia, the new government announced that we had permission to leave the country for Israel. The government set a time limit until some time in 1949 – those who would not leave by that time, would have to remain. The beloved foreign minister Jan Masaryk committed suicide – or was murdered. With thousands of other citizens, I stood at his funeral in Wenceslas Square. In a large hall in the center of town, I listened to a Requiem played to honor Masaryk. During my time in Prague, the fateful and historic vote took place in the United Nations regarding the establishment of a Jewish State in the Land of Israel. We followed events in the General Assembly closely; it was an emotional and moving experience. Afterwards, I spent one year in Brno carrying out the same tasks with Jewish youth.

Mother and Karmela continued to live in Prostejov. Mother worked and tried to provide Karmela with good food and nourishment after three years of hunger in the Ghetto, during which Karmela had barely grown. Our synagogue had served as a store for furniture that once belonged to members of our community and the Germans had taken most of it away. In 1945, only a few items remained which nobody wanted. Mother decided to take several of them – a tea trolley and a hannukiah (nine branch candelabra used during the eight-day festival of Hannuka),

today they adorn my apartment in Tel Aviv. From Theresienstadt mother brought several mattresses so that we could sleep on them. Later, she bought three beds in Prostejov and had the mattresses upholstered and made to fit the beds. Whatever happened to the bedbugs from Theresienstadt, I have no idea! Over time, mother bought some utensils, clothes, books and even bicycles, one for Karmela and one for me!

Karmela (left), mother, and I. Prostejov after the war (1947).

I worked quite hard at the training center in Bratislava. I sowed and planted vegetables in the garden, tended them, cooked, washed clothes, and bought food for my comrades at the center. Despite the difficult conditions and the bitter circumstances I had experienced in the Ghetto, I remained idealistic and linked my Zionism to pioneering and work. I continued to learn Hebrew. At the summer and winter camps I acted as a counselor for groups of young children or youth. I tried to carry out my duties to the best of my ability. I was bothered by the fact that I have no talent for singing. I also did not have a good sense of direction. Once in an orienteering trek I went in the wrong direction – they had to send out a search party for us!

Mother insisted that I must learn something and not only provide services. For several months I acquired sewing skills with Mrs. Schmiedl in Zilina. This helped later in domestic housework with my children and I was the expert in sewing patches when we lived in the Beit-Lehem communal village in the lower Galilee region of Israel.

I tried to organize Jewish children in Prague, meeting with them in the afternoons and evenings. When I had an evening free I went to the theater or the opera. At the clubhouse on Maisl Street, I would meet Jewish youth, Jewish students. At this time there were emissaries from Israel in Prague; Honza Beck from Brno, a member of Kibbutz Givat Haim, arrived with his puppet theater. Abraham Yelinek, a member of Kfar Maccabi, was appointed to supervise the Gordonia-Young Maccabi emissaries in Europe. His daughter, Ruth, shared a room with me in Prague. I met my new relative – Xiel Federmann. My cousin Ruth Steklmacher had married Xiel's brother Samo Federmann in Tel Aviv. Xiel purchased weapons for our fledgling state in Czechoslovakia. In Prague there were many other emissaries and other people who lectured in Czech, Slovak and Yiddish.

After a year, I transferred to Brno in order to work there with Jewish children and youth until our aliya (Hebrew meaning emigration to Israel, literally 'going up' to the Land of Israel) in February 1949. Many children from Brno migrated to Israel – Pavel, Tomy, Jitka, Bobby, Hynek, Rutka, Eva, Aki and others. There were several mothers who had recently returned from the concentration camps with their children, but without their husbands who had perished; they were afraid of the unknown, lacked confidence and were without means, and so they stayed behind. In the 1990s, I reunited with some of them in Brno – Zuzka Ungar, (the daughter of the well-known artist, Otto Ungar), Beda, Pavel, Peter Sagher.

1st row: Maud, an unknown girl, Zuzka Ungar, Jitka Graetzer, Beda Burgmann, Anna Fischgrund, Eva X, Akiba Herrmann, Peter Sagher.

Second row: Boby Graetzer, Jiri Broch, Jenicek, Pavel Glass, an unknown boy Vera Schwarz, Eva Roth.

In 1948, the Czech Government helped the fledgling Israeli state. Our pilots learned to fly their planes at Hranice. Czechoslovakia sold planes and weapons to Israel.

The Jewish students faced a problem – to discontinue their studies and emigrate to Israel, or to remain in order to complete their studies, and not be able to emigrate because of Government restrictions. The Government decreed that the Jewish immigration wave would cease in 1949. The movement requested that I stay a little longer to help complete the Jewish exodus to Israel but I could not agree to that. It was my strong wish to emigrate with my mother and Karmela, since we had survived together; I wanted all three of us to leave Europe and to travel together to Israel – the land which we had dreamed about so much.

Before we left Czechoslovakia, I traveled to Brno to meet members of my youth group. After that, we packed our belongings in Prostejov. In February 1949 the Communists took control of the Czech government – a totalitarian regime – with many prohibitions. They allowed us to take only specific items – there were things

that we were forbidden to take out of the state even if they were our personal belongings. An inspector was sent to us from Brno. He was attracted to me. If I had been compromising, he would have closed his eyes. But I was not compromising; I did everything in my power not to be near him – and since I had rebutted his advances our requests were refused: an electric fan – no; a small electrical stove – no, nice utensils – no - a Persian rug – certainly not. The supervisor even checked the number of underpants we were packing and did not allow more than a half dozen for each of us. Valuable pictures – no: mother placed two family pictures on two small and pretty drawings; thanks to her ruse, these pictures hang on the walls of my apartment today.

The possessions that they did not allow us to bring to Israel mother stored in a large trunk and sent to her cousin Bruno Steiner, who had returned with his family from England and lived in Prague. When we visited Bruno with Edna for the first time in 1990 he took down from the wall one of the pictures that had been in my grandfather's house and gave it to me. This picture also hangs on my apartment wall in Tel Aviv. Before emigrating, mother managed to sell grandfather's house for a ridiculously low price of a million kronen. We transferred the money by illegal means with the help of the organization called "Bricha" (Flight), and in Israel we received a very small sum. The third, or half, which was my share, was just enough to pay "key money" for one room in an apartment which contained two rooms. It was in Gav Yam and had its back to the sea. Shimon and I lived in that room after our marriage in 1951. In the other room lived another young couple.

When we sat in the train in Bratislava, on our way to Israel, two men came running down the platform at a terrific rate towards us. It was the man who had purchased our house and he was accompanied by his lawyer – the Government was confiscating private houses and he wanted the money back! But the train had already begun to move …That is what I recall … The name of the man was Mr. Suchomel!

Israel

Return to our Old-New Homeland

Our aliya was organized by the Gordonia-Young Maccabi youth movement whose headquarters was at this time in Bratislava. The division of the youth was according to age. Karmela joined a group of children, mostly from Slovakia, who were destined for Kibbutz Kfar Maccabi, whereas I joined a group which had already arrived at Kibbutz Ginnegar. The reason for my relatively late migration was that I was forced to continue my counseling work with my youth group children at Brno; I also wanted to leave the country together with my mother and sister. We came together to Israel, mother Karmela and me. Our relatives at Kibbutz Givat Haim, who emigrated from Vienna many years earlier, saw to it that the kibbutz received mother into its ranks.

In 1949 and for a number of years afterward, the country received hundreds of thousands of immigrants. It was not possible to provide them with basic goods such as food and housing in sufficient and suitable amounts; the kibbutz was organized in such a way that it was more easily able to absorb groups of immigrants and give them work, food and housing, even though it was at a very basic level.

On the voyage to Israel, I was given responsibility for children who were making aliya without any accompaniment – they were orphans who had lost one or both parents or their parent or parents intended to follow them to Israel at a later date. The train traveled via Vienna and there we had the opportunity to meet our uncle Lutz who came to see us at the railway station. Lutz survived the Holocaust having sojourned in various places and had already managed to return to the city of his birth, Vienna.

From Vienna we continued to Italy where we boarded a ship, and on the Sabbath, because we were anchored, we were able to gaze at Venice. I so much wanted to leave the ship and visit this city, but of course it was not permitted. The name of the ship was Kampidoglio. An old ship, it was jam-packed, we dwelt on four-decker bunks. Beside us were stacks of onions which already were going rotten (the stench!) and crates full of apples. When we arrived in the port, a dockworker took pity on the children and gave each one an apple from a crate, which had broken open. It should be noted that the 'menu' on the ship never included any fruit. On the

first of March Karmela celebrated her fifteenth birthday on the deck of the ship. It was very stormy, the sea was grey and brown; there was no blue or azure to be seen. We felt very ill and I even fainted. When we got to Cyprus, we exchanged the tins of sardines that we had brought with us with the Greek fishermen for oranges. What a pleasure!

The Sabbath again arrived. The ship anchored several hundred meters from Tel Aviv, waiting for the Sabbath to end so that we could descend from the deck. On Sunday morning the sea was still stormy. The harbor in Tel Aviv was small, the water was not deep enough, a large ship could not enter it; so that we had to disembark – men, women, the elderly and children - via wobbly rope ladders into fishing dinghies while the sea around us continued to be turbulent.

Upon our arrival in Israel in March 1949, we finally had the opportunity to meet our relatives living here. The adults that our family had known in Europe now were blessed with many sabras (Hebrew name for those born in Israel – literally a sabra cactus fruit – prickly on the outside but soft and sweet inside) children. Mother's cousin Efra Schallinger came from Kibbutz Givat Haim to meet us at the port.

In Tel Aviv, we visited our only cousin, (from the Steckelmacher side of the family) Ruth. Ruth had made aliya with other children in 1939. When I met her for the first time here in Israel, she was 23 years old, married to Samo Federmann, today one of the owners of the Dan chain of hotels. Their first-born child, Ami, was one year old. They lived in an apartment on Yarkon Street with Samo's parents. The Dan Hotel, contained twenty one rooms in 1949. Today, on the same location is the large, luxurious Dan Hotel.

Ruth Senski, who came to Palestine with a children's aliya before the Holocaust, lived with her husband Shlomo in a modest room in a fledgling Kibbutz, Sdeh Nehemia – Huliot. Her mother, our aunt Lotte Senski, who, like us, was a survivor of the Theresienstadt Ghetto, came to Israel in 1946. Lotte had been living in Sdeh Nehemyia for two years already. Several days after our arrival, I met Ruth in Haifa. She was sitting beside the driver and I was sitting above, on the same lorry on many sacks. We were traveling to the Upper Galilee. We passed by Nazareth and from the height I saw the Sea of Galilee, the 'Kinneret', which was the subject of several of our songs in the youth movement. The black basalt rocks of the Upper Galilee were

full of anemones. In the kibbutz we went for long walks with aunt Lotte and her infant granddaughter Michal, often through deep mud.

As I have already noted, to our good fortune, mother was accepted into Kibbutz Givat Haim, thanks to our large family there. Efra imigrated from Vienna in 1930; he was one of the founders of Kibbutz Givat Haim. His parents and his sister Mimi, came in 1938 and settled at Kibbutz Givat Haim too. When we arrived in 1949, the husband of aunt Lotte, Dr. Benno Schallinger was no longer alive. Aunt Lotte lived alone in a wooden hut and she invited mother to live with her. Efra and Gerti had three children: Hava was ten, Eli seven, and Tsila was three years old. Mimi was married to Josef. Her first husband, Koloman, was the father of Daphna aged ten, and Ilan seven; Josef was the father of three years old Zeharia. It was wonderful to have such a large family in Israel.

Kibbutz Ginnegar

Efra, my mother's cousin was waiting for us when we arrived at the Tel Aviv harbor. A small khaki-colored army bus, took us from the Tel Aviv harbor. We traveled north, breathing in the intoxicating scent of the blossoming citrus trees. I will never forget this. Mother and Efra descended from the bus beside the road that led to Kibbutz Givat Haim while we continued on to Haifa, Karmela and her group to Kfar Hamaccabee, the younger children to Kibbutz Degania Bet, and I, the only one to Kibbutz Ginnegar.

In Haifa Agi and Joschka (Josef) were waiting for me; from there we hitch-hiked to the small town Tivon. It was beginning to get dark and we began walking with the hope that we would catch another lift in the direction of our destination. We were hungry, taking bites one after the other from the Czech salami that I had brought with me; in the gathering darkness we heard the wailing of jackals. On the upward slope to Ramat Yishai we found an old car and decided to rest in it. Ginnegar was still far away. After a long hour an open-top car drove by, stopped, we jumped on and travelled along a path that was not the regular path to Ginnegar. We got out of the car and entered a forest – the "Balfour forest". Yoshko first, Agi after him and I was the last one. I sensed the tension among my friends who did not utter a word till we had crossed the forest; then they sighed (a sigh of relief) and said "we have just

crossed a mine field". In March 1949, there were still signs of the War of Independence.

At the children's home in Ginnegar my friend Sonia was working. I had not seen her for almost a year, Sonia had been one of the first to leave the 'hachsharah' training and immigrate to Palestine, even before Israel was established. Sonia handed me a thick ceramic cup filled with lukewarm water, which didn't taste good to me. We went to sleep in a big tent where few girls whom I had known in Slovakia were already asleep. Like all the other new immigrants I was allowed a few free days off to get to know Ginnegar, which had just celebrated its 25th anniversary. In true pioneer spirit, I asked to work in the vegetable garden. I remained in Ginnegar for almost two years. The pioneer settlers of this kibbutz had arrived from Russia many years ago; yet they were still unable to get rid off their heavy accent, just as I have not been able to get rid of my Czech accent till today. What fascinated me the most were the children. There were so many adorable children. They didn't know….they didn't know, that in Ghetto Theresienstadt I had seen babies packed in boxes and crates on the trains heading east to be exterminated. The few children who returned from the east were at least fourteen years old; maybe one or two were a bit younger. Occasionally I also participated in dining room and kitchen duty in Ginnegar. The winter of 1949-1950 was the only winter since I had lived in Israel, when it really snowed and the snow remained on the ground. Although occasionally it snows on some high mountains and in Jerusalem during an Israeli winter, it had been almost sixty years since it had snowed like this in this country.

During the time when the snow fell in Ginnegar, there was no work in the vegetable garden and I was sent to work in the nursery. That was wonderful! For the first time in my life I held a baby in my hands, I fed it, changed its diapers and learned a lot about young children and childcare. I loved children very much and I decided, that I would not raise my own children in a children's home (as was usual practice on the kibbutz), although it was very clean and the babies and children were very well cared for. In the spring of 1950 some young men appeared in Ginnegar; Pavel, Karel and Shimon. Pavel and Karel were new immigrants from Czechoslovakia who had settled in Kibbutz Dorot in the Negev. They had heard that there were girls from Czechoslovakia in Ginnegar and they wanted to meet them.

Wedding

Pavel chose Edith, Karel chose Sonia, Pavel's brother Shimon chose me. Shimon had been in Palestine for ten years already and he had left the kibbutz that had absorbed him many years ago. During World War 2, he served in the Jewish brigade of the British army which enlisted Jews in Israel and in Britain, and fought against the Germans. When we met in 1950, Shimon was living in Haifa; he worked at the Customs Office in the port. During his free time he was translating the beautiful story "The sad eyes of Hanna Karadzits" by Ivan Olbracht from Czech to Hebrew and was planning to study for the matriculation exams.

Our wedding photo; Maud Michal and Oskar Shimon Beer, January 1951.

In January 1951 we were married by Rabbi Glaser in Haifa. Before the war Rabbi Glaser was the Rabbi in Brno; there he had performed Shimon's Bar-Mitzvah. Our wedding took place in his apartment and was very modest, in the presence of a few family members and friends. It is hard to believe this today, but I didn't even buy a wedding dress. I wore a brown cloth dress, which had once belonged to my grandmother. Gentile neighbors gave the dress back to my mother in Prostejov after the war; I wore it in Prague and in Brno and brought it to Israel with me.

When I left Ginnegar I found a job as a child caretaker at the 'Ramat Hadassah' youth village. Children who had recently come to Israel lived and were educated there. Shimon continued to live in a tiny room in Haifa with Pavel Gelbkopf from Brno. This room was eventually meant to become a laundry room of the house, which was still being built. I received a small shack in Ramat Hadassah, which looked like a wooden box. Ants and all sorts of insects were crawling on the floor; there was no running water, no toilet. I loved working with the children although it wasn't easy. The children arrived from different parts of the world and from different cultures. From Turkey, Iraq, Poland, Yugoslavia, Morocco, Romania. Shimon continued to live in Haifa and came to visit me on weekends. He had to walk from Tivon to Ramat Hadassah, as there were hardly any buses. Later we looked for a flat, which would serve us both. As I already noted, my mother gave us money for that purpose, which she had received from the sale of my grandfather's house in Prostejov.

Michal and Shimon
Gav Yam 1952

We rented one room in a two-room flat in Gav Yam (near to Haifa). Our neighbors Mirek and Bori were a young couple from Yugoslavia. Shimon traveled by bus to work in Haifa every day and he studied by himself for the matriculation exams. The small house in which we lived was close to the sea, surrounded by sand, except for the road and the narrow paths. I loved it very much! Bori was a photographer, because of that fact I have a few memorable photos from that place.

Mother let us have our bicycles (mine and Karmela's), so we became mobile. After I moved from Ramat Hadassah to Gav Yam I started looking for work. I cycled to older and more established settlements, to Kiryat Motzkin and to Kiryat Hayim. I worked there as a domestic help and did laundry. I would boil the water in a big kettle on a fire in the yard; wash the linen by hand on a metal scrubbing board. This was considered the hardest work of all. Although those were times of austerity and food was scarce and rationed, my employer would give me an egg for brunch! On some nights I would work in a commercial laundry, which did the washing for ships. In the evenings I babysat for children whose parents went to the movies or visited their friends. Later on I decided to take an intensive course for preschool teachers. It was in Petah-Tikvah, most often I hitch-hiked from Gav Yam to Petach-Tikvah. I would stay with all the students in Petah-Tikvah at the 'Pioneer Women's House' for the week, and return on Friday to Gav Yam for Shabbat. At the end of the course I got a job in Acre in a day care center. To Acre I used to hitchhike as well – money was scarce. At the day care center in Acre there were more than forty children from all around the world. I had two helpers and felt sometimes, that I wasn't experienced enough. It was winter, a lot of rain, then a beautiful spring. Often I would take the children for a walk. I and some of the children would stay at the day care center till noon; most of the children with the helpers would stay there till the afternoon until their parents finished their work. Once, on my way to Acre I was involved in a car accident and was slightly injured. It was in Acre, that for the first time in my life, I met adults and children from the Yemen.

Among the children at the center were Evicka and Emilek from Prague. Years later I found out that Emilek, who was three years old when I took care of him, trained to be a pilot and was killed during the Yom-Kippur war in 1973.

My Husband, Shimon

Shimon (Oskar) Beer was born on 27/2/1925 the second son of Judr. Julius (Yoel) Beer, the chief financial councilor in Brno, a lawyer and doctor of Law, and Hildegarde Fried. Shimon's older brother Pavel Zwi was born in 1923. The Beer family origins were in Jevicko; the Fried family was from Holesov. Pavel and Shimon went to a Jewish kindergarten, a Jewish school and Jewish high school in Brno, where they learned modern Hebrew. Shimon was influenced by Professor Baruch Kurzweill, and he became not only Zionist, but religious too. For that reason,

although he was the younger of the two brothers, Shimon left in December 1939 with the last transport from the Czech Protectorate to the Land of Israel. At first he stayed with relatives - the Hahn family in Kiryat Motzkin; they sent the certificate which allowed Shimon to immigrate to Israel. Shimon studied in a high school in Haifa and later moved to an agricultural school in Pardess Hanna. He succeeded in skipping a grade in this school.

After the last school year he moved to Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu, in the Beit Shean valley. As noted, when Shimon turned eighteen, he joined the Jewish brigade, which was part of the British Army, in order to fight the Nazis.

Meanwhile Shimon's parents and family had all been arrested by the Nazis and were eventually killed in Auschwitz. Pavel miraculously survived and immigrated to Israel in 1949. He married Edith Borger from Ostrava, who had survived the war in England – as one of the lucky children who were sent on a train by the English stockbroker Nicholas Winton to foster homes in England. They had two children and five grandchildren. Shimon met Pavel in the summer of 1945 in Brno, when he was allowed some time off from the army to search for relatives. Pavel was still a musulman and talked about the death of their parents. Shimon was shocked and this shock remained with him for the rest of his life. It made him feel that he had to live in a rather disciplined and orderly way, to function.

A photo of Michal and Shimon Beer Tel-Aviv 1980

Despite the fact that he had completed the Matriculation exams, Shimon wanted to be a pioneer and a farmer. We did not want to live in a kibbutz, so we settled in moshav Beit- Lehem Hagalilit (a moshav is an agricultural village where the agricultural equipment is communal property but the land and houses are individual property as opposed to a kibbutz where everything is communal property).

A Letter that Shimon wrote:

The letter was written in Czech to Mr.Gale the administrator of Masaryk University in Brno:

I will respond to your request and tell you my life story in short.

They say there is no mercy, as strong as the ability of the human mind to forget. In my case I had plenty of reasons for this memory loss regarding my childhood in Czechoslovakia, which is somewhat foggy. My father Judr. Julius Beer, the senior financial counselor in Brno, was born in the small Moravian town Jevicko. My father graduated from high school in Olomouc and studied at the Vienna University. During the First World War he joined the Czech legionnaires on the East front. As late as 1921, they returned from Vladivostok, through Ceylon (Sri Lanka today), Aden (Yemen), and the Red Sea, to their home country. No longer so young, my father married my mother Hildegard Fried from Holesov. I am a descendant of two 'respectable Jewish' families from Moravia, as they say.

Here I have to clarify a few unknown facts: the concept Palestine in the 1930's had no relation with the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization); the few Arabs who lived here did not recognize it and rejected it. The name Palestine was used only by the Jewish and Christian world for a small piece of land, a part of the Turkish Empire which was a part of the British mandate between the two world wars.

Zionism, in those days was not an obscene word connected with 'Imperialism'. Zionism was then a supreme entity which expressed the noble desire of the Jewish people, who were aware of their identity, to return to their historic homeland. The great and admired Czech president Tomas Masaryk and his son Jan, were ardent supporters of the Zionist ideal. In contrast to the Czech Jews, most of Moravia's Jews were Zionists. Sadly, it was usually merely 'salon Zionism' of talk alone and they kept delaying the immigration to Palestine (Israel today) to a later day.

The Jewish community in Brno was proud of its Jewish education which it provided for the children from kindergarten to matriculation at the Jewish high school. The main language was Czech in the reform Gymnasium on Hybesova Street, where not only German but Modern (Sephardic) Hebrew was obligatory. Almost every young Jew in Brno was bilingual, but Czech was their primary language. We did not have television; I read a lot, all of Karl Capek's works a few times. Voskovec and Werich were admired and we knew their songs by heart.

From the age of twelve I begged and pressured my parents incessantly to let me immigrate to Palestine (Israel today). By March 1939 finally even the utmost optimists were worried and decided that something had to be done to save and rescue the young generation at least. Some transports of Jewish children to England and Sweden were organized. There were long lines in front of the Palestine office in Prague of those who were candidates to emigrate. My mother corresponded with our relatives, the Hahn family in Kiryat Motzkin who promised to send a certificate [there were only a restricted number available from the British Palestine Mandate government] for legal immigration to Palestine. In the summer after finishing 9th grade, like other Jewish youth, I joined a Zionist training course. Three months working on a small farm in Sedlice, a village in Bohemia; I learned not only agriculture there, but for he first time in my life I encountered Yiddish and the mentality of the Eastern European Jews – with the emphasis on sentiments and Jewish soul, above the Jewish mind and Western integration.

One day in November 1939, my parents stood with me at the train station in Prague. I was fourteen and a half years old and I saw my parents for the last time. My father an honorary member of the Jewish Zionist academic organization 'Barissia' gave me the addresses of three of his friends; an engineer in Trieste (Italy), and two medical doctors in Haifa. I don't remember how, but in Trieste I was able to find this engineer and to give him my father's letter; I forgot his name, the street address I remember: Via dei Morreri. Every week a boat from Trieste left for Haifa, the ships were the 'Galilea', and the 'Jerusalem'.

I sailed with the 'Galilea'. Every night I wrote down in detail my experiences and before I got off the boat in Haifa, I mailed a letter fourteen pages long to my parents in Brno. Italy at that time was still neutral; that was my last letter to the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia at that time. The correspondence between me and my

family continued to flow through Hungary and later with the help of the Red Cross. Twenty censured words each time. This also ceased in December, 1941.

Thanks to my linguistic talent, inherited from my father, and to the modern Hebrew which I had learned in the Jewish school in Brno I was accepted to study in the agronomical school in Pardess Hanna where I finished three classes in two years. The realization of my pioneer ideals was very important to me, therefore I moved to Kibbutz Sde Eliyahu in the Beit Shean valley. The kibbutz was on the Jordan border; we plowed with a gun in our pocket. We didn't have a phone so the contact with the adjacent kibbutz was from the roofs of the water towers at night by a spotlight and by Helioscope during the day. The natural scenery was beautiful, but the heat was almost like in the tropics. I became sick with Malaria as well.

About the holocaust nothing was known - maybe nobody wanted to know, but there were fears.

In 1943 when I turned eighteen, I volunteered to join the British Army. With the Jewish Brigade I arrived through Egypt, to Italy. The end of the war found me on the border between Italy and Austria. I asked for permission to look for my parents. In early June 1945, I arrived through the American zone to Pilsen in CSR, from there by train I came to Brno.

A soldier in the British uniform was a rare sight and with the 'Palestine' tag and the Star of David on the shoulder, I was the first one to appear in Brno. "Your original address"? asked the lady at the police station. "Stoyanova 3"- "Hold on for a minute please". In less than five minutes she returned with my brother Pavel's address. The encounter with a real musulman, and the news that our parents perished in Auschwitz were an immense shock to me. I visited the CSR again after a few weeks, from Holland this time. Forty years later some survivors who now live in Israel still told me what a positive influence my two visits then to Brno were for them and for their morale. But for me, after those visits, I was totally devastated. I was released from the army in 1946 and it took me a long time to collect myself and stand again on my own.

In 1951, I married a girl from Prostejov who had immigrated to Israel after the war in 1949. She had been imprisoned in Ghetto Theresienstadt for three years. For over twenty one years I was a farmer in the village of Beit-Lehem Hagalilit. I passed

my matriculation exams when I was already a twenty seven years old father. My first degree from the university, I received twenty years later. Apart from working in agriculture, I taught languages and did translations; I worked in different government offices, not only Israeli. I also worked in the American FBIS (Federal Broadcast Information Service), one year in Cyprus and seven years in Tel-Aviv.

I want to mention that after some futile attempts, I succeeded in 1989 (before the revolution in CSSR) to spend three short days in Brno - which was a unique experience. Before my final retirement I worked for two years as a part time pensioner in the Israeli branch of the Czech "Transakta" in Tel-Aviv.

Oskar Shimon Beer

Beit-Lehem Hagalilit

In summer 1952, while we were living in Gav-Yam I became pregnant. Shimon wanted to be faithful to the pioneer ideal - to be a pioneer and not a clerk. I didn't want to raise my children in the children's home; therefore we decided to live in a moshav and not in a kibbutz. We chose Beit-Lehem Hagalilit, because most of its founders came from Austria, where their culture was similar to the culture in which we had grown up. As it turned out I befriended Aviva and Ada who were Israeli born and Esther who had come to Israel from Egypt.

I loved Gav-Yam because it was located on a wonderful beach. The smell of manure in Beit-Lehem was much less agreeable to me than the smell of the sea. I thought however, that I should remain faithful to the ideal which I had held since I was a child. It was in Prostejov that I had planned to become a farmer in Palestine.

In the fall of 1952 we moved to moshav Beit-Lehem Hagalilit. Ednah lives there to this day. Shimon and Yael are buried there. We received a place to live in an old building with two families who already had children and with Leah who was yet unmarried. Our apartment had a nice small room upstairs and a large dark room downstairs, which was converted into a kitchen, dining room and our guest room. There I would also have my bath. After Ednah was born, Shimon moved downstairs; there was not enough space in the small upstairs room. In order to eliminate or stop the annoying flies in the room downstairs, Shimon decided to install a screen made of beads in the entrance. There were no beads however, Shimon brought some reeds from the nearby wadi, he cut them into pieces; threaded them onto cords and

hung them close to each other within the entrance. It did not help much, but it added some Mediterranean decor to this German style house. In the courtyard Shimon prepared and dug the soil, he got some potatoes which were no longer edible from a neighbor, cut them, and put them into the ground. Miraculously, we then had a good supply of tasty potatoes. A few days before Ednah was born Shimon traveled to Haifa to take his matriculation exam in mathematics.

During that winter we worked our land. We sowed peas on most of it, which turned out well and bore large pods of tasty sweet peas. Shimon carried the produce in boxes on a wheelbarrow, which he constructed by himself to the center of the village where the Tnuva truck collected the produce. We gave some peas to our friends and neighbors; some asked how to cook them. We ate them usually uncooked. We grew other vegetables; having no proper tools, we did everything by hand in a primitive way. We sowed radishes because it was easy and cheap and they were ripe and ready for the market in a few weeks.

Ednah was born in February 1953. When she was three months old we moved to a shack on our land. We did not have any electricity for the first few months. When the electric light was lit for the first time, Ednah was standing in the playpen (which Shimon constructed by himself out of old planks of wood) and she exclaimed: "or!" which means "light!" in Hebrew. Sometimes we didn't have any water; there was no road or sidewalk, in the winter there was a lot of deep mud everywhere.

We grew vegetables on our lot. In order to grow them we did not need much money or a large investment. Later we were given a calf by the Jewish Agency, later young chicks; we fattened the cocks and sold them for meat, the hen we kept to lay eggs. On the lot close to the area designated for our future house we planted different types of fruit trees for our own needs. We soon had beautiful large guavas, mandarins, oranges, grapefruit, lemons, an almond tree – which did not provide even one almond. Later on Shimon planted pomegranates and other citrus fruit. Once when he built something, Shimon marked the place by sticking two branches into the ground. It turned out that these were mulberry branches. Today there are two large mulberry trees in the yard!

Our Children

A letter I wrote to my husband Shimon before Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) 1951:

Yom Kippur is approaching, during this time thoughts and memories are coming to me. Maybe you are surprised and don't understand why I am not a believing person. I want to write to you and explain what caused me not to believe. In the fall of 1944 the Germans decided to send a lot of people from ghetto Theresienstadt to Poland, to an unknown place. At first a transport of two thousand men was due to be sent to Poland on Yom-Kippur. Everything was ready for their departure on this morning, but the train didn't arrive, it didn't come. The whole ghetto, even the most secular people (who were many) hoped that because of this holy day a miracle would happen. The boys and the men who were due to depart, fasted the whole day despite our constant hunger. After a special day, full of hope and belief, the train arrived in the evening, and a long bloody history of eleven transports began – about 20,000 people were transported in less than one month. - You already know, that I have a strong desire to have children. It is a natural instinct which every woman has, which is the cause of this strong wish of mine; I think the reason is also the fact, that I was a witness of the extermination of our children. They sent children, what was the worst of all - was the order - to expel all the children who were born in the Ghetto. With my own eyes I saw how babies in baskets, crates, old carton boxes, most of them with their thumbs in their mouths, were carried into the trains to be sent to a place unknown - that was awful! Here in this country in Israel, it was so strange for me to see children, our Jewish children, so many of them, and they don't know about this catastrophe…I want us to have a lot of children, but I ask myself if I should bring children into this cruel world.

I loved children; I was hoping to have my own children, a natural desire for every woman. On February 1953, Ednah was born. My mother came to help me for the first few days and then Karmela, who was serving in the army at that time and had a few days off. A few months later we moved into a wooden shack on our piece of land.

When she was less than a year old, Ednah contracted typhus. I only learned the fact that she had contracted such a serious illness, when Ednah had already recovered and we received the lab results. I probably had enough common sense to

help her to get over the illness and was assisted by the excellent book by Dr. Spock, the American pediatrician. I changed Ednah's diapers, boiled them and cooked rice-water for her constantly – luckily it helped.

A photo of the Beer family with "Hemda" the mare and her colt in 1955.

Of course, we didn't have a phone and I didn't have time to go to the village office to make a phone-call. The doctor would arrive once or twice a week, but because of the mud he didn't always manage to reach our shack.

On December 1954, Hanan was born. The two children were good, they got along very well and were good friends, they were cited as an example in the village. The parents of other children would tell them: "Look at the Beer children, they don't quarrel". Despite the difficult conditions I raised and took care of my children with pleasure and happiness.

A photo of Hanan and Ednah, 1956.

We built our house, in 1958 we moved in. We didn`t own an electric refrigerator so I carried the ice, which was brought in by a truck three times a week and it would always melt before the next arrival. In addition to my work in the household and taking care of the children I worked on the farm: I raked, and planted, and weeded. I picked the vegetables, packed many crates of lettuce, sewed sacks of potatoes and onions, I fed the chickens, collected the eggs and I learned to milk the cows. I however could not milk more than one cow perhaps because I have very small hands. Shimon worked hard, but we never made enough money and like most families we were in debt; constant debt, despite the austerity and my efforts to use as little money as possible. I found it very difficult to be in debt. I couldn't live like that. Once the children grew a bit, I was the first one who did not hesitate and was not ashamed to work as a domestic for some women who were in dire need for help, when they were either sick or pregnant. I worked for Batya when she bore twins. I worked for Ziporah who had a difficult pregnancy and was bedridden.

Yael was born in 1962; it was such a joy to raise such a beautiful baby girl who developed so well.

After her birth Shimon started working at the agricultural research station in Neveh Yaar.

Yael, 2 years old.

Ednah, Yael, Hanan, 1964 sitting on our lawn in Beit Lehem Hagalilit.

The Illness (Encephalitis)

Yael was not yet two years old when Ednah and Hanan returned from school and found me unconscious, lying on the floor. Hanan ran to call for help. Willi drove me and Rachel the nurse as fast as possible to the Hospital in Afulah. I could barely breathe. It was encephalitis, the same disease I had in a mild form in 1943 in Ghetto Theresienstadt. This time, in 1963-64 the attack of this disease was much more severe. The doctors feared that I would not survive the several days of unconsciousness and extremely high fever. But I survived - maybe thanks to my strong maternal instinct?

The following article was published in July 1975 in an Australian catholic newspaper "the Vineyard". The author was my husband, Shimon Beer, whose style was beautiful and his command of the English language in writing and speech was perfect.

The Miracle of Beit Lehem

Beit Lehem in Galilee sits on gentle sloping hills which separate the Haifa bay from the valley of Yezreel and which are abundantly covered with beautiful oaks and are rich with colorful shrubs and bushes. We look up to the hills of Nazareth on one side, to the majestic Mount Carmel on the other, and down to the south-west, one's gaze is rewarded with a lovely view of the checkered fields and settlement–studded Yezreel plain. In contrast with a kibbutz where members lead a communal life, we in Beit-Lehem live in a moshav. Each member has his own small farm and only the marketing, heavy machinery and the usual tasks of running a small municipality are shouldered and shared cooperatively by the whole community.

It was Friday and I was returning home in the early afternoon from my job at a nearby agricultural experimental station at Neve–Yaar. My small tractor usually covered the short distance in fifteen minutes, but I was in no hurry. Tomorrow was Shabbath and I knew that I wouldn't have to race in the morning to finish milking before leaving for my work on the experimental station. It was a beautiful sunny winter day, and flowers blossomed everywhere. Slender and demure cyclamens sheltered in the shadow of trees or rocks and gay anemones splashed the countryside with a wide range of provocative color.

My eyes were drinking in the captivating beauty of Galilee and my mind was anticipating the joy of beholding Yael, our third baby. Those who are wise among us claim that a father has to have his third child before he starts to enjoy it whilst it is still a baby. Maybe they have something there, but being a mere farmer I couldn't help comparing Yael's helplessness with the vitality of a new-born calf. From the first day a calf is a full-grown beauty in its own right, standing on its legs while showing its appreciation for a meal by vigorously wagging its tail. Yael on the other hand has spent most of her life on her back and I wonder how she manages it without getting callouses. But unlike a calf, Yael smiles! Each smile is different and each one more fascinating. She smiles with her mouth, her eyes, chin, and every wrinkle of her little face. It's a smile which squeezes your heart and puts lumps of happiness in your throat.

And so my little tractor purred into the moshav. In a matter of moments my peace of mind and thoughts of Yael were to be shattered with an unexpected cruel blow. I was told by a few bewildered neighbors that my wife Michal had been driven to hospital about an hour ago. What I could piece together from my overwrought children, Ednah eleven and Hanan nine years old, was that they had come home from school and found mother still in bed 'asleep'. Nobody will ever know at what time she lost consciousness. The children said that she had behaved strangely in the morning and they ate breakfast and went to school on their own. Michal's strong maternal-instinct helped her to perform her last conscious action – Yael was found by the neighbors clean and not hungry.

I raced to the one and only public phone in Beit Lehem. It was an antiquated device and most of the time it functioned badly, or not at all, and I prayed that this time it just wouldn't fail me. In a matter of seconds I heard the urgent voice of our nurse Rachel. "Shimon, is that you? The doctors at the hospital want to see you immediately." "Rachel, Michal, tell me....." She is very dangerously ill. Ask no questions and get to the hospital in Afulah as soon as you can."

Afulah is the "capital" of the Yezreel valley. The busy and efficient maternity ward at the hospital was, and is the birthplace of all the children born in this the beautiful valley, provided, of course, that the local transportation system (tractors, horse-drawn carts, trucks and semitrailers) gets them there on time.

Some of the symptoms indicated that Michal had been poisoned, and for the first eighteen hours doctors worked entirely on that assumption. They hung on my lips for every relevant bit of information that might give a clue to the cause of her illness.

They made no bones about her chances of survival. In spite of the late hours of the afternoon, tracheotomy was performed. Breathing returned, but her temperature and pulse rate rose to such heights that there was no room to register their curve on the printed sheets of her case history.

Just as I was saying a silent prayer, the chief intern said: "Mr. Beer, today's medicine knows no sure way of healing a brain disease like this and all we can do is just to help your wife to do her own fighting. Believe me, we are doing everything we possibly can, but if you believe in God, you had better to pray to Him because she'll need his help too".

The news flew fast and when I returned late that night to Beit-Lehem the people rallied and rose spontaneously like one man to help: time, money and all other resources were shoved upon me. The men helped on the farm and drove me daily to and from the hospital; the women took care of the children, the cleaning and washing and also showered us with an unceasing stream of food.

On Saturday afternoon the diagnosis was established. Michal had a critical seizure of Encephalitis. She lay strapped to her bed. On one side stood a bottle which fed her arteries and on the other side was placed a draining apparatus for cleaning the opening in her throat through which she breathed wheezily.

On Monday her doctor told me there was nothing to be gained by waiting by her bedside. She could neither see nor hear me and her movements were unconscious reflexes. When I was about to leave I asked the doctor if I might stay just a moment and he watched as I took her hand in mine and started talking to her. I thought I felt an answering pressure and then her eyes began to open. The doctor jumped to her bedside. "Step aside, please!" he commanded. And then: "Speak up Michal, talk!" She opened her eyes and repeated three times a hoarse and unnatural call, "Boiee!". (Come!) It was the entreating call of a mother summoning her daughter.

From that moment a miraculous and dramatic recovery began. On Tuesday the glucose bottle disappeared and she started to receive food through her mouth. Michal had always been a shy and introverted person, but now she exhibited an

entirely different nature. She was pleasant and quite uninhibited by social protocol. She wasn't even aware of the dangerous condition she was in but a short time ago. At the hospital she stole the show and remained a never ceasing centre of interest. Beside her I was a nonentity whose name was just plain "her husband".

Then the doctor gave me a few words of warning. "Her full recovery will be a slow and laborious process. You may hear things that you have never heard before."

As Michal talked to me I listened in awe and fascination as innermost mysteries of a human mind were laid bare before me. She dwelt longest and repeatedly in her concentration camp period. She was sixteen years old at the time of liberation and the transit from the concentration camp to a life of freedom must have been a heady and happy experience that made a lasting impression.

Meanwhile everybody was congratulating me on my wife's miraculous recovery – not only the hospital staff and other patients, but also people from neighboring settlements, bus drives, operators of the telephone exchange and even the Bedouins who live in our vicinity.

On Wednesday she asked me whether I took good care of the children. I told her not to worry and asked: "What are their names?" She giggled: "Ednah and Hanan". How many children do you have? She laughed again:" Two". I was flabbergasted. "Michal, we have three children: "Ednah, Hanan and Yael!" "No" she said "Only two. But" she added with a languid and half reminiscent smile: "I've always wanted a third". Then she closed her eyes and drifted into sleep.

The scar upon Michal's throat today is the only reminder of an urgent prayer to God, Adonai Rafaech, (God heal you) who deigned to let man share in the miracle of Beit Lehem.

Memory Loss

My first hoarse words were meant for little Yael. For a short time I suffered from partial loss of memory, followed by complete recovery. My mother and other people thought I ought to take better care of myself and that I should not work so much. When Shimon was working outside the moshav, I had to undertake some of his jobs on the farm. One of my responsibilities was to bring the cows into the cowshed when they returned from the pasture, to go and open and close the sprinklers in the fields.

After being so ill, in addition to caring for three children including an infant, it was probably a bit too much for me. We sold the cows at last. Shimon noticed that those people who worked with him at the experimental station who had an academic degree had a better standing and their salary was higher. Despite all our difficulties, Shimon started to study English at the university; he taught English in high school in Beit Shean and gave private lessons (through a then new and modern audio-video system). By then we already owned a small old car which preferred to stand rather than to move.

After my illness the doctors found out that I had asthma. Shortly after, Yael also became asthmatic.

Beer Family from left: Hanan, Michal, Shimon, Ednah, Yael in the middle.

My Firstborn – Ednah.

Both of us, Shimon and I, wanted very much to have children. It seems to me, that because of my being a woman, a holocaust survivor, that will was so powerful and strong. I thought and felt that I had to do something to right the terrible injustice, which was imposed upon us. With my own eyes I saw how babies were loaded in cartons and boxes into the train on their way to extermination.

Of my childhood friends I was almost the only one who survived.

We were happy when our first baby arrived – at that time it was not yet possible to know the baby's gender before it was born and actually till today my husband (while he was alive) and I still believe it is better not to know. It adds more charm and mystery to this big event of bringing a human being into this world. My pregnancy started when we were still living in a small room in Gav-Yam near Haifa. Once, when I was swimming in the sea near our house a big wave caught me and pushed my head into the sand. I realized then, that I would have to be more careful to protect the baby who is growing inside me - suddenly I was afraid to ride the bike…

A few months later, in Beit Lehem Hagalilit, I was weeding on our plot and, I sensed pain in my back. I attributed it to my working in the field. At night the pain got stronger, it was a stormy night, strong wind and hail. The Friedman family's new puppy barked and whined all the time. Early in the dawn I discovered a little blood. Miriam Friedman, our neighbor and an experienced mother of two, told me it was time to go to the hospital. Shimon ran to call Shraga Weiss the truck driver, a kind and a good man, for help. Shraga called the driver of a tractor to pull out the truck, which was stuck in mud; then we went by truck to the hospital in Afulah. I remember the pile of hail in the hospital yard. I was left in the hospital just because I had come from far away. Visitors were not allowed, Shimon hitchhiked back to Beit-Lehem - Shraga had other assignments with the truck, he wasn't returning to the moshav. In the afternoon and in the evening my labor pains increased, I walked through the

corridors of the hospital and it was hard for me to handle the pain. At night I was brought into the delivery room - the nurse was nice and dedicated - Ednah was born early in the morning. I lay in a large room with many beds; I was situated at the end, far from the entrance, so I was able to keep my sweet baby longer during feeding. When she was brought to me, I took off her clothes to verify that everything was in order. Because of my experience working with babies at the nursery in Ginnegar, I was not afraid to touch the tiny, one day old baby. Despite the fact that Ednah was tiny she had black hair and looked beautiful from the first moment.

My mother and I brought her home. (In the office they thought my mother was the baby's mother - she was 45 years old and looked well.) Mother stayed with us to help. At home we discovered that Ednah had been sent from the hospital with a mouth infection she therefore had problems breast-feeding. Dr. Bergmann, Mrs. Ilse Kohn's second husband arrived. I was worried, for six weeks tiny Ednah did not gain any weight - a catastrophic situation on all accounts. I tried to get advice from books and neighbors who were already young mothers; "take milk, dilute it with water, add a bit of sugar, a bit of cornflower, boil it, mix it well, let it cool, put it in the bottle and be patient". I did whatever I knew and was capable of.

Ednah was never a big eater. I tried to prepare for her (and later for the other children) what they liked to eat. Ednah was a beautiful baby, sweet and alert. Shimon remembers that our neighbors in the moshav advised us to put a red ribbon on her against the 'evil eye'. We received a used baby carriage from the Kamil family and Shimon attached a screen to it against flies. Once, when Ednah was about three months old, I stood with her by the grocery shop and Irit Kaufmann, who was three years old at that time bent over her and announced in astonishment "she has no teeth!"

It is fair to mention here that Shimon (who rarely smiled) was always amazed letter full of praise, a few pages long, in English, a real masterpiece. He wrote he could not but compare the baby to a calf, which a few hours after its birth is standing on its four legs, while the baby who is lying on its back helpless, waves its legs up in the air. But "man is different from the animal". The beautiful, magical toothless smile, which is free in all dental advertisements.

Ednah, was always smiling and she probably had a high tolerance threshold for pain. Despite all the illnesses she contracted, during those early developmental years, neither I or Shimon could remember her as a crying baby.

We had a few embroidered linen bedclothes, which were returned to my mother by our Christian neighbors in Prostejov when we returned from the concentration camp. From the pillow case I made a blanket cover for Ednah. Those covers grew old and were used as 'mumma'- a substitute pacifier which helped Ednah and later Yael to fall asleep. Only Hanan fell asleep with out a 'mumma'. Our children were raised without pacifiers, and Hanan did not even suck his thumb.

I washed and boiled everything and according to Shimon, I was overprotective and worried too much about cleanliness, almost sterile. Once I boiled a thermometer to sterilize it; it almost exploded to my bewilderment and Shimon gleefully explained to me that water boils at 100 degrees while the thermometer reaches only 42 degrees. Despite it all, Ednah contracted a horrible diarrhea, I don't remember exactly when, but I remember, that the weather was cold. Miraculously, with rice water and dedication she survived. Once she completely recovered we got the lab results that she had had typhus!

Occasionally scorpions appeared in the shack. I was terrified that something might happen to my children. I was also scared of snakes.

Little and delicate Ednah was a good natured and independent child. One Saturday morning we were walking in the grove behind our shack. In the afternoon, despite my vigilance, Ednah disappeared. After a long and tedious search she was found in the same grove where we had walked earlier that morning. If I am not mistaken she was barely a year and a half old.

Later, when Hanan was a baby, Karmela (my sister) and Jano lived in the center of Beit Lehem. I mentioned to the children that: "later we will go to Karmela". Within a minute Ednah had vanished - she walked alone among the cows, which were on their way out to the pasture. I was afraid of cows; tiny Ednah obviously was not afraid of them! More than once we found Ednah in the pen close to the cowshed, playing with a week-old calf.

Once, in the winter Shimon had to go to Tivon to settle some errands and was not at home. That day the kerosene stove turned over and fire broke out in our shack. I took a bedspread and dragged the stove out of the shack. On that day there was strong very dry eastern wind and the flames blocked the entrance to the shack. The children were asleep in the 'children's room'. I screamed, until our neighbor Hava Vardi came to my rescue. I broke the screen, broke the glass, climbed in through the window and handed the children to Hava. She took them to her house. I was injured; the nurse Anni Gotlieb gave me a tetanus shot, under a kerosene lamp in the infirmary far away. The bell rang from the water tower; all the members of the moshav came out to help extinguish the fire, which was not so big. The shack and our belongings remained intact; we were lucky we got out all right. Shimon took the window to be repaired in Tivon (by bus of course) so we were without a window during the winter for about a week, then Shimon had to travel to Tivon again, to bring the window back.

A minor detail; for some reason we brought long gray underwear with us from Czechoslovakia. From each trouser leg I sewed long pants for my babies. The night of the fire they were both wearing them and I was a bit embarrassed, in front of Hava my neighbor. I really don't know why.....

On summer mornings, I used to put water into an old tub outside the shack and let it warm up in the sun. When the children came back from kindergarten the water would be warm and they were able to take a bath.

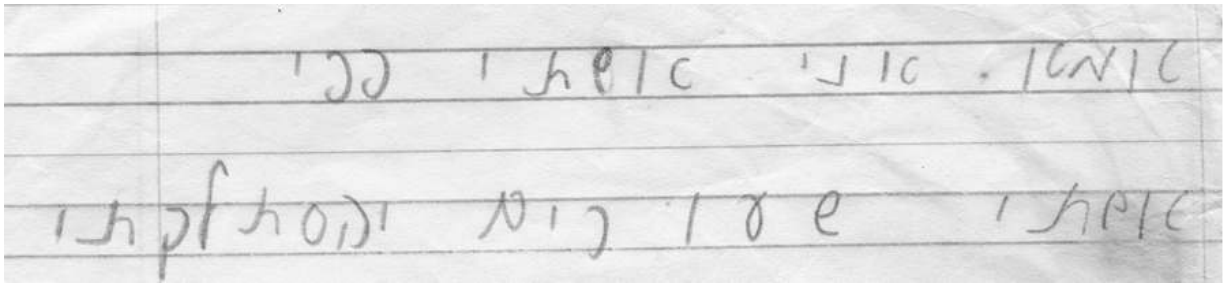
Ednah and Hanan in the tub

When Ednah was a bit older she was a great climber. She climbed trees, chimneys and even high-tension electrical poles, before they were connected to the electric network. Hanan usually followed her. Ednah had no fear but Hanan knew what fear was.

Ednah, three years old in front of our hut.

Ednah always knew how to keep herself busy; I never heard that common phrase; "I am bored!" from her or from my other children She was always so busy.

Once, when she was in first or second grade, she left a note for me: "Mum, I peed, I did my homework and I left."



This original testimony was saved by Shimon.

Toys at that time were few and simple. No tape-recorders or television. Ednah did not have many dolls. She was not a girl who played with dolls; she preferred to play with boys.

The yard, the fields, the hills were our children's playgrounds, but especially for Ednah, who loved everything that was growing and living. The children in our neighborhood were always together and constantly busy. Everything interested them and they knew how to improvise and have a wonderful time together.

Dealing with responsibility was not for Ednah. Once I tried to send her to buy something at the grocery. She left her bag on the bench and went to play with the kids. Therefore, I decided not to ask her for help. But we didn't give up on doing homework. As expected, there were complaints that we were the only ones who insisted: 'other parents don't!' … we heard the same complaint later when we asked our children to come home at what seemed to us, a reasonable time in the evenings.

I want to mention the polio epidemic, which affected the country in the early 1950s and scared everyone. I took every possible precaution and when I read about Dr. Salk who invented the vaccine against polio, I was relieved. The first vaccines arrived in Israel but they were only distributed to private physicians. Shimon sold the horse 'Hemda' so we had some money. I immediately took Ednah and Hanan to Haifa to a private physician to give them the vaccine.

Our small dog bit Ednah once; because of the danger of rabies, the poor child was supposed to receive fourteen shots into her belly. At last we got a confirmation from Beit Dagon laboratory, that it was not rabies and the torture ended. Ednah was so brave; she would walk alone to the nurse Rachel to receive the painful shots! Yael was a baby then, it was almost impossible for me to accompany Ednah.

I will never forget, that when I was pregnant with Yael and did not feel well, Ednah would occasionally bring me walnuts from the neighbor's trees, she would peel them and hand them to me. She was only eight years old and it was her own idea.

Hanan

A poem, which eleven years old Lior wrote for his father's 43rd birthday:

My dad is the best,
I love him that way,
Together we both,
Experiment and play
He explains everything,
Without me asking at all
We play and have fun
and really have a ball.

Hanan was born on 27th December, 1954 when his sister Ednah was twenty-two months old. It is good when there is a small age difference between the first two children. But during the winter it was quite difficult. At that time there were no disposable diapers. We lived in a small shack at the end of the village, without neighbors, without a paved road or a pavement except for a small, narrow path that Shimon paved from rocks and gravel. We had electricity only for a few hours a day, often there was no running water. Our bathroom was outside. A shower was built by Shimon adjacent to the shack with a few metal sheets; a short distance from there, Shimon dug a hole for a toilette, covered the top with a roof, surrounded by wooden walls, a self-made wooden seat and the door. We did not have toilet paper, so we used newspaper that Grandma Kaethe cut when she came to visit us, because I did not have the time to do it. We were pioneers, in the beginning of our way. We had no money, it was only now that I learned and realized how difficult it could be when you have no money at all … A day before Hanan was born I was still working with Shimon, we were digging potatoes from our plot of land. I recall that I didn't let sweet little Ednah attend the nursery because I was afraid she would catch a cold or some other disease. Little Ednah was with us during our work in the fields. That winter was dry and not really cold. Despite my advanced pregnancy and hard work during the day, I did something extraordinary that evening, which was not part of my routine. I probably felt rather restless, so I went to the community center to see the movie "The Love Boat" with Ava Gardner. I don't remember if I stayed till the end, I don't think so. At night, I went out to the close field and I felt my water break, I felt that I was in labor.

Since there was no phone at home, Shimon went to call Gideon Piker, the driver, who took me in the truck to Afulah. Shimon stayed behind with Ednah. During my first delivery Shimon had accompanied me to the hospital. In those days it was uncommon for a husband to be present during the delivery. This time I went alone, in the early morning hours, after an easy labor and delivery, Hanan was born. I remember when they brought him to me I touched his head (he had dark hair,) and I easily felt the gaps between the bones of his skull.

My mother was supposed to come and help Shimon to cope, but she had a very bad cold so Gerti Shalev, Efra's wife from Kibbutz Givat Hayim came instead. I gave birth to Hanan a day after Pnina Rotmann bore Nimrod. Since it cost a lot of money to hire a cab from Afulah to Beit-Lehem, I arranged to be released a day earlier from the hospital to go back with Pnina and Nimrod, in her brother's car from Beit Shearim. The usual stay in hospital after birth was three days; I remained for only two days. He didn't bring me to our shack, Pnina's brother dropped me off with Hanan and my bag in the middle of the village. During the days when I was in the hospital there had been a lot of rain, the village road was covered with mud. Luckily, Zipora Zitterspieler walked out of her house at that moment, took Hanan from my arms and walked with me to our shack.

I don't remember how I organized it all without a phone. Ednah at that time was at Hava Schnitzer's house playing with her son Rani. I didn't want Ednah to be present when I brought her newborn brother into our home. I wanted her to see him sleeping in the basket, as a matter of fact, and this is how it was.

Brit Milah – circumcision, is not easy, however you look at it. Like every mother, I didn't want my baby to be hurt, but I had no choice; a male Jewish child has to be circumcised when it is eight days old, this is the law. We had to invite at least ten men for Minyan (a religious quorum) and prepare some refreshments. Pavel and Ali and Paula Hahn came, which delighted us. With the help of my mother, who in the meantime recovered, we baked a cake or two in the "Wundertopf" on the kerosene stove. Due to the fact that on the day of the Brit there was a funeral in Nahalal, the rabbi was late. I was instructed not to feed the baby so he would be willing to breastfead after the ceremony; poor baby Hanan was starving, he cried before, during and after the circumcision and my heart ached …..

Hanan was a sweet and good baby. He ate, drank and was alert. A few weeks later his dark hair fell out and underneath there was a fine almost white, fair plume.

Hanan's arrival motivated Shimon, with the help of a neighbor to add more space to our shack - about six square meters. My father's beautiful old cupboard, which Christians had stored for us in Prostejov and given back to us after the Holocaust, was used as a partition. This was how a 'nursery' was created. Most of the children in Beit-Lehem grew up in the same basket, which was handed on from one family to another. At first Hanan was in this basket for a few weeks like Ednah before him and Yael after. Later, uncle Pavel bought Ednah a bigger bed and Hanan inherited the crib. The playpen that Shimon built for Ednah was ours. We inherited the old baby carriage from the Kamil family. We used old sugar bags, which my mother got from the kitchen in Kibbutz Givat Hayim, instead of sheets for our babies.

Before Hanan's birth, we had bought a semi automatic washing machine. We had electricity from the generator three times a day, for a couple of hours each time. We cooked and warmed up food on a kerosene stove. Uncle Lutz sent us diapers from Vienna. Our children were well-dressed, almost elegant, thanks to the packages sent by my cousin Ruth Federmann from Tel-Aviv of hand me down clothes from her children Ami and Ronit. However, I still had to buy shoes, which was also a problem because we really did not have any cash. We would receive "bons" instead of cash which were only good for shopping at our local grocery store.

Physically Hanan was very well developed. At six months he was standing up, at ten months he took his first step.

We were growing different vegetables, which we also ate; the former German settlers had left us with all kinds of fruit trees, also olive groves and vines; I would pick all these crops and mushrooms which I found in the grove in wintertime, and this helped to enrich our food.

Hanan's first steps at age ten months

We were not hungry, but did I allow myself to buy a jar of mayonnaise or a piece of yellow cheese? I would think twice about that. Once a week every family separated a can of milk in the dairy, so we had cream. From the skim milk we prepared white cheese, from which I would occasionally also make processed cheese. Shimon became an expert with olives. At the end of the field we had a few olive trees; in our shack we always had a few big tin cans packed with wonderful olives.

Due to the small difference in age and maybe also because of the children's personalities, Ednah and Hanan got along very well. They did not quarrel, and some parents gave them as an example to their children in the moshav.

It was very important for me to keep my children healthy. Sometimes I grew vegetables for them. They ate plenty of spinach and loved it.

With the help of a grater and a piece of thin cloth I prepared carrot juice for them, as long as they were really young and couldn't eat anything else; I prepared tomato and orange juice for them too. Bananas and apples were a luxury at that time. Nonetheless, I tried to occasionally get apples or bananas for my babies. Aunt Lotte sent us some apples, which could not be marketed from Kibbutz Sdeh Nehemia, but for the most part my children lived on carrots and tomatoes that were grown in our fields. We did not have an electric refrigerator, or "Materna". Luckily, Hanan was breast-fed for five months, later I would cook each meal separately for him.

Hanan is crying; he wants to eat. I am holding him in my arm while cooking corn flour with the free hand, on the kerosene stove which stains all the pots black, later I try to cool the porridge, so the baby can be fed. Hanan usually finished a whole bottle, as compared to Ednah who was not a big eater.

In those days babies were done with their bottles by the time they were a year old or even sooner and they would start eating solid food. I wanted them to be independent, in the summer I would sit them naked in the high chair which we

received from Ruth from Tel-Aviv, I would turn my back while washing dishes or doing something else, so as not to see what was happening when Hanan was eating. Most of the valuable food would end up on his belly, but he learned how to feed himself at an early age. After the meal I would place him inside the concrete sink that we had in our 'kitchen', I rinsed him and that was it.

When Hanan was three years old, he fell asleep with his head resting in the soup bowl…. Much attention was given to the other end of the digestive system too. I remember the sight of Hanan and Ednah, every morning before going to the nursery; they were sitting on their pots one next to the other. This meant that, they were occasionally late; it was a kindergarten - not university, so it was not so terrible.

Hanan loved warm milk with sugar. On rare occasions when I took him to Haifa, it was a problem to find a place that would prepare warm milk with sugar for him. We didn't own a thermos flask, and at that time there wasn't the abundance of bottles we have nowadays. It was a problem to obtain water to drink in Haifa. The kids called soda 'jumping water' and did not like it.

Hanan who is currently working at Intel and travels periodically to the USA came with me to Haifa when he was twelve or thirteen years old. We walked into the "Hamashbir" department store where there were escalators. Hanan very seriously says to me: "Ima, I never imagined that such a thing exists." Hanan received his first new pajamas when he was about fifteen years old. (In those days everyone slept in pajamas.) Hanan wore it till it fell apart. It was not so bad – but today this sounds strange.

Memories: Hanan and Ednah were always together - hand in hand - at first Ednah was taller, later they were the same height, when Hanan reached first or second grade he was already the taller one.

For some reason I did not dare to cut Hanan's hair by myself; his hair, which was almost white, was very long and we had to take the bus to Tivon to the barber. His first haircut and his first ride on a bus was a real adventure accompanied by crying and weeping. Hanan was not two years old yet.

Sometimes both children wanted to sleep with me in my bed. We did not have a double bed in our shack; we had wide couches, which we brought with my mother from Czechoslovakia. Each one of them stood separately by a different wall. We

would sit on them during the day and at night they would turn into beds. One evening, Ednah was already asleep beside me when Hanan woke up. There was no room next to me anymore and he would cry "not next to the feet!" What could I do? Pass him to his dad? Nobody was even thinking about that in those days, aside from the fact, that Shimon went to sleep much later. When he was three years old, Hanan went through a rough period; he had fears and started behaving like a baby again. I took him to a psychologist, but aside from taking advantage of our distress she was not helpful. But things got better and Hanan developed well.

We lived in Beit-Lehem for about 20 years without a paved road. There was a lot of mud and big puddles in winter. Rubber boots were a must for everyone. At the entrance to every house there was a self-made boot removal device (a wooden board which had an incline, on its highest point there was a metal angle which surrounded the heel of the boot when you took it off.) Once, on his way from the Kindergarten, Hanan fell into a big puddle and was covered with mud up to his neck. He was soaking wet, but he held the bag with his slippers above his head – the slippers remained dry. When Hanan was three and a half years old, we moved into our new house. Shimon built a closet in the children's room. An old curtain was used instead of doors. Ednah and Hanan loved playing hide and seek; Hanan was still a very young child and he would burst out laughing so he was easily found. Once he was hiding in the closet and fell asleep inside.

We had some doubts before first grade; there were four boys in Beit-Lehem, all were born in November-December 1954; three mothers wanted to send their boys to school when they were five and a half years old. I did not want that, but how could I hold Hanan back in Kindergarten, while all his friends were going to school? Therefore I was forced against my will and my common sense to enroll him in first grade at a very young age.

Hanan was a good boy, active with a lot of ideas. Once he asked for a birthday present, a few used baby carriage wheels; Shimon bought them for Hanan at the flea market in Haifa. Hanan built a carriage, made sails out of pieces of plastic sheet and tried to travel with it with the help of the wind as in a sailboat - his own unique invention.

While Shimon visited his aunt in England, Hanan killed a snake under our house. He was barely six and a half years old.

The Beer family (from left to right) Hanan, Michal, Shimon, Ednah 1960

A nice story, which Shimon witnessed and wrote down:

Hanan was always an original and analytical thinker. He liked to analyze everything to its final and minute details. One day I was with him at the grocery store at our community center. Next to us stood a worker from "Bezek" (the phone company) with his little boy, who became frightened when a big and threatening dog entered. The man calmed him down: "don't be afraid. The dog is a labor party Mapai member, it won't harm you." Hanan came home with me, thinking and silent all the way back. About thirty minutes after this episode, he came up to me and with a serious expression on his face he asked: "Abba, explain to me please, how can a dog be a member of a political party?"

When Ednah and Hanan contracted the measles and were already recovering, I gave each one of them some colored pencils and paper so they wouldn't be bored. Hanan drew an impressive picture of a man with a very long and thick beard, surrounded by grapes. When I asked him who was this man he answered that it was

the Grape Elijah; he had mistaken the Hebrew word for grapes – anavim – with the Hebrew word for a prophet – hanavi – hence the abundance of grapes!

An article written by Hanan for the school magazine "Alonenu":

What will I be when I`ll grow up?

I wanted to be a farmer.
Later I heard, that John Glenn flew in a rocket three times around the globe,
so I took an interest in space and decided, that when I`ll grow up,
I`ll be a cosmonaut! And I have already been interested in space for half a year,
and I think, that I'll fly in a number of rockets. And I hope that a couple of people
will fly with me.

Hanan Beer Grade Two.

When Hanan was a teenager, he found a sick cat. Hanan took care of the cat with much devotion. When the cat died, Hanan did not eat the whole day, he dug a grave, buried the cat and on the tombstone he engraved: "My beloved cat is buried here". Only after completing that ritual did Hanan come home, he took a shower, and ate. I found his first confrontation with death positive. When Hanan served in the army (IDF) a few years later in the Yom Kippur war, he confronted many dead and badly wounded soldiers on both fronts.

Time passed,

The children grew up. Ednah and Hanan studied in the high school in Tivon. Yael was five years old and she already knew how to read. Ednah sat with her a few times, explained things to her and Yael read.

In 1967, Ednah was fourteen, Hanan twelve and Yael five years old, when the Six Days War broke out. How lucky we all were, that it was so short! I saw an enemy airplane falling, when I stood on our balcony of our house in Beit Lehem Hagalilit.

When Ednah was eighteen she passed the matriculation exams and enlisted in the army. Ednah served in Tel Aviv in the Kiryah in the proximity of Moshe Dayan, David Elazar (Dado), and other well known IDF commandants.

Hanan passed his matriculation exams and enlisted in the army too. A short time later Ednah and Eli married.

Ednah and Eli – wedding. 2.7.1973.

2.7.1973. Left to right: Michal, Kaethe, Eli and Ednah Michalovich, Shimon.

From Beit Lehem to Cyprus.

Shimon completed his studies and received his B.A. degree from Haifa University. He answered a USA government job offer from the newspaper, they were looking for a Hebrew-to-English translator. They invited him to an examination – a very difficult one – and Shimon was chosen to work for the FBIS (Federal Broadcast Information Service). The central office of the FBIS in the Middle East was in Cyprus.

Ednah and Eli stayed in our house in Beit Lehem Hagalilith. Hanan served in the army (IDF) at that time and would spend his furloughs in Beit-Lehem or at the home of my mother, grandma Kaethe in Kiryat Gat.

Shimon, Yael and I travelled to Cyprus in summer 1973. Cyprus is as far as Eilat, if something happened that needed our attention (our worry was about our soldier Hanan), I could reach home in less than an hour.

The transition to Cyprus was a liberation for me from a very hard life. Kyrenia was a very small town – it was not a village. There was the sea – the beautiful marvelous sea, there was a small port, and there were tourists from various countries, speaking many languages. I got to know many people; I tried to speak English. I was introduced to a new life, to customs that were unknown to me, to food that I had never tasted. Shimon received American wages, At last, as a holocaust survivor I had begun to receive health compensation from 1970. We were not so very poor anymore. The good feeling and joy did not last for a long time. In autumn 1973 the "Yom Kippur War" broke out. Hanan served as a regular soldier in the Sinai desert on the Egyptian border.

At work Shimon listened to the news from Israel and translated them. I was paralyzed because of my fear for Hanan. When it was possible I flew home to Israel immediately. After a few days Hanan got a short furlough and we met at last! Hanan did not talk about the war. Many years later I learned that Hanan and his friends were in the frontline; they met the Egyptian army and fought face to face. Many of Hanan's friends were wounded, many were killed. Hanan was only nineteen years old; he had to kill Egyptian soldiers who were young boys too. Those were hard times. Hanan, a soldier in regular service, was due to serve for two more years in the army. The war was short - we had many losses. I returned to Cyprus with a heavy heart. Shimon received a short holiday a few weeks later and flew home of course.

For the 1974 Pesach, all three of us flew home and we had a big Family Seder with my mother and Karmela's family in Beit Lehem, with Ednah and Eli and our soldier Hanan was with us too!

Yael probably inherited Shimon's talent for languages. After a few weeks of English lessons with a private teacher, which FBIS gave her, she was able to study in the English school in Nicosia. She used to travel to Nicosia with the schoolbus. Yael studied in the Grade 6 without loosing a school year; in a short time she was one of the best pupils. Yael learned ski in the Trodos Mountains in winter.

We met new people in Cyprus, we were on friendly terms with an elder couple who emigrated from Germany to England before WW2 and found it hard to live with the English. Our neighbor was a German woman married to a Turkish man. In our neighborhood lived the Armenian family Bagdoyan; we got to know some American families and young Israelis who lived temporarily in Cyprus. We bought a car and became familiar with the small and beautiful island.

One day the Israeli Embassy in Nicosia notified us, that the Arabs were preparing an attack against Israelis in Cyprus. We were ordered to leave our dwellings and to spend the weekend in a hotel. We spent the weekend in a hotel with other Israelis and a young Israeli security man with a pistol in his pocket guarded us. Later a young security guard Uri came to live with us, he accompanied us everywhere and took Yael to school with our car. Later we learned, that a school in Maalot had been occupied by Arab terrorists, that there were many wounded and killed pupils and teachers.

The War in Cyprus

The work contract between Shimon and the Americans was for two years. But this was not to be. In July 1974, we brought Yael to the airport in Nicosia – she flew to Israel to spend the summer vacations at home. Our plan was that Yael would stay for some time with her grandmother Kaethe and with Karmela's family in Kiryat Gat and also spend some time with Ednah and Eli in our house in Beit Lehem Hagalilit. I planned to spend a part of that time in Kyrenia and a few weeks in Israel.

We could not realize all our plans, because war broke out in Cyprus. The Turks occupied the Northern part of the isle, the part in which we lived. Shimon was at work in Karavas a few kilometers from Kyrenia. It was Shabbat, I stayed in our villa

in Kyrenia. We were ordered not to leave our homes – the Turks started the occupation. I listened to the radio – two Israelis were broadcasting from Nicosia. In Kyrenia there was shooting, I sat with the transistor on the floor in the middle of the house, in the place which seemed to be the safest. The day before, on Friday I cleaned the house, put everything in order, washed the floors because of the approaching Shabbat. There was good food and a festive Shabbat meal in the fridge. But Shimon didn't come home and Mr. Cree from FBIS called and told me, that we were going to be evacuated; that I had to prepare for the evacuation, that he would come to fetch me with his car. I packed two small suitcases, one for me, one for Shimon and a bag of food, which didn't need to be in the refrigerator. – Mr. Cree arrived….quickly…quickly, he allowed me to take only one suitcase. I took Shimon's shirt from his suitcase, from the bag of food I took a package of crackers and we rode quickly to the hills above Kyrenia. There was a U.N. camp there.

All the aliens who lived in Kyrenia were now concentrated in this place. Zahava, a young Israeli woman was there too. We stayed in a wood; it was the beginning of August and it was very hot. We slept on the earth, the ants stung without mercy. Everyone received a small bottle with water from the U.N. soldiers, there was no food. The UN people prepared a kettle of soup later. There were no dishes; they tried unsuccessfully to put the soup into our small water bottles. There were young American families with babies and with toddlers; the young American women coped excellently in this unusual situation. Bullets flew around; one bullet went through the palm of one of the Americans.

After the night spent on the bare earth, Zahava and I decided to explore what was happening; we went to a point that looked out over Kyrenia. We saw Turkish ships arriving and anchoring in the port of Kyrenia. There was shooting all the time, it became more frequent and nearer to our location. We joined a Canadian UN soldier and ran with him into the UN building in which UN soldiers and their families were hiding.

They gave us a slice of bread and a tomato, we could use the WC and wash our faces and hands. The shooting became stronger and nearer, I crawled under the big table with the Austrian children and made boats and hats from newspapers to amuse them. Panic!!! The wood was on fire!! Then, all of us, fifteen people at least, huddled in a jeep, trying to escape from the fire. Zahava's and my belongings were left in the

wood; an Arab FBIS employee took my bag from the burning wood and brought it to me (the suitcase was still in Mr. Cree's car).

This situation lasted one more day and one more night – we heard shooting and explosions, the surrounding woods were on fire. Later we moved to the seashore, there a helicopter waited for us, which took us to a huge British aircraft carrier. It went slowly around the isle and picked up the alien residents; within a few hours the carrier reached Karavas. With the FBIS employees, Shimon entered the ship with his briefcase, wearing slippers as always ….. in the next days he used my underwear. Shimon was glad that I had brought one of his shirts for him. The Americans planned to bring us with another ship to Israel. The ship was due to sail in Lebanese waters; therefore those who had an Israeli passport could not join the voyage.

We, and two Arab families who came from Nazareth were put on an old aircraft - not a jet plane - and we were flown to London! For me it was Europe for the first time after 25 years! Shimon had been in London in 1961 for a visit to his aunt Bertl, who paid Shimon's voyage of course.

In London the FBIS rented hotel rooms for us and we received extra money to buy some clothing. Most of our new clothes we bought in Marks & Spencer and used them for many years. Some of those clothes are still in our wardrobe. I remained in London more than two weeks. Our passports were in the Israeli embassy in Nicosia, we had to ask for new passports in London. Shimon left England with a temporary passport to continue his work for the FBIS in Tel Aviv!

I left London later, on my flight home I stayed for three days in Zurich, and for three days in Rome; I acted as if I were a tourist and tried to do as much sightseeing as possible.

Tel Aviv.

After the evacuation from Cyprus we lived temporarily in a hotel in Tel Aviv. When I came home to Israel, for the first night all of us were together again; we slept in a hotel room which was meant for a couple – the children slept on the floor. We were so happy to be together again! So happy that our soldier Hanan was with us!

Later, we rented an apartment in Sirkin Street. It was situated near to the American Embassy – the offices of the FBIS were established there. Shimon worked

shifts as usual in FBIS. Yael studied in a nearby school. In 1975-76 I started a medical secretaries' course, which was the only way that I could learn something about medicine. I had always taken an interest in medicine; because my formal education only amounted to five grades of elementary school, this was my only opportunity to reach my aspiration. After finishing the course I worked as a medical secretary in the Zamenhof Medical Center and in Ichilov hospital. I liked the work very much and I found it very interesting.

Our contract in Sirkin Street was only for one year, we looked for another apartment. We found one in Northern Tel Aviv and Yael started to study in the Herzliya Gymnasium which was near to our new apartment. In June 1977, when I finished my studies and started work as a medical secretary, our first grandchild, Inbal was born. At that time we lived in our third apartment in King David Avenue. In that apartment, in March 1978, we celebrated the seventieth birthday of my mother, grandma Kaethe. Yael passed her matriculation exams and left for a short trip to Europe. When she came back, Yael enlisted in the army.

March 1978 grandma Kaethe with Yael (Kaethes 70th birthday in Tel Aviv).

Hanan finished his military service and like every Israeli soldier, he was obliged to serve for one month at least once a year as part of his reserve duty.

August 1975, Hanan in training (towards the end of his regular army service.)

After his regular army service, Hanan traveled around the world for a year; initially he traveled by ships as the ship's security officer, which was quite profitable. When he had saved enough money, he went backpacking around Europe with a Eurail-pass. He used this pass very efficiently. The Scandinavian countries were the ones he loved most.

In 1979, when we were living in Tel Aviv, we decided to join an organized tour for a month; it was a good deal the travel agency arranged for us. I was almost fifty years old and Shimon was fifty-four, till then we had rarely left the country except for Shimon's visit to London to see his aunt and our stay in Cyprus. Yael turned seventeen; she was an 11th grader at Herzliya high school. She was very talented, mature and independent. We thought we could leave her alone at home for a few weeks and my mother Kaethe promised to be in touch with her and visit her. Shimon came to Palestine by himself when he was fourteen and I from the age of thirteen was more or less separated from my family in Ghetto Theresienstadt. Therefore it

didn't seem to be problematic or dangerous to us, for Yael to be left alone in our flat. We had good neighbors, the refrigerator was full, and we left her some money.

We flew to Johannesburg in South Africa, we visited Pretoria, a safari in Krueger Park, and then we continued to Australia, to Sydney; in Melbourn we met friends and relatives who had immigrated there from Czechoslovakia and from Israel. The most beautiful part of our tour was New Zealand, all green, the sheep, the geyzers, the local Maori people. We continued to Singapore, Bangkok and Hong-Kong. I celebrated my fiftieth birthday while we were in Bangkok.

Work at FBIS was no longer so interesting to Shimon and working shifts, wasn't easy either. In 1980 he asked for and was granted a sabbatical leave. We rented a small flat in Tivon, close to Beit Lehem Hagalilit. We went often to Beit Lehem, Shimon was contemplating returning to live in the village again - not me. During that time Yael was in the army. In August 1980 our second granddaughter Tali was born. Ednah, who was living in Beit-Lehem, wanted to finish her teaching degree so I took care of Tali during her first year. I would take the bus to Beit Lehem Hagalilit, or Eli would bring Tali over to us very early in the morning. I liked taking care of Tali; our flat was well equipped with all that a baby needed.

A year later we returned to Tel Aviv, Shimon returned to his work at FBIS. He probably understood that he was too old to start farming again and to get into debt again. We rented a flat for one more year and in 1982 we bought our own flat in Shmuel Hanagid Street. I had been searching intensively for a flat and I saw about twenty of them before we decided to buy this one. It seemed to be the most suitable one, despite the fact that it was a bit dark and the kitchen was small.

Once Yael finished her military service, she lived with us and worked in various jobs: babysitting, as a domestic help, house cleaning etc; she saved money to travel in Europe.

Hanan began his chemistry studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He lived in the dormitories with a roommate, cooked for himself and excelled in his studies. From his second year he won a scholarship. He continued to serve in the army's reserve forces at least for a month once a year. Therefore he often missed his exam periods. While he was studying he was also working to earn some money; gardening, washing instruments in the labs, helping disadvantaged children and

during the summer vacations, in agriculture and as a night guard at Beit- Lehem Hagalilit. After his first degree he took a year off and worked at a chemical plant. He gathered much experience there and saved money to continue his studies. During his studies toward the master's degree he worked among other things at the meteorological center in the Jordan valley and Samaria. Hanan once took me to see those places. It was marvelous!

In 1982 the Lebanon War broke out. Hanan arrived at our home in Tel Aviv to get his military shoes. I followed him to Ibn-Gvirol street, he wanted to hitchhike to the north. I begged him not to go, but Hanan caught a car to the Lebanese border; it was already dark. We didn't hear from him for a few days and then one evening, he called and told us he was on his way to Tel Aviv. Yael and I waited up for him till two or three o'clock in the morning. Hanan finally arrived, very pale with a strange look in his eyes. He had been caught in an incident where the Israeli air force attacked our forces by mistake. Miraculously, Hanan was not injured, but he carried and transported the wounded and dead soldiers. He was devastated.

Hanan continued to study for his Ph.D. during that time he was also employed as a teaching assistant and gave private lessons. During that time Hanan and Sarah got to know each other; they married in 1984.

When Noa was born, Hanan was writing his thesis. Hanan decided to buy a computer, which was very expensive at that time; he wrote the thesis at home and took care of the baby. Noa was cared for by her father and they saved the money they would have otherwise have had to pay for a nurse.

Yael

While we were away on our trip, Yael used drugs. Later we learned that she had used them before. In the late 1970's it was not "in". Yael was always the first, the trailblazer. The summer of that year, I traveled with her to the Sinai, which was still under Israeli control at that time. Yael taught me to snorkel we had a fantastic time. We 'lived' in a hut on the beach and met people from all over the world. While Yael was a high school senior she worked as a babysitter and a waitress. After graduation Yael flew with a Eurail card to tour and to see Europe.

Yael 1984

Yael came back from the tour and enlisted in the army; she didn't like the base and job which were assigned to her and took matters into her own hands. Yael went to the appropriate offices in Jerusalem and managed to get transferred to Sharm-al-Sheich in the Sinai desert. There she befriended two soldiers, young women from a kibbutz; they lived in a tent and were happy together. Every two-three weeks Yael flew home. After the desert, Tel-Aviv seemed so green to her! Yael arranged for me to get a permit to travel on a military plane and I went to visit her a few days before Israel gave Sinai back to Egypt. After that Yael was transferred to the Lebanese-

Syrian border, shortly before the Lebanon war broke out. At the time when Hanan came to our home in Tel Aviv, after helping the injured and the dead (as was mentioned before), Yael was at home. The doctor gave Yael a few days off, because she had severe headaches. On the first day of the war one of her classmates fell, more were killed later. Along the Lebanese border at the time of war it was terribly noisy - that affected Yael very much. This was the source of her headaches and the days off.

When the war ended, so did Yael's military service. She moved back home, worked, cleaned apartments, babysat, worked as a waitress in order to save money for a trip. In 1982 Shimon became ill and was hospitalized, Yael was a big help to me. We visited him every day; we brought him home-cooked meals, because he did not like the hospital food. Once Shimon recovered, Yael sailed to Europe. On the ship she met a UNO soldier who continued his journey to Sweden by car. Yael joined him and went on further to Norway where she found a job in a fish plant. When winter came, Yael flew to Thailand, to Nepal and to India. She stayed in an 'Ashram' and participated in a trek to the Annapurna mountain in the Himalayas. In the spring she returned to work in Norway. In 1984 I traveled with a Eurail pass to visit Yael. I flew to Munich, I stayed there with Vera Schulz – whom I knew from Ghetto Theresienstadt. In Vienna I met uncle Bruno from Prague, whom I hadn't seen for thirty-seven years. I traveled to Yael in Norway through Switzerland, Denmark, and Sweden. In the Norwegian city of Narvik I got on a boat that sailed along the Norwegian shores. Past the Nord Cap, I arrived in Kjollefjord where at the small port Yael was waiting for me. I noticed that she had some strange ways of behaving and I wondered: "what does this mean?" While staying with Yael, it was light for almost twenty-four hours. I cooked and bought food for her. I toured in the near vicinity and after a week, I sailed again to Lofoten -Trondheim - Bergen a beautiful trip along the fjords, Stockholm. I traveled, partially following Karl Capek in his book "Journey to the North". I went back to Vera to Munich; from there I went on a short bus trip in Germany "Die Romantische Strasse". There were a few days left – where should I go? To Venice of course, by train again. Italy – Venice, so total different from Scandinavia!

At that time Yael had registered for studies at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and she returned home. She was different, not the same person we once

knew. After a few weeks of school she decided that it was not interesting and that she couldn't concentrate. She came home to Tel Aviv. In 1984, at Hanan's wedding to Sarah wedding, Yael looks well in the pictures. She lived with a girlfriend for a while, did menial jobs, moved back to our flat later. Her behavior became stranger. We went to psychologists and psychiatrists the diagnosis was Manic-depressive Disorder. It was probably related to the drugs she took while she was in the Far East. Yael insisted on returning to Norway to visit a boy friend. This time she left in the fall and we were very worried; we received a long letter, followed by a long phone call. Hanan was the one who warned us of things that sounded bad. I sent money to Yael, so she could come back home. It was not legal to send money abroad at that time. Luckily, by chance a woman whom I had known in Ghetto Theresienstadt came for a visit to Israel from England; she helped me to transfer some money to Yael.

When Yael came home again she got worse from day to day. She was cared for by psychologists and by psychiatrists. We did not want her to be hospitalized. Yael received various medications.

She tried to work cleaning apartments and as a waitress, but she was restless and unable to continue working at length at any one workplace, she was not able to work well.

In March 1986, Ednah bore her third child – Adi. Yael went to Beit- Lehem to help Ednah after the birth – she was no longer the efficient and industrious Yael we had known.

At that time I took care of two small children in Tel Aviv, I also cared for three elderly gentlemen later.

Shimon had meanwhile left FBIS and worked in various jobs; for some time he worked as a senior clerk in the Ministry of Communications. After the age of sixty he taught English and Hebrew.

In June 1986 Shimon and I visited my mother in Kyriat Gat. Yael did not want to come with us. I felt uneasy having to leave her, but we did not think that we had to be with Yael all the time and to guard her. When Yael was at home by herself she swallowed most of her medicaments and opened the gas in the oven. The neighbors smelled the gas, they did not know where we were; although we were only in Kyriat Gat for one day and one night. When we returned from Kiryat Gat the next day, Yael

was in the hospital in the intensive care unit. She stayed there almost one month. On the 15th July 1986, our dear Yael died at the age of twenty-four.

Nothing worse can happen to a parent – I did not know and tried to understand what mistakes I had commited – I could blame only myself, being the mother who took care of her child.

Shimon and I decided not to use any tranquilizers and not to seek help from psychologists – from those who had been unable to help our beloved Yael.

Our Therapy (Shimon and I)

The first two years after Yael's death were hell.

Yael left many diaries and other written material. Shimon's therapy was to put together a book which was based on Yael's writings. I could not give my permission to publish this book because the exposure might embarrass our granddaughters Inbal and Tali, who were nine and six years old at that time and lived with their family in the close society of the moshav.

In December 1986, our only grandson was born – the firstborn child of Sarah and Hanan. When he was a baby and later as a small child I used to travel to Jerusalem once a month to be with him, to take care of him – that was my therapy. Sarah and Hanan, are both chemists. Sarah works for the Police Force. They call her whenever there is an emergency, a terrorist act, an explosion, they would also call her at night at the time when the children were still small. Hanan received his doctorate when he was 35 years old; he works for the American hi-tech company Intel. Sarah and Hanan were obliged to leave their children from a very early age with nannies. I regretted this, and tried to compensate in the best way that I knew by travelling often to Jerusalem to be with the children. In 1988, Noa was born, in 1994, Dana.

In 1889, I joined an organized tour to USA and Canada. At the same time Shimon took a trip to Europe with a Eurail ticket; he visited the Czechoslovak Republic for the first time after almost 50 years. At that time there was still a communist regime in Czechoslovakia. It was not easy for Shimon to receive permission to visit the country in which he was born, the main reason was, that he came from Israel. On his journey to England, Holland, Switzerland, Denmark,

Finland and three days in his native Brno in Czechoslovakia, Shimon had many experiences, he told us and our guests about these experiences with much humor and delight.

After a short time at home again, Shimon met Mrs. Stepanek and her children on the Tel Aviv beach. Her husband managed 'Transakta', a Czech export and import company and shortly after that meeting, he started to work for Mr. Stepanek. After the fall of the communist regime in 1990, diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and Israel were renewed. Mr. Stepanek was appointed as the temporary Consul, Shimon had new and interesting duties now. He granted Czech visas to travelers.

The Stepanek family was later recalled to Czechoslovakia, their daughter Pavla remained here, she lives in Israel.

In 1990, after the fall of the communist regime, I traveled with our daughter Ednah to Czechoslovakia; this was my first visit to my native country after almost fifty years! Immediately I started to take the first steps to reclaim our house in Prostejov on Sadky 4. In 1991, the house was ours again.

At that time, our house served as a school for backward children in the mornings, pupils from other schools prepared their homework there in the afternoons.

In 1993, our mother died. Mother was almost 85 years old at the time of her death. Mother had osteporosis and suffered a spontaneous break of her thighbone. The operation in Beer Sheva hospital did not succeed, our mother suffered terrible pains. Karmela and I took turns sitting at the side of mother's hospital bed and January 1993, our dear mother died in the hospital, when I was at her side.

Kaethe Steckelmacher 1978

In 1994, I traveled to Czechoslovakia again, to take care of our house. For two and a half months I stayed there. After so many years I again experienced the

unbelievably beautiful colors of the autumn leaves and the European winter with the preparations for Christmas and beautiful white snow.

Shimon started to work for "Yad Sarah" (a voluntary medical equipment supply organization), he worked there till his last days. Shimon and his work gained much respect from his coworkers and his clients.

The years were passing, our children got older, our grandchildren grew up and we were getting old.

Karmela

My sister Karmela came to Israel with mother and with me in 1949, when she was 15 years old. She came with a youth group to Kibbutz Kfar Hamakabi. Most of the settlers in Kfar Hamakabi were from Czechoslovakia.

Karmela's family: Rani, Karmela, Jano, Naomi in Kyriat Gat

When Karmela was twenty years old, she married Jano Weiss. They changed their surname later to Ben-Dom. My brother in law was not sure what his father's Hebrew name was, he had the feeling that when he was called to the reading of the Torah in the synagogue in Slovakia, the name was Dom. Therefore their name became Ben - Dom.

They have a son and a daughter. Ran is a physician, his wife Daliah came to Israel from Iran. They have two beautiful and gifted children, Itai and Maayan. They

live in Beer Sheva. Naomi is a doctor of biochemistry, she has a beautiful and clever daughter named Roni who twists all the adults around her little finger with ease.

Our mother went to live with Karmela's family in Kiryat Gat in 1964. After her death in 1993, she was buried in Kyriat Gat.

Saying Good Bye to Shimon:

Shimon died in 2002, at the age of seventy-five. He had lung cancer for a year and a half and refused treatment or surgery. After fifty-two years of marriage I knew that a stay in hospital was not for him. Shimon died in our flat in his own bed. At least this I did right.

Now I am fighting with loneliness and old age, I am thankful that I am relatively healthy, that I am a free woman and have enough food.

Edna's speech during Shimon's funeral:

07.7.2002

Abba

Every flower even the rarest and most expensive one, eventually withers, for us it is so hard to absorb and understand. As a child and as an adult I knew that if I didn't know something in English, history, science, Abba would always be able after a short pause to give me the answer. Till today we occasionally receive the farmer's newspaper. Years ago, you wrote a letter to the newspaper, and Mr. Ziv Av, the manager was so impressed, that he decided to send you the newspaper forever. Over the last few years you have mastered the computer, you made sure that you attended various lectures and you joined the walking group "In the steps of the bible". Abba, I was always proud of you, so knowledgeable, so humble, gentle and considerate. I can not remember you ever raising your voice, or even laying a hand on us as children. When I would come to visit you in Tel Aviv, you always cared and made sure to accompany me to the bus station. At all my deliveries you came to visit me in the Afula hospital, despite the distance. Even on your last days of your life you managed to say: "don't' bother, go rest - there is no need". You loved going to Yad-Sarah to volunteer, to fit old people and invalids with the appliances they needed, and explain to them how to use them.

Abba! You sang so beautifully! I remember you working in the fields and sometimes singing. When we were children you built swings of all kinds for us and a wooden rocking horse for the grandchildren, good and firm. I remember you returning from a backpacking trip about five years ago, from the Reunion and Mauritius islands in the Indian Ocean. Happy, contented and blossoming. There was no end to your stories.

Abba – in these crazy times I know that I have to be thankful, that I had a father till I was fifty years old. And you, my dear dad, since the age of fourteen, you did not see your parents again. Last Friday night we were still watching a movie on TV together. On Saturday morning in your bed without pain after long suffering, you died. No end to the stories, no end to the memories, we love you. May your memory be ever blessed!

War and Peace

I was in Eilat, during one of my frequent visits to explore the magnificent coral and its inhabitants. I stayed in a hotel. In the evening I sat in the dining room; a German speaking tourist asked to join me. We had dinner together and talked. It turned out that during the 2nd World War we had both witnessed the same event - each one from opposing sides.

On the13th February, 1945 the allied forces bombed Dresden. It was a massive bombing which basically destroyed the city. The German tourist said that at that time she was in Dresden, her city of birth; miraculously she survived, while most of her family and friends were killed or wounded. During that time I was in the Theresienstadt Ghetto – about 70 km away. At that time I lived in the girl's home L410 room nr. 25, twenty-four girls in the room. We all woke up in the middle of the night to a horrible loud noise. We were sitting on our three levels bunks in darkness, hearing boom…boom… boom. It was very loud and came from a distance. We were happy - something was happening to the enemy, perhaps there would be an end to the terrible war. Those memories were related in a relaxed atmosphere, in a nice Eilat hotel, with plenty of good food on our table. It is hard to believe - but there was an understanding between me and the German woman. We parted with hope, that there would be peace and no more wars.

Our Old-new homeland: Israel

When I immigrated to Israel after the holocaust in 1949, the War of Independence was not over. Afterwards every few years there were wars, fedaiun, shahids, intifadas, most of the time we live in fear and unrest. Shimon was dismissed from military service because he suffered from a breakdown after learning from his brother Paul, what happened to his parents in Auschwitz and that his beloved grandmother and all their relatives perished in the holocaust.

Our son Hanan served his three years military duty during the most difficult of all our wars, the Yom-Kippur war in 1973. All the years till he was forty-five, he served in a combat unit and he served in the reserves for at least one month a year. His children Lior and Noa finished their army service recently. Ednah's daughters Inbal, Tali and Adi, finished their military service with honors.

After our miraculous survival of the holocaust, in which most of the European Jewry has perished, we hoped that we would live in peace in our old-new homeland; in the land in which our ancestors lived till they were cruelly exiled by the Romans two thousand years ago.

Although we were dispersed all over the globe, we were aware of our Judaism, it was an important part of our lives and identity, and we never thought of abandoning it. Life in our small country is difficult. I hope that the State of Israel will survive despite all adversities.

With great effort and a strong will we gathered in this land, Jews from all over the world. We speak Hebrew in our own country; our children study the Bible and the history of our people in Hebrew. Thousands of books have now been published in Hebrew, the ancient language of our ancestors.

My small prayer

God, God

Let us have the sea

Let us have calmness and peace.

Let us stay here!

Plates

Just before Passover Seder in my flat after Shimon's death, Hanan offered to buy me new plates. I did not understand and strongly objected. I have plenty of plates from two sets of dishes. I would like to tell you about them. The plates with the black flowers, which are partly faded, we received while Shimon, Yael and I were living in Cyprus. At that time Shimon's aunt Berti died. Instead of transporting our belongings from Israel, we asked Shimon's American employers to pay for the shipping of aunt Berti's belongings from London to Cyprus. In Cyprus in the small quaint town Kyrenia we slept at first on mattresses on the floor. After a few weeks a small lift arrived by ship from London with much unfamiliar stuff. There were many books in German and English and a few in Czech too, furniture, bed linen, and dishes; plate sets and beautiful crystal glasses. This story doesn't end here.

Aunt Berti arrived in London in 1939, at the last minute before the war broke out. She came from Ostrava with a small suitcase for a two days trip to Prague. Maria, her housekeeper called Berti urgently and told her, that the Germans had occupied Ostrava and that they were on their way to Prague. Aunt Berti managed to buy a train ticket and travelled to London. She was a psychiatrist, after a short time she was able to work in England as well. After the war, dedicated Maria sent Berti a lift with all the belongings she had left in the Czechoslovakian Republic in 1939. Maria sent the dishes and the plates too.

The second set of my plates once belonged to my parents. We used ordinary plates for every day. Before we were deported to the ghetto, my parents gave the better dishes and other valuables to our non-Jewish neighbors and acquaintances to keep. They were honest people; they gave the property back to my mother after the war, when we came back to Prostejov after we had stayed in Ghetto Theresienstadt for three long years. We brought the plates with us to Israel, I received half a set and the other half went to my sister Karmela.

I hope that by now you understand how precious those plates are to me - and I hope that someone from my family will receive them with love in due time.

My Wishes.

When I was a young girl, still a child, I thought about death, it occupied my thoughts quite often. I wanted to die with my parents and my beloved family members; I was afraid of separation and of mourning. During the war, my wishes were almost granted to me. My childhood friends perished together with their parents and families while they were still children. Their ashes are scattered upon Polish soil. Just by chance and extraordinarily my mother, my sister and I survived. Always in pain, always in sorrow and sadness; despite it all, I immigrated to Israel, raised a family, I have children and grandchildren.

Now I am old, it is hard to believe it but Liv Ulman's words "the young woman in me refuses to die" ring in my head. I remember how aunt Klemi, the oldest woman in our family looked and behaved when she was my age, when I was a little girl. Aunt Klemi wore a long black buttoned up dress and high black shoes. Klemi used to walk slowly and heavily she was always serious. I forget sometimes my age and behave like a young woman, running and jumping, forgetting that my body is not young and flexible anymore. I think of death waiting for me, as it does for all of us mortals, but now I am closer to it. What keeps me alive is my curiosity, my fear of the unknown, and the great love between me and my family. I don't believe anything will remain after my death besides the bones and the memory of those people who will remain alive. My only wish is to live and to die in dignity, not to be a burden to myself and to other people.

Since 1977 I have been writing my memoirs. I am active in the "House of Terezin"; I travel there frequently and tell the young visitors what happened to us during the Holocaust.

I wrote my memoirs in Hebrew, the mother tongue of my children and grandchildren. A short movie about my memories was filmed in 1997 "What fire can`t burn". Parts of the stories I have written are published in four books. One was written by Erica Fisher, another by Pavel Kohn, a story appeared in Canada in the book 'Whispers from the Ghettos' written by Kathy Kacer, and the fourth was published by the Tel Aviv municipality recently. In 2005, I translated my memoirs into Czech and the book called "Co ohen nespalil" was published by the city museum of Prostejov.

The book was printed in Hebrew in 2008. I am glad that we are publishing my memoirs in English too.

I am a survivor, the Nazis intended me to die, my ashes could have been scattered many years ago. Therefore I appreciate the tiniest and most ordinary things in life. A flower, a tree, a butterfly, the gorgeous sky and the clouds, the sun, the sea! I am so grateful, because I should not have been here – everything is a gift.

I am grateful that I survived the terrible Holocaust in which millions of my people were cruelly murdered, I am grateful that I have lived most of my life in Israel, in our land that we dreamt about for long years. I am thankful that I was granted the privilege to witness the gathering of Jews from all over the world in our ancient homeland. I am happy that I have lived most of my life in Eretz Israel among my people, where I feel at home.