Introduction

Our high school uniforms in Poland included a cap with; a flat round top. This top was slashed cross-wise at the time of high school graduation and was sewn up in a colorful design in time for graduation exercises. The designs were individual and done by girl students. If I remember correctly, mine was done by my sister who was in my class. It featured a night landscape of sharp black rocks under a distant sky of stars. The Latin inscription (around the rim) was: *"Per aspera ad astra"* ("Through hardship to the stars"). This inscription turned out to be mildly prophetic, but aspera (hardships) was a huge understatement of things to come, and astra (stars), real as they turned out to be, were dimmed by the preceding tragedy.

In the latter part of this memoir I describe what happened in the fateful decade after high school graduation when I left home for university studies abroad. To start with, I describe my childhood and school years at home. Aside from occasional digressions, I do not go much beyond my arrival in America, in 1948, a decade after I left home. I was often asked by others, and by myself: Why did I never go back to revisit my roots? The answer is that these roots, both familial and physical, have been violently torn up.

I fear that views of a completely leveled part of town, street, and house would damage the happy and vivid images of my physical and emotional childhood. I want the images in my memories to persist undisturbed.

Pre-School Years (1922-1927)

I was born to Dvora and Isaac Mincer in 1922. My sister Karolina (Kraintshe in Yiddish) was two years older; Fryda (Frymke) was born five years later. We lived in the house of my grandfather Moshe-Aron Mincer, we on the upper floor and he with his family on the ground floor: my grandmother, Feigl-Leah, nee Lederkremer, a son (my uncle) Issy, and three daughters: oldest Sara, middle Sima, and youngest Hanna (she was my sister Karolina's age and became my classmate in high school).

My mother's parents, Mordechai (MotI) and Chaya Eisen, lived next to Market Square a short walk (5 to 10 minutes) from us. They had a big house, which included their liquor store and many rooms for their large family (11 children). Some of my uncles and aunts were married and lived elsewhere. Those still at home during my childhood were Natan, Israel, Chaim-Yona, Meier, Yitzchak, and Ypytche (Rivka). Yosef-Eli and Avram lived in Lvov, Feigl and Hinda in Jozefov (see map).

The Mincers and Lederkremers (my paternal grandmother's family) settled in Tomaszow early in or before the 19th Century. They were prominent families in town. On hearing my name, in 1943, an old Russian Jew (named Dovgonos) told me that when he travelled from Russia to France before the First (World) War he stopped in Tomaszow and was hosted by both families. My maternal grandparents, the Eisens, came originally from Hrubieszow (a town 20 miles away). Yael's father, cousin Kopel Esteron, was a nephew of my grandmother Chaya. We also had relatives in Chelm, who, when asked where they were from, would answer: "So you are a chochem (smart one)."

At least once a week, usually on Saturday, we would visit our grandparents Eisen. Little wine glasses with mead (honey wine) would always be waiting for us grandchildren in the liquor store. A separate room was full of drinking peasants, especially on Thursdays, which was market day. On those days, peasants from neighboring villages sold their produce. At the end of the day they would spend their money in local stores, as well as get drunk.. When fights erupted among drunkards in his liquor store, my grandfather, Motl, a handsome, tall and strong man, would physically throw the patrons out.

Of course, we saw the Mincer grandparents daily as they lived right below us. Grandmother Feige-Leah was a renowned cook and homemaker whose advice was valued by many neighbors. She always had some delicious tidbits for us. No wonder my grandfather Moshe-Aron became a gourmet and a steady customer (as was my father) at the Lederkremer gourmet delicatessen. He was especially fond of imported tropical fruits, cheeses, and wines. A small shot of vodka with herring always started his meals. My grandfather's mother, Chaya, had

a room on her son's floor of the house. All her great-grandchildren would visit her on Saturday afternoon to receive sweets of all sorts. She was very old, and died when I was a teenager.

My grandfather Mincer was a partner (with a few others) in a saw mill located in Belzec, our local train station about 5 miles from town. The forests which supplied the logs were near a neighboring village, Jezierna. My grandfather's job was to manage the land and forests in Jezierna. He would spend most of his day there, riding a horse in the fields and forests. In the summer I would sometimes join him for the droshky ride to Jezierna and, once there, for the horse ride. He would point out what crops were growing and would describe their use. He was a real nature boy! I loved the countryside and all its rich fragrances, even the cows whose milk I drank warm right after milking. My collecting of caterpillars started there as well and continued for a number of years. To the chagrin of my mother, some of the caterpillars always managed to crawl out of the boxes I brought home. Beautiful and varied butterflies appeared in the boxes in early spring. I let them fly out of our windows.

Whenever I joined my grandfather in the village of Jezierna, we would stay (sometimes overnight) at the house of Josel Mincer (a first cousin of my grandfather). Josel supervised the tree-cutting crews. His brother Jack (father of Sheila Borsook) later became mayor of Johannesburg in South Africa. My grandfather's brother Wolf, whose house was next to ours, bought logs from his brother's firm and cut those into planks which he then sold to builders and furniture makers. These planks were arranged in .triangular or quadrangular shaped pyramids. Our gang of neighborhood kids had a lot of fun climbing on them. The backyard was quite large, and only half of it contained logs and plants. The other half was empty, except for a big apple tree. We used it as a playground for me, the Citrin boys (sons of my grandfather's sister Rachel) and a half dozen or so of neighborhood kids, all at most 6 years old. Aside from memories of climbing the pyramids, my earliest recollections (dating back to age 2 or 3) were the wrestling duels; these established a pecking order based on physical strength. I was not the weakest, and I had some privileges since the backyard belonged to the Mincers. The most popular game we played in the backyard was "palant," a Polish version of baseball. Often, the balls we used were mine, brought to me as presents from London by my great uncle Lederkremer (I forget his first name), the brother of my grandmother. He was an elegant man, devoted to his sister whom he

visited every year or two while he was vacationing in Poland. His son Sidney, whom we first visited in 1971 in London, became a prosperous businessman. He was a good man, like his father: He contacted me soon after the war and offered some help. I did not need it, but I appreciated the sentiment.

Though at least half of the Jews in Tomaszow were not religious in my time, most families sent their pre-schoolers to "cheder" where they learned to read the Torah in Hebrew. The typical cheder was a room in which a private teacher (melamed) taught about a dozen kids sitting around a table. It was a depressing view and scene, as the kids recited after the teacher without really understanding what it was all about. I was sent for a day to cheder when I was 3 or 4. The experience was so dismal (especially the broken down room and poverty-stricken kids) that I came home in tears and announced that I would never again return to cheder. My parents consented, provided I agreed to a private teacher who would come to our house for an hour once or twice a week. The teacher was Duftsche (David) Shapiro, who some years later married the sister of Jack Mincer and moved to South Africa. Shirley Perkin is their daughter, Sidney Shapiro their son. Shapiro's pedagogical "method" was to hold a pin under my chin-to "help" my memory-and to urge "nu! nu!" It worked sometimes. Anyway, he was forgiven in retrospect when he joined the family. Still, my Hebrew suffered.

When I was 4 my sister Karolina started public school (there were no nurseries or kindergartens). remember being very envious, because she had beautiful illustrated books and was very proud to be a student, speaking Polish in a literary way. We used to speak mainly Yiddish before we started school. My father spoke Polish fluently, my mother less so. I decided to learn to read my sister's books and, with her help, kept up with her. Before my 5th birthday, I was reading fluently, even the Polish daily paper which my father brought home. At that point I felt that I was ready to start school, but the minimum age to enter was 7. The idea of waiting two more years was very unsettling to me. I made a big scene, pleading that my father enroll me. As it happened, the director of the school (Slugocki) was a friend of my father's. Amused to hear about my request, he invited me to his office at school. There, I impressed him by reading the newspaper. He promised to enroll me as soon as the birth certificate said the right thing (i.e., that

my year of birth was 1920 rather than 1922). As a result, my official papers show me to be two years older.

Public School Years (1927-1932)

The elementary school was about one mile from my home (see map). As most roads were not paved (they would be 6 years later), I could not walk when mud was deep or in winter when snow was high. I would be transported on the shoulders of our maid, who was quite cheerful about it. Classes started at 8 o'clock, at which time all the gates were locked. That meant that if you were so much as a minute late, you would be locked out (unless you managed to squeeze through under the gate which some small kids, including myself, were able to do). School ended at 2 p.m. and was held 6 days a week. Vacations (other than religious and national holidays) were 2 weeks in December and 2 months (July and August) in the summer.

I have very few recollections of public school, only that it was crowded with loud, uncouth kids mostly from neighboring villages. Tomaszow was the seat of the county, and most of the county population lived in the villages. Anyway, the teaching was not memorable. I learned from the books mainly on my own. This became really exciting when I ventured to the public library to which I had privileges, after proving to the librarian that I could read. The library was open until 8 p.m. 6 days a week. They had quite an ample collection of books, including classics and moderns.

The library was over half a mile from our house (on main street). I started with fairy tales by Grimm, Anderson, and similar Russian and Arabian tales. Soon after that, I moved to adventure stories, historical novels, and, above all, to Karl May's sagas of cowboys and Indians in the Far West. By that time, I was already in 5th grade. The most famous Polish historical novel was the trilogy by Henryk Sienkiewicz (who got the Nobel prize). I read it in between the books of Karl May. When I returned the books the librarian asked me who in the family I was taking them out for. She did not believe my answer and asked all kinds of questions about the contents, which really amused me. After that she trusted me.

I often recall walking to and from the library under a moonlit sky, the whole world covered by white sparkling snow, the warm library, and the books waiting to be snatched up.

My carefree childhood was interrupted by a move to another town, Luck, about 150 miles east in the province of Volhynia (now part of Ukraine). The move was necessitated by my father's new occupational venture, joining in a partnership as a dealer importing agricultural implements from Czechoslovakia. Luck, the capital of Volhynia, was a big city (eca 100,000) compared to Tomaszow (10,000). We stayed there two years (1929-1931). Business was not good, and we returned home to Tomaszow to the same house and school.

I recall feeling like an exile in Luck. The town was noisy, especially because of a streetcar and the occasional honking cars. (In Tomaszow, only the mayor and one or two doctors had cars. The noise emanated from horses.) The population in Luck spoke mainly Russian or Ukrainian, and the Jews, when they spoke Yiddish, used the Litvak pronunciation which I understood almost as little as I did Russian. I made one friend, Kurtis, with whom I walked to school.

My parents, despite the precarious business situation, were quite sociable and frequently gave parties in the new town. They would dance the latest ballroom dances from America, such as the foxtrot, Charleston, black-bottom, and, above all, the Argentine tango. My father also liked to play the violin with or without the gramophone (record player). He inherited the violin from his father who no longer played in my time. I carried on the tradition after I entered high school.

A very disturbing event happened in Luck at a May Day parade in 1931. The parades were organized each year by socialists and labor unions. This always led to scuffles with the police. A close friend of my father's was shot in the street that May. We left town two months later as my father's fledgling business folded.

I should mention that in 1927, two years before we left for Luck, we had a bittersweet farewell at the departure of Issy, my father's younger brother and one of my favorite uncles. In

his twenties and without a job-as was true of most of the Jewish young men in town-he was fortunate enough to get a visa to go to South Africa. The whole family traveled with him to the Belzec station, all in tears, but happy for him. I would never forget the image of the train leaving the station with my uncle waving a white (undoubtedly wet) handkerchief until the train disappeared around a bend.

After we returned to Tomaszow and I finished the 6th grade, I applied for high school admission. This required a rather stiff entrance exam. Despite the fact that ours was a state-run high school, tuition was quite costly, and sending more than one child to high school was a heavy burden to the average family. In our case, all three children went to high school, though Fryda entered when my sister and I were in our last year. Both exams and tuition were a way of rationing high school enrollment, as well as an easy way of imposing a quota limiting the proportion of Jewish students to about 10 % of all, the same as their overall representation in Poland (three million Jews in a population of 30 million). As it was, no more than 10-15% of the youth cohorts in Poland could attend high school, so this was the ticket to the economic and intellectual elite among Poles. Thus, despite discrimination, Jewish graduates were proud to be members of the intelligentsia.

My father's occupation changed once again. Before Luck he worked as a bookkeeper for the saw mill. Afterwards, having received a license to provide paralegal and tax accounting services, he opened his own office. He had studied these subjects before he married and had hoped to enter law school when Poland became independent in 1918. But with Polish independence came other troubles. My father was mobilized into the Polish army when the Soviet army, led by Trotsky, invaded Poland in 1920. Trotsky's order to his army was: Forward to Warsaw, Berlin, and Paris! They hoped to ignite a worldwide communist revolution, but it did not work. They were stopped by the Poles (and the French) in a battle near Warsaw, and retreated. My father was slightly wounded and recovered at home. Every year he paraded with the veterans of that war.

My father's military experience in the Polish army was not as bad as great uncle Wolf's experience in the Russian army some 20 years earlier. Our part of Poland was under Russian

occupation throughout the 19th Century and up to 1918. The Russian military draft was open-ended. They might keep recruits for two years or as many as twenty years. Uncle Wolf was drafted before 1905 and was sent to the front at Vladivostok (Eastern Siberia) to fight the Japanese. He survived unharmed, but spent at least 5 miserable years there. His brother, my grandfather, somehow escaped the Russian military service.

Before I proceed to describe my high school years, I want to add a few details about my self-education before that. Besides the voracious reading of books I became addicted to the radio. Initially (I was 4 when radio was introduced) we had a small radio to which several earphones could be attached. I would sit many hours daily with my earphones on, listening to miraculous talk and music from "outer space" (actually, Warsaw, no more than 200 miles away). Listening to music was a powerfully exciting experience, whether it was popular dance music or classics like Beethoven or Tchaikovsky. Chopin, the greatest Polish composer, was played in piano recitals several times each week. New horizons opened for me, especially when we got loudspeakers and a receiver with most European radio stations accessible: Moscow, Prague, Berlin, Vienna, Paris, and London. My interest in music got only stronger with the years. Interest in politics was also aroused by listening to news from Warsaw and, later, from abroad.

My father and I shared interests in music and in political news. We discussed these matters at lunch or dinner after listening to the radio or reading the daily newspaper. Every Friday evening we turned on radio Vienna to hear a complete operetta by Lehar, Kalman, or Strauss.

High School Years (1932-1938)

I entered high school in 1932. Although admissions policies restricted the number of Jews in high school, I was not aware of anti-semitism at school, with the exception of sporadic misbehavior by very few kids from peasant families. The teachers were exceptionally well educated, serious in their teaching, and unbiased in their treatment of students.

In Poland there were two types of high school: "humanistic" (with emphasis on arts, literature, geography, history, and languages) and "real" (with greater emphasis on science and mathematics). Ours was humanistic, where 5 years of Latin (or Greek) were obligatory.

I liked everything except painting, drawing, and shop as well as the rudimentary sciences such as chemistry and botany (which I found very boring, particularly because they required memorizing classifications). I did not mind physics or zoology, and I loved all the other courses, including mathematics and the sports part of physical education, which we had daily. I was not good (too small) in gymnastics, but I learned to swim, skate, and ski before I had entered high school, and these we did in as well as out of school.

We often went cross-country skiing many miles across hilly parts of our countryside. The area was wooded in part, with open spaces as well. Once I lost balance and skied straight into a tree (remember the New Yorker cartoon?) and was taken home with a big bump on my forehead. We also used to ski to and from school when the snow was high.

My sister Karolina and aunt Chana apparently lost a year in transferring from public school to high school so I wound up in the same class with them. This was a source of fun for the teachers who would call on me with "brother!" or "nephew!", while my sister would be called "sister" or "niece," and Chana "aunt!" We got used to it.

I achieved special recognition in history and in mathematics. Reading historical novels and discussing politics with my father gave me an advantage which did not escape the history teacher. Whenever he tossed a question to the class and did not get a satisfactory answer, he would turn to me: What do you think, Mr. Minister? The math teacher also realized that I dabbled in math on my own. He, therefore, always called me to the board to initiate a new topic. I resented it at first, but was happy to be rewarded the last two years of high school, when I was selected (as a good mathematician) to run the town weather station which was located in the high school. Every day I checked the temperature, direction, and speed of the wind, clouds, precipitation, and barometric pressure. The numbers were telegraphed to Warsaw. From time to

time some freakish weather was reported by radio Warsaw. If they reported it from Tomaszow, I felt very proud.

My short-lived career as a violin student started in high school. Our shop teacher whom I otherwise feared (shop was my worst subject) taught violin privately. He was expensive, so when my classmate Slugocki (son of the director of the public school) proposed that we take lessons jointly, my father agreed. I suffered about 3 years of lessons (1 hour a week) that did not get me far, because Slugocki kept me back. Though he was very artistic in painting and drawing, his musical talent was practically nil. I dropped the lessons and tried to teach myself, with little success. I always regretted this lack of proper early training.

My progress in high school was very good. My only serious competition in the subjects in which I excelled was a girl named Golda Brinker. Unfortunately, she got involved in politics in an illegal communist organization and was kicked out of high school just before graduation. During the war she fled to Russia and later became a member of the Polish government when the Soviets took over. She went into exile later, 1968, but I lost track of her. Her family is an interesting case study: She had two brothers and two sisters. All, except one sister who was mentally ill, were known to be intellectually brilliant, but as Jews had no real opportunities. Golda's oldest brother converted to become an Anglican missionary and divided his time between England and India. According to my uncle Natan, in the 1930's, this man was often seen in the audience at Zionist congresses in Switzerland. Clearly his conversion was not genuine, but it helped him and his family. The other brother also converted in order to enter university and got a government job in engineering.

Three other "geniuses" were one grade ahead of me. They were: Fishelson, Fogel, and Edelstein. They showed off by engaging in Latin conversation privately and publicly. I was close only to Chaim Fishelson, because he was a chess player. He was the champion in Tomaszow and was always eager to find fellow players. His family lived on main street. If you were a chess player and walked by their gate, Chaim would grab you and pull you in (he was strong) to play chess. This I did not mind as I wanted to improve my chess playing. As soon as we sat down to play, he asked his mother to bring "compote" (stewed fruit) and some bread for us. He loved to

eat-if he finished the compote before the bread he would ask for more compote; if he finished the bread first, he would ask for more of that-and dragged out the eating until we finished (slowly). (Of the three friends, only Edelstein survived the war.)

Returning to my aborted musical career: I used to listen to the latest hits played over the radio broadcast from nightclubs in Warsaw. I memorized the tunes I liked and was able to play them on the violin. The father of one of my friends, Silberman, was the local barber as well as leader of a band that played at balls and dances almost every weekend. Since there were no music stores in Tomaszow it would take a long time before a hit was popular enough for the band to finally get the music. My radio picks and violin "transcriptions" became a shortcut, quite helpful to the band. Only once did I try to turn my services to my own benefit: I composed a tango that sounded like the many lesser ones and submitted it to the band without revealing its true authorship. They played it in good faith once or twice. I don't quite remember it now, but the lack of success put an end to my composing career!

Aside from reading, music, chess, and competitions with math problems, the most important social activities were sports. I was among a group of high school boys (in fact, I was the youngest) who organized a "Jewish sports club" to play soccer and volleyball, to go on outings in the summer and go skiing in the winter. [See picture of Lou's party...] Swimming and skating did not require a group, but we would meet anyway in the large municipal pool and on skating ponds. We had no telephones (with a few exceptions) so to arrange a spontaneous meeting we either walked out on "the corso" on main street, to await serendipity, or walked around outside a friend's window and whistled our melody (it was taken from a Kuhlau piano). A responding whistle was the expected signal.

These activities went on all year, but especially during the summer vacations. Some summers I took vacations out of town. During the last three summer vacations of high school my sister Karolina and I went to a summer camp far away in the Carpathian mountains (Tatarov). Close to 100 Jewish students from Southeastern Poland would spend a month there. The mountains and the river (Pmt) made a beautiful setting, and meeting kids from different places was exotic and exciting.

When I was still in elementary school, we-that is, my mother and the three children-sometimes spent two weeks in Jozefow, about 20 miles to the west, as guests of my mother's sister Hinda. She had three daughters (Guta, Mina, and Atara) all younger than me. They had extensive properties (perhaps a flour mill) and a cottage in the woods. One day (I was 8 or 9) a terrific summer storm developed. Lightning struck our cottage and several others, which went up in flames! We managed to jump out a low window and ran through the burning forest to my aunt's house in the town. From that time on, I took a strong interest in observing the sky and predicting the weather. I was ripe for the later assignment as weather boy in the last years of high school.

Throughout my high school years, both the international situation and the domestic Jewish conditions (or, conditions for Jews inside Poland) kept deteriorating. A year after I started high school (1933) Hitler became chancellor of Germany. From radio Berlin we heard the ranting and ravings which threatened the destruction of the Jews everywhere. Compared to his venom, Polish anti-Semitism was almost benign. But as fascism spread elsewhere, it grew in Poland, and anti-Semitic measures became government policy, especially after 1935 (the year Pilsudski, the Polish leader, died). All kinds of educational and economic restrictions proliferated, and Jewish emigration was openly encouraged. Unfortunately, there were no takers. My father wrote to his aunt Esther (sister of my grandmother Lederkremer) who was living in Youngstown, Ohio. He asked for help with a visa to the U.S. Aunt Esther replied that the situation in Ohio-in all of America, for that matter-was desperate. It was the time of the great economic depression. My father replied with an invitation for her family (the Ulanskys) to come to Tomaszow. "At least, you will not starve," he wrote. (I found this out from Aunt Esther when I visited her in 1949).

My father and I kept listening to news from Warsaw and abroad about the war in Ethiopia (1935-36) where Mussolini invaded; the Civil War in Spain (1936-39); the German remilitarization of the Rhineland (1937); the Anschluss-the takeover of Austria (spring 1938); and the Sudeten crisis against Czechoslovakia (September 1938). Clearly, the noose was tightening, and an impending war was predictable. Yet all was quiet in the "eye of the storm,"

except that the gathering clouds directly affected my plans at high school graduation, even before I actually found myself under the Nazi boot.

Tomaszow Lubelski: Historical and Demographic Background

Tomaszow Lubelski was founded in 1590 by the Polish nobleman (Marquis) Jan zamojski for his son Tomasz. Earlier, he had founded Zamosc, his own seat, about 20 miles north of Tomaszow. Zamosc is a more picturesque (baroque) town. It was home to two famous Jewish figures: the writer Y.L. Peretz and Rosa Luxemburg, the head of the German communist rebellion in 1920. In the 1930's, Zamosc had a population of 30,000; Tomaszow had about 10,000.

The earliest mention of Tomaszow in a local history book is that soon after its founding a nobleman with his family drowned in their carriage, as the horses plunged into the mud (in a severe rainstorm) on .Krasnobrodska Street (where my family lived three centuries later!). This was the same street I crossed daily on my way to public school.

By the 18th century Jews were sufficiently numerous in Tomaszov to build an imposing synagogue, again close to Krasnobrodska street. In my time, the Jewish population of Tomaszov was 75 % of the total, or over 7,000. As was true of hundreds of other small towns (shtetls) in Poland, Jews were the majority. They were a smaller proportion in big towns (about 30% in Warsaw). Of course, about 70 % of the Polish population lived on farms. Very few Jews were farmers. They could not own land under Russian rule.

At the end of the 18th century, Poland lost its independence. It was divided up between Germany in the west, Austria in the south, and Russia in the east and center the biggest part. Tomaszov was in the Russian part, only ten miles north of the new Austrian border, an area called Gallicia. Poland gained independence in 1918 after World War I, at which point Tomaszow found itself almost in the center of the country, as parts of the Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania were incorporated into Poland.

Poland lost its independence again in 1939 when the Germans invaded and touched off World War II. My childhood and teenage memories are restricted to this interwar period, more a truce between hostilities than genuine peace, a distinction we did not recognize at the time. After September 1939 the Polish-Russian border was moved all the way west to the River Bug, about ten miles east of Tomaszow, and stayed this way after the war in 1945, while Poland became a satellite of the Soviet Union. Poland regained independence in 1989 when the Soviet Union collapsed, but the borders of 1945 remain. Poland was a poor country, largely agricultural, with some small industries (mainly agriculture-based and textiles). The Jews, whose numbers reached over three million (in a total population of about 30 million) lived mainly in small towns. They were owners of small stores, craftsmen, workers in the needle trades, and much restricted numbers of professional occupations.

Initially in the interwar years, Jews fared better in Poland than under the preceding Russian occupation, but in the 1930's popular and official anti-semitism was on the rise. Despite so much poverty and unemployment, Jews in Poland managed to maintain a thriving cultural life and an active political life. Yiddish theater, music, literature-even movies-proliferated, especially in larger towns, but even in Tomaszow. Yiddish was the language of the masses, but most Jews spoke Polish even if not very well. An educated Jew was recognizable by his perfect, literary Polish. Some Jews also spoke Hebrew. The religious Jews learned and prayed in Hebrew. Zionists learned it as a secular language. Although Jews were restricted in academic pursuits and in the professions, they nevertheless had a strong impact on Polish culture. They were the greatest poets (fuwim and Slonimski), musicians (Rubinstein, Huberman, Fitelberg) and mathematicians (Tarski, Banach). These were, of course, assimilated Jews, but they did not deny their Jewishness. Despite the strong pressures to convert, very few Jews did convert to Catholicism. (One mass conversion by a Jewish group of about 30,000 so-called Frankists took placed in the 18th Century when Polish law declared all new Jewish converts to be noblemen, with all the attendant political and economic privileges.)

Prior to the 20th Century, the overwhelming majority of Jews in Poland were Orthodox. There were, of course, gradations in religiosity, cultural differences between Hasidim and Misnagdim, as well as followers of various famous Rebbes.

By the time I was a teenager (in the 30's) the orthodox Jews in Tomaszow, as elsewhere, constituted no more than half of the Jewish population. At least a half were secular; still, most of these kept kosher homes and attended synagogue on Shabat and holidays. The secular Jews were politically divided mainly, in about equal numbers, into Zionists, Bundists, and Polish assimilationists. The Zionists wanted to create a Jewish homeland and, eventually, a state in Palestine. The Bundists, who were Socialists, believed that the adoption of socialism would make it possible for Jews to live together with Poles and to contribute to both cultures. The Jews who assimilated hoped that democracy would someday come to Poland and that Jews would receive equal treatment.

All of these movements were very vociferous, organized into clubs, soccer teams, publishing papers, petitions, debates, and so on. Examples of this political and social diversity can be seen in my own family: My father was a liberal assimilationist who hoped for a Polish democracy. He was a Polish war veteran and patriot. He was a Revisionist Zionist, a follower of Jabotinsky (later the part of Begin). Jabotinsky foresaw the Jewish catastrophe in Europe and urged a mass outmigration. He also urged military training, warning Zionists of the necessary struggle for independence. My father was a sympathizer, but he never seriously thought of migrating to Palestine. In my teenage years, I could never warm up to the idea of leaving Europe for a desert and swamp full of malaria among hostile Arabs. I understood Jabotinsky's warnings, but did not really believe the dire predictions. After all, I believed that the Western powers and the Polish Army would be able to handle Hitler. I did not actually think of migration anywhere until after high school graduation. Nor was I interested in joining any political movement. To me, being organized meant a loss of freedom, whatever my political convictions-.

My mother and older sister were not political, nor were my father's siblings. My mother's brother Natan was a Zionist, left of center as most Zionists were; so was his younger brother Meier. His brother Haim-Yonah was a Bundist. Natan became a journalist and political leader (he worked with Ben-Gurion personally) in the 30's when he left for Palestine. His brother Israel joined him, but was unhappy there. He, as did Haim-Yonah and his sister Rivka (Ypyche) ended up in Argentina.

Some-but not many-of the young Jews flirted with Communism. The party was outlawed, and police surveillance was rampant. At any rate, the Soviets were not popular in Poland-this, despite their propaganda, which was understood to be false. Past experience of Jews and Poles with the Russians was a guide. Still, when Hitler invaded Poland in 1939, about half a million Jews, including my family, fled to the Soviets. (See my uncle Natan's pages "On the city of my birth" that capture both the vitality and hopelessness of life and youth of that period in Tomaszow.)

High School Graduation and Departure (1938)

The last year of high school was devoted to a thorough review of all we learned the preceding five years, in preparation for the comprehensive exams which had to be passed to get the graduation certificate ("matura"). This made you a member of the "inteligencja" and entitled you, in principle, to apply to University and to enter professional or bureaucratic careers.

Although Jews could apply for admission to universities, the restrictions were even-more severe than for high school admissions. Entrance exams were used as a way of eliminating Jewish applicants, so the chances of being accepted were very small. Knowing this, some Jewish graduates applied to universities abroad, but most countries were not eager to grant visas to Polish Jews, fearing that they would not want to return to Poland after completion of studies. Moreover, it was financially costly.

My father was willing to finance my studies abroad if they did not accept me in Poland. So, I applied to the School of Engineering (Politechnika) in Lvov which was only two hours away by train and which had an excellent reputation. At the same time, I applied to universities in Czechoslovakia (Brno), Italy, and Denmark. Anti-Jewish restrictions were put into effect in Italy at the time, so I was rejected. Denmark was not eager, either, but the Czechs accepted me. That was August 1938. The same month I went to Lvov for the entrance examination which was quite stiff. I was rejected even though I knew I had answered correctly virtually all the questions.

Out of 20 Jewish applicants, only one was accepted, either at random or with the help of some pull.

So, I got ready for the only alternative-Brno, Czechoslovakia. But the political situation got in the way: In the spring of 1938, Hitler marched into Austria, which, not unwillingly, became part of Nazi Germany. At this point, the Nazis started a campaign against Czechoslovakia: They demanded that the Czech region of Sudeten (containing 4 million inhabitants, over half of them Germans) be turned over to Germany. The Czechs refused and hoped for support from the Western powers with whom they were allied. The help did not materialize. England attempted to mediate the conflict, but by September, they (England and France) wound up betraying the Czechs in a Conference in Munich: All of the Sudeten was to be handed over to Germany. The Czechs objected, but did not dare put up a military defense all alone. The government resigned, and a new government, which accommodated the Germans, was installed in Prague.

After the crisis was over in October, I was ready to enter Brno's Technical University. In order to validate my entrance visa I first had to stop at the Czech embassy in Warsaw. I said goodbye to my family and friends with a light heart as I expected to be back soon for vacations (in the winter and/or spring), and I was looking forward to a university career. I did not have the slightest notion that I would never see my family again.

In Belzec (our railroad station) my father and I took the train to Warsaw. We went to the Czech embassy where we were confronted with bad news: The visa issued by the pre-Munich regime was no longer valid. I don't know how my father managed it; he made a big scene at the embassy. He had some Czech friends from his days as an importer of Czech agricultural machines. Anyway, the next day I was issued a new visa. My father very happily returned to Tomaszov. I was accompanied on the train to Cracow by my uncle Israel Eisen, who was temporarily in Warsaw. He said goodbye in Cracow, and now I was on my own. We crossed the Czech border. I soon fell asleep and, had a fellow passenger not awakened me in time to get out in Brno, I would have wound up in Nazi-ruled Vienna.

The Year Before the War: Brno (1938-1939)

Here I was, all of sixteen, all alone in a big city (half a million) with people speaking a comical language (partly similar to Polish but with strange accents). Fortunately, my father had gotten in touch with a family in Brno who were relatives of some friends in Tomaszow. The man who came to greet me, named Flinder, was a military doctor, a major in the Czech army. He helped me with formalities and put me up in a hotel in midtown. I had some money that lasted less than a week. I could not check out of the hotel without paying them, so I stayed there another week, living mainly on chocolates that were farewell presents brought from home. Eventually, the money from home came. With Flinder's help, I found a room for rent with a Czech family near the University. I registered for classes, already a month late, and had to catch up with coursework while learning the language.

During the first semester, I made rapid progress in all respects, including voluminous eating, Czech style, with plenty of beer. I was not a big eater at home, but eating dinner with a Czech family who cooked for students, I had to keep up with my dinner-mates. I took a lot of excursions in the city and beyond and wrote long letters home describing the big city, its people, and university life. Czechoslovakia had the traditions of a liberal democracy-people were friendly, and the standard of living was quite high.

Aside from Flinder's son, Jenda, I made friends mainly with foreign students, most of whom were from Bulgaria. Two of them were Jewish. Surprisingly to me, they did not understand Yiddish but spoke a Spanish jargon, Ladino.

Brno is the capital of the Moravia Province, north of Vienna (about one or two hours). Before the first (world) war (1914) Czechoslovakia had for centuries been a part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Czech national rebellions against Austria erupted from time to time and were put down brutally. The leaders were locked up and tortured in the prison fortress called Spilberk (Spielberg in German). This fortress, up on a high hill, loomed over the city, visible from everywhere below. It was a must-see for tourists and newcomers, like me, to visit the fortress

which was kept as a museum. I could not have imagined that in less than a year's time, I would be held inside as a prisoner.

As the year 1939 arrived I was getting closer to going home for the June vacation. But a new crisis broke out that winter: Slovak nationalists, with the help of the Nazis, separated from the Czechs by declaring Slovak independence early in 1939. (Slovakia was the eastern region of Czechoslovakia. The Slovak language differs only slightly from Czech; and whereas the Czechs are Protestants, Slovaks are Catholic.) In February and early March German propaganda pictured the remaining Czech Republic as a non-viable entity that needed to be protected by the German Reich. Only half a year earlier, at the Munich Conference, Hitler declared that after the Sudeten he had no further territorial demands!

In the evening of March 14, 1939, my landlady knocked on my door and asked me to listen to her radio, because she could not understand the local station's talk; it was in German. That was it: The Germans called for peace and order as they were marching to "save" the remaining Czech lands.

The next day German troops were all over town, and thousands of Nazi flags covered the city. The Germans who lived in Brno (close to a third of the population) were celebrating, while the Czechs were crying in the streets. Here I was in the lion's den so suddenly! My first impulse was to pack up and go home to my family. My father advised against it. There was no reason to panic, because I was a Polish citizen, and there was peace between Germany and Poland. "At least try to finish up the academic year, if school remains in session," my father wrote. So I did finish the first year in June with good grades and the hope to return home soon. Again, my father pointed out that if I went home I would not be able to come back to continue my studies. Therefore, he advised, I should stay so long as the situation did not change.

However, it did begin to change in the spring, when the Nazis started a campaign of demands on Poland to cede the Polish parts of eastern Prussia, including the city of Danzig (Gdansk) and more. The Poles refused and negotiated an anti-Hitler alliance with England and France. In turn, the Western powers tried to persuade the Soviets to join the alliance. But the

Soviets were not eager to join, and they secretly negotiated an alliance with the Nazis, who gave them better terms than the west did; namely, in case of war the Soviets would be entitled to half of Poland and some of the Baltic states. The Soviet-Nazi pact was revealed the last week of August, 1939 to a shocked world. At that point, I knew (as did everyone) that the outbreak of war was a matter of days. And so it was. Hitler invaded Poland on September 1. Two weeks later Poland was completely overrun by the Germans in the west and the Soviets in the east. World War II was only beginning as England and France entered the war.

My attempts to travel home in July, when the crisis was heating up, came to naught. All transportation to Poland was stopped as troops massed on both sides of the border.

Stranded: Spilberk (1939)

September 1st was a Friday. The weather was nice. I went out for a walk. The street loudspeakers (installed by the Nazis) were blaring military marches, interrupted by announcements of German victories inside Poland. It was an eerie feeling to be inside the enemy camp, this time the enemy of Jews and of Poles: I had a double reason to be afraid for my life. Yet, at the same time, I had a strange hope that finally the world, standing up to Hitler, would surely defeat him. Also with a common enemy, the Poles would change their attitude towards the Jews.

I knew, however, that my days were numbered. Every day I expected to be hauled to prison by the Gestapo (the dreaded German secret police who were the instruments of terror). The third week of September, the mail brought an order for me to appear at the Gestapo office. A group of Polish Jews, some of them long-term inhabitants of Brno, were reporting as well. After a miserable day at the Gestapo we were loaded on trucks and were driven up the hill to Spilberk!

I recognized the gloomy dark passages and cells for prisoners, well below ground. level. The German SS guards (the armed troops of the Gestapo) were stationed at thirty-foot intervals. It was not a welcoming party. Each day we were driven to most exhausting work, such as digging ditches, shoveling snow, cleaning barracks from early morning til evening. Very little

food, awful weather, no warm clothes and guards constantly yelling, taunting, and beating made for an inferno that was difficult to endure. My strength was ebbing; by December I became ill with what later found out was pneumonia. There were two rooms in the prison where sick prisoners lay on cots. A prisoner, a Hungarian Jewish doctor, was in charge of the sick; but aside from iodine and aspirin, he had no medicines. After a few days I fell unconscious. Two days later I revived, and to my surprise the sick room was empty except for me, the Hungarian doctor, and an older prisoner named Amsterdamer who had been critically sick as well.

What happened was described by the doctor: Yesterday a number of SS trucks came to pick up several hundred imprisoned Polish Jews to deport them to Poland (now under German occupation). All of the sick were included as well, except for me and Amsterdamer. An SS officer who was a military doctor determined that the two of us were unlikely to survive anyway and so were left here. At the same time, the following conversation ensued: The German doctor asked the Jewish doctor to diagnose each case, which he did correctly. Then the German asked, "What are you doing about it? You Jewish doctors think you are the best, but you don't have the knowledge of German doctors. Let me give you something and try it on Mincer. You may be surprised!" It was a sulfa drug (a predecessor of Penicillin), and it worked.

As I later found out, the deportees were driven near the new German-Russian border. They were pushed out of the trucks and told to flee across the border. As the prisoners were running, the SS opened fire. Very few were able to reach (temporary) safety across the border.

After several days, the Gestapo in Brno ordered us released, with a proviso that we had to report twice a month to the Gestapo.

Another prisoner who escaped the deportation was a young fellow (a little older than me) named Cholevka. He kept telling the Gestapo that he was not Jewish. He was actually half-Jewish (his father was Jewish, but he denied that, too). They did let him out a few weeks before the deportation. He had a German girlfriend who testified on his behalf. Cholevka became a close friend of mine in prison and afterward. I also became friendly with the family Amsterdamer.

Trying to Escape (1940)

When I returned to my apartment early in January, I was greeted by my landlady who said that I could stay there for the time being, but would have to share the room with another student, a Bulgarian. I was happy not to be out on the street, and rent payments could wait until I had money to pay with. I was lucky to be with compassionate people.

Within days I received two letters from Russia: One was from my father, who reported that everyone in the family was alive and well. They fled Tomaszov when the German army advanced on it. The new Russian border was only 15 miles east. They crossed into a town named Rawa Ruska. A few days later they settled into a town another 50 miles east, named Brzezany in the Ukraine. My-older sister Karolina wrote to me from the city of Krasnodar, deep in Southern Russia, north of the Caucasus mountains. She had spent the year before the war studying nursing at the University of Vilno (now Lithuania). When the Germans came close to Vilno, she fled by train far into Russia. She worked as a nurse in Krasnodar. I was overwhelmed with joy, reading the letters over and over. Since Russia was at peace with Germany (following the August 1939 pact), I was able to correspond with my family until June 1941; at that point, the Nazis invaded Soviet Russia.

I, of course, wanted to see my parents immediately, but this was not possible without a visa from the Soviets. This they would not grant to foreigners. How long could I last in the clutches of the Gestapo, which could crush me anytime? How does one escape?

My Bulgarian roommate, Sava Savov, was a very nice and friendly young man. He introduced me to some of his friends. One of them, Metody Pavlov, suggested that I escape to Bulgaria, using a Bulgarian passport-perhaps his. I took him up on it, but he changed his mind at the last minute, deciding, I think correctly, that the idea was dangerous for him as well as for me. Meantime, I became friendly with Mr. Amsterdamer, the other Jew who survived Spilberk. He was a wealthy businessman in his fifties, with a wife and two daughters. He would invite me to dinner once a week. This is where I met Joseph Goldah and his wife Martha who were also

among the invited guests. Amsterdamer's older daughter was planning to escape Germany by smuggling through the border on a transport to Palestine organized by Israeli guides. All of this was illegal and required money to pay off guards and officials. The cost was 100 British pounds (or $300), a huge sum at the time. Martha's brother Kurt joined such a group of escapees two months before and was already in Jerusalem. Early in the winter of 1940, Amsterdamer's daughter arrived in Tel Aviv the same way. Of course, this was an opportunity I should not miss. The problem was the money.

The only people who might have been able to help were my uncles in Palestine (Natan and Israel) and Uncle Issy in South Africa. I knew they were not rich, but thought, perhaps, that they could get help from other relatives. Since direct correspondence was impossible, I used the Bulgarian address of Pavlov, and his family transmitted letters from and to me. (Note: Britain, including South Africa and Palestine, were at war with Germany. Bulgaria was neutral.) After a few months a letter came from Issy and from Amsterdamer's daughter (named, I think, Ruth), reporting that Issy sent the money to Ruth. Upon receipt of Ruth's letter, Mr. Amsterdamer paid me the sum in Czech currency.

By now it was already June 1940, and, having swallowed Western Europe-Norway, Denmark, Belgium, Holland, and France-in less than two months, Germany changed its policy with regard to Jews. While before, the Germans had looked the other way if Jews crossed the borders out of Germany, now they were clamping down. The illegal transport was no longer in operation. I was doomed to stay in the clutches of the Gestapo.

My longing to go home intensified, and I wondered whether I could get a visa from the Soviets despite their general rules. My friend Cholevka (the half-Jew who was released from Spilberk) encouraged me by proposing that the two of us travel to the Soviet consulate in Prague and ask for visas, as we each had family in the Ukraine. (His fears of the Gestapo did not cease as he had good reason to know.) Although the probability of success was infinitesimal, we went to Prague and were interviewed (separately) by a consular official named Yakovlev. I described my history and desperate situation and my hope of returning to my family in the Ukraine. He said he could not promise anything, as they did not usually grant visas on request, and that I

would hear from him within half a year. Cholevka told me that he tried to impress the consul by saying that he was a believer in Communism. This, it later turned out, was a mistake-the Soviets did not like idealists who were bound to be disappointed once they settled there. His application was rejected.

I wrote home about my application and asked my father to reinforce it by writing to the ministry of Foreign Affairs. This he did, as I later found out from my Uncle Meir. He did so despite the hints he gave me in his letters that he was not sure that my return would be wise. Once again, surprise! In January 1941 I got a positive letter from the consulate! I went there immediately and received an official document, a travel passport. But, the official said, I would have to wait some time for the -entry visa, without which I could not travel. Although this was another disappointment, the document was honored by the Gestapo. I no longer had to report to them and was exempt from the various restrictions applying to Jews. I could breathe freely, though only for the next six months, until the Germans invaded Russia in June 1941.

No Exit (June 1941 to April 1943)

The first half of 1941 I waited impatiently for the visa. The money sent by Issy paid for rent and modest meals for almost two years. Sava Savov and Jenda Flinder shared a two-room apartment with me. Sava was a good violinist and Jenda a pianist. It was quite a pleasure to forget the outside world, where all of Europe from the Russian border to the Pyrenees was under Nazi occupation. The Jewish situation, in particular, was miserable.! learned all the details weekly when visiting the Amsterdamers. Their business was confiscated, as was true of all Jews, including professionals. Without jobs, they lived on savings and on Jewish communal charity. Deportations had not started yet, but random arrests and attacks on the streets were frequent. The radio and newspaper propaganda constantly blared about Jewish iniquity, and Hitler's speeches repeatedly threatened with the destruction of the world "Jewish conspiracy" against Germany.

Goldah, like myself, was a lucky exception, being protected by the "friendly power" of the Soviets. His documentation was automatically granted to him when the Soviets annexed Kishinev (Goldah's hometown) in the spring of 1940. Our fate was to converge even more

closely the next four years. The thunder out of the blue struck on June 21, 1941. Early that morning I turned on the radio and heard the terrifying news that, during the night, German troops had invaded Russia and were making rapid progress.

Now I was not only without protection, but was in mortal danger both as a Jew and as an enemy alien. And so was my family, in the Ukraine, as Brzezany was not far from the border. As for myself, I was certain that the Gestapo would apprehend me in no time and that would be the end. I decided to go to Prague immediately, hoping to go into hiding with the help of the Flinder family who now lived in Prague. I knew that Flinder, a former Major in the Czech army, had a circle of friends of former generals and other Czech leaders. I speculated that they must be either involved or familiar with the Czech anti-Nazi underground. There were rumors about such organizations, but not much evidence. I arrived at the Flinders' apartment about noon, and rang the bell. Flinder opened the door, recognized me. His face paled and he immediately told me that there was nothing he could do for me. I should leave at once because I would be putting his family in danger.

At this point I had no alternative. I went back to my apartment. My landlady told me that a Gestapo man had come to ask about my whereabouts. He left an order for me to appear at the Gestapo office, if and when I came back. I did that, feeling complete resignation. After a harsh hearing, I was delivered into a prison, this time one attached to Police Headquarters in Brno. I spent three months there (July to September, 1941). Though the conditions were very bad, they were not as bad as in Spilberk. The place was crowded with political and criminal Czech prisoners. From time to time we were taken to work in various locations. Hunger and sickness were omnipresent. Luckily, after Spilberk, I never got sick all through the war and at various prisons. I also became stoical in my attitude and quite resilient.

One interesting episode was the arrival of three new prisoners, three captured British airmen who were shot down in Germany and who attempted to flee to Switzerland, but were caught at half way. I was able to converse with them, though the accents were bewildering: one of them was British, one Canadian, and one Australian. They exuded optimism and assured me that the Germans would lose the war. They also gave me some food (including chocolate) that

they were entitled to receive. After a few days, they were shipped out to a prisoner-of-war camp. The episode was a real moral boost for me. Actually, I kept hoping for German defeat all along, but now I felt that this was not merely wishful thinking.

To my surprise, I was released after two months, again with an order to report to the police every week. Once again I was going to live on edge as a Jew and as an enemy alien. The winter 1941-1942 was gloomy. The Germans were pushing ahead in Russia and reached as far as Moscow and Leningrad. In the south, they reached the Caucasus including Krasnodar where my sister was. I had no idea what happened to the family, In the spring of 1942 I received a letter from Josefov in Poland, where my mother's sister Hinda (mother of Atara) lived. It was written by my sister Karolina who said that she travelled to Brzezany from Krasnodar , and, together with my mother and younger sister Fryda, went on to Josefov where Hinda gave them shelter and food. Karolina had married in Krasllodar and her son Roman was over one year old when they arrived in Josefov. Her husband was a Jewish man of Czech origin. Neither he nor my father were mentioned in the letter. I wrote to Josefov but never got an answer. After the war I was told all about it by uncle Meir and Atara:

Meir fled to Brzezany in 1939 when the Germans over-ran Poland. When the Nazis invaded the Ukraine in 1941 and started rounding up Jews, he was hidden by his Polish (non-Jewish) girlfriend Stefcia in her house, where he survived the war. My father, together with other Jewish men in town, were rounded up by the SS troops, driven out of town, never to return. The same fate awaited my mother and sisters as well as Atara's family a year later in Josefov. Atara saved her life by fleeing into the forest with a group of Jewish partisans. Her older sister, Guta, survived by joining a work brigade of Polish women (she pretended to be one) who served as factory labor in Germany.

Beginning in 1942 the Jewish situation in Brno became extreme. Deportations to ghettos or concentration camps in Poland began in earnest and accelerated in the summer. The Amsterdamer family was deported to the Warsaw ghetto, the Flinders to Theresienstadt (Terezin). None survived. Goldah and I met frequently to consult. We were in the same situation as Jews and, presumably, as Soviet nationals.

After the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, Switzerland represented German interests in Russia, while Sweden took care of Soviet interests in Germany. Such arrangements are usually made -in wartime using neutral countries. Goldah thought that the Swedes would perhaps be able to protect us. He traveled to the Swedish consulate in Vienna and asked the consul for help. He could not promise anything, as it depended on the German bureaucracy. What he did say was that he knew that there was an internment camp for Soviet nationals in Wulzburg, Bavaria and that it was not an extermination camp. Perhaps that was the best one could hope for.

In the summer of 1942 an event plunged the Czech lands into a nightmare of terror. Two Czech airmen who served in the British air force landed near Prague and assassinated the German governor of the Czech Protectorate, Reinhardt Heydrich. Heydrich was one of the most vicious Nazis, a head of the Gestapo, and the leader of the plan for the "Final Solution." This was a plan for the mass killing of Jews, decided upon in the beginning of 1942, at Wannsee (in Berlin) to be implemented shortly by Eichman and others.

Nazi retribution for the murder of Heydrich was swift and severe. Lidice, the home of the Czech airmen, was totally destroyed, the population executed. Everywhere else, including Brno, there were mass arrests of suspects, innocents and Jews. I was arrested that July when I reported to the Gestapo. I was put into a large detention center in Brno, while Goldah (as I later found out) was sent to the coal mines.

The detention center was a former student dormitory named Kaunitz, which accommodated several hundred students. More than a thousand prisoners were kept there at any given time.. Almost daily transports sent prisoners to various concentration camps in Germany and Poland. Their numbers were immediately replaced by new arrests. Heavy labor and a starvation diet cut down the numbers as well. In addition the Gestapo kangaroo courts resulted in frequent executions.

Summer and winter of 1942 passed with each day difficult to outlast physically and mentally. Taunting and blows by the SS guards made it all the more unbearable. Selections to

transports I dreaded most: We were told (by prisoners who were cleaning the offices) that the prisoners who were shipped out survived at most a few months. One time, my nerves snapped and I started running to the gate in order to put an end to it. But a guard who walked behind me quickly subdued me, hit me lightly and asked, "Are you crazy?" He took me back to the barracks. From then on, my stoicism (or fatalism) returned.

I observed prisoners collapsing frequently. This was true of older or sick people, especially political prisoners and Jews. There were also criminals in Kaunitz. The criminals were at the top of the hierarchy; they had better food and less crowded barracks, and they were in charge of bossing around the other prisoners. The Jews were at the bottom of the heap and disappeared more quickly in transports.

Much of the working time was spent cleaning the barracks reserved for the SS guards. On the radio blaring in an office we overheard German reports from the battlefronts. Early in January 1942 we heard about the German retreat from Stalingrad, clearly a turning-point in the war. Some weeks later, one of the guards (a bit older than the others) asked me to come into his room. He wanted to know what I thought. "Who is going to win the war?" I said that I really did not know, and how could I know? He said: "You know very well that the Russians are going to win, but you are afraid to say so." He let me go. On another occasion he showed me a place in the barracks where he kept some leftover food and told me I could eat it, when no one was there. This happened a few times until the guards changed.

By April 1943 I had been in Kaunitz nine months, longer than most prisoners, as transports were leaving every day. All the Jews I knew were gone. I expected my turn any day. The day of my transport came the third week of April. They loaded a group of over one hundred prisoners on a train. The train first stopped in Vienna. There was an air raid in progress so they put us underground below the train station for the night. The heavy thunder of bombs from American planes was audible as was the noise from the anti-aircraft artillery. Of course we could not see it, but it was encouraging to know, despite the danger, that the Nazis were on the receiving end from time to time.

One thoroughly demoralizing episode happened that night in Vienna. Among the prisoners from places other than Kaunitz were some young Poles. Two of them were lying on the ground not far from me, allowing me to overhear their conversation. One of them who was shipped from Poland was asked by the other how things were there. The answer was that life is quite miserable under the Nazis. But, one thing is good: the Jews are being wiped out now quite rapidly. The news did not surprise me, but the hostile attitude in the midst of all the suffering came as a great shock to me. I still had feelings of Polish patriotism in me up to this point-but, no longer! I realized that the attitude did not reflect on all the Poles, but it was clearly common.

The next morning the train moved on westward into Germany. We recognized the names of stations, and the stops known for concentration camps located there. At each stop, names of prisoners were read out loud. When they debarked, the train continued.

Since many of the prisoners' names were Slavic, the guard on the train needed somebody to read them properly. When the reading prisoner was sent off the train, the guard asked for other volunteers to read the lists. I volunteered, hoping to find out what my destination would be. I quickly paged through the files to find my name, which was there, next to the destination Wulzburg bei Weissenburg! The place the Swedish consul mentioned to Goldah! At this moment I had the most joyful vision and conviction that my life was saved! Without any real basis, I no longer had any doubt. This feeling remained with me till the end of my captivity.

Wulzburg (1943-1945)

Wulzburg is a medieval castle-fortress (see picture) which served also as barracks for the Bavarian cavalry. Several barracks, including former horse stables, formed, together with the castle, a large quadrangle. It surrounded a large yard that accommodated over 1,000 men assembled each morning and evening for a count-to check if anyone had escaped. One of the barracks contained Jewish prisoners; all the others were for the non-Jewish Russians (and Baltics). Almost all the Russians were navy officers and sailors of the Russian merchant marine. All served on Russian ships which brought goods (mainly fuels and grain) imported by the Germans according to the Soviet-German pact of 1939. On June 21, 1941, the day the Nazis

invaded Russia, the ships and sailors were captured by the Germans. After a while, the sailors were shipped to Wulzburg. At the same time a number of civilians-Jews and others-who had Soviet documents were sent there as well. Groups of such people were imprisoned in Warsaw, Prague, Paris, Belgium, and Holland in June 1941 and sent to Wulzburg a month or so later. Obviously, the policy was not uniform throughout German-occupied Europe. I got to Wulzburg in 1943; Goldah arrived a year later. In many places, Jews with the same passports were sent to extermination camps. It obviously depended on the local German bureaucracy (the Gestapo and the Foreign Office-who may not have seen eye to eye).

When I arrived the prisoners had already experienced close to two years in the internment camp. People were hungry, and some were not well; but the general atmosphere, especially among the young people, was optimistic. Comparatively speaking, the mortality rate was not very high. The guards-who were not members of the SS but regular draftees and somewhat older-did not bother people.

The Jewish prisoners (several hundred of us), who came from various parts of Europe, spoke various languages, but the common language was Russian. The sailors spoke Russian only. It was imperative to learn Russian, which I did (conversationally) in a matter of weeks. I was happy to acquire a number of friends close in age to me. In the Warsaw group were Rudi (Horenstein) and Rysiek (Hercenbergs); Pat (Nieburg) was from Berlin, Sam (Aron) from Paris, and Peter (Schulhoff) from Prague. Peter lost his father Erwin (the composer) a few months before I came. He died of typhus, as did several other prisoners in 1942. Our small group of friends provided physical and moral support to one another, making things much easier to bear.

Soon after my arrival we were sent to work in a quarry a few miles away. This was very heavy labor collecting and transporting heavy rocks on wheelbarrows and lorries. The food was a little better, but far from adequate. Rudi, Pat and I turned out to be lucky. Rudi was assigned to run the crane, Pat spent half the time in the kitchen, and I was assigned to work on a machine that cut marble.

I learned the job from an Italian worker who was scheduled to leave in a few weeks. He was very helpful. He frequently brought food for me and taught me how to avoid danger that the machine posed; the round saw (made of carborundum) frequently cracked and broke, sending lethal fragments of metal into the air. You had to lie down on the floor to avoid getting hit. But there was a change in sound just before any breakage. I learned to recognize it.

The spring and summer of 1943 brought good news from the battlefronts: The retreat of the German army across Russia, the allied victory in North Africa, and the allied Italian campaign including the demise of Mussolini, the Italian dictator. But horrible stories circulated about the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto after the desperate uprising in April and May. We also learned about the massive dimensions-in the millions-of the massacres of Jews in camps, ghettos, and gas chambers, especially in Poland. (One prisoner came to Wulzburg in 1944 from Auschwitz: He was there apparently by mistake. He was an eyewitness to the worst.)

Wulzburg is located north of the Danube, about 50 miles south of Nurnberg. On clear nights we were able to watch massive air raids on Nurnberg. These were spectacular colorful displays of rapidly moving lights (bombardments and flak, chasing and dodging airplanes). It was a morale booster. The biggest excitement came in 1944: the allied invasion of France in June. Before that were the Russian sweep into Poland, and the Polish uprising in Warsaw. The latter was put down by the Nazis right in view of the Russian army. Only after the destruction of Warsaw by the Germans did the Russians move in.

Incidentally, as I later found out, my cousin Moshe Lederkremer participated in the uprising and died in it. A year earlier he jumped out of a train that was carrying Jews from Tomaszow to a death camp and made his way to the underground in Warsaw.

In the fall of 1944 our work changed. We were moved to a factory (in Gundelsheim, not far from Wulzburg) which produced parts for German tanks. We were instructed by Dutch and German foremen how to work big lathe machines. The Dutch, who were apparently conscripted for the job, closed their eyes and even encouraged faulty workmanship-provided it was not discovered before the part was shipped out (a rather fast process). In the spring of 1945 the

factory was attacked by a few allied planes with machine guns. Strangely, I had no fear-after all, the shots were from "friendly fire."

As the allied armies pushed ahead in Germany, American armies moved south in the direction of the Danube. This was April 1945, and the order came from Berlin for all prisoners to be marched south toward the Bavarian Alps. We were marched out of Wulzburg about the 20th or 21st of April, going south in formation. Some units of the retreating German army were ahead of us, and some Americans behind us. I don't know the distances, but we could hear artillery dueling over our heads. We walked several days with infrequent rest. Some victims of exhaustion fell by the wayside. Most were shot by the guards.

Finally one evening they led us to a huge barn full of straw where we fell asleep, completely exhausted. When we woke in the early morning of April 26, all was quiet. We tried to get out, but the barn was locked. We realized at that point that one match could have burnt the barn with all of us trapped in it. Yet, that had not happened. But where were the guards? We broke the (wooden) gates open and ran out-no guards in sight. A look south provided the answer: there was the river Danube and a destroyed bridge across it. Some pontoon boats were on the shore; apparently the guards crossed on pontoon boats and left us in the barn. To our great luck, they apparently did not mind abandoning us to our fate.

That very morning a few planes buzzed us but did not strafe. Also, a German jet plane (their invention of 1945) attacked and shot down an allied plane. It was remarkable to see the jet flying at least twice as fast as the other planes. Fortunately, the war was almost over; the German jets and rockets were too late to turn the tide.

Liberation, Return to Brno, and Escape Once Again (April 26-August 1, 1945)

The Russian officers immediately went to the German mayor of the village, Mockenlohe, announcing occupation by us and putting a red flag on top of city hall. They ordered the mayor to make sure that each one of us was given shelter and food for the duration of our stay. The same day three American tanks stopped on their way south. One of the soldiers was a Jew from

Brooklyn, eager to learn our whereabouts. He said that they were scouting the roads for the army which was chasing Germans across the Danube. The next day the army followed. We were now in American-occupied territory. Our arrangements in the village were approved pending eventual changes.

We were recuperating quickly, eating, drinking and resting non-stop! After about a week I got impatient. Though I had no real hopes about my family I had to find out; and I had to decide what to do, where to go. It was clear to me that going to Poland would be most risky and futile, unless there were family survivors who returned to Tomaszow. I decided that the safest move would be to return to Czechoslovakia and find out from there about the situation in Poland, as well as contact my uncles in South Africa and Palestine. The possibility of continuing my studies was also in the back of my mind.

Peter Schulhoff joined me for the march to Prague, and his home where his stepmother would take care of him. We walked toward the Czech border about five days, stopping at farmhouses for food and for the night. The German farmers, who were afraid that the freed prisoners would exact revenge on them, rapidly complied with our orders. We also stopped at American Army bases from time to time. Peter was a good jazz pianist and would improvise in the lounge. Grateful soldiers would give us some PX's (food and cigarettes). Near the Czech border they put us on an army truck that was going to Pilsen (about an hour west of Prague). In Pilsen we took the train to Prague.

It was the first week of May 1945. Pilsen was the western-most town that American Army had reached. According to agreements between the Western Allies and the Soviets, Prague was to be liberated by the Soviets, after their capture of Berlin. In the meantime, the German army retreated to Prague from the north and west. Czech patriots decided to liberate Prague themselves-not wait for the Soviets to do it. The Germans fought off the Czech militias and would have destroyed the city. However, anti-Soviet Russian troops (Vlasov's Army), who had fought alongside the Germans against Stalin, now turned against their German comrades and so saved the city.

The day we arrived in Prague was the day after the fighting just described. Czech militias were roaming the streets searching for German soldiers who exchanged their uniforms for civilian clothing in order to blend into the population. I said goodbye to Schulhoff, as I was going to take a train to Brno. I had to wait some hours, but a group of militias spotted me and questioned me. I looked like a suspected German soldier, as I was wearing German military boots and pants (taken from a warehouse in Germany). I had no identifying documents, and my explanations fell on deaf ears. They threatened me with execution if I did not produce a witness. Unfortunately, I did not have Peter's address (I had given him mine in Brno). I did have the address of Grossman, another prisoner of Wulzburg, who had insisted that I visit him when in Prague. But Peter and I left the village of Mockenlohe before he did (if he did at all), so it was unlikely that he would have already been in Prague. One of the militias went to Grossman's address anyway and-to my absolute delight-did find him and brought him along to identify me. That was a close call!

I stayed overnight at Grossman's. The next day I was in Brno and went to my friend Cholevka's house. The last time I had seen him was in 1942, before my imprisonment in Kaunitz. I opened the door and saw Cholevka, his parents and his girlfriend sitting around the table. They took a look at me and were speechless for a while, as if a ghost had suddenly appeared. After a final realization, we had a joyful reunion. They invited me to stay with them as long as I needed.

The next day I found out that as a student imprisoned during the war, I was entitled to complete my studies at the Czech government's expense. This included a stipend and housing for as long as it took. Although I was not sure I would stay in Czechoslovakia-depending on news of my family-I registered at the university and got money and clothes; an apartment would be available within two weeks. Meanwhile, I stayed at the Cholevkas.

One night that week there was a knock on the door. Three Russian soldiers entered, asking for Cholevka's girlfriend. A German, she was to be expelled to Germany, following a policy that applied to several million Germans living in Czechoslovakia. This, despite the fact that she was born in and had spent all her life in Brno; moreover, she was anti-Nazi and had put herself in danger by helping Cholevka throughout the war.· When the Russians insisted that she

leave with them I intervened because the Cholevkas could not fully communicate with the Russians. My Russian was quite fluent and so I explained the situation to them and the injustice of the order they received. They were taken aback and left saying that they needed to clarify the matter with the authorities. A week later the episode repeated itself, with three different soldiers appearing at the door. My explanation stopped this group as well. But before leaving, the officer who headed the group took a good look at me and, in an unfriendly manner, asked, "Who are *you*? What are *you* doing here?" It was clear that I appeared suspect to them; I cleared out of the Cholevka's household the next day and was able to move to my own apartment. Apparently the Soviets did not track me down. Perhaps they did not try, and perhaps my fears were unfounded.

Classes at the university started in July, to make up for the lost time (Czech universities were closed throughout the war). My first class was math, the same course I had taken seven years earlier with, surprise, the same professor. His lecture was quite similar to what I remembered, and his style was the same. He even cracked the same jokes. It put me into a weird trance, being pulled back to pre-war 1938 when, in fact, it was now 1945. Nothing had happened in between? Did I have to pretend that, too? I could not stomach the very feeling. I walked out determined not to come back, at least until my plans were clarified. I was sure at that point that I should leave Europe one way or another. I tried to get information from Tomaszow by mail. Eventually I was told by the mayor's office that no Mincers were there. Contacts with South Africa were not yet possible.

Peter Schulhoff got in touch with me. He had a good job at the Czech Ministry of Culture. He hoped to land a position at the Barandov film studios in Prague, his lifetime ambition. He could get me a job at the ministry, but I was not interested. My desire to leave the country was getting stronger. I had the intuition that I should escape before the Iron Curtain shut down, as I suspected it would. The country was de facto under Soviet occupation, and my encounter at the Cholevka's did not bode well. This determination was strengthened by Goldah, who was back in Brno and felt the same way. His wife and son were in France; and instead of their coming home to Bmo, he decided to go to France.

The first step was to leave for the American occupation zone in Bavaria (southern Germany). This was not a simple matter, as it meant first crossing the Soviet-American demarcation line between Prague and Pilsen, then crossing the Czech border to Germany. My unease about Poland was confirmed that July, when papers reported that Jews returning from Russia to Poland were attacked by Poles in a number of towns. The worst was a pogrom in Kielce. Most of the returning Jews were fleeing Poland toward the American occupation zone in Germany. The Americans were establishing displaced persons camps, both for former prisoners, slave laborers and refugees from Eastern Europe. We read also that transports of Jews from Poland stopped sporadically in Pilsen on the way to Bavaria.

The last week of July Goldah and I made our way to Pilsen across the demarcation line; the American and Soviet controls were not very strict. They did not understand our documents, - anyway. (I used the university ID and Goldah used something from Brno to prove that we were only visiting Pilsen.) Once in Pilsen we found out when the special train with Jewish refugees was arriving from Poland. When the train stopped, we jumped up on a crowded platform and blended into the crowd. The train left for Munich. It stopped in a placed called Landsberg, near Munich. Landsberg, I recalled, was a military base, where Hitler staged an unsuccessful coup as early as 1923. This base was now to become a major displaced persons' (D.P.) camp. American MP's (Military Police) led us several hundred arrivals to one of the barracks and showed us to rooms, each of which accommodated more than a dozen people. They apologized for the unprepared housing conditions. They asked us not to leave the barracks, in order to keep the accounting of people and their needs. They promised quick repair and organization. In the meantime, the MP's locked the gates. We were closed inside a rectangular fence.

Goldah and I were not at all eager to settle in a displaced persons' camp nor to be locked up anywhere again. We checked out the fence during the day and found a few places where it would be easy to break out. This we did during the dark night and promptly ran to town to locate the railroad station.

In American-Occupied Germany (1945-1948)

There was no passenger traffic, but occasional freight trains arrived carrying coal. Goldah hopped on a train going west, hoping to get to France, which he managed to do a few days later. I waited for a train going to Nurnberg, which arrived early in the morning. Several men and boys were sitting on a mound of coal, singing in Italian and munching on some bread, which they shared with me after I explained my plans.

I should note at this point that I left Brno without telling my friends, including Peter. All of them felt that I had great opportunities in Czechoslovakia and that I was crazy to intimate (as I had) a desire to leave. Eventually, I wrote to them from Germany. In Prague, some of the people from Wulzburg who had returned at the end of June told me that my friends Rudi, Pat, Rysiek and Sam were in Nurnberg working for the American army and having a good life while taking their time making decisions about the future. I took the train to Nurnberg, hoping to join them, pending opportunities to leave Europe. In Nurnberg my search was futile for two days. On the third day I was told at one of the American Military Posts that my friends were last seen working for the French Liaison Office. People there told me that they left for France quite recently. Again, I was all alone with no clear idea what to do next.

While looking for a place to stay a few days to gather my thoughts I encountered groups of Jewish refugees from Poland. One fellow, hearing my name and origins, told me that his family was related to my mother's. They had lived in a neighboring village. He invited me to stay temporarily with him and his family in their apartment. That same week on Friday evening he suggested that I join them and other DPs for evening services in a synagogue in town. Apparently, that was an occasion to meet American Jewish soldiers who were friendly to the refugees. My conversational English, modest as it was, would be a help.

Sure enough, the meeting was quite warm, the soldiers inquiring about each of us. They were impressed with my English. I told them about my situation and that of others. At the end of the evening, two soldiers took me aside and asked what my immediate plans were. I mentioned South Africa or Palestine, but any plans were far off. In the meantime, they asked whether I would be willing to work for the American army? The work involved a Special Branch of Counter-Intelligence dealing with Nazi members and war criminals. The two soldiers were

recruiting agents. They recruited future civilian employees of the Special Branch who were fluent in German and English and who were proven anti-Nazi. Once recruited, candidates had to spend six weeks in a special school where we would study the history and structure of the Nazi party and other related details.

I promptly agreed, and the next day the two soldiers drove me in their jeep across Bavaria west to a resort named Bad Orb. The school was located in a big hotel. The courses were not difficult and took up only half the day. The other half was devoted to leisure, sports, and socializing. Among the "students" I ran into a woman from Tomaszow named Sabina (Melnyk) who had been a friend of my aunt Sarah (my father's sister). She told me about many of the horrors that befell people in Tomaszow.

The instructors of the courses were American officers who knew German, most of them German-Jewish refugees who had fled to America in the 1930's and enlisted when the war broke out. The head of the "school" was Max Eastman.

After completion of the course, each one of us, singly or in pairs, would be assigned to a particular Military Government Office in a town or village in the American zone. The assignment was arbitrary, but some exceptions were made: when the results of the final exam were announced, I was called into the office and congratulated on handing in the best paper. As a reward I was allowed to choose the place of my preference. I immediately opted for Munich, the headquarters of the American Military Government. My recruiters now drove me and a friend, Eddie, to Munich where we were greeted by our boss, Lieutenant Ettinger. The next day, we were given an apartment in a very nice part of town (Niebelungenstrasse). There we spent almost three years before leaving Germany.

Before we got to the Military Government, we stopped at the "Four Seasons" Hotel in the center of town. This was the place where the 1938 Munich Pact was signed by Hitler and Chamberlain betraying Czechoslovakia and encouraging Hitler's aggression a mere six months later. The hotel was partly damaged but the infamous conference room was almost intact. The four of us triumphantly peed on the floor.

Work in the Military Government's Special Branch consisted of verifying statements on mandatory forms filled out by every German who held a job or was looking for a job. The job was denied for Nazi party members. In more prominent cases, or when suspected war criminals were involved, special counter-intelligence agents would take over. When our work detected one or another category of culprit, it was my job to provide the evidence. My friend Eddie was the investigator in the field, interviewing potential witnesses, and I was searching for documentary evidence (such as lists of Nazi members or various accounts of activities of the more prominent Nazis in the area.) The evidence, including testimony of witnesses, went to military court. After a few weeks, we would hear about the court's disposition.

Early in 1946, I was able to make contact via the APO (the military postal network) with my Uncle Issy. He reported that his parents and sister Sima survived the war in Siberia and were on their way to Poland from where they would contact me. No word about my immediate family. I asked him about the possibility of joining him in South Africa. He was in favor of the idea, so I applied for immigration to the British High Commissioner for South Africa. A few months later came a rejection explaining that only parents, children or siblings were being admitted.

In the meantime, my boss, who took an interest in my history and fate, confronted me one day and asked me whether I would like to emigrate to the United States. The American Consulate was going to open in Munich early in 1946, and he might be able to secure an immigration visa for me. I turned him down-this was before the rejection from South Africa-but primarily because I feared my ability to make a living without any occupational qualifications. I told him that if I have to spend my life as a factory worker, I would rather go to Palestine where at least a larger purpose would be served. He did not argue and admitted that his life as a salesman in America was much harder than that in the Military Government.

A few months later, Ettinger (now a Captain) came to my office and offered me a new opportunity: A man he knew had just arrived from New York. His purpose was to select a small number of Jewish students whose studies were interrupted by the war for scholarships to study in the U.S. These scholarships were a project of the Hillel Foundation, headquartered in New York.

The Hillel Foundation project was launched in 1938, after a suggestion by Albert Einstein to the head of Hillel, Howard Sachar. Einstein anticipated a catastrophe for European Jews in an impending Nazi aggression. This was related to me much later, in 1994, by the 90 year old Sachar at a reunion of former Hillel Fellows.

I immediately agreed to an interview, which went very well. The man from Hillel was impressed and told me (off the record) that he would recommend me highly. A month later, I received a letter of acceptance from New York. However, it took two years until I got the visa. The delay was due to the refusal of the State Department to grant temporary student visas to people who were stateless and who would obviously not want to return to Europe after completion of their studies.

Work at the Military Government proceeded routinely through 1946. We were successful in identifying some of the Nazi criminals. Starting in 1947, the progress of our work slackened, as I could tell by the fact that we received fewer and fewer court dispositions. The politics were beginning to change, with the onset of the cold war making the pursuit of former Nazis a lower priority. By the summer of 1947, I felt that the job had become meaningless, and so I left.

With the help of my Uncle Natan, who arrived from Palestine in 1947, I got a job with the American Joint Distribution Committee. This organization sponsored the Central Committee of the Jewish Displaced Persons in Germany, where I got a job in the public relations section. The main goals of the Committee were to assure tolerable living conditions in the Jewish DP camps and to lobby politically for mass emigration to Palestine. Uncle Natan was in Munich as a delegate of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, maintaining a liaison with the American Military Government and the Central Committee. My job was to translate (into Polish) relevant press reports from German and American newspapers and the radio. I then wrote abstracts which were read in Yiddish translation by my colleague Ilya Mirman at daily meetings of the Central Committee. I also wrote a column on entertainment (music, theatre and movies) twice a month for a German-Jewish weekly. As a result, I saw all the operas conducted by Solti. I also met Leonard Bernstein in 1947 when he visited Jewish DP camps and gave piano recitals.

During those years of temporary residence in postwar Germany, I was reunited with some relatives and friends. In the spring of 1946, I received news from Israel that my cousins Atara and Guta had survived and were living in Bergen Belsen. I travelled there to see them. They eventually went to Israel, as did my uncle Meir with his wife Stefcia, aunt Feige with her husband and two sons, Kopel and Shmuel, cousin Kopel Rabinovicz with wife Genia and son Aron. The Rabinoviczs changed their name to Esteron once in Israel. Yoel Esteron was born in Israel and is now the managing editor of Haaretz, Israel's largest newspaper.

My grandparents Mincer, aunt Sima with her husband and baby son (Yitzchak) left Poland for Israel. I did not see them again until 1956 on my first visit to Israel. Aside from Sabina Melnyk, the only other family from Tomaszov were the Schiflingers whose son Adam had been my classmate in school. They left for America in 1949.

Each of these people had hair-raising stories of survival: Nazi camps, the Gulag, partisans in the forest, hiding by non-Jewish friends, assuming false nationalities, etc. Although each person's story was different, the experiences they described became increasingly familiar in subsequent years through the Holocaust literature. Piecing together the stories told to me by Meir, Atara, Sabina, Kopel and Adam, the following history emerges.

Most Jews from Tomaszov fled to Russia when German armies arrived. In 1940, the Russian authorities sent a questionnaire to each refugee family asking whether they planned to return home after the war or stay on in the Soviet Union. The latter (a minority which included my family) were permitted to stay; the former were deemed disloyal and were shipped to Siberia. Wary of the consequences My father's fear of foul play determined his cautious answer. My paternal grandfather answered differently and so he, my grandmother and Sima spent two years in Siberia, surviving the extremely harsh conditions there. In 1942, they were released after the Nazis invaded the Soviet Union.

My maternal grandparents stayed with their daughter Hinda (Atara's mother) in Jozefov. Later my mother and sisters joined them. In the summer of 1942, the Nazis rounded up the Jews there. Only a few managed to escape to the forest; even fewer managed to survive. Jozefov was

the first town in Poland to be "freed" of Jews according to the Nazi plans. This was just before the industrial murder technology was applied. That technology was first tested in crude form in Belzec, our railroad station. Over half a million people were killed there in the winter of 1941-42. The events in Jozefov are described by C.-Browning in Ordinary Men; Belzec horrors are described by Karski, a Polish eyewitness in his book, Secret State.

From Tomaszov itself, the remaining Jews were deported to death camps in 1942 and 1943. My cousin Moshe Lederkremer jumped out of the train and made his way to Warsaw where he fought in the uprising of 1944 and died in battle. Another classmate of mine, Berek Burstyn, died a hero's death when the Gestapo came to deport him: He shot both SS guards and himself on the street next to his house.

During the first week of 1939 when the Nazis invaded, low flying German planes over Tomaszov machine gunned people in the streets. Among the first victims were my friends Poldek Dornfeld and David Silberman (son of the band leader). Among my friends who survived was Adam Schiflinger who ran ahead of the German armies all the way to Moscow in 1941. Two other classmates of mine fought in the Soviet Army. Shanek Ginsburg lost a leg in the war. Both he and Benio Hochman survived, married Russian women and stayed in Russia. No one knows where.

As I found out from the Shiflingers, my friend Lou Gerson (Adam's cousin) who left for the U.S. in 1938, enlisted in the U.S. Army when the U.S. entered the war. He took part in the invasion of Europe and fought in the Third Army all the way to Pilsen. As I found out from him later, our paths were crossing that last week of the war and we each hoped to run into the other: I guessed that he was fighting in Europe and he hoped that I was alive.

Returning to my career in the military government, in late 1947 and early 1948, the cold war intensified. The Berlin airlift and the communist coup in Czechoslovakia showed my intuition to be correct when I fled across the Iron Curtain in 1945. However, the situation in Europe was getting dangerous. In Palestine, fighting between Jews, Arabs, and the British continued despite, or because of, the UN decision to partition Palestine between Jews and Arabs.

Meantime, Hillel was not able to convince the US Department of State to grant visas to the Hillel Fellows. I was losing hope and by May of 1948 I thought it was a lost cause.

That month Israel declared itself an independent state and was immediately attacked by Arab armies. In order to mobilize men and supplies, Israeli agents recruited young Jewish men all over Europe, but especially in Germany where close to half a million Jews languished in DP camps. By this point, I had almost completely lost hope for getting the student visa, and so I had to make up my mind. Staying in Germany became meaningless. I felt that if I did not register for military service in Israel, I would not be able to go there in clear conscience after the war if Israel still existed. I discussed my plans with Natan who suggested that I could continue my studies in France. As I did not feel that this was a solution, I decided to treat the matter as a lottery: Together with a friend named Meilach (I wanted a witness), we went to the recruiting office of the Hagana early in June and we both declared our willingness to join the Israeli Army. However I told them that if my student visa arrived before my ship left for Palestine, I would go to America. To my great surprise and relief, a few weeks later Hillel informed me that the visa was on the way.

In the middle of July, I boarded the Marine Flasher, a reconstructed "liberty ship" used three years earlier in the invasion of Bremerhaven. The ship was full of DP's emigrating to America.

A Start in the New World (1948-1951)

The journey took ten days. I was seasick half the time. Excitement reached a peak when we saw the lights of New York Harbor and turned north in full view of the Statue of Liberty, at 4:00AM on July 26. Champagne corks popped all around. We docked an hour or so later. All passengers debarked after a check by the immigration officials. I was stopped by them and was told to join them in their car, which took me to Ellis Island, which no longer served as an entry center. It became-as I found out-a deportation center for illegal aliens. Before the gate was locked behind me, I was told that they had to check on the authenticity of my papers, as they had never heard of Emory University.

So, my first day in America, I spent behind bars. I was deeply worried about a possible mix-up and deportation. The next day, they came for me with the good news that Emory was alive and well, and that, indeed, I was registered there. After instructions from Hillel, I left by train for Atlanta.

The beautiful campus at Emory appeared to be in a sea of tropical flowers. I was invited to live in the Alpha Epsilon Pi fraternity house. Best of all, Emory gave me two years of credit after a placement examination that I demanded. I enjoyed the two years at Emory: It was a restful as well as amusing vacation. Emory also launched my career as an economist. I followed the advice of my economics professor (Ernst Swanson) to pursue graduate work, either at Chicago or at Columbia. Thanks to my then future wife, Flora, I did both. We met in Chicago in the Fall of 1950 and married a year later in Philadelphia (her home) on the way to New York. The rest is family history.