

# ISRAEL JUTAN / XAVIER PIATKA

8 July, 1919 - 25 July, 1998

*My life story in my own words...*

## Not An Ordinary Life



From Vilna, Poland – Lithuania – Germany – France, England ... to Cape Town, South Africa

Son – Cousin - Friend - Stamp Collector - Journalist - Holocaust Survivor and Witness

Lino Typer - Salesman - Advertising Executive – Bnai Brith – Sheerith Hapletah – CASPIP

Husband - Father - Grandfather - and everything in between





# ISRAEL JUTAN - XAVIER PIATKA

1919 - 1998

“ NOT AN ORDINARY LIFE “  
My Life Story .... in my own words ”

## MY BIRTH

I was told many times by my father that 'You are one in a million in our faith.' I never knew for the longest time what he meant. Maybe it had something to do with being a Cohen, one of the high priestly tribes of the Israelites, and I knew I could be very proud of that. But later he told me exactly what that "one in a million" meant. He explained to me what it was about me in particular that made me to be regarded as special. And then it was that it all came back to me, all those times that my mother had boasted to me and to her friends about how I was destined to be lucky in life with women. " Lucky in love, my special Issinka", she would say, with a knowing look in her eye, her smile curled up the one side of her beautiful face.

I could never understand why she used to say that phrase, "Lucky in love..." to me. Because as a young teenager, I never felt particularly blessed by good looks or dashing personality. It was certainly not because of my face, long pale, and sombre, with my small heavy-lidded eyes and protruding nose. Nor could it be my build, what with my skinny legs, delicate hands and delicate feet. There was no modicum of masculinity hiding anywhere in the physical form God had bestowed on me, that I could see. This rather anemic, a pale faced serious-eyed, little boy with no muscles to speak of. I was kept indoors mostly, kept from doing any unnecessary exercise because my mother didn't believe in it. I only really started doing anything athletic at high school, when by chance I became a football player, which I suppose now that I think about it, occurred only because I was given the position of goalkeeper as some sort of perverse punishment for my complete hopelessness and utter ineptitude in gymnastics.

In truth, the ropes that hung from the ceiling in the gym room were my mortal enemies and I would not even dare to approach them. And as for the horse, it was my nemesis. There was no way that I could ever hope to get across that old piece of padded leather on sticks. The only way to the other side was if I walked there! Jumping soon became a source of embarrassment, and I acquired many bruises, to my physical as well as psychological well-being. I tried that too many times and the cost to my ego was too expensive. It was entirely offensive to my childish sense of pride and aesthetics to let a dumb piece of sturdy equipment, which tried to masquerade as a graceful live animal, get the better of me.

This led to a sort of internal battle with me and the fake horse, which I assume was interpreted by the gymnastics master as an arrogant obstination on my part. All I know is that he announced my name for being goalkeeper for my team in football. So I imagine that it was in his sadistic revenge against the reluctant "athlete", that he must have specifically put me, a Jew, of course, in the targeted role of goalkeeper to place me in a position where the others could legitimately beat me up with the ball.

But strangely enough, as is the ironic way of perversity, I somehow warmed to that position. It felt okay for me to be there, my back against the hollow net, guarding the vacuum, facing the enemy all on my own. Wasn't that what life was about anyhow? Standing on your two skinny legs, with the ball aimed at you, and only your wits to keep you safe?

So, against all expectations, particularly my own, I proved to be rather a good goalkeeper, and in many cases I saved the ball. It actually felt good to clasp that ball firmly against my chest. It felt almost like I was saving my own honor.

And from there on I went on to excell myself in the 100 meter races, and actually I think I won some quick sprinting races by sheer willpower despite the handicap of my skinny legs. But all in all, the sweaty world of the physical was quite plainly not for me. For me, the kingdom of the mind was much more important and cherishable. At the age of twelve and thirteen, I was already writing little stories and reading with the appetite of a hungry sparrow, all the appropriate Polish literature.

You see, that was my main passion, the safe, non-threatening world of the written word on paper. Even until my old age, I have continued my love for pieces of paper. My stamps, for example. But back then, by the age of fourteen I was already contributing stories to our school newspaper. It was called the "wallpaper", peices of paper with handwritten stories and articles stuck up on a long horizontal board on the wall of a long corridor. By age sixteen, I was the editor. Our school itself, a Catholic parochial school, was named after one of Poland's national heroes, a writer and poet himself, the illustrious Adam Mickiewicz. It was he who wrote about the Independence of Poland in the early 18th century. He represented the pride and passion of Polish nationalism and independence. Oh, we learned all about this famous man who was a philosemite, a lover of Jews, and all of us boys were made to read and study his marvellous book "Pante Deus," in which there was even a story about Jankel the musician. I remember it well: Jankel was a simple Jewish fiddler who was invited to the baron's or prince's castle to play at the court for weddings and other ceremonies. It was especially interesting for me, as well as for the few other Jews in our class, because we were only seven of us, out of a class of forty. The story validated our existence. One of them had paid tribute to one of us. In a story. In the form of art.

But I must return back to the origin of my story. About why my father spoke to me about being one of the chosen from the chosen... and why I was to be deemed "lucky in love" by the woman who herself was never to have that same fortune she cast on her son. It is rather an interesting story.

When I was born, something like eight o'clock in the morning on the eighth of July in my mother's bed in our home, attended by her sister-in-law the midwife, my mother was very very happy that it was not a difficult birth. When my father, the doctor, had his turn to examine the new baby, after I suppose, my being washed and cleaned up before being presented to him, and there being the excitement over whether it was a boy or a girl, ....it was announced that it was a boy, and all the time my father was hoping it would be a girl, because there was the story that he used to say to my mother "Oh, my sweet Vavinka, it'll be a beautiful girl just like you, with your dark eyes and beautiful skin, and lovely hair," and well, now it was announced that "It's a boy!", my father the doctor discovered something unusual.

When I was handed over to him to be examined, the first thing he did, was examine my manhood. Or rather, in all accuracy, I should say he examined my baby boyhood. As he gently



gazed down at his new little baby son's identifying gender piece, I imagine he must have blinked, gasped and then shouted: "Eureka".. he is a Jew already!" You see, as he later told me the story of why I was different and special, he explained that at my birth when he checked my penis, they found a rather remarkable thing. I was born with a penis that at birth was already circumcised! As soon as my father saw this astonishing evidence of natural Jewishness, he quickly hurried to convey the news of the unusual happenstance to his father, Reuven, who then in turn went to several rabbis from all over Vilna. Now came the discussion of the problem of what should be done for the brith milah. For as you know, the foreskin of the penis is to be sacrificed by a the ritual doctor, the mohel, at the prescribed eighth day of the newborn baby boy's life. This is the ancient Jewish tradition of circumcision, which now, I believe of course, is quite a common medical procedure. Back in my day, in the beginning of the century, it was the unquestionable giveaway mark of a Jewish male, and the source of many a taunting by the Gentiles, because circumscision then was solely practised as a Jewish custom.

So the rabbis convened, I imagine with a great amount of nodding and tugging at beards, deciding what should be done with an already circumscided penis. They apparantly came up with a decision that satisfied my concerned father and proud grandfather. So, when it came the eight day, and all the family was gathered to celebrate my joining the brotherhood of Jews by the paring off of some of my precious penis foreskin, the mohel simply recited the prayer and blessing over me and my parents and the whole Jewish nation, and then according to the rabbis decision, all he did was simply make a tiny cut in my penis to show the appearance of a little bit of blood. It was my fate that God had already done most of the work of deeming me a Jew before I was even born!

And so, as my father proudly told me, it was a very special sign for a Jewish boy to be born so, and that is why after my birth, there was a special prayer said for me at the nearby synagogue to which my father belonged. It was an old small building, this synagogue, with the traditional Orthodox arrangement of men on the first-floor and women on the second floor, separated from the men. Now my father was gabbeh, the president of this congregation. I do not believe my mother attended there, for she herself was not very religious, coming from a more intellectually inclined aristocratic Russian household. But for my father, a special prayer was recited, honoring his uniquely sculpted baby, the first-born and only son, destined to be only child, of Zaccarias Jutan, doctor and prominent city councillor, and of course, a Cohen, a descendant of the Holiest of tribes of Jews.

It was this special occasion of brith milah, the welcoming of the baby boy into the Jewish community that was the one and only occassion for which my grandfather came to our house. That is, the house where my mother and father lived. He had not approved of my father marrying my mother, you see. But that is another story. And so grandfather Rueben stepped into his eldest son's house solely to witness the mock brith-milah of his precircumsized grandson. And after he ate the lekach that my grandmother made, the sweet cakes and confectionaries set out on the lace tablecloth near the gleaming samovar, drank a little wine to celebrate the birth of another Cohen offspring, complimented the mohel on a job well done at that, and shook hands with all who congratulated him, (perhaps he might even have taken a peek at me lying in my bassinet) I imagine him putting on his hat and saying goodbye to my father and all the guests and walking out the door without so much as a polite reference to or glance at my mother who

may have been busy in the kitchen. It was a man's affair after all, this Jewish circumcision rite of passage, with women being barred from any participation. And that was exactly perfect for him. He did not want to have to encounter his daughter--in--law from Russia, the one who spoke French but no Yiddish, who walked about with an air of confidence and quite frankly, an air of plain sexuality, that was distinctly affrontive to old Orthodox Jewish men, like Grandpa Reuben. No, a headstrong Jezebel would have no place in his life, or should in his son's life as he tried so strongly to advocate before the non-approved marriage, even if she had just produced his first grandson with the miraculously circumcised penis, the talk of the town.

And as he walked out the door, down the steps into the warm, vaporous Polish July sunlight, I can just imagine the pernicious mutterings and sinister superstitious thoughts that his mind was whispering to him, such mean-hearted malevolent things as made it impossible for My father's father ever to retrace those steps and come back and visit his innocent little grandson with the pre-ordained marking of being a Jew.



## The Young Boy.

The park. My memories from way back seem to start by an image of park. I was always very impressed with park just across the road from our house. <sup>hold</sup> My earliest recollections are about crossing the wide grey cobbled stone road, and walking with my governess into that big tree-lined <sup>Municipal</sup> park. We would stop <sup>^</sup> by the delicate round cupola, where on Saturdays and Sundays, a <sup>small</sup> little orchestra, sometimes a military band, or a group of uniformed firemen, would play some rousing trumpeting marches or tremulous lilting waltzes. There together with many other children I would play. I was a little four year old boy, with long curly black hair, dressed in a sailor's outfit. I had on a white shirt with blue stripes on my sleeves, a big wide navy sailor's collar, tied in the front with a sailor's knot. I wore the matching blue shorts and knee-high navy socks, and very elegant shiny shoes. I remember looking down at my feet and seeing the gleam of black (my mother would spit on the shoes and shine them with her handkerchief.) that squeezed my tiny feet so tightly. The outfit was completed with the sailor's cap resting securely on my head of curls that my mother refused to cut, because in truth, my mother had <sup>like my Dad</sup> really wanted a girl. So anyway, there I was in my beautiful green park, dressed in my immaculate sailor suit that mother had bought especially for me. I remember the park particularly, because I remember the feeling of anxiously waiting, that feeling of eager anticipation, to go there, to cross over our courtyard, open the wide tall iron gate, beyond which lay the

most luxurious park in the world, with the view  
of the large Cathedral to the righthand side, <sup>the ruins of a large</sup> ~~giant~~ castle ~~or build by ancient~~  
<sup>on a hill overlooking the town</sup> ~~faraway~~ kings, and the lazy river to the left, where the  
beautiful maidens and their princes sailed in their boats  
only in the midnight hours when I was asleep. Ah, it was a  
beautiful paradise of peace and beauty, this garden of Eden,  
this park of my childhood.

I listened to my father recall a distant memory of a long-ago  
place of childhood, and I tried to imagine his experience,  
that time, that world. Large green lawns, bright flowers and  
trees abundant in their foliage. (I too had my park of my  
youth, but it was in a differect climate, a world apart,  
another time.) Now I imagine, like some impressionist  
painting, the distant sounds of children playing, ducks and  
geese squawking at the river's edge and the melodic strains  
of the band. It was the lush well-kept park of a by-gone  
world of etiquette, lace, sailorsuits and romantic love. Of  
order residing in fragrant colors placed next to each other,  
neat and tidy, with the aristocratic stone pointed man-made  
church on one side, and the quiet, flowing river on the  
other. And in that park, gazing with wide eyes and mellow  
heart at the beauty and peacefulness around him stands a  
young little boy with long <sup>black</sup> curly hair, proudly wearing his  
sailor costume that his mother had bought him. He leans  
against a willowtree and shuts his eyes, counting down from



ten to one as the other children run and hide around him. "Ready or not" his little voice shouts into the calm of the sheltering trees. He slowly moves away from the tree, his governess watching him from her resting seat on the ornate wooden bench, as he begins his timid search for the other little children who lie crouching<sup>o</sup> in the cool dark places of undergrowth. His little ears can hear the daring revealing titters of one child and then another's teasing call as they lie waiting, excitedly for him to find them. His little ears that peek from under his long dark curly hair. You can just see the earlobes..earlobes fat and fleshy whose future dictates that they will be pulled again and again in reprimand by his mother in accordance with the traditional Eastern European method of parental punishment in the authoritarian style of child disciplining. Those ears hear the sharp calls of the hungry geese and swans that scare him a little as he walks softly and cautiously toward unknown hiding spots. High up he can hear too the occassional twitter of birds exchanging their timeless songs. But what he doesn't hear, he's still too young, is the visionary gentle sighs of that bending willow there by the edge of the river, that still remembers his recent touch. The young boy dressed up in the new sailor suit that his mother bought for him, walking cautiously in his good shoes, cannot hear what the willow whispers down to the river. Even if he did, he would still be too young to understand that the willow, leaning towards the river, was softly weeping for the end of

of the little boy's passing innocence and the arrival of a new age of evil and destruction.

"Dad", I say, "you mentioned something about your father always wanting a girl.. remember?"

"Ah yes," he replies, his masculine body, heavy with age, and experience shifting a little in the chair, his shoulders shimmying for a second as if to get adjusted into a different pose.

" My mother used to tell me always,: Your father wanted to have as his first born, not a son, but a girl. I don't know why, perhaps to have a difference from his brother who had a son already, or perhaps he simply liked the idea of a little girl to spoil and to pamper. So what did Mother used to? First of all, she didn't allow me to have my hair cut. She insisted my hair grow long and curly around my head...like a girl's. So my hair was growing longer and longer. I was about three or four years of age. And from time to time, Mother used to dress me like a little girl, because she designed some beautiful Victorian dresses, (she loved to design clothes) then sewed them up, and fitted them on me. Now this was always done in the privacy of our home, of course. Never did she allow me to go outside with these dresses on, but only inside the house, where she would parade me around in her creations and look at me with adoring eyes.



It happened once that during the time when my father was on his usual travels, she came into my room and told me we were going to have a special day. With great excitement, smiling with an extra sparkle in her eyes, she told me we were going to play a special game. Play a surprise on Daddy!

Before she had said to my father, "WHy do you always bring back only boy's toys from your trips, why not girl's toys too, if you so want a girl?" And my father answered her that that was ridiculous, a boy was a boy, he had a son, and maybe the next one would be a girl, who knows, maybe that could happen."

So today she says to me, "Now Papa is coming back today, and we are going to do something special for him. You and me." First she took me downstairs to our neighbors who had some daughters, and she knocked on the door and asked if she could borrow some dolls for that afternoon because we were getting some girl visitors and would they mind if we took some dolls for them to play with. And so we came back upstairs with two big dolls. Then she showed me what she had sewed, Mother } delete and took out a brand new child's dress. I had never seen it before. It was pink and lacy with long ribbons. "Look at what I made," she said, "Isn't it the most beautiful you've ever seen?" Then she looked at me lovingly, stroked my long hair, and whispered close to my face. "Today, you are going to wear this dress, especially for your father." Then she kissed me on my forehead. And so she put <sup>the dress</sup> ~~it~~ on me, and then

she brushed my hair and put a large pink bow in it, on the top of my head. And she told me exactly how I was to behave. I had to act like "a girl," and when my father came home in the afternoon I must stay in my room and play like a girl with the dolls. Wait, now I remember.. yes. The little girl neighbor from downstairs actually came upstairs to play with me, and I recall she was giggling, hee hee hee, all the time, staring at me dressed in girl's clothing. And then my father came home. I remember my heart beating when I heard the door bang shut and heard his familiar beloved voice. And then he called for me. I heard his footsteps ~~across~~ <sup>partly</sup> the wooden floor, and I knew I must play my part well. Then the moment came when he opened the door to my room and in he stepped and saw two girls in my room, of course. He turned around and called for me, to see where I was. And in great excitement I looked around, smiled and shouted, "Here I am Papa!" He stood still for a moment, his eyes widening his mouth dropping a little. AND then he stared at me with disbelief on his face, and I said again; "It's me Papa."

"But, but... what is this? You are not a girl!", he stammered. But I just smiled and said what Mother had told me to say. I stood up in my pink dress and replied: "Yes, but you wanted me to be a girl, didn't you?"

Suddenly, my father smiled and in an unexpected swoop, picked me up and hugged me close to his body, carressed with my hair and squeezed me tight against his smooth woolen

overcoat. He began to laugh and started to say, in a joke, you understand, "Oh, my sweet little girl,...Ha ha, give Papa a hug, what a pretty girl in a beautiful dress..." but all the time holding me up in his arms and kissing my face, which he had never ever done before. He was not the type to hug a child, you see. He was too serious, too proper. He would always just pat the top of my head, or if he did kiss it would be merely an obligatory peck on the forehead. But never a hug or a kiss on the face. That was the first and only time he ever did that to me. When I was a girl!

It is a strange twist of family braiding, in that one generation can rework itself in a different strand into the next generation. My father had always made it clear to me that he had wanted a son. To name him after his father. To keep the memory alive. And pitiful twist of irony, all he got was one daughter, to be followed by yet another. And to his first born, a daughter, it was clear that being a girl was a disappointment to the one who was most important to me. The difference is, my father did hug me, and kiss me on the face, and stroke and wash my hair. Was I the lucky one, being a girl? Is it some special fortune that dictates that only little girls get hugged and caressed by their fathers, while boys don't? Which law dictates that? Is that not instself, a sexual prejudice, bred in-house? Or was it only some quirk true to my particular patrilineage. Perhaps, however it belongs to some larger truth... that if are not truly loved for yourself, you wish to procreate someone entirely different to you that can be worthy of love... Down to the genitalia.

Name

I would like to tell you now the story of how I got my <sup>literary</sup> name.

I was very impressed with a book written by a Polish writer called Ksavery Pruszezyński. I was about sixteen at the time when I first read this book <sup>progress in Palestine</sup> talking about things Zionist <sup>dream</sup> and Jewish. The name of the book was "Palestine for the Third Time." He describes how he visited Palestine on his <sup>first</sup> visit, and how glorious it was, with dedicated Jewish people making a Garden of Eden out of this wasteland of a desert. It is very possible that his inspiration came from the slogan that we saw everywhere, written by our enemies of course, saying Jews go to Palestine! This was the saying we would see as graffiti on the walls, on banners and then finally in our <sup>Polish</sup> own newspapers. There was a very strong anti-Jewish feeling. Now when I used to write as a teenager for the youth newspaper, I would sign my initials, ~~from my Hebrew names,~~ <sup>from my Hebrew names,</sup> ~~Y. M. I.~~ You remember that at the time I was submitting to the Courier Vilensky, a daily newspaper with supplements for children, as well as the Jewish newspaper.

Now it came to my attention, as somebody from the Courier informed me, that with these initials, with my Jewish sounding name, I would not be able to write much more than the little sidelines and trivial articles. I should rather think about getting myself a nom de plume, he said. So I said: I have it. I have the perfect name for myself. I want it to be Ksavery. Ksavery ... <sup>PIONKA</sup> Pionka. This <sup>is written in Polish, was spelled Piatka, which represented also as a noun</sup> Pionka, as it is written in Polish, was spelled Piatka, which represented the number five, which was the highest grade achievable in school-- the best score, you see. Ksavery, because of this inspiring writer and also because it was such a very aristocratic name, and Piatka, you now know why. And so that is how I became known at the newspaper. This is how they called me; Ksaver, Ksavery, Ksav, whatever, and that became the name I adopted in the world of non-Jews. With this nom de plume I was able to get myself a reporter's card. And so I had this identity of a writer.

So this is one story I wish to settle. And I will now tell you why it is important. During the term of the Russian occupation of Vilna, 1939, 40, 41, it was a time when my father slowly began to go back to his work in the hospital, and started to meet Jewish doctors, younger than him, some of them who worked also in the army. One day ~~he~~ my father came to me and said: I have some good money for you to earn.

What is it?

"You know where Napoleon's <sup>palace near the University</sup> castle is? Well, it is now the headquarters of the Russian Red army. You go there and



present yourself to a high-ranking officer , Colonel So and so, he is Russian but he is also Jewish. He will explain to you the job.

But what kind of job is it?

Just go there and they will tell you. They have some books that have English descriptions of armaments or war strategy, something like that. Look, you will take your dictionary, and you will go there and translate for them. That's all what you have to do.

SO I went there, and after being scrutinized and inspected by five different army officials, I came to this man. He was very happy to see me, and spoke to me a little in ENGLISH. AND I answered back as best I could. AND he looked at me and smiled a big smile under his moustache. "You are ideal for us, young man," he said to me. AND he proceeded to write me down in the attendance book as Israel ~~Jutan~~ <sup>Eitan</sup>. I went there about ten times. IT was very difficult, mostly military terms and diplomatic phrases. AND after that was completed, he had me do, about four lessons I think, some basic English. Like "how do you do.." and "pleased to meet you" and "How is the weather", things like that, and he would give it to me in Russian and I would respond in ENGLISH, and that is how I became the teacher to six to ten high-ranking army officials. I would repeat the phrase in English and they would have to write it down, to listen to what I was saying, then repeat it after me. Majors, colonels, all high-ranking. Because by that time, the connections with the Americans had started to be forming.

"HOW did you know English so well, Dad ?" I asked.

"My English started at <sup>the high-</sup> school. ~~Adam Aniskavitch school~~, in the first grade, for eight years I studied English. A young girl came from England specially to teach English. She was the only woman, certainly, and her and only one other were non-clergy teachers. She was wonderful. Young, pale with reddish hair, and all of us boys would prance around at recess and talk with a falsetto in the "propah English of the Queen!", just like Ms. Windham. Even our <sup>my</sup> Matric I did in ENGLISH, with a marvellous imaginative essay on the CORonation of the Queen and King, 1937."

He took a deep breath, then continued.

"this is the reason, when I was in ghetto, and I was going to a work assignment which was outside the actual ghetto, I learned that the Germans were looking for me, by my name, through the work organization force, the Jewish Labour Bureau, office. You see, the Gestapo had quickly taken over Vilna, within two days, and of course they had swept into Napoleon's

job  
as  
translator

teacher  
English  
to Army  
officers

Mrs Eitan

Eitan

Palace, which the RUSSians had just deserted, just ran out of there, when the GERman tanks rolled in. THE RUSSians had evacuated so quickly they had just left everything lying there in their haste to escape, and now the GEstapo found my Jewish name in the logs of the general to whom I had taught the English. AND so they found all the names. Now, of course, Israel Jutan was a lot more obvious to identify than names like Petrovsky, Mejinsky or some other "insky" which could be any kind of person. But Israel, well, there's no mistaking the Jewishness of that name. So here is the Gestapo, and they have my name and they figure out that the best way to find me is through the offices of the Ghetto Labor Force, where every Jewish person there is registered, other you could not get anything like food etc, you see, and where my friend, luckily, is working. SO he tells me that they are now looking for me. SO we arrange that I must not go out of the Ghetto on any work passes and I should rather stay inside the Ghetto and have a job within the administration right there. I used to go out with Mr. Lazar Feigenbaum as his electrical assistant before. But now, they said that I would make a good "scriba" ---a recorder of events, a clerk within the Office of Labor. And so that is how I began to work in the administration of the Labor office, where the names of those working within the office were never disclosed to anyone. And for working there, I used to get a food card. and with this food card I could get the potato and bread rations.

XP  
job as  
admin  
in ghetto

This I tell you so that you understand when after the war, it so happened that I happened by accident a man in the park, the man who was the editor of the Communist Paper in Vilna, the PRavda, which had previously been the old Courier Vilensky until the RUSSians changed it. I had worked there, remember, under Ksavery Piontko, and here is this man and we see each other and slowly he recognizes me, I recognized him first, he couldn't recognize me I was so thin and emaciated after concentration camps, and then he remembers and says "I have a job for you!" AND this is how in those days I got papers with the name Ksavery Piatka, which were very good, I must tell you. Because in those days the Russians, after victoriously winning and giving Poland the so-called independence, wanted all those people not originally from Poland to go back to their home countries. They wanted them all to go back and become citizens of Soviet Union. But I now had documents that I was born in Warsaw, and my name is not Jutan, so I did not have to return to Vilna.

So this is one story side of the adaptation of a new name.  
Eitan

And second story: When you are in a COMMUNIST newspaper, and all around you is <sup>are</sup> anti-semitic outbursts, and in Kelsa is a pogrom of Jews by the illegal Nationalist movement of Polacks who are xenophobic, distrusting anybody foreign that came into the country to work for the RUSSians when they took

Underground youth 10

over....they were fighting with Russia in the beginning to protect their own independent Poland but they lost,.... anyhow, and Jews who I met in the Russian army, had Russian names, and so I became very happy to pretend to the Polacks that I was an assimilated Jew with a Polish name. It was also something which could give me a good position for the future life, whatever the life would be, whatever would be waiting for me. Now you understand it? How I came to have only documents under this new name. It is because at the time when this old editor of mine offered me a job after the war, I stated to him that I needed documentation. He said: I will give you a uniform, I will give you rank, whatever you need. I will help you. AND we went to the office of records, and he provided me with the documentation as I told him I wanted it, with a photograph and his signature as witness, I got myself a document that stated I was a newspaper man. Now based on these two papers I was able to make an affidavit as to who I was and then apply for a passport. And it was easy to continue that same chain. All the identification was based on that first union card of my being a journalist. ~~Hankla~~ And when it came time to register my marriage to ~~ANushka~~, I registered it ~~only~~ in the courts, ~~besides the inscription in the rabbinical court in Legnica.~~

get  
passport

NOW at this time I need to explain something to you. At the time of 1941 when RUSSIA came in for a short time before Hitler's army, it was the time you remember that I was first working for this editor at the paper, all the Jews from all over Poland ran away from the advancing GERMans, from Warsaw, from Bialistok, from ~~Grodnew~~, from Krakow, they run to Vilna, because Vilna was now under Russian occupation, and there was some kind of refuge and safety here, so anyhow all these people are coming in. But suddenly, there began a movement against those "enemies of the people." And these enemies were of course the Polish army officers or amongst the Jews, it was the Jewish youth from the youth organizations who still dreamed about Palestine, had meetings and gatherings to talk and further those dreams, and they were clearly not accepting the Russian ideology of the propoganda for communism. And so it began to be a purge operation, with the Russians looking for the leaders of these "anti-communist" movements, arresting them and sending them off to Siberia. This was the trend. Now when we heard about this from the newspapers and the rumors flying around about arrests etc. we knew that our cousin David who was a prominent leader in the REvisionist movement must be hidden. AND where was a good place to hide? In our basement. In my father's house, in which our friendly "tenant" the Russian officer now resided and whose trust we relied on.

NKVD - the  
political police

So before Germany occupied Vilna, this is how the timing of it all worked out, there was a big wedding. My cousin David and Sara were married in a very beautiful synagogue,

which is still standing today in Vilna, we called it the choral synagogue because it was the only one with a choir... and it was a most marvellous affair for those times, with many important Jewish figures, and much good food and festivities. And then both of them, through all sorts of machinations and sometimes falsified papers, were able to get visas to leave the country to go to Palestine, through consuls from Peru and Japan and Shanghai. It was the time when a lot of Jews were leaving, through Moscow, with the aid of the American Joint Distribution Committee, with people coming to Vilna with money and papers for Jews to get out the country and emigrate. SO David left, <sup>but</sup> Begin left. But before they left, there was a big raid on the Jewish REvisionist Zionist offices ~~sponsored and~~ organized by the Jewish Communist Party league and youth movements which supported the leftist Marxists ideology. And because we had a good name in the vicinity, and because of our Russian lodger, in our cellar were hidden Begin, my cousin and his wife and other notables from the more right-wing parties. And when they left, my father sighed from relief, and said: "Oi! Thank God they've gone!" We didn't want to think what would have happened if they would have found them there. Violence from anywhere is bad, but it's somehow worse when it's from your own people.

was  
arrested  
and sent  
to Siberia.

When <sup>Daniel</sup> ~~David~~ went, it seemed like a part of my life had gone with him. I don't think I realized it at the time. But I did feel his absence. I had lost my cousin, my friend, my sometime advisor. During all this time, since I had rushed back to Poland from Paris, I had heard nothing from my mother. The last letter from my mother, I think it was even <sup>only</sup> a postcard, was in 1940, I think. It was before the German occupation of France, I am sure, and in it she <sup>asked</sup> wrote how am I and so on, and from the newspaper she knows that we are now under Russia and there is no war, and she is very happy about it, and perhaps there will be peace.... a very neutral letter without letting me know anything about how she is, but rather more about me. And this was the last time I ever heard from her.

A few weeks  
Daniel



## THE DAWNING.

"Now when it comes to the actual awakening of my manhood, I remember it happened to me at about the age of five. Next door to us, at number 6, used to live on the second floor, a family with the father who was an electrician. There was a boy who was my age, and a girl who was about a year older than I was. And we used to play all kinds of games together. Indians and cowboys, pirates and robbers, hiding games and so on and so on, and of course one of the plays was "doctor." Now, my father being the doctor, I felt a special connection to this particular game, as if it was my special privilege by virtue of my heritage, that I should play the main role. I remember we tried to make sure we had instruments and such to lend the game that feeling of extra authenticity. I was keen to make the play seem as real as possible. What else is the point of child's play? And so, very creatively, we used to take, I remember, a can from the shoepolish, clean it out and make a hole in it. Then we passed a long piece of string through it and then attached another long string to that one, and that was our telephone. But this elaborate gadget also served a double purpose. With slight adjustment of the string and our imaginations, we also used this instrument as a tube to measure the beating of the heart. And we would move this all over the various parts of the body, anywhere we thought it possible to detect a heartbeat or maybe even the sound of an imaginary hidden disease. And so the three of us played doctor-doctor. Now understandably, this game of doctor has more to do with the discovery of genitals than of rare fake diseases! And we had heard some interesting things about those mysterious genital parts from what the children who lived downstairs, the janitor's children, had passed onto us with great authority.

Our janitor, the man who cleaned the streets and garbage outside our apartment house, Arturo, was a gigantic red-faced man, with a big moustache, Polish style, who was nearly always drunk and who would yell and beat his wife, (we heard the constant shoutings) and had about seven children. Now, me and my neighbors would play sometimes with these children, out in the courtyard and in the cobbled street. It was they who taught us how to say swears and other bad words. They were the ones who educated us on the more basic facts of life that we were never to learn from school or home. It was the oldest boy, Panek, who seriously pointed out to us what it was that the dogs, mounted on top of each other and jerking spasmodically with toothy grins, were doing in the streets. We watched with fascination, until his younger sister with the missing teeth that made her speech full of spits and sprays, announced to us all that people do that kind of thing too, and that was the way we all came into the world.

"Only people do it lying down in bed," she gushed, " with the daddy on the top and the mommy on the bottom." "People don't do it like dogs," she instructed, " that's only the way animals do it. People do it different, but it's thtill the thame thing," she explained, her tongue darting back and forth to fill the space where her teeth had been. That being said, her little speech over, she turned and skipped away to the jumping game

of hopscotch she and sisters were playing and she left us more higher class naive children to gaze with awe at the furious scene of canine frenzy before us. It stirred within me a strange sensation below my navel to watch those dogs, and in that moment, my mind grasped aimlessly at forming a picture conjured up from the incredible information just handed to me that humans did the same things dogs did, only in bed. I tried to imagine it, how humans could do this wild thing, but somehow I just kept having an image of dogs' tails wagging and wild jerky movements, and then of course, my perplexed young mind went blank. At this point, Panek, the older boy, surrounded by his ragged array of sisters and brothers, called us eager students to come with him to the back alley, the narrow place between the end wall of the apartment block and the other building. It was there in the shadows that he would stand in the middle of us all, there in the back alley way where no-one could see us, that he would assuredly demonstrate his advanced knowledge of how it was that sex between adults was performed.

"It's simple," he boasted. "The man takes out his john", he explained, "then he puts it in the girl's john, and then the girl has babies. That's all there is to it," he said disparagingly. My head reeled with this information. First of all, I didn't even know a girl had a john. And how curious it was that you could make babies with the same thing you made pee-pee with. Wait a second, what happened if you wanted to make pee-pee at the same time you were making a baby? And how did the baby get out of the john...and ...and... Well, it was all a bit much for me to fathom, so I settled for the basic outline that Panek, his little sister and the dogs' live performance had given me. I figured that somehow, sooner or later, probably much later, I would find out the rest.

Well, once we had this secret understanding, it was only natural that children with inquisitive and intelligent minds like our own would want to figure it out more for themselves, right? So, one day, I remember we were playing doctor over at her place, the electrician's daughter, when suddenly she spontaneously picked up her skirt, and I saw with astonishment that she wasn't wearing any panties at all. Then she proceeded to lay herself down on the little rug on the floor, looked up at me earnestly and said determinedly: "You must put it in!"

With heart beating wildly, I did what I thought she expected and wanted me to do, and when I did, she all of a sudden began to scream and yell at the top of her voice. Her mother instantaneously appeared at the doorway of the room in time to see me lying on top of her daughter. With a shrill shriek and a series of quick brusque movements of her very strong arms, she pushed me out of the apartment, and slammed the door behind me. I walked over to my own apartment, still full of the shocking vision of soft girl flesh, and went to my room.

I was playing quietly with my toys and when my mother came home. Now she slammed the door shut behind her. She burst into my room and started to yell at me.

"You brute, you pig," she shouted at me in Russian, a whole torrent of offensive words I didn't even understand, while she waved her arms around and pointed her finger at me. Then she put me over her knee, took down my pants so that my "tochus", my bottom was bare to the slap of her hand, and really gave me such a hiding on my behind like I had never had before in my life. I remember crying and sobbing in my room from this hitting.

I was not allowed any food, and I had to go to sleep hungry, hurt, and cursed by my mother. I knew it had something to do with the events of that day, something about me and the electrician's daughter, and my penis and where it should be going, or not going! The next day I was taught the lesson of boy-girl relations by my mother. She was always very strict in her style of childraising with me, and what she said was the absolute rule.

"You must never do it again!" she warned me. I wasn't sure what the "it" meant exactly, but my childish powers of reasoning attributed it to taking out my penis and placing it near a girl. I now understood from my mother's reaction that that was a forbidden thing, which I was knew now would lead to screaming girls, angry women, and slamming doors. And when my mother decreed I must never do it again, I wouldn't dare to it again."

He looked up blankly for a moment, this seventy year old man, with the startled innocent eyes of a five year old, looking up from his toys at his wild and angry mother.

"Did you have any idea what she was talking about?" I asked.

"No," he replied immediately, shrugging his head. "I'm sure I didn't, because it was not in my realm of experience. I was just not aware of those kind of things. And now my mother was telling me all these things I musn't do. I mustn't even "look at a girl's you-know- what, " she said to me. I knew how fussy she was with what my eyes saw. My "looking" was to be always censored by her. When I was about four already, we used to go to the cinema together, my mother and I, and if there was some romance or kissing or touching, for instance in a love story, I remember Dorothy Lamour in a film and everybody was excited to see how they kiss... Well, my mother would suddenly cover my eyes with her muff that she always wore to keep her hands warm, and so there I would be, suffocating under my mother's fur muff pressed over my eyes and nose, because I was not supposed to see the adults kissing on the screen. Of course, later I would see the whole thing, not really understanding anything, because it was silent movies then, only music playing and words on the screen to tell the story, and I couldn't yet read so quickly. But anyway, so this was my very first encounter into the mysterious world of sex."

He nodded his head, and smiled: "So much for my early luck with women!".



We would also play tricks on Bertha, his sister, the little snobby queen with the nose in the air. We only wanted to do one thing to her, and it was only to pinch her fat behind as she sat and did her homework or push her off the piano stool as she practised her scales. Aunty Sarah used to shout and scream at us: You hooligans, get away from her, what are you doing... GO, get out of the house, you hooligans! Bertha was older than us both, and always so serious and pompous. She never changed. Always a carrot up. And Benny's older brother, Lazar, was a very talented pianist already as a teenager. When he was seventeen, Lazar was playing at the Polish officer's club in the centre of town, and he also had a job playing in the cinemas for the silent movies. He improvised music with the action on the screen. Because of him we were sometimes able to sneak in and see the movies now and again. Aunty Sarah, she was the caretaker of them, because their mother had died early on. Now Sarah, she was the youngest daughter of grandfather Simon. And the father said that according to the law she must go to Uncle Leon and perhaps he will marry her. Because you know, that by Jewish law, if a man loses his wife, he can marry her unmarried sister. But Uncle Leon insisted that he preferred to remain a widower, and so, according to his will, Sarah became basically their housekeeper, servant, caretaker, and she was given her own room to live in. I have a picture of Aunty Sarah in my mind, standing in the kitchen, koshering the meat. I remember the meat lying on the mat, a woven straw mat, waiting to be "kashered". She would stand by the window, little fat Aunty Sarah, in front of the double window, two windows to have a stream of cold wind coming through. And there was always a lot of salt on the meat, and I always wondered why it had to be like that. WHY salty meat? I couldn't understand it was the "kashering" of the meat, because in my house I never saw anything like that. Funny, the images that stay behind, of inconsequential things... like a still life... meat with salt on. Like an Old Dutch interior painting, but with Aunt Sarah in her old fashioned skirts and up-to-nech blouse of not bright colours, a proper "shaitl" as her dark hair and at the waist cotton belt with a ring of keys...

In the middle of the cobbled stone "Napoleon's" square was a broken stone pedestal, which once held the monumental statue of Mouravieff, the governor of Russian Vilna. Of course at the time Poland gained its independence from Russia, temporary of course, the people immediately knocked down the statue, symbol of the imperialist occupier, and left only the broken stone base for posterity. So there it stood, nobody ever replacing anything on it, broken marble rock, until the Russians came again and put up Lenin on that waiting piece of



pedestal. Funny, huh? I imagine that he went down with the new Lithuanian independence of the 90's.

So there was a big square in the middle of which a round garden of flowers was surrounded by grass and metal ornate low fence. Then you faced a high brick fence and behind the was an enormous, elegant French styled palace, with gardens of a variety of flowers, small fountain and outer houses for servants and horses. Opposite the palace was the university. It was a very beautiful place. Century old stone buildings, each with high wooden gates at the entrance, through which the horses and carriages would pass into the courtyards. Where I lived, it was a very big gate through which we used to come in and inside were the apartments and a long courtyard. In the morning I would go with the governess down the street to the bakery shop in the basement of a building, and buy the "Kaiserkes", Kaiser rolls. Once we were home again, she would recite to me different phrases in English and in French, and I would have to repeat them after her. We were on the first floor, directly above the poor basement rooms where the janitor, Walenty lived with his family. AND while THE governess leaned over to me, saying in her sweet gentle voice "la plume de ma tante", the crude loud beatings, screaming and shoutings of the old man, the hairy janitor, wafted up from downstairs. Of course I was to learn the intricate poetry of his coarse abusive phrases of "your mother's whoring cunt," and "I'll wring your neck till your eyeballs fly to Russia and back again" much sooner than any delicate French pens of my aunt.! (plume isn't it a feather..??????)

Down next to the janitor's hovel in the basement was the storage cellar where we used to keep coal and cabbages, fruit and potatoes bought for the whole winter. IT was a very interesting story about the cabbages. WE used to bring the cabbages upstairs. My mother used to hire a machine, a tool with a knife or blade to cut the cabbages, and the maid used to cut the cabbages. AND my mother used to buy red berries which used to be put into a big vat along with the sliced cabbages. I remember they put other mysterious ingredients along with the cabbage and berry combination, some consomme concoction, perhaps onions and herbs of all aromatic kinds, and then would start the dance of the cabbages; the maid would take off her socks and shoes and roll up her skirt and tuck it up around her thighs and then she would step into the vat and stomp and stomp and stomp around, making pivoting circles in that small vat. I remember the sounds that emitted from under her feet. Wet slurping squelching sounds all of a rhythm, like huge sounds of a heart beating, down in the cold wet darkness of the cellar. And when the maid would finish, wiping the sweat from her brow, she would carefully step out of the vat onto the newspaper left specially lying there, my mother was very particular, and I saw with fascination how her feet were

stained red up to beyond her ankles, like she was wearing bright crimson short stockings. And then she would sit down on a stool and I used to watch how she scrubbed and scrubbed away at that purple color of the cabbage soup dye on her feet and splashes like blood on her legs. She would scrub and her mouth would be moving quickly as if she was talking, but no sounds came out, only maybe soft Ukranian phrases I of course couldn't understand, it sounded like spits, until the red from the dye slowly turned to a kind of pinkish which looked instead like skin, you know, that you rub to make clean too hard. And then she put back on her socks and shoes, and then smacked her hands on her knees, her legs open like a man's, and she would make her eyes into little lines, and then she would suddenly look straight at me where I was and say "And what are you staring at, little mouse?" Then she'd give me a half-smile, and wave me off, pointing to the stairs. And I would run up the stairs as if the red-footed witch was about to get me any minute. She never did. She would come slowly, I could hear her heavy steps creaking the wooden steps as she came up from the cellar behind me. You know, it reminds me, the looking like blood on the legs and the dark cellar, and the feeling of being half afraid of that, how would you say, ....slurpy ( he pronounced it slurrupy) purple cabbage mixture, it reminds me of another story."

He paused for a moment, smiled to himself and then began.

"My mother used to have three very good girlfriends, who used to come over in the evenings and spend time sitting in the living room and discussing all sorts of things. Anushka, Dora, and Sonja. All of them not married. I liked them, they would always bring me little presents when they came, little chocolates, or postcards or interesting little toys. I would like to let them in the door, because they would always be full of some nice sayings to me, like for instance, "hello handsome little fellow", or "here's the little man of my dreams," or "and how is the little sailorboy today," and each one would have a special way of greeting me. Sonja, she was the small petite one, pretty, very pretty, she would bend down right close to my face and hold me with her warm fingers under my chin, I could feel the tips of her painted glossy nails against my skin, and she would lift up my face to hers and say "Where's Auntie Sonja's special kiss from her special boyfriend?" Now sometimes I would kiss her, of course, you remember she has my chin in her hand and she would push it up to her red lips, then I would have to kiss her on the lips. It wasn't so bad, and anyway, I would wipe my mouth afterwards when she wasn't looking. Now there was Dora, she was taller, and very thin and elegant. White, white skin and black hair, she was also pretty, in a very Jewish way. Black sparkling eyes, full of promises of sweetness. But she acted more like a queen, like a noble lady, and she was the one who

would pat me on the head with her long white ringed fingers and ask if I had been a good boy today, and to make sure I didn't give my mother too much trouble. "You be a prince, now" she would say to me seriously, "your mother, she is a queen, and so you must always try and act like a prince, you hear?" and then she would smile and hand me a chocolate or candy, pressing it secretly into my hand. She'd take my hand and curl it up into a ball, like a fist, over the secret treat, and then she'd clamp her hands closed over mine. I remember the feeling of her moist hands holding my small fist so tightly, it would sometimes hurt. But I liked to endure it. "Only when your mother tells you can," she'd say and give my hand an extra squeeze. AND my mother would say "Kiss AUnty Dora 'thank you', and I would reach up as she slowly bent down and I would plant a kiss safely on her snowwhite cheek. Of course I would rub it off immediately when I was out of sight.

Now Anushka was my particular favorite. She had soft skin and a wonderful smell like a garden of roses or some flowers. SHE was always smiling and laughing, and she was the one, most of all, who would make me feel very special. She was the one who would play silly tricks, like "which hand do you choose, little sailor?" and I could choose the right or left behind her back, and one of them would have a candy in it, or she would sometimes do little waltzes with me, all of a sudden lift me up from the floor where I'd be playing, and swoop me up and start a polka or a waltz, la, lah lah la lah...she'd sing in her beautiful husky voice, and laugh as she swung me around, my legs would swing this way and that, I felt like a limp puppet. AND she would always try to make me laugh in some way, it was her game. "what do you have hiding here, bubbeleh?" she'd say and she'd start tickling me, "and what is this funny thing on your head?" and she'd be touching my ears. "And let's see what's behind you kneecaps?" and her fingers would scamper down behind my legs, and I would scream and shout and laugh all at the same time and then she'd roll on the ground with me, all the time tickling me or touching me, and I'd hate it and love her all at the same time. She was fun, Anushka, she was the most fun. She had the most wonderful laugh, she did, sparkling green eyes, and always smiling at something. SHE made you feel happy, even if you weren't."

My father smiled, he was appreciating lost moments long gone. Memories of warmth and laughter, amorphous blanket, wrapped him for a while. It was nice to see him smile like that. I also noticed a tear or two in his eyes, he was happy.

"Now why was I telling you about Dora, Anushka and Sonja, the Three Mooskateers?" he asked, exaggerating the sound of the "mooskateers" in a deep accent. Past dissolved into present. Sunlight filtered through the trees, casting dappled shadows around us.

"Well, let me see now," I traced back the images. "I think the last thing you were talking about was the maid and the cabbage soup."

"Yah!" he said, a affirmative jerk of the head acknowledging the return of memory, like an actor's flash of recognition of his cue. "I know now what it was.. Yah! It is the blood story. The story about the corpse."

"It happened one evening that I was put to bed in my room, which was near the living room, and my mother was sitting drinking coffee with Sonja, Dora and Anushka and they were talking and telling stories. And I heard Dora say "Did you read what happened to that couple from Lodz? Wasn't it awful? AND I hear the other women say "No, tell us," and " What happened ?" and then I listen as Dora, in her husky voice tells the story about a young couple who had just got married and they were honeymooning in one of the mountain resorts, right in the heart of some thick forests.

"They were in their bed, getting down to business" says Dora, and I hear the women whisper and giggle for a while, "when all of a sudden through the window there climbs a robber who quietly climbs up to them with a knife in his hand. Just as he is about to stab this passionate couple in the middle of their bed, " she pauses, " the woman turns around and sees the outline of the man in the darkness, and she screams." Dora pauses again, and as I lie in my bed, you can imagine now I am lying stiff in my bed, I cannot move because of fear, and I hear the women shouting at Dora to go on, go on, tell more, finish the story, and so she carries on....

"Now, when the woman screams, the new husband thinks it is because of him," Dora laughs. You know I could never understand that at the time, why Dora and the other women laughed, just as I was trying to understand in my fear why the bride should scream with fright at the bridegroom. "BUT, says Dora, "the bride points to the man, or screams out something about their being a man in the room.. and the bridegroom quickly turns around and in a flash punches the stranger. A struggle occurs, and the woman runs around to the stranger, ooh she must have been mad with him for coming in just at that moment, huh, "says Dora," and she grabs the knife that had fallen from the stranger's hand when he got punched, picks it up from the floor where it had landed on her side of the bed, and just as the man came back again presumably to strangle the bridegroom, she pushed the knife into his heart with all her strength. And she killed him. He staggered back, moaning, blood coming from his mouth and he fell against the wall of the small country inn room. Dead. Well, now, at the end of all this, this young couple realize they have a dead man, all bloody all over, in their room, and these young people, they don't know what to do. SO they decide to clean up the mess and hide the body under the



bed. Perhaps when they leave the next morning and go far away , no-one will notice until much much later. You know how it is young people think. SO they clean up all the blood from the floor and drag the bloody corpse from the wall where he is lying and they stuff him under the bed. AND now they try and go to sleep. AND at last, finally they manage to fall asleep," says Dora, her husky voice low and calm," when all of a sudden from under the bed a bloody arm comes moving out and the bloody corpse is reaching up up to the bed where the young couple lie asleep."

Now I am listening to this story from my bedroom. I am listening to this story of the poor young couple and suddenly I have a terrible thought. I think to myself: "Wait a moment...perhaps this corpse is under MY bed." And I am afraid. I am so afraid I cannot even get out of my bed, because I am so sure that this bloody corpse is lying under my bed and it is going to grab my thin legs as soon as I start to put them down on the floor. AND I started to scream " Mommy, Mommy, Mommy," and my mother came running in to my room, followed by the others, and they switched on my light, and they said "What's the matter?" and I cried " Look under my bed, Look under my bed.." and they said "What are you talking about? What's under you bed?" and I sobbed: " Is there, is there a .. a bloody corpse.... Is there that bloody corpse under my bed?" and they all started to laugh and I started to cry. AND of course, for a week afterwards, or even more, they used to tease me and say to me "Did you look under your bed, today? Did you check for the corpses?" And I remembered that. Yah, that was my mother. Always enjoyed a good joke, and always knew how to make it last for a long time.

BUT, from another point of view, to give you an example of the character of my mother, I'll give you just a little story: There was a maid. OUR maids were always peasants from up in the country, from the farms, and there used to be an old Lituanian or Russian woman who was the employment officer, you see. And she used to have maids, all seated on chairs in a semi-circle row in her rooms up there a few streets from us. I used to go with mother there to choose a maid. My mother used to go and look into the maids' faces and demand in a curt way: "show me your hands!" AND they used to put out their hands, and my mother would examine them closely, I suppose they should be not too fat or too thin, or maybe she looked to see if they were working hands, I don't know, some secret philosophy to look at the hands", he smiled. "Anyhow it was always an inspection of the hands, I remember. And mother would speak in her broken Polish, more Russian than Polish, she never learned Polish. But the peasant girls always understand her. MORE sometimes than the upperclass people, I remember her sometimes going to shops to buy some things and they didn't understand what she was

saying, ooh , she would get so mad, she would walk out and curse the shopkeeper in Russian. But the maids, they never had a problem understanding her, oh no. You see, I'm sure at their homes, it was the same, a mixture of languages, what the Babushka or the father still remembered and spoke. It was still early days after RUSSIAN occupation. SO the Polish was not even a polished Polish, it was rather a kitchen Polish, a little bit of Lithuanian, Russian, a touch of Baltic, you understand? Anyhow, the old lady, I'm sure knew already which maid was -good or not, from how many times they'd been there at her place, and she knew that MOther was always interested in having a fresh new maid, someone she could train in her own way. SO now this new maid had to make one day "Cantletti".. it is cutlets. Like ground beef or chicken cutlets, you know, you take an egg, and some bread pieces, flour.." my father adds the motions as he explains, clapping his hands to pat the invisible "cantletti" from hand to hand.." to pat it into a patty, and then you put it on a plate..and then to put it in the oven or on top.. I'm not sure how it was done.. I think it was done on an open stove.. I remember a big fireplace, done with coal, to make the oven hot. Anyhow, whatever it was, the maid had done the "cantletti" somehow, six or ten cutlets and I don't know how she did it or if she had forgotten about them in the oven, but when mother came back in the evening and she went into the kitchen before dinner to check over everything as it should be, and she tasted the cantletti, they were hard as stone. I remember I was standing in the doorway, the maid was next to the stove and my mother was next to kitchen table where the cantletti rocks lay next to the potatoes waiting to be served on the china plate. My mother stuck a fork into them, and the fork would not go into them. So she took them into her hand, one at a time, and started to hurl them across the kitchen at the maid. "You idiot! You dumbhead! You Balvanske kop!" my mother was shouting." My father began to laugh. "The cutlets ," he spluttered," the cutlets, were flying into the maid," he raced on, "and the maid was fencing them off, this way, that, she ducked,... and with every throw of the cutlet, "he took a short breath," mother hurled an insult along with it." He was laughing between the words, his voice skipping along as it reenacted the barrage of the cutlet grenades. " And and.. as they were hard, " he said laughing," they were bouncing all over, falling, from up the floor, boing... to the oven, boing onto the wall, and onto the oven ... oh oh, it was, oi, it was something to see, just like in the films..." his voice escalated, gleeful, almost to a boyish whoop..."and when I saw all this, I couldn't help it, I just began to laugh. And Mother, in her rage, looked at me and started to scream at me: "What are you laughing at, you imbecile?" and smacked my face! Just like that, smacked my face, until I ran out crying," he exclaimed, his voice high and agitated, still boyish and excited, still victim of surprise.

Then his voice dropped to a lower register, the adult was back, the old reminiscer, as he concluded: "That is how it was with my mother. Very strong character." He paused for a moment. Reverence. Remembrance. "Yah" he said into the silence.

I started to say something, but he interrupted me. That was not to be the concluding testimony. He carried on: "But a heart of gold," he stated. There was no argument. I was not to know any better or worse. This is my grandmother as she is passed down to me, late in my life, after my own mother is long dead and gone. A chance now for me to meet a female relative far away from home, in a neutral setting, through scattered second-hand memories. Is that how we are to be remembered? Incidents that stick in the mind only because they are so unusual? Out of the ordinary moments that transcend the day-to-day brushing of the hair and routine bedtime stories and nagging petty reminders to play safe and chew carefully. Is that it then? Are we to be remembered for something other than our daily presences, by those who happen to be standing witness to our folly or bravado. For those unexpected moments in which we either rise or fall to the event that challenges us. Or are we remembered regardless, for just having been there, as a partner to the relationship, as a significant other in the true sense. For having shared that scrap of time in a unique way.

"A true heart of gold," he repeated, his tone somber. "Nearly winter, already colder and so on. We could not open the windows already.. we had double windows. In between the double windows we had a layer of cottonwool, and on the cotton we would put red berries or I used to make from paper or paper mache, a little mannekin or some decoration, just to decorate..it should look pretty and happy in the cold months. You see, the windows on the outside would open outwards, and the windows to the inside would open towards us. And then we used to have a lot of people coming into the yard, hawkers and sellers, you understand, coming to make announcements to the several floors, we had three floors in our building, about their wares; "Shmattes, shmattes, give me your old clothes", my father imitated their sing-song calls, "Glass Repairs, Glass Repairs!" "I sharpen knives, scissors, best sharpening.." all these artisans used to come around and shout up to the closed windows, but we heard them, and then somebody used to send the maid down to do this and this for fifty groshes or something like that. NOW from time to time in the spring or summer there were others like a duo or trio to do a circus stunt, like a man who would take a sword and swallow it down his throat, or inhale a flame and put needles in the tongue or a man who would juggle fruit or sometimes torches, all that kind of entertainment for children to marvel at. AND I remember that my mother always used to give me five groshes or even ten groshes to fold in a piece of

paper to throw it down to the acrobat from the window. But when it was already October, or November, I used to go outside myself downstairs to the street level, I used to wrap a warm scarf around my neck, and go down to give the money to the street performers. Never, she never let somebody, the performers or the poor beggars, go without giving them something. A few groshes, or some bread or some potatoes, always something to share. Never said "I don't have." AND she told me that in her home, back in Russia, in St Petersburg it was like that. But in particular, there were two people that she was especially kind to. One was a gypsy who used to sing Russian ballads. He would be dressed in a colorful fringed shawl, with a big round black chapeau, Spanish style, you know, always on his head. His boots, for instance, were boots different to normal boots, red or blue or some color, and he played the guitar with these gloves where his fingers would be sticking out through the open holes. You know, we would throw him the money and the money would fall and were lying all around him, and this gypsy singer, he never picked it up until he finished the song." My father paused. I could sense he was fighting back tears. The dam of tears that lies dormant, always threatening to overflow as a result of abundant nostalgia, old age and lost loved ones all flowing together at the same time. Too much water. We human beings are saturated at 89% anyhow, so anything extra in the way of watery emotion will either seep out, or at best form itself into a tightly rolled up little lump that sits and sticks in our throats. I knew my father was struggling with that lump. He took the extra breaths necessary to turn the viscous knot into words that flowed soft and slow with a liquidity akin to the evocative ballads sung by a phantom gypsy..

He breathed, then allowed his voice to strum: "He used to come with a guitar and strum the guitar and sing Russian stories about love and desires and romance." My father's voice was lyrical and breathy, his words were gentle breezes. "There was once one very famous composer and singer, a Russian by the name of Vertinsky, it was Ah...people knew of him for miles around, the famous melodies and lyrics of Vertinsky, " he elongated the name. "And I remember one song by him, about Singapore, an evening in Singapore, and a girl and a man, and this is the last night together, and he is leaving....she remains, and all kinds of ....Ahhh..." he stopped. It was too much. The dam could contain it no more. He sighed, like some humid wind that stops quietly to release its soggy load. A soft spring shower, dense with forgotten romances. It was painful for me to watch him, his eyes becoming more watery than even an old man's eyes should. "My mother used to stand at the window and gaze out to him, and she used to hear him singing, "my father's voice broke, " and she used to cry.." he sobbed. "I stood at the window and I



cried with her," my father cried, his voice high and sad, crying with the forever ageless tears of a young little boy. He was crying now, as few men do, unashamed, awash in emotion. "Such beautiful stories," he sobbed, " and I understood, it was Russian, pure pure Russian, singing..." he paused, his sobs subsiding a little now, hard rains turning to soft drizzle. " And she used to put out everything that she had in her purse, all the small change," Give it to him, Give it to him, she said to me, and I would run down and give it to him...." he paused, the sudden shower over, relief come and gone, and then with a ironic twist, he said, "and so I suppose he knew to come to our place very very often," my father smiled and chuckled.

"AND when he was finished with his song, he would take off his large hat, with a big sweep, and do a very deep bow first to this side of the building, then to the other, all around, to all the windows of the buildings, to all the women, ladies and maids who were leaning out of the windows listening and crying to his songs of love."

"Uh" he grunted once more, "I remember asking our RUssian friend Mishka Lenitzky, you remember him with the big beard, I remember asking him one day if he knew songs by Vertinsky, and as soon as I mentioned that name, he began to sing: Oh dum de rumpum pah dah -Singa..poreh, poreh.. he knew the whole song, he could remember it all. It was world famous, he told me, Mishka said." AND then my father began to sing himself, in his basso voice in RUssian, about Singapore ".Ya vas loobloo, daragaya, wstrechnaya ..vsiegda was droog... , a typical lyrical RUssian ballad melody. "All about these far, faraway foreign lands..." he concluded, " Yah, it reminded me of my mother," his voice now fading to a whisper, "she was always so generous to those entertainment people."

I wanted to tell you what I heard about what happened between my father and mother. My father, as you remember I told you, was always travelling around Europe with his work. He was very seldom at home. I always received beautiful presents from him when he returned home. Now we had a friend who was my father's friend, Blumenthal, his name was, a friend of the family so to speak, not married, who spent a lot of time at our house. And when my father would travel, before he left he would say to to him, Please come over and help out with Vava and my son. Vavushka must not be by herself, you know how she loves to dress up and go out to dances and films shows, so you must be her escort while I am away. He knew how much my mother loved to go out dancing and have a fun time, and it was not his custom to dance, he was a head shorter than my mother. And so that is what happened. Blumenthal and my mother went to places while my father was away. I presume that there was some kind of romance there,

that is what I believe. Anyhow people began to talk. Because when my father arrived once, I was about four or five, my grandfather was still alive, and he called him in and spoke to him and there were rumors in town about my mother going around with this particular man who was the owner of the only mineral water factory in the town. He was what you might nowadays call a very eligible bachelor, what Dora in those days called; A goldene yugendt... a golden youth, good-looking, always generous with money, a party-person, a good dancer who knows how to mix with different people and always seeking to have a good time. NOW I'm not sure what happened, if something did or didn't between my mother and Mr. Blumenthal. However I do remember her telling me: "You must never in your life have anything to do with anyone by the name of Blumenthal, never in your life, you promise me now!" But I cannot imagine what might happened, if it was indeed only rumor, but I think maybe not. I suppose, I think something must have happened. NObody of course said anything to me. It was a different age, parents didn't tell their children too much of a personal nature, we were just innocent bystanders mostly. But I do remember the atmosphere in the house. I suppose my father confronted my mother, and demanded to know if there was any truth to what he had heard from his father, and I imagine that he asked her; "You tell me now what happened between you and BLumenthal!" "Nothing." "What do you mean nothing.. the whole town is talking, and I have to come home and see people look at me in a strange way, and have my own father call me in and tell my my wife is sleeping around with my best friend.. I tell you that's not nothing! I want the truth!

"Well, the truth is that nothing happened . We went out like you suggested. THAT's all."

"I don't believe you, you're lying, you're lying!"

"Oh, I'm lying am I? You're telling ME what happened with me. Well if that's the way you trust me, and if you cannot believe your own wife, then why don't you just go on home to your precious Papa and Mama, and live with them, and believe everything they say. Your father never liked me anyhow. This would make him extremely happy, wouldn't it. And why don't you just go and make HIM happy, because that's more important to you than believing your own wife! So go! There's nothing more to say!"

My father instead of being clever was not clever. And as he was not clever, he got a divorce.

And so, the end of the story is that my mother got a quick Jewish divorce. My father, being a Cohen, you know, the tribe of the holy men, he was able to hold out his hands, his fingers divided into a V and say "I divorce you, I divorce you, I divorce you, in front of witnesses and so it was done.

"He was obviously influenced by his father, who had never really liked your mother, right?" I prodded.

"Oh, definitely so," agreed my father." And his brother too, and Sonja the French speaking sister, also didn't like my mother. They felt that he could have married a very rich woman in town, perhaps even one of their friends they had in mind for him. But that is what happened. They got a divorce, and he told my mother; I will provide for you until you marry, and I will care for my son. Which he did ... which he did."

And then I remember one day, he came to see me.

Now my father moved out of our apartment and moved into his brother's-in-law place, the hotel. He had a beautiful big space of his own there. He stopped entirely his private practice as a doctor, and that was the time when he intensified his travels as representative for the medical supply company, and so began to travel much more than before. Of course, he used to visit us, and take me to the nearby synagogue, but he was gone away a lot. During that time, not long after the divorce my father met another woman, an older woman, Rachel, who was a pediatric doctor. She was very well educated, French educated, and her father had one of the biggest shoe factories in town. And so they married, and she moved in with him into the hotel. And I used to go there and visit them.

I called her aunty. Aunty Rachel and she was always trying to be nice to me, but I .. I never gave her the satisfaction of showing her any real affection. That was only for my mother. I remember the one time, a special time, when my father went away. I was about ten, and the big news was that he was going to America for a long time on some important business. It was nineteen twenty-nine, and my father had been elected World President of the Jewish World War One Widows and Orphans Fund. I remember I was at the station to say goodbye to him, he went to the United States to collect money for Europe to help the widows and orphans. He went there and was met at the docks by family members living there who greeted him and introduced him to more relatives. I remember the maps and guide books he sent back to me, I would study New York, the streets and famous buildings, so that when I first got here, I remembered it like an old school friend, from way back. It was familiar from that long time ago. Oh, it was a big event, my father meeting all the important people and planning to go around fundraising, it was in all the newspapers back in Vilna, and then happened the famous Wall Street collapse." My father paused and smiled a crooked, sardonic kind of grimace. "AND my father, the doctor, the President, in order to eat a meal, had to wash dishes in a Jewish restaurant in Bronx. Can you imagine that? What humiliation, the disillusionment! When he returned to Vilna, he was a broken man, with hardly any money of course, not for the widows or the orphans or let alone for himself. And

America, the Goldeneh Medinah, it was not the country of riches for him. For him there were just bad memories. For him it was a country of fantasy, where one day you were a millionaire and the next you were a pauper, or even worse, a man dead from jumping out from a tall building. Yah, he came back a sad, disillusioned man. But he recovered. He had help... he was lucky. Auntie Rachel had a brother, an accountant who married a rich man's daughter, and this brother was now a managing director of a bank. He helped my father get back on his feet financially.

So that was my father. AND my mother, it was a different story. During the time after the divorce, the brother of my father's brother's wife, Osnat, his name was Lurie, arrived from Germany or some other place in Europe, in to town. He had been away, out of the country, doing all sorts of things like being with the circus or some such related kind of irregular business. And now he was returned and come to stay at his parent's house again. And he was the cause of some problems. The old parents had a room for him, but he didn't want it, he was complaining it was too small, and he refused to be in their framing business, he didn't like picture framing, so he was looking around for something better, I suppose. AND his sister Osnat came to my mother and started to plant the seed. She said; "You know, now that your ex-husband is getting married, what about you?... You shouldn't be alone like this, with a young boy and all....surely it's not right. It is not good for him, or for you either for that matter... you should have a man in the house, and a father for the boy... let me introduce you to my brother... see what happens, maybe you'll even like him, so what do you say, huh, alright?"

And there was my poor mother, without anyone, alone in foreign country, no communication with her family, brothers and sisters back in Russia, it was 1926 or 7, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Soviets against foreigners and former Russians, she couldn't even go back, she was alone in captive Poland. So she was quite much stranded, with no-one to advise her, and that Blumenthal person was gone, finished, a stranger already, he must have had a big fight with my father and obviously something bad, an argument, with my mother, and so she was left with nobody. Her girlfriends that she had were not in a position to help, they were so young and inexperienced themselves. So there was Osnat, who was busy persuading my mother to marry her brother, and I believe in a weak moment, she must have given in and said finally; "Alright Osnat, you want me to marry your brother, let's get it over with." And so they got married, my mother and this Sor (that was his surname) character. There was never any big love there, ever, at all. It was more or less a marriage of convenience, to have a man in the house, and it was all nice and in the family. A workable family business proposal, in which I had no say at all..



And she took his name, and I acquired a step-mother when I was about seven or eight years old.

Now when I turned twelve, ready for my barmitzvah, my father and mother had an arrangement for my caretaking. My mother wanted to leave the country and go to work in a firm in Warsaw, besides which her life with Sor was not working out. And so I went to live with my father. He had moved out of the hotel by this time and was living in a very nice second-floor apartment, with a surgery and waiting room and everything on Ludwissarka street, which was right on the end of the street facing the magnificent Napoleon's Palace, which I told you about. Our building was a four-storey one, and within the huge gates, was a large cobbled courtyard big enough for horses and carts to come and rest for the night, and at that street level was a type of huge resting area, like an inn, where you could have coffee and tea and drinks for perhaps bench-type lodging for the travellers, the hawkers, and the poor people.

My high school, it was called "gymnasium" ( he pronounced it Gimnah-zioom.) was an all boys Catholic school, named after Adam Mickiewicz, who was Poland's national poet. The school was situated on Dominikanska Street, opposite the big church, about five minutes walk from my uncle's house and his advertising business. It was there that I would go after school to meet my father, and sometimes we would go to the Hotel Europa to eat lunch, and other times we would go to the corner of Dominikanska and Trotska, where there was a popular coffee-house, Cafe Rudnitski, where he would have a black coffee and for me he would order a coffee with whipped cream on top, with lots of cinnamon and sugar. It was wonderful, with a piece of cake. I was about 11 years old at the time, and about six months into the school year, our class had to put on a production of a play. It was a performance done in mime, like a filming of a group of kids representing a school which is greeting famous dignatories coming to town. The place where we stood was painted to resemble a train station, and the train was about to come in. Now out of all the boys in my class, they chose me, me to play the part of a girl. I had to give the "dignatory" a bouquet of flowers, and of course everything was without words, quiet, and I had to make a curtsy. My mother was there in the crowd of parents, but my father, he for some reason didn't come. He didn't come. only my mother was there. She made me a very nice dress, and my teacher, they were for the most part priests, did the make-up on my face. It was very interesting. It was the only time I played a girl. Otherwise I was always a boy in plays."

Now the times between ages 13 and 15 were transition times. After my barmitzvah it was agreed that I had to move over to my father's house in Ludwisarska Street. I didn't have too

many friends where we lived now. My father's house was centrally located, in the heart of a more commercial area. The more Jewish suburbs were much further away. The only real social life I had was when I went to some other boys Barmitzvahs. Now to my own Barmitzvah, I didn't invite any of those boys. Firstly, it was too far for them to come, and secondly, I was not quite frankly, interested. To me this Barmitzvah stuff was something I did for my father's sake, he insisted on it, because truthfully my heart was not in it. I remember I used to have to go across to the Jewish old part of the town, the "Ghetto", up the narrow cobbled stone streets into a poorer area, up the stairs of a ramshackle wooden building where there was an old Hasid who would rattle away these foreign sounding words at me. Yababatatam rabatum tum, he'd be singing and nodding away, his long beard wiping back and forth, like a broom, the high wooden table where I sat writing down the foreign words in Latin phonetics so I could make learn them to repeat them. I could pick up the melody alright and I learned the words from my Latin scribbles, and that's how I had my barmitzvah at the small, old shul where my father was gabbeh, which was the one five minutes walk from the first place we lived in on Arsenal'ska street. When I used to go and get my little breakfast buns from the basement bakery in Garbarska Street, just opposite was this little synagogue, I would see the elder Jews walking around in the morning from and to prayer, but it really didn't occur to me that we were from the same type of people, that we are brothers, no, not at all. To me, to my young eyes, they were like strange people, talking and dressing differently to us in our family. But nevertheless, it was there that I went with my father for services, just like other Jewish boys would go with their fathers. Mother used to dress me up nicely, my hair in place, and I would go for Holidays or Shabbat, and somehow it was not too bad because there in the shul I used to feel not afraid. I'd run around with the other young boys, or go inside to my father as he sat in his gabbeh's place in the front and sit with him for a while, even though he was engrossed in his mumblings along with the other hunched over men. Then I'd get bored and run out and play again with the boys outside in the little courtyard around the shul. And sometimes I would go with my father, he would take me for special occasions, to the Great Synagogue on Nemetska Street. It was an enormously huge Synagogue which could hold over a thousand people. When I was in Israel recently, I was there at the Museum of the Communities, and I saw there a model which is standing on a big table. Somebody had made an exact copy of the Old Great Synagogue of Vilna and its immediate surroundings. It was perfect. Every little detail as I remember it. It brought it all back to me. I saw this tiny model and I cried.

He drew in his breath, as if sipping in and swilling his own tears that were spilled in front of him.

" I don't understand why you say you weren't afraid at your little shul. Afraid of what?" I asked him gently. "Explain to me why it is that you even comment on being afraid?"

"Well," he looked at me in surprise. "It was just a little type of house, comfortable like one's home. Not cavernous and scary like the cathedrals were. It had a completely different feeling to the cathedrals. In the cathedral I was always very scared. They had all those giant stone figures looming out from the tall walls, looking at me from behind columns, and some of those Barons and knights who died , they made statues of them, paid big money to have them built, and all those monuments and angels and gargoyles for a little boy, well it was very very scary."

"ER Dad," I interrupted, wonderingly. " I don't understand, what were you doing in cathedrals, for God's sake?" I realized I had made an unintentional pun, and smiled to myself. "Why were you ever there?"

"Please," my father replied impatiently, as if I should have known the answer implicitly. As if I was not listening properly and attentively the first time.

"I grew up going to Cathedrals... before even I stepped inside a shul!" he declared. "It was my governess who took me there. She was a Catholic, always with a big cross hanging from her neck. Every day, I told you, she and I, we would go out for a walk. Next to our home, the very next street was the beautiful main Avenue, on both sides wide pavements, kept clean, tall trees with multitude of leaves, big department stores and little shops and cafes and bistros. We would walk around and sometimes we would go the basement bazaar of all sorts of fresh fruit. Like a fruit market. And then opposite was the Colonial Shop, a shop of all sorts of foods from all over the world. AND the smell of that shop, ah, with the spices and the chocolate and candy, it was magical. And then we would walk back and it would bring us to the big dark Cathedral in the Square, facing the beginning of the main Avenue. We would walk down the long aisle and she would quietly go into a pew, then she would pray, kneel down and pray, and I would stand ther next to her, she told me not to kneel like her, I must stand, and so I would be left to stand and look up at the huge pointy ceilings. And all around me were either marble coffins with stone statues lying down on them, or these grey dead people standing in their suits of armour with swords and lances peering at me with anger in their bulging grey eyes which had holes pierced in them. I remember sometimes I had nightmares with statues coming to life to get me for something. Perhaps it was because I had not prayed properly to them, I thought. Soon of course, I would know by heart the words of the Catholic

prayer, which helped me much later at school when I could understand a little what the boys were saying."

"But at my school, I was mostly with the other Jewish boys. Especially when we were about fifteen and sixteen. Anti-semitic feelings were very high, very high at the time. And we were in a Catholic school, only six or seven Jews, and they were all against us. So we Jewish boys made an arrangement. We arranged to meet after school to go to whoever lived nearest, and sit down and work out the lessons for our homework together, and in this way we progressed and kept on top of our studies, and in the top ten places in our classes. AND some of the boys who were very aggressive learned about our little scheme, our study group, and they wanted to join our group. SO we said Yes! We will tell you exactly what we are doing and so you will also be well prepared for school. but on one condition... you will be our guards! If anyone threatens us, you have to stand up for us and protect us. And they agreed. AND it happened that way. And soon the whole atmosphere changed. We would sometimes stay after school in the classroom, and the priests would be so pleased with this arrangement. And so we made our bargain.

NOW I was friendly only with one Gentile boy--George Haidukewitz. A Pole. A tall blonde fellow, whose father was a banker. They lived very near to us off Arsenalaska street. He used to come visit me sometimes, and we would walk home together from school. I would go to my place and then he would carry on walking to his. He was part of this study group too. We got along fine together, because we had similar interests... stamps, reading, discussions of politics, you know how it is with boys. And then one day he invited me over to his place. I think we were planning to do homework together. We came in to his apartment. The servant opened the door, and his mother was there inside waiting, and he walked over to her, greeted her and kissed her hand. AND then she said "Hello" to me, and stretched out her hand to me. SO I walked up to her, took her hand and I shook it. I didn't know that way of the Poles; in my house we didn't kiss hands on welcome. AND then she asked me "Where are you from?" And I told her, and then she asked my name, and when she heard my Jewish sounding name, she didn't say anything to me, but turned around to her son and told him to go upstairs. "George," she said to him, "you have to go upstairs now. YOU don't have time to entertain your guest right now, so I'm afraid he will have to go home." THEN she showed me the door, and said something like thank you for coming, and then as I walked out, the maid closed the door behind me. George told me the next day that his mother had said he cannot play with anyone who does not know the routine of kissing the mother's hand. I was very angry with him. "WHY didn't you tell me?" I yelled at him, and he yelled back that he didn't know I didn't know about such things, and I remember how very angry



I felt. But, we still liked each other and remained friends without going to each others' houses. The end of the story of George is, that when he finished his final year, he was one of the top students, he went on to university and we were still friendly at university. I had lent him a book that was very dear to me, and when the German occupation of Lithuania began, and we were forced, us Jews to be confined in the Ghetto, one day I used a group that was going out of the Ghetto as a work unit, (I had enquired the location of the work which was near to where GEorge lived), and I went out with them. When I was near his house, I quickly splipped away into his building. I had found out he had moved, his father's bank had folded soon after the Soviet occupation and now he lived with his granny far away in the industrial section of the town. So there I was. I knocked on his door, and when he opened it and saw it was me, I remember his look of surprise that was a look of terror too. He was so afraid that I had come to visit him. He just wanted to give me the book and some food and to get rid of me. I could not believe it. He was so nervous of either being caught or of having me there, that he kept saying over and over again; Please for the love of God, go, leave us in peace, but go, go now. I cannot do anything for you, please go!" Can you imagine? I explained to him that I could not go then, I had to wait until the unit returned when I would join up with them again to return to the Ghetto. He had to go out later and he didn't want to leave me alone with his old granny, he was so scared. He was just rushing me to go all the time. I remember it . I looked at him and said: George, my dear friend, what is the story with you? We have known each other for so long, and now you look at me with scared eyes, and push me out your house? Is this how you treat a friend, a friend you trusted with intimate secrets and romances and thoughts? Is this what you do now to an old friend? " AND he looked at me, with his panic in his eyes, and he relied:" Well, this is life, this is life. If they find you here, I will be dead. I don't want to die. Please understand, I don't want to die. I'm sorry, I just cannot help you. You must understand."

My father took a deep sigh, and let out his breath in an elongated stretching out of the word "Ya..ah". In that one word of conclusive affirmation, he condensed a lifetime of judgement, pity, disappointment and regret. It was all contained in that one little breath, that one audible sigh that moaned quietly for the next generation.

He continued; "The story ends very very bad. During the war, something happened to him that made him have to leave Vilna. As other Polish people. AND when I enquired later from other people that I met when Poland was liberated by the Russians, what had happened to him , to George, they told me that he is without a leg in Olstein, a town where many Poles went from Vilna. They told me he worked in an office somewhere and

that he wore a wooden leg. SO they suggested I write to him, and I thought to myself that whatever I had wished him, had been too little. FOR him to turn away from me, for him to be scared like that, not to acknowledge me, there was no forgiveness for that. I would have helped him. IF the situation were reversed, I would have helped him, like I helped others when the Russians came. Nah, he got off light with that wooden leg of his.

"NOW father had a secretary by the name of ALbert Katz, a young fellow of about twenty-two or twenty-three, who looked like twenty Jews all in one. He acted as a messenger for my father's social activities and commitments. Besides being the head of the family, like the chief of our small tribe of Jutans, uncles , aunts, brothers and sisters, you see, he was also involved with civic affairs. He was a city councillor and honorary President of the Volunteer Firemen of Vilna, which had ten different branches, and Albert used to be the one to deliver letters and speeches to all these different places for my father. He was also fighting for the rights for the better living conditions of the World War One Jewish Widows and Orphans. SO he was always busy, always travelling around to different towns in Poland, and then different countries like Czechoslovakia and Hungary and especially Germany. SO as a result, I didn't have too much time with him. My life was in those years made up of school, and then sitting in the long dark office of my uncle Samuel. I remember the big portrait that hung there of the famous Yiddish writer Peretz.

Now my uncle did not pay too much attention to me, you remember the story of him and his lack of love for my mother. But his sister, Auntie Sonja would come over to me sometimes on her visits to the advertising office, she was the one who loved to speak French, and ask me questions to see how my schoolwork was going and then she would test me in French. Now French was the language which my stepmother, whom I used to call Auntie, she was fat, very very fat, would sometimes speak at the house. You know, talking about the fat, I recall my mother saying something I could never understand fully then; she told me: "It didn't help her. I wished on her to have stones, and so she had a miscarriage." I was about seven or eight at the time, and I couldn't work out why my mother wished my auntie to have stones.. I thought perhaps she had stones in her body somewhere, and that was why she was so so fat. Of course, now I understand. Vavka's dugh! "Vavka's spirits!". SHE wished her barren. And she got her wish. I was to remain an only child forever. NOW AUntie tried her best to educate me, to be kind to me, and look after me in a motherly way... she was a pediatrician after all. Now I understand her better. But at the time, as a child I am sure I hated her. I do remember making it my mission to be deliberately ungrateful and unkind to her. After all, she was not my true mother. SHE did not deserve my feelings of

gratitude. Only my mother, she was the one to whom I was to remain faithful in my love.

"But for most of these years my most favorite companions were the books. It was arranged by my father one day that I would go after school up the hill to one of the sisters of my stepmother. She had a very big house way up on the top of a hill and her two daughters, Fruma and Sara, and the two daughters of another sister, Leah and Basya, there was always a whole family coming to the house and this aunty Bella would prepare a big lunch for all of us to eat. All these girls and me. And afterwards we could do our lessons there, or maybe talk or play a while, or simply I would decide to go home after lunch. So, I used to go down the hill, down the very sloping hill, walk down, down to the bottom where there was a "holzmarket" a wooden open air marketplace with leaning stalls full of fishes, and fresh fruits and vegetables, and the smell of salt and earth and greens mixing together. And I would walk down through there on that steep hill, and right at the bottom, at the edge in Zawalna Street was a wooden shack in which an old Jewish man kept used books for renting and sellings. AND there I used to buy, and sometimes borrow, the magnificent books of Karl May and Jack London and other in the same Western adventures field. Afterwards I learned that Karl May was jailed in Germany, wrote all these fascinating about the Red Indians and their wars with the "pale faces" from his memories of adventures he had in the Americas. He was the one who brought to life for Europe's youth the wide open spaces of North America and the tales of Indians and Cowboys. I remember the names: Old Tomahowck, and Winatoe, Old Shatterhand and Big Kowtou and others. I used to browse in that dark little hut, like a little cave it was, a cave of treasures that were all books, and I used to love the smell of the musty books. It was my interest to flip through the pages and read some pieces in the middle, like a taste you know, to see if it was something I would like, some adventure with nature and the elements, somewhere far away. In those years I would read books by Ferdinand Cooper, Defoe, the one about Gulliver's travels, all fascinating to me. AND there I also discovered Karl May. And this how I started to addict myself to books.

And it was during this time, that one day, while I was walking back from school, a group of local gentile boys jumped on me and beat me up. YOU see, in Vilna I looked very Jewish. Dark hair, soft skin, largish nose I suppose, even though I had on my school uniform from the Catholic School, with the crest on the arm of the jacket, it did not prevent them from attacking me and calling at me: Zhid parchaty (ill blotted Jew) Jewboy, why did you kill our Lord, you Christ Killer, you pay for that!, things like that, and the end of the story is that I was beaten up. And when this happened, another boy, a little bit bigger than I, was passing by on

the other side of the road, and when he saw what was happening he came over and started fighting those boys and then they ran away. He helped me up and offered me his handkerchief to wipe the blood off my nose, my nose was bleeding already, and he asked me what had happened. He didn't look at all Jewish. I was about fourteen I think, or fifteen. Then he said to me: You have to belong to a fighting group of JEWish boys, scouts like, because we must not allow to be at the mercy of the antisemites. We Jews cannot allow ourselves to be victims of these bullies any longer, don't you agree? AND his name was Smulgovsky. Mishka Smulgovsky. AND he walked me home. Now we didn't live any more at Ludwarska street, but over the Green Bridge in Kalvariska Street, number twenty. It was a very beautiful home, a big house, with a maid, and we even had a horse and cart of our own for my father's outings. In the basement was his surgery. It was in a poorer part of town, interestingly enough, because my father was very socialistically minded. Now this Misha walked back with me, and we discovered that he lived nearby, at the entrance of the Green Bridge, where his father had a restaurant, with liquor, which was very important. AND so we became very good friends. He introduced me to the youth movement of Betar. AND as I did not know any Yiddish, he introduced me to a particular group of students in this movement who had formed the "Massada" offshoot of Betar. It was made up of more assimilated Jewish youth, intellectually, scholastically inclined and from the more affluent professional parents. AND soon enough they recognized my leadership qualities and I was made secretary of that group. AND this is how my life became more interesting, because I would go off to the main Jewish Library and read up on the lives of Jewish thinkers and leaders, and learn the difference between Socialism and Revisionism, and get information about all the historical events in the Zionist movement; who was Weitzman and Herzl, The Balfour Declaration, who was Bialik, all kinds of things I had never heard before. And so I became an active Zionist in the youth movement of Zeev Jabotinsky.

"Was it a boys' and a girls' mixed group?" I asked. My father had signed me up when I was a teenager to enter the same Betar movement, even though most of my friends belonged to the other more Socialist party. It was not a question of choice for me though. My father's history became a dictated legacy for his first-born.

"Oh yes. Boys and girls group, AND for the first time I understood what it means that girls are going after boys. I used to get secret letters from three girls at the same time. One was Smolgovsky's sister, she was two years younger. WE accepted a lot of people. ONE day, a young girl, actually Katrina Karloff, you remember her, she was about nine, and she came and said in her little voice: I want to join. I want to belong to the organization. AND so I asked her if her



mother knew about this, and she replied yes. So I told her, I was the secretary now, I was about sixteen or seventeen, I think, that her mother must bring her. I remember a very small woman came in with a big mouth, shouting and yelling at us : what is the problems with you all, I signed my daughter up, and now you say I must bring her in myself! What, you don't trust us? and on and on.. and so I just said to her, please, we need you to sign a form here and pay the membership dues and she calmed down and huffed and puffed and did what she had to do, I remember. I heard later that she, Katrina's mother, was an innkeeper. She was the woman who took in the boarders who slept on hammocks in the rooms they would stay there for a night, and the little girl, Katrina would have to help with delivery of tea or vodka, or whatever else in food served there. She was, only nine years old and coming faithfully to the meetings, she liked her uniform and all, with the interesting activities she became a good member of her unit. This is Katrina Karloff Story.

Now back to my "teenage loving stories". So one was this sister of Misha Smolgovsky, and one was Lilka Levinuvna. Lilka was a lovely girl. Her father had the only factory in Vilnius of toilet paper, which he couldn't sell much. AND he also made from thin papers, the filter paper for do-it-yourself cigarettes. And the love story was that we used to meet after the early evening meetings, usually once a week at about nine o'clock, and we would walk to her home, and she would invite me in and make some tea or give some cake, and we would sit and keep hands together, maybe a smotch now and again, to kiss, or listen to the music on the radio, and then I used to say goodbye and give her a squeeze or something, and that was that. That was Lilka Levinuvna. Then there was another smallish girl, Bela Lichterman. She was very aggressive. She had decided that I was predestined for her, she told me, and she was not happy that I was spending time with the others, with Lilka especially. I just used to smile at her, appease her, you know. She'd say "something in you is attracting me so strongly, it must be destiny, and I would smile and say YES Yes Yes, and then she'd say "When did you go with her? and I'd answer: NO, no, no, I didn't go with her... her father wanted me to walk her home, that's all." "You didn't stay with her, huh?" "NO, no no, I didn't stay with her, okay." But with this Bela either, I could not go up to her place, because her father was very strict and would not allow us up. SO I would stay downstairs on the street with her and give her a smotch and a squeeze and talk a little and then I would walk home in the evening. Sometimes us boys from the group would arrange to meet at a corner and just be together also. But this was the story of the three girls whom I .. I ... I didn't like them even. Lilka I liked. But the others, well, it was just a kind of passing time, and being of service, you know. Actually, it was a service." My father started to laugh. "A number of us guys

in the head command made it our policy to be nice to all the members, especially the female ones. We couldn't afford/didn't want to lose them from the movement!"

Now I remember one of the other fellows, he went with a girl called Mira. SHe lived not far away from where we held our meetings. She didn't want to go straight away home, so she would say: Oh I will walk around with you guys, and then you will take me back home. AND sometimes I would take her home, and then she was the one who would tell me: Oh this one loves you, and this one really loves you, and so on and so on, and she was very interested in being the matchmaker, because after all she already had a boyfriend and was enjoying all the benefits of young romance, and so she was rather eager to pass it on to me, I suppose.

AND this was the beginnings of the loves stories, of my forays into the world of girls. But my true interest lay elsewhere. I was interested in someone not from this circle at all. HER name was Vera Lerman. SHe was blonde, tall, very well groomed always. She was the daughter of a doctor, my father's friend, and her mother was a piano teacher. They lived far away from us, in another part of town, in a huge apartment house in a eight floor building, the only one in Vilna that had an elevator. I was very often there in her place, and I was a very accepted guest, because of the status my family had. And in Vilna, one's status, that is who your parents were and what they did for a living was very important. We were very aware, I speak especially in the Jewish community, of who was of upper class, professional educated type people, as opposed to the mercantile lower class of shopkeepers and tradespeople. AND Vera was definitely, in her look and manner, from the upper class. Very elegant. Very noble looking. Yes, that is who in my heart I really thought of.

"How did you meet her?"

"Hmm, I don't know.." he said quizzically. He thought for a moment. A silent sifting through the faded memory cards, tracing back, back, sorting through time and place, far into the cool recesses where once red-hot passions lie blackened, long ago burned out by the apathy of time. Is it really important where and how they met, I think now that I have asked for that information, or is it more important to merely rekindle the feeling, the cherished memory of a soul once known and desired.

" Well, I think it was, ... ah yes, I know, I know . We met the first time, they were from the fifteenth of June till the end of AUGust, always in the summertime.... on a 'dacha'. A dacha was about fifteen kilometers from Vilna, in the country, in the forests, near a river, the place was called

Tsharn Boor (it means Black Forest) where the peasants lived there year around. We used to rent a room in the peasant's house, which was always a better room than they themselves had, a special room for the 'letnyakes', for the summer people. The train used to bring on the Friday evenings, all the parents, to spend the weekends in the country houses, and on Monday mornings off they would go back to work again. But my father used to come here and stay on as the doctor, with his own surgery, you see, and that is why we had a lot of eggs and bread and cheese and butter, and chickens which was the way the peasants would repay my father for his doctoring. My stepmother would come mostly for the weekends, because she was working in the hospital with the children.

Now Verka used to come with her parents also to this same place, and being housed about ten minutes walk from our home. We used to take walks along the river banks, it was always shallow with many stones and a little bit of water at our spot, and one day our parents met and recognized each other as doctors and so we had visits together. This is how I met Vera. And I was very much... very much in love with her. I suppose if I think back now, she was my first true love. But it was not to be consummated as I would have like it. The intimacy was very interesting. She never allowed me to make love to her, but she enjoyed very much a different way. We would take off our clothes and lay down next to each other, and she would let me lie on top of her, and then we would slowly let our bodies move together and rub each other, and I was to come in a handkerchief or something. And so we would masturbate each other, and that was how we enjoyed each other's bodies. " My father gave a snort of a laugh. " It was very interesting in those days.." he chuckled. I wasn't sure if it was a sniff of mockery at the prententiousness of sexual purity, or an ironic dismissal of lost opportunity. Perhaps it was quite simply, the chuckle of a wise man finding the humor now in the past clumsiness of adolescent lust. Whatever it was, he continued his little grunts of amusement. Then with a smile of a wily country cat remembering the treat of milk after a day's catch of mice, my father continued:

"But, but at the same time, the peasant's daughter, Yadviga... let me see, I was fifteen, so she was about seventeen, she was the one who introduced me into the whole story of the act of lovemaking. We used to play together, and one day she said she had something to show me, we always examined nature things together, because coming from the city, frogs and rabbits and chickens were all very interesting to me. So I went with her to see what it was in the barn, and we climbed up the ladder into the hayloft, and she said I had to follow her into the back corner there where it was dark, and so I did. AND then she giggled, I remember her face was hot and sweaty, red in the cheeks, I thought it was from all the climbing, and then suddenly she pulled up

her skirts and I saw in a panic that she was not wearing any underwear. And so my lessons in the barn began. SHE showed me all the working parts of a peasant girl, what and how and what to do and how to do it, and she told me it was alright to take off my pants and do it to her. And so, there in the barn, became our lovemaking place. We would do it from time to time. But a funny thing, she would always demand something from me after we were done. Or it has to be gift, or a favor, or something special to show her that I thank her for a good time, I suppose. AND one day I remember, we were there in the dark corner, when she heard her father calling her. I quickly jumped up, pulled up my pants and escaped quietly through the back door. Now he came in and when she showed herself, she was all hot and sweaty and red in the face as usual, and her father thinking that she had been up to no good, he beat her. HE took a whip to her, and beat her up. She told me afterwards what he had done. She laughed. She said: "The silly old man didn't even realize there was a boy there with me. He only thought I was playing alone with myself, or maybe he even thought I was doing it with some animal, crazy man! We have to remain pure until marriage, you know. It is a sin. But I don't care. I do it my way as my body tells me. I don't want to be a nun, psheh!" SHE spat three times. "What am I supposed to do with my feelings, huh, sweet boy? But that's okay... how is he ever going to find out that his precious daughter, the virgin, is a cracked egg already, ha ha ha," and she laughed. "In the meantime we make fun, huh? We make the corn grow, huh, sweet dark-haired boy?" And then she made me make love again, right there in her own room.

" AND it was about this time, through the organization, when I met Malka." He paused. "Malka," he repeated, his voice turning serious. Summer in the hay had disappeared.

THE way he said her name, it felt like a new character had stepped forward onto the stage, and one had the feeling she was to play quite an important role.

"I was already about seventeen when I met her." He took a deep breath. "Malka loved nature. SHE loved to go to the hills, to the parks, to the lakeside, loved to go on long walks, that was Malka. SHE was thinnish, very intelligent. SHE had a friend, whose name I sometimes remember and sometimes I forget again. But they were inseperable, Malka and this friend of her. And she was as fat as Malka was thin. SHE had a roundish face with a lot of pimples, I remember, but always smiling, always with a quiet shy little giggle. They stayed in the centre of town, near a monastery, because Mr. Lazar, it was Malka Lazar, had his big electric supply shop right there in the middle of town. HE was a very fat man with a very thin wife. It was very funny to look at them

Nadya



together. HE was a very rich man, but no culture. His life, he had made lots of money from his electrical business, was just shop to home, shop to home. No music, no art, no books, no culture at all. In fact he behaved like a fat boorish nouveau riche man. Their house was unkempt and all they talked about was material things and of course, money. AND this Malka was a spoilt girl. SHE had the best of everything. Beautiful clothes, beautiful shoes, and all the time: "I pay, don't worry, I have the money. I pay." SHE was always generous to everyone in the organization. SHE was the one who would volunteer to spend on food for everyone if we went out as a group, donating money to the organization. And one day we all were on a big outing, we had arranged a hike on one of the nearby mountains, and we had all gone together. AND so we were walking, and as she is next to me, she pulls at my arms and says to me: "Come, let's go up a little further, I know a nice place where we can watch the birds a little higher up. Come with me." There were only about ten minutes or so left for our "Tiyul" our hike, and I was anxious that we didn't miss the rest of the group by going off somewhere else. "Don't worry," she assured me.. "we will be back in time. IT doesn't take long." We were with another couple, walking, and then they went off somewhere, and Malka held me by the hand and pulled me up after her. And so I followed her, she was always athletic, and a good climber. And soon she brought me to a place and it was a cave. So I said "No, I am claustrophobic a little, I don't know if I want to go in there, Malka." And she said to me "No, don't worry, it will be fine. Look, it really isn't a proper cave. Come look here, it has an opening.. look you can see the sky through this hole up here, isn't it beautiful? Please come in here and just take a look, you'll see. The view is spectacular." SHE was very excited in her voice and she kept urging me towards her where she stood in the cave. So then I went inside and yes, I could see, it was not like a cave so much, but like a grotto with a hole up in the roof of the cave through which the sunlight was pouring in, you could see the sky peeping through, and further along, there was a wide opening on the side that looked out at the view down the mountain, and on the floor of the cave, it was more like a giant hollowed out rock, was a soft carpet of moss and grass. And once I had stepped inside, Malka laid herself down on this soft carpet and said to me, I was just standing there in the middle of this cave, she said: "Come lay yourself down next to me," and so I did. And then she started to kiss me and .. well she really started to go for it." He paused to swallow, his jaw moving a little. He pursed his lips, as if to hold back words that would reveal too much. As if the experience was destined to remain forever lost in a cave somewhere high on a mountain, with not even the crudeness of carved out names to mark the moment of a serious young boy's uncertain demise into temptation. He was choosing the words carefully. The secrecy of that cave was being respected. After all the

talking taht came before, this paused now, at the mouth of the cave, seemed longer than a lover's moan.

"AND she had it," he stated succintly. Silence broken, Desire satiated. The spoilt Malka got what she wanted yet again, his voice seemed to betray. And I gave it to her, his words said smugly. Mission accomplished. Wipe the hands. "And I said to her," he continued, his voice now relieved, heading on back down the mountain, out of the cave and its moist nature sodden air, "why did we have to come all the way up here to do this?" He was laughing now, amused at his own wittiness, dismissing the whole incident in a toss of the eyebrow, "we could have stayed at home and had a much more comfortable bed..." he smiled sardonically, still speaking to Malka of the cave. "And she replied, NO, no, it had to be like this, out in the open,...this is a so much more romantic way of making love. This is how it should be. Natural, part of nature. OUT in the open, under the sky."

His tone was mocking, his voice imitating Malka like a drag queen who cannot refrain from indulging in the anger of overacting. I remember this tone from my own experience as a child ---the voice and the mocking smiling eyes from the God I adored. How he could make one feel insignificant in a flash, with a twist of his face, or a narrowing of the mouth. Oh, you have ideas of your own, do you? the lips would snarl. Oh you think it is so easy and wonderful to be a free spirit, huh, and believe in airy fairy things, do you? His eyes would glare to the beat of his grinding jaw that made his high temples move up and down, up and down in silent scorn and ridicule. Silly you, with your wishes and your fanciful thoughts, don't answer back, and your head in the air, silly girl! He could make you feel humiliated just for having a thought, just for being interested in dreams, he could. Just for being female. That is how it felt to me. The laugh that dangled you helpless.

"So this is the story of Malka. Malka the nature lover... " he continued, his eyes still twinkling. He had come down to more familiar territory, safely away from Malka's cave, back on the ground where he could walk with more assurance, recall events with more bravado.

"And then she used to invite me to her house, when she knew that her parents were going to be away. And her younger sister would be fast asleep, and then we would make love in her room."

"She was how old, did you say?" I asked him.

"Well, I was seventeen, so she was a year younger, she was sixteen," he answered.

"Sixteen!" I repeated, incredulously. She was so young, I thought to myself. I realized suddenly that I had had such a

different picture planted in my head of young people in those so-called olden days. Those prewar days about which we were led to believe that girls were supposed to have had strict Victorian morals, and our generation had been nurtured on purified images of prudish virginal maidens who married young and then spawned us, woe is me, flaming revolutionaries. And it was we alone, the sixties bra and groundbreakers who finally led all women to their eventual sexual liberation and into the realm of free love. Now wait just a minute. Something wrong with this picture! I was beginning to question that misguided image. It appeared from the story of Malka, the cave siren, not to mention Yudviga the Panting Polish Peasant that teenagers had been acting on the firm convictions of their hormones no matter what era they were born into. The rest was just good public relations or great big whopping lies.

"She had a very strong desire to have sex," my father said matter-of-factly. He broke into my train of thought, and confirmed my musings. I felt betrayed. I had spent my whole adolescence under the very tight reins of this very man, this man who was now divulging all the passions of youth to me, to ME, who had been reprimanded at every turn to act like a lady and keep my mouth and my legs closed at the best of times. Yah!

He continued his story. "One day she invited me over to her house. I came over there and I see that her friend is with her there too. Oh, I just had her name now, er... Nah.. Nat.. Natalie.. Let us call her Natalie for now. Oh no, oh no, I have it. NOW I know, it came to me now! Natasha-- it is Natasha. Natash Shneiman. That is her name. The friend of Malka. So Natasha sits there, and we being talking and so on, and then Malka says to me: 'Look, I want to be fair. And please, I don't want you to be cross with me.'"

He pauses. He is searching for the right words, the exact words.

"'We will have sex,' she says to me. 'But Natasha will be a part of it.'"

'Whoa, what..wha....' I spluttered, I just didn't know what to say to that.

'Just listen to me, for a minute,' she says. 'Listen to me carefully.'

"It is very interesting, this next five minutes," my father smiles to me. He knows what he is about to reveal to me, the unsuspecting listener.

"She looks at me and says to me: We will have a sandwich! I will be in the middle. She will be under me and you will be on top." MY father looks at me and smiles. "You never heard about it, huh?"

I suddenly became aware of the droning sound of a lawnmower coming from the next house. What was I supposed to say. Oh sure, Dad, everyone knows about those things. Those kind of things go on all the time. What I was truly trying to imagine was the logistics of it, and I was having trouble placing a half-imagined thin Malka with a vague fat Natasha under a young image of my father all in the nude balancing on top of each other. Somehow in my mind they kept falling off and giggling, and I just couldn't get to the picturing of the sex part of it. But that was obviously the failure of my inexperienced imagination. Besides which, the truth of it was, that I was still struggling with the idea of these girls daring to do at sixteen, what I in my postchildren renaissance barely allowed myself to think about in our modern Aids-infested day. "Dad," I finally heard myself say,

"I .. I .. just can't believe that they were doing this at sixteen. We, we ... just had such a different picture of our parents. In fact, you never think of your parents as youngsters, let alone having sex, doing the ...doing the nasty, is what the young kids today are calling it..." I said to him. He was grinning. He was definitely enjoying this moment, like the faint aftertaste of a good delicious meal, He was remembering the taste again for a brief second.

"Oh," he smiled, beginning to laugh, "It's very funny. The parents don't hear from the children what the children are doing, and the children don't hear from the parents what they are doing..." He was laughing gleefully, mischievously now... "But we were all doing it, you better believe it, we were all okay. All having a good time."

"Right!" he said, announcing that he was carrying on with the story. "And it was very exciting." Then his voice became more conspiratory, more soliticiously quiet. "And she used to get red on the face.." he almost whispered.

"Who?" I asked. "Natasha?"

"Natasha," he confirmed. "She enjoyed it. Underneath, you know. I could hear her breathing and moaning little sounds of pleasure. AND afterwards her look of smiling face and glistening eyes. Like a doll with a painted smile. It was very strange, but she kept the secret. And afterwards it became a routine, like this.'

"With Natasha," I said.

"With Natasha, yes" he replied. "Natasha underneath, or Natasha on the side, how ever, and she would play with her, or with herself or whatever. But I, I was always with Malkaleh, only with Malka."

He stopped for a moment. I feared he was done with this episode. I wasn't ready to have Malka or Natasha leave the bedroom quite yet. I still wanted to get a clearer picture in my mind, position them in the bed in a series of various poses before he went on to whatever else his memory presented next. For he was the one in control, as always, uh huh, the



scene director, the rule maker. The one to impart his knowledge, his dictates, his stories. The one with the power to cast spells, good or evil, with his words.

He spoke again. "Just to end the story with Natasha", he declared. His tone was now crisp, precise --- the rounding up of facts and herding them into a neat tidy solution. "When the Ghetto had to be liquidated, the first September nineteen forty-three, Malka somehow was with her father, and her sister and her mother. For about two days.... There was a whole chaos in the Ghetto. I was in a room like this ( he spread his arms to suggest my livingroom, about twenty by fourteen feet), ten families. BUT I had a ledge on one of the window sills, with some kind of linen sheet that I tacked up onto the wall to indicate some kind of privacy. AND I was packing, I didn't care what was happening around me, all the wild turmoil of shouting and cries and bewilderment. I had heard there was a call for people to go and work in Estonia, and I sent a message to Malka and her family, that if they wanted to join me we would travel together. But we would have to leave immediately."

" But were you married already?" I asked.

" Yah," he said hurriedly. " I am just skipping... I'm going from 1938, I 'm going to 1943."

"Alright," I said, nodding, understanding suddenly that my interruptions were barricades in the way of his flight to Estonia. My quest for logical, timesequencing was a stumbling block for the freedom of his quickflowing mindstream.

"And that, that I will be waiting for them," he rushed on, There is a point at which we will meet at eight o'clock, and we must all be there, you see, you must all be there," said quickly. " You must be packed, all what you need, not too much, only what you need, I told them. I gave them all the instructions, everything I told them,...in ...in a little letter. AND.. and .. I gave it the boy. And he went. The little boy. There were always little boys who ..who would be the quick messengers, whom you used to pay, give something, and they did it. AND he came back to me to say everything is alright... the children are packing and the parents are getting ready and the parents will go together." He paused briefly for a quick breath.

"At about ten at night", he said in a hushed voice, "Natasha came to me. She said : I have nobody. With whom will I go? And I told her; You will go with me. Don't worry. And she stayed with me... and then...me made love."

He took a breath. "And I never forgotten it, " he said. "She was ... unbelievable," he said softly, breathlessly,

"... unbelievable, this Natasha."

His voice had become delicate and flushed, like a shy little girl who looks in the mirror and sees with a pang of pleasure that she is starting to become beautiful. He was silent for a moment, his face calm with a radiant smile that betrayed an uncommon wonderment. It was a cherished memory. Tucked behind the thin linen screen, hiding furtively in the crumbling darkness of a past life best forgotten, suddenly a moment comes to light, to life, and causes an old sunwrinkled man to bask in its gentle glow.

"After the war, I was looking for her, by the way. And I heard from a friend that she had died."

"You know what," he said to me, his voice suddenly breaking the mood, "that friend of mine Meish, you know him, he loves now in FLorida, when I told him afterwards that I had made love to Natasha and how incredible it was, he says to me; "Hey, what's the matter with you, why didn't think of doing it before? I had her all the time!" he says." My father chuckled, then broke out into a hearty laugh. "that bastard Meish," he laughed, his voice reaching higher and higher, I couldn't tell soon if he was laughing or crying... " He .." he laughed, "he...had ...her ...all the time..."

I looked at him. Here he was, the old man, laughing like a child, over lost pleasures, his eyes crinkled to a slit, his body shaking gently like some CHinese made head-bopping ornament. What is so funny about it, I thought to myself. It must some male thing. Some secret male bonding agreement underscored in the Rites of Conquest rulebook, which states in small print that the winner takes all, and the loser laughs the sadness away. Shake hands and role the dice again. Onto the next play. Place your bets. Smile and congratulate the winner. Especially if it is your friend.

"And do you believe him?" I asked.

He sat up, his laughter stopping suddenly. "I don't know," he replied, as if hearing something for the first time. "To tell you the truth, I don't know." His face settled back to its former seriousness. In effect, I had changed the game with my surprise question. I had showed him different cards.

He recovered quickly. "I think perhpas it was not true. And I will tell you why. ONce, I remember Natasha did not come to a meeting.. she was sick. NOW Malka was just a regular organization member, but Natasha belonged to the leadership group with us boys, Meish, Misha and myself...the three Mooskateers. AND I remember that day going to visit her. And it was the last day of her sickness, she was feeling

better, but she was still in bed. Her parents had a shop of clothing, ..., em, blouses, belts, bags, and so on... very nice shop, beautiful shop with all sorts of elegant, nicely arranged things, and they were always in the shop, Natasha too, she was the only daughter. AND there was a young maid. And she was sitting in a chair next to Natasha who was lying in her bed. AND I said to Natasha, in Yiddish, what does she want, this maid. WHY is she sitting there. So she says to the maid, please leave, you can go, go to your room, I will be alright. AND the maid gives me a look, turns to Natasha and says to her: No, no, he will do something to you, you mustn't stay alone with him, it's not right. AND I say to the maid: NO, no, don't be silly... I will not do anything to her. Don't worry, I am just a friend come to a visit, to see how she is, you can be assured I am not that kind of person.

AND then when she was out of the room, I turned to look at Natasha and of course, now that the maid had planted the idea in my head, I began to think of only that and so I said to her; So, what about it, eh, you feel like it? Can anything happen here? AND she said quite strongly; No, no not at all. You are with Malka, and I could not do that to a friend, never, no...no. I will not allow it." So we sat and talked for a while, and then I could not help myself, I suppose, I tried to put my hand near her breast or something, and she smacked my hand away, and I got very excited, and then I said to her; Well, you're feeling alright, I see. You're getting better, huh? And she said she's feeling much better, and I said ALright, alright, alright..that I would see her at the next meeting, then, alright, and goodbye! AND I walked out of her room. And there stands the maid right outside the bedroom door in the hallway. And she presses her back into the wall, and swaying from side to side, she says to me: "So what happened....you didn't get it?" "what are you talking about?" I asked her. "Well, I saw what was going on... I heard you two. You still want it, heh? And I said again my voice very high and innocent of course, "What are you talking about?" AND she took my hand and led me down the hall, round the corner and into her own room." He paused, a grin growing on his face again. "This was like butter," he proclaimed gleefully, and began again to laugh his staccato chuckle. " I suppose she did it so much, you know," he said between the chuckles, "it was just like going into soft butter." "I saw it in your face when you looked at her," she told me. I protested. It was never my intention. "Well, anyway," she said, "you got what you wanted!" He began to chortle again, "AND she got me soap, " my father said chuckling, "and, and .." he continued, "a new towel, to clean myself off."

"Yah, that was Natasha. A most marvellous lay with a face still full with the acne. The acne remained all the time."

And I will tell you why. ONce, I remember Natasha did not come to a meeting.. she was sick. NOW Malka was just a regular organization member, but Natasha belonged to the leadership group with us boys, Meish, Misha and myself...the three Mooskateers. AND I remember that day going to visit her.

And it was the last day of her sickness, she was feeling better, but she was still in bed. Her parents had a shop of clothing,...,em, blouses, belts, bags, and so on... very nice shop, beautiful shop with all sorts of elegant, nicely arranged things, and they were always in the shop, Natasha too, she was the only daughter. AND there was a young maid. And she was sitting in a chair next to Natasha who was lying in her bed. AND I said to Natasha, in Yiddish, what does she want, this maid. WHY is she sitting there. So she says to the maid, please leave, you can go, go to your room, I will be alright. AND the maid gives me a look, turns to Natasha and says to her: No, no, he will do something to you, you mustn't stay alone with him, it's not right. AND I say to the maid: NO, no, don't be silly...I will not do anything to her. Don't worry, I am just a friend come to a visit, to see how she is, you can be assured I am not that kind of person.

AND then when she was out of the room, I turned to look at Natasha and of course, now that the maid had planted the idea in my head, I began to think of only that and so I said to her; So, what about it, eh, you feel like it? Can anything happen here? AND she said quite strongly; No, no not at all. You are with Malka, and I could not do that to a friend, never, no...no. I will not allow it." So we sat and talked for a while, and then I could not help myself, I suppose, I tried to put my hand near her breast or something, and she smacked my hand away, and I got very excited, and then I said to her; Well, you're feeling alright, I see. You're getting better, huh? And she said she's feeling much better, and I said ALright, alright, alright..that I would see her at the next meeting, then, alright, and goodbye! AND I walked out of her room. And there stands the maid right outside the bedroom door in the hallway. And she presses her back into the wall, and swaying from side to side, she says to me: "So what happened....you didn't get it?" "what are you talking about?" I asked her. "Well, I saw what was going on... I heard you two. You still want it, heh? And I said again my voice very high and innocent of course, "What are you talking about?" And she took my hand and led me down the hall, round the corner and into her own room." He paused, a grin growing on his face again. "This was like butter," he proclaimed gleefully, and began again to laugh his staccato chuckle. " I suppose she did it so much, you know," he said between the chuckles,"it was just like going into soft butter." "I saw it in your face when you looked at her," she told me. I protested. It was never my intention. "Well, anyway," she said, "you got what you



better, huh? And she said she's feeling much better, and I said ALright, alright, alright..that I would see her at the next meeting, then, alright, and goodbye! ANd I walked out of her room. And there stands the maid right outside the bedroom door in the hallway. And she presses her back into the wall, and swaying from side to side, she says to me: "So what happened....you didn't get it?" "what are you talking about?" I asked her. "Well, I saw what was going on... I heard you two. You still want it, heh? And I said again my voice very high and innocent of course, "What are you talking about?" ANd she took my hand and led me down the hall, round the corner and into her own room." He paused, a grin growing on his face again. "This was like butter," he proclaimed gleefully, and began again to laugh his staccato chuckle. " I suppose she did it so much, you know," he said between the chuckles,"it was just like going into soft butter." "I saw it in your face when you looked at her," she told me. I protested. It was never my intention. "Well, anyway," she said, "you got what you wanted!" He began to chortle again, "ANd she got me soap, " my father said chuckling, "and, and .." he continued, "a new towel, to clean myself off."

"Yah, that was Natasha. A most marvellous lay with a face still full with the acne. The acne remained all the time."

The favor. *Eitan*

The Jutan family consisted of many brothers and sisters. My father's brother married Osnat Sor. She was the daughter of a couple, very smallish in size. He was a picture framer, one of the only ones in the town of Vilna. Osnat got herself a very good education and became an assistant "accouche", which means a midwife. She worked with a very rich lady doctor, Dr. Lurie, and they were very good friends. "Surely it wasn't very common to have female doctors?" I interrupted.

"No, it was not common," he replied, "but she was from a very very good family. Jewish, a very known name, Komai. Well, to continue, the story I want to tell you is a very interesting story."

"Osnat one day came to my mother. She said to her: 'Vasha, I'm in trouble. I'm in big trouble.' So my mother said to her, : 'What can be this big trouble?' And Osnat said to her: 'I am being blackmailed by a girl for whom Dr. Komai and I did an abortion.' As you know Poland is a Catholic country and in Catholic countries, abortion is prohibited. Now this girl was looking to make trouble. So my mother says to Osnat: 'I'm not sure why it is that you are coming to me, Osnat. How do you think that I can help?' So Osnat says to my mother: 'I know that you have three friends. One is Anushka, who, you know lives with that German fellow who comes here from time to time. You know the one, the traveller who comes to Vilna every now and then and she lives with him... her own mother doesn't even know about it or that he's German, even. And the other one is Dora, the nice black-haired one, who also has a German fellow. Well, now the girl with whom we are having all this trouble is German. So perhaps you can talk to your friends and they will talk to the men, and the men perhaps will talk to the girl perhaps we will pay her, whatever it is, just to get out of the trouble.'

So my mother says to her: 'You know what, Osnat, I will see what I can do for you.'

Now why did she come to my mother, is also an interesting story. You see, we were a double family. What does it mean double family? (He asks the question for me.) I shall explain what this means. When my father divorced my mother when I was about five or six, a year later Osnat introduced my mother to her brother who was Yossi Sor, who made a very impression on my mother and the whole family. And so she married him. This Sor was a tallish man with very bright eyes looking in all directions how to make a living. As a son of a picture framer, he also knew that profession, but at the age of twenty he left the country for Germany and France to avoid being called up to the army. Afterwards he returned to his home town, but we never knew what kind of fellow he is. But when my mother got married to him, we realized what

a very big mistake it was. First of all, he had a illegitimate son from a Jewish girl, and perhaps this was even the reason he ran away in the first place. His son was about twelve or thirteen when I was about seven, and the son already had a criminal record and had been in a juvenile correction home for delinquents. Anyway my mother had to take care of this son of his sometimes when he came to our house and would ask for money or food, especially when he knew his father was not at home. In fact I'll tell you a story about this wildboy, this ganef. He was older at the time, and had a job during the summer at the fairground. AND one day I was walking around there, when this Dotka, David, was his name, sees me and calls out to me. He is working at the horse carousel, taking tickets. HE shouts out to me: HEy, Isska, come over here... you wanna ride ?" Of course I did, so I shook my head eagerly and he led me up onto the round platform of the carousel. It was lovely.. the dainty cheerful music going, pum pum pah, parapa pah.. and those beautiful brightly colored painted horses, ah a magical circle. So I follow this Dotka as he presses his hand at my back, and I 'm looking around at the bright horses, and then suddenly we go through a little door and I am thrust into a dark little hole, like the centre of some giant wheel. HE had pushed me into the hub of the carousel, a small dark chamber with light only from the open top high up. And I am now the horse." I looked at my father not understanding. "Don't you understand, there was no electricity. Back then we didn't have electricity and everything had to be done by hand! SO this Dotka was in charge of supervising boys, little boys who wanted to ride free and a couple of poor old men who struggled for the few groshes, to turn the giant wheel that revolved the carousel and made the pretty music-box melodies. IT was heavy, that wooden bar to push. Hard work for a little, so that I couldn't even push the bar with my arms, I would strain against it with my stomach. I got my free ride, but my face was dripping with sweat. And I even did this twice because I wanted a another ride. And I did it. But I hated the way that young Sor tricked me. I never forgave him for that. And he always used to come to our house to beg for food or money especially on those occassions when my stepfather wasn't at home. My mother was always very kind to him and helped him in the little ways that she could, but told him that he sould not come and bother his father. And she used to tell me not to report to my stepfather that his son had visited when he had. AND sometimes I would tell him, and I would get into trouble from my mother for doing so. I don't know. I never liked my stepfather, Sor. And I liked his son even less.

So now, here is the connection between Osnat Sor and my mother. NOT only was she my father's first cousin's wife but now she was my stepfather's sister, my stepaunt. And so you the double family, I mention. You see that she knew all about my mother and her friends from not one, but many sources.

She knew all the stories. So this is connection that brought her to my mother to come and ask for this big favor, when I was about eight years old.

I lived with my mother until I was thirteen years old, at my barmitzvah time.

So my mother immediately made the necessary requirements from her three friends, Dora, Anushka and Raya, little Raya. All three of them were not married, and nearly every night they would come to my mother's apartment and sit together in the living room and tell their stories to one another. When I was seven, which is around the time this incident happened, they must have been, let's see now, around thirty. My mother was twenty-eight, Raya too, Dora was thirty and Annushka was twenty-nine. This was the group. The Musketeers. They used to all go together in the evenings down to the cafe Strahl, where the entertainment was a ladies trio playing the popular waltzes and tangos of the day. Violin, piano and cello, they played, these ladies of culture. They were very nicely dressed and coiffed, very very elegant. At eleven o'clock on a Sunday morning, we all used to go, me included, with the ladies as escorts down to that coffeehouse for a coffee-cream, and I was allowed a small cake which was like an éclair, roll with cream in it. Oh, how I loved it. Anyway, the decision of the three girls when they discussed this problem of Osnat, was that "Yes we must help her, of course, but unfortunately the two Germans had just left. These two fellows were not connected with each other, and it was coincidental that they were both gone at the same time, but they would be back in about four months time. So Raya said: "Wait a moment, girls, I have a connection. I have a connection with a judge." (My father smiled as he feigned the feminine voice with a twinkle in his eye.) "He uses from time to time my services, he's a Polish Judge and we are very friendly, and he helps me from time to time. But I have difficulty in meeting him, you know how it is, in town, where can a single woman meet a prominent person in a nice intimate private setting? In the hotels it is not allowed, and he is married, we know that. But I have a feeling that if I can go to him, you know, and ask what he thinks about the situation, well, you never know what little favor he can come up with for me." Well the Judge was very amicable to her and explained that cases like that came across his bench very often, and that if the case would indeed come to him, then for a specified amount he was sure he would be able to squash it. Which meant that now the case had to come to court. So Osnat was notified about the whole story, and spoke to her Doctor partner, and they agreed that they would not submit to the blackmail of the girl and if the girl really wanted to, she could take them to court. They



understood that perhaps the boyfriend of the girl wanted to make some quick cash, and probably thought "if the Jews don't want to pay, then we go to court." This was the idea. Because the girl actually said as much to them. Osnat was very upset because they had done everything to help this desperate young girl in good faith, and then complications must have happened after the operation and the girl had panicked and instead of returning to them had gone to a local hospital. Osnat believed that the girl's religious guilt had then begun to plague her once things were public, and she then decided to find the scapegoat which is always the JEw, always the helper.

Now the way it worked out, the girl did indeed go the police. The police came to make an inquiry. NOT with the Doctor, mind you, but with Osnat. Doctor Lurie was very cleverly away from town at this time. So they came to Osnat and inquired, and she said "yes , a girl came to us, she was desperate for help, and I examined her and said to her I'm sorry you are already in such a way that I cannot really help you, and she went away." Now that police made a dossier and determined that it would have to go the state attorney who decided that it had to go to court. The friendly judge was notified about it and he took over the case.

Raya came to say that there was some complications with the case.

MY mother said back to her: "Complications, or no complications, if he wants money, he will get it." So Raya said; "I have an idea. Maybe if I could meet with him again and talk to him in a different kind of venue, you know, well, it could happen that between the two of us we could come up with some solutions. . (My father smiles as he pauses.) DO you think it might be possible to perhaps have the use of your salon for a meeting with him?"

"Salon, meaning living room?" I interrupted.

"Yes, yes, of course.." my father replied. "You see," he explained, his mind easily retracing his steps back into his apartment from sixty years before, " When you come into my apartment where I lived, you go through the entrance and on the left is the kitchen, and straight is the door to the livingroom. A big livingroom, with an elegant couchette in the centre and a palm tree in the corner, with little two tables and armchairs in which the women would sit and share their stories."

"By couchette, do you mean those curved chaises with the satin upholstery?", I asked. I was trying deperately to conjure up in my mind a picture of an elegant stylish room of a bygone era that had died along with the grandmother I had never known.

"Yes," he said slowly, patiently. YES, like a Napoleon style little sofa, where mother used to have a nap in the afternoon..." he paused. Was he there, tiptoeing softly in the darkness of an lacy afternoon, careful not to wake a

sleeping woman? Careful to let beloved ghosts have their afternoon nap?

" I have always wanted one of those.." I said. I now knew why. A precious memory of a familiar treasured object had been passed into my genetic code, secreted into my cells issued from my father at conception. Dormant inheritance. Memories from another generation slipped into my unsuspecting enzymes to lie lurking like strangers from a foreign land in a corner room of my modernized mind. To register finally, ironically, as a piece of furniture.

"Now on the right hand side," my father carried on, wading just as easily back in time as he swam his leisurely breaststroke in the pool," was the bathroom, and then a corridor passed along, whose left wall was the back wall of the salon. And then a dark corridor which led finally to three rooms. One was a big dningroom. ON the lefthand side was a big room in which it was the bedroom. Right." HE paused for a fraction of a second to change gears. From the tour of the old apartment he slid easily into the narrative. HE had complained to me at the airport of how bad his memory was. Yet her he was as quick and agile in recalling his young past as a young boy running from trouble. SO my mother said; "You know what, I think it is a good idea. Let him come to us, this judge. You can invite him over and say it is a party and you'd like him to meet your good friends, why, you know how to do it, Raya, you know what to say better than I do. Let him come to us."

"A social evening," I contributed, smiling.

"Yes," my father nodded," I suppose you could call it a social evening.

"Now I was at this time..well, I had heard the talk about this story going on and on, but you know, I was always playing with my toys or writing or doing something with my imagination to keep myself busy. Oh yes, it was my farm. At this time, by the way, my father had brought me home from one his travels to Germany, a big farm as big as half of your kitchen table, made up of cows and pigs and trees and stables and barns, everything from wood, everything that a farm has, and I could play and rearrange all the pieces in different places for hours. So yes, anyhow, for this particular evening about which we are talking now, it was about nine o'clock, she put me to bed, my mother, and said to me sternly: "You must not get out from the bed!"

"And where was your father, I mean, stepfather?" I asked, trying to sort out the pieces of information like a little boy playing with the figurines on his model farm.

"My stepfather was away or something. Yes, he was away. He used to be away often, my stepfather, like my father too. He used to frame pictures, religious pictures, pictures of Mary and Jesus, et cetera , and then travel out to the little villages in the country and try and sell them to the peasants

or villagers far away. Oh, Sor used to keep himself very busy all the time." His voice dismissed him readily from the picture. As for his stepfather, my father's contempt for him kept him out of my father's memories just as surely as those very trips he had taken himself.

"So the end of the story is," my father continues, "when my mother told me that I must not get out of my bed, of course it was natural that I would do exactly the opposite. And so now I came out from my bedroom and I saw this man in the salon from my secret hiding place in the corridor, the dark corridor. He walked in with Raya into the apartment, and there is waiting my mother and her friends. Raya introduces my mother, and then introduced Dora and also Annushka, and the judge didn't know what to do." My father stops to smile, the mirthful grin of a young boy outwitting a grownup, his voice becoming sing-song as he recalled the judges' confusion. It was as if he is suddenly his mother, Vava, greeting this prominent judge at the door. He seems to be recollecting this story from her point of view, with her sardonic wit and narrative rather than the innocent observations of a curious boy in the shadows. For a moment I wondered whose memories they really were. And then I suddenly realized with a pang, that they had now become mine too. Ghosts can come alive. She has woken from her nap.

My father continued his gleeful encounter : "Can you just picture this judge, huh? There he is at the door, having come all the way for a rendezvous with one, one girl.." he chuckled as he held up one finger, "and now all of a sudden here he is face to face with four women." He smacked his hands together and brought them up to his mouth, prayerlike, to hide his pursed and mischievous grin. He breathed out his amusement with a high cascading whistle, and brought his hands back down to rest flat and smooth, palms down on his chest. He has had his moment of fun, and now he continues with the story.

"Alright, so now this judge he makes a little bit of polite conversation, and my mother says to him; Well, we know that we must leave you two alone, because Raya has told us that you two have something very very important to discuss, so please make yourself at home. You see, over there I have prepared a carafe of wine, some drinks, a little streusel, some canapes...so eat a little, drink a little and talk for as long as you need. Be well in my home, and we'll see you in a while." And then my mother left them and with her two friends walked out of the living room, heading towards the corridor. Of course as soon as I heard them coming, I ran quickly back to my bedroom. They went into the diningroom, And from my bedroom I strained to listen to their voices telling their secret stories. And I hear that my mother says: Well, now we got him. Now I can deliver to Osnat." But the whole story is that this judge still hadn't received his

money. The court case comes up and he informs the young girl that the accused has denied doing the operation, and that she has alibis for that day, and so there is not going to be very difficult finding in favor for the young girl. But I can help you in some way, because you are poor people, I can let you off paying the court costs. And he gave them a warning, telling them that if they pursue any more action against the midwife, they would get into trouble for harassment. And so the case was dismissed, and the judge now made another appointment with his friend Raya for another appointment in the "salon".

When he came to our house the second time, there was an envelope there already waiting for him. My mother greeted him warmly and said to him: You honor, we wanted to buy you some flowers or some special gift for being so helpful to our cause. But then we decided you would probably have some special flowers that you prefer, so you don't mind if you choose out some flowers for yourself, do you, and we will give you the money?" she said as she handed him the envelope. "It is not much, really only for some flowers, but it is just a small token of our appreciation of your kindness." Then she took the money that Osnat gave her that Dr. Lurie had given to Osnat (the Doctor, you understand had paid everything to keep her name and practice clean) and gave a large part of this money to her friend Raya for arranging the whole scheme. Because Raya was one of the poorer ones, and she worked from time to time as a social call-girl or like an escort, what you call it today. Now Osnat wanted to show her appreciation in turn for what my mother had done for her, and so she baked a nice babkha cake and gave it to my mother, with a nice little card: "Thank you very much." So it's all very nice and in the family, yes? Everybody happy in the end, right? Well, let me continue. So my cousin David's father, Osnat's husband, in conversation with my father, says to him: "Well, I never expected that in your home there would be a bordello!" So my father, he doesn't know what he's talking about, what when, what.. so, he just kind of flubs it off, and he says back to his brother "Oh you know, Vavka, it was nothing... she just arranged something for one of her girlfriends to meet somebody, and so on... and tell me, how do you know about this?"

So his brother says "Well, Osnat told me."

"And how does Osnat know about it?" my father asks.

"Oh, you know people, they meet and they talk..." he answers.

My father takes a break and breathes in a deep pause. HE has been his mother, his father and his uncle in his voice. Now they are offstage for a moment, and my father reappears as the narrator. He continues:

"My father, at a meeting which they had from time to time, you know, my father and my mother had to meet and to discuss things about their son... they were on speaking terms you see, he says to her: "Vava, tell me, what is this story that



I hear about you and your friends arranging liasons in the home?"

So my mother told him the story. That Osnat came to her begging her to help her because she was scared she was might have to go to jail. "So I tried to think how I could help her, and Raya came up with an excellent plan and so we went ahead and did it."

MY father looked at her and said plain and simple: "You shouldn't have done it." (low voice, shake of head, Pause) "YOU should not have interfered, not have helped them in that kind of way. You know, they are not nice people, the family. Not nice people. The Sor family." He was not good with the SOr family, my father. He didn't like them. He was always having to support them in one way or another. I even remember there was a time when my father paid for her brother's upkeep when he had angina and was flat on his back for three months. ALL I know is that the next day, My mother went over to Osnat's place and gave her hell! I don't know what happened between wife and husband after that, but I know that from that day on, Osnat's husband, my father's brother never spoke to my mother ever again.

AND the only things that I learned afterward was the following: He asked my mother about the money-- if she had taken any money. So my mother said back to him: "Me take money? For something like this? Never. I was trying to help. I would never take money for a favor. Whatever money we got, we gave to the judge and to Raya. What they did with it is none of my business."

Now I was not aware of all this intrigue as a boy. I only knew that my uncle suddenly stopped being nice to me. It seemed like he just didn't like really. See, I used to go there, to David's father's office, every day after school, because it was right on the corner where my school was. SO I used to go there after school and meet my father, who used to come there too, from the city coucil offices which were also right across the street. He used to bring me a chocolate of a book or just to come and talk to me, and we would walk from there to the corner coffeeshouse where we would a coffeecreme or cake and so on, very delicious, I remember, and where we would ask me how things are going on at home. In fact when I think about it now, in my teen years I don't remember having meals at home. My father's new wife was not really a cook, and so my father and I used to lunch at the Hotel Europa, a beautiful big classic old hotel, every day after school, at about 2.15pm. They knew me there, a young school boy having lunch date with his father during the week. Then, after a while, my father organized that I should go and spend lunches over at my stepmother's sister's house, a fifteen minute walk away. This sister, Malka, she had daughters, about four of them, and they all used to eat together and so I ate with my new "cousins".

Not cousins of the same genes, you understand, but cousins nevertheless. There were always children running around, busy, shouting, and only one daughter, Raya, was close to my age."

✓ Karina.

"Tell me again how you met Francine," I asked him.

"It was at a party at Karina Karloff's place. Well, it was actually a party that I had organized for the Survivors' Group. It was a Hannukah party for all of us surviving survivors, because you know that are not that many of us left there now... Borsinsky died, that meshuggeneh Weismann who yelled at the rabbi in my house, I kicked him out of my house, how dare he..., all dead now. So I arranged for us to have a Hannukah party at Karina Karloff's house. Now, Francine was a window neighbor of hers.. she was living opposite Karina at the time. I suppose she met her while they were both on their balconies, and they started talking and I suppose they got on together and so they became acquaintances. You know how it is, two older women from another country, cosmopolitan.. they recognize each other. Something in common. So anyhow we are at this party, and she comes in, Karina had invited her to meet some French speaking people, and Karina brings her over to our group and introduces her to us. And we say hello, and we talk all of us a little bit.

Then I go to the kitchen to organize the dessert, because I had told Karina that she did not have to do anything other than provide the venue. SO I 'm in the kitchen, arranging the cups and saucers and I'm ready to cut the cake, someone had brought a most beautiful cheesecake, into so many pieces, because you know how I am, I am careful that everyone there, eighteen of us, should have a piece of cake, so I'm cutting it into very thin slices. And then Francine walks into the kitchen. "Je pouvais vous aider", she says to me. Can I help you? "Yes" I say and then I show her the cups and saucers and the tray. "Oh, " she says, "a cheesecake."

"No", I say to her, this is not an ordinary cheesecake, this is a Jewish Cheesecake. Here you must try some.." and I take a teaspoon and scrape all the little leftover crumbs from the cutting and the fallen pieces from the plate into the spoon and I gently pick it up to her mouth and say "Let me help you". Then I feed her the spoon with the cheesecake into her mouth. Well, I see that she gets all red on the face." ^

My father laughs his gentle stutter of a laugh, pursing his lips.

"I didn't know," he says, his voice rising comically, "I thought she was just enjoying the cake."

"She told me later that it was such an incredible feeling, I gave her, when I fed the cake, like a "bebe" she said, like a little baby, that she came on the spot." He shook his head smiling, "How I was I to know? All I wanted was for her to have a good time tasting a piece of Jewish cheesecake."

"Karina called me the next day to tell me what a big impression I made on the French lady." "What French lady?" I asked her, and that was how we met. You know I don't think Karina ever forgave me for that."

A "I can't remeber, were they together, or divorced when her husband died?" asked my sister.  
"Divorced?" my father frowned. "They were never divorced", he stated. They separated and then went together, then separated again, then together, and then you know what, one day when all the divorce papers were all written up and ready to be signed, her lawyer came up to the judge and said "I'm sorry your honor, we cannot proceed with this divorce. "WHY not ?" asks the judge. "Well, they cannot possibly be divorced becuase last night the marriage was consumated!" My father smiled as he delivered that last confession. "She had gone to him, or he had gone to her, no, I'm sure it was her, she went to him the night before and that's it... fartig! End of story.. end of geshighte! Never divorced."  
"And when he died he left all his money to his daughter and none to her," added my sister.  
"Ya. Karina's mazel. Fighting right to the very end," said my father.

I was lying on the air mattress, floating in the pool. I Decadent but delicious. It seemed that somehow I had earned this little taste of luxury for all the suffering I carried around in my genes. My mother would have liked to see me this way, I think. I like to see me this way, finally, without guilt. Floating freely.

I was trying to remember Karina Karloff. She had never been referred to by her first name alone while I was growing up. She had always been Karina Karloff. "Karina Karloff", I repeated, remembering the diminutive attractive little woman. There had always been marriage problems with her as I recall. On again, off again. A woman always rattling off about something or other in her quick animated way, with her fiery eyes and sparkling gold jewelry. She had married very rich, but very crazily. It seemed like she had carried a bag of personal sparks around with her wherever she went. Karina Karloff. A distant memory. "You know, it's a most beautiful name," I said out loud. "It's like a filmstar's name."

My father stood up from his suntanning position. HE started walking towards a chair to get the towel to drape around him. His strides long and authoritative. HIs voice matched his walk. I thought. Deep, resonant and authoritative. Impressive if you're a stranger. Formidable if you're the daughter.

"Oh yes, " he said in his base voice.  
"Karina Karloff. Four face lifts she's had already" he



ruminated.

Then, he suddenly stopped. His tone picked up. "Wait, I have a story for you about Karina Karloff," he stated in a different voice. A voice that sounded more playful. A butterfly skipping past in the sunlight. He began:

"Last year I was invited to a Barmitzvah of the grandson of a Survivor. AND at our table is sitting also Karina Karloff. AND nobody is saying a word to her. Then the music starts and the dancing begins, and people at our table are getting up to dance, or others are left talking to each other, but no-one is talking to Katrina.

AND she sits there. Then suddenly, from out the corner of my eye I see she is getting up from the table and walking way across the dance floor and I watch her as she goes up the steps of the stage to where the band is playing. SHE walks over the bandleader who's now finished singing his number at the mike, and she is whispering something to him. Next thing, the bandleader hands over the microphone to her and she faces everyone on the dance floor and suddenly, instead of "Hava Nagila" coming from the band, we all hear the voice of Katrina coming through the microphone. "I would like to make announcement," she says in her high raspily lilting voice. "I would like to speak to all the men here tonight. Hey guys," Katrina leans over and shouts into the microphone. "Hey guys," she calls out, "there's a lot of widows and single ladies here who would also like to dance, you know. So please do us all a favor and be real gentlemen and ask some of us to dance so some of us can also celebrate Michael's barmitzvah!"

"I supposed of course that she was referring to me", chuckled my father. "That's the story of Karina Karloff."

Lying on the raft, listening to the daring "chutzpah" of little Katrina Karloff, I felt my sun-drenched lazy body jiggle with my silent laughter. THE air mattress beneath me bopped up and down too in rhythm with my shaking and soon I had started to make little waves of laughter all around me in the pool. The sound of splashing water underneath me in response to my body's humorous response made me laugh even more. Ripple effect. Champagne in a glass. In my mind I could see a small blonde, multi-facelifted almost-seventy-year old woman, spunky in her short sequined dress, shouting in her Polish accent to a room full of tired old survivors and acne-faced dazed young boys. AND then I let my laughter come out good and loud and long.

"ALright!" I yelled up into the air from my horizontal position on the rippling bouncing waves. All the way across the waters to another continent, I shouted. "Atta girl, Karina!"

I was still smiling when the laughter, joined in by my sister, settled down. The water still quivered with the aftershocks. "What a woman, Karina Karloff, " I sighed. " My kind of gal," I said to my father. "Simply will not quit. Hoo boy, " I sighed, wiping a tear of laughter into the sweat. "Just doesn't give up, just doesn't take it lying down. Still telling the world ....after all she's been through!"

"Yah," nodded my father. "And how! Did she go through a lot!" His voice turned serious. "Concentration camps, partisans, refugees, emigration, and then on top of it, a husband like that! He was probably the worst. You remember her story don't you?" he turned to look at me demandingly. As if it was a challenge to acknowledge my ignorance of tales never told, never shared. Does he really not know they I was never told anything directly? Always finding things out later, from some other removed source, sometimes a little too late? Too late to understand why things in my house were the strange, gut-wrenching way they were... too late to say "I'm sorry." The only stories I can remember are the silent ones I overheard in my innocent ignorance. The ones whose only narrative was my father's angry outbursts and cruel admonishments to an unsuspecting child. Or the tears rolling down my mother's cheeks as she smiled at me playing with my new dolls. The only hints of the unspoken horrors were those repetitive mournful sighs that accompanied my mother's movements. She tried to march so boldly through her brand new life. It was as if by taking extra breaths, or letting old ones escape, she could succeed in making the present the only reality.

My father sternly reminded me. "C'mon, Nancy. You remember the cuttings I sent you.. you still have all of them, don't you? Don't you remember they told the story of Katrina in one of the features to commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day?" His tone was accusatory. It seemed as if he was prodding me, like some harsh investigator, to tell him "Yes, I remember everything you send me, scraps of fragments of testaments to suffering that must never be forgotten, but must be made to surface again and again to ensure it never happens ever again. To eradicate any form of racism that denies us our humanity, that robs children of their childhood, and their children of their happiness and everyone of their freedom to breathe easily, normally, not one breath too many or too few, that is the secret vow of the child of the survivor. Yes Dad, I remember everything. I promise."

NO, of course I didn't remember. What was I supposed to do? What do you want me to be ...the receptacle of other people's painful memories now condensed into tiny markings of

printer's ink smeared onto newsprint paper? Was I meant to serve as some kind of living Wailing Wall, stuffed with scraps of paper in the crevices of my soul scribbled with words of hope and dreams and promises for the future? GOD, I should be as strong and as ancient as that stone wall, impervious to human suffering and longings. Forgive me, Dad, I'm just a vulnerable, sentimental creature carved out of flesh and tears. Trying to live an ordinary life. No, I can't remember. It happened to others in far away places, in black and white, with subtitles that are too faded to read.

"Dad, I'm sorry, I don't remember that particular story, " I say, trying to be coy, to hide my guilty feelings of failing the memory test.

How does my father remember all these stories? He complains regretfully about not remembering things these days. Are you kidding? He can remember sagas, epics about people and dates and circumstances throughout Europe, historical data and Latin proverbs, and I can't remember anything without writing it down. We are losing the art of oral traditions, of passing history down from father or mother to son or daughter, we are losing our personal heritage little by little, just like those Jews who lost their personal belongings and then their humanity, bit by bit in the forests of modern Poland.

"Just remind me again, was she in a concentration camp?" I asked my father. He was walking around the deck towards the pool, going in for the midday swim, beads of sweat already balanced in fullness on his forehead. Pausing for a while as he walked, he sighed and then stepped carefully onto the first step of the pool. "You want me to tell you what I remember about Krazee Katrina?" he asked in a pointed tone, as if now it was I who was demanding too much of him. "Alright", he acceded, slowly letting his body's weight disturb the surface of the water. AND as he swam his gradual, plowing breaststroke, he recounted the summary of someone else's suffering. When the war broke out Katrina had rushed to board a truck, thick with people to return to her native Vilna and her family. Reunited with her sisters and mother, they were holed up with six other families in one small bedroom in the Vilna ghetto. Sweet sixteen and already walking over dead bodies lying in the streets. Learning how to peel endless buckets of potatoes in the work factory, you had to have a job inside and outside the ghetto, or else you were marked by the Germans for death. She had to learn to smile as the soldiers called them ugly sadistic names, as they worked their kitchen work, scraping and peeling vegetables. Wait, that's not all! Then she was transferred from that factory to another where the kitchen work now extended to cleaning everything from toilets to trains. Then the feeling of leather straps on the knees and blistered hands as she, in a band of young women,



had to break up large into tiny pieces. Oh yes, even a young girl can do that kind of work too, given the right circumstances. And also the unloading of huge logs of wood which six or eight girls working together could manage. Oh humans can be made to work like oxen, if only they're banded and branded correctly. In Katrina's case, it was the yellow sign of 'Jude' that marked her slave status. Forced to march for miles from one job to another, and while marching they overheard someone tell the horror story of Ponary, the woods that were pitted with holes for mass burial grounds. Walk the plank and get shot into your own grave. You dig it, you die in it. Sixteen, and already educated enough to know that that death was always waiting for you in a German soldier's gun and his mood of the day. Finding out that the enemy was everywhere, not only dressed in German uniforms, but in Russian too. Discovering that when the war ended, the hatred of Jews didn't. Others were now waiting to kill Jews too, as if it was a contagious sickness that had infested the whole land. Now it wasn't only the smirking complicity of Poles and Lithuanians but Russians on horseback, thirsting for Jewish blood to cleanse their betrayed souls.

The work was over, but the hiding wasn't. Katrina joined the Partisans, small scrappy bands of survivors living in the unreliable safety of the forest, sleeping in the day and working secretly for the resistance underground at night. Groups of women, skinny and always tired, their mission was to saw down big trees in order to destroy the German communication lines. She witnessed the Germans in their tanks storming through the forest, and then herding the stray survivors into deserted farm houses which were then set alight. Lucky Katrina, she was one of the few of her party who managed by some small flip of fate to escape the fate of being a human candle. The following two days and nights they spent hiding in the lake, only their heads above the water. The whole two days submerged in the water. As luck would have it, a cow from a nearby farm had wandered down to drink from the very lake they were hiding in. Imagine, a cow with the freedom to wander freely while some human beings were denied that very freedom. And so, it seemed a sign from above that this cow was to be their sustenance. It was not for nothing there was a butcher in the surviving group of fourteen shivering wet refugees, chin-deep in water. He started to cut up the cow that had been led into the water and to all of those survivors, he gave little pieces of bloody meat to be eaten in the name of survival. Only when they realized that the Russian army was advancing did they come up out of the lake and follow the troops, straggling behind them towards Vilna. Then came the refugee's journey ; from country to country one moved as a displaced person, no home, no intact family, no going back and reclaiming what once belonged rightfully to you. From Poland to Czechoslovakia, Hungary to Rumania, to Austria to Italy, one refugee camp after another,



one different language after another. Another hard cot and another bureaucrat, transit camps for people who had been robbed of everything except the will to survive. It was in Italy, that Katrina found out that she was pregnant on the day she arrived at the new camp. That was her "home" for two years, where she brought up her new baby until finally she heard news about an uncle in South Africa who promised to sponsor her. And so she came to a land of sunshine and palm trees, of bright flowers in manicured gardens. A world that was physically as different to the one she left behind as black and white. IT was a country in which the importance of one's identity lay in the color of one's skin, not in the origin of your mother's religion. It was a country which offered sanctuary to a small and bruised woman with a small child, a husband and a past full of despair.

My father swims his measured stroke, leisurely back and forth across the pool as he tells the story. As he talks about her experiences I try and superimpose in my imagination, the image of a small woman in the different scenarios. It is all too vague. They are all merely words that describe realities too removed to imagine. How to encapsule thousands of days where each day seemed like a year? How to even picture that? Impossible. The present sunshine that I feel warming my body is much too bright to clearly see those dismal faded pictures.

THE clearest picture I have of Katrina is of her in an evening dress, up on the stage, talking loudly into the microphone and telling off a bunch of staid men in starched white shirts and black suits. SHOW them girl! Prove that there's still some life left for the taking even after all you've survived. I can almost hear her yelling: Cant' you see? I can still dance. I still WANT to dance, Goddamit! So don't you let me down, you Jews, not after what we've been through... Don't you let me sit on the sides when these little legs of mine can still be dancing, when my arms can move freely up in the air, while I can still move to the beat of the music and not the roar of the tanks, God damn you all! Give a lady a little pleasure, why don't you!

Ah Katrina. That is my image of her. A woman, who having found a refuge in a safe country, with a rich husband and more children, is destined to wander on, ever the surviving refugee, in search of every tiny bit of control her grasping hands can seize. Now she wears a face, purchased specially from a local plastic surgeon to betray no signs of age and bitterness, only a triumphant red lipsticked smile and moist sparkling eyes under sardonic pencilled-in eyebrows.

"Hey Katrina," I shouted across the pool, across the treetops, across the miles and years that separated the young from the old, the living from the dead, the present from the

ever-present past. "Keep on going, girl," I laughed. "You show 'em!" I whooped. I stood up , energized by someone else's daring. "That's it. Don't ever let them get the better of you!" I yelled as I jumped up high in a girlish scamper, and splashed into the pool.

My father raised his eyebrows at my impulsive and very unladylike shouting, I could tell. Even though his back was towards me. His noonday swim completed, he was walking back round the contoured deck to the chair that had his towel casually draped over its back. "Yah.." he sighed. He took the towel off the chair and wrapped it around his full waist, tucking the one end of the towel in and back under the wrapped side at his middle. He began to take off his bathing suit, manipulating it under the towel that held firmly to his body, as he jiggled his hips to loosen the wet suit. This discreet dance was a standard routine of his since as far back as I can remember, this shuffling of wet bathing suit under the towel trick that began from the early days of changing on the beach. As he tucks in the end of the towel back around the fold at the waist, voila, he changes from city bather to island native before your very eyes. It has travelled well, this routine of his. Modicum of decency. Never dropped the towel, as far as I'd ever witnessed. Always managed to wriggle out of any wet suit, slipping it dripping down to his ankles and then tossing it with his one foot up to his free hand. The released object is then hung out to dry on the nearest available object. After that, the loose ends of the towel hanging down like a skirt, are hoisted up to dry the unencumbered crotch area. That done, the finale in this ritual, he begins to walk his slow steady stride back across the deck and up onto the wooden steps that lead to the porch. Old man chief in sarong. He turns around to look back at the pool as if he forgot something important and shouts: "What are you preparing for lunch ?"

I am a limp jellyfish, melted flesh on a stretch of clear tubed plastic, floating in an undulating haven of clear aquamarine water. Somewhere in the distance I can hear the sound of human voices. But they do not disturb my moment in the sun.

Marilyn.

ONE night we watched a British Broadcasting Corporation documentary exploring the death of Marilyn MONroe. She had always been someone special for my father. Whenever he would hear her name or see her picture, he used to put his hand up to his heart, close his eyes and sigh soft and long: "Ah Marilyn". It was as if he knew her personally in some secret way and remembered her with great fondness and longing. She was his ideal of a woman. For him I think she evoked an image of supreme femininity, the way a man wanted a woman to be.. cute, soft and vulnerable. When I was about six or maybe even younger, he brought home a new doll for me. SHE had a short and sturdy plastic body, a cute tiny featured chubby face with bright blue eyes and lashed eyelids that closed when you tilted the doll backwards. And she had a head full of tight bright white blond curls. "HER name is Marilyn," he told me, as he announced everything else that he presented me in my life -- rules, toys, philosophies, second hand books, newspaper articles ("read this!") food ("finish your plate") explanations.... "She reminds me of Marilyn MONroe ." AND so I had aquired a tiny version of a delicious plastic smelling Marilyn whose thick curly hair I loved to wash over and over again and whose tough little body with moveable arms only, I would dress and undress tirelessly.

We watched the sad story of the enigmatic but inevitably tragic final days of Marilyn MONroe together, my father, my husband and myself. My father seemed to be weary, his face set in a stillness that heralds sleep. "HIS heroine..." I thought to myself, "the story of his goddess and he's nodding off?" I wondered. THEN it dawned on me that this was a documentary on T.V. It was not a larger- than-life silver screen fantasy featuring the acting of gorgeous blond Marilyn n a love-filled romantic comedy. ON the contrary, here we were being forced to look at outlines of a dead body in a bed. We were being exposed to the complications of a confusing, politically intricate plot involving passion among highly visible individuals, the Kennedys and Monroe, that got played out in the small controversial and conflicting details of their personal lives. We were being told ugly truths about the covert grundgy, messy trivia that led to the death of everyone's beloved, Marilyn. "I remember the day she died, my father had said. "I was sitting at my desk, and the news came over the wireless and I felt this pain tear at my chest. I remember I started to cry, actually had tears in my eyes. I just couldn't believe it... Marilyn Monroe dead...it couldn't be. Not my beautiful sweet Marilyn." This was not the Marilyn he wanted to watch, the one dead and naked on the bed, a mass of blond hair and a dead phone in her hand. Better to close the eyes and wander away from the scene of the crime. better to deep precious memories pure and simple and beautiful. Us romantics feel that way.

As I watched my father's eyes droop closed with a will of their own, I was able to understand many things about Marilyn. AND as I began to understand her, so I felt I knew about my father. He had loved her with that soulful passion which one loves another, even one's child, in whom one sees a reflection of oneself.

Marilyn. She had represented more than just the breathless vulnerability of a childlike female sexuality. To those who adored her, she was the epitome of the female sex goddess. To those who understood her, she was a hurt and lonely woman who had been denied her childhood. When she sat, those last few days on a park bench watching young children play in the playground, it wasn't because she was regretting or missing her unborn children, as the T.V. Announcer suggested. NO, no, I saw her sitting there amongst children, a grown woman pining away for her own lost young innocence, her own fragmented childhood. Watching children play was a way to vicariously live a new childhood, one that was carefree and secure, better than the scarred one she carried within her womb of memory. She was constantly battling to reinvent her childhood, actress that she was, in her eager childlike manner, her abandoned laugh, her girlish coyness, her petulance and her desire to continue living life as only a child can. And her constant immersion in the pursuit of love in the form of amorous encounters in the arms of admirers. She was always the willing victim. For love, that is. Any hope of love was a thin fragile thread that reconnected her to her lost self. That was her appeal that manifested itself on the light beams reflected on the screen, the body of a woman and the heart and soul of a child. She had lived her life in constant search for a special love that had long ago eluded her and she had died when she realized she was never going to attain it. She may have died physically of a drug overdose but her heart had given up long before. Pills merely dulled the pain that was too heavy for the soul to bear. My doll too is long gone, her hair having thinned and her face gotten smudged, I soon gave her over for books and boys in my teens. She must have been given away to charity. But the feeling and memory of her still remains. The faint distant smell of a plastic doll and her wet hair. The strange sweet clinging sadness of a once-real childhood, an aura that hovers at the back of you like some half-invisible shadow that sometimes comes right up and touches you on the shoulder, and other times trails so far behind that you fear it might be lost forever.



## VILNA 1929

I remember that my father moved out of our apartment and into Uncle Simon's hotel. He had a beautiful big space of his own there. He stopped his medical practice and began to travel much more than before for the medical supply company. He used to visit us, and take me to the nearby synagogue, but he was away a lot.

Outside my Uncle Simon's hotel in Biskupia Street there was a big square surrounded by a smaller one with flowers, grass and a small ornate fence.

In the middle of the cobbled stone square was a broken stone pedestal, which had once held the monumental statue of Mouraviev, the governor of Russian Vilna. When Poland gained its independence from Russia, the statue, a symbol of the imperialist regime was knocked down and only the broken stone base was left for posterity. There it stood, a broken marble rock, until the Russians returned in 1939 and put Lenin up on that waiting piece of pedestal. Funny, huh? I imagine that he too will go when his time is up.

There you faced a high fence and behind the fence was an enormous elegant palace. Opposite the palace was the university. It was a very beautiful place. Centuries old stone buildings, each with high wooden gates at the entrance, through which the horses and carriages would pass into the courtyards. When visiting my cousins and Aunt Reeva, I used to look out of the hotel windows at the palace and admire its architectural grandeur. I used to play with my cousins.

I remember cousin Abram and I going to a nearby chemist and other shops where we were given posters, advertising cardboard cut-outs and some small give-aways that the shops did not want. We arranged all these in the courtyard of their hotel and made them into an exhibition to which we invited the neighbourhood children to view - but at a price. Already at the age of ten, both Abram and I showed business acumen. The entry fee was two groschey - the price for two small chocsticks.

Not long after the divorce my father met another woman, an older woman, Rachel, who was a pediatric doctor. She was very well educated, French educated, and her father had one of the biggest wholesale shoe businesses in town. They got married, and she moved in with him into the hotel. I used to go and visit them there.

I called her aunty, Aunty Rachel. She was always trying to be nice to me, but I ... I never gave her the satisfaction of showing her any real affection. That was only for my mother.

I remember one special time, when my father went away. I was about ten, and he was being sent to America for a long time on some important business.

It was 1929 and my father had been elected President for Europe of the World Association of Jewish War Invalids, Widows and Orphans.

I remember going to the railway station to say goodbye to him.

He was going to collect money to help the widows and orphans in Europe.

My father was a war veteran and an invalid. During his service in the Russian army, he was wounded somewhere on the front and hospitalised in St. Petersburg in 1917. Being a young medical officer he wore bright yellow boots and was known for it in his regiment. When the German bomb exploded near him and he was thrown face down in a heap of mud, the sanitary group looking for survivors recognised his outstretched boots and brought him back to life. He was with concussions and respiratory defects, which later caused him a lot of suffering. When in hospital he met some auxiliary

Jewish ladies, assisting their co-religionists. One of them Basya (Vava) Goldman enquired about his ancestry and when related whom she assisted in the hospital to her parents it became clear that the Goldmans and Eitans were third or fourth cousins, emanating from the same Utyans family from a small village in the Vilna province.

The father of Basya was an orthopaedic shoe specialist with his own workshop and shoe salon in Nevsky Prospect, the main avenue in St. Petersburg. Upon his reconvalence, my father married Basya and left for Warsaw and Vilna to meet the family. This was the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia and my mother could not travel to her hometown. She kept, as I was told, contact with her siblings for a few years, learnt about her parents' death soon after the revolution and even sent parcels to Leningrad to her sister who was a doctor and brother, the musician. In 1925 all contacts were closed. The Soviets did not like the people who had contacts with the West, even only in family matters and she was told not to write anymore to them. I remember my mother talking about it for many months, always in anger, but sometimes crying too. She was so alone, just on her own in years to come...

My father being the administrator of a hospital (I think it was a Jewish one, sponsored by the community and wealthy donors) traveled to various congresses, visiting pharmaceutical factories overseas, and I was already then admiring all the printed matters arriving on his desk, describing maladies and medicines, the colourful blotters, calendars and books. The one which fascinated me was with pictures of human organs and also methods of ancient delivering of babies, the one which natives were shown with two men pushing from behind a woman's stomach with a blanket - in secrecy I used to show it to my friends of the same age - the six years old.

My early recollections of my grandfather, the "zeyda" from Mostova Street is when we used to meet him (I used to look for him and rather for his beard, the long one, nearly till his groin) at the small synagogue of which he was the "gabe" - the president. He used to put his hand on my head, say something I did not understand and push me back toward his son. Somehow I felt he is angry with me. Later in years I realised that he was not fond of my mother, "the Russian one" who did not speak Yiddish, only Russian and

He was also involved with civic affairs. He was a city councillor and Honourary President of the Volunteer Firemen of Vilna, which had ten different branches and he delivered letters and speeches to all these different branches.

They awarded him a gold medal for outstanding services of which he was very proud and he always wore a smaller copy in his buttonhole.

My father was also fighting for the rights for better living conditions for the War Invalids, Widows and Orphans. My father was always busy, always travelling around to different towns in Poland and to different countries like Czechoslovakia and Hungary and particularly Germany. So as a result I couldn't spend too much time with him.

When I was about 11 years old, our class had to put on a production of a play. It was a performance done in mime, like a film about a group of school kids who are greeting famous dignitaries coming to town. The place where we stood was painted to resemble a train station, and the train was about to come in.

Out of all the boys in my class, they chose me to play the part of a girl. I had to give the 'dignitary' a bouquet of flowers and of course, everything was done without words and I had to make a curtsy.

Mother made me a very nice dress and my teacher, a priest, put the make-up on my face. It was very interesting. My mother was there in the crowd of parents, but my father couldn't come. It was the only time I acted a girl. Otherwise I was always a boy.

When I turned 12, ready for my barmitzvah, my father and mother made an arrangement for my caretaking.

My mother wanted to go to work for a firm in Warsaw. Her life with Sor was not working out, so I went to live with my father.

He had moved out of the hotel by this time and was living in a very nice second-floor apartment, with a surgery and waiting room and everything in Ludwisarka Street, which was right on the end of the street facing the magnificent Napoleon's Palace, near the entrance to the University of Stefan Batory.

Our building was a four-storey one and within the huge gates, was a large cobbled courtyard big enough for horses and carts to come and rest for the night and at the street level was a huge resting area, like an inn, where you could have coffee and tea and drinks as well as lodging for hawkers, travellers and the poor.

I lived with my father and stepmother, who was very fat. It is surprising that Aunt Rachel was so fat, because she did not prepare our meals.

In fact in my teen years I do not remember having meals at my father's home. When I think about it now, I don't remember eating at home then. As she did not cook, my father and I used to lunch every day after school, at about 2.15pm at the Hotel Europa, a beautiful big classic old hotel. They knew me there, a young school boy having a lunch date with his father during the week.

I recall my mother saying something I never fully understood at the time.

"It didn't help her. I wished on her to have stones and so she had a miscarriage".



I started to follow the steps and soon overcame my shyness and learnt to waltz and foxtrot. Then she introduced me to Izaak's cousin and I danced with her.

As their diningroom was small and darkened for the dances, I hoped nobody noticed my mistakes. As I danced with the mother, she spoke to me. When I danced with the girl neither of us uttered a word.

Later that summer, in Charny Boor, where we had a 'dacha', a neighbour's daughter, Yota, taught me the steps of tango and other dances, yet at parties I usually asked not only the girls of my age, but older ladies, mothers and aunties who sometimes shyly refused, but in some cases smilingly accepted the invitation to a slow-foxtrot.

My own Barmitzvah was not very relevant for me. I didn't invite any of those boys.

Firstly, it was too far for them to come, and secondly, I was, quite frankly, not interested. To me this Barmitzvah stuff was something I did for my father's sake; he insisted on it, but truthfully my heart was not in it.

I remember I used to have to go across to the Jewish Ghetto, up the narrow cobble stone streets into a poorer area, then up the stairs of a ramshackle wooden building where there was an old Hasid who would rattle away the foreign sounding words at me.

Yababatatam rabatum tum, he would sing and nod away, his long beard whipping back and forth wiping like a broom the high wooden table where I sat writing down the foreign words in Latin phonetics so that I could learn them in order to repeat them.

I had no difficulty picking up the melody and the words I learnt from my Latin scribbles and that is how I had my Barmitzvah at the small, old shul where my father was gabbeh, which was five minutes walk away from the first place we lived on Arsenalska Street.

When I used to go and get my breakfast buns from the basement bakery in Garbarska Street, this old synagogue was just opposite. I would see the older Jews walking in the morning to and from prayers. It did not occur to me that we were from the same people, that we were brothers, not at all.

To my young eyes, they were strange people, talking and dressing differently to those in my family. But nevertheless, it was there that I went with my father to services, just like the other Jewish boys would go with their fathers.

Mother used to dress me up nicely, with my hair in place and I would go for the Holidays or Shabbat and somehow it was not too bad, because in the shul I did not feel afraid. I'd run around with the other boys, or go up to my father where he sat in his gabbeh's place in front and sit with him for a while, even though he was engrossed in his mumblings along with the other hunched over men.

Then I would get bored and would run out and play outside in the little courtyard around the shul with the boys again.

Sometimes I would go with my father, for special occasions, to the Great Synagogue on Niemiecka (German) Street. This was an enormously huge Synagogue which could hold over a thousand people.



I started to follow the steps and soon overcame my shyness and learnt to waltz and foxtrot. Then she introduced me to Izaak's cousin and I danced with her.

As their diningroom was small and darkened for the dances, I hoped nobody noticed my mistakes. As I danced with the mother, she spoke to me. When I danced with the girl neither of us uttered a word.

Later that summer, in Charny Boor, where we had a 'dacha', a neighbour's daughter, Yota, taught me the steps of tango and other dances, yet at parties I usually asked not only the girls of my age, but older ladies, mothers and aunties who sometimes shyly refused, but in some cases smilingly accepted the invitation to a slow-foxtrot.

My own Barmitzvah was not very relevant for me. I didn't invite any of those boys.

Firstly, it was too far for them to come, and secondly, I was, quite frankly, not interested. To me this Barmitzvah stuff was something I did for my father's sake; he insisted on it, but truthfully my heart was not in it.

I remember I used to have to go across to the Jewish Ghetto, up the narrow cobble stone streets into a poorer area, then up the stairs of a ramshackle wooden building where there was an old Hasid who would rattle away the foreign sounding words at me.

Yababatatam rabatum tum, he would sing and nod away, his long beard whipping back and forth wiping like a broom the high wooden table where I sat writing down the foreign words in Latin phonetics so that I could learn them in order to repeat them.

I had no difficulty picking up the melody and the words I learnt from my Latin scribbles and that is how I had my Barmitzvah at the small, old shul where my father was gabbeh, which was five minutes walk away from the first place we lived on Arsenalska Street.

When I used to go and get my breakfast buns from the basement bakery in Garbarska Street, this old synagogue was just opposite. I would see the older Jews walking in the morning to and from prayers. It did not occur to me that we were from the same people, that we were brothers, not at all.

To my young eyes, they were strange people, talking and dressing differently to those in my family. But nevertheless, it was there that I went with my father to services, just like the other Jewish boys would go with their fathers.

Mother used to dress me up nicely, with my hair in place and I would go for the Holidays or Shabbat and somehow it was not too bad, because in the shul I did not feel afraid. I'd run around with the other boys, or go up to my father where he sat in his gabbeh's place in front and sit with him for a while, even though he was engrossed in his mumblings along with the other hunched over men.

Then I would get bored and would run out and play outside in the little courtyard around the shul with the boys again.

Sometimes I would go with my father, for special occasions, to the Great Synagogue on Niemiecka (German) Street. This was an enormously huge Synagogue which could hold over a thousand people.

Soon of course, I knew the words of the Catholic prayer by heart, which helped me later at school when I could understand a little of what the other boys were saying.

At home I was an ardent reader of the local daily Polish paper to which my father subscribed and urged me to peruse.

At the age of 14, I was already contributing stories to our school newspaper. It was called *Wallpaper*, pieces of paper with handwritten and sometimes typewritten articles and stories were stuck up on a long horizontal board on the wall of a long school corridor. By 16, I had become the editor.

The school was situated on Dominikanska Street, opposite the Dominican Church, about five minutes walk from my Uncle Samuel's advertising office and apartment on the second floor. It was there that I would go after school to meet my father.

When he was not busy we would still go to the Hotel Europa for lunch and sometimes walk over to the coffeehouse at the corner of Dominikanska and Trotska. There he would order a black coffee and for me a hot chocolate with whipped cream on top, with a lot of cinnamon and sugar. It was a good treat with a piece of honey-cake as well.

But for most of these years my most favourite companions were books.

One day my father arranged that I would go after school up the hill to Leah, one of the sisters of my stepmother.

She had a very big house way up on the top of a hill, a 15 minutes walk away. Her two daughters, Fruma and Sarah and the two daughters of another sister, Luba and Basya would be there. There was always a whole family coming to the house and this aunty would prepare a big lunch for all of us to eat. All these girls and me. So I ate with my new cousins. Not cousins by blood, but cousins nevertheless. This house was full of children, of all ages, running around, shouting and only one, Luba was close to my age.

After lunch we could do our lessons there, or talk or play a while, or simply decide to go home. I used to like to go down the hill, down the very sloping hill, walk down to the bottom, where there was a 'holtzmarket', a wooden open-air marketplace. On the leaning stalls cases full of fishes and boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables pleased my eyes and the smell of salt and earth and green mixing together enriched my nostrils.

I would walk down on that steep hill and at the foot there was a small Jewish second-hand book shop where I used to buy and sometimes borrow, the magnificent books of Karel May.

Afterwards I learned that this man was some kind of adventurer who was in jail in Germany, writing these stories from memory of adventures he had had in the Americas. He was the one who brought to Europe the life in the wide open paces of North America, tales of Indians and Cowboys. I remember the names: *Old Tomahawk and Vinatoe, Uncle Tom's Cabin...* I used to browse in that dark little hut, like a little cave it was, a cave of treasures that were made up of books and I used to love the smell of the musty books. I loved to flip through the pages and read some pieces in the middle, to get a taste, to see if it was something I would like, some adventure of nature and the elements, somewhere far away. In those years I would read books by Fenimore Cooper, Defoe, Gulliver's Travels... all were fascinating to me.

Soon of course, I knew the words of the Catholic prayer by heart, which helped me later at school when I could understand a little of what the other boys were saying.

At home I was an ardent reader of the local daily Polish paper to which my father subscribed and urged me to peruse.

At the age of 14, I was already contributing stories to our school newspaper. It was called *Wallpaper*, pieces of paper with handwritten and sometimes typewritten articles and stories were stuck up on a long horizontal board on the wall of a long school corridor. By 16, I had become the editor.

The school was situated on Dominikanska Street, opposite the Dominican Church, about five minutes walk from my Uncle Samuel's advertising office and apartment on the second floor. It was there that I would go after school to meet my father.

When he was not busy we would still go to the Hotel Europa for lunch and sometimes walk over to the coffeehouse at the corner of Dominikanska and Trotska. There he would order a black coffee and for me a hot chocolate with whipped cream on top, with a lot of cinnamon and sugar. It was a good treat with a piece of honey-cake as well.

But for most of these years my most favourite companions were books.

One day my father arranged that I would go after school up the hill to Leah, one of the sisters of my stepmother.

She had a very big house way up on the top of a hill, a 15 minutes walk away. Her two daughters, Fruma and Sarah and the two daughters of another sister, Luba and Basya would be there. There was always a whole family coming to the house and this aunty would prepare a big lunch for all of us to eat. All these girls and me. So late with my new cousins. Not cousins by blood, but cousins nevertheless. This house was full of children, of all ages, running around, shouting and only one, Luba was close to my age.

After lunch we could do our lessons there, or talk or play a while, or simply decide to go home. I used to like to go down the hill, down the very sloping hill, walk down to the bottom, where there was a 'holtzmarket', a wooden open-air marketplace. On the leaning stalls cases full of fishes and boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables pleased my eyes and the smell of salt and earth and green mixing together enriched my nostrils.

I would walk down on that steep hill and at the foot there was a small Jewish second-hand book shop where I used to buy and sometimes borrow, the magnificent books of Karel May.

Afterwards I learned that this man was some kind of adventurer who was in jail in Germany, writing these stories from memory of adventures he had had in the Americas. He was the one who brought to Europe the life in the wide open paces of North America, tales of Indians and Cowboys. I remember the names: *Old Tomahawk and Vinatoe*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*... I used to browse in that dark little hut, like a little cave it was, a cave of treasures that were made up of books and I used to love the smell of the musty books. I loved to flip through the pages and read some pieces in the middle, to get a taste, to see if it was something I would like, some adventure of nature and the elements, somewhere far away. In those years I would read books by Fenimore Cooper, Defoe, Gulliver's Travels... all were fascinating to me.



Soon of course, I knew the words of the Catholic prayer by heart, which helped me later at school when I could understand a little of what the other boys were saying.

At home I was an ardent reader of the local daily Polish paper to which my father subscribed and urged me to peruse.

At the age of 14, I was already contributing stories to our school newspaper. It was called *Wallpaper*, pieces of paper with handwritten and sometimes typewritten articles and stories were stuck up on a long horizontal board on the wall of a long school corridor. By 16, I had become the editor.

The school was situated on Dominikanska Street, opposite the Dominican Church, about five minutes walk from my Uncle Samuel's advertising office and apartment on the second floor. It was there that I would go after school to meet my father.

When he was not busy we would still go to the Hotel Europa for lunch and sometimes walk over to the coffeehouse at the corner of Dominikanska and Trotska. There he would order a black coffee and for me a hot chocolate with whipped cream on top, with a lot of cinnamon and sugar. It was a good treat with a piece of honey-cake as well.

But for most of these years my most favourite companions were books.

One day my father arranged that I would go after school up the hill to Leah, one of the sisters of my stepmother.

She had a very big house way up on the top of a hill, a 15 minutes walk away. Her two daughters, Fruma and Sarah and the two daughters of another sister, Luba and Basya would be there. There was always a whole family coming to the house and this aunt would prepare a big lunch for all of us to eat. All these girls and me. So late with my new cousins. Not cousins by blood, but cousins nevertheless. This house was full of children, of all ages, running around, shouting and only one, Luba was close to my age.

After lunch we could do our lessons there, or talk or play a while, or simply decide to go home. I used to like to go down the hill, down the very sloping hill, walk down to the bottom, where there was a 'holtzmarket', a wooden open-air marketplace. On the leaning stalls cases full of fishes and boxes of fresh fruits and vegetables pleased my eyes and the smell of salt and earth and green mixing together enriched my nostrils.

I would walk down on that steep hill and at the foot there was a small Jewish second-hand book shop where I used to buy and sometimes borrow, the magnificent books of Karel May.

Afterwards I learned that this man was some kind of adventurer who was in jail in Germany, writing these stories from memory of adventures he had had in the Americas. He was the one who brought to Europe the life in the wide open paces of North America, tales of Indians and Cowboys. I remember the names: *Old Tomahawk and Vinatoe, Uncle Tom's Cabin...* I used to browse in that dark little hut, like a little cave it was, a cave of treasures that were made up of books and I used to love the smell of the musty books. I loved to flip through the pages and read some pieces in the middle, to get a taste, to see if it was something I would like, some adventure of nature and the elements, somewhere far away. In those years I would read books by Fenimore Cooper, Defoe, Gulliver's Travels... all were fascinating to me.



French He was dictatorial , he did not approve of the marriage (perhaps worried about cousins marrying, who knows) and he used to show it by not allowing my mother to come to his house. Zeyda's character splintered mostly to his younger son, David's father, Samuel, and not to my father who was the oldest of the family and dearly loved by his mother, Esther ( I think this was her name), a smallish woman with bright eyes, smiling, always busy in the kitchen though amicable to me and kissing me when occasionally I visited the grand-parents. I recollect that my grandfather used to take me with him to the municipal baths, situated near his house. My father used to take me there and leave with his father who then had to call a Russian helper to take care of me, himself walking the steps higher up in the sauna. I watched the men, mostly old ones, being beaten on their backs with bunches of string leaves and then their red buttocks sprayed with cold and hot water, men being given a massage on hard wooden tables by a half-naked masseur, who beat the hell out of them, men soaping themselves with strong smelling clumps and others who sat for long times in the metal urns full of hot water and the bathing assistants keeping it hot. And then in the resting room, all with red faces, sweat still lingering, men drinking hot tea or cold lemonade, all covered in towels and talking loud, Yidish mostly, and me not understanding, only following the orders to helpers given in Russian or Polish. In the foyer my father awaiting me with a piece of chocolate or a cookie and taking me back home.

In the earlier stage I used to go the ladies division of the same municipal baths, but after enquiring vehemently about the mostly dark patches of hair between the legs of the ladies bathing, me being only four or five but with a stiffening small member, an additional embarrassment for my mother, I was relocated to the care of my father and grandfather .

I was the only child of my parents. The cousins mostly were a few or more years older than me, the only one of my age was Abele, the son of my father's younger sister, who married a Treger, for whom my grandfather donated as a dowry a small hotel in Skopovska Street, facing the Napoleon's Square and magnificent Palace. As the hotel, in which my father lived after the divorce, was just a five minutes from my home, I used to visit my father and the Treger family, Issy the student and piano playing prodigy, his younger sister Gita who also played piano and learnt to speak French and my partner for games, running around the square or playing hide-and-find in the yard, where an enormous oak was easily climbed upon. Abele was a year younger than me, but stronger in build and full of fun. In the winter, when the snow used to cover fully the square we used in the evening to come out, look that there is no people around and competitively wrote our names pissing as far as possible. He was usually the winner.

Due to bad economic conditions prevailing in the twenties

Zach  
new & ailing

Love  
Lessons

Burak

The year is 1937. It is my Matric year, and suddenly sometime in April, my father has a heart attack. From the city Hall, he is brought down to the doctor's, Dr. Frankel, the only cardiologist in the city. When the cardiogram results came through, it was found that my father did not indeed have a heart attack as was thought, but rather he suffered from Angina Pectoris. It was prescribed that he must rest for a long while to recover. He is not to be taken home, but he is to rest at a nearby place where are the offices of the advertising building of my uncle, my father's brother, on Nemetzky Street. And as Osnat, <sup>home and</sup> this brother's wife, mother of my cousins Jenny and Danil, <sup>Esther</sup>, had a very nice surgery for her midwife practice, so my father was left there. And I would visit him every day, for about two months, as he lay there in my aunty's surgery, resting his heart.

which is in the  
suburb

agency

I did my Matric very well, and immediately my father applied through his various American and Polish connections, for me to get into Columbia Medical School, which I had to start in 1938. But this heart attack made him very uncomfortable, and limited his activities. From the active man, with his finger in every pie, he became a tired old worried man, just twiddling his fingers as they lay idle on the bed.

But I was not so sure what I should do my life. What should I become, what profession should I choose. The truth was I did not want to be a doctor. It was, in truth, my father's plan for me. And although it was my dream to visit America, the Golden Land of the prairies of my youthful imagination, I was not so keen to leave my familiar surroundings and enter into a strange new land, so very far far away. I also was reticent to go and leave my father lying there so sick and troubled. What if he were to die, and there I was far away in another land with no way of knowing until it was too late to say goodbye. As I muled over my future plans and the thoughts of leaving home and my father behind, I suddenly became aware of the power of something I now call "institutionalized love." Yes, there was a love from me to my father, but what kind of love was it, if I stop now to think about it? Is it out of duty that a child loves a parent? Out of thanks and appreciation for the memories of consideration and effort given the child by the parents. Or is it the adoration of a beloved god of protection and guidance that makes one forever bonded, as Abraham to his almighty Father, a bond strong enough to make one sacrifice even one's own son, or life? I loved my father, because he was my father, and perhaps he loved me because I was the only son he had, and he had no other children. At the time that is all I knew, the duty of the only child to love his ailing father and to want to be near him. Anyhow, for all these reasons, I guess, I was just not able to turn my back on

Vilna and sail to a completely new place to start a fresh beginning.

And so I decided to stay for a while. To let things slide, or perhaps glide. Stay with what was secure and see what life would bring me. I suppose you could say to let nature, or is it fate, take its course. So I continued to stay on at our big house at the corner <sup>first</sup> off the Green Bridge. And in order that a year should not be completely in waste, I enrolled in our university in the Humane Letters, what you call ~~me~~ for a Bachelor of Arts.

I was prompted to go into that field, because I had already been writing little articles about school and youth activities not only for my school paper, but for a Polish newspaper called Courier Vilensky. And now in the university I continued to do reviews of sports events, and interesting university meetings or visits from foreign professors, that kind of thing. So this is how I came to study reporting.

The next attack of my father occurred in 1938, and at this time, I was by that time heavily involved in the Zionist Movement. By this time, the idea became clear to me that to be a Jew in Poland was not a good thing. Already at the university there were expulsions of Jews, and beatings, and popular discrimination methods during the lessons in the form of prearranged seating. Everyone except Jews, that is the Lithuanians and Poles and the Germans, would sit on the right hand side of the lecture halls, barring the Jews from sitting among them, and forcing us to sit on the left hand side. But we chose to stand rather. WE did not sit where they wanted to dictate to us, so we chose to stand, backs against the wall, taking the notes. But it was very difficult to concentrate on learning under these adverse conditions. I spent much of my time in the library. But of course, you had to attend lectures, and it was very uncomfortable for us Jews.

My father was once again suffering from his heart, and I began to feel the urgency of having to secure some sort of future for myself, not knowing what was going to happen to him. So I applied to the Zionist Office <sup>of</sup> Warsaw, to get the necessary permission from the British Mandate, governing Palestine to apply either to the University of Jerusalem or the Technion of Haifa. That is what the Zionist youth movements were encouraging the young Jews of Europe to do... to think towards emigrating to the Promised Land. From our original group of seven boys in the leadership of Betar, most of them had left Poland already. It was only myself and Leon Dangler, who became a lawyer after the war, who were left still at the university. In the meantime my papers were sent away and I was waiting to hear from the university. Time passed, and still I didn't hear from them. Then came a

authorities  
the nationalist youth  
movement

letter from my mother who was living in Paris, with a ticket to come and visit her for a little while. It seemed a perfectly fortuitous opportunity to escape Poland for a while and reconnect with my mother. Of course, the thrill of seeing Paris again was not overlooked. And so I went to Paris in June of that year.

Mother lived now in 19 Rue de Coeur, <sup>near Les Halles</sup>. It was quite a nice part of Paris, with medium sized shops and many workers who lived there because of the factories nearby. But the best part was that only a few minutes walk away were the grand Boulevards with the elegant boutiques and designer shops.

My mother worked for a small special designer clothing factory, and she was the chief designer. I think she had a man friend, but I did not actually meet him. She somehow arranged it that either I would go out with some of the factory girls in the evening or else she would go out. Other times the two of us would go out together, mostly to the Music Halls which she loved so much. It was there I would see the legends, Maurice Chavalier, Josephine Baker... that exquisite negress. And sometimes we would go to the matinee shows to see different performers and watch for the first time Negro Spirituals. It was a time of enormous stimulation for me, culturally. I was open to so many new and exciting things for the first time. The first time I ever saw a black man walking in the streets. Or bohemian artists, men with their long hair and with little berets tilted on their heads. Sidewalk women dressed in such provocative clothes, showing their sensuous flesh and strolling with a movement that made my young heart race, and the flashing lights of the sex shows that excited my imagination. Ah Paris, it was the centre of earthly delights, the sights, the smells, the living from the passions. It was for me, a boy in my prime, a young aspirant reporter who is tasting the world with curious eyes, like a luscious garden of Eden. And everywhere I turned there was some kind of forbidden fruit waiting to be eaten.

One of the episodes I do remember. I was nineteen, going on twenty. It involved one of Mother's girlfriends, who was about thirty-four maybe. She was a Jewish girl from Poland, now working and living in Paris, and she always had a smile on her face, always a good sense of humor. You know, joking eyes. She went out dancing with me. She told me my mother said she was to show me a good time in Paris. And this is what she did. Eva, that's her name. Eva, she had a darkish skin, as I imagined the ancient Israelite women would look like, dark-haired and tanned skin, especially next to my pale European complexion. She reminded me of something exotic, a little, because she was older than me and because of her tawny brownish skin.

This Eva, my mother's friend, one night, we returned home

Paris  
sex lesson  
10/34 me 19



from a dance hall where she and I had been dancing together, and then we went out later to a street cafe, there on the boulevards, where we spoke a little about my life and her life.... she had come to Paris from Poland when she was about seventeen with a man who promised to marry her, but he then broke his promise and disappeared, you know how it is, there is always a sad story, a story of heartbreak in many women..... so we came back home to my Mother's place, and then she sat me down and said that Mama had told her it was okay to stay with me for a while because Mother would be late in coming home. Then it is that she began to show me *what is the nature of* lovemaking of a mature woman."

She first of all went to the old record player and found some music that she liked to hear. She asked me if I had a favorite type of music. I replied not really, that I like all sorts of music in a way. "Ah, she said, "but you must have your own music. It is a reflection of our lifeblood. La musique... it is the reflection of our very natures," she sighed as she took out some long red colored candles from her handbag, stood them in little saucers she took from my mother's kitchenette, and placed them all around the living room. As she did this, she was moving slowly and sensuously around, it was like a snake dance, her hips swaying, humming to the tango music she had found. ("Ah, this is the true music of my soul", she had said when the first strains of the bandelero had moaned into the room.) And so, bending and swaying, she stepped around the room from candle to candle, lighting each one in time to the slow beat of the music. It seemed to me like she was putting on a show especially for me, like a private one of those strip shows my mother had suggested, with a smile, naturally, I go and see down in the Red Light district. Except here it was in my own mother's salon, and it was only me alone who was the audience. It is of course, unnecessary to explain what kind of a state of arousal I was in, not to mention embarrassed and shy. There was something about how this older woman, this beautiful Semitic dancer, she was doing this all for me, there in my mother's house, in Paris, mon Dieu, the city of love. I was without breath from excitement, but I was somehow glued to that spot on which I sat like some melting candle in the heat of my own sweat. I knew I needed to just sit and watch. You know, to behave myself. To keep in control.

So Eva, she was even more attractive in the flickering light, she had switched off the lights in the room. It is only the music and the strange light of the candles in the various places of the room. Now, all of a sudden she stands before me, more than a handstretch away, and starts to take off her clothes. She is still moving to the music all the time, and says: "You don't mind that I do this for you, do you? It is my secret pleasure. To entertain a man, to dance

for him. And you are soon to be a real man , non? Your maman tells me soon it is to be your birthday, and so you must be moving out of the teenage years and entering the grand twenties, n'est pas? So it is time you are learning the art of true sex of the adult world, eh?" And then, while I sat so quietly and so composedly on the sofa, and inside my body is burning a wild forest fire, she slowly began to undress, all the time humming in between to the music whose moaning strains played straight to my genitals. She took off her blouse and then stood near me in her brassiere. It was black and lacy. I will never forget the sight of soft flesh behind black lace before my teenage reporter eyes. My heart was racing, you can imagine a nineteen year old, sitting on the sofa, I thought my legs would turn to pudding. Then she unbuttoned her skirt. "This is a creation of your mother's.." she said, giving a little laugh. "She is such an excellent designer, you know? Do you have some of her talent with your hands too, huh?" she smiled, and then winked at me, as she walked around me only in her dark stockings, coming up to her thigh, and her silken black underwear. You know, what a sexy thing it is to see black fabric next to white skin on a body, a little showing, a little hidden. It is the stuff of tantalizing torment to innocent eyes. Ah, the days of garter belts and silk stockings, an age when sex was still an adventure of discovery between the initiated and the novice. I was seduced by the true art of seduction. Invited to explore new terrains as they became visible to me, slowly by slowly... eyes first. Imagination always the leader!

Eva came and sat down on the sofa next to me, patting the pillows into position with her small fluttering hands.

"I would like to teach you how to be an expert lover", she said to me. "It would give me great pleasure do that. How is that with you, are you in agreement?"

Her voice was sweet, like some kind of delicious cake I was about to take into my mouth. What was I going to say, sitting there with my legs like pudding, and my penis like a spoon sticking up in it. Huh? I tried to come up with something clever to say, to act adult, to act older than my young fairly innocent years. Because I thought I already knew everything about sex, you see. But it was just the first of many lessons in which I was to learn the true art of lovemaking from the experts themselves, women. But I did manage to rally and stutter (and it is true I did have a faint stutter when I was younger) something like; "Well if it is your pleasure, it will be mine also." Anyhow I thought pretty well of my answer at the time.

And so my lesson began. Eva, like a teacher, like a blind person's helper, took my hand and after stroking my fingers and putting them to her mouth and kissing the

fingertips, she began to move my hands across each part of her body, not just the you know, er... erogenous parts, but all over. She introduced me to making love to the foot, how to work my fingers in and out of the toes and around the ankles, like I was fitting a soft shoe to hold it in my hand that must always be moving, stroking. And always she had some light joke to make it easy for me. "It is like the woman is a pet, a cat to be stroked," she explained. Then she burst into a cadence of giggles. "Alors, and why do you think they call it by the cat names?" she laughed. She nuzzled up near my neck and purred: "If you stroke me nicely I shall come up and rub my body against yours and lick you." Then she sat back and laughed again, this time like a little girl, never for once stopping the unbearably wonderful stroking of my feet and legs. Her fingers were like ripples of a lake. Her laughter was like the warm breeze of a hot summer's day in the country. And the music, languid and long, played on.

"You must discover every woman as if for the first time," she instructed me. "Make them feel as if you are exploring their bodies like some strange new lands, and how exciting for you to be the adventurer conquering their wonderful new undiscovered territories it is... you must make it a voyage of discovery....each time,... you see, like ah, here are the beautiful hills of Madame Sonja, and why look what we have here... we have the valley... eh, let us see what is in this dark cave right here,... ah oui, we have here the vast desert of the back which we will traverse slowly in order to get to the shade of the neck..." she spoke in a husky tone. "...Remember, my young one, it has to be slow and sensuous." "You have a long journey ahead. Much to discover. Do not conquer by force, but by persuasion of your powers of control and understanding, or you will be in danger of losing the precious thing you most desire. So, follow the pathway, the rhythm if you will, of the woman, of the movements of the earth you explore. Listen to her sounds as if listening to the music you dance to, tu comprends? Remember it is a dance afterall, that we do, eh? Sometimes it is you who lead, sometimes it is she.... but in this, the horizontal dance of sex, (she laughed again her warm earthy laugh) and it must not always be horizontal, you understand, (she laughed again, her eyes creasing into bright sequins) it is mostly the privilege and right of the woman to lead. Eh bien, she is the hostess. She must invite you in. And when you are in, ah, then...you must pay her the compliments as you would to the hostess who offers you the fine food and the music romantique and the little close dance after."

"And now, my sweet young visitor, stand up and let us dance again, you and I, the dance of discovery."

And so we made love this Eva, my mother's friend, and I. On my mother's sofa, on the rug and then on my bed in my

room. I felt as if I had been to China and back again, and to tell the truth, I was worn out from travelling. This woman's way of lovemaking, with its intricate details was quite a complicated task for a teenage boy with only the thought of getting in and out of the pool. Finished! None of this splashing here and there, and staying to savor the feel of the water. No! For nineteen year old me, I just wished to take a dive straight in, a deep dive, mind you, do some laps perhaps, and then get out. That is how I felt. Good enough for me just to get wet! That is the difference, between the boy and the girl, I think, when it comes to sex. And I'm not sure it is all Viva la Difference, you know.

After we had made love once, Eva, with her fingers through my hair, knelt up beside me and asked me: "Have you heard of the numbers? The body making numbers?"

I had no idea what she was talking about. So, of course, I pretended I did. I said something like: "Well, I think so... just remind me which number that is, exactly....."

And she said, "it is called by my countrymen 'soixante-neuf'. It is a new position of dining, you could say," and then she laughed. She would always laugh after anything she showed me, a soft almost girlish laugh. It made me feel not so young as I felt. Then she stood up and walked over to her little basin which was in the room, you remember how it is in France, with the basin in the rooms always, and proceeded to clean herself and brought a warm soapy cloth over to me too. It was a wonderful feeling to be washed by someone. It made me feel like a small baby and a grown man all at once. Then she showed me how to do it. The position. I was terribly embarrassed at first. I somehow had the idea that lovemaking was only to be face to face. But when it comes to pleasure, all preconceptions go flying out the window. And after all, I was a good student, trained from early on to respect and honor the wishes of those older than me, and so I did as I was told. And after we were done, she kissed me and said; "Dear boy, if there is one thing you remember from Eva, it is that the love, she must be tried in many ways, like the eggs. It is not enough in life just to know the taste of hard-boiled egg. No!", she shook her head, and began to use her hands to count, one finger pointing to the rest, "let us see, ....there is soft-boiled, omelette, fried, zabaglione, hard, mousse, etcetera. You blend with certain other ingredients to make it just that much more interesting to your taste... you see? Do not be afraid to try new platters, eh?" she laughed, and stroked my hair. "There is more than one way to scramble the eggs, my young one, and everyone's eggs is delicate, c'est vrai!" Eva smiled as she pointed her finger at me in amusement. Ah, she always knew the right thing to do.. at the right time... marvellous!

Now the initiated traveller, I was able to wipe my lips, like



some experienced and well satisfied diner, and offer one of my own quips from my store of well-learned Latin phrases: "De Gustibus non distupandem," I said seriously. There is no discussion when it comes to taste!

"And lesson two, my hungry gourmand," she continued, touching my lips, "It is very important what I am going to tell you now...if you are to make love to a woman, if you are to be a good lover, then remember this. Do not make love only with the penis. It is not the only tool of sex, although too many men are foolish enough to believe so...."

"It is the hands too, right?" I interrupted, eager to show what an excellent student I was. "Like, my father always says to me when we are looking for things that cannot be found... he says, 'do not look only with the eyes! Look with your hands!' You mean that kind of thing, right?" I stated, proudly.

"Well, you have one of the answers, my boy," Eva smiled. "But what I speak about is something other than your hands... I tell you now.. it is for you to remember the language of love... language, it needs the tongue, non? YOU cannot talk without the tongue. So it is with lovemaking. The tongue!" She jiggled her back as she sat up straight, like she was shivering from cold, but laughing. "Ooh la la", what a lovemaking organ that one is, my boy!"

"And yes, you are right, the hands... always keep the hands busy.... always keep them searching for pleasure, reaching, touching, stroking, fingers like on a guitar, like a spanish guitar player, ah yes," and she shivered again. I think the music had stopped. She stood up and went over to the old vitriola, put the scratchy music back on again and came back and lay against me, her soft skin making a lasting impression, like some fragile fossil, against my hardening body.

She was the first one to teach me the delicacies of the art of lovemaking." My father paused. Then gazing into the distance, he added, "And for this I am very grateful to her."

"Yah," he sighed, his eyebrows raised in mock fatigue... "and all those women who came later in my life also have magnificnet Eva to thank," he sighed dramatically, and then chuckled.

He turned toward me and suddenly turning serious,said, "You know it was afterward, that I found out that it was my mother's idea, the whole thing. Eva did not do this out of some kind of fondness for me, or even a need for sex, she did it as a favor to my mother. My mother had decided that it

time for me to be coached in lovemaking, the proper way, and knew that her friend Eva would be the perfect one to do it, this favor for me, and so she set the whole thing up. This is what Eva intimated to me, in her kind way. My mother of course never mentioned it, and I never spoke about it either, and so I never ever let on that I ever knew about her little conspiracy with Eva," he ruminated. Then he stared silently away into another time.

His story brought to mind strangely enough the confessions of a college mate of mine. We had been sharing some intimate experiences, recounting our infamous first times, one night on campus, a little drunk, a little loose. His story was so different. A young group of boys travelling with older brothers, they had taken them to a prostitute across the border in a foreign country, and told them it was something they had to do to become a man. Yeh, go for it! C'mon what you got to lose! He was afraid and revulsed, pushed into an act that was impersonal and distasteful to him, and left him empty of semen but filled with bad memories. Yet he came out smiling, didn't he. Oh yes, oh sure, he had done it. AND how was it? Oh great, of course. What else does a boy, I mean a man, say. SHE had moaned and told him, while chewing gum loudly in his ear that he was wonderful. His first time. Paid for in full. Ridiculous virgin no more. At least he had got it up, he told me, my friend. He is gay now. No trouble talking openly and honestly to a woman, about sexual experience. It is just another aspect of life, isn't it? Like talking about a good meal at a good restaurant, comparing notes, making fun.. having a meaningful exchange of anecdotes..... a little like talking to your aged father about his past experiences? Something strangely unthreatening in the safe distance that Old Age and different sexual preference make between persons of the opposite sex. Boundaries are clearer. HOW secure in our own we need to be, before we can venture forth to connect with others on such a deeply personal level.

I regard my father with a feeling that is unrecognizable at first. I believe it is a combination of feelings. I realize that it is mostly made up of the deadly duo, jealousy and envy. What luck the old bastard had with women. Resentment is a close companion: How different it was for me as a girl. Everything fell in his timid lap and boisterous me, I had to go out and find my sexuality to have it validated. He had his stamped and approved at every turn, lucky devil! I was always desperate to have mine even noticed.

Then I realized how surprised I was at the contradictions

his stories presented to me his daughter. SURprised and resentful, again, at the dissonance between strict father, ruler of the family, prude and disciplinarian extraordinaire, and this illicit experimenter of anatomical experiences. I could not help the next feeling. It came from nowhere to sting me/lodge in my mind like a sudden sliver of dust trapped in my eye.

I felt cheated. I felt like I had missed knowing a part of my father I could have enjoyed long before this tired time. I would have like to joke and kid with him, share innuendos and winks, felt a comraderie into my married years, instead of waiting to the final years to start a new relationship. Am I complaining? I apologize. I should be gracious enough to accept what I am receiving, even if it is accompanied by regret. Then again, I have learned that things will arrive only when the timing is right. For both! ---When both the giver is ready to give and the receiver is ready to receive. Of course, one hopes that the two find themselves in the same space at the same time, otherwise ... forget about it!

So with these feelings of jealousy and regret and resentment hovering around me like mosquitoes, I look at my father and say:

"You know Dad, this might sound strange, but I think you were lucky to have that happen to you. It's not every mother who is aware of some of the basic requirements of life, and actually goes out and arranges some sex ~~rather~~ than Math coaching for her son. SHE was definitely an avante garde woman, you know. I mean let's face it, who tells you these things? Who bothers to talk honestly about the fine points of having sex?" I ask him.

"WHO passes on to us the expert knowledge of lovemaking? OUR parents? HUH! That's a joke. All Mommy ever said to me was "Don't let a boy put IT in there." I didn't even know what the IT was...although I had a vague idea what "there" meant. That was the sum total of my sex education. And even now, now that some smart people are waking up to the fact that yes, teenagers are putting IT in THERE, all over the place, they're introducing sex ed in schools, hallelujah! But, the sex ed they learn is all about location of body parts and dreaded diseases to be avoided ... it's enough to put anyone off sex! This culture just cannot come to grips with sexuality, with the warm feelings that occur between boys and girls. They take the ostrich approach; stick the head in the sand, and we don't see it, so we don't have to worry about it. It's like a conspiracy... us against them. The had its and had it not. Sex is left hanging out there made into THE giant mystery, left for each individual to come to experience for themselves. There's making babies and then there's pornography. What's in between, do we know?

Parents will teach you everything else about life, experts will teach you everything else about how to make money in the world, but join bodies together in an exquisite way? Hah, you got to be kidding! Birds and bees, my ass! We don't lay eggs and we don't have wings, tell us the real stuff! The great big no-no in conversation: religion and SEX! The one thing that does not get passed down from father to son, or mother to daughter.... the essential basics of how to please yourself or your partner. Can you believe it, but the only sex expert this society could finally bear to listen to was a midget ugly old lady, with a squeaky puppet-like voice in foreign-tongued English whose advice was brought to us anonymously through the air waves. A chipmunk! We were being taught the rudiments about sex by a Chipmunk with a German accent, for GOD's sake! "Ven you put ze peenis in za vahgina, pleez don't forget, tzchildren, be sure to loobrikate it vell, heee, hee , heee!" AND what's more, everybody loved her. No wonder... at least the little chipmunk was bold enough to come out and chatter about sexual problems and dare to pronounce the unmentionables, even in her funny way. SHE was the little animated fairy godmother who could be privy to all our embarrassing fears. SHE was the dumpling good fairy who could make our secret wishes come true, just by listening to them. Hey, Walt Disney couldn't have come up with a better caricature. But society doesn't talk with her good-natured cuteness and tolerance. Society is a tall white man, speaking New England American, saying: You be the good girl, or the good son, but never the good lover. That's reserved for moviestars acting it out on the silver screen, not for us ignorant incompetents who are reduced to Playboy leering, because we are only told what NOT to do! Too bad, that's what I say. SO what if we miss out on basic training. It's only our lives and our relationships. Who cares anyway! The way it works out is, if we're lucky we'll experience good sex, and if we're not, we'll never know the difference!"

I looked at my father as I finished sounding off my frustration, my impatience with ... I was not even sure with what. My own puritanical upbringing? THE AMERICAN way of polarising sex issues into good and bad, turning the blind eye to our essential nature. I have a friend from Indonesia who talks openly about the natural way sex is explained easily and integrated into the young people's lives. The body is the earthly container for the soul. Treat it well. Massage it and give it pleasure and sustenance. Why the hell were we even made to feel such excruciating pleasure in the during the act of procreation in the first place? Why are the most exquisite sites of pleasureable feelings situated right there, in IT and THERE? I have been contemplating these things lately. That is why I am interested in finding out who my father is. Not in the limited way I have known him, in the way that designates me to be forever the child



and him forever the distanced controlling father. NO, uh uh, it is that precious intimacy between parent and child that I seek. IT comes from a knowledge that transcends roles and ages, genders too, growing into a compassion and a true love. A love based on simple honest exchanges, from the heart, from the mind. Not as my father himself has called it, an "institutionalized love." It is attempt to become closer by sharing what few dare to disclose. Like girlfriends, like soulmates, like sharers of the same blood.

My father had had his eyes closed, lying back on the chaise to enjoy the sun. I had been talking more to the world he represented rather than to him as a person. A little while after I finished talking, he opened his eyes and turned his face slowly towards where I was sitting, seated upright as I was with residual conviction. He rested his gaze on me. I could not know what he was thinking. Perhaps he was just bringing me into focus after the darkness of his doze. He stared intently at me. I looked at him, lying prone, his old leathered body wrinkled and saggy, at rest. Lizard on a rock.

We both caught each others focused looks. The listener and the orator. Role reversal. Suddenly a new noise pervaded our silence---the ringing sound of crickets vibrating, that high-toned buzzing resonating harshly in the surrounding trees, burst into our momentary pause. We both realized how long we had been ignoring that very eery continuous sound that had accompanied our conversation from the start. And then there it was, louder than any insect had a right to be, a shrieking of nature that pierced the sky. A change of frequency. We were off the air. An intrusion of the outside world just when we had let our minds drift for a moment, our concentration lapse, our guard down. As we both heard the sound come crashing in on our now relaxed beings, we both began to smile at each other. It was a simultaneous acknowledgement of defeat, a laying down of arms to the mightier, louder invisible victor. Then we slowly began to laugh. First it was me who shook my head and giggled. Then my father crinkled up his eyes and let forth some loud laughs, nodding his head.

"What do you expect from parents?" he grinned at me. "The last thing a father wants to even think about is his daughter having sex! It is just not something we are able to talk about."

"Oh", I consented. "I see... the old dad being mum," I quipped. "I guess maybe that's what the whole Virgin Birth is all about, huh? Mary's father, the old patriarch, just couldn't face up to the idea of Mary making it with just any old regular guy. Maybe he never even liked Joseph in the first place! PERhaps he wasn't even Jewish enough for his taste. So he denied the whole thing, concocted the

immaculate bit, the part about absolutely positively no physical sex involved, and so we ended up with a holy person! SERVES him right then.. his only grandson turning his back on the old religion and going out into the world to spread revelations and start revolutions. See, that's what can happen from burying one's head in the sand.. you get your butt kicked!"

I laughed at my own spontaneous epistle. Sometimes, I thought to myself, I became quite inspired to say outrageous things, especially if I was riled and stimulated enough. And of course, if I had the freedom and the right setting to speak my mind out loud. THAT is what was nice about my relationship with my father, I realized. I could talk about objective topics, about anything at all, and I knew he would be open to hearing some outlandish things, despite his own views. But anything related to my views about himself, or his failings, or misconceptions and possible mistakes about childraising, well, that was quite another story. Those comments were never welcome, never tolerated. I would literally be able to see his blood boil, and his face close up tight like a a safedoor shut abruptly. "I will not discuss this," he would say, his voice trembling with explosionary anger. THE messages, more like warnings, had always been clear, no matter how many times I had tried desperately to be heard:

Don't dare tread on my territory. It is loaded with mines. Stay off! Trespassers will be prosecuted!

But this was different. I had been addressing my grievances at society at large and not at my own father in particular. I had been careful. I had turned the conversation cleverly into irreverance and play. This was a way of walking safely, carefully behind the fence. Paying attention to the signs. Caring enough for individual property, not to dare intrude. Out of a respect that comes, I suppose, with age, that in its slow wisdom teaches one to set down the passion for truth and justice and leave it for a while at the gate.

This was a route, a pathway, I have only recently in my older years, learned to follow.

Then suddenly, in the beginning of 1939, I received papers while I was still in Paris with my mother, informing me that I was required to return home to Poland because the country was mobilizing to be ready for impending war. France and England had an agreement with Poland that they would respond to the call to help with armed forces in time of threat of war.

I came back and my father was influential in securing me a job in the army in the communications department. I had the job of translator and radio monitoring. I was to translate from all languages, Russian, German, English and French all the messages coming through on the air. It was a cushy job, one that did not require me to be out there on field practising shooting, although we had already done these preliminaries during our final school years as cadets, learning the basics of soldiering. I wore my uniform only in the barracks, and afterwards at about 5 or 6 in the evening, I was allowed to be in my civvies till the next day when I reported to my duty. Friday evenings and Saturdays were free. And those were the times that my friends from the movement would spend together. By now Malka was my steady girlfriend.

It was not expected seriously that the war would come.

From what I ascertained in my radio work was that France was very prepared with the Maginot Line. England was not as prepared, but France was very secure. And then events started to go very quickly. Austria was annexed by Germany, the part of Czechoslovakia was taken over by Poland with great patriotic fervor, claiming that it had always been a part of Poland. Then when Germany took over Czechoslovakia, Poland felt very confident that she faced little danger as compared to Czechoslovakia. Poland was bolstered by the assurances of the Alliance. After all we had the horses, we had the men mobilized and Russia behind us, and nothing would happen to us. That is what we all believed. The slogan among the Polish soldiers was "we will not even give them a button off our pants!"

And then the war started. The first of September 1939.

*The same date my mother died, I thought immediately. Only forty years later, exactly. As if the cancer that killed her physically had begun to eat away at her spiritually that day Poland was invaded. The day the Germans came to town ---and changed the whole course of her life. And here I am, eventual product of that one day. That first day of September, 1939.*

Immediately during the seventeen days that followed, German troops swept through Poland and occupied half of it, and on the seventeenth of September, Poland collapsed because

Russia occupied the other half of Poland, including Vilnius, Vilna. Now my father was not well, sick and ailing. His wife was working full-time in the hospital. I had no reason to be at home because I was mobilized into the barracks, and when the war ended with

Russia, I demobilized myself from the army, threw away the uniform, scratched out my name from the officer's guild, and became a civilian. And I didn't want to stay at home for fear of being caught by the Russians as a Polish soldier. So I asked Malka's parents if I could stay with them. They agreed and gave me a room for myself. But the trouble was now starting to invade their lives also. The Russians, after about ten days, they nationalized all bigger shops, which included Mr. Feigenbaum's enormous electrical wholesale supply store. Now, because Mr. Feigenbaum was truly an excellent electrician himself, and had always been kind to his workers who vouched for him, they decided that he could remain as foreman of his workers. So he really had it good, considering that most of the other big places were stolen out from under the owners who had little if any recourse.

My father's position however, was no longer there. Whereas before he had been active in the government of Poland, now with that option gone, he chose to be permanently sick, lying most days at home. His colleagues helped out by signing papers to the effect that he had not been active for the past years, in order to help him keep a low profile. It was a time of great uncertainty. Of terrible fear. We were none of us sure what the Russians, the Communists, were going to do, or who they were going to target. For the Jewish Political Parties, the Zionist organizations, however, it was very bad. The Russians started to look for the refugees from German-occupied Poland-- the Jews who had run away from the Germans towards Vilna which had represented a haven for Jews.... Begin and other big leaders from the party had come there ... it was all in such a big fear of the Russians.

Then one day Mr. Feigenbaum came to me and said we needed to talk. He said; Listen you're staying with us in our family, and these times are bad, we don't know what is going to be, and we would like to know what exactly do you intend for the future... what is your position here?

And I answered "Well, I am Malka's boyfriend as of now. That is really the only position."

And he looked at me, patted me on the shoulder and said: "Okay, okay, don't worry. Whatever will be, I will always make a living and whatever it is, you will be part of it." And I said: "Thank you very much."

In the meantime, at the university, everything was alright, and some of the people who took over the newspaper needed a reporter and were looking for someone Jewish. I understood they did not have too much confidence or trust in the Poles who were not amenable to their Communist beliefs, and they didn't care that I was a Zionist or not, especially in the first month, and so it came to be I was assigned to do university stories and sport. And slowly, I started to write about cultural events, like cinema and art, and performances. For the first time there were interesting performances at the City Hall, sponsored by Russia, you understand --- they were big in communal patriotic shows. And it is there for the first time I saw Anushka Goldman, a young teenage girl, performing on



the stage. She played the part of a young worker who does her job with good spirit, and she is happy with her work, and she sings a song about it. It became a hit song, she did it so well. So, I wrote the first article about her and her excellent rendition of the song that was now to become a hit. It was sung in Yiddish, which was recognized as an ethnic language and sponsored by the new government. It was after seeing this performance that I decided I too needed to be part of an arts group, and so I joined a Russian performing arts society in which Madame Mossofsky, you remember her from down the road, she was the director and main actress.

*I vaguely recalled a dark-haired woman, who spoke with a heavy accent in a low and languorous way. I imagined how beautiful she must have been in those young days, for she had in my memory the vestiges of serene wide-eyed beauty beneath the aging wrinkles and stiff styled hair as I had known her.*

We played some plays in Russian, some in Yiddish, and I had mostly small roles. Meanwhile my cousin, as I called her, she was not really my cousin, but we had after all grown up together, I speak about Fruma, daughter of my stepmother's sister,--- she became a big shot. She got herself a good position as cultural program director for the youth of Vilna.

We now come to the middle of 1940. Because many Russians were coming in to Vilna, a lot of people coming in and looking for accomodation, there was developing a shortage of housing for the increasing population. Mr. Feigenbaum said to me: 'Look, I don't want to be unpleasant about this, but we need to register you as living here with us, and not with your father at his place. It is only fair to the system, besides which the committee of the apartment has been asking questions and can make trouble for us, which we do not want, you understand?' AND I replied back, I said that no, I preferred rather to be registered where my father is, and that is the best way.

I think it was at the end of 1940, there was a strict regulation that people with more than one domicile must reregister at only one place. Now in our house, where my father was, there was a Russian officer stationed. He had taken over two big room, so we remained with less rooms, and because I was often not there, they insisted that I make a decision on one firm place of my domicile. And the decision came along in an unexpected way.

Mrs. Feigenbaum, Malka's mother, came to me one day. She said: I know what's happening between you and my daughter. She doesn't want to tell you, but I have to tell you. She is pregnant. There now! Now you know! Now you have to make a decision." And she left.

So I went to my father and told him the story. My father said: "There is only way to solve this, the honorable way. Did you sleep with her?" he asked me, and I said "Yes." "And now she is pregnant?" he asked me again. I replied that that is what I had been told by her mother.

He said: "Then the only thing you can do is to marry her."  
I said to my father that I was not really so keen on that idea.

He stared at me for a while and then he said to me: "Look, I will arrange it with the rabbi and he will perform the marriage ceremony between you. But we will not register it immediately. We will wait to do that."

And so this is what happened. We had a small house wedding, with a little bit of wine and the breaking of the glass. And people congratulated us, and smiled, and wished us all good things, and so it was that I became a married man when I was twenty-one years old.

I was still staying with my Malka and her family, the Feigenbaums, at the time that the Vilna Ghetto was formed. The Germans had cordoned off a block of buildings that ran about four streets long and six streets wide, enclosing it with a wall barricade, and they designated this small enclave, hence the word Ghetto, ... you know it comes originally from the Italian? Oh yes .. there were Jewish ghettos even before ours became more famous! So, here it was... this small area was to be the sole dwelling place of all the Jews in Vilna...about fifty thousand or so of us. Try and imagine!

Now this area was about ten minutes walk from where the Feigenbaums lived, and so when the announcement came that we all had to move into that Ghetto, I made sure that I was there early enough to secure a good place in one of the buildings , on the second floor, it was very near to the gate. I had a corner in one of the rooms , and there I stayed with Malka only. The Feigenbaums, her mother and father and sister went somewhere else. Later on my father came and also got a place in the same building as I was, but on the ground floor because he couldn't walk so well. He was still busy with the Hospital at that time. When the registration started for all those who could work, my father was helped by his brother-in-law, the banker, to get out of the Ghetto and find work in the city. A German policeman used to take my father and my stepmother into his double motorcycle, you know with the little chairs on the side, that kind, and drive them out of the ghetto to another town nearby called Leda, where they both worked as doctors, until Leda was liquidated, and the same policeman, for the same fee, brought them back.

In the meantime I got a job in the Jewish Committee to be a clerk in the office of Labor, and Malka obtained work in one of the co-operatives. My marriage as I said, was not a good one. I still never trusted her. When the liquidation of the Ghetto occurred in '43, Malka and I went as volunteers to Estonia to some work camps. In one camp where I was involved again as a secretary or registrar, Malka was working in a group that went daily outside of the camp for work purposes. One day I heard a rumor that she was in love with one of the men in that same workgroup. When she came back that evening, I confronted her. I asked her if those rumors that I had heard about her and this other man were true. She told me yes, she was in love with another man from her group, and if we survive this nightmare, she is not sure, but she thinks maybe she wants to be with him. But now, she said, she also wants to be with me . She just didn't know, she was so confused. She was so scared.

And I looked at her and I didn't know what to answer her. We were living in two different barracks. One for men, another for women, as it was all over in the work camps. That same night a girl came running up to our men's barracks, knocked on the window, and shouted for me. When I came out, she says to me that Malka had

disappeared... perhaps she committed suicide or something, she says, but I should help look for her.

So I immediately ran with her over to her barracks to help find Malka with this girlfriend of hers, and I found her in the toilet outhouse, which was a separate building. She was hanging by a belt around the neck, over one of the toilets. She was still alive. I untied her, and carried her to the clinic, to Dr. Nesky, where she was administered to. When I asked her why she had done such an awful, foolish thing like that, she looked at me sadly and said that she just couldn't take it any more. All the girls in the barracks were telling her how badly she was behaving to be carrying on an affair as a married woman, behind my back, to betray a husband in times like this. Then when she knew I had found out, she couldn't face up to it. When she realized she had to make some sort of decision, she tried to end it all for the good of everyone by hanging herself. Of course I comforted her, and told her I would forgive her, and time would be kind to us all, we must just wait it out. But later on, the more I thought about this, the more I considered things rationally, I realized that it was just another of Malka's dramatic false alarms. Another one of her schemes. It was deliberately made to look like she was hanging, but in truth, she was not even hanged. She had tied the belt around her chin and not her neck, because Dr. Nesky told me later that he had not found any markings or bruises on her neck that pointed to a real hanging. But I never said a word to her about my suspicions. I did not make any issue about it. It was not worth it, I thought to myself. We only had about two or three months until this workcamp would be dissolved and then we were to be transported to separate places. The Russians were very near, and rumors were that this camp was going to be evacuated soon. At that time, things would sort themselves out. She would be out of my life, and I would be out of hers, and our problem would be taken care of.

The end of the story is that when we were separated, men and women, at the dissolution of the camp we were both at, we went to Estonia, to the ships which were to take us back to Poland. Myself to the concentration camp Stutthof and Malka to another concentration camp. I never saw her again until after the war. About three months after the liberation by the Allied Forces, when I was already working in the newspaper with the editor I told you about, and Anushka had left for a while to meet some important people in Lodsz, I heard a knock on the door of the house we now occupied. I opened the door, and there stood Malka with another girlfriend. I was surprised to see her. I thought I never would again.

She looked at me and said, quite boldly: "I've heard all about you. .. all about what you are doing these days and who you are with. I found your name at the Jewish Agency, and I've come to ask you for a proper get, a real divorce."

She also wanted some money from me and some clothing or goods, whatever I could give her, that she felt she was owed. Whatever I had in the way of money, I gave to her. Also some things that I had found in the apartment we now occupied once the Germans had fled and left everything. I gave her some clothes that had been left there. And then we went together to the Jewish Committee, and I asked if there was a rabbi there, and



there was somebody who was, and in his room, he asked me if I wanted still to be married to her, and I replied no, and he asked her the same question, and she replied no. Then I, as a Cohen, had to say three times that I am divorcing her, and it was so. The rabbi, he signed some papers which I also had to sign and she had to sign and then he gave it to her, and she took it and folded it and put it in her purse. We looked at each other as we walked out of his office. We had signed our farewell. There was nothing more to do but to shake hands and part. I extended my hand to her, and she hesitantly put out hers. Then we shook hands and wished each other well. We said goodbye to each other and that was the last time we ever saw each other. The end of a chapter. The end of a mistake. I went home to my empty apartment that night and thought about all that was now gone from my life.

"I am back to the time of ~~the~~ summer of 1941.

hitler

and <sup>to</sup> Lithuania becoming a Soviet Republic.

We accommodated to the Russian takeover quite quickly. Soon life appeared to take on a normal look, and the focus was turned away from the threat of war with Germany and redirected to the grand cultural renewal under ~~Russian~~ the communistic rule. There was big excitement about the upcoming festival in Moscow, in which all the ethnic groups from the conquered territories which were now part of 'Mother Russia' would be represented. And so I wrote for the newspaper, Youth Truth, about a young Jewish girl who was chosen by the Vilna Cultural Association to represent Vilna <sup>Lithuania</sup>, a great honor, especially for a Jew, to sing at the International Festival of Folklore Music and Dance to be held in Moscow in the summer, July, of 1941, that year. That was the second time I wrote about ANushka ~~Goldman~~ <sup>Muselson</sup>, who was perhaps already then, under the ink of my pen, destined to become your mother. It was a nice article, inspired mostly by Vera who was, you remember the Cultural Director of Youth in Vilna. So that is it. That was our orientation... life under Russia, safe and prescribed. Oh, what <sup>my</sup> young, provincial fools, we were.

Then one day in 1941, in June, I think it was the 22nd, we heard the unusual sound of bombing. The German Stukkah, the raid of the lowflying airplanes loaded with bombs, was over the city and bombing factories, one bomb fell near the Green Bridge... and suddenly there was war. The first day when I heard about it, I was still staying with the Feigenbaums, I <sup>Lasar</sup> immediately ran to my father's house to see him. But he was not there. He had also run somewhere, either to his brother or sister..I don't know. I found only my stepmother there at home, and she was very agitated, because she could not go to the hospital, and she wanted to. There was an unbelievable panic in the town. We looked out the windows and saw the Russians, we could not believe it, in trucks, on cars, on, on, ... even on bicycles, all on the road running out of town towards Russia. The telephones were not working. People were running about wildly in the streets. I went to see some of my friends from the movement, and we decided that if the Germans are coming in, we have to go. Malka said that she <sup>Matka</sup> wanted to stay with her parents in the meantime, and that we boys should prepare to go. So we got our things together, important belongings that we could take on the road with us, and ~~so~~ we marched, a group of us boys, on the roads leading <sup>east</sup> out of Vilna, towards Minsk, with hundreds of others, on horses, on foot, with carts, people everywhere carrying peklach, parcels and baggage, on their backs, on donkeys, on makeshift carts, even the Russian soldiers in the military vehicles, all of us trying to escape what we dreaded. And very soon ~~sometimes~~ quickly we had to run, rush out from the road into the fields nearby because we could hear the low whining, the

*full of people*  
rumbling sound of the German planes, like a monster mosquito it sounded, swooping toward us, and dropping bombs on the roads we were following. BUT we did not stop walking. Even at night, we kept walking, for one and a half days. Like the exodus from Egypt. Except not to the Promised Land. Nothing was promised. AND when we saw people coming from the direction we were headed, returning back, we asked them why, and they told us GERMans were there too, ahead of us, so they were coming back to Vilna, what's the difference? AND so there was nothing for us to do but to turn around and walk all the way back to Vilna. So we came back home.

And then it started... all the announcements about the Jews, notices in German, Lithuanian and Polish plastered all over the buildings and also in the newspaper. Everyone must bring to the authorities your bicycle, your radio, *any all fur items* valuables.. all to be turned in.

"Was it forced?" I asked. "Did they suggest what would happen otherwise...?" I pressed, needing to understand the methodology of submission.

Agh, it was all made very clear to us. THE Jews had to turn over everything to the Jewish COMMITtee, the valuables, the silver etc, because they were collecting for the ten hostages. You see, the Germans had immediately taken ten hostages, ten men of distinction from the prominent JEWish life.. the rabbi, the president of the COMMITtee, the banker, the chief doctor, --important people, leaders of the community, and they announced that they would kill them if they didn't receive a certain amount of gold and silver and money for their release.

AND of course most of the JEws responded quickly, standing in long lines in front of the office of the JEWish committee, waiting to give generously of all their collectibles and valuables, heirlooms, silver menorot, candlesticks, you see, and it didn't help nothing. Not a thing. THEY were all killed anyhow, those ten. SO and so, they murdered them, and took our ransom. They said, those Germans, that the value the Jewish community placed on those ten was clearly not high enough for their lives to be spared.

And so the list of little restrictions continued. The announcement was that we couldn't walk on the sidewalks, we must only walk on the streets, on the cobbles, and we could not walk in couples, but only one after the one, singlefile, like geese. And the Lithuanian police and even the Polish helpers used to catch Jews and force them to work. For instance, say they were cleaning the streets, well, if a Jew was walking along, single, in the street, for instance, they would just come up and grab you and point their gun at you and force you to clean the street, with your bare hands,

while they laughed and joked and cursed at you, and often kicked you when you were down on your knees. It was always the threat of ugly violence. Or say you were standing in line for some bread ration, and you obviously looked like a Jew, they could come and chuck you out of the line and push you to the end of the line, and tell you you could not wait there. And so you would walk back home in silent rage and when you got home you would send the maid instead to go stand in line. The maids, at least, <sup>some of them</sup> were still trustworthy.

AND all the time on the radio, came the vicious attacks on the Jews, for the benefit of the POles and Lithuanian population. A group of boys decided that it was safe to be <sup>out of</sup> ~~the~~ town, where the "Hapooners" that means "catchers" were waiting everywhere ready to pounce. And I was in the group. We decided to look for some work with some Polish peasants, who needed extra laborers, and through our parents who knew some of these peasants, it was arranged that we could go out into the country where it was not so thick with German soldiers or bloodthirsty Lithuanians. So I was in a group of <sup>we worked here for food and</sup> sixty boys and men and we went to a place about forty <sup>were</sup> kilometers from Vilna where there <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ <sup>were</sup> ~~peat~~ <sup>peat</sup> patches. <sup>Malka</sup> On Sundays, when we had half-days off, our families could come and visit us there. AND Malka came to me with her mother only, her father was afraid to come in case he got caught by the Germans, being prominent as he was, and then one day, one Sunday, on one of these visits, I look at Malka and I say:

"Wait a minute...you don't look very different...What happened to the pregnancy?"

"Oh," she says, "I aborted it."

"But you didn't...why didn't you discuss it with me?" I asked her, shocked.

"Oh," she said lightly, "I discussed it with mother, and we both agreed, and we needed to do it quickly, and I went in and it was over and that was it. It's all taken care of now."

In the beginning I thought it was because of the war and all and probably it was the right thing to do if she felt that way... but then it dawned on me that she really should have been quite large by now, by my simple calculations. You know, the young men in those days, especially me, we were not so informed about women's pregnancy and birth and all that stuff, not like today. It was all woman's area. AND so I didnt' pay much attention to keeping a watch on what should be happeing to her body, because I truly knew very little about it all. But suddenly I began to think something new. I suddenly began wondering if that whole pregnancy story was ever true in the first place. I suddenly had the feeling that it was all a bluff... a proper bluff! And this made my



thinking about Malka <sup>atla</sup> very different. I felt I had been cheated. I felt that she had abused me, that I had been conned into this whole situation of being married. And so, with this thought in my mind, I could not feel very loving towards her, even though she was technically my wife. I was now just a husband out of duty, her family had become mine, and I would continue to help them as they had helped me in my need. But towards Malka, my heart had become a stone. Later on, in ghetto, one of Malka's best friends, confirmed my theory of a "false pregnancy", pushed on Malka by her perfidious mother.

YIWO Kloga

Meeting with Luba was a great event during my last stay in Los Angeles. I spoke to her and Michael, her husband, several times previously and this time arranged to travel to Los Angeles at the same time to coincide with their visit to Nan, her older daughter and my long overdue visit to my niece, Fama. Fama settled in USA seven years ago and I have seen her last time in Israel about eleven years ago.

The flight by Northwestern was not bad, six hours included a lot of reading, seeing from above the Great Canyon and in the intervals eating the snacks supplied by the airline.

Tzili, Fama's daughter fetched me from the airport and forty minutes later I was warmly welcomed by Fama and her 14-years old son Adi.

Same evening Luba and Michael arrived and after a hug and embrace I did introduce my Vilna friends to Fama. The evening was warm and we sat at the patio near the pool. Luba was a very good friend of some of my "preferable" girls during the teenage period of my life. She also belonged to our Zionist organisation and in those times she was liked by many as a reliable person of good culture and wisdom. We were reminiscing about those pre-war years, talked about people we knew so well, some of those dead during the Holocaust and some still alive, some already widowed but luckily some enjoying the winter of their lives with the loved ones.

Michael told me of his debt of "thanks" to me, for as he expressed it "you somehow saved my life in the ghetto. The story was as follows:" I was already married to Luba and we had a baby son. During the march to the Vilna ghetto, when Jews had to leave their homes and trek to the six short streets in the centre of town, surrounded by high walls, I was working in Byala Vaka, 15 km away from Vilna in a labour camp, mining peat bricks used by peasants for heating. When I learnt that Luba, the baby and her parents and sister are in the ghetto I asked my foreman to give me an employment certificate to enable me to travel to the ghetto for a visit and then come back to work. In those days a Jew found walking on the road or in the street without a work certificate was usually sent to prison to be killed. He obliged and the next day I walked to the ghetto gates, where a SS-man stopped me.

Usually groups of Jews were marching back to ghetto in the afternoon or evening. Here I was in mid-day one person asking to be admitted. The German read my certificate and said that I may see my family, but I should tomorrow early see him and in the meantime he will keep my 'schein' - the certificate until he sees me again.

The joy of being with my dearest was spoiled by the thought of the SS-man holding my 'schein' and for what purpose. The certificate in hand was at those days a guarantee of life, without it your destination was Ponary, the forest near Vilna where many of our co-religionists were brutally liquidated. Luba had an idea to contact you who were a clerk in the Labour Bureau for advice. When she saw you and told what happened, you strongly warned me seeing the SS-man tomorrow and then promised to intervene with higher Jewish authorities about me. As I remember, a few hours later you came to our place, where we

lived and asked if I can provide with a bottle of vodka or 'schnapps'. My father-in-law knew some people who could sell it to him, and later on I brought the bottle to you. I saw you again the next day and with a smile on your face you gave me back my certificate back. Your explanation was simple. You went to the gate and from the information received you knew who the SS-man was. You went then to Joseph Glazman, who was in charge of police and explained to him in what danger a former Betari is. Glazman was in the pre-ghetto times the leader of the Jabotinsky Zionist movement in Lithuania, and you urged him to help. He was dealing many times with this German and knew his requirements. A bottle of vodka changed hands and the life certificate returned to me. Although I insisted to recompensate you for the trouble, you refused saying 'what are friends for if not to help each other'. With the certificate I could reach again Byala Vaka and work there, as it was impossible to obtain any new certificates which allowed you to work in or outside the ghetto. On many occasions I have blessed you and spoke about what you did for me and for Luba. Thank you again for helping me to have a chance to live..."

I knew from our previous telephonic conversations that somehow he is obliged to me. But truly, I did not remember being of help to Luba's husband and I was slightly embarrassed by their insistance of thanks. When Michael dealt with the particulars of the story, recollection came up. Yes, I did remember the vodka bottle I had to deliver to Joseph and later on <sup>one</sup> gave me back the certificate. The SS-man's name was Weiss, the overseer of the ghetto in the first year of its existence.

During our next day talk, which this time took place in a very luxurious home of Nan, I saw the video made by Michael during their visit recently in Vilnius and Ponary. I saw the dreaded place and the two monuments, one in memory of the children and one for all the martyrs. Michael recited Kadish. I saw views of the old and new Vilna. Nan was there with her parents and asked questions. Parents answered as informative as possible about places where they lived before and then in ghetto. Michael repeated the story of help with the 'schain' and during the showing of the video drew my attention to that moment.

Again we talked about people we were associated with. Luba proved to be the almanach of remembering names, and who was with whom then and after the war, an unbelievable memory. It is during this very interesting conversation that some impulses in my brain provided me with sudden remembrance of names I have never could recall. It was a stimulating meeting with them. We spoke also about our friends whom we see nowadays, like Sol, David and others. I have learnt from Luba that a girl I wanted to meet after the war Nadya, and my search was fruitless, was alive, married someone called Mileykovsky and lived in Israel. She died recently. When we said goodbye we promised ourselves to be more often in touch.

included some actuality poetry of Polish-Jewish authors like Julian Tuwim. Seated on bar-stool I faced mostly young listeners, in darkened cafeteria, the small electric light on the papers I had in my hand. From time to time, I had to stop reading, as my voice was filled with tears, choked, and a glass of water helped. At the end it was silence and then shouts, bravo's, people came up to thank me for the intellectual experience. Further evenings were arranged with actors, and actresses from the local theatre whom I had to introduce to the public. The evenings were very successful. One of the readers a young actress Halina, whom I saw in a polish film 'The Frontier Street'-about Warsaw Ghetto, became sick, and was hospitalised. I went to see her with flowers and arranged for her to be transfered to the nearby Home for Recuperation in the mountains, which belonged to the Union of Retired Actors. After a month, Halina, who regained her health, played in the theatre again and I wrote a good crit about her acting. She had to return to Warsaw and invited me to visit her while I am in the capital. The occasion soon arose when I made my trip to the unveiling of the Monument to the Ghetto Fighters.

The arrangement was to meet a few days before the unveiling, to have time to see the re-building of Warsaw, go to a theatre, or just spend time together. Hanka was still performing in Wroclaw in the Yiddish State Theater and had to come to Warsaw with the group of actors by bus for the unveiling. Halina's mother, a devout Catholic was not happy to host a Jew at her home, even for a day or two. But the circumstances were against her. I did spend with Halina a full day running around Warsaw in search for a hotel room. All were booked out, even the family pensions and holiday rooms. Thousands of tourists, Jews mostly have booked in advance for the unveiling, and Warsaw did not have room for the crowds storming the capital. Halina and I we have been very frustrated, as she was sure I will get a hotel room to spend in privacy with me. Anyway Halina's mother arranged for me to sleep in the dining room at her apartment on three chairs, covered with cushions and the doors to the room were locked.. She feared that my presence can lead to my greater involvement with her daughter. At the morning breakfast I refused the bacon and eggs and limited myself to a coffee and croissant, although I was hungry, as last night's supper was just potato salad and cooked apples, tea and biscuit. My thanks for hospitality were short. Halina went out with me with tears in her eyes, to say goodbye. She wrote to me afterwards with thanks for the care I extended to her, while she was sick, describing the feelings she had for me and desires, alas unfulfilled. She was a beautiful dark-haired girl of 25, enchained by her widowed mother, a promising actress, unspoiled yet, although successful. I liked her quiet sensuality, the freshness of her spirit and delicate approach to life. She was tender and plesurably exciting. I



remember the day we spent together when in the evening she had to leave Jelenia Gora for Warsaw. I took her up to the mountain in my DKW-car, we had a picnic-lunch, the spring was already showing flowers in the meadows. We spoke about the film in which Jewish youth fought the Germans. Her upbringing was very aristocratic and Jews were non mentionable, yet she read some books and was very interested in learning more about the Jews and their lives. She said she found me attractive and we kissed. The afternoon we spent in my apartment and although we engaged ourselves in kissing and touching I could not make love to her. Frustrating as it was for her I was deeply upset by my non-performance. Perhaps I was too much excited or eager. I don't know , but occurrence like this one was rare in my repertoire. The failure of getting again together in Warsaw that April perhaps was an omen, a sign that my brief encounter with Halina should end. In the calendar of my destiny I have had many signs like this one. And fortunately to my benefit and a good lesson in life.

I spend my second day in Warsaw with some friends from the camps, slept in their apartment with several others on the floor in the kitchen and the next morning joined thousands who trekked to the ruins of the ghetto, where the Monument was unveiled in an unforgettable ceremony.

Warsaw was in ruins. The place designed for the monument was part of the ghetto and I could not visualise even the places I visited last in 1939, as the streets I rememberd and the buildings were not there, just an empty space, cleared of remanents of bricks, plaster, wood and steel, which once was a locum for inhabitants to live. Now crowds of people, Jews and Gentiles, from early hours gathered around the monument. A specially erected stand and chairs were placed in a circle for the invited officialdom. Survivors from ghettos and concentration camps, Jewish refugees from Soviet territories, who resided now in the new territories of Silesia, displayed placards with names of their places of domicile or past-exile in the USSR. The band of the Polish military placed them selves near the stand. Sonn the invited guests were guided in to their chairs and uniformed militia girls distributed pamphlets with the information relating to the occasion.

The monument presented to the viewers scenes of heroic stand of the fighters of the ghetto uprising against the Germans. After the official speeches and dedication, the band played an occasional march and the anthem, and the barriers surrounding the monument were set aside for us to come nearer and view the scenes depicted there. Many of us cried, people were taking photographs. I took some with Anushka and shot a few for some friends who asked for it. From nearby vendors I bought fruit and rolls and we ate in celebration of the event. In the afternoon of same day, exhausted we settled in the overfilled compartment of the train, which brought us

back to Wroclaw and then by car to Jelenia Gora.

When many years later, on visiting Israel, I have seen the replica of the monument, I had a chance to examine more precisely the structure and work of the designer. In Warsaw the emotional encounter was overpowering and the details rather sketchy, the impact was of the magnitude of that monument in the field of nowhere, the edifice of a statement for all to see, placed in the rightful Jewish whereabouts of past years.

The monument of another kind was on my mind, but this time not of heroism but of martyrdom, when in Cape Town, forty years later, being the honorary secretary of the 'Sheerith Hapletah' - the Survivors Association of the Cape, I applied to the Jewish community leaders with a request to erect a monument commemorating the Six Million of our people killed by the Nazis.

At that time the community had established a Holocaust Memorial Council, whose activities incorporated organising commemorative functions, educational materials for schools and organisations desiring lecturers on the subject, videos of testimonials by survivors, etc. The proposal for a monument was prepared by the Association (it means by me mostly) with the co-operation of a local architect Hillel Turok, whose project and methods of erecting the monument was approved by the Association's committee. Hillel with his good connections made it sure that sponsors amongst the local building trade (Jews and non-Jews) will cover the costs. Yet when it came to discuss the project at the meetings of the Holocaust Memorial Council, I have encountered critics of the visual of the monument, expressions of fears of the costs involved in the maintenance of that kind of monument now and in years ahead, various voices about the inscription on the structure, etc., etc. Many meetings later and months of unnecessary delays, yet with my perseverance and dedication I did get the approval from the community's Board of Deputies to go ahead with the project with small corrections.

With great satisfaction of a job well done I was honoured to inaugurate the Monument at the Jewish cemetery, in front of the Tahara House, during the well attended commemoration of the Yom Hashoah - the Remembrance Day for the Six Million. Our example was taken two years later by the local Jewish Ex-Service League to erect on the other side a monument to the fallen in the World War II and in the Israel's War of Independence,

XP - or  
organizes  
monument  
to 6 mil

7 XP

A 5 E 6  
VOID

As I was in charge of publicity and promotions for arts and literature, being the editor of the Lower Silesia's daily newspaper, Jelenia Gora local edition of "Gazeta Dolnoslaska", I was trying to enliven the cultural expectations of the populus and bring some kind of free entertainment to the young and old of the town. Jelenia Gora had many restaurants and the evenings were spent mostly in attending dances and in some cases cabaret of lower class distinction. Alcoholic drinks, of all kinds, were served profusely, semi-professional bands were playing the slowfox's and tango's, waltzes and rumba's and the locals took to the floor in pairs, some in perfect unison of movements, some not in rythms of the music, but all in enjoyment of the "body close ins".

I was a frequent guest of the restaurant owners, their printing of menus had to be OKayed by my office, and on many occasions met and became friendly with the musicians employed there. An idea came to my mind to use the bands for a jazz jamboree, in the park, on a Sunday morning, to give a free performance for all to attend. I had several meetings with the band leaders, discussed the programme of the first concert, and was pleased with the favourable response for my request for their help in staging the event. One summer Sunday a large crowd was eagerly awaited the twelve players, who assembled on a platform, in a centre park avenue, and with me conducting, played as the first number a part of "Rhapsody in Blue". Applouse after applouse greeted other items. My conducting was good, as I knew the numbers being an ear-pitch musical, non-playing enthusiast of jazz and prom compositions. The musicians on the platform also played by ear and the total experiment was well accepted by the public. To add to the attraction of the event which I repeated (with changes in programme) I've secured the sponsorship of the local Y.M.C.A., who publicised the events and collected donations from the public for a youth orchestra. On a few occasions at that time, and after a few drinks at some restaurants, I was invited by the band to come up on their rostrum and conduct their music, the fun enjoyed by those who performed and the diners, whom I invited to dance or sing, when the music was the well known hits of the season.

A friend, Stash was a baker. His establishment in the Main Street was well patronised. In the evening the bakery was open for tea, coffee and cakes and I got Stash's permission to present as an additional entertainment evenings of poetry reading. For the first evening I read my own poems, written immediately after the liberation, expressing in verse the emotions, feelings of pain and loneliness of a survivor, alive but in mourning for the dearest family, yet with hope for the days ahead, verses of the tragic years of persecution, words of accusations for the bestiality of nazi-oppressors, calls to avenge for the murder of the innocents. I have also

my poetry on stage

In May 1950 I left Paris for South Africa and remember saying adieu to the rooftops of the City through my tearful eyes promising myself to come here again not as a refugee from the Holocaust but as a tourist. It took forty years to keep the promise.

The flight by SAA was pleasant and by the courtesy of a senior steward Archie, I was allocated three empty seats and could take a nap of a few hours. Grey clouds greeted me at Orly Airport and from there the taxi manoeuvred through the tense traffic for nearly an hour to bring me to Les Halles, to the apartment of a friend with whom I had to stay.

In the evening we took a stroll towards the river Seine, near Chatelet theatre. The chairs at the outdoor cafes and bistros were fully occupied. Seeing the promenading colourful crowds at the Rue Rivoli pleased my heart. Paris was the same as I left it, I thought. Even the ladies at the Rue Saint Denis waiting for clients did not change their stations but noticeable was the fact of majority of darker skins in the profession, the oldest in the world...

Prior to my Cape Town engagement I worked for several ethnic newspapers and journals as a technical editor and had to supervise last editions at the printing shop, where I made many friends. Revisiting the place, after so many years, was a traumatic experience. The elderly forman recognised me. He told me about some people I remembered and explained why the premises look abundant. I arrived just in time to witness the shop's machinery being sold and removed as the building will be refurbished for new apartments. The printing presses, the linotypes, editor's desks, etc. were neatly packed for transportation. An eerie picture for someone who has so many memories of the place where my professionalism matured and experienced gained.

Before the war my mother (divorced) lived in the 'couture' district and was engaged by a big clothing factory as a dress designer. The last time I saw her was in 1938 during my student vacation. I stood again now in front of 19 Rue du Caire, my eyes focused on the fourth floor windows. How many times I found her looking towards the sky predicting the weather and telling me to put on a sweater or raincoat, before going out. After the war I came to Paris to find her. The old concierge recalled how the French police, three months before the liberation of Paris, came to arrest my mother, dragged her down the steps and took her away in a police car. My further enquiries at the Prefecture and the Ministry of Deported were fruitless. Only a few years ago in a book published by the Klarsfeld Documentation Centre I found my mother's name and the date when she was gassed in Auschwitz. She was only 45 years old.



The majestic edifices of the Louvre Museum, the largest museum in the world, is a magnet drawing hundreds of visitors daily. I stood in a queue, a long one, this time because some of the entrances were closed for renovations. Still the Venus of Milo was attracting crowds of onlookers, and so was Leonardo da Vinci's enigmatically smiling Mona Lisa. New remarkable displays in various departments presented to the visitors the latest achievements in museum art from many countries of the world. I was particularly stunned by the ultra modern architectural Pyramid in aluminium and glass by the renowned French architect Pei, built on a inner yard of Louvre, so poignantly contrasting with the 17th century buildings surrounding the pyramid.

My friend took me by car through the western district. We passed Champs Elysees with multiple crowds on pavements and a serpentine of cars, limos and buses in both directions. I welcomed the magnificent Arch of Triumph with the French tricolour, 20m long flying inside, and after a while we reached the futuristic site of La Defence - an entirely new suburb of high rise buildings, with prominence of aluminium and glass, in a variety of shapes, very modernistic containing thousands of offices and apartments, presenting a new vista of Paris skyline.

Dominating the view is the recently construed 'Grand Arche', the seat of the Universal Foundation of Human Rights, a tall square built in white marble, with conference halls, libraries on various floors and a multi-thousand auditorium field for spectacles, rock-and other music festivals and entertainment presentations. Six lifts transport visitors to the top of the arch, from where with many others we admired the finest panoramic view of the City. On our way back we stopped near the famous Eiffel Tower, still a great tourist attraction, and watched a variety of streamers and boats carrying hundreds of tourists on the river Seine. The cruises pass under many romantic bridges and we saw on both sides many historical monuments and buildings.

A visit to Place Pigalle and Boulevard de Clichy, where I was domiciled after I left Poland in 1947/8, was a disappointment. It changed radically from the old styled suburbia of Moulin Rouge, Nouvelle Eve, bistro's and restaurants frequented by Parisians and tourists, mostly of mature age, to a vulgar, indecent porno-market-place, with hard-nude exposition visuals in showcases and a multitude of sex boutiques attracting youngish looking tourists in jeans and leather jackets, arriving on buses with mostly German and East-European number plates.

I don't remember if I have told you, Naava, about the period which I call "the years of the Three Musketeers". In our youth organisation Masada, where I became the vice-commandant of the group (sgan-mefaked haken), after two years of doing the secretarial duties, the "troika" of the more efficient activists beside me was Mishka Smolgovski and Ziamka Sakier.

It is on our heads rested the enrolment of new members and the planning of programs, to keep the group (over 80 ) well activated in a variety of fields. We propagate learning about the history of Zionism, and of course, historical development of our right-wing party headed by Vladimir Jabotinsky and when the Revisionist Party left the World Zionist Organisation, we remained with Meir Grossman as our political leader of the newly formed "Judenstaatspartei"- the party of the Jewish State. We had instructors for semi-military exercises, organised talks and picnics in the nearby forests and provided lessons in Hebrew language. The fortnightly Saturday evenings were enjoyed by all who attended the "mesiba"- a form of "theatre-in the round" which was an occasion for a show of artistic talents of our members in music, recitation, choir and story telling. Ziamka was in charge of the entertainment and when it came to singing I did too my part with the group in the presentation of the latest hits. Some of them with our own, ideologically interpreted lyrics.

Our troika was very effective in social activities, which usually resulted in bringing new members, girls mostly, who then were followed by boys. Mishka, who looked like young Robert Taylor and Ziamka, whom I can compare to Marlon Brando were the magnets. They knew a lot of teen-agers from the co-ed Jewish schools. My connections were limited (I was in a boys only catholic high-school where a small number of Jews attended) and the only help I had from occasional visits for dances or school performances at Polish-Jewish schools, where cousin Luba and Chayela studied.

Mishka lived in an apartment over his father's restaurant in a corner house facing the Green Bridge over the river Vilya. It was convenient for me, who lived on the other side of the bridge (ten minutes walk up the Kalvaryska street) to meet him and walk together to meetings and back home. Our premises were on the second floor of an old three-story house occupied mostly by businesses during the day and giving us a freedom of noise and singing during the evening hours and mornings of Sundays. Mishka helped his dad during the day. His younger sister Sarah walked with us sometimes and I used to find "love" letters from her on my desk or in my jacket

left on the armchair. At the same time I was involved with Lilka, a tall, brown-eyed sixteen-year old, very pretty and shy girl, whom I walked home after meetings, talked a lot and from time to time took to a cinema show. We kissed often on saying goodbye at her gate but she never allowed to be body touched and I respected it. I had to speak to Mishka to persuade his sister to stop pestering me and was happy when her attention were directed to another member of our group. Although we were good friends when it came to girls each one tried to outdo with elegant clobber, or knowledge of books or in any other way to draw girls attention. One day after a matinee cinema show I spotted a beautiful tall girl walking with a girl I knew. I approached them and started talking, but was not introduced to the tall one. She attracted me strongly but was not responding to my question about the picture and excused herself as being in a hurry to return home. Next day I made some phone calls and learnt that the object of my attention, Wilma, attends a private school, and lived far away from my suburb. Then I got her phone number and after several calls (she was not interested in the very beginning to meet me) she agreed to see a new show with me at the cinema. The film was "Rose Marie" with Jaenette McDonald and Nelson Eddie - a romantic musical which then suited our viewing. I was soon introduced to Vilma's parents and could visit her on week-ends. Wilma was beautiful, long brown-redish hair adorned a delicate face, with a straight nose and full voluptuous lips.

I was very attracted to her. She was aloof and even when we danced at her room to the rhythm of tango or slow-fox music played on the modern "pathefon", she kept the body distance. Our platonic friendship lasted a few months and then I was given excuses at not being able to see her. Ziamka to whom I spoke about Wilma did not want to hurt me, although he knew that Mishka was taking Wilma out now. But one of the girls in Masada gave me the news. Mishka said that Wilma asked him to take her out because I was too much involved in the work of the organisation and she felt it will be better that I devote all my efforts to my Zionist ideals. When I confronted her, she was elusive and said that I was too shy to her liking and that she preferred other types of men. For some time I was devastated by her statement but there were always some other girls to give my attention. Perhaps not as beautiful and unapproachable as Wilma, but more plainer and yet still more willing and adventurous. With the war and the Lithuanians in Vilna I lost trace of Wilma. In the meantime Mishka met a rich girl from Kaunas and not long after proposed and married her. He became a father of a girl and worked in the radio and electrical store owned by his father-in-law. In the ghetto he was at the gate police and I lost contact with him. One day Wilma came to the Labour office where I was a clerk and asked

for help. She was now with her mother only. She was still very beautiful but subdued. I found the possibility to get her a job outside. The newly acquired employment card enable her to protect her mother and help her with food. A month or so later she came to thank me and announced that she has a better job now, a more permanent, as a cleaning girl for some of the high German officers. A few months later I heard the rumour that a high German army officer was in love with a girl from the ghetto working in his apartment. The affair after a while, was discovered by the Gestapo and the officer killed the girl and himself in a suicidal pact. The girl was Wilma.

During the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto in September 1943 Mishka and his family was transfered to a fur processing factory "Kailis" on the outskirts of the town. The factory employed over 250 Jewish tradesmen during the German occupation and Mishka found refuge there, but not for long. A few months later the factory was liquidated and only a few were saved from Ponary, by fleeing to the forests to join partisans.

Ziamka, who during the Soviet- Lithuanian regime in Vilna, was on a lucrative job as an accountant, married a pretty local girl. Our Zionist activities were curtailed and the only contact we kept with each other was while helping our refugees from the German-occupied parts of Poland, streaming to our town. The war was at that time somewhere in Europe (October 1939-June 1991) and we tried to get used to the new socialist Stalin headed regime. With the German occupation of Vilna, Ziamka and I worked at separate peat farms and then in the ghetto seen each other occasionally. He was involved with the security administration in the ghetto Council and before the liquidation went with a group to the Rudnicki Forests to join the Jewish partisans. In summer of 1944 his group participated with the Red Army units in liberation of Vilna.

During my stay in Yelenia Gora, Ziamka visited me twice and we had long hours of reminiscences of our youth. From him I did get news about people we knew and their fates. We were in touch through the years and when my children emigrated to America, it was my pleasure to be hosted warmly by Ziamka and his wife very charming and symphatetic wife Mira at his home in Brooklyn, every time I was visiting my families. Ziamka came to New York in the fourties. Same as all the newcomers he had some very difficult years before establishing himself with a partner (also a wartime partisan) in a clothing business of mens slacks. His business acumen and hardworking salesmanship brought the company, he founded, to the forefront position in the trade. He is now retired. His son is a lawyer and daughter a teacher. Both married and with lovely children.



The following to be inserted in NAAVA's BOOK  
Computer:XAVBOOK pages 4 & 2

C.T  
1955  
first prize

In August 1955, the daily newspaper The Cape Argus asked readers to write on a theme "What have you done with ten years of peace?". I decided to write and was pleased to get the first price (and a cheque for L5 5s.) in this contest. The editor, under the heading 'We were naked, hungry, diseased' wrote: We have awarded the first prize to 'Alien' (that was my nomme-de plume) for the sincere and thought-provoking letter printed below. It reads just as we received it, without corrections to spelling or phrasing.

Here is what I wrote;

I was amazed to read about your competition: 'What have you done with ten years of peace?' Not later than a day or two before Week-end magazine reached me, I was discussing with my wife the date of August 15.

It seems to me that I have done a lot during those ten years, but let me go back to the 1945 and start with March 10. On this fateful day the German S.S. guards left our concentration camp and let the Russian to liberate us. We were naked, hungry, typhoid-eaten, more skeleton than men, but we were alive and soon afterwards recovered to be able to go forward and look for friends and relatives.

I found myself travelling by foot, horse or overcrowded trains looking for what Nazis destroyed and even never left a trace. I've realized soon that I am alone in a big world of after-war sorrow. I was very upset and did not want to live

I found myself a job - not interesting, but it kept me busy and time heal my wounds. One day I've learnt that my wife is still alive and I made a very dangerous trip to look for her. When we saw each other, we realized how we have changed but our joy was great and tears could fill a glass.

We decided to leave the country where we were born - because it was full of our graves and memories of destroyed youth. We became refugees, as other thousands and our life became more difficult, more uncertain, hanging on good will or smile of a consular official. Our sleep was often interrupted by nightmares of various Immigration Acts and our worry was not the every-day bread, but tomorrow's mirage of a peaceful haven.

How many times in those days, driven from one commission of scrutiny of aliens to another, we wished we never were liberated, but killed in gas-chambers! Finally, I was notified that I am to leave for South Africa. My trade is needed there and we had no difficulties in obtaining necessary papers. It was too good to be true, but it seemed to me that God had a

hand in it to give me a chance. After so many dissapointments, with South African visa on my stateless papers, I felt happy again and looked forward with hope for a better future.

It is a proverb in my old country, saying that those who suffered are entitled to more happiness. When I arrived with my wife in Cape Town I was greeted, hosted, taken for drives, shown scenery, was introduced to others, etc. I found that I am again a person of importance. I found myself not treated as unnecessary burden of displaced object. A feeling of thankfulness overcome me and I gave myself a word of honour to be worth the confidence given to me on my arrival.

I am a qualified tradesman and I tried to give my outmost to work hard and de cent. From one room we have moved to a flat last year. I've bought a car. I have a circle of friends who help me with everything I need.

I have children - born in South Africa - and i think it is very important to stress upon that in Europe we never wanted to have a child.. We were unafe, troubled, worried, tired of refugee-ism. In South Africa we found a place to live and to enjoy life again, a fresh start for a new generation.

Don't blame us for having more children, we want again to have families, relatives. Let in the new generation live and flourish the memory of the dearest and beloved who vanished so unexpectantly during the last war.

You ask, how I feel about my life in the past ten years? Well, I feel I've lived fully, experienced a lot and fortunately found here a place to-day under the sun to warm myself and mine after the coldness of yesterday.

I am satisfied that Fate has given me those 10 years of peace. I was horrified when Korean War started and its flame will spread all over the world. I still bear fear in heart when I see A- or H-bomb headline in the newspapers or watch its destructive power in the newsreels.

If I have to live another 10 years in Peace, let them be prosperous, joyfull and happy for me and mine and all those who have same wish as I have now. 'An Alien'.

## THE DANNY KAYE STORY

During our stay in Paris Anushka from time to time performed with the other Jewish actors - refugees from Russia and Poland in a Yiddish Repertory theatre staging old fashioned melodramas. During the summer, when Paris was full of foreign visitors, mostly Americans, she was also engaged in a night-club 'Habibi', owned by a Polish born French Jew, Dave Star. Located on the Boulevards, the night club was well frequented by tourists, show usually started at 10 p.m. and Anushka had her appearance after eleven. In the cast there was also a negro singer, I think named Williams, who was warmly applauded for his rendition of 'My Yiddishe Mama' in Yddish.

The well-known Arthur Buchwald, from the 'New York Herald' Paris edition, wrote in his daily column a praise of Anushka's acting talents, her comedial mimics and singing, and was often seen at 'Habibi' in company of visiting entertainment personalities from abroad. Danny Kaye, who was in Paris came with Buchwald to 'Habibi' and upon requests from the patrons did one of his numbers ( I think it was about Hollywood ) which he said he dedicated to Anushka for her singing specially for him one of her nostalgic ghetto songs. I was there at the guest table with Arthur, Danny, his wife Sylvia Fine, and another couple, friends of Arthur. Danny was inquiring about our past expiriences and I obliged with short paragraphes of acting history of Anushka and the ghetto theatre. On his invitation we had tea with the Kayes at their Champs Elysees hotel one afternoon later in the week, and on presentation of his card, attended a preview of his Hans Andersen film. Same year a Rosh Hashana New Year greeting card reached us at the Mont Joli hotel in Rue Fromentin, near Moulin Rouge, in Clichy district in Paris, where we lived, helped to pay the rent by the American Joint Distribution Committee.

*Danny  
Kaye*

Eight years later, in Cape Town, I read about the forthcoming tour of South Africa by Danny Kaye. Through my, already established contacts with the African Consolidated Theatres, for whom I did promotional services and advertising for films and theatre productions, I enquired about the dates and when Danny Kaye landed in Johannesburg I did phone him at his hotel and offered him my assistance for his Cape Town show. I did explain that I am at service with same people who engaged him for the tour and it will be my pleasure to see him in the city, where I and Anushka now live. Danny immediately instructed the PR people to get in touch with me in Cape Town. I was given the task to arrange the first press conference for the American star. It was my plan not to have the usual assembly of the press in the hotel where the visiting enetertainer stay, but to make a homage to this talented man, by the Mayor of the City and the welcome at the Mayor's Parlour in the City Hall, combined

*XP  
D  
Opporhty*

with the attendance of the press, radio and other dignitaries.

The co-operation of the Mayor was arranged, the tea and sweet cakes, fruits and juices, in a colourful display, and beaming Danny Kaye was presented to the Mayor, who handed him a pictorial book of Cape Peninsula and a plush-lion toy for his daughter (my idea). I was seated next to Danny and initiated questioning at the press conference in the Mayor's office and then accompanied him to his hotel suite. A short talk about when and how we landed in South Africa followed. His Cape Town solo performances was a great success. We saw him twice after the show at the Alhambra Theatre, had late snack at the restaurant, opposite. A letter from the head office in Johannesburg addressed to the Cape Town manager, expressed thanks for the well organised welcome for Mr. Kaye and the press coverage and by request of the American entertainer, special regards to Mr. Xavier Piat. The manager, Mr. John Clark became a very good friend and helped me to establish further contacts in my advertising and promotional services to the entertainment industry in the Cape. The meeting with Danny Kaye in Paris was a good omen. I did mourn his passing and still enjoy his acting, singing and comedy talents of this remarkably able Jewish entertainer and humanist volunteer for the world's children.

John Clark

Piat Promoter

Danny  
12

My involvement with the world of entertainment brought me in contact with famous singers and groups which were brought by the African Consolidated Theatres and by other private impresarios, one of which was Quibell, who owned Luxurama Bio and Three Arts complex. His Public relations was David Yeller - a warm hearted fellow, always obliging, helping others, but not so lucky in his four marriages with non-Jewish ladies. The third one gave him a daughter Sharon, the fourth a boy, and when she divorced him left the youngster with David him being 69 at that time. Sharon who lives in George with her mother and step-father visits David four, five times a year, a lovely teenager. My friendship with David reaches now its 40th year. I am always thankful for his advise and comradeship in the years when I needed him for moral support and I am proud to have helped him on many occasions in later years. We did campaigns together for ballets (Luissilo, Markova) and numerous singers (Feliciano, Humperdick, Springfield, Eartha Kitt, Los Paraguayos, and others MORE NAMES TO COME), for theatre performances, and circuses including the yearly shows of ice-skaters.

Promo campaigns for ballet via shows 3 Arts

Pieter Toerien

I was also helping in publicity and promotions to a young talented fellow Pieter Toerien, who with a Jewish gent Ruben financing brought to Cape Town stars like Marlene Dietrich, Maurice Chevalier and others. Later on Toerien was bringing many British entertainers, made money and bought two theatres



in Johannesburg and refurbished an old cinema Alvin into a 300 seater and renamed it Theatre on the Bay, where many comedies, farces and from time to time best hits from overseas stages were presented.

The always badly remunerated acting fraternity during the sixties and seventies (prior to the era of television and performing arts councils) needed some help in organising meetings and entertainment for themselves. As a honorary secretary of the Players Club of Cape Town I was during my 17 years of tenure in charge of providing venues for monthly get-togethers, non-expensive dinners, arranging for local entertainment and special gala evenings with a pleiade of world artists who were performing in South Africa and were guests of the Club. On some occasions Anushka was given accolades for her solo performances, which benefited the Club. From the contributions the Club's committee ( of which I was an important part) was able to give financial support to talented young actors for an overseas vacation cum study.

For many years I was also associated in canvassing for funds, providing publicity and printing well illustrated and class produced programmes for the performances of Italian Operas by the Eoan Group. A friend of mine, an Italian Joseph Manca (married to a Jewish lady, he also spoke good Yiddish) by profession an accountant with Municipality, was a producer of operas in which the non-white singers performed in Italian. It was a most satisfying work with talented people, mostly under privileged, and so proud of their own achievements in times when the apartheid ruled their lives and we who were assisting, needed permits and licences to be able to give the Eoan Group a chance to perform on "white" stage.

with Joseph Manca

arranged licences to underpriv.  
Eoan Group  
to perform on white stages

XP  
The Players Club

# raised to help actors

printing programmes

Naava's Book  
XAV 1. pl.

## MORE ABOUT SOUTH AFRICA

In the world of entertainment you meet many people, with whom you know immediately that you can work together and later become friends. One of them was an Italian, Joseph (Giuseppe) Manca, by profession an accountant, working for the Electricity dept. in the Cape Town Municipality. He was married to a Jewish lady and during the years learnt to speak fluent Yiddish. As a lover of Italian opera he became involved with the non-European, mostly coloured people of the Cape, in teaching Italian and with the help of another Italian (also Sicilian) to perfect their art of opera singing. The existing society involved in promoting arts among the Coloureds called The Eoan Group had a wealthy Jewish sponsor, Joseph Stone, who provided funds to build a theatre and rehearsal rooms for opera and ballet, in Athlone.

The first performance by this very talented group of singers coached by Mr Manca was the opera Carmen, staged at the Alhambra Theatre in centre city, with a special permit by the local authorities allowing acting in the "whites only" theatre. The coloured audience was allowed to book seats only on the balcony of the theatre.

Joseph to whom I was recommended by the theatre manager, Mr Solomon, asked me to provide a printed programme, which would bring income and cost the group nothing. Many a times, invited to an evening meal or to a treat of some Jewish delicacies (Mrs Manca was an excellent cook and baked wonderful cakes) while working with Joseph on publicity or discussion on general themes, I enjoyed their company and was happy with their friendship. In the years to come and eleven Italian and other operas staged by the Eoan artists I was involved not only in printing of programmes, some of them of 24 pages in full colour, and soliciting income from advertising, but also in public relations for the Group.

Mr Manca for his efforts in promoting the Italian language and opera, received from the Italian Government a high award and the title of Commodore. I was satisfied with helping people, recognising their talent and their need to achieve recognition of their work on stage. With the establishment of Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB) and later due to the boycott by Cape Town theatre goers of the Nico Malan Opera House productions, the authorities were were persuaded to have a more enlightened stand and understanding towards the coloureds, some of the prominent and talented singers from the Eoan group joined the opera section at Capab.

At Joseph Manca's large funeral hundreds of coloureds gave last farewell to their friend and tutor.

printing  
ads  
+  
public relations  
(P.R.)  
for group

C.T.  
Joseph Stone  
Athlone  
Group  
print  
programmes  
to bring

✓

# "DAVE YELLER"

by Xavier Piat

Dave was a manager and super-salesman at the local branch of the world-wide stationery company, Gestetner. He made many friends with the state and municipal officials, who were in charge of buying duplicating machines and paper and stencils for them. He was always helpful to provide tickets for boxing and wresling matches, being a part-time promoter and publicity organiser in this field of entertainment. From time to time helped Jewish organisations with promotions selling ad-spaces in their fund-raising programmes. His connections with the cinema and theatre managers whom I have also befriended after the successful Danny Kaye visit to Cape Town, resulted in getting to know Mr Dave Yeller. Very soon, Dave as always big-hearted, in trying to be of assistance and also recognising the talents and stage personality of CHayela, whom he adored, became a frequent caller with tickets to see a show or just for a chat and sometimes for advice or opinion of a matter in which he was involved.

Although of very conservative Jewish upbringing and loyal to his synagogue his second marriage was to a beautiful, tall gentile lady, who from previous marriage had a daughter and a son. Dave, whose first marriage with a Jewish girlfriend resulted in a divorce (his best friend a boxing promoter later married her) had now a family to care for. This was the time when a newcomer to the entertaning business in the Cape Peninsula, Mr George Quibell (who was previously in the tennis-cum-sports grounds layouts) opened a new theatre Luxurama, aiming at the non-whites patrons mostly. He needed a publicity man and Dave filled in the position energetically. Busy from early mornings with Gestetner affairs and then in the evenings with the theatre he neglected his home life unfortunately. The divorce followed, yet Dave still fully supported his adopted children and divorced wife.

In years to come and with Quibell's enlarged entertainment business (he built a new 2500 seater called Three Arts) Dave became fully involved with the increasing numbers of engagements of local and foreign variety and comedy stars. He was helped by a new wife, June (he met her at The Argus handling all publicity and advertising for the new theatre). It was a great simcha when Dave's first child, a daughter Sharon was born. He was already installed in a beautiful house, in Oranjezicht overlooking the town below, and June was in charge of all the renovations and inside decor. I was a frequent visitor there, specially for a swim in the pool, or as a participant in welcome parties for artists and many other occasions for a braai- or just a evening of TV viewing. This was an era of my full co-operation with Dave on all kinds of promotions and publicity, our friendship grew stronger, I was delighted to be of any help with my experience in show business and journalism to him, who befriended me when I needed support and free access to shows and duplicating materials, in my early beginnings.

I was happy to be a witness of his marriage in the Court and a small gathering afterwards, and related to him the need for

Xavi p4

By  
Xavier Plat

p. 2  
Dave  
Yeller

a more solid attendance to his family life. He was at that time a changed man. Sharon brought to him a lot of understanding what it means to be a father, he adored her, the child's room was full of toys and clothing. Overwhelmingly full of attention and love. These were the happy days for all of us who cared for the Yeller family. But as the pressure of show business and Dave's retirement from Gestetner preoccupied his mind, there must have been some neglect or argument which resulted in a third divorce. The separation from Sharon affected Dave strongly. The child lived in another town now and only on holidays visited her dad. I saw her a few years ago a beautiful teen-ager, well groomed, good at school. Dave, who always had a "good eye" on many young girls in the past was now facing a dilemma of staying alone in big house, but not for long. Another helpful lady from The Argus became involved with David. She was a divorcee from a Mr Cohen, who in a mysterious way disappeared and left young Jeanne with a small boy. A small wedding ceremony was performed at court and Dave again had a family. Jeanne had previously been attracted to the Jewish faith and now started again seeing the Rabbi to complete her acceptance to the faith of Dave. The birth and Bris Meilah of Ruven (named after Dave's dead brother, who left the Oranjezicht house to his younger brother) made Mr Yeller very happy. I will not forget the big occasion, with over 200 guests, three Rabbis and community leaders, kosher catering par excellence and Dave's smiling face, at last the name Yeller will be continued.

The eighties brought to the fore the ever increasing number of non-Europeans to stage spectacles of their own theme. Dave's was helping a Jewish enterprenuer David Kramer with publicity and promotion for a show depicting the nostalgia of the District Six. In the history of Cape Town, coloured community lived for years somehow apart of the white owned houses but near the centre of town. By draconian rule of the Afrikaner dominated apartheid government, thousands of collured inhabitants were forcefully relocated from that district to a far away locations of Kaellisha and Mitchell's Plain. The show, with effective help of Dave Yeller was staged at the non-racial University theatre, Baxter and became a success of the year. The same Kramer was successful as performer of songs in Afrikaans of the rural type "smart Alec" and with the innovation of the Waterfront on the site of Cape Town's old harbour, opened there a well-appointed theatre for more income bringing shows. Dave Yeller is still promoting the new venue.

The last years were not to Dave's liking. He suffered from a stomach illness and had trouble with his neck. His only good humour was now with Ruven, whom his mother under some misunderstanding with Dave, one day left to be with his father, and required a divorce, but taking with her the Cohen junior. With professional income diminishing Dave moved to a smaller apartment, hired a maid, and got for Ruven a day care school. I meet him often at the Argus now, he still busy with pro-motions ...

Rabbi  
born

David  
Kramer

Ruven



The following to be inserted in NAAVA's BOOK

In August 1955, the daily newspaper The Cape Argus asked readers to write on a theme "What have you done with ten years of peace?". I decided to write and was pleased to get the first price (and a cheque for L5 5s.) in this contest. The editor, under the heading 'We were naked, hungry, diseased' wrote: We have awarded the first prize to 'Alien' (that was my nomme-de plume) for the sincere and thought-provoking letter printed below. It reads just as we received it, without corrections to spelling or phrasing.

Here is what I wrote;

I was amazed to read about your competition: 'What have you done with ten years of peace?' Not later than a day or two before Week-end magazine reached me, I was discussing with my wife the date of August 15.

It seems to me that I have done a lot during those ten years, but let me go back to the 1945 and start with March 10. On this fateful day the German S.S. guards left our concentration camp and let the Russian to liberate us. We were naked, hungry, typhoid-eaten, more skeleton than men, but we were alive and soon afterwards recovered to be able to go forward and look for friends and relatives.

I found myself travelling by foot, horse or overcrowded trains looking for what Nazis destroyed and even never left a trace. I've realized soon that I am alone in a big world of after-war sorrow. I was very upset and did not want to live

I found myself a job - not interesting, but it kept me busy and time heal my wounds. One day I've learnt that my wife is still alive and I made a very dangerous trip to look for her. When we saw each other, we realized how we have changed but our joy was great and tears could fill a glass.

We decided to leave the country where we were born - because it was full of our graves and memories of destroyed youth. We became refugees, as other thousands and our life became more difficult, more uncertain, hanging on good will or smile of a consular official. Our sleep was often interrupted by nightmares of various Immigration Acts and our worry was not the every-day bread, but tomorrow's mirage of a peaceful haven.

How many times in those days, driven from one commission of scrutiny of aliens to another, we wished we never were liberated, but killed in gas-chambers! Finally, I was notified that I am to leave for South Africa. My trade is needed there and we had no difficulties in obtaining necessary papers. It was too good to be true, but it seemed to me that God had a

hand in it to give me a chance. After so many dissapointments, with South African visa on my stateless papers, I felt happy again and looked forward with hope for a better future.

It is a proverb in my old country, saying that those who suffered are entitled to more happiness. When I arrived with my wife in Cape Town I was greeted, hosted, taken for drives, shown scenery, was introduced to others, etc. I found that I am again a person of importance. I found myself not treated as unnecessary burden of displaced object. A feeling of thankfulness overcome me and I gave myself a word of honour to be worth the confidence given to me on my arrival.

I am a qualified tradesman and I tried to give my outmost to work hard and de cent. From one room we have moved to a flat last year. I've bought a car. I have a circle of friends who help me with everything I need.

I have children - born in South Africa - and i think it is very important to stress upon that in Europe we never wanted to have a child.. We were unafe, troubled, worried, tired of refugee-ism. In South Africa we found a place to live and to enjoy life again, a fresh start for a new generation.

Don't blame us for having more children, we want again to have families, relatives. Let in the new generation live and flourish the memory of the dearest and beloved who vanished so unexpectantly during the last war.

You ask, how I feel about my life in the past ten years? Well, I feel I've lived fully, experienced a lot and fortunately found here a place to-day under the sun to warm myself and mine after the coldness of yesterday.

I am satisfied that Fate has given me those 10 years of peace. I was horrified when Korean War started and its flame will spread all over the world. I still bear fear in heart when I see A- or H-bomb headline in the newspapers or watch its destructive power in the newsreels.

If I have to live another 10 years in Peace, let them be prosperous, joyfull and happy for me and mine and all those who have same wish as I have now. 'An Alien'.

## BNAI BRITH

My involvement in the B'nai B'rith organisation is worth mentioning. As a newspaperman I was very eager not only to learn about world events or the happenings locally and nationally, but most important to be aware of what is news in Israel and about Jews in Diaspora. From the Jewish press I had cuttings about the various organisations and soon my attention was drawn to the largest, worldwide Jewish service organisation, B'nai B'rith.

Upon enquiry at the office of the Cape Board of Jewish Deputies I've contacted Carl Fileman, who was the chieftain of the local branch. He was interested for me to meet old members, mostly German Jews. Carl, who was a member of the Hamburg lodge before he emigrated to South Africa in the late thirties, was now trying to get members from Eastern Europe and I became one of them.

Our monthly meetings were held in the Jewish Old Age Home in the Highlands (in this way we supported the Home) and very soon, after a period of initiation I became a fully pledged member. It was interesting for me to meet "brothers" and "sisters" of the German origin, get acquainted with their higher intellect, well-mannered behaviour and religious attitude to tradition and discipline in performing acts of service to fellow men.

My first year in the "Bar Kochbah" Lodge ended with myself being elected to the Executive, which entrusted me with various tasks. I was then much involved in propagating the ideas of the organisation amongst the Jewish population in the Cape Province and participated in many outings to Paarl, Somerset West, Worcester and Strand where we had informational meetings and founded lodges.

The "Bar Kochbah" Lodge, being the Mother Lodge became soon the South African headquarters with contacts to Johannesburg and Oudshoorn, Durban and Bloemfontein. The Lodges in the region was often visited and I duly participated in congresses, initiations of new councils in these towns, making new friends, who in exchange used to come to Cape Town to visit us.

In Cape Town I was influential in founding new Lodges: in the Southern Suburbs (I initiated Pipe Forbes as President) in Milnerton, in Camps Bay (there I was the President for one year) and a special lodge for Sephardi members. As "Bar Kochbah" was a lodge of members over 55 years of age, I tried and succeeded in founding a lodge for younger members mostly living in Sea Point.

As the growth of B'nai B'rith required now a full secretariat the Council called for an Executive Director and we engaged Josie Amiel from Johannesburg, who not only helped to organise new lodges in Transvaal but also gave a hand in all matters relating to our region. With him and other delegates I did participate in the International Congresses of BB in USA, with its mammoth conventions, contacts and programmes. I did speak about the situation of South African Jewry at some

sessions in Washington and also in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

For several years I was the Editor of a quarterly B'nai B'rith publication, The BB Recorder, distributed locally and also to the HQ in Washington. Many letters of accolade and appreciation for the high standard of articles and news coverage, picture presentation and layout, arrived on my desk during those years. Unfortunately with the budgetary cuts due to the transfer of the organisation's head office to Johannesburg, the quarterly had to cease publication.

It is due to my B'nai B'rith status and activities, that my name was given by an old member of the Johannesburg lodge to the publisher of the national Jewish weekly, The Jewish Times as a prospective manager for their Cape Town office. I was on my way to the USA for a convention there and stopped in Johannesburg to meet Reuben Shapiro, who offered me the job. When I returned to Cape Town I had a task immediately to canvass for the Rosh Hashana 1972 advertisements, which I did, to the amazement of my patrons, very successfully. Prior to my appointment, a non-Jew, a Hollander was the manager who did not do well for the weekly. Now I took over not only the advertising, which was the mainstay of the paper, but also increased the subscription and engaged a lady reporter (Mrs Susann Belling) for community news and interviews.

*The Jewish Times*

Under my pressure, the publisher allowed me to have every week a special page or two devoted only to Cape Town news and advertisements. The weekly became under my management the more readable and influential paper in the province.

\*

Now I could also serve B'nai B'rith with more articles and stories, pictures and interviews published in The Jewish Times. For twenty years the weekly, which I started to work as a part-time engagement, became soon a full-time job. My other services in the promotional (entertainment and sales), advertising and journalistic ventures, my involvement with the Yellow Pages canvassing were the additions to my professional capacity of making time for all what was needed.

With the time being fully spent on professional activities one had less time for B'nai B'rith. I also was excused from council position, being for 3-4 months away in the USA. Being not active you lose interest, especially when due to many causes, the lodges declined in attendances, people who were active departed to other countries and the leadership was now rather in the age of retirement, all that was left was one or two lodges to keep up the aims of the organisation. But I still have in my heart a soft spot and feel being a real devotee of this the largest Jewish service organisation in the world.

*refined  
from BB.*

*end.*

I did mention to you that when I was organising a new lodge in the Southern Suburbs I was helped by Pipe Fortes

Episodes



# EPISODES

I remember my search for some distant family, immediately after establishing myself in Jelenia Gora. I wrote to the Red Cross offices in Geneva and New York, but did not receive satisfactory replies. When in Paris the enquiries continued. Anushka went with Zak, her acting partner to the Displaced Persons camps in Germany, where thousands Jewish refugees lived in war-build barracks and tried to leave Europe for distant lands to start a new life, helped mostly by Jewish welfare organisations, like Joint Distribution Committee and HIAS. There, after one of the performances, my Father's cousin Anna Shogam (she was one of the three best friends of my Mother) stormed into the dressing room, shouting "Nushka, my dear Nushka, our ghetto singer", hugging, kissing <sup>Hanka</sup> and crying. From her I got the address of some distant cousins in the USA, who even still remembered my late Father when he was their guest in 1930.

Through this contact I wrote to my cousins in England and was invited to visit them. I stayed with Cissy Berman, whose grand-father was a brother to my grandfather. Abe Berman, her husband was a taxi driver, their daughter Pat, aged 17 was my guide to many interesting parts of London. The family reunion took place in a hired hall in Stamford Hill, where over sixty people gathered to hear my story. It was a special occasion, as it was the first time that nearly all of the same clan, met after the war. That afternoon I was the guest of honour. It was in 1948. The "rich" Berman, owner of the Housdnich Warehouse, took me for dinner to the Albion Club (my first visit to this so very English institution) and for coffee to his apartment in St Johns Woods. Gifts given for my wife were three small samples of Balmain perfumes.

Pat made for me appointments to meet others and I was pleased with the warm reception especially from those who were just making a living, middle aged and elderly. One, Jane, lived off Commercial Road, in a tall, old building in Flower and Dean street. Small, with a smiling face, this 82 year old lady, awaited us in the street and lead us up to the seventh floor apartment, taking the steps so easily, while we had to stop and take more breath going up. She was the one who gave me a portrait photo of my Vilna family, with me at the age of four. She has received it from my father in the early twenties.

Prior to my saying good bye, she asked me to do her a favour. She handed to me a small, yellowish card with the name of a very old Paris hospital and a number crossed over a date: 1880. She wanted me to enquire if the baby of hers, born in the hospital and given away for adoption, is still alive and perhaps her address could be traced. She was in love with an English fellow, whom she could not marry and had to go to Paris to get rid of the baby. She never had children and was married in her late fifties and widowed ten years ago.

My enquiries at the Hospital were fruitless. When I saw her in London again, on my way to Southampton, to board a boat to South Africa, she tried to give me a five pound note, taken from her stocking, as my "inheritance". I have gently refused. I have corresponded with Jane for a few years, send parcels and even few pounds from my meagre wages, when she was given place in an old age home. I did grieve when she died. Her gift of the portrait was reproduced by me into a postcard, which

I've sent to the few remaining members of our large pre-war family.

Vanya  
Raya's friend

It is also through Jane that I met in London the second of my Mother's friends, Raya Lesoff. She was lucky, she visited England to see her older brother in 1939 and remained there during the war years, met a fine Jewish man, married and lived now very comfortably in a house with servants. Raya took me in her car to Oxford street, bought for me a pair of expensive Saxony shoes (I still wear them in winter), a grand camelhair coat (my son-in-law inherited it from me), some shirts and other utensils. She insisted that I take some money from her but I refused. For a few years ~~we~~ we corresponded, I mourned her passing away.

and in 1956

I looked through the London's telephone directory and found the name of my school friend, whom I knew went to London in 1938 to join his father, a director of the Vilna based radio factory Electric, doing business with the English partners. I made the contact and met Elkes in an inn for lunch. He was very English looking, umbrella and hat, Oxford-like accent and not the same Fima Elkes, whom I befriended a few years ago. Now a lawyer, he gave me a cold reception. Was not interested in a survivor, perhaps he was afraid I will ask for money or help.

Noch m  
sister Minnie  
in NY

Back in Paris, <sup>Hanka</sup> Anushka who corresponded with her Father's sister, Minnie, of New Jersey, USA, received news that she will be visiting Paris with a group of tourists. The Aunt, whose late husband, an entrepreneur in plumbing supplies, left her and her son and two daughters a very successful business, was entertained by us in our small hotel room (Anushka made a 'heimishe soup' with noodless) and we talked about the family. She immediately assured us that she is helping Miriam, <sup>or Mary?</sup> Anushka's sister in Poland and if we need something it will be decided by her family. She gave Anushka an old red jacket, which was never worn by her afterwards. We took <sup>Aunt Minnie</sup> ~~her~~ back to the fashionable and elegant, Meurice Hotel. There <sup>we</sup> and met an older gentleman from her group, Mr. Ruthenberg who was very interested in meeting some Holocaust survivors. We spend hours chatting with him and others. Aunt Minnie was not pleased, she was not interested.

Next day we went to Gard du Nord to say goodbye. Mr Ruthenberg came to us and asked if Aunt Minnie left us some money. I said no. He then went back to their train compartment, asked the group to get rid of French money and handed it all to us. I was sure that Auntie Minnie was again not pleased. When in South Africa we did correspond with Minnie's children. Never asked for any help. Later learnt from Miriam that her aunt's help was ridiculously minimal. When Anushka, years later was in New York, invited by the Yiddish Theatre and successfully opened her show in the Billy Rose Theatre on Broadway, the Minnie's family was in the audience and came backstage to invite her to a restaurant. Anushka <sup>Hanka</sup> refused and gave them a very cold reception. Instead she went to eat with Anna Shogam, who had married in the DP camps a man from Warsaw, whose brother brought them to live in New Jersey and helped to get established. Anushka told me that the journey by underground from Manhattan lasted an hour. When they walked in to the small apartment, Anna's husband was fast asleep. Anna made soup and warmed up the meat. <sup>Hanka</sup> Anushka had to go back to her hotel at 3 at night. She has forgiven the trip but never forgotten. <sup>Hanka</sup>

✓ writer and a poet. He wrote songs and performed with a puppet theatre, and ANushka as a little child was already acting and putting on the voices for the puppets. I saw her once when she was only about thirteen, performing in Yiddish on the stage, and she was really remarkable. I remember how good she was. I used to go often to shows because I could get free tickets through my uncle's advertising agency. Tickets to the circus, to some famous singers, and sometimes to the Jewish Theatre too. I would go with my father. SO anyhow, we are talking about Mr. Rozynski. (L) He was supposed to have been a very quiet person, a small man who established a printing shop. Then he got the licence to produce a Vilna issue of a Warsaw Jewish Daily newspaper. How was this done? It was done this way... he had some space on page 5, and then some space on page two, in a newspaper that was printed in Warsaw, and then delivered by train one day later, and he would fill in the blanks with Vilna news. SO this was our Vilna Jewish Daily! The news was always about one and a half days late, but it was Jewish, so did it matter that it was slightly old? Never. Gossip is always new. He used some of the space on page three, I think, to put in a "roman", a novel which he used to put into little pieces, you know, like a serial. Now, where did he get it? He got it from America. Al copied from AMERICA! I remember the last episode. They were talking about Sister Martha, who is in love with a doctor, and now she is carrying his illegitimate baby... and what is she to do... that kind of drama.... Now, sometimes, it would happen that the mail, not from Warsaw, but from America, was late. AND you know what that meant... that the next episodes of the story are late in being delivered. SO what did they do? Leon, your mother's brother, the writer, would add his own version of the romance. He would kill off somebody, marry some other two people, and have a good time playing with the story. Of course, once the real story arrived things would have to be all sewn up neatly, because if someone who Leon had killed all of a sudden is there, Leon would have to suddenly bring him back from the dead!"

✓ Rosinski  
 - a ending in  
 Polish men  
 a female

Noche  
 newspaper

Leqb  
 making  
 up  
 romance

"Now Mr. Rosynski was a very nice man, and when he established this deal with the newspaper, he took his brother as a partner with him into the printing business. But this was a mistake. His brother was a no-goodnik, a swindler, who spent the money on gambling, playing cards, losing money.. it was just a bad partnership of this man. Now when the Russians came in around 1940, and immediately took over all the communication outlets of course, as is the way of any invading conquering force, they took over the printing shop for their own purposes, and made the brother into the manager of the shop, and made MR. Rozynski who used to be the manager, into a worker, a typesetter. They changed you straight away from the owner into the worker."

~~But he was a gentle fellow, not one to complain, and one day, this is at the time a year later, when the Germans are already coming into this part of Lithuania, ANushka comes home from school and sees her mother sobbing uncontrollably~~



*I do not* ~~What do we~~ *much* know about my mother, Anushka, and her family when she was young. Not much about them ~~from~~ *was told to me by* my mother. She was never one to discuss personal stories. Her past in the ghetto or the camps was never discussed. But there are three brief stories I do remember she told me. How or why she did, I don't remember. The first was a story about how one day she came home from school and found her mother crying. "Like a chicken running around without a head," was the saying my own mother used. I remember it, because I could not at the time imagine a live chicken without its head, and when I tried to, all that popped into my head was a picture of a brown feathery creature with blood dripping down its chopped neck running around the room flapping its wings. Also, with the passing of time, I imagined that there actually was a chicken running around in the room without its head, because her mother had been busy making chicken soup with a freshly slaughtered chicken, when my mother returned home from school. Time has played tricks with my memory of her actual words, but the mindpicture of the headless chicken remains strong and vivid. My mother told me that her mother cried out and rushed to embrace her, informing her that her father had been taken by the Nazi soldiers that morning without warning. He never returned after that day and they never knew what happened to him. They never saw him again.

A1 The next thing she told me was that when they were herded into the concentration camp, her mother, her sister and herself, the guards were lining them up and shoving people either to the left row or the right. It seemed that all the older and more sickly people were being assigned to the left row of people. When it came to their turn at the front of the line, waiting to be pointed in either direction by the SS-man soldier, my mother clung desperately to her own mother. "But she pushed me away from her," my mother told me. "They pointed her to the left, and she pushed me away, I was crying to be with her, but she pushed me away from her and said I must go to the other side, not to come with her. She pushed me to the right side. 'The side of life,' she said. Her mother was killed in the gas chambers that day.

*"Lolek" Leon*  
A2 The third story that related to her past was the one about her brother who was a poet and a writer, and one whom she adored. She had his picture, a black and white small photograph of a serious dark-haired handsome boy, under the glass of her dressingtable in the bedroom. She told me how clever he was at writing songs and lyrics, and how he had written material for her when she was young. She clearly idolized him. "He was killed the day before the liberation," she said. "They just came and shot whoever was still alive --one day before the liberation," she said looking at his solitary picture surrounded by all the other colorful photographs of her recent life under the glass. There was nothing more to say. I realize now how pain and loss can render one mute. *More about him I learnt from my father.*



" But he was a gentle fellow, not one to complain, and one day, this is at the time a year later, when the Germans are already coming into this part of Lithuania, ANushka comes home from school and sees her mother sobbing uncontrollably in the kitchen. "She was like a chicken without a head," ANushka used to say. Or maybe she said something about her mother being in the kitchen with a chicken running around without its head, a chicken that her mother had brought home to cook, squealing and running around without its head. I don't remember now. Whatever it was, Anushka was told by her crying mother that some German soldiers had come during the day and told her father to get a towel and some soap, because they were taking him to work somewhere else. They were taking him to work. That was the last they ever saw of him. He was one of the very first to be taken away, one of the first in a group of about 5000, I presume to be shot and dumped in the Ponary forest just outside Vilna. Yah, there was no return of those people. They were never seen again."

Repeat ex  
p21

Delete  
be arrang  
p21

" Leon was already an acknowledged poet, a small thin, very active fellow, and very beloved by everyone. He worked during the start of the German occupation at the Yiddish Institute of Culture. The Germans wanted to take all the archives and all the artifacts of Jewish historical significance that were kept there, and take them back to Germany. His job was to make a list of everything in German for the records, you know how meticulous the Germans were in their killings and thievery, keeping records of everything....so Anushka's brother, Leon, managed to hide some of the more valuable books and archives, and give them to some trustworthy Poles to keep, or he had them smuggled into the Ghetto. He brought a lot of manuscripts and books into the Ghetto. AND he continued to write his wonderful lyrics in the Ghetto too."

Leip

hide bo  
cultu

"Later the Germans sent him to Estonia to a camp called Kloga. Now in this camp my father was the doctor, I didn't even know about it at the time. When the Ghetto was liquidated, I volunteered to go to Estonia to work there, in 1943. It was the first of September. After two days of travelling we landed in a place where about a 1000 of us were put to work laying railway lines. NEarby was a mine of yellow coal, and in another place was a factory that made petrol out of that coal. AND it was our job to lay the railway line to connect these two places. You see, in '43 already, the Germans knew about making fuel from coal. It was a very difficult job, I can tell you that."

It was September

called  
Kiviolli,

(Detail...)

See A3

"BUT one day, to my great relief, while we were standing in the yard for rollcall, "appell", one of the officer's called for someone who knows how to write in German. AND the Jewish leader of the group who knew me well, pointed to me, saying that "this prisoner here knows how to write well in German."

So I had to step forward, out of the line, and that is how I became the official "shreiber" in this camp. And it was my luck to be spared the hard back-breaking manual work of laying the railway line."

"Now in this part of the country it becomes very wet and cold during this time of Autumn. It was the Tundra... large open wastelands of ground, and when the rainy cold came it was like a gigantic wet marshland. ~~We lived on poles.~~ Our barracks were built high up on poles to keep them off the wet soggy ground, and you had to climb all the way up the many steps to get into the barracks. So you can just imagine having to work in this sponge of a land, with the icy wind coming down on you, and all you have is those miserable clothes made from cotton, and a pair of shoes, no socks, trying to tie railroad ties together in the cold. Oh, I was dreaming about better warmer days. AND now I had a little bit of good luck come my way. So now I used to sit in the office transcribing figures all day. I was the "Shreiber" <sup>the clerk</sup> once again. "

"Now in NOvember or December there was a new call to have about 250 people to go to a new camp where there was a factory of cement. And the "eldest", the elder of our group, who had become friendly with the German commandant of the camp, said to him that he would like to be in charge of choosing the 250 people and going to the new camp to work in the cement factory. And of course, <sup>the commandant</sup> ~~he~~ consented. So, immediately, I was asked to make a list of the people he planned to take, this one, that one, that women, this man. He was a good organizer, this man, I forget his name. He was a fat man, with a big stomach. He used to be a principal in a school in Lithuania, so he was used to saying "you must do this, you do that, etc, you know. Any how, he was very efficient. He told me that he remembered me from one of the youth movement meetings. That is why he chose me for this job of <sup>his</sup> secretary, I suppose."

"SO we came to a new camp, huh, I say camp, I mean it was just a place where there was nothing, absolutely nothing. Just barbed wire and endless land. We slept on the ground that night. A day later building supplies arrived. Now, he was told about what was supposed to happen there I imagine, because I realized afterwards who exactly he had taken and why he had been so specific about choosing certain craftsmen individuals. You see, he had chosen a carpenter, and other men who obviously were good with their hands, and he took also an electrician, and one of the men who he pinpointed was a man who had been a supervisor of certain industries in the Ghetto. He also took a shoemaker, two tailors and women who could cook and clean. And this clever man, ~~I forget his name,~~ ordered the building of a bathroom with a bath and toilets, a kitchen and two big barracks with a double story, one for men and one for women. Within three months everything was completed. And around us, watching all this work going on,

*I think his name was  
Hayman, an assimilated  
Jew from Warsaw...*

stood the Estonian guards and three SS men. One of the SS-men was a commandant by the name of Johann Klee. He was a tyrant. There is nothing else to describe him. He used to put us on "appell" where we would have to stand out in the cold for hours while he counted us twice, three, or four times over. He would beat people for nothing, for no reason at all, just for the hell of it. AND he was always stealing things from our kitchen, just walking in and taking food from our meagre store, just comes and grabs something for himself, although he had a kitchen of his own, mind you, but no, he liked to stroll into our kitchen and steal from us, just to make us have less, because he could get away with it, you see. After all, what could we do? He was interested just to make our lives that much more miserable. To make us suffer even more."

ubino

"Now in our group, we had man, a lawyer, by the name of Rubinsky, who was a very gentle, refined man. We discovered afterwards that he had some gold rubles. This is just a little story: I became friendly with some Estonian guards, because I straightaway started to learn their language and start chatting to them when I could. To make some kind of interpersonal contact, you see. Otherwise you are just some stranger, some nonhuman to them. I could count, I could say how are you, I could say 'where are you going' things like that, just to make simple conversation, and some even spoke Russian. One of them said to me that for <sup>one</sup> ~~one~~ coin, ~~of~~ <sup>for</sup> ten rubles, there was a possibility to have it arranged to be <sup>illegally</sup> transferred to Finland. AND from our place, Port Kunda, on a good day, when it was nice and clear, and you were standing on the edge of the cliff of the beach, you could see across the ocean to Finland. And Finland was a free country. Yes, it was occupied, but the Jews were treated kindly there. It was in essence, a free country <sup>to our thinking</sup>.

SO I came to this lawyer, Mr. Rubinsky<sup>off</sup>, and I said to him, "Hey, come on, let's go. I know you have the money. Let's go, you and I. Let's grab our chance for freedom." But he just shook his head and said that he cannot go. He believes that his wife is waiting for him in Yugoslavia. He got married in France or somewhere, and her father was the chief rabbi of Yugoslavia, and he believed that perhaps his wife ran away, escaped to Yugoslavia to be with her father and was now there waiting for him to rejoin her there. As a matter of interest, he went to the commandant and told him a story. He said to him: "I would like to write a letter to my wife in Yugoslavia. She is not Jewish, and I wish to write in the letter how good it is in your camp here that you run, and how good a commandant you are, and maybe, she has some connections, you know.... could you perhaps see your way to giving me permission to do that?"

The commandant was so astounded, for it was not allowed <sup>to do</sup> this kind of thing. It was not allowed to give signals or send letters during this wartime. But he was so astounded by this odd request put in such a genteel way, <sup>that</sup> he said yes! He said

See p 2

Includ  
there  
my  
addition



"Now, in our group, we had man, a lawyer, by the name of Rubinsky<sup>off</sup>. He was a very gentle, refined man. One day, not long after we were established in the camp, I heard from some others that Mr. Rubinsky had some gold rubles with him, probably stashed away somewhere. Meanwhile, I had made it my business to become as friendly as I could with some of the Estonian guards. I would straightaway try to learn their language and soon I began a course of casual interchanges in very simple language with them, always smiling and courteous. To make some kind of interpersonal contact, you see. Otherwise you are just some stranger, some nonhuman to them. So, because I love to master languages, soon I could count in Estonian. I could say "how are you," and "where are you going" things like that, just to make simple conversation. Some of them even spoke Russian, so I was able to have some kind of regular discourse with them. That is how, one day, one of the guards called me up to him, and after our usual jocular greeting, he told me he had something interesting to tell me. Smiling, he told me that for one coin, for ten rubles, it was possible to arrange to be transferred to Finland. I thanked him for this important piece of information, and told him I would let him know if I ever needed his help to arrange just such a deal.

"Now from where we were situated, at the *Labour Camp, 20 km from the harbour town,* ~~(miles... short distance? right on?.....)~~ of Port Kunda, if you were were standing on the edge of the cliff of the beach, on a good day when it was nice and clear, you could see all the way across the ocean to Finland. And to all purposes, Finland was a free country. Yes, it's true that it was occupied, but the Jews were treated kindly there. And that made it, in essence, a free country."

"So, after thinking about this new piece of information for a day, I approached this lawyer, Mr. Rubinsky<sup>off</sup>, when we were alone in the office, and I told him what I had heard. He listened to me in his calm dignified way, but made no response. I wondered why he hesitated. My God, if I had the money, I'd be gone in a shot! I realized in facing Mr. Rubinsky<sup>off</sup> that this was for some strange reason not going to be an easy sell. So with all the urgency I could muster I said to him, "Hey, come on, what's the matter with you....let's go, let's make the most of this wonderful opportunity. Hey, I know you have the money. It's no secret you have rubles. What are you waiting for? C'mon, let's go, you and I. Let's grab our chance for freedom." But he just sat there and shook his head and said quietly but determinedly that he cannot go. He told me that he believes his wife is waiting for him in Yugoslavia. He got married in France or somewhere, and his wife's father was the chief rabbi of Yugoslavia, and when the war began and he was taken away, he believed that his wife had managed to run away,



to escape to Yugoslavia to be with her father. "I believe that is where she is now, and I know in my heart that she is alive and waiting for me to rejoin her there." So I looked at this small well-kept man, even in our shoddy ragged uniforms he managed to look composed, and I saw my dreams for escape to Finland fall into tiny pieces around our feet."

"Now there is an interesting story attached to this RUBinsky. One day, he went to the commandant and told him a story. He said to him: "I would like to write a letter to my wife in Yugoslavia. She is not Jewish, and I wish to write in the letter how good it is in your camp here that you run, and how good a commandant you are, and maybe, she has some connections, you know.... maybe a promotion, something like that... you know.... so could you perhaps see your way to giving me permission to do that?"

"The commandant was so astounded he could not speak for a moment. For it was not allowed--this kind of thing. It was strictly forbidden to give signals or send letters during this wartime. But he was so taken aback by this odd request put in such an earnest and genteel way, that he said yes! He actually agreed to it. And Rubinsky wrote the letter and sealed it and gave it to the commandant. With the permission of the commandant, the letter was sent. He actually sent Rubinsky's letter. And the end of the story is that by some kind of mazel, by some blind luck, I don't know how, not only did the letter arrive in the hands of his actual wife, but the faithful couple were reunited. How do I know this? After all the camps were liberated at the end of the war, those of us who miraculously survived till the very end were sent to refugee camps and from there we wandered around our former homes, asking and searching for vestiges of our former families in Europe, and there he was... Rubinsky. He had survived the Holocaust, and when we recognized each other and I went up to him, the first thing I asked him was if he had ever heard from his wife. (You remember that it was she who kept me from my freedom in a matter of speaking.) His face lit up and he told me that yes, his wife was alive, he had found that much out, and now he was going to travel to where she was with her father, the chief rabbi, in Yugoslavia. And as I wished him good luck and a safe journey, another part of me cursed him silently at the same time. He had never wanted to give me the ten rubles for what I believed to be my only chance for freedom. I still was angry about that. I remember feeling such a hatred for him at the time. But as I looked at his small body walking steadily and calmly away, I realized that he was not to blame. He was merely listening to his own heart. Perhaps he had had a premonition. Perhaps it was just blind determination in honor of his love for his wife. In the end I realized the strength of his desire to be reunited with

I was by now aware of the strategy of the Germans to get rid of us Jews by any means. It was apparant all around me that one could be made to work until one dropped dead from cold or hunger or exhaustion. It was quite clear that for the German Nazis, we Jews were dispensible. Wherever we came from, wherever they had dragged us from, the Germans could and would get more of us again, simply to use us up and then dispose of us when our service was no longer necessart. It was nothing to them. They did not see us as humans. Enough propoganda took care of that. We were now their prisoners, their slaves. We were their source of labor, that's all. We were just simply numbers, (purple numbers branded on flesh it turned out,) to be totalled up.

So I was very aware of an urgent need to keep trying to find work for me that was safe and could keep me out of their view. If the work didn't kill you, they would. Or injured you, which was perhaps worse. I remember one time\* a German soldier, when I was busy fixing a light bulb in one of their barracks, came up to me and insulted me, for sport, of course, guard duty having become boring, I presume. He was busy jeering at me, which I was managing somehow to ignore, keeping my eyes on my fixing the light above me, when without warning (I was up on a ladder at the time) he shoved his rifle butt hard and sharp into the small of my back. "Filthy Jew!" he yelled, "We finish you off soon," he laughed.

*in the early of ghetto I taken to clean military barr. and was given a bayonet to test all li outposts,*

"I could not believe the burning pain in my back. Of course I had fallen off the ladder onto the hard cold cement, and I just lay there. I was trying to get back my breath, and I felt so ashamed of myself that, in falling, I had cried out in fright.

"Of course, a Jew lying down on the ground is just like a soccer ball for a German soldier, and so he started to kick me in the back where he had just shoved his rifle, and I picked myself up as quickly as I could, which, trust me, was not fast enough. ~~I hobbled back to the barracks. Leon said later that I should go for a few days to the infirmary. I could hardly walk, it was so sore.~~ And that is the source of my back trouble I have had ever since. Whenever it rains or the weather is about to change, my back aches and reminds me of that moment, of that man without a face who stuck his bayonet in my back for fun. I curse him forever."

*on my way, back to the ghetto.*

*The pitat story taken in Burgraben (para. 9 am a welder connects it! See A7 which relates to p. 51 when I was on sick leave.*

Naava Piatka-"Not an Ordinary Life."

afraid, running away from some great terror that chases us, we open our mouths wide but no sound ever comes out."

"So, you see, when I talk about a beautiful camp, and I complain about a thug of a man, you must understand that it comes from trying to make the unreal real. From trying to act normally when all around is a lunatic asylum. From trying to behave as if this was just a temporary insanity, a bad dream from which one would hopefully awake. It is man's nature to carry on, to survive, to seek some sort of balance in his life, whatever form that life takes at the moment. It is man's gift to make ordinary things seem extraordinary, and the extraordinary seem as ordinary as an everyday sunrise."

- Israel/Jutan/Xavier Piatka

"Now I continue my story. So, because I am always looking to make life a little easier for myself, I am now busy day and night, thinking and thinking about how to rid ourselves of this ogre of a commandant, Klee. If only there was a way he could get shipped to another camp. If only we could complain about him somehow. But who would listen, and what complaint could we make? That he was treating us worse than badly? That he was depriving us of our proper rations? That he was beating us unnecessarily? Ha, those things would have led to him getting a recommendation or a medal of honor, the way those Nazi's felt about us!

And so I fumed, and fantasized, and eventually schemed. Then, one day, it came to me. I suddenly had an idea that might, I thought, have a slight chance at working. I went to my friend the principle, and I suggested to him that we should write a letter in German, an anonymous letter, to the authorities in Germany. In the letter we would write that this commandant is not doing a good job, because he has taken to bed with him and is now living with --a Jewish woman! Well, what else? It was the only thing one could write! It was the only thing offensive enough to the Jew-hating regime that I could think of. And so, my ~~new~~ friend, the principle, <sup>Elder</sup> agreed to participate in this trick. We both agreed that this was a chance worth taking. And if we could get away with it, well all the better! And so that is what we did. We just wrote this rumor, in the guise of a concerned Nazi-sympathizer from the town, and addressed it to the SS Headquarters in Germany. We knew the exact address from ~~all~~ the <sup>my</sup> administrative business I was doing. Then I casually gave this envelope to one of the friendly Estonian guards, asking him to please send it for us, and in return for this

In the Camp's office.

"So back to the camp at Port Kunda. This was such a beautifully built camp, compared to others we had been in, but there was one thing desperately wrong with our situation in this beautiful camp. And that was our commandant. He was the most evil, most odious and cruel man and it was our bad luck, no... it our curse that he was the one to be put in charge of us. His very presence alone, without his pernicious acts of taunting and deliberate cruelties, was making our life a miniature hell."

"I see you look at me strangely. I suppose I should stop and explain something right here, before I continue. You see, you must understand that it is not my meaning to imply that the camp was a vacation place, like some 'dacha' out in the country, and that our lives were fine until this terrible man came along. No, that is not my intention at all. How can I put it? Navele, it is impossible to describe adequately or even accurately, like you want me to, to put in details and so on.....to someone who was never there, who never underwent what we had to go through, and God willing will never have to. You see, it is one of those things where words fall short. All the words in the world can never tell you about the feelings of a person's private pain and humiliation and degradation. There are no words for this.

You see, words can never explain completely the overwhelming bitterness and sadness that consumed our souls, the anger at how effectively they took away very quickly what made us human... our hair, our clothes, our names, our precious possessions, our privacy and cleanliness, our past and our future, when they made us their prisoners just for the "crime" of being from a different heritage. We were deprived of our families, torn away from our familiar surroundings, treated worse than dogs, and forced to do things always at their constant demand and all this lasted years! They shamed us, mocked us and stripped us from our liberties. Yah, all those grand fine concepts that the French had fought so valiantly for: Equality, Liberty, and Justice for all... what a joke... 'a bittereh gelegchter'... the Germans just trod them into the ground with the indifferent precision of their goosestepping heavy brown boots. This total annihilation of our lives as we knew them, is not something that can be easily put into words. It is much easier to tell you the incidents as I recall them, as I am doing, telling you the stories of things that happened, than to describe to you how they killed my soul. We were a nation that got raped. And the rape victim is always at a loss for words. For words fail us in the face of intentional evil. When we see people act with no feelings about other humans, we are speechless. Just like in the nightmare, when we are

how to talk about our pain



"favor", we paid him with a pair of socks we had managed to procure and some spare rations of food."

"Meanwhile life in the camp here continued. The majority of the prisoners were involved in work at the cement-making factory. Groups of people went each day in shifts to the nearby cement making factory, and some of these groups even worked down in the mines alongside some Estonian ~~prisoners~~ miners. <sup>Seto</sup> too. These Estonians were most of them Communists, ~~taken as~~ ~~prisoners at the time of the Nazi Occupation~~, and these Estonians would mutter and complain about the Germans. They especially like to talk about how they couldn't wait for the day their Russian Comrades would come and kill all those bastard Germans, and shoot those traitor Estonian guards. This was the talk down at the mines. And these were the stories that came back to us from those who worked outside of the camp. It was felt that these Estonians were in a way our friends as fellow sufferers and could be helpful to us if time came for such co-operation. And so the days passed, every day the same as before, the early morning yard roll-call, the constant working and the restless nighttime sleeping of two men to a bunk, a hundred men to a barrack, and so we forgot all about the letter."

"Then one day, about a month or <sup>two</sup> ~~so~~ later, three black cars arrive and pull up into the yard of our camp. We thought immediately about something having gone wrong, and we were all anxious about this unexpected SS visit which usually implied trouble. The SS officials walked briskly across the yard, through the kitchen, and in and out of the barracks, inspecting everything, and then the next thing we knew, Commandant Klee was gone! They had taken him away. I looked at the principal and he looked at me as we stopped our work in the office. We both frowned in disbelief, and then slowly I began to smile. I started to clap my hands, long hard smacks, and to laugh hysterically. He quickly walked over to me, thrust out his hand towards me and I grasped it firmly.

"I guess it was that Jewish mistress of his, the bitch!" I muttered under my breath at him, and he burst into a loud laugh of derision and triumph.

"Well it just goes to show," he said to me, his one eyebrow raised, "doesn't pay to mess with a good Jewish mind!" I laughed as he smiled at me. I felt as if I had won an unexpected prize. I was quite exhilarated. I sensed in that instant the glorious power of my own creative mind. That a small little trick cooked up in my own little desperate mind could yield such bounty! I was delighted with myself.

That night we of the administration, in honor of Klee's departure, had a celebration. We raised our metal cups filled with thin brownish soup that we pretended was wine, and all chanted "'L'Chaim!" as we clinked those metal cups with their pathetic strands of string attached to our belts. To life! We smiled at each other in that moment of moral liberation. The Pharoah is gone! Our God has come through for us!

In the grand scheme of things though, we, the vanquished, had won but a miniscule yet satisfying victory in what was truly the wasteland of no real victors. Truth was, I still remained the prisoner, even though I had banished the evil king!"

"Now with the reality of Klee gone came the uncertainty of who would replace him. We hoped and prayed and believed that there could not be a worse fiend of a commandant. The next day, his replacement arrived and we saw that in his favor, he was at least ~~he was~~ better-looking than that pock-marked toad of a monster Klee. This new man's name was Johann Bekker. Soon after he is put in charge, he summons a group of us Jewish prisoners to the office, which is now his <sup>off</sup> office. It was me, the "Shreiber," the lawyer Mr. Rubinsky, who was the official secretary, and the principal who I already told you was the overseer of all of us Jews. Oh yes, and a doctor, a very well-known man from Vilna, a friend of my father's. We were the official Jewish staff. So we are now standing in front of this new German SS man, who tell us to sit down in the chairs that are placed there in the office. Commandant Bekker looks at us all, and then he begins to speak.

"Look," he says to us, "I know the story. I know about Klee. We all knew about him. He was a drunkard, a thief, a thug... what we call a really low-class person. The truth of the matter is that Klee was a common criminal serving time in prison for assault. He had already a reputation for violence, beating up other prisoners in jail, so we know who he is. It is my assumption that the only reason they might have sent him out here is because this is not a big camp and it is not so difficult to run it." And then he leaned forward over his desk, and said to us directly: "But I called you in here today to assure you that I am not at all like Klee. I am completely different."

Then he got up and resting his hands on the table, said: "I will tell you my story. It is like this-- I am a pharmacist. *I live* Quite near the Polish frontier I have a nice home and a good business, a pharmacy shop where I work." AND he told us the name of it. He walked to the window and looked out of it as

if he could see the little village from there. Then he turned back to face us and continued :

"AND one day the SS men came in, and declared that they need more people for the front, for fighting in the lines, and that I needed to sign up. Of course, I was very dismayed, and started to plead on behalf of my age and my profession and my family, but they interrupted me and said that they had a suggestion for me. If I joined the SS, they said, that would be a way to get me out of fighting, and because they knew me, in other words, I was well-known and respected in my town, they would see to it that I would have an administrative type of job." And then they told me what they wanted from. They explained that they had been left with so many pharmacies on the Polish side, they wanted me to take over and help out with a Polish town, just across the river, on the other side, where it would be my job to teach other Germans how to manage a chemist shop."

He walked back to his desk and sat down in his chair again. He looked at us for a while as if searching for an explanation, as if offering some excuse for his very presence. As if confessing to some as yet undiscovered crime. To us, the victims...

"And so I became an SS man," he continued, "and I travelled back and forth from Germany to Poland, teaching my skills. And I managed for a while to live a very good life for those times. But in 1942, with the organization of work and concentration camps, they needed more SS men for positions of governing and controlling those camps, and so I was sent off to a training camp for this sort of job." And in 1943, when I heard about this small camp, out of the way, where no-one would come and snoop around and watch over me, I asked to be transferred here. AND so this is why I am part of SS," he concluded, "and this is why I am here."

He paused and offered us a token of a smile. His hands were folded in front of him on the desk. We waited in silence. We had learned enough about the world in such a short time as to not trust anything, however much we wanted to. Life to us was pure chance. Life was a matter of good luck or bad personality. Perhaps what we had here for a brief interlude was good luck and good personality. Who could predict? We could only sit and listen and hope.

"I called you here to explain to you my situation, so that you may know where I stand, and so you may know where you stand with me. It is important for you to realize that we Germans are not all criminals. It is apparant you have ? suffered enough already at the hands of, what I can only call, ignorant and evil men," Commandant Bekker said to us,

as he stood up. "But I assure you I am not one of those, even though I wear the insignia on this uniform they gave me," he said earnestly. He leaned over, his hands on his desk and peered at us all solemnly. Then he said quietly: "I will try my best to make this place as comfortable as a work camp can be, I give you my word."

"We all sat there for a moment not believing this turn of events. But he did seem sincere, this man Bekker. The doctor stood up and thanked him, and we followed by muttering thanks and nodding our heads in appreciation and acknowledgement. He offered us his hand to shake, and we shook his hand one by one, all of us. For a moment the world seemed almost civilized. We had a reprieve, perhaps. It was as if God had answered our prayers. He had traded us an angel for a devil."

"Yah, Herr Bekker did in fact turn out to be an ideal commandant for us. So it seemed that for a brief pause in time, when hell was erupting around us, we had a little haven of decorum in the midst of our misery. Those of us lucky enough to be part of the Administrative staff, that is. We felt as if we were living, for this while, our own free lives. We could read his newspaper that he left for us, he allowed us the freedom to conduct the business of taking care of the operations of our daily work without his constant checking of our actions. The general camp "appell" was short, and sometimes even not at all, and throughout the time of Bekker's command, there was not one attempt to escape. It was like a cool breeze on a hot sticky day, like an oasis, you understand, a moment of respite granted us by Fate and the intelligence of a kind gentleman. All of us in the administrative staff felt that we could manage nicely for the few months more we believed the war would take to come to an end, if only to be till the very end under this man's rule. Just a few months and the war would be over and we'd all be free to pick up our lives again. This is what we believed. Even Bekker led us to believe that. He constantly hinted at the war coming to an end soon. He made it clear he wanted an assurance of our forgiveness, our compassion for him as an individual and not part of his political party. He would say to us in the office,

"Just remember, when all is over, that I was good to all of you. If the Russians come and take over, I will count on you to remember to vouch for my kindness."

"And of course we nodded, in agreement, because he truly was good to us. And everything would have been alright ... but for the timing of events. You see, at the time that he arrived and assumed the position of head of our camp, there



Naava Piatka-"Not an Ordinary Life."

"They had time for every little detail, those Nazi bastards."

"Yah."

"So....

"Now..., we come back to my story. I am now with a group of people from my camp on the upper deck of the boat going towards Danzig. The boat is packed solid with people from different camps in the area. We are all being transported to a destination that is unknown. But we realize that the war is turning over and that the Germans are scared and we are just the victims to be shunted from place to place until who knows what. aken we don't know eWE are talking about different things and all of a sudden, someone comes up to me and says to me: "Do you know that your father is down at the bottom?" I stare at this man, I recognize him from Vilna somewhere, from my past that seems so very far away, and I say "What?" "My father...here?"

"Yes, yes, your father," he repeats again excitedly, "Your father, the doctor, he is downstairs on the bottom deck." So I run down, hah, run, it is more like push my way through a wall of people, and I am weaving my way downstairs and asking people here and there, saying his name, asking if anyone has seen him. I looked and looked and I could not see him. I instantly began to doubt it. My father on the same boat? Impossible! I suddenly had the feeling that a trick had been played on me, that the man was bluffing me. AND then I began to worry about my food parcel that I had left up on the top deck with my friend, in case someone should steal it from me.

I was standing in the throng of people, deciding whether I should continue my frantic search or just accept the fact that I was the subject of a cruel joke, when suddenly, I saw him. In the middle of a mass of people, I saw him. I called his name, and he turned towards me, looking who had called him. Then he recognized me and we both began pushing our way to get to each other. We hugged. We kissed. We both started to cry. THEN we talked about what had happened to us.. to fill in the past, the missing pieces... up to the evacuation. And then the ship arrived in Danzig and we realized we were once again to be separated. I looked at my father, and I told him: "Look, whatever happens, wherever you go, send a message to try and find my group and I will do the same to try and find your group and get word about me to you." He was shoved back into his group that moved in another direction from where I had to be. And that was the last I was to see my father. We were all separated into our original groups and herded off the boat. We waved and blew

was already a plan underway amongst the prisoners who were organizing some kind of defence committee. One of the mine worker fellows, a man name Turetzky, (he later became mayor of town in Israel) he had already started an underground movement with some of the Estonian fellow mine workers. You see, he was a Socialist, so he knew the language of communism and "workers unite", and all of that propaganda. He had already started planning in preparation for the defeat of the Germans, and what we would do if we were to hear, as we expected to soon enough, that the Russians are moving closer. It was already planned that we would leave Herr Bekker with his Germans, and we all would escape into the mines. This was the plan, you see, and the defence committee under the leadership of this Turestsky had been secretly hiding food and supplies in the mines in preparation for just such an event. We all knew about it, in secrecy, and we were all waiting for the signal when the exact moment of self-imposed evacuation would come.

and  
Estonian  
guard

(Pause)



"I don't know exactly how it happened, but four days before we were about to be liberated, and we could already hear the sounds of bombing and guns close by, so we knew the end was approaching.... and we were ready to go and hide in the mines, any day now, we were just waiting for the Estonians to signal us, when all of a sudden, three young men in SS uniform arrived. They relieved Bekker of his position, to go back to the headquarters, assembled us out on the yard, counted us, ordered us to take food for two days, then packed us into trucks and brought us into Tallin, which is the capital of Estonia. We had no warning, we had no time to issue the command for the planned evacuation or any defence, nothing! It was just assemble and follow orders, or else. They caught us by surprise, those bastards! They managed, these young SS men, within two days, to put us on a big boat to ship us off to Danzig. Total evacuation, not one soul left. Not one even had the time to try and escape. Now, a day before we arrived, they had also evacuated Kloga, the camp in which your mother's brother and my father were, you remember. My father went there also. He was shoved onto a train also destined for Danzig. And now I must tell you what happened to Leon, your mother's brother. Now what happened at this camp at Kloga was that there were not enough trains to herd everyone out of the camp. So when the first shipment of people was completed, and off it went on its destination, and there were no more trains for the rest to be evacuated, the SS came up with their very simple solution of how to get rid of the evidence. These 180 or 220 people who remained behind, very few, with your uncle Leon among them because, nice guy that he was, he was always caring for others, he was helping everyone-- the old and women first,

with an  
order

the railway  
station  
by train  
to

Leyle big  
on the  
1st  
of Feb



get onto the trains, helping them in, ... these people that remained behind without a train, well, what else... they were shot. Packed into pieces of wood, and burned. Your uncle the songwriter, the kindhearted soul with music still flowing in his veins was killed one day before the liberation."

"This is what I learned later."

"They had time for every little detail, those Nazi bastards."

"Yah."

"So...."

"Now..., we come back to my story. I am now with a group of people from my camp on the upper deck of the boat going towards Danzig. The boat is packed solid with people from different camps in the area. We are all being transported to a destination that is unknown. But we realize that the war is turning over and that the Germans are scared and we are just the victims to be shunted from place to place until who knows what. ~~taken~~ we don't know. WE are talking about different things and all of a sudden, someone comes up to me and says to me: "Do you know that your father is down at the bottom? *lower deck*" I stare at this man, I recognize him from Vilna somewhere, from my past that seems so very far away, and I say "What?" "My father...here?"

"Yes, yes, your father," he repeats again excitedly, "Your father, the doctor, he is downstairs on the bottom deck." So I run down, hah, run, it is more like push my way through a wall of people, and I am weaving my way downstairs and asking people here and there, saying his name, asking if anyone has seen him. I looked and looked and I could not see him. I instantly began to doubt it. My father on the same boat? Impossible! I suddenly had the feeling that a trick had been played on me, that the man was bluffing me. AND then I began to worry about my food parcel that I had left up on the top deck with my friend, in case someone should steal it from me.

I was standing in the throng of people, deciding whether I should continue my frantic search or just accept the fact that I was the subject of a cruel joke, when suddenly, I saw him. In the middle of a mass of people, I saw him. I called his name, and he turned towards me, looking who had called him. Then he recognized me and we both began pushing our way to get to each other. We hugged. We kissed. We both started to cry. Then we talked about what had happened to us.. to fill in the past, the missing pieces... up to the evacuation. And then the ship arrived in Danzig and we realized we were once again to be separated. I looked at my father, and I

told him: "Look, whatever happens, wherever you go, send a message to try and find my group and I will do the same to try and find your group and get word about me to you." He was shoved back into his group that moved in another direction from where I had to be. (And that was the last time <sup>I thought</sup> <sup>you see him</sup> <sup>in</sup> <sup>Stutthof</sup> <sup>in this</sup> <sup>afternoon</sup> <sup>you meet him</sup> <sup>on page 4</sup> ~~was to see my father.~~) We were all separated into our original groups and herded off the boat. We waved and blew kisses to each other for as long as we could. Then I just looked away, and didn't look back any more.

*but it wasn't.*

Our group was taken on a barge and we went through the swamps and lakes from Danzig deeper into Poland, and landed in a place called Stutthof. We had no idea that this was a concentration camp. All through the war up to then we had only been in ~~work~~ camps. That is all what we knew. We didn't know about the death camps. We had never heard of anything like that. Everything was so sealed, all the information...and perhaps even if we would have heard of such a machination, we could not have conceived or believed it.

Alright. So we now arrive at Stutthof. And we see for the first time <sup>a large number of</sup> ~~many many~~ SS guards, <sup>with</sup> ~~and~~ dogs, and the beatings of people as they herd them into the camp. You must run, quickly, shnell, quickly, while they shout orders at you as they beat you to move faster, faster. "Your clothes must be taken off, you must go to the showers to be disinfected.. there must be no lice on you, make sure you are clean...". We are moved quickly, like people without a will, to where there are people waiting with small electric shavers to shave off our hair. Our "barbers" are our fellow Jews, and as they begin their punishment of shaving scalps, they say to us: "You are lucky you only come now to Stutthof, and not before, because now the ovens are not working." So I look confused and I say, "What are you talking about, what ovens?" I remember thinking that perhaps here they had hot food prepared in ovens, but why do they say we are lucky then, if the ovens are not working? And they tell me: "The ovens where they burn the people, <sup>you fool</sup> idiot, you don't know about this?"

"I didn't believe it when I heard this. I'm telling you, I just could not begin to let this sink into my mind. That there were ovens specially meant for the burning of people? I was horrified. <sup>What kind of business was that?</sup> <sup>Here in Europe</sup> <sup>refined with</sup> <sup>Europe cen</sup> <sup>of the world</sup> ~~What kind of inferno had we been shoved~~ into this time? Is this the time that death comes to visit?"

After shaving and all the cleaning procedures, we were issued our striped uniforms and "clothes." It was at this point that I recalled something my father had said to me.

*These are the thoughts I had as I was being purified for the Final Solution*

*Stutthof  
Labour  
Death  
Concentration  
Camp*



He said : "If there is a change of clothing, you must remember to always make sure you have good shoes. Good shoes, and warm feet. Because you will have to do much standing and walking. Shoes are the most important." So after this whole procedure of the cleansing, ~~procedure~~ (So ~~that they could offer a clean sacrifice, I suppose?~~) --- showers, water running down, cold of course, and a small towel, like a dishcloth to wipe yourself with. Then you go in and you get the uniform of stripes, whatever size they hand you is yours, too big or too small, it's too bad, you get what you get, maybe you can swap it later with someone else in your group. I was lucky enough to get a size that fitted me. But the shoes, they were no good. They pinched my toes. So I was looking around for other shoes, looking at other people's feet to see who has a better pair of shoes.. At the same time, we each got a half a slice of bread and tea, like a dishwater liquid, and a tin.

Then they said to us: "One of you is responsible for the knife. With this knife you will open your tins and then you will keep your tins for the rest of your meals. From this tin you will drink your soup and water. It will be your only cup and your soupbowl. So do not lose it. Do you understand?"

So first of all I said to myself. "I have a half a piece of bread. I will cut the half a bread, immediately, with the knife. Then I will hide the bread, and this quarter of a bread, I will keep and perhaps I will be able to exchange it for a pair of shoes. Better shoes than what I have now. And that is what I did. I came to somebody and said to him "The tin I cannot give you, but I have some bread I can give you, I will go hungry, but I need to change my shoes. I just cannot walk in these shoes, they're good shoes, but I cannot walk in them." SO he gave me his shoes. They were nice shoes, with leather undersoles. AND I felt much better in these exchanged shoes.

( Were all the shoes different, where did they get the shoes from.... stolen from conquered people? or regulation army all the same shoes?????????)

See  
A5

We stood on the "appell" and they counted us... twenty-four here, twenty- four there, you know, separating us by groups different amounts, to go to the different barracks. So i come to the Barrack, and there stands a GERman, a kapo, (which in Italian means head) and he is the ugliest meanest looking individual I have ever seen. A face like a dog, with a scowl over his tufts of mud-coloured eyebrows, and a mouth that is snarled and curled down to one side under his small pig-like nose. Yes, in fact he looked like a bloated yellow pig, with little grey eyes that were like pinpoints in a full face of flesh that was coarse like sand, with knife scars down his

cheek. I had never before had the experience of being horrified and revulsed by a person's face like that. IT turns out that this here kapo was a criminal, made to sit for twenty years in a German prison for some heinous crime, like a murder or something, and the Nazi elite decided to free this man and other criminals like him to use them as guarddogs of the barracks.

SO this kapo with the face of a pig, lines us up inside the barracks and walks up and down ~~staring~~ <sup>staring</sup> at us, right up close, from under his bushy eyebrows. Then he begins to deliver his welcoming speech. First of all, he tells us, his eyes small and pink, and his mouth twisting like a worm into I suppose a smile, (but it was more like a sneer,) he was going to look for the younger boys to help him <sup>at night</sup> get to sleep. Second of all, he said, "In my barracks I want it spotless!" "THird of all," he declared, "I expect there to be quiet at night. Nothing but sleeping at night. The only noise I expect to hear is the sound of your snoring." And then he says to us, his eyelids almost closing right over his pinkish eyes, "If you will behave according to my instructions, you will experience no problems here in my barracks. But if you do not obey, I will simply take the offender and kill him. Then I will have some of you toss him out the door. END of story! You understand, of course, that to me, killing is not a problem, because I have already committed murder before, so it is nothing to me." He said this quite proudly, in his native German, which many of us could understand because it is so close to Yiddish. I thought how strangely apt it was that he was in the position he held now due to the fact that he was a murderer already. Yet what a bitter joke on us! What a cruel twist of irony! That us innocent prisoners were made to be watched over by a guilty prisoner. But any how, I had long ago tried to make any sense of the war and the cruelties of the Germans. It seemed like some giant horror circus to me already, so whatever new acts would possibly come up were likely to be just as bizarre and pernicious as before. Of course, I was to find out that this premise of mine was not true. Human beings, it became apparant, were capable of a great many unspeakable variations on the theme of malicious torture and cruelty.

In this camp, I met a man who was <sup>a head</sup> taller than me, who was standing behind me. We were assigned one bunk. This means that his legs were next to my head, and the same for my legs next to his head for the sleeping arrangement. This is how we all slept. Head to toe. In one small hard bunk. *The mattrass was a long of 1st.*

We were all of us Jewish prisoners in that barrack~~s~~, number 12. ~~twelve~~. Each of us had been given a number previously, coming into the camps, with a colored triangle patch to mark our particular offensive status. In our case it was a yellow

triangle for Jews. The communists had red. Jehovah's Witnesses had violet. HOMosexuals were marked with blue. And next to our barrack, there was a barrack number thirteen, which held the whole government of Lithuania.-- the all the ministers of the cabinet, and the president, whoever was the government, communists, you remember, at the time the Germans invaded and took over, <sup>June 1941</sup> the whole bunch of them were in the barrack. They were protected by the Geneva CONvention, and I remember they were always receiving beautiful parcels and goods from the Red Cross.

triangle  
states  
diff  
colors

meeting  
Malenkov

NOW this tall man that was my bunkmate, introduced himself to me. "My name is Malenkov" he said, and put out his big hand to mine for a firm handshake. I looked at him. He was an impressive fellow. He did not look Jewish in the traditional stereotypical ways Jews had been portrayed by the Nazi propoganda, or even Jewish in the way that I was able to tell, by the more subtle indications of face contour and coloring. He had a fine strong build, and an open, smiling, bright face that inspired confidence. We exchanged brief histories. He told me he was a house painter before the war. I told him I was a journalist. At that moment, looking at each other and shaking hands, we sensed and established a comradeship that preceded the partnership that was to naturally evolve over time given the fate of being assigned the same bunk. I'll tell you, well-planned marriages could have turned out much worse than the fateful preordained good friendship Malenkov and I were lucky enough to share. This tall and intelligent man, he was to be my guardian angel. He saved my life....

Don Malenkov was the type who, on the first day of camp had already scouted the area for familiar faces. He had already found out who were Lithuanians, and mastering the art of communicating en passant, in passing, that is talking to others like a ventriloquist, without showing you were talking at all. SO while moving, he would mutter something to someone that he made contact with and pass on information and the like, you see. He just a charm about him... very attractive aura, he had. SO he told me that he had already spoken to several Lithuanians and asked them to help a fellow "Landsman", a compatriot. And so that is how he was able to collect from them little <sup>small</sup> peices of bread, sweets, a cigarette stub and so on, like treasures found in the sand, he would bring these delights back to the bunk.

We were taken <sup>to</sup> very bad jobs. Standing on the appel at five o'clock in the morning, with the weather getting colder and colder, while they <sup>SS-guards</sup> counted and sorted us everyday. We were taken in groups of about a hundred, or sometimes fifties, far away to distant fields. Always walking. Trekking through the mud, through forests, through dirt,



whatever, walking and walking until we reached our work destination. My first group was sent to a quarry. What was our work? WE had to carry huge stones and rocks from one place to another. Then after twelve noon, we had to haul them from that place back to the original place. IN ~~the~~ <sup>my</sup> meantime, people were dropping from exhaustion, others were kicked, sent stumbling into the ravine for not doing the work fast or good enough, and others were simply killed outright. My hands, these delicate fingers of mine, that my father always declared were going to be surgeon's hands until I decided otherwise, were now full of cuts and tears and bleeding. After about three or four days of this hard labor, handling the rough rocks, straining my body beyond endurance, I came up to Malenker at night and I said: "Malenker, I just cannot take it any more! I cannot do this shit-work any more!" He immediately said to me that he would help me. "No," I shouted. "You cannot help me. You know that is impossible. They'll shoot the both of us. I just cannot bear this anymore. Look what has become of my hands. This is not work for me to do! I've somehow got to find a way to do something else, anything else, but not this shit pointless work of everyday hauling rocks from one place to another and then back again. I am not a mule! I am not an animal, for godsakes!"

"He listened to my point with his natural compassion. He did not argue with me. At the end, he simply said, "Well, what are we to do about this. How can I help?"

"SO then I told him, "Look, we must do something that will keep us indoors. Any kind of work, cleaning or scrubbing or some kind of work that would just keep us from getting sent out there, to face the bad winter and the hard labor." Now at the front of the barracks, on the right hand side of it, is a smaller selfcontained room with a little window, which belongs to the Kapo. On the other side of the barracks is a longer room which is the "pissoir", our toilets. You walk in there and you piss, and it stinks and it's horrible. So I said to Malenker; ~~Malenker~~, "what is necessary to make that pissoir clean so that it will not stink so wretchedly awful like it does now, and we have only been here four or five days?" He looks at me and answers straight, "Tar. You need tar for that." I said: "You know what, I will go and speak to the Kapo and suggest that we clean it up so that it is nice and clean-smelling. See what he says." And Malenker frowns and says: "I don't want to clean it up. It's a bloody stinktrap in there!" So I take his hand and I say, looking at him intently, "Malenker, please think about this. I think this is the way. You know how every Kapo is so insistent on how clean their barrack is. Our own Kapo admitted the same himself. You know these Germans and their "Reinheid" compulsion, this obsession with tidiness and cleanness. It is their passion. Come on, what have we got to lose? If he



Naava Piatka-"Not an Ordinary Life."

(see pg 2) - Malenker was  
physical therapist to officer who  
complained about Kethy latrines

says yes, then we have a job that will keep us indoors, which is exactly where I need to be, don't you see? Please, Malenker," I begged him, "just help me out on this one."

The end of the story is that I was the one who came to report to this Kapo. He sat back on his chair and glared at me and said "So, what is your complaint today?" I replied that I had not come to complain about anything. "But," I added, "I do have something I wish to ask of you." I looked into his very ugly face, thought of my bleeding hands and the rocks, and continued: (Did you address the Kapo in any particular way, like a salute or sir, or some title???)

I had to say on enter.  
"Häftling 10052  
reporting..."

"My friend and I were wondering if it is agreeable to you that we volunteer to undertake the cleaning up of the toilets of our barracks. I am not sure if you have been past there recently, but the stench is quite bad, sir, and it would be a shame if one of the SS guards was to walk past and be offended and enquire as to whose barracks these were and why something had not been done about that awful smell. You know it is just a thought, sir, but my friend who is a professional painter and I would be very willing to undertake such a job of cleaning it properly for you. We have already discussed what would be necessary for the work to be done as best and quickly as can be, and he is convinced that some tar could do the job of getting rid of that disgusting smell."

The kapo looked at me all the time with his fixed scowling expression, and after I was done talking continued to stare at me. Then, after a short while, he stood up and walked towards the window. "Ya," he said, his back towards me, he "Perhaps you have a point there. I tell you what I'll do, I shall enquire about whether I can get some tar." AND then he told me to leave.

The next morning, ~~he came to me~~ (at the appell, ~~he~~ in your barracks???) pointed his finger at me, and said; "You stay!" As I heard these words I immediately realized what it meant and quickly said that that man over there, pointing to Leon Malenker, must also stay with me, because he is my partner. He hesitated a moment, and then nodded. "Okay," he muttered gruffly and ordered us to report to the kitchen where they would tell us what we were to do. We went to the kitchen where there was waiting a giant barrel of tar. We invented some kind of stirring spatula out of a piece of wood. And we lugged this vat over to the toilet barracks ~~at number twelve~~. In our Barrac. You should have seen us. We looked so official. we set up a barricade outside the door, and kept that pissoir closed for about a half a day while we cleaned the "farshtunkeneh" place and mopped it and poured it with tar. We were not allowing anyone to come in to piss while we were working, and were those men mad at us! Oh boy, you should have heard them

shouting at us and yelling obscenities and vile curses at us, as if we had taken away their finest possession.

"Wait, wait," we shouted through the walls back at them. "You curse us now, but you'll bless us later!" we shouted, laughing. "What do they know," I said ~~to~~ jokingly to Malenkov, "here we are, taking the time and effort to turn this stinkhole into a boudoir for those guys, and all they can think about is pissing! Psheh!" By that afternoon, our job was complete, and the pissoir now smelled heavily not of urine but of rich tar. Much better! We had to wait some more until it dried and then, and only then, would I let anyone in. The guys who had yelled obscenities before were now nodding their heads and mumbling compliments as they relieved themselves. I felt that we had done a good deed. <sup>restored a little</sup> Our sense of dignity was ~~elevated~~, <sup>not to mention my hands</sup> ~~not to mention my hands~~ <sup>curse of smell!</sup> NOT only was my sense of smell rescued, but I could now reclaim a small patch of dignity in this refurbished haven of a urinal while I poured out my waste body fluids. I no longer had to retch from the stench of that place. I believed I had elevated our lives one small notch up from intolerable by this brave act of tarring the toilets!

Now after we were done, we were called into the Kapo's office. He told us in his gruff curt way that he was pleased with our work. We had done a good job! He was very clever this Kapo. He said to us: "Now, you have done this fine job, I think you should be the carriers of the bread. You get two other people to help you and that is now your job."

See A6

(Only job? where did you carry it to... what else did you do?)

Now the bread for the prisoners was transported from the kitchen to the ~~barracks....yard/mess room,???~~

All the bread, just enough to feed the approximately two hundred and twenty of us in the barracks, was placed on a large piece of flat wood which the four of us would have to carry from the kitchen. Now the bread was already cut in pieces, you see, so us <sup>the</sup> four people carrying the bread. <sup>always some offer to share</sup> ~~well, you can understand how sometimes the amount of bread when we got to the barracks was not quite exactly the same amount as when it came from the kitchen.~~ <sup>also a former criminal.</sup> Now the chef of the kitchen was a German, <sup>also a former criminal.</sup> and knowing my fame now as the toilet tarrer, he says to me one day, "Hey you, you the one who did the latrines, ja?" So I nodded and smiled. If there's one person I wanted to be on good terms with, it was the chef, the provider of paltry sustenance in this mad nightmare.

"Well," he said to me, "we have some more tar. You can do OUR latrines now too, ja?"

So I replied that I did not have the authority to do anything like that without my kapo's permission. He would have to speak to our kapo, I suggested to him. So he looked at me, and then turned to his partner in the kitchen, and in German said: "Oh ja, I know that kapo. This little venture will cost us a good piece of meat!"

The very next day, we received our order to report to the kitchen. I assume the kitchen was one piece of beef the poorer, but as for me, I was the richer. I now had established myself as an entrepreneur, and saved my ass at the same time.

That same day, an SS man came into the kitchen as we were beginning our first day on the job. They were always in the habit of wandering in uninvited, snooping around, particularly in the kitchen, home of comparatively good smells. The SS man brushed past us. "Weiter machen!" he said, this SS man, waving me on. It was their refrain, "weiter machen" which means "carry on what you are doing." Of course, what else would they say -- "Stop and take a look around you?" "Check out how we torture your fellow humans, work them till they bleed and starve away, kill them and burn them, no matter?" NO, of course not! SO it was a mere courteous shrug of "just carry on working" don't mind us, don't pay any attention to us, just carry on doing what we told you to do, good doggie!"

After the job was done, I reported back to the kapo, and thanked him for giving his permission to let us do the work. "We were rewarded with an extra piece of bread," I confided in him, showing my gratitude. "May we keep it?" I asked him. Malenker of course thought I was crazy. He just wanted to swallow the damn thing right away and not tell anyone about it. But I argued with him, and said that we must tell the kapo. We must include him as part of our deal, part of our "business." SO with much begrudging dissatisfaction, Malenker finally went along with my thinking. So here I was, in front of the kapo, asking if we may keep our extra pieces of bread. He looked at me and thought for a minute. Perhaps he was thinking how crazy I was to be so honest, I don't know. BUT then he said: "Yes, you may have the bread."

I then asked him if it alright if we left the two pieces of bread there in his office, on his desk in his safekeeping, until we could come back later and retrieve them. You see, I was worried that others would find out we had the extra bread and perhaps would try and steal it from us, or be jealous and fight, who knows. I just didn't want to have such a precious commodity on me as I did my everyday work of clean up around the barracks in front of the the others. Life was precarious enough as it was without incurring the wrath of your fellow

sufferers. And so it was arranged, that our payment was kept safe for us in the kapo's office, and we were able to enjoy the "bread" we had truly earned at our own leisure.

One day the kapo comes to us in a rush. Malenker and I now had the luxury of hanging out in the barracks during the day, cleaning up a little, and of course, if we heard footsteps outside we would immediately spring into a frenzy of fake cleaning activities. This time was no different. We were <sup>sitting</sup> ~~lying~~ on the bed ..... talking, trying to sleep ..... ?????????????????? (What did you do in "chep" a spare time?????) See A6.

when we heard the quick heavy boot sounds clomping up the stairs. Immediately we began running around adjusting the bed blankets and sweeping floors. The door burst open and there stands the kapo, his face flushed. I can tell he is agitated about something. "Quick" he tells us, almost in a whisper. "You must hide yourselves immediately." We stop our pretend busyness and look at him incomprehensively. "Just do as I say, go now and find a place to hide!" he urges us. We do not move. Then he comes towards us, his arms out and begins to push me forward as he points up to the ceiling.

"Upstairs, in the attic, go quick! Now!" he hisses.

Then he is gone. We looked at each other, Malenker and I, for a brief second, and then without a second thought, we scrambled up onto the bunks and up into the rafters of the barracks. There was a small opening that led to the attic. First Malenker hoisted himself up through the trapdoor, then leaned down and dragged me by the arms up beside him into the dusty attic. Lying there in the dust and darkness we could hear the vague flutterings of noise outside. Inside all was deathly quiet and we waited, heads pounding, for the worst.

Suddenly there came an announcement over the loudspeakers for everyone to go outside on the yard and stand for counting. It was an "action". The SS had arrived to gather together about 5000 people and remove them from the camp. Those who had already left for their work out of the camp were saved. The rest of the people, those who were left at the camp, doing whatever, were immediately rounded up and removed by trucks to an unknown destination. Gone! Just like that. One minute they were there, the next they were taken away. Cleared out. One, two! We used to call it "~~a~~chapoongs", from the Yiddish word "~~s~~chap" --to grab. They just grabbed 'em and took 'em away. Theirs for the taking.

We waited until all was silent again. Until we heard no more sounds of motor engines being started and the gravelly sound of tires grinding against the road. Until we heard



only the sound of our own hearts pounding in our ears. Then we climbed back down and dusted ourselves off from the spiderwebs and dust that had attached themselves onto our crouching bodies in that impromptu hiding place. I was shaking. We went to our bunks and sat down wearily on our bunks. We were both silent. What is there to say when you have been saved by your captor? Saved for the moment, that is, with the knowledge and fear that any other moment can bring but another fate. A matter of timing...

I turned to Malenker, and caught his glance. He was not as confident as before, that air of good-natured joviality had vanished along with the dust from under the SS trucks carrying 5000 of our campmates away. I looked into his eyes, and held his distant gaze. Then I said quietly again what I had said before. "This is not good, Malenker," I said sadly. I shook my head from side to side as I quietly picked off the dusty woodshavings, thick with spider webs, that were still clinging to my thin clothes, as if they too were seeking escape from the confines of a dark prison. "Malenker," I repeated: "This just does not feel good to me."

"Agh, it's just another action. This is the way it happens here. We were lucky. It probably won't happen again."

"Malenker," I shouted, "listen to me! Look around you, for GOD's sake! People are dying here all the time. We have to get away from this place and get some real work, perhaps in a concentration camp where they concentrate just on labor. Only then we can go about our work and not have to worry about sudden attacks and changes to our schedule. This place ... this place here .... it's like one giant net. Like a trap! Don't you see, we are just a storehouse here. They can just come and grab people out of here any time for who knows what? I don't like it, Malenker. It's very bad here. As good as it seems, trust me, I cannot explain, but it's bad for us, Malenker, we have to get away from here."

Malenker, of course, merely shook his head and tried to allay my fears. "Nah," he replied, "it will turn out alright, don't you worry. Look, we have work here, solid work, the kapo is our friend now, and all will be alright, you'll see. We are needed here."

But even the good humor and gentle optimism of my friend Malenker could not allay the bad feeling I had in the pit of my stomach. And it was not the feeling of hunger that was gnawing at my insides. After all we had our two extra pieces of bread! No, it was rather like a nameless dread of something bad about to happen... of eventually running out of good luck.



But I listened to Malenker and took some comfort in his good-natured kidding and joking about our particular good fortune in "high places" as he put it.

And so it turned out for the time being that he was right. The next afternoon, the kapo called me into his office and told me that that afternoon I was to be escorted to Barrack number seven, for my next job of tarring. We were in business! And that afternoon, an SS man came and knocked on the barrack door to escort me and Malenker to barrack seven, for you understand, of course, it was not allowed to be just wandering around any where without supervision.

We found the tar already prepared for us, as before, and so it was we went back to work. We worked on number seven, then number five, then two, and so on. Malenker was right. Somehow, for the time being, we were needed.

I had hoped to be assigned the barracks in which my father was housed, but it didn't work out that way. However, I was meeting him from time to time in my barrack's latrines. He was working as a doctor ~~or assistant to the Red Cross.~~ (the hospital unit?? ~~was the actual Red Cross Organization there??~~) *in the makeshift Clinic (Lazarett)*

and so because of that he had the privilege of walking around relatively untroubled from barrack to barrack. And so we used <sup>to</sup> meet in the darkness ~~of~~ <sup>but mostly</sup> the newly tarred barracks, number three. 222222? And there in the relative privacy of our latrine, I would share with him some spare bread or soup of mine and we would talk about the events happening around us.

One day, at one <sup>assigned</sup> of our brief meetings, he told me that he had been ~~delegated~~ to a medical unit up in Koenigsberg. I gave him some extra rations for his trip, and we said goodbye to each other. He looked at me and said: "You know, I am an old man already, I'm not sure what will happen to me... but you, I feel that you will manage. You will survive this thing. Just remember, try to be invisible. Do not make yourself noticeable. Try rather to blend in and remain undetected. Then they will not single you out, because they will not know that you are there. That is the only advice I can give you. The rest you will learn on your own. Good luck, my boy. May GOD always be with you in whatever you do." Koenigsberg

We hugged and kissed and I felt extremely sad although I had not even seen this man that much in my recent years. I had the distinct impression this would be the last time I was to see him. He had such an air of resignation about him and his movements were slower than ever before. We kissed again and he said goodbye. Then as he turned to walk away, I called

out to him. "<sup>Daddy</sup>~~Pappela~~....," I asked him, not knowing from where the question sprung. "I want to know one thing from you, Papa. You divorced Mama, and married another woman, but somehow in my mind, I think that you still loved <sup>Vava.</sup>~~her~~. Did you, Papa?"

He looked at me with glistening eyes and said softly; "I will love her till my dying day." And then he turned around and slowly began his shuffled walk back to his barracks. I gazed after him, my throat filled with the swollen ache of uncriable tears and the unpronounceable last goodbye.

\*\*\*\*\*

After that last meeting with my father, there in the newly tarred latrine, product of my own ingenuity, I returned to my barrack with a new vigor and resolution. I brushed away my viscous pain of loss, like I had cleaned away the foul smell of waste fluids. I came up to Malenker and I told him: "Malenker, my father has been sent away to work. We must do the same. We must leave this place for another place of work." I ~~had decided~~.

*to Danzig*  
In <sup>later</sup> a couple of days, the call came for a team of welders and electricians to report for duty to be shipped out to Danzig where they needed these skilled tradesmen to work in the harbour. AS we stood there on the "appel," I turned to Malenker and motioned that we must offer ourselves for this workload. And so it was that Malenker and I stepped forward out of our lines and volunteered our services. We were after all electricians of sorts. I mean I had worked ~~with my father~~ <sup>with my father-in-law</sup>, and that was qualification enough for me. Malenker was handy at most things, being a painter of course. And so we stepped forward and they took our names. Within three days we were on a train, in a group of twelve people, guarded by the obligatory SS men, bound for Danzig and a new line of work.

*In my spare time during the 1939-40 vacations,*

*Burgraben* <sup>the concentration camp</sup>  
Our new labor camp, part of Stutthof, was situated about twelve kilometers outside of Danzig harbour. It had ~~very nice~~ <sup>well-built</sup> barracks, and there was a railroad track with a small train that transported the workers back and forth from the camp to our workplace at the harbor. For the first time I saw the huge tankers and big boats and U-boats in the harbor. IT was very grand and impressive. WE were led by the SS men to our place of work, a welding shop. There we met a tall, ~~very~~ <sup>old</sup> man of about eighty ~~years old~~, with a giant bush of a moustache, who said to us: "Welcome to Germany! Do anyone of you understand German?" WE all nodded, we all had our

understanding of German, mostly from Yiddish. "Well, that is good, everyone understands the "mutershpreden", he smiled. Then he said: "Now, I ask that you all show me your hands. Put them out like this..." he told us, showing us his own large bony hands outstretched in front of him. And he came around to each of us and inspected our hands. When he came to me he, looked into my face, and the corners of his eyes crinkled even more as he pronounced: "You have never been a welder, have you?" I looked down at my betraying hands and said in German, "Please, it was the only way I could think of to get away from the concentration camp I was in. Whatever you will ask me to do, I will do. I give you my word." He nodded his head a little, smiled at me, and moved on to examine the other hands stretched out before him.

Well, this tall old man taught us welding for three weeks. And in those three weeks he told us his story. He was a socialist, he told us. But being a worker, he was a member of the union, and that meant being a member of the party. But he hated the Nazis; he revealed, and promised us that he would teach us whatever he knew so that we would be able to do our job well and keep us working for as long as possible.

"You are only twelve people," he told us. "So, this is what I have in mind. When I go to eat my lunch, everyday, there will be something dropped into the wastebasket for each one of you. But you must take turns, you understand that. It cannot work another way. It is up to you to honor this system. Be good socialists and share amongst yourselves," he said to us. And so everyday, one of us would get a treat of some polony or sweet bread or something special wrapped in newspaper to be retrieved out the wastebasket and enjoyed, thanks to the kindness of this old socialist. And he would walk around, shake his head and mutter softly for us all to hear: "Deutschland is kaput, ja. Deutschland is kaput!"

"One day I was busy welding, I had really got the hang of it, and suddenly I felt a sharp piercing pain in my hand. Our instructor looked at my hand and told me that I had to stop working. The next morning my hand was swollen to double its size. I went to the clinic where they treated my hand. It appeared that a little piece of metal had lodged in my hand. So for one whole week I could do nothing and had to stay in my barrack while all around me went to work. I was doing nothing all day long, and the pain was quite extreme. A while later they <sup>doctor</sup> actually cut it open, and took out the sliver of metal, and for a while I had little feeling in my hand. Soon it was time for me to return to work, but because of the schedule set-up I was now sent on the day shift while Malenkov was relegated to the night shift. The one positive

*my left thumb*



side of this split up was that now we each could have the whole bunk to ourself, so sleep was a little more comfortable. But I missed his company. The only way we could meet was when we passed each other in the night, on our way to and from work. It was dark early now in the cold of January, <sup>1945</sup> and as I came back from my day-shift and he went out on his night-shift, we would shout greetings to each other. Phrases of a couple of words slung together as messages, we would pass back and forth to one another as our groups passed each other en route to work, escorted as always by the SS men. It was our only way of communicating to each other, our brief attempt at contact. But it was more than just a greeting, it was a precious necessity for the maintenance of our lonely isolated souls. Malenker and I, we had become each other's family, home without home, each other's mirror of selfhood, without which it sometimes became dangerously impossible to know if we truly were alive or if we even wanted to be.

And so we made a point of calling out to each other, my friend and I, only one or two words sometimes, but that didn't matter. It was just to verify our existence, to acknowledge our faith in the fact that we were still human. In the sound of our own voices calling out to ourselves, we heard the echo of courage and recognized the sound of human survival. That was what it had all been reduced to: The naked gut reaction to keep surviving, no matter what.