

My Life



My Life

**by
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*Thanks to Noy Spiegelman for the beautiful artwork that graces this cover
and that of the Hebrew document*

The Enemy

I was born on July 13, 1936, the poster child of an enlightened future. Most countries in Europe had made strides towards civil rights for Jews. The sons of Jacob finally got the freedom to live as any other citizen.

Families Neuermann and Karabelnicov announced my appearance in this world with celebrations and bursting pride. My parent's families were hoping for a bright future. Close relatives pleaded that I wear the names of their loved ones, so I would wear the name Tsila Cvia Tiabale Jonah - light to Israel ... and Gentiles.

Five years passed, and in June 1941, everything suddenly turned upside down. The rights of freedom slipped through our fingers like sand and equality melted away like snow in hell. Friends and neighbors turned their backs and no one came to our aid. The world, an asylum surrounding us, connived and organized a hunt, a hunt for me, Tsila Cvia Tiabale Jonah, the 5-year-old enemy of nations.

Protagonists of the Tale

Mother - Batya, *the daughter of Lev and Etta Karabelnikov.*

Father - Chaim Reuven, *son of Yehuda Halevi Neuermann and his wife Tsila.*

Those who secreted and saved me -

Zosia Josephin Tashnioskina

Nun Poishieti Apalobiya Poishieti

Iz'ik *the Jewish fellow that guarded the barbed wire around the Kovno ghetto for the Germans.*

First memories

I remember an arrow fired from the country toward the sky.

I remember Berg – the mountain of death – grim and gloomy with a murky black cloud as its crown. Meandering path led to the killing fields. Sadness stained the air and the sun was ashamed to shine here. I wore a stifling, black scarf as we passed here. I did not know where we were going.

I remember a rickety, thrown-together hut at the foot of the high mountain that was the stage of the unfolding tragedy. The hut is our hotel - mother, father and Tsila. We lived in the shadow of death, here in our valley of tears.

My memory goes no further back, but my mother told me that on the Fifth of August, 1941, we were expelled from Kovno, from our spacious and comfortable home. The neighbor next door, Mom's friend, had entered early in the morning and told my mother that since the Germans decided to deport the Jewish community in Kovno, she felt, that as a friend, she should get my parents dining room furniture which my father had purchased new two weeks earlier. This was our good neighbor, my mother's friend. With German efficiency, we were whisked to the ghetto Slebotka, the poorest part of town, dark, grimy and scary.

Ghetto

When I started writing the story, the words came flooding forth. Little effort was needed as even long-forgotten pieces jig-sawed together and the pages seemed to write themselves. Within three months the molds were cast. Quickly, I poured in the iron words that were the fortune of my life.

After I finished, I set it aside. I felt completed, but after a while, when I started to read the book, I found the story lacking details about life in the Kovno ghetto.

It seemed to me that this place, "ghetto" was so scary and disgusting. My subconscious refused to break its seal of pain and disgust.

I will have no choice but to retell a few stories my Mother and Father told me - our first exit from the ghetto and return to that hole, the story of the brave partisan action and murder of children.

Train Station

We lived for two years in the ghetto Slebotka, a small town near Kovno - Prison for Jews. A thick air of miserable grey morose and the smell of desperation enveloped the buildings and alleys, and this was our whole world. Close quarters held men, women and children, yet it was the children that least understood the nightmare vision. The children's eyes were watching all the happenings in the ghetto, their world. They saw Jews, persecuted, hurt and confused and ask, "What happened?"

Then, in the confusion of the blink of an eye, I stood at a train station at dusk with my mother and Zosia. For the past few days Zosia hid us in the broom closet of her home. Her husband was unaware that two Jews stood stiff in this coffin of a room. After he left for the office, Zosia

would let us out briefly, for a few minutes we could move. This deception, however, threatened all involved and we needed to move elsewhere. The train station led elsewhere. It was a huge building swallowing trains and belching in and out countless people scurrying from place to place like rats in a maze. I was shocked that we were here, but the shock blended fear with confusion. Even Lithuanians feared German soldiers. Eyes were lowered and prayers to any grasped deity were muttered on pursed lips.

I wore a blue coat with fur collar gray my hair blonde and dark brown eyes.

Ghetto girl eyes. My mother, however, was like a totally gentile Lithuanian. She had reddish blonde hair, her eyes were green, and somehow, she summoned a proud march, full of firm confidence and good appearance. All this cloaked the fact that there was a terrible fear in her heart that secreting me away to safety was as if one needed to hold a shadow. But she was determined that no obstacle or calamity could stop her. This thought has been etched in all her essence - heart, soul and body. Days earlier, Mother had said, "Chaim, I'm going to take the Tsila (for the second time) from the ghetto and do not try to convince me otherwise. Please, I beg you, and all the family not to talk about it." To me, no one in the family mentioned our escape from the ghetto until the evening we left.



I just found myself outside the ghetto in Kovno train station on the way to the village. Zosia went to the ticket window to buy tickets. Mom and I were just watching what was happening. Mom held my hand, seconds ticked and her grip tightened. She pressed my hand so hard. It hurt so much. I pulled away but still clutched and pulled at her sleeve. She bent down and I whispered in her ear, "Mommy,

don't worry, when I get to the village, I will write you a letter. If I draw a beautiful house, you can come to me." Mom kissed me and said, "Great idea Tzilinka." Tears streamed down her eyes. Zosia returned with tickets. Zosia and mother whispered quietly.

Mother let go of me and moved away. I sat down on a bench nearby. A stranger approached me and wanted to sit on the bench. She handed me her purse and unbutton her coat before she settled down. You must remember that I spoke no Lithuanian, I saw Mom's eyes filled with despair and Zosia was frozen in the knowledge that I only spoke Yiddish. Without saying a word, I took her purse and held it until the woman opened the coat and sat down. I gave her the purse. Zosia and mother were relieved. Zosia moved me to the next seat and sat in between the woman and me.

The rule was simple: to anyone who gives safe harbor to a Jew, a death sentence applies to them and their family. I knew it, every Jewish child knew it.

We all relaxed. I was with Zosia and mother, and I felt mother hugging my shoulders. I looked around, people came and went, trains came and went, and I kept thinking I was seeing Father's smiling eyes, his soft face. My loving father was a wise and good man. Yet I knew that he was alone, praying to God that everything would go well, willing that mother would return in safety and security to his arms. I was pulled back to reality by a terrible screech and evil hiss as a train pulled in front of us. Mom whispered to me in Yiddish to go with Zosia to the train. She kissed me and said, "Zie Gezunt Mine Kinder." Tears flooded her beautiful face. She squeezed my hand and said thanks to Zosia. We had to leave. Zosia put small suitcase on my shelf and sat me next to the window so I could look at Mother. Zosia sat tight by my side. Mother waved until the train left. I waved back until it disappeared on the horizon. I did not speak or cry. A ghetto girl knew not to speak or cry. Mother returned to the ghetto before curfew. In the evening, I was tired and fell asleep. It seems I slept until we reached the village. Zosia woke me very rapidly and we picked up our packages and quickly went down the stairs of the train station. Zosia walked before me with a suitcase and package, I clung to her.

There was a wagon with a horse next to the platform. Zosia put the packages on the ground, lifted me by the arms, put me in a wagon, and covered me with a blanket. The sad expression on her face indicated that she was worried I might speak so she put her finger to her lips to quiet me. She put the suitcase and packages on the cart, and dragged a blanket over my head. She sat beside the coachman, and the horse took off. Zosia and the driver chatted. I listened quietly to the clomping of the horse's hooves. I was awake, I thought of my father and mother. I committed to writing a letter as soon as we got to the farmhouse, painting a beautiful house with flowers and trees and the sun shining. Mother and Dad needed to know it was good.

Home – Poishieti's Village

When I opened my eyes, the wagon was in front of a log house built from forest trees. I picked up the blanket so I could see the new place where I would live without Mom and Dad, with people who I did not know. But a Kovno ghetto girl did not cry, a Kovno ghetto girl did not require anything; a Kovno ghetto girl did not speak. As Mom whispered to me in Yiddish before I left "you must be a good child."

I was at the home of Fosckiti. There was a huge barn and a vegetable garden, many trees and a small lake. Before I left the ghetto, Dad told me Poishieti, Zosia's sister, was a nun. She was single and had dedicated her life to Christian worship. She and her family would take care of me and love me. The monastery that belonged to the nuns allowed Poishieti to hold their property.

There were other people there; one farmwoman and her husband and a young Gypsy man to help her to manage and work on the farm.

Zosia knocked on the door and her sister opened the door. They looked at each other and hugged and kissed immediately. They began to speak Lithuanian. I did not understand a word but I knew the subject. I tried not to let them see me. I was scared and I wanted my mother and father. I had tears running down my face.

I was like a small point in all this space, fields, trees and farm. I washed and put on my blue coat with a gray collar and a thought came to my mind if there is no good after the war, I'll go to Israel. In Israel were my grandparents. Mother wrote a note with her parents' address and sewed it inside the collar. Mom stressed that I had to keep the blue coat.

Zosia held my hand and a suitcase and entered the hut. There was no floor, just dirt, a rickety table, thick glass windows that you could barely see through, a wooden barrel stood on the wall and a bed in the corner. There was another room with a bed and a closet and another closet that only held a bed. This was to be my cell. Zosia put the suitcase on the bed and said in Lithuanian that this is my bed. I understood her because she reached for the bed, and then introduced me to Poishieti, who was a little old lady with kind eyes and a smiling face. "This is Stasia," she said and pointed at me. This name was my new name. It took me a short time to recognize that. No more Tzilinka, Stiebel or Cvia. My name was Stasia. All my documents said Stasia. Poishieti watching me, I was small and skinny because of the lack of nutrition, my face was round, full of life and red with excitement. I had lots of blond curls and dark eyes, ghetto sad, but bright. She took my hand and spoke to me at length and finally hugged me and said "Welcome, Stasia."

The next morning was nice and warm. We went into the yard and sat on the bench in front of the house. Suddenly I remembered my parents and my promise. I went back to my room quickly, opened the suitcase and immediately found the paper and pencil Dad placed within so I could write them a letter. I drew a nice house, a bit like the hut of Poishieti, flowers, trees and sun. As I thought about where my parents were, I remembered the ghetto was not sunny. Clouds swallowed it. The flowers were gray, and the trees were bare. There was no life in it, at least in the eyes of a child of five. I looked at the picture and I was not satisfied. I drew another picture and spent all day on it. I then searched for Zosia. I told her "Mama and Papa." Zosia knew and understood a little Yiddish but forbade me to talk to her Yiddish.

Years later, I learned that when my mother stole from the ghetto to explore my fate, Zosia handed her the letter picture. Mom was happy. By the way, Dad kept the letter until he reached Dachau, but unfortunately once in a moment of danger, hid the letter in his mouth and swallowed the paper.

After I gave the letter to Zosia, I was satisfied; I laid my head on the pillow and fell asleep. In the morning, a beam of light woke me up and I knew not where I was. I looked around and remembered that I was in the house of Poishieti, sister of Zosia. The truth was that I first saw Zosia just days before, but Dad told me she was a good and generous person. She worked for Grandpa and had helped Aunt Luba run the house and raised her young family. After I heard what my Father said, I felt good with her and trusted her.

I got up still wearing the same clothes as when I got there. I saw Zosia and Poishieti in the

next room, sitting next to the rickety table, drinking milk, eating fresh bread from the oven and deep in conversation. When they saw me, they smiled and motioned for me to join. They gave me bread and milk. The bread was fresh and delicious, I ate the whole slice before I sipped warm creamy milk. I never drank a drink so good before. I smiled and said “a dank.” After breakfast, Zosia and I went back to my room. Zosia opened my suitcase and gave me a dark skirt and yellow sweater. I got dressed and went outside into the yard. We walked toward the barn. It was a huge wooden building with an unbelievably high ceiling. I could hardly see the end of the building. The building was packed with bundles of hay and fodder and wheat. At the end of the barn were the animals - cows, a horse and pigs. Several of the large pigs were very fat and some smaller pigs had glistening skin. There were also chickens, ducks and geese. There was a tall, thin man wearing work clothes and holding a pitchfork. A plump woman with blue eyes and gray hair wearing a floral dress and white apron stood by him. It was probably his wife. Past them was a young man, very tan with black hair. He looked just like the description I had heard of a Gypsy. Everyone knew Zosia and asked how she was. Zosia introduced me to the workers of Poishieti. “This girl is named Stasia and is from Kovno. Unfortunately, her parents were killed in a car accident. She is five and has not spoken since the accident. Please treat her gently; her condition may improve over time. She is staying here under the supervision of Poishieti.

By the way this story and the forged papers were created in the ghetto.

The woman nodded and said, “We’ll take care of the poor girl and be good to her.” Zosia thanked them and left the barn. We walked slowly through the farmyard. Here, in the wilderness, the sun and the fields were all in gold and blue flowers dotted the landscape. Zosia said in Yiddish, “It’s very beautiful, it’s very beautiful, Tsilinka. Tomorrow I’ll go back to Kovno. I’ll talk to your Mom and Dad. You must not speak Yiddish.”

Zosia’s leaving surprised me. I never thought I would stay here alone. I started to cry, but the sight of the lovely scenery somehow calmed me down and I quit worrying. Peace washed over me as Zosia and I walked through the golden fields. Occasionally, I would stop to pick wild flowers and Zosia patted my head. I was happy. We returned to the house. Poishieti stood before the table covered with food - bread, butter, cheese and sweet milk. Poishieti recited a blessing before we ate a satisfying meal. Immediately after dinner, I added gold fields and blue flowers to a drawing I made for my parents. Though I did not have colored pencils, I knew they would see the colors in their imaginations. I gave the second letter to Zosia.

Night was falling and the room was chilly. Poishieti put wood in the fireplace the whole house warmed up. I sat on the dirt floor before the fire, watched the flames and drifted off to sleep. Zosia picked me up, dressed me a nightgown, rested my head on the pillow and whispered to me in Yiddish that she would return to Kovno the next day and give the letter to my parents. She added, “Tzilnka, be a good girl and make sure to listen to Poishieti.” She kissed me and I fell back asleep.

Stasia's New Life

I got up with the sun. I looked around and no one was home. Zosia had left for Kovno and Poishieti was absent. Dread fell on me and I ran outside without anything on but a nightgown. In the distance, I saw Poishieti and called to her. She came quickly and we went to my room and she helped me get dressed. Without saying a word, we sat down and ate breakfast. We ate slowly and I remembered that it had just been days since I was in the ghetto.

Food was scarce in the ghetto, subsisting of a little bread and a few vegetables. I had become sick and my vision was blurry. The doctor said I suffered from malnutrition. Mom did not let the danger assuage her; left the ghetto and traded some jewelry for butter, sugar, cheese, bread, jam and other delicacies. We ate our fill and we thanked God for the blessing. Soon, my vision improved. It was one of the few good memories of those hard times.

I helped clear the table and left the room. The smell of spring was in the air and the trees were wearing colorful flowers. Plenty of fruit trees flourished here, pears, apples and cherries. My heart was filled with joy and happiness at the sight of this landscape. I missed my parents but the serenity and beauty was wonderful. Best of all, I was not in the ghetto!

Several days passed. It was a Sunday and a sumptuous meal covered the table. There was bread, eggs, butter, sliced cheese and ham slices. I ate the egg and bread and drank milk. I did not touch the ham.

I remembered in the ghetto, even in the worst of times, my parents did not eat pork. Mom and Dad argued about it.

Mom said, "We live, we do not eat unclean animals, the Nazis do not win, not in my house."

Father answered, "Batya even rabbis say that saving lives permits the eating of anything."

Mom insisted and we ate no pork.

Now Poishieti motioned me to eat a pork slice, I took two pieces and chewed the red meat. When she turned around, I took the white part of the fat and I ran to my room. I pushed back a board and hid the fat behind it. I did not imagine what would happen after a few days. Poishieti smelled an acrid stench in my room. The rotten, stale smell of the pork fat came through the wall slats. She talked to me at length but I was unable to explain the smell. She finally found the pork, but never knew why I did it.

The days passed peacefully, the sun warmed the earth; all flowers and fruit trees bloomed. The food was delicious and there were no Germans. Sometimes I lay on the grass and imagined all

my family was there. I imagined playing with my aunts and uncles and especially my cousins, Esther, David and the two sons of Uncle Abraham. Deep in my heart I knew that the Nazis took them and I'm the only one left alive.

During the "Great Aktion," my parents hid me under the floor and placed a bed above to avoid suspicion. For the first weeks I was hidden, they let me go out just at night. I did not complain, I was a ghetto girl. "Children of the ghetto are heroes," said Papa and everyone wiped away the tears.

I dreamt everyone was happy singing and dancing as if it was Purim and Hanukkah combined. Poishieti let me alone because I did not speak, she motioned me with her hands and I did what she liked. One day, a few weeks after my arrival, Poishieti dragged the barrel that was against the wall to the middle of the room and called for the woman from the barn. She had a red face with blue eyes. They decided to wash me. I did not understand exactly what they meant when they motioned towards the barrel. I noticed that they had filled the barrel with hot water and held out a rag and soap. They motioned for me to undress.

In my whole life, I had taken a bath in a tub or shower, never a barrel. I suspected they wanted to drown me but I had no choice. I started crying. Poishieti suddenly she understood my anxiety and motioned with her hands that they want to wash me. I stopped crying. The water in barrel reached my neck, warm and cozy. They washed me well, dried me and put on my nightgown. I fell asleep and dreamed of Mama and Papa.

The days spent in the fields and barnyard was wonderful. The blooming trees and bushes were beautiful and their perfume wafted throughout the air. Good food and quiet were good for me; even my clothes become slightly tighter. I did not look like a ghetto girl any more.

Every morning I went to visit the animals in the barn. Our cows were hearty and robust. The thin man with pitchfork tried to teach me how to milk them. After many attempts I realized the principles of milking. I was glad to visit the barn because everyone smiled at me. They helped me to sit on a stool they built for me. I was given a big bucket. The thin man stood behind me and encouraged my efforts. I learned that one needed to wet ones hands in milk, hold the teats near the udder and gently press down. When milk came out, everyone applauded. I loved watching the rest of the animals. Small pigs were cute and shiny like sunrays. We had a tiny pond and ducks swam in it. Geese with their goslings always went together, the mother and all the little ones in a row. There was also a chicken coop and we had plenty of chickens. Poishieti collected the eggs from the henhouse early every morning. In short, our farm activities went on all day.

Every Sunday, Poishieti, wearing her uniform, disappeared towards the monastery. I was always afraid that she would not come back, but in the afternoon, she would always appear on the horizon. One Sunday, Poishieti told me she was on her way to the convent, but she would be there until evening. I took a walk in the sunny fields and did not notice the time pass. I loaded a basket with blue wildflowers for Poishieti and the people in the barn. Poishieti came back early, went to the house, but she did not see me. She rushed into the yard, chicken coop and barn. I was missing. She was petrified that someone had informed to the Germans that she had a Jewish girl

and they had taken me. She immediately organized everyone to search all the fields to find me. They called out my name “Stasia, Stasia,” as they went deep in the wheat fields, I heard them all calling my name and I ran to them. Poishieti hugged me while tears streamed down her face. She scolded me and said she feared someone had kidnapped me. Poishieti held my hand tightly all the way home. I looked at her and saw the pain I caused her. I handed her the flowers I had collected and that made her smile. Although I did not know what she was saying, I knew exactly what had happened and I wished I could have it to do over again. I hugged her and washed her face.

Responsibility for a child from the ghetto was a huge risk. I do not know if I were she, if I could take this responsibility. I think Poishieti was one of the thirty-six righteous.

Slowly I began to understand Lithuanian, but I thought it better not to talk until I was sure I could speak it well.

Stasia Talks

Now, after many days, the children of the village started to come play with me, especially the neighbors’ children. The neighbor’s house was far away but they came to visit from time to time. I was silent, but I listened to their spoken language and got used to it. The next problem occurred after I was with Poishieti two months. One morning I woke up and my legs were swollen and covered with small wounds. It turned out that lice found me very delicious. I scratched my legs until they bled. Poishieti bathed my wounds and brought in leaves from the giant shrub that grew in the yard. The leaves were shiny on one side, and rough and gray as wool on the other. She wrapped my legs in the leaves and put bandages over the leaves. I lay in bed and did not move. It took two days until my legs healed and we moved past that catastrophe. Poishieti was relieved it was over, but fate thought otherwise. One day, I got up and washed my hands and sat down for breakfast. Poishieti brought me a cup of milk and some bread. She looked at me, and the glass slipped from her hands.

During the night, my hair had a growth spurt! Suddenly, I had a head of blonde hair with jet-black roots showing! Poishieti was sure that God had cursed me. The poor nun did not know that before I came, my aunts decided to wash my hair with a bleach so that I did not look like a girl from the ghetto, a Jewish girl from the ghetto, with curls black as coal. My blonde hair created a girl named “Stasia” with blond curls. Poishieti did not hesitate, however, she took a razor to my head and all my blonde curls fell to the ground. Poishieti was very anxious now. She was worried everyone would know I was Jewish. Even before, when my hair was blonde, the villagers suspected it, but now, with black hair, everyone was convinced. They whispered, but nobody bothered me. I was so small that everyone felt sorry for me.

After all my misadventures, however, life moved along smoothly and I was happy. I learned

many new words and one day I decided to surprise Poishieti. After lunch, I thanked her in Lithuanian, and added that I wanted to go play in the yard. Poishieti rolled her eyes and her mouth opened slightly and she whispered, "Thank you, Jesus, I thought you were really dumb." Poishieti was stirred by the moment and danced a little jig with me. We sat back down and she held my hand and said in a calm voice, "Stasia, please minimize talking with the workers on the farm and with your friends, they need to get used to the fact that you're talking slowly." I told her that I understood. The course of my life was more pleasant and interesting, though. After three months of silence, I enjoyed every word uttered. I thought Papa and Mama would be proud of me. I learned Lithuanian! I asked Poishieti to send a letter my parents. "Sure, Stasia" she said, "Zosia is going to come here in a few months and then we will send the letter."

What I did not know was that the ghetto was no longer a ghetto. The Germans had decided to close the ghetto. Mama and Papa, along with all the other Jews, had gone to concentration camps. Later, Dad called it the time of the Jewish Destruction. My parents hid in the basement of one of the half-destroyed houses. The basement was full of Jews, broken and desperate, trying to breathe their last breath.

Before the end of evil, a Jewish girl had a baby in one of the basements. The mother held the child on her lap, but the child was crying and she could not quiet him. She put her hand over the baby's mouth when the Germans were over their heads, shouting and swearing there were Jews hiding in this building. In the end, they broke the door down for the hidden basement and dragged and beat those inside without mercy. The woman with the baby was dragged out and in the light of day, she noticed the boy was not breathing.

Mom and Dad came out of the basement into the light and mother started laughing. Dad took her by the shoulders and asked, "What happened Batya, why are you laughing so much?" Mom replied, "I laugh with joy that Tzilinka is not here. I do not know where she is but she 's not here. Wherever she is, it is a better place from this." The Germans separated my father from my mother. Dad and Mom were taken to Dachau concentration camp on the border of Poland and Germany.

Summer days were pleasant and beautiful. One day, Poishieti told me that since there was so much work to do on the farm, I shouldn't wander off and walk in the fields or barn. I stayed close to home, took a small basket and started picking a cherry tree's fruit. I decided to pick until I filled the basket with cherries for Poishieti. Suddenly, I heard terrible screams from the barn. The screams continued for a long time. I panicked but was frozen in place. I felt like the wife of Lot, turned into a pillar of salt. Abruptly, everything went dark, I felt like I was in the ghetto. After a while, everyone came out of the barn bathed in blood, I was so scared I became ill. It was the seasonal slaughter of the little pigs. After that I never went to the barn.

The days become longer and very hot but the evenings were cool and pleasant, and my life

was full of activity. I helped Poishieti at home and played with the neighbors' children. My hair grew into short, tight curls. Everyone got used to me and I talked Lithuanian freely and many times I expressed my opinion seriously and decisively. I remembered that around strangers, I still needed to be quiet.

One of the girls of the village was celebrating a birthday and since the party took place in the evening, Poishieti told me to give the dark coat with gray fur neck to the girl. "I do not want to give away the coat. I never want to give up my coat," I said, and ran away from her. I was so upset that I did not see the bucket standing by the door. I tripped, and my right arm went right into the bucket that was filled with lime. Poishieti took off his coat and tried to wash the coat sleeve but it was covered with lime. I cried so much I could not breathe. Poishieti could not calm me down. The whole time I was on the farm, I had never talked back to Poishieti. I had not said the word "no." Poishieti did not understand what was going on, she asked, "What happened?" After she hugged me and said I should not give up the coat, I relaxed. I took it off and put my hand on the collar and felt it. "What do you have in the collar?" Questioned Poishieti. I told her Mom had sewn the address of my grandparents into the collar and after the war I had to go to Israel and find them. Poishieti ripped open the collar, took the paper, put it in her purse, hugged me and said "don't worry, I'll keep the address until after the war." She gave me a glass of milk, washed my face and we went to sleep.

War came to the village

In the morning I asked permission to go to the golden wheat fields. The sun was shining and the world glowed in its warmth. Summer was a pleasant time of year and my life was calm and serene, but in the village and on the farm, everyone was whispering. News from the Capital was not encouraging. Fighting between the Germans and the Russians was shifting towards Kovno.

Among the villagers and farmhands, every face had sad eyes and no one smiled. The villagers quit working and congregated in small groups to try to guess what fate the future would bring. It was beginning to look like the faces in the ghetto. After two days, the German soldiers started to appear. We heard the crackle of gunfire and the bursting of bombs. The air was pregnant with the ether of helplessness. One morning, Poishieti said we had to pack and leave the village. All the residents packed their belongings in horse drawn wagons. After about three days, there was a long line of these horse drawn wagons, some pulling cows, and we left the village. A few of the older folks said that they would stay behind and mind the chickens, pigs and other animals. The convoy set off early in the morning and progress was very slow. There was a background of gunfire and bombs behind us.

At noon, we stopped and everyone got out of their carts and prepared a meal for their families. Poishieti had me stay in the covered wagon as she sat up front with the Gypsy barn worker. He

drove the cart and Poishieti led the convoy. When we stopped, Poishieti prepared a meal of bread, cheese and apple juice. After lunch, we rested for a few minutes and then moved on. As time went on, we seemed to be moving a little quicker and I could even hear some singing from some of the wagons. I noticed that the sounds of war had quieted.

In the next couple of days, we passed several villages, but they were all abandoned. A storm was brewing in the evening of the second day and we came upon another village. This one was not abandoned. Poishieti decided that the caravan should spend the night there. The villagers were pleasant hosts and put us and our cows and horses in empty barns to spend the night. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief, we could neither see explosions nor hear the sounds of war. All the villagers tried to make themselves comfortable, but the animals were top priority and everyone worked hard to feed the livestock and brush the horses. I was tired and fell asleep in the cart. I missed my bed, but exhaustion from the road and excitement of the adventure took their toll and I fell right asleep.

When I woke up in the morning, I could not figure out where I was. During the night, I dreamt that I was with my parents celebrating my birthday in a huge wagon barn. The confusion upon waking scared me and I did not see a familiar face, but soon Poishieti came over and calmed me down. There was very little to do other than feed and clean animals, so I joined the children outside playing. All the adults were talking about the war. They were all scared of the Germans from one side and the Russians from the other. They really wanted the Americans to come, but they knew that this was nowhere near the fighting Americans.

Three days went by and the village got news that the Germans had retreated and a decision was made to return to the village and the farm. We packed up all our belongings, said thanks to the hosts and the convoy set off. We moved very slowly because we were afraid that the Germans were still in the area. As the day slipped away, we continued along the road. Suddenly, the convoy came to a halt and some villagers ran back and told Poishieti that she should hide me in a basket in case the Russians met us. Panic wrapped me but Poishieti said reassuringly that she would come with me. We got off the wagon and went to the caravan leader. They sat me down with a coachman and Poishieti sat in the cart. The coachman smiled at me and asked if I wanted to hold the horses. I smiled and everyone relaxed. We continued along the way. About half an hour after we settled into a rhythm of wagon wheels and horse hooves. Suddenly, we heard a loud noise. After few minutes we saw them... Russian soldiers, red flags and many horsemen. They stopped the convoy, they asked who we are and we responded to them that we hid from the Germans and now we're going back to our village. The coachman said: "We are good people and hate the Germans and breathe a sigh of relief to see you." And added, "There is a Jewish girl who we rescued." One of the soldiers saw me, black hair, eyes Black, typical Jewish girl. He approached me, took me out of the cart and asked me in Yiddish what my name was. I said Tsila Neuerman, and added that I was in the Kovno ghetto. Tears fell from his eye. He hugged me and said in Yiddish, "Me too." They put me back in the cart, he spoke Russian with other soldiers and they let us go. We went back to our wagon and continued our way to the village.

Zosia and Her Husband Arrive

In the morning we came back to the village. We were exhausted from the road. Poishieti and the Gypsy unloaded the cart, put the horse in the stable and we went to sleep in soft beds. Good to be in our house. It seems we slept there all day; we got up in the evening and sat at the breakfast table. Suddenly, the door opened and Zosia stood in the doorway. Immediately, I knew her and ran to her and spoke Lithuanian and she was amazed with my speech and my jet-black hair. Her husband came with bags in his hands. Poishieti invited them to join us for dinner. We sat down and Zosia started telling us about how all the residents of Kovno were try to leave the city to escape the war, yet they were surrounded by shooting and bombing. Zosia decided to come to the village until things cooled down in Kovno. Zosia suddenly remembered something and she ran outside. She returned with a cute white puppy. She fed the dog and Poishieti, Zosia and her husband sat and talked about the calamity of war.

Zosia described in detail the events in Kovno but did not say a word about Mama and Papa. I asked her if I could give a letter to my parents. She said "Yes Tzilnka." It had been so long since I had heard the name, I had tears in my eyes. "Here, they call me Stasia" I corrected her. "I know," she replied. Zosia took me aside, patted my face, "Tzilnka, you talk so beautifully, and you've grown, and black hair, what happened?" "Zosia" I said, "My black hair grew out and Poishieti shaved my head and now they have emerged again. Did you see Mom?" I asked her. Zosia said Mom and Dad left Kovno, but are fine and will return in a little while. Zosia had no idea about my parents. She knew that the Jews were transferred from Kovno to all kinds Concentration camps, but wanted to reassure me.

Zosia prepared her husband for the fact that she decided to take me back to Kovno. He was a tall man with white hair and a sour face. He spoke very little and would not have notice me if I did not make myself heard. It was hard to know what he thought. Zosia, however, was nice and warm and I heard her thank Poishieti for my rescue many times. In the morning, I asked permission to go to the wheat field and the sunflower patch. Zosia joined me and we picked blue and yellow flowers. While we picked, I told Zosia about the village, the barn, the caravan and how I was in the first wagon and talked to the Russian soldiers that let us go back to the village. I kept chatting until we got back to Poishieti and we gave her the flowers. Zosia's husband was walking around the yard and spoke with some of the workers. Rumor was that the Russians had come into Kovno and the Germans retreated. Supposedly, all the refugees were able to return home.

Zosia and her husband stayed with us for two weeks. Farm work trudged along. Everyone was preoccupied with the political situation. Russian soldiers stopped in occasionally during those weeks and bought food and rested. The people in the village welcomed the Russians with open arms. We were happy that the Germans had left Lithuania.

Poishieti and Zosia sat at the table and asked me to join them. "Stasia it's time you get back to Kovno so that your parents can find you," said Poishieti. "Tsilinka," Zosia continued, "I am

sure that your mother and Chaim will come back to Kovno.” Zosia called father by his first name because she had worked for many years for grandpa and was very fond of Papa. I said to Zosia, “I want Poishieti to come to Kovno with us. I love her, she is like my grandmother.” Poishieti said she could not leave the farm because there was so much work. She was also expected regularly at the monastery. But she would come to visit me in Kovno. There were tears in my eyes. I knew I would never see her again.

I got up from the table and went to bed. I cried myself to sleep. Poishieti woke me up in the morning and said that I should pack. I was to join Zosia, her husband and the dog and return to Kovno. Zosia took a lot of food because she thought there’d be a lack of food in the city, and all my clothes were getting too small for me. Poishieti also gave her sister the paper I had in my fur collar. All my friends came to say goodbye, I was a hero because the Russians let the villagers back because of me. I said goodbye to the golden fields, the blue flowers, the farm animals and especially the people who were family to me and loved me. Early the next morning, we harnessed the horses to the wagon and the Gypsy was our driver. His job was to take us to the city and then return to the village. Poishieti cried, hugged me and kissed me. While we were leaving, she waved goodbye and went into the hut.

We set off. I left my home of many months and I was very sad. The road was full of military trucks with Russian soldiers, tanks and even cavalry horses. From time to time we turned off so the Russians would be able to pass. There were way too many carts with refugees attempting to return to their homes and traffic was slow. The Russian army moved more quickly to finish their mission... to eliminate the Germans. The war lasted so long that the Russians were tired and weary and they wanted to return home. We were about an hour in the cart and Zosia’s husband, who never noticed me until now, turned to me and asked if I wanted to hold the puppy. I shook my head yes and he handed me the puppy. I stroked the puppy and it kept me amused. The sun was shining. My thoughts drifted from the past to the future, perhaps Mom and Dad will come soon and my nightmare would be over. I turned to Zosia and asked her when Poishieti would come to visit. “Soon,” replied Zosia. I did not ask about my parents, I knew that if they were not in Kovno, someone else would come and get me.

The Gypsy said “Whoa,” and horse and wagon stopped. Zosia announced we would eat lunch in the woods. All along the road were pleasant and inviting groves, so we went down the road and we dined in the woods. The puppy was running around in the woods and I tried to catch colorful butterflies. The little puppy amused me. I suddenly remembered that in the ghetto, there were no butterflies, birds or flowers. At least I did not remember them. On the farm, there were crickets at night and birds at day. The orchestra was persistent and the background colors of a rainbow washed the day.

We re-boarded the wagon and continued on the way. Zosia was happy at the thought that in a few hours we would be at home, her husband smoked a pipe and he seemed satisfied. Then a terrible thing happened. The coachman stopped the cart and called for the puppy. I heard the puppy running hard to catch up with us. At that moment, a military car approached us. The driver did not see the puppy and ran over him. Zosia’s husband tried to revive the animal but his efforts were in vain. The Gypsy dug a small hole and buried his puppy in the ground. We all cried and

there was sadness in our hearts. Zosia's husband muttered a few words at the grave of the puppy. Feeling broken, we continued the way. I probably fell asleep and slept a few hours since I woke up in the dark and we stopped in a large city.

The Gypsy, Zosia and her husband unloaded the packages and put them in the hallway. Zosia led me to bed without a change of clothes. I could not sleep, I thought about Poishieti. Every night before I closed my eyes I said a prayer that evil would not enter the house, that everyone would be healthy and that God will keep our departures and our arrivals safe. I wondered what would become of this new home. I also thought about the little dog. I heard the adults talking; I fell asleep and dreamed of mother, father, aunts and grandfather.

Life in Zosia's house in Kovno

Zosia house in the Kovno was luxurious compared to the hut in the village. The building was red brick, with a tall roof and an impressive chimney. The yard was tiny compared to the endless golden fields in the Village. When my mother brought me to Zosia the first time from the ghetto, I did not notice the magnificent exterior. Inside the house I remembered only the broom closet where we were kept. Now, since Zosia's husband knew of my existence I was able to explore at a leisurely pace. There were a number of bedrooms and a bathroom and a spacious living room, furnished with heavy carved furniture. The dining room and kitchen were near the living room. The dining room contained a huge table and cabinet with glass doors and fine porcelain dinnerware. The atmosphere at home was calm and elegant. After a while, I got used to city life. Zosia was good to me. She gave me two dresses, very nice new shoes, and other clothes since the dresses I brought from the ghetto were all small on me. I loved my new appearance. Next door lived a girl my age. We became friends. Life, again, seemed orderly and calm. Zosia talked to me about my family and my parents. Before the war, she worked for Papa's family and helped raise the children because my grandmother had died. Zosia loved my father and uncle. They were tall, intellectual, kind and handsome. Dad ran a Harley-Davidson motorcycle store. My uncle was happy working in a government office.

Incidentally, after we came to Israel, the Board of Directors of Harley-Davidson tried to convince my father to return to work for them, but dad refused. Our little family was tired of wandering. Apart from the fact that Mom and Dad loved the land of Israel, they had lived in Lithuania their whole lives. The head of the family was my grandfather Yehuda Halevi, a tall and noble spirit. He served as a high school professor and was an expert in Latin and Greek. Aunt Luba, at age 11, kept house after the death of my grandmother. Since grandfather was a rabbi, he hired Zosia to help raise and educate six children. Aunt Zipporah studied medicine in

university. Aunt Sarah was educated at the medical school for nurses. Youngest daughter Hannah studied at Elementary school. Zosia felt so close to the family that she agreed to sacrifice her life to save me from the Nazi murderers. If not for the relationship between Zosia and Papa's family, I would not have been saved.

At Zosia's house, I tried to be disciplined and obedient, but with the way the world was, one day something happened. It saddened me and made me long for my family. Except for the war ending, my existence in Kovno was not comfortable. It was not a lack of any daily needs. About a month after we returned, Zosia announced that her nephews would come to visit. Her husband was excited and told in detail about his relatives. Zosia, on the other hand, was concerned how to feed them all. When they arrived, the family that appeared did not resemble Zosia's husband. The sister and mother were plump and round, her husband was short of stature with features that reminded me of a mouse, and the son, who was my age, had a mischievous look. They stayed with us for a few weeks and everything went well. One morning I woke up and found Zosia standing over me. She said in a whisper "Why did you not tell me that you broke the window? That was very bad." I



I looked at her in amazement; I did not understand what it was. I'd never seen her so angry. She dragged me to the kitchen window and the window was smashed. "I did not break the window," I told her. She listened and said her husband's nephew saw me break it with my ball. I tried to convince Zosia that it wasn't my fault but she yelled that I was a liar and liars should be punished. I could not believe my eyes. She poured the contents of a bag of peas on the floor and ordered me to kneel on them with bare knees and holding a broom over my head. I did not cry and did not say one single word. I remembered I was a girl from the ghetto and a ghetto girl did not cry or complain. After a while, it felt like many hours, Zosia took the broom from me and tried to put me on my feet. My knees were full of small pea holes. I could not stand on my feet by the end of the day. Without having to utter a word, she helped me get into my room and brought me a glass of milk but I could not drink. Anger and grief felt like stones blocking my throat. After that, I didn't approach the lying boy.

The guests left and a smile returned to Zosia's face. I thought in my heart that she had not been angry with me, but the guests. I tried to delete the whole chapter from my memory.

The winter season brought Christmas. Zosia explained the importance of the event, but noted

at the end of the sacred Christmas story that it was for Christians, and Jews like me had a holiday called Hanukkah a week later. Christmas and New Year was celebrated with great joy, the Nazi enemy was gone and the people were free. I was invited to celebrate with the rest of the family.

In the morning we all put on our best clothes and walked to church. The building was impressive, red brick with huge doors and towers soaring into the blue sky. High windows, sparkling and decorated, magnificent statues that looked like living people, painted ceilings. The beauty was amazing. Prayers, hymns and the children's choir singing made me happy. Visiting the chapel was a one-time experience. We got home and we had a dinner banquet. I turned to Zosia and said, "I want to go to church every Sunday because the place is great and there is beautiful singing." Zosia was silent for a while and replied, "Tzilnka, you can not join the Church because you are a Jew." I dragged her sleeve as she tried to get up, "then I'll be a Christian like you." And Zosia replied, "No, no! You'll have to wait until you're eighteen to make a decision like that, I promised your mother." The conversation was over. In my heart, I was hoping she'd forget and would continue to take me to church.

Winter arrived and the whole city wore white, the trees were heavy with snow. Roofs and yards sparkled with lights. The snow looked like puffy clouds wrapping the sky. At the beginning of the winter, the world seemed like a pure kingdom cleaning away the murky black of the war. Killing and murder faded, it was a new creation for a fleeting moment. Life in our house was calm, days passed slowly, and although I did not forget my parents and Poishieti, I was calm.

Looking to the Past

Zosia was nice, talking to me sometimes in Yiddish and told me funny stories from Grandpa Judah, competitions between uncle and dad, and holidays that the family celebrated together. The most interesting story was about my father. When he reached military age, he joined the Lithuanian army cavalry unit. Army life was not an easy one to choose for Jews. The soldiers practiced day and night with the horses in the stables, rode a big part of the day, and the rest of the time studied every detail of the animal so that the horse became a part of them. They were also expected to be sniper experts. I do not know the reason but Dad served six years. Zosia added that when he had come on vacation, she did her best to ease and soothe his stay at home. And she noted that this was the time dad started writing stories and poems.

Once, when I spoke with my father after many years, he confessed that without his experience in the Lithuanian army he would not have left Dachau alive. Army was hard but it made him stronger and allowed him to stand the difficulties of concentration camp.

The winter passed and spring flooded the earth with flowers and greenery. One day, Zosia and I were walking down the street and I asked her if she would take me to my home. Maybe mom

and dad were there. Zosia was silent and hurried to return home. We walked into the kitchen, Zosia took me on her lap, patting my face and whispered that there had been a ghetto and that Mom and Dad were deported to Germany. Then she added that she heard that there was an institution that linked family members separated during the war. The next day, we would go to sign up and maybe find someone in the family. Tears streamed from her eyes, she wiped my face and added, and “Tomorrow will be a good day.”

In the morning I got up early, put on a blue dress with a white collar, black shoes and a blue coat. I sat in the kitchen and waited impatiently for everyone to wake up. When Zosia came into the kitchen and saw me, she noted, “Tzilinka, you are dressed up! We will eat breakfast and go.” We left the house, and we took the bus to the city center. After a short drive we arrived at a grey building. We got off the bus and entered the building. First, Zosia asked where to sign up for people looking for relatives. A person guided us to a large room at the end of the corridor. The room had a huge booth. There were a number of tables and chairs. A clerk sat behind the bench. Zosia motioned me to sit on a chair, and she stood in line at the clerk. A man came into the office. A tall bearded, limping Russian in a worn uniform. When Zosia saw the soldier, she almost jumped from her skin. Her face reddened and trembling seized her. She rushed to me. “Tsila, do you remember this soldier?”

“No.” I replied.

“I think it is your Uncle Simcha.” Zosia was stunned. She remembered Simcha as a handsome man, tall and straight with burning eyes. It was a weak resemblance, though; the man was crushed and broken, lame and poor. What to do? The clerk finished her business and motioned to Zosia to come forward. Zosia turned around and announced loudly so that the soldier could hear her, “Sir, I have a Jewish girl, and I want to register her. Put Tsila Neuerman.” She screamed it out. The soldier jumped up and ran towards Zosia, look at her and whispered, “Zosia?” He held her and asked, “You have my Tsila?” Simcha also had a happy girl named Tsila, and a girl named Esther. “No, no, I have your brother’s daughter. Simcha, I do not know where your Tsila is.” Simcha began to cry, looked at me and hugged me, “Tzilinka, how are you? You live, you live.” He could not relax. Before the war, Uncle Simcha went on vacation to the Black Sea. He went alone. His family, his wife and two daughters remained in Kovno. He tried hard to return to Kovno, but the Russians did not allow anyone to cross the border, and he was stuck in Russia. Having no choice, he joined the Red Army, fought bravely in many battles, and now in searched for his family and found me.

We left the office excited but pained. He asked Zosia a thousand questions. She understood that his heart was broken, so she invited him to her house the next day, and promised to tell him all she knows about the events in the life of the Neuerman family. We parted from Simcha and went home.

By the way, when we got home I said to Zosia “I’m a little scared of that man. I do not remember him, and he looks kind of strange.”

Zosia assured me and promised that everything will be fine. The next day, Uncle Simcha came early in the morning. He was invited into the kitchen, and given a delicious meal, but he could not eat. Simcha immediately began ask questions. He looked like a man parched by the desert

but could not drink water. Now, he sopped up every word that Zosia uttered. Zosia and Simcha were in the kitchen all morning. She spoke and he listened. Tears streamed from his eyes. Zosia, apparently, had maintained contact with the family up until the ghetto. I did not listen to their conversation. He stayed until late afternoon. After that, he got up, kissed me and left. Much to my relief.

Uncle Simcha stopped by the house on a regular basis, talked to me and brought me gifts. His appearance also changed. He shaved and wore clean uniforms, but the sadness in his eyes did not expire. One morning I heard an argument between Simcha and Zosia, "Tzilinka must join a Jewish school and be with Jewish children."

Zosia, "I do not trust people. Orphanages do not treat children properly."

Simcha said excitedly "Chaim and Batya want their child to receive a Jewish education. "

Simcha promised to go to the orphanage to check whether the place treated me properly. Zosia promised that she would also and she wanted to see the place first. Several days later, their conversation was brief, and they decided that I live with Simcha. That is, if I'll sleep at his home and study in the orphanage.

Zosia sternly announced she gave Simcha 6 months. If I were not happy, I'd come back to live with her and go to public school.

Having no choice, Simcha gave consent. I was miserable. I did not want to leave my home; I did not want to go to an orphanage. I did not want to live with Simcha, even though I started to like him. Zosia explained the agreement with Simcha. If I'm not happy at the orphanage I will be back with Zosia. "But," I argued, " Six months is a long time. Maybe just a month?" I pleaded.

Do not worry I will visit you every week and see how it is working out. My fate was signed, a new calamity again. I was so afraid Mom and Dad would return and would not be able to find me. I decided in the back of my mind that it might be a good thing if my parents come back to me now! A week later, my suitcase packed and was on my way to my new apartment with Simcha.

The Orphanage

The apartment was part of a multi-story building. On the second floor, we stopped at a door with a brown paper nametag with the name of Simcha Neuman. We knocked on the door, Simcha opened it, and we went inside. The room was giant with huge windows, an old couch, a rickety table and one chair. There were yellow flowers in a glass of water, Uncle Simcha's attempt to beautify the place. Simcha led me to a medium sized cubicle with a bed and a wardrobe. He noted that this was to be my room. Everything was old and shabby - not like at home. Zosia surveyed the place and look suspicious. Simcha was quick to point that he needed to buy new furniture. Simcha turned to Zosia and me and said "Tsila, tomorrow, I'll take you to school. I

went there and talked with the Principal. It is a very nice place and they are excited to meet you. I said nothing. I went to my cubicle and lay on the bed. Zosia came after me, kissed me and said, "Tzilinka, do not worry, everything will be fine."

I fell asleep and dreamed of my parents. I got up early in the morning even though it was dark. At first I did not know where I was. But, after I got used to twilight, I remembered that today I'm going to school at the orphanage. I'd never been to class. When the war broke out, I was three. I spent two years in the ghetto, and a year in Poishieti's care.

I got dressed and sat on the edge of the bed. I waited quietly until Uncle Simcha woke up. Up until now, I lived with Zosia and Poishieti, never with people I did not know so well. My throat hurt like a raisin was stuck in it.

Uncle Simcha was glad when he woke up, came into my room with a big smile and said, "Tzilinka, you will like living with me. We will be a family. We will live together until Batya and Chaim come." He meant my parents.

After breakfast we rushed into the street to catch the bus. We drove for about fifteen minutes and stopped before a two-story, white building with brown doors and windows. We went inside. It was completely quiet in the building and there was not a soul in sight. I did not think I could be happy here. We turned left towards this modest office; a woman with white hair welcomed us with a smile. She ran the place. She asked my name,

And I replied, "Tsila Neuerman, and I am also call Stasia."

"How old are you?" She asked and I gave her my age.

The next question was whether I had ever been in a school, and if I'm illiterate. "No," I answered, "I was never in school, and I do not read nor write."

She said with a smile they would teach me to read and write here and learn Hebrew and Lithuanian. "I speak Lithuanian and a little Hebrew," I said, and she smiled again.

Just then the bell rang. The principal took me by the hand and we went to one of the classrooms. The children stood up and said, "Hello."

I whispered to Uncle Simcha that the children look nice, and surely I'll find a place with them.

The room had seven children: four girls and three boys. The children were thin and shrunken, with sad eyes. They did not smile. Ghetto children lost their smile and joy of life. Instead, we had become experienced at dealing with any situation, not to complain, because there was nobody to complain to. The class introduced themselves and greeted me kindly.

Uncle Simcha returned to school in the afternoon, and together we went to a restaurant nearby. I had never eaten at a restaurant. I was very impressed by the experience, good food and the waitress!

Then we went back to the apartment. Uncle Simcha seemed to have worked all morning. Inside, there were a number of changes, three green chairs and a new sofa. We sat on the comfortable sofa and Uncle started questioning me about my life since I left the ghetto. I told him in detail about Poishieti's, home, the stable, the golden fields and beautiful flowers. I was especially proud of having saved our entire village when we met the Russian army, and they let us go back to our village because I was Jewish girl from the ghetto.

Thus began a new chapter in my life. I spent all day at the orphanage and in the evenings with Uncle Simcha.

Ida and Simcha

Life is a puzzle, and each event brings a twist and a new turn sprouting from acts that we have no control over them. Simcha would have had a wife, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren if the Nazis hadn't killed a large part of the ghetto residents to reduce the area of the ghetto. All Jews who survived the reduction scheme had to find a new residence. Of course, that disaster brought chaos. Jews did not know who was homeless, who will open doors, give them a bed to lay their heads.

"Hello Batya, how are you? You do not look so good, what happened?" Said the friend. Mama told her we are desperate and homeless. The friend suggested that they immediately come to her house. Although the house was full of refugees because of the reduction in the ghetto, there was a bunk bed that two adults could sleep in. Mother thanked the woman, and hurried to tell my father about the miracle that happened to them.

The generous woman who actually saved my parents was the mother of Ida. So we met Ida and her family.

I got used to life in the orphanage and Simcha. Zosia would appear from time to time, talking to me about the school principal and my teacher. All of her visit made me happy. She always brought gifts like cookies and candies.

I asked her to take me home, but she patiently explained to me that I promised to make an effort to learn with the Jewish children. Until now, every time I got in a comfortable situation, something went wrong and my world turned upside down again.

I loved school and studied diligently. The teacher noticed that I did not see the board, so I stopped reading. The director of the Institute took me to the eye doctor and he stated that I have an infection in my eyes. Parasites in my eyes caused me immense pain and I cried all the time. I told the doctor that when I was in the ghetto, I had similar pain. I remembered that my mother took some of her jewelry, came out of the ghetto and brought butter, sugar, bread and fruit. The problems with my eyes dissipated. Simcha realized I lacked a good diet. When Zosia heard about the problems with my eyes, she announced that I was coming home. She was so angry she could not speak. Simcha reassured her and promised her that if after two weeks it did not improve, he himself would bring me to the house. From that point, Simcha managed to find nutritious food. He even came to the orphanage at lunch every day to check the situation.

Zosia came to the school every Monday and Thursday and Simcha treated me like a baby. With improved nutrition, there was evidence of improvement, I gained weight and looked good with red cheeks.

I was in the school for a few months, when a huge change was about to happen in my life. One

morning Simcha brought me to school, he promised to come and pick me up at four. The bell rang and I ran to class, the teacher began to teach about Israel and the Exodus.

Suddenly the door opened, and the principal walked in. All the students stood up. She turned to the teacher and told me to join her “Tzilinka,” she whispered, “someone comes to visit you,” and pointed toward the end of the corridor. I looked up and saw in the distance, a figure of a woman with gold hair, and all glamorous. I did not realize she wore quite miserable army shoes and a tattered and torn khaki bag containing all her possessions. I ran at her, but my legs felt heavy. What I saw couldn’t be real. For months I dreamt of this, imagined mommy and here she was. She hugged me and kissed me and all the misfortunate experiences went away, and hell became heaven.

The bell rang; the children came out of the classrooms. The principal said to the students that Tsila’s mother was back from a concentration camp. All the children were around me with sad, round eyes. Each one hoped that it would be their mother. The principal put us into a tiny space, brought us both cups of tea, and hoped we would feel comfortable here. Mother sat in front of me, did not say a word, just looked at me with tears in her eyes.

I tried to reassure her. “Mama, do not cry, now everything will be fine. We’ll go to find father and drive to Palestine.” I tried with all my might to calm my mother, but she was very tired. Suddenly the door burst open. Zosia stood in the doorway. Zosia and mother embraced. Mom kept murmuring thanks.

Each had many questions. “Zosia, what are you doing here?” Mom asked.

“I came to bring Tsila home. Tsila had a parasite and was sick and was not completely well. The people were good here, but I needed to come help. Thank God you’re back. I prayed every day for your welfare” Zosia finished.

After half an hour Simcha appeared. The excitement was overwhelming. Simcha took the sack from Mama and we started to leave for his house. Zosia said good-bye and told us to come by after my mother rested in a few days. It was a good day.

Finally, I have a mother.

Back at the apartment, my mother took my cubicle. Mom barely took off her clothes before she fell on the bed and fell asleep immediately. The next day we were so happy and I stayed in the apartment. My mother’s way was paved with obstacles. But no difficulty or obstacle stood in her way. After they burned the ghetto, all Lithuanian Jewry was transferred to extermination camps. Dad went to Dachau and Mother went to Stutthof on the border of Poland. Also, my aunts found themselves there.

Aunt Hannah was the youngest and died there. Mother suffered terribly in the camp, but since she had a mission, the enemy could not have her life.

She always came back and said, “I must live, I must return to Kovno, take Tsila and emigrate to Israel. The last days of her stay in the concentration camp mother contracted typhus. Her life was saved when Russian soldiers captured the camp and transferred her to a military hospital.

When my mother recovered slightly, she left the hospital and was on her way back to Kovno. After the war, her situation was difficult, and after many days on trains, she found herself on the way to Kovno.

Immediately, she went to the institute that compiled information on every refugee who returned to Kovno. This is the same office where we met Simcha.

Officials knew Simcha and me, and immediately and gave my mother instructions on how to get to the orphanage, and Mom found me.

Mom slept about 12 hours and when she woke up and saw me, her face glowed. She hugged me, patted me over and over and praised God. She was very thin. Her hair just started to grow back, and her eyes were sunken.

Uncle Simcha held back and watched us. But, after a few hours, he had to ask, “What happened to my girls Tsila and Esther and to my wife Sarah?” Mom told him. She cried. Tears choked her voice. A black cloud landed on the flat.

The Lithuanian government was now in the hands of the Russians. Murderer Stalin ruled with a strong hand. Every part of our lives was controlled. The food was only available with points. It was difficult to get clothes, and everywhere you went, you had to give bribes.

One day a package came to us from UNRRA with clothes. We were happy to get the clothes, but Mother said we needed more.

My mother tried to get a job, but the salary was bad, and we could barely subsist. Then, Mother decided she would sell liquor to the Gentiles. I remember the song Mama was singing while she prepared the bottles: “Shicker Az Are Drinkin, Moz R Will R Vis A Goy”

Mom would get up early in the morning and go to the farmers market where some of them even knew her from before the war. There, she bought barrels of brandy, brought them home, filled bottles and sold them to the Russian soldiers. After a while there were a number of regular clients who would buy it, and some even bought quantities. I had to learn to deal with the soldiers.

Within a year, there was enough money to buy my mother forged papers, and enough money to go. We needed false papers because it was forbidden to leave Kovno, even to go to a nearby town. Everything had to be left. Mom asked Simcha whether he wanted to join us, and she would pay his way, but he did not. He had a good job, and he loved Ida, and therefore, no.

Mom could not stand the way of life under communist rule, with all the laws and all the dangers, so we decided to leave. I remember the constant fear that was involved in living in Kovno.

Come election time, Stalin was the only candidate. Voters were not allowed to open their ballot, and, God forbid, you had lost the envelope with your ballot, the punishment was imprisonment or even worse.

Mother receiving her envelope the day before the election, she held the envelope in her hand for 19 hours, even afraid to go to sleep. The next day, she ran to vote, put the envelope in the polls and was relieved.

A week later all our friends gathered to celebrate our departure.

The next day we went to the train station with Simcha and Ida. Lovingly, I gave them hugs, kisses and adieus. We were on our way to find father, and then to Israel.

We did not know what calamities to anticipate. Mom’s plan was to go to Warsaw. Luckily, Mother spoke Polish fluently. From there, we planned move to Germany. Mother also spoke

German. There we would search for my father. Dad was at Dachau. After the war, all the Jews who knew of other people who survived took on the responsibility of remembering who is alive and who died.

First, contact institutions established in every major city. Register and give a list of survivors you knew. In such offices, people wrote their names on the walls, and the names of their friends. Also, where the person was after the war. So, after many hardships, we found father on one of these walls.

Mother spent a lot of money buying papers saying we were Polish and returning home to Warsaw. We got on a train and started on our way. We drove for a while and suddenly, the train stopped; our hearts sank when police entered the train car. Lithuanians had to produce IDs, and were asked many questions. As I said, Mom looked like a Pole, and spoke the language, and the police left us alone and we continued on our way.

I do not know how long we went, because I fell asleep. When I woke up again Polish soldiers stood in the middle of the car and demanded security papers. Mom gave them paperwork and spoke Polish, but when they saw me, with black hair and I spoke no Polish, they took us off the train, and together with a number of people were placed in prison.

I was so scared. I was convinced that this was our end. But I looked at my mother and I relaxed. My mother was completely calm! I knew we would be saved from this terrible situation, too. We were put in a huge room with narrow windows close to the ceiling, so that we can see the light of day but nothing else. The walls were gray stone, and the place seemed like a grave. I noticed that the moment we entered, mother threw her ring high into the window, and no one saw it.

They checked us in, took all the money from the people removed from the train. By the way, my mom sewed her money into her coat so that no one could find it. They told us to sit on the wooden bench that was in the room and left us alone. In the evening a soldier came in, probably our guard. He said that in the morning they would take us back to Kovno. Everyone was sad, but saw that they had no choice.

Mom went to the soldier and spoke to him at length. Mom removed her ring from the window and gave it to him, and the soldier told everyone that they can't leave the prison but turned his back and everyone ran out quickly. Of course, all packages and belongings remained in prison. Everyone left with nothing, everybody followed mother and ran like beasts pursued them.

Mom asked someone where the train station was and we walked towards it. We walked for about an hour since we did not have luggage or property, only money in mother's coat margins. Finally, we came upon the train station. In the morning, Mother bought tickets and we were on our way to Germany.

The meeting with my aunts and my disease

We had papers saying that we were Germans returning to Munich. Someone had told my mother that my aunts are there, perhaps even my father.

We rode for hours. Since we did not have any luggage, everyone left us alone. Surely there was nothing to rob from these two poor people.

Tension met the Wandering Jew. What did we do for the community in which we lived for generations? We learned, invented, even gave them their God, Jesus. Then they abused us and drove us out.

All nations, even those who murdered us, did not lift a finger to help us. Only a few individuals like Zosia and some righteous nations stood beside us.

Many people we met were looking for something or someone, each questioning, each wondering. We ran helplessly from place to place.

My mother tried to protect me from the sorrow. Mom could save me from the Germans, but not the pain. I had seen the Jews. We arrived in Germany and went to the Munich Jewish office. We found information about our aunts, except Aunt Hannah who died at the age of 31. They were all here. We met them, and of course they were glad to see us.

I was a symbol of resurrection. Suddenly everything was possible. They did not know where Dad was, but one said there was a rumor that Daddy went to Italy.

In Munich, mother found a room and decided to stay there until we knew where Dad was. We were there two weeks. We rested, we saw my aunts occasionally, and my mother told them about the fire of joy and life within Dad.

Mom investigated where dad might be. She spoke with hundreds of people. They did not know the location, but told us that he survived and left Dachau after the Germans abandoned the camp. He ran away with a number of Jews.

Mother planned well how to reach Italy. Here, too, there were many people, who, for money, helped Jews who wanted to get to various countries. Her plan was to get to Austria. Jewish refugees were there to decide where they desired to emigrate. Most people want to go to Israel. Some of them wanted to go to America. There were also those who traveled from place to place, like us, seeking family.

Mom acquired documents and transportation to Austria, and again we were packed and ready to start wandering. Mom always said "A person thinks and plans and then God laughs." I was sick with chicken pox. Although this disease is not so dangerous, I was very weak and fragile and it took about two months until I got better.

We said goodbye to our aunts and again were on our way.

By the way, various things happened to our aunts.

- Aunt Sarah married Eliezer, a Lithuanian Jew who lost his family in the Holocaust, and was an engineer by profession. They wanted to immigrate to the U.S.*
- Aunt Zipporah, who was married to Dor Stotzko, was dealing with matters of community. They wanted to make a future in Israel*
- At the same time, one aunt stayed in Germany.*

So off we went. We went to the train station, and to our surprise the great journey passed uneventfully. We arrived safely in Austria at a Jewish camp. Mom gave me a place to sleep, and there was a kitchen and the general public provided food for the camp.

Austria and Italy

After we were settled, mother began her research again to find Father. Our life was peaceful. The camp had many emissaries from Israel visiting, and Mom talked with everyone. Several of the emissaries knew our family because they were merchants in Israel.

One day Mom told me that there was a man who had asked for her hand. She was young and healthy and was very nice. Mom laughed and thanked him for the offer, but rejected the proposal and explained her husband was in Italy, and we were on the way there.

We were in Austria for a few months. The economic situation was worse after the war. The houses were run down and there was garbage in the streets. We strolled a lot and we ate chestnuts. We always talked about Dad, Grandpa and the life waiting for us in Eretz Yisrael.

Autumn was coming, and my mother was afraid that we could not cross the Alps. Again Mother prepared to leave. There were people helping who had a defined purpose. Their job was to bring to Israel all the saved children. Mother was very afraid that we would be separated and lost. She had a plan, step by step. First, find a person to arrange false identity papers to move from one country to another. Of course, there was always a price. The black market could make any arrangements we needed. Human rights activists and financiers could achieve wonders. Arrangements were made with the right people. The weather was still fine, but the Alps were covered with snow all the time.

Mother got the papers and other things our guide told her to bring.

Israeli emissaries were interested in only two subjects: take the youth to Palestine and to prepare ships. They helped the Holocaust survivors get out from Italy. But we were not there yet, so Mom had to take care of every detail.

We arrived in the evening in the Austrian town that was the launching point towards Italy. We met a number of Jews who were willing to risk their lives to cross the Alps on foot, to take a ship to Israel.

It was clear that the person who guided us could do with us as he pleased. Luckily, the

Austrian was a decent fellow and did everything he had promised. When we got to the meeting, however, and the guide saw me, he said to Mother that we could not get through the Alps. I was too young and looked sickly. Mother was at a loss. Our guide started to run around all over the place and talked with many people. In the end, he returned and told Mother that he was very glad and had found a solution. There was a group of six nuns who had a car. They agreed to take me with them and wait for Mother on the Italian side since crossing on foot takes longer. Again, my mother stood the test of bravery. After much deliberation and agony, she agreed to give me to the nuns. They all smiled at me and encouraged me. During this time I realized that some German sounds like Yiddish. They had to speak slowly so I understood them.

Mom kissed me, hugged me and asked the nuns to take our bags as well so that the walking would not be so difficult. Mom sat me down at the edge of the back seat of the car, and a nun hugged my shoulders. The driver started to move. Mother ran after the car. Finally, I could not see her again. I cried quietly. I was without a mother and without a Father abandoned alone in the world. Suddenly I remembered Poishieti, and I relaxed. After all, these were nuns, and even if Mom will not find me I'll be fine. Poishieti was a nun and she loved and cared for me. I stopped crying. I closed my eyes and dreamed of wheat fields and blue flowers and sun. The sun was shining and warm, not like the ghetto. I woke up when the car stopped at the border, and Italian soldiers checked the papers of the nuns and the driver. The nuns told the guards that I was a student of theirs and they allowed us to enter Italy. We drove a short distance and stopped in a small town on the Italian side of the Alps. Some of the nuns were napping and I was awake. I saw dawn rising, the sun illuminated the snow and it sparkled like diamonds. I looked around, there was dead silence, and I thought I saw my mother. Two hours later, the sisters woke up, opened their baskets, prayed and began to eat. They gave me bread and butter and coffee from a thermos. I could not eat because a lump was stuck in my throat and tears streamed from my eyes. The nuns smiled, talked to me and encouraged me, but I wanted my mother. One nun took me out of the car, and we went together for a walk. The area was made up of small homes with white walls. Light colored curtains could be seen in the windows.

The driver got out of the car and rubbed his hands to keep warm. Suddenly, from a distance, we saw a group of people. Everyone pointed towards the people approaching and said, "Tsila, your mother is coming!"

Mom was far away, but her golden hair shone like a golden crown. It was a joyous reunion, but after hugs and kisses, everyone smiled and waved their hands goodbye. The guide took us by car to Milan, which we reached by evening. Italy was not like the rest of Europe. Milan was a city lit in rainbow colors. Residents of the city were loud, happy and cheerful. There was an abundance of happiness and joy and kindness. The light blinded us.

Our guide took us to the building that housed the offices of various Jewish organizations helping veterans of the Holocaust reach Palestine. After registering at the office, Mom tried to get information about my father. Daddy was registered, but no one knew where he was. We stood near the wall with the signatures of thousands of Jews trying to find the name Neuerman,

Chaim Neuerman. Actually we gave up because we could not find his name. A Jewish woman suddenly approached and asked mother who she was looking for. Mom turned and replied, "Chaim Neuerman."

A man said, "I know where he is. He lives in the Casa Blanca hotel." Mom almost knocked the man down. "Please take us to him!" but the man refused. He lived in the same group as father, but had an argument with one of the leaders and left annoyed and remained adamant that he would not go back. Mother offered him money, and begged him, but he insisted and refused to help us. He offered to take us to the bus and told the driver where to drop us. Having no choice, we walked in despair to the bus station. The man took us to the bus and told the driver the address and left. We did not know the way without knowing Italian and hoped somehow by the grace of God we would reach our goal.

We drove about half an hour. Mom went to the driver when he stopped once, and he gestured that he would signal us when we arrived. The bus stopped, we observed the driver signaling us and told us to go right. The sun was setting and twilight darkness covered the evening sky. We walked without speaking. We were tired thirsty and hungry. Even mommy, my heroine, began to despair, but to me, she said that we would soon be with father.

We came to a large house with high fence and stood before a huge wooden door. We knocked on the door and no one answered.

But soon after a voice said something in Italian, and Mother said out loud "I am Batya Neuerman, Chaim's wife and his daughter, Tsila Neuerman." The voice replied in Yiddish that he would come immediately. A cry was heard, "Chaim come out, you have visitors." The time seemed like hours. The door opened and Dad stood in the doorway. He was tall, handsome and, in my eyes, looked like an angel from heaven.

Dad was shocked. He did not expect to see us alive. He did not know of our existence and had certainly not expected that we would show up in the front doorway of Casa Blanca. Mother and I were surprised, but we knew he survived and lived in Italy. That evening we found father and there was light! The darkness that was located in my heart melted away and was replaced with my love of Mom and Dad. I finally put behind the fading light and shadow of the ghetto.

Life in Casa Blanca, Milan, Italy

Shortly after Dad recovered, he hugged and kissed us. At least a thousand times mother said that God had made a miracle and we had reached him. Dad took a few packages that he had there in his room. We stood in the middle of the room and all of his friends came out to meet us. They were members of Kibbutz Betar, who planned to immigrate together and to establish a cooperative. All the people shook hands with father and mother. We ate food, and one friend brought an accordion and sang songs in Hebrew. There was great joy. Mom and I were very tired, so we said goodnight and thanked everyone and went to father's residence. We fell asleep after five minutes but Dad sat and watched us, praying silently to bless our lives.

Father

In my mind, Italy symbolizes light and splendor kindness and love. Mommy and Daddy, love, peace and life. Filled with art, poetry, adventure, new discoveries and normality, Mom changed. Her face relaxed and she had a constant smile on her face. Her nature was refined and the vision of visiting family in Eretz Yisrael brought her comfort. Follow all the tribulation and anguish she suffered, she found father and me and her world was complete.

As for Father, the wrinkles his face disappeared and a mysterious smile was on his face all the time. When focused on my mother, and me the fear in his eyes disappeared. The situation was like a dream, like the stories he wrote after his departure from concentration camp. We went through a period that had penetrated our hearts to the reality we lived in and were together.

My father was very handsome. He was tall, straight and had a generous smile on his face. Dad read books, studied and studied more. He spoke many languages and was a divine poet and writer of mind and spirit.

Dad came out of the Dachau concentration camp to Italy because he was told that many women with their children reached Italy from Lithuania. He left Germany after liberation and went to Italy with a group of men. Most thought that their wives and children might have arrived in Italy. Eventually, Dad was disappointed that he had not found us. He left Italy in hopes that Mother would come to him. Dad knew Mom would get me, so he did not try to reach me. He settled in Casa Blanca and lived on the planned route. My parents decided to stay in Italy until an opportunity arose to immigrate to Israel. Daily life was peaceful and pleasant. Kibbutz members loved father and could not believe all the hardships we went through so far. Everyone there was Jewish. There was much talk about politics. Each person had a different opinion of the situation, but they were all Betar members. Except me. I did not agree with the ideology of the right. After all I was 10, I heard all the heated arguments between friends. Dad tried to give me a lot of attention, and the city of Milan was most appropriate for my education. Art, history and Judaism. Dad and I visited each art institution and each church around the city.

I was so impressed by what I saw and learned. When I got older, I decided to supplement my degree in education with a degree in history of art and specialized in the Renaissance period.

One time, when we were in a museum, I asked to know why we do not remain living in Milan, instead of moving to Palestine. I argued, “Dad, this is a place of light and beauty. Let’s build our lives here. “

Mosaic of history

Dad saw my announcement as a chance to address my knowledge of Zionism and our family history. We went to the bustling streets of Milan, and Dad waxed poetic words of love between the people and the land of Israel. That day we walked for hours. When we got home, mom had been concerned for us.

Father and grandfather were together at Dachau. Existence was difficult. Lack of food, cold weather and grandfather's failing health made it difficult on both of their lives. Dad carried grandfather on his back to work every day because his legs collapsed all the time. In German law it was if you cannot work, the verdict is death. Therefore, both tried to hold on that salvation might come soon.

Days passed and grandfather told my father that he could not continue, "Chaim, it's time to depart," he whispered, "My soul desires to return to the Creator. Do not be sad. God gave me life and many blessings and I know you have more to come. We have a strong and genuine people, and honesty and justice will be our lot. You live it. And you will have children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren, men of honor and good will share in life" and that was it. Grandpa faded from this world. Judging by the nature of Father and the stories he told, Grandpa was educated, he was principal of a Hebrew high school and spoke Latin, Greek, Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Yiddish and Hebrew.

Yehuda Halevi had been the family name before it was changed to Neuerman when they came from Spain.

The family made a living from printing and bookbinding. I have a long list of books that were destroyed by the Germans.

There was also speculation that Yehuda Halevi, a poet from a most important period in our history, was our ancestor. I do not mean to delude myself, but I see my grandfather and father were talented with the pen.

Least of all me, but we all felt the need to express our souls.

Grandfather married a pretty woman, Cvia Ettinger, wise and brave, and together they built a family. Two sons, Simcha and Reuben and four daughters: Luba, Zipporah, Hannah and Sarah.

Jewish life at the beginning of the century was not easy, and some were deported from Lithuania to a small town named Zidik. Probably the whole town was Jewish because of the name Zidik, "Zeid" was the nickname of Lithuanian Jews.

Dad wrote a touching story about the place he was born. Much love and affection, but when he returned there, he said it had mostly disappeared and now the place was poor and paltry. Anyway, my grandfather was deported from Zidik to the Ukraine. Ukrainian life was hell on earth. Barely able to survive, it was a land of hardship.

Finally they made their return to Lithuania, but my grandmother died. She could not stand the horrible life. In Lithuania, grandfather and his children settled in Kovno. Life improved. Grandpa got a job in education. The children continued their education and girls were allowed to go to university. The family hired a housekeeper and nanny named Zosia, the woman who saved me. She and Aunt Luba ran the family life and existence finally went on smoothly.

Every morning, the sun woke me and I waited eagerly for the new day. I knew that Dad would take me to Milan by bus, and tour the magnificent streets. Dad would tell me tales and stories of his life and family, the Land of Israel and the history of our people, and sources of the Zionist movement, which advocated the return of Jewish home in Eretz Yisrael. Dad told about his meeting with Jabotinsky. That changed his political thought of being an internationalist Zionist Betar. Dad could not forgive himself for years.

Songs he had written, in which he expressed an opinion that all are equal and all have equal rights. With the arrival of Shoah, we found that we do not have rights.

Dad chose to tell the story of Grandpa Leo. Every family has one special person. Over time, he becomes a sort of hero and has properties that distinguish it from other family members. In our house, it was the grandfather Lion Heart.

Lion Heart (Lev) was a Russian Jew, proud, with a big heart and endless love for Palestine and the people of Israel. He spent his youth growing up in Kiev, the family name was Karabelnicov, and probably members of previous generations were sea captains. My grandfather and his family were seamen. My great-grandfather had a music store. There were three brothers and two sisters. According to family stories, one was a beauty queen in her time. Grandfather joined the Russian Army before World War I, and since he was a great trader, rose to be the supplier of the Russian Army in the Baltic countries. Grandpa met Grandma Etta Rabinowitz in Kovno. Her father was a great scholar who sat all day at the synagogue, and his wife, Pesia, supported the family by running a small haberdashery. They had two daughters and one lived in the United States.

Etta was the great-granddaughter of the Vilna Gaon, and of course took pride in that, always mentioning that to family members. Etta was a very brave girl, and rare in nature. Always stalwart no matter what befell her. After my grandfather knew he had her heart and ask her hand, she refused. She told grandpa that she wanted to visit his family in Kiev and then decide. Grandmother Etta was known for her perseverance. When she was 31 she went to work at the factory in Siberia to make money and help the family with her dowry. According to the stories, she was very beautiful in her youth and the son of a factory owner fell in love with her and she with him, but all plans changed when she discovered that the climate of Siberia was not suitable for her. Her nose dripped blood all the time and the son did not want to leave his father's factory. Grandma left him in pining for her, but never forgot him

and always spoke of him fondly. But only to the women of the family, grandpa never knew.

Grandma made her way to Kiev to find the family Karabelnicov. She knew the address of the music store. The day when she arrived by train, she went to see the shop. She stood in the doorway but did not enter, just looked inside. To her surprise, she saw a tall man in the shop, a shapely face like a Greek statue with trimmed white beard and blue eyes like the sea. Etta stood with mouth open, not moving. She just stood in the doorway like Lot's wife. The man turned to her and asked if he could serve her. She recovered and went in and introduced herself. She gave him greetings from his son, and told that purpose of the visit was that they want to marry but she wanted to know the family. Mr. Karabeknikov met her with open hands, hugged her and invited her to his home. All the family members were happy to meet her, and by Russian custom had a great party. Etta was favorably impressed. She went back to Kovno contented. Lev and Etta married. Lev knew Etta and his heart told him she was brave and always would be a helpmate. They had three children: Ben Avraham, Batya and Ben Joshua. Grandpa worked hard and had a good life, guaranteeing to them a good future, but the First World War broke out, and the army drafted Grandpa. Great sadness broke his heart when he left his family. Etta was realistic and knew she could not support and raise and educate their three children. She asked her mother whether she and her children could come and live in her house. Pesia agreed wholeheartedly and they raise the children together.

After the war, the Lion Heart returned to Kovno and to his surprise his wife and children had gone to live with Pesia and Rabbi Rabinowitz. He rushed to the Rabbi's house, bought flowers and was happy that he could surprise Etta. The Rabbi's house was a small house with a garden and haberdashery in front. He was very excited, opened the door, came inside and announced that he returned from the war. Etta, Pesia, and the Rabbi were surprised and delighted to see him. Etta was sad and Lev asked her why. She brought the children, Abraham and Batya. They were cute. Lev hugged and kissed and just danced with them. Suddenly, he stopped and looked at Etta with a question in his eyes. She whispered the young boy died from a serious illness. He wiped his tears, hugged Etta and went and gave the children Abraham and Batya presents. They were happy to see their Daddy. Lev said that since the Russians won, and Lithuania is a country run by the Russians, his job is still to provide the Russian army, which is a very good job.

Grandpa went to work in the morning, and then took Etta to see her new home. Lion Heart did not see problems, just solutions waiting to happen. He was full of energy and determination, and within half a year bought a large building with shops and apartments on three floors.

Lev could not rest until he got everything he wanted. Fritz was a Lithuanian who died and the children spent away all their inheritance, and Grandpa bought all the property of the family. After Grandpa left his position in the army, and continued in

trade, he became a wealthy and respected man in the community. Etta participated in all decisions ran two of the shops, and had three sons: Chaim, Aaron and Isaac. Life was peaceful and frum. Four maids took care of the magnificent home. Saba was the first one in the city to own a radio. When the children were older, they married. Abraham met a very nice woman named Sarah, and Batya, my mother, married Chaim Neuman.

Homelife was beautiful for the couple and they loved their life together. Lion Heart and Etta prospered in all they did.

One day in 1936 the Lion Heart went down the street and stopped in front of his home on the street. Suddenly, a man pushed Lev to the sidewalk. Lev looked at the man and scolded him, "How dare you push me to the sidewalk?" the Gentile turned and shouted, "Mr. Karabelnikov, remember, your home may be yours but the land and the street are mine." Lev's blood rushed to his head, and he hit the fellow and went home.

Please note that the Jews lived in Lithuania since the days of King Solomon. Acceptable at the time, soldiers from the kingdom protect the entire population in this particular county in Lithuania.

After that Grandpa was not the same person. Has completely changed. He did not smile, did not speak, did not even go to his business. Abraham ran the trading company for Grandpa and wondered what was happening. My father came to live with grandfather and sat with him for hours to find out what the reason was that melancholy had descended on Lev.

Lev, in the end, confessed to my father and told him what had happened, adding that he could no longer live in Lithuania. Chaim and Abraham tried to convince him that it was just a simple Gentile, who probably was drunk, but Lev refused to be convinced. In the end they decided that there are only two places you can emigrate to: Israel or the United States. Grandpa said he did not take into account travel to the U.S., but will investigate what conditions are like in the Land of Israel, and if it is possible to live there.

Grandpa Lev went the next day and asked the consulate for a passport. After a while when his passport was bought, Etta also decided it would be better to join Grandpa, even though there were many obstacles. By law, Lithuanians were not allowed to take money or property from Lithuania. Only a small amount was allowed for each family member. It was a big obstacle, because my grandfather was a man of property and money, but, by law, he could not sell the property and take the money.

Etta entered into this with her eyes open, knowing it would be difficult to manage with little money in their possession. On the other hand you could not calm grandfather. He prophesied and said Gentiles would kill the Jews, and he wanted to take the little children and leave.

Early 1936 Grandma and Grandpa and Isaac came to Palestine. Yosef remained in Lithuania to finish the school year. Aaron stayed in Italy to attend a school for seamen. He wanted to be a captain, according to the tradition of the ancient Krabelnikovs.

It was getting late and Dad said we had to go home. He promised to continue the story another day.

Our lives in Italy were relaxed. We lived in Casa Blanca, and waited for our turn to immigrate to Israel. Mother started to join our tours of Milan. This time Dad wanted to show us the whole city. The place was full of small shops and tables full of diverse merchandise, especially all kinds of foods: fruits, vegetables and all kinds of insects and worms, which were sold live. I cannot forget that market to this day. Dad explained that Italians are fed from these items, although not to our taste. But it was a market. There were shops for clothes, cosmetics and ornaments of all kinds.

We felt good because we knew that in the future we would live normal lives. We'd have a house and go to the market to shop. But that day had not yet arrived.

One day, we left the house to visit the most magnificent church in Milan. Mother joined us and we were all in good spirits. We reached the square in front of the church and father took us to a small bakery for cakes and tea, and it was good. We enjoyed the visit very much and paid attention to Father who told us all the historical facts and described the artistic statues and stained glass windows with Bible stories. He continued to tell us the history of the artists who participated in the construction of the grand building. To this day, my life in Milan is decorated with pleasant memories... except for what happened that day. On our way back, we got on the bus to return to where we lived. The bus was full of passengers. There was no place to sit, and we were all crowded. Father held the majority of our money in his pocket. He feared that the money would be stolen, so he was holding his hand on his pocket. The thief, however, was smarter. At the end of the bus ride, Dad discovered that most of our money was stolen. He felt terrible. It was Mother's money earned from the sale of gin in Kovno. Sadness and guilty feelings made Father sick, but since we moved through the torments of hell and survived, mom and dad decided not to think about it. It only changed our plans and made us decide to move up the trip to Israel. The Jewish Agency took care of the details. They moved us to the city of La Spezia. From there, we were to sail to Palestine where refugees were unwanted and criminals. If we knew that English law considered us this way, surely we would not have gone. Anyway, we did not know what the future would bring.

We arrived to La Spezia and it was a beautiful dream. Emissaries from Eretz Yisrael rented a mansion. The palace was decorated with porcelain and sculptures, stained glass windows and floor marble. The yard was a colorful flower garden and a tiny church was on the premises. The architecture was stunningly beautiful. The streets were planted with citrus trees. We thought we were in an orchard, and home. There was a nice citrus smell that hung in the air. We received a nice room. Even though it was small, a window overlooked the church and a small yard. We

loved this city. There was hardly a trace of destruction and memory of the war faded. We were finally together.

Autumn was colorful and fragrant. Early in winter, to our surprise, we had an unexpected guest one morning. Uncle Aaron was on the doorstep of our house. Uncle Aaron, brother of mother, the child that was left in Italy to learn seamanship. He had finished his studies in Italy and traveled to Palestine. His ship docked in the port of Haifa. One of the American sailors offered Aaron to come to the United States. Later, he presented his diplomas from Italy and the captain allowed him to join the crew, and Aaron became an officer in the U.S. Navy. He participated in many battles against the Germans.

Visiting many countries and speaking about 39 languages, he was a modern adventurer like in the stories of Jules Verne.

Grandma Etta was in touch with him. He wrote to La Spezia and found out that we were going to immigrate to Israel. Because of this, he took his earliest opportunity to reach Italy to visit us.

He painted a bleak picture of the life of refugees in Palestine. We would not have a home or any property. No one wanted us there and there was standing room only on the ships. There was also a great chance that the British would turn us back.

Despite all this, we celebrated every moment we spent together. We walked the streets of La Spezia. We ate delicious Italian food, and we were happy we were together and alive.

Uncle Aaron told us about life in the country. The business of his parents, and gave us the exact address of the family. After about a week, Aaron returned to his position on the ship and we were sad to see him go. We began planning our trip to Israel.

We received information from the emissaries who took care of our plans, that we were going to sail in a few months. There were many Jews who were waiting to sail. People ate, drank and talked politics. People didn't talk about the past only to future and the English conquest that dominated the country. In the middle of the discussions, the men would go to pray that we would get safely to the port of Haifa and Palestine.

A few months passed and we tried with all our might to be merry and in good cheer and every day we exhausted the beauty of the city around us. We were calm and peaceful, however. I had not been sick a day in Italy and my parents had moments when their souls and hearts and physiques were stronger. We knew about the dangers of this trip. But Mom and Dad were tired of the hardships in concentration camps.

I heard Mom and Dad talking, "Batya, what will we do, take a boat and risk getting caught by the British and sent to Cyprus, or stay here for a little longer?" Mom replied, "As long as we were in the war, we took our destiny in our hands. Let's make the move and maybe eventually we can live a normal life. Let's ask the child, its her life and desires, too."

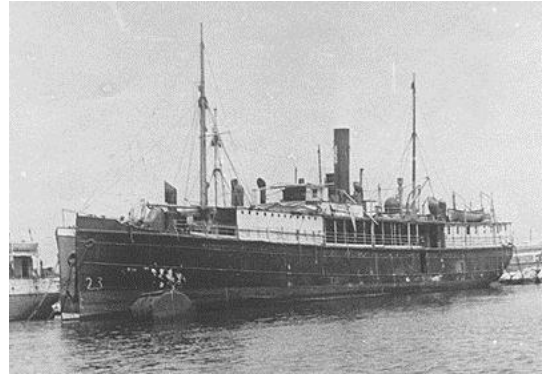
Dad asked me to join the conversation. I heard all sides and told them, "I want to stay here, however, we are not Italians, and we are Jews. Let's go to Palestine, where I can go to school and learn Hebrew and have friends." So far I spoke Yiddish and Lithuanian. I surprised my parents and they said, "Tzilinka, we will go to Palestine. You'll go to school and you will have friends". I was happy in my heart. Father and mother told me that nothing bad would happen to us. I did not imagine the hardships that still await us.

The day before the cruise we walked the streets of La Spezia and it was pleasant. We visited every place we loved. We said goodbye and thank you to the city full of light. We packed our few belongings. I tried to pretend that I was brave and calm, but deep inside a storm of concern and fear rose.

We parted with a smile from those who we stayed with in La Spezia and had to sail on another ship. We got on a bus and drove toward the uncertain future. La Spezia streets quickly moved past us and before long we came to the port. We went out and found before us a medium-sized ship, with peeling paint, worn here and there.

We were a little shaky. It was late March. The ship's name was the "homeland." Dad smiled and said not to worry, Israel is not that far away, and God will protect us.

I looked at the boat and saw a cloud floating in the sky above her. The cloud and the darkness of the ghetto were here. Below deck were niches. Every niche had a blanket. This was my bed. I do not know how many niches there were. I imagined thousands of people, each in a niche. I started crying, and I said that I did not like the niches, they reminded me of crypts. My parents tried to get us room on the deck to sleep there. Because of my past experience, the crew agreed. We took our blankets and stuff and we got on board. During our voyage, sun shone on the deck, and at night, there were endless winking stars from the sky for me. I told my parents that I enjoyed it very much and I was in an excellent mood.



At night, many people joined us, and slept on the deck. Even during the day, everyone tried to be topside. It was good that everyone talked, talked and worried less about our future. We were on the ship about four days. As we approached the shores of Palestine, the captain asked the people not to be on the deck so that the English aircraft, looking for immigrant ships, would not spot them. Therefore, for the last few days we slept on the deck at night but during the day, we spent inside the ship. It was very crowded and people became sick from the heat and lack of sanitation. It was so crowded that people vomited and fainted. Despair began to permeate the hearts of the illegal immigrants. Now, we were ready for anything, especially torture. On the last night, March 13, we finally got to the coast of Israel. Glittering lights on the shore invite us to Israel, home of our ancestors.

But, the stars shine and twinkle lights did not help. Suddenly a giant monster was on the side of our toddler ship and wanted to swallow us. In the morning twilight, I saw the monster ship. It was English, immense, gray and had hundreds of sailors. British bullhorns thundered. People on the ship screamed and cried. Jews, who had gathered on the beach to welcome us, stood by helplessly. We were like Moses, allowed to see the land but not to get in.

I asked Dad why they would not let us go to see our grandparents. Mom and Dad cried and told me they would explain it to me later.

On the deck of the ship “Homeland” I stood, astonished. What have I done? Lithuania did not want me. The Germans wanted to kill me, and now the English did not want me to go to school in Eretz Yisrael and to have friends and a good life. Now even Mom and Dad could not save me from these creatures on the huge ship that want to put me in a concentration camp in Cyprus. Why? I am only a child. Why do they hate me?

I felt like I was in a bad dream and wanted to wake up immediately. Englishmen dragged us out of “Homeland “ into the monster and pushed us below deck. We had not seen more than a glimpse of the Land of Israel. The British did not allow even patients on stretchers to stay in the country, and carried them to the English monster.

Heartbroken Jews were below deck. Suddenly, there was dead silence. Some people prayed in silence, and each of us tried to gather whatever strength of mind we had for what awaited us in Cyprus.

No one spoke until we came to Cyprus. Overwhelmed and tired, we disembarked. Many Jews were in camp there and they tried to talk to us and encourage us. But we were like bodies without souls. We quietly were listening to instructions. We ended up in shacks made of tin. I think that these were chicken coops. Now they were used as housing for the people of God. How the mighty have fallen. Hitler, his Germans and Poles and now the English were ready to finish us off. I know for a fact that my parents suffered greatly in Cyprus, and I added a lot of difficulty to the situation. However, I wanted to be good and obedient, a good girl from the ghetto, but I was not able to cope.

Cyprus symbolizes hell forever to me, after the pleasant life in Italy, and peace and power we felt there, everything became chicken coops. The heat was unbearable during the summer. If you touched the wall of the chicken coop, you burned yourself. Toilets were public. A whole series of holes in a long wooden box was our bathroom. Once I went into the bathroom, and a terrible fear fell on me. I shouted. My parents came running. They couldn’t calm me down. Mom asked me what happened, but I did not answer. I cried aloud, and my whole body was shaking.

I was sick for three days. Mom and Dad were over all the time to calm me down. The camp’s barbed wire, the English police, the ragged people, despair hung on this piece of land where we survived. I could not recover and finally became very ill. The English took me to hospital. Of course my parents were not allowed to come with me, and the ambulance took me to a place where I did not know any people. Doctors discovered I had typhus. I was very sick, almost on the verge of death, and without a father and a mother. I do not remember too much of what happened to me.

One morning I woke up. I was in an unfamiliar place, and I was completely bald. All black curls had disappeared.

My mom was pregnant so father suffered, my brother was born after just seven months and weighed a pound. One pound. The first night mom got up to check him and found him not breathing. Mommy was frightened and began to cry and scream. The nurses came and gave him oxygen and he started to breathe. Mom spent all day looking after our baby. Mom was able to do one thing, however. As we were in the same hospital in Nicosia, she was able to visit me.

I was bald, thin, sad, but I started to get better and she saw it and relaxed. She said that I had a cute brother and she and father named him for her brother's and grandfather Avraham Yehuda's memories. I was very happy to see mother and know about my new brother. After a while, my mother left. I stayed several weeks in the hospital, when I put on a little weight and my hair grew slightly, they took me back to my parents and my brother. While I was away from them, they had aged both from worry and grief.

We were in Cyprus thirteen months. Apart from the fact that I had a nice fireplace and my parents were with me all the time, this was hell on earth for me until the end of the British mandate. It was decided that families with babies born to Cyprus were allowed Aliyah. (Actually it was a tribute to the British Government's Queen Mother's birthday. The mother of Queen Elizabeth then released all babies on Cyprus.

Twenty one days before the declaration of the State we reached Haifa. We stood on the deck of the ship and Dad said, "look upon our lives," we saw the mountain Carmel and Haifa.

The ship docked and our feet were on Israeli soil. The date was May 10, 1948. They took us to a reception camp near Haifa. We were there for several hours but we did not want to stay overnight there. We took the bus to Tel Aviv. It was evening, and I did not see too much of the landscape between Haifa and Tel Aviv, but we were in a dream. We felt completely empty and without emotion.

At Tel Aviv Central Station, we took a taxi to 24 Tchernichovsky Street. The four of us stood in front of the door. We rang the bell and the door opened. We were at home. We entered the home of my grandparents. The excitement was palpable. Tears, hugs, kisses and warm feelings flooded our hearts. We were free for the first time. Five years of shaking, the risk of death, and the knowledge that we were considered to be barely humans washed away.

We all sat around the table. Grandma served tea and cookies, and it was completely quiet. We just looked at one another, and there were no words in our mouths to tell the story of our tired, sore and broken spirits.

My baby brother, Avia, started crying, and my mother jumped up and fed him, and put him to sleep on the couch surrounded by pillows so that he would not fall.

Now everyone started talking. Everyone asked questions, and none of us believed we were in Eretz Yisrael and alive.

Suddenly the door opened and two of mother's brothers entered: Joseph and Isaac. The excitement started all over again and after a while, we were exhausted. Grandma set beds for everyone. We fell asleep immediately. We slept a full day. Only mother got up to take care of Avia who arose from time to time. In the afternoon we woke up, my grandparents, Joseph and Isaac were all around us, looking at us. It was hard to believe we were here. We got out of bed, grandmother made a snack and Grandpa Leo said we would talk later. That we should get a house, buy clothes and other necessary things, and all that had to be done today. And it was.

We lived on Bugarshov Street. I sat on the couch and looked around the apartment. It was large, tastefully furnished, with a balcony that faced a large garden. Lots of trees and flowers grew around the house.

Grandpa was of medium height with a small paunch. He was well dressed and shaved. I never saw Grandpa with facial hair. Typical of Russian Jews, he spoke Russian and Yiddish, and Hebrew. He was a very talented person and even the Arabs came to speak to him. Grandfather was religious. Every Saturday, he was exemplary dressed and went to the synagogue to pray. Grandpa was a respected and generous person. My grandparents always gave charity. We arrived to Israel twenty one days before the Declaration of Independence on May 31, 1948.

On Independence Day evening we went dancing in the streets. Dad insisted that even my little brother would celebrate with us, despite the late hour. We felt joy, gratitude and excitement in the Holy Land celebrating the first Independence Day all together.

And The Story Continues...