The Tail of the Lion

Memoirs of Rafael Teitelbaum

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Preface

I have written these memoirs at the request of friends who have told me that my life experiences are unique and that the beliefs I have developed from these experiences should be shared. Like most Holocaust survivors, I have seen the ultimate in human brutality. I have also been fortunate enough to witness great human kindness.

As a young man of twenty-one, recently liberated from the Ebensee concentration camp, I was faced with many changes. I had been groomed to be a Hasidic rabbi, but most of my community had been killed. I needed to find courage to accept what had happened and to do what was necessary to prepare myself for a different life. My circumstances compelled me to give much thought to my beliefs, values, and Hasidic traditions. I realized that the old ways would not fit more modern times. Yet, all I knew were the old ways. How could I change myself and live a good, productive life with self-respect? This has been my struggle and my quest.

Although I have not accumulated much material wealth nor have I earned university degrees, I do have peace of mind and many good friends. As I look back on my life, I feel content. I sincerely hope that by reading

my memoirs, people will find something of value to help them through difficult times.

My Early Years

In the 1920's my hometown of Tasnad in Transylvania, Hungary was surrounded by lush vineyards, abundant fruit trees, and tall wheat fields. The town's population numbered about five thousand, and the town center included City Hall and the public school. The Hasidic synagogue, where my father led services, stood nearby.[1] A variety of stores lined Main Street, which began at the town center, ran east and ascended a hill on top of which was the larger, non-Hasidic synagogue. Our house was on a street which also began at the town center, but ran west, away from the hill. People from diverse backgrounds lived in the residential section of town; Hasidic and non-Hasidic Jews and Christians were all neighbors. The majority of us who lived there in 1923 spoke Hungarian, although the legal language was Romanian.[2] It was here that my values were formed and here that my heart was infused with the desire to live life to its fullest.

A private citizen who owned the flour mill and oil press provided Tasnad with electricity from 5:30 a.m. until 1 a.m. We youngsters sometimes stared at the big, powerful wheels and listened in awe to the drones of the generators.

Travel was by donkey, buffalo, oxcart or horse and buggy over dirt

[1]The Hasidic movement began in the mid-18th century in Poland with Israel Baal Shem Tov. It is a sect of Jewish mysticism and stresses prayer and studying the Torah as a means of obtaining individual redemption. It discourages sadness and emphasizes the joy of a spiritual life.

[2]After World War I Romania received this region, known as Transylvania, as the spoils of war, from Hungary. However, once the Germans gained control of Europe in 1941, Hungary renewed its claim to the region.

roads, dusty in summer and muddy –sometimes completely unpassable -- in winter. Some people walked to the train station a mile outside of town at a lower elevation, where they boarded the train to Szatmar. A few wealthy residents owned automobiles.

Communication was primarily by word of mouth. Tasnad prided itself on having a weekly newspaper, but only about half of its adult residents were literate, so the paper's circulation was small. However, literacy began to rise in the 1920's with the advent of compulsory education for children.

The Tasnad area produced bread for Germany. The town boasted excellent soil from which farmers grew wheat and fruit. They also produced wine and raised poultry and beef. Because for centuries the laws had forbidden Jews to own farmland or to farm, we traditionally served as merchants and professionals in town: watchmakers, letter writers, accountants, dentists, doctors and lawyers. Most of the merchants and professionals lived comfortably and were envied by the less fortunate.

My family was descended from a line of famous Hasidic rabbis: Rabbi Sighet, Rabbi Sanz, and Rabbi Munkatch. My parents, the Hasidic rabbi and rebbitsin of Tasnad, were cousins. My father's father, Shlomo, and my mother's mother, Rosa, were brother and sister. My father came from Poland. All his family, except for one sister who lived near Tasnad, still lived in Poland. My mother, her seven brothers, and one sister all lived in Romania or Hungary.

I was the third of eight children, born November 4, 1923. I had two older sisters. Rachel, the oldest, was smart, ambitious, and very responsible; she helped Mother take care of the younger children. Next came Pesil, who

was kind and sweet, but a little slow. After me came my sister, Handil, who was very beautiful and smart and also had a pleasant disposition. After Handil came Bile who was quiet, intense, and a deep thinker.
My only brother, Moses Leib, a handsome redhead, was born next, then two more sisters, Hannah and Brach Sima. I last saw Hannah and Brach Sima when they were six and four years old. It is painful to realize that I hardly remember them, because they, along with the rest of my immediate family, were all murdered by the Nazis.

About 150 Jewish families lived in the vicinity --- about 100 non-Hasidic families and about 50 families who clung to the Hasidic tradition. Unlike larger cities, Tasnad had no division of Jews into orthodox, conservative, or reformed sects. All Jews, except for Hasidic Jews, worshipped at the main synagogue led by the chief rabbi of the region. Members of the main synagogue ranged widely in the extent of their religious practices, but the majority were not very observant. They belonged to the synagogue because it was the only social group to which they could belong. All other groups excluded Jews.

Hasidic Judaism does not differ from orthodox Judaism in basic beliefs, but in expression of the faith. Hasidic Jews pray and worship in a more animated way. For example, in a Hasidic synagogue people sing, clap, and dance to religious hymns, whereas in an orthodox synagogue worshippers chant quietly and the entire atmosphere is more subdued. Hasidic Jews believe it is important to express joy; cheerfulness and hope are viewed as essential components of life. We also place greater emphasis on dedicated Torah study, which is a source of moral strength.

Our Hasidic community in Tasnad held fast to rituals and traditional Jewish customs. A small group of men would rise before 4 a.m and immerse themselves in the ritual bath, the mikvah. This bath, originated for cleanliness at a time when people had no baths or showers in their homes, was required of all men daily and all married women after their menstrual periods. The bath usually consisted of a large tub or pool filled with well water or accumulated rain water. In the winter the water felt like ice because it was too expensive to heat the water. After the mikvah, the men studied the Torah until sunrise; then they prayed together with the rest of the community. After this they left for work. After sundown they returned to the synagogue to pray and study the Torah with the whole community for about half an hour.

A traditional Hasidic man wears a pair of long pants and a long, sleeveless shirt with fringes on the four bottom corners. Over the fringed shirt he wears a jacket. He also wears a black hat, similar to the type of hat worn by the Amish in the United States. A hatless man is considered to have no fear of or respect for God. The traditional Hasidic woman wears a long dress with long sleeves. She covers her legs with thick socks. In an earlier time, women's socks didn't have to be thick. The story goes that one day a man complained that some women's socks were transparent (and therefore too revealing). Since then, thick socks have been required. Also, once a Hasidic woman marries (usually very young at 14 to 17 years old), she shaves her head and wears a kerchief at all times. This practice originated because in Eastern Europe, Jewish women had often been raped, with impunity, by Gentiles. It was thought that a woman would be less

desirable to a would-be attacker if she were bald.[3]

The chief rabbi of the area, who held his position before my father was recruited by the Hasidic families to come to Tasnad, felt insecure and threatened by us. Despite the fact that he was popular with his congregation, he tried to prevent my father from becoming more influential with the non-Hasidic Jews. His actions were hypocritical and actually violated Jewish ethics. His behavior directly affected me, because it caused my family to live in poverty. All the Jews in the region paid dues to the community for religious expenses. The Hasidic Jews were a minority within a minority. The dues they paid to the community were supposed to pay my father's salary, but the chief rabbi kept these funds. I did not know it as a child, but I later heard that the chief rabbi's unethical behavior extended even further. He had put his son-in-law, who had no rabbinical duties, on the synagogue payroll instead of my father.

Despite the efforts of the Hasidic community to raise another salary for my father, it was barely enough to feed and clothe our family. Many times my father sent me to the treasurer of our synagogue to ask for an advance from next month's salary. The treasurer's sarcastic remarks humiliated me. I vowed to myself that when I grew up I would not be a rabbi, because there were too many rabbis and too few communities to support them. I liked manual labor and considered doing that to earn a

[3]There is a story about a Hasidic woman who came to live in Brooklyn. A mugger tried to grab her handbag, but she struggled to keep it. In the struggle, her kerchief fell off. Shocked to see the bald head, the mugger concluded that she must be an undercover police officer, and fled without the handbag!

living.

When I reflect on my father's precarious financial situation combined with his tireless work for the community, I feel sad. He had unquestioningly followed tradition and was a victim of his background. Coming from a family of rabbis, he had no choice but to be a rabbi. This was the only training he could receive from his family, and the community would reject the idea of a rabbi's son assuming any other role. I realize now that had other occupations been open to him, my father would have been a diligent and able provider for his family. He did the best he could in his circumstances and served God and his community to the best of his ability.

In a small town such as Tasnad the rabbi functioned in many capacities and his work was never done. My father led the prayer at services, sang the prayer melodies with great emotion in his voice, taught classes on the interpretation of the Torah, counseled married couples, resolved disputes, and even advised people which doctor was best to see for a particular malady.

One of my father's followers, Isaac Frankel, who owned a lumber yard, had been instrumental in persuading my father to take the position as spiritual leader of the fifty families in the area. Mr. Frankel was a very kind and generous man who used to invite all the poor people who came to town to his home. He would give them food and a place to sleep. On Sabbath evenings he sometimes fed forty people! Mr. Frankel enthusiastically supported my father and had a house built for our family.

The house was small and cozy. There were four rooms. Consistent with modest European homes of the time, there were no hallways; each

room had a door which would open to the adjoining room. At the back of the house was the kitchen, which opened up to my sisters' bedroom, which adjoined the main room. In the main room we dined, studied, and Father met with his followers. I also slept in the main room at night. My bed was tucked into a corner of the room. The main room adjoined my parents' bedroom, and I recall once hearing my mother's cries during the birth of a younger sibling. Outside were the well and the outhouse.

In the kitchen there stood a massive, cast iron stove in which we burned wood. There were two round holes on the top surface where pots or pans could be placed for cooking. Because there was no refrigeration in those days, all meals had to be prepared just before they were eaten. I fondly recall going to the kitchen with my sisters for a snack. Laughing and teasing each other, we would dash into the kitchen and eagerly slice pieces of potato. Then we would crowd around the stove to toast them and argue over who would get to toast his or her potato slice first.

The kitchen also served as a laundry room. Mother placed dirty laundry in a huge pot of boiling water on the stove. Then she used a washboard which she placed over a basin on the kitchen floor. Washing clothes by hand is a very long and arduous task, especially for a family with eight children. We children knew not to disturb Mother on laundry days, lest she lose her patience with us.

An exciting event occurred in 1926, just before my third birthday. Workers came to our house to wire it for electricity. The overhead lights, which had consisted of a simple round candleholder for a few candles, became a holder for electric light bulbs. I recall when the workers tested the

lights, the room radiated. I was awed by its beauty. Years later, a Gentile girl from the country, hired as a part-time housekeeper, arrived on Saturday morning to turn out the lights. (Jewish law prohibits Jews from working on the Sabbath, which includes creating or extinguishing a fire or light.) Because she knew nothing about electricity, she climbed onto a chair and tried to blow out the light bulbs.

When I was five or six years old, I wanted to catch and keep a pigeon as a pet. I constructed a trap using a wooden box, a wooden stick, and some string attached to the stick. I did catch a pigeon in our front yard, and Father let me keep it in a wooden cage on the bottom shelf of the wall-to-wall bookcase in the main room. After a few days, I had to let the pigeon go because it made a mess on the bookcase.

In 1929 tension began to rise between Jews and Gentiles because of the Depression and the seeming disparity of economic circumstances between them. Perhaps because I sensed this tension, I began to suffer from nightmares and often woke up in the middle of the night quite frightened. Some older boys had told me stories about dead people rising at night from their graves and rousing living persons to go to the synagogue to pray for them. One night I was awakened, not by a nightmare, but by a knock on the window at midnight. This window was directly opposite a house across the street and faced a window in that house. Near my window was a door which opened to the street. The lock was not very secure, so the door could easily be pushed in from the outside. A drunk had knocked on my window and was pushing the door open. I couldn't understand what he wanted and was frightened. He saw me and left. A few days later I learned from some older

boys that my room was directly across the street from the room of a prostitute.

When I was eight years old, Isaac Frankel, the lumberyard owner, invited my father and me to accompany him on a trip to the town of Care-Mare to participate in the festival of Purim. Purim celebrates the story of Esther, a Jewish woman married to the Persian king, whose bravery saved her people from an order of execution. This is the only Jewish holiday in which it is a good deed to become so drunk that you cannot tell the difference between a blessing and a curse. Mr. Frankel rented a horse and buggy to travel twenty-five kilometers (about 15 miles). I sat at their feet in the buggy. This was my first trip in a horse and buggy and the first time to travel such a distance, so I was very excited. We passed through two villages and I enjoyed peering out of the buggy and seeing all the fields and open spaces I had never seen before. We left for the celebration in the morning and arrived in the late afternoon.

In the evening, we sat at long tables in the synagogue and ate dinner. After dinner, the tables were cleared and the performance began. The people acting in the skits stood on the tables so everyone could see them. There was a morality play, of sorts, in which a shepherd was faced with a dilemma regarding sick sheep: should he take them up to a pasture on higher ground with the healthy sheep, or should he leave them in the lower pasture to die? The rabbi's answer was that we are not strong enough to take up the sick sheep, therefore we must leave them so that the healthy ones can survive. There was also a clown who told funny stories, such as one about a poor man who put money in his pocket, which had a hole in it. When asked

why he put money in a pocket with a hole, he replied, “Had God meant for me to have money, even with a hole in my pocket, the money would not have fallen out!” I had a great time. We returned home the following morning.

Another joyful excursion was our trip to visit my father’s second cousin, the rabbi who later became known as the Szatmar rabbi. Until 1934, this cousin, Joel Teitelbaum, led a group of followers in Care-Mare. Father was very close to him and had a great deal of respect, admiration, and affection for him. My father used to praise him for his uplifting sermons and his incisive understanding of the Torah and the nature of things. Father always asked for advice from his cousin Joel, who was considered by many to be a very holy man. Father visited every three months or so, at each holiday, and helped him to expand his group of followers. In 1934 our cousin was offered a position as chief rabbi of the Jewish community in Szatmar, which he accepted, and his following continued to grow.

The Szatmar rabbi was of average height and build with magnetic brown eyes. He had a certain charisma that attracted everyone, Jew and non-Jew alike. In 1936, the King of Romania traveled through the town of Szatmar. The Szatmar rabbi was one of the few Jews who was granted an audience with the king and was photographed with him. I myself saw this photograph of the rabbi and the king shaking hands.

As a child, I greatly admired this relative. He was very patient and kind to all persons, regardless of their station in life. He understood human nature well. He was also an excellent orator, knowing just the right timing and tone of voice to use at any point in a speech. Most important to me, he

was a truly moral and unselfish person who was totally dedicated to his faith. When I was about seven years old, he gave me a special coin that he had blessed. I treasured this gift from him. Later he would come to play a major role in protecting me for a while from the Nazis.

On some Friday nights, the Szatmar rabbi would hold special Sabbath services. He was so beloved that men from both Hungary and Romania would attend. His wife would prepare Sabbath meals for all who came. People would socialize from about 6 p.m. until 10 or 11 p.m., at which time they would sit on wooden benches at long wooden tables in the smaller hall of the synagogue and wait for the rabbi to join them.

Dressed in a prayer shawl and a special hat with fox tails--a shtreimel--which was worn only on the Sabbath by the well-educated--the rabbi would enter the hall. I was always impressed with the way he carried himself and how he looked in the candlelight and glow of the thorium lamps. He would sing religious melodies between each course of the meal.

During the service, held in the larger hall of the synagogue, he would sing as if he were beckoning to angels. One song was especially beautiful and melodious. It was from chapter 50 of the Book of Solomon, which praises women and their contribution to the family and community. All of his songs radiated healing energy and had the ability to pull us out of our sadness and bring delight to our souls.

In addition to fond childhood memories of the Szatmar rabbi, I also remember my first childhood "jobs." The first was for a chicken vendor who asked me and a few other Hasidic boys walking home from Cheder (religious school) to help him grab the chickens from a large cage and place

them into smaller cages for shipping to his wholesaler. With earlocks and fringed shirts flying, we jumped up and down as we caught the squawking fowl. For our services the vendor paid us each 8 lei (Romanian currency.) I rushed to my Uncle Michael's grocery store where I bought some candy. After leaving the store I ate it all. My Uncle Michael later informed my father that he had sold me some candy. My father confronted me, "Where did you get the money to buy candy?" I had to confess my detour from my walk home and "job" to my father who let it pass without further comment.

Another job (for which I first obtained my father's permission) was harvesting grapes in a vineyard. Except for me, the workers were all Gentiles. I watched their mannerisms and listened to them talking. I envied them. They had a more relaxed life style. They lived in their own country. They didn't have to eat only kosher food. They didn't have to get up early in the morning to pray or to immerse themselves in a cold ritual bath. They enjoyed nature. Yet, once the job was completed and I was paid, I did not dwell long on my envy. Instead, I ran to the general store and purchased a special treat, peanuts. (Peanuts, not grown in our country, had to be imported, so they were quite expensive.) The peanuts tasted so good to me that I thought I would be the happiest person alive if I could always have all the peanuts I desired. To this day, I am quite fond of peanuts.

I don't know how my father managed to circumvent Romanian law and keep me out of public school, which was mandatory at the time. My Polish-born father could be quite persuasive, despite the fact that the only secular language he spoke was Polish. He had already convinced the authorities to put all his children's Hebrew names on our legal birth

certificates, which had never been accomplished before. When all the other children -- including my sisters -- went to public school, I was the only child who remained home.

My father used to wake me before 6 a.m. to study the Talmud and the commentary. We studied the five books of Moses, but not Prophets or Kings. The Book of Prophets and the Book of Kings are very nationalistic. It was considered pointless to stir nationalistic longings in us when, at the time, it appeared hopeless that we would ever have our own nation. Furthermore, members of the Hasidic movement believed that the Messiah and a Jewish homeland would come in God's time and could not be "forced" by people.

Father also guided me in the study of the Book of Ecclesiastes. It was discouraging to read that every joy is balanced with equal pain in our physical life. Yet the resolve that serving God gives us a purpose in life anchored me. As a Hasidic Jew I was taught that each person is born with a spark of Divine origin. We who choose to use our spark positively by serving God through serving others, find joy in this life. This joy has helped me through difficult times.

Father was very selective about the education he chose for me. He frowned on my reading secular books, such as novels, which he deemed frivolous. He expected me to be a rabbi, as our ancestors had been, so rather than "waste my time" with some of the "irrelevant secular subjects" I would have studied in public school, he taught me Jewish philosophy, mysticism, Hasidism, morality, and Kosher laws (dealing with the purity of food eaten.) Although we spoke Yiddish at home, Father and I switched to Hebrew and

Aramaic for my Torah studies. Father also taught me that the Jewish culture survives because we are educated to be strong mentally and physically. He always said that knowledge is precious, because it is the only thing that cannot be taken from a person. Later I profoundly realized the truth of his statement when, as a young adult faced with life in a Nazi concentration camp, I used my knowledge of Proverbs and the Ethics of the Fathers[4] to help me survive.

My study sessions with my father would make me restless. In between study sessions I would take every opportunity to go for a walk outside or to chop wood in the backyard. I especially liked chopping the eyes of the wood, which did not yield easily to the ax and gave me an outlet for my pent up energy. I also helped dig septic tank holes. Manual labor was a relief after long hours of study.

Although I obeyed my father regarding my reading and studies, I secretly envied my sisters and friends who went to public school and were learning about the world around us. From them I learned a little about world history, geography and literature. More importantly, they taught me to speak both Hungarian (the popular language) and Romanian (the official language) of Transylvania at the time, because neither language was spoken at home. Eventually, in 1935, the door to secular subjects was opened briefly to me when the increase of Nazi propaganda and anti-Semitic hysteria caused the one Jewish teacher at the public school to be fired. Immediately my father engaged him to tutor me in mathematics and writing

[4]Proverbs is a Book of the Torah. The Ethics of the Fathers is a work of collected pieces of wisdom from early Jewish leaders. A chapter of this is read on each Sabbath from the Sabbath after Passover until the Sabbath before Rosh Hashana.

the Roman alphabet (so I could write Hungarian and Romanian.) He tutored me from 1935 to 1937.

Not only did my father's decision not to enroll me in public school cause me to stand apart from other youngsters, but my small stature did also. Being short and skinny, I had to work hard to develop athletic skills. I was often confronted with anti-Semitism and forced to fight non-Jewish children who used sticks, stones, hands and feet to attack me. At times even the non-Hasidic kids would make fun of my clothing.

Occasionally I would leave the insults and attacks and walk up the street past the home of the sausage maker whose pigs lived in his backyard. Their stench filled the air, which was also pierced by the high-pitched squeals of the animals being slaughtered. Ironically, when I reached the main street where the merchants' stores were located, I would pass the sausage maker's shop and then my nostrils welcomed the aroma wafting in the air and my mouth watered while I coveted this forbidden food.

As the son of a rabbi destined to follow in his footsteps, I was not permitted to associate with children whose families were not sufficiently devout. My one friend was Moses Solomon. His father, Israel Solomon, was a very devout and respected member of our synagogue. Ironically, Moses deeply wanted to become a rabbi, while I would have preferred to be a farmer or manual laborer so that I could earn a better living and enjoy the outdoors. Moses and I played soccer together and enjoyed many boyhood activities. We loved to play a popular game using nuts during the Feast of the Tabernacles (Succoth), which celebrates the fall harvest and commemorates the wandering of the Jews in the desert during Exodus. We

enjoyed helping build the Succoth hut and gazing at the stars and night sky through its open roof. Often on the Sabbath, while our parents would sleep off a large meal of cholent (beans and barley stew) Moses and I would take long walks. During these walks we were careful not to tear a branch from a tree or use a fallen branch to draw figures in the dirt, because tearing and writing are prohibited acts of "work" on the Sabbath. Afterwards we would return home and then go to the synagogue before dark for more worship. When it was getting dark, the adults would recite two long prayers and sing mystic melodies while we restless children played hide and seek.

One year Moses and I ventured into acting together and put on a skit for the Feast of Lots (Purim), celebrating Esther's saving the Jews from a massacre designed by Haman[5]. Pouring all our imagination and energy into this task, we delightedly enacted the story of Joseph.[6] That was the extent of our acting career. Today Moses, a friendly, devout, and cheerful man, lives in Israel and is a kosher slaughterer and rabbi.

Despite the anti-Semitic sentiments of the time, the neighborhoods of Tasnad were not segregated. Some Gentile children would not play with us and some chose to pick on us and say mean things. Yet some Jewish and Gentile children played together. I recall us sledding in the snow. We also enjoyed an occasional game of soccer, played with a "ball" fashioned from rolled up socks tied with a string. One day when I was ten years old, I had a

[5]A Persian official who planned to destroy the Jews, he was hanged when Esther told the King about Haman's plot.

[6]This story has been popularized by a recent musical. It is the story of Joseph's jealous brothers selling him into slavery and of Joseph's rise to a position of power in Egypt.

discussion with a Gentile boy about God. He tried to convince me that his idea of God was correct and that we Jews were misguided. Of course I was equally sure of my concept of God. I decided that we couldn't both be right. My first efforts at critical thinking emerged at this time. Despite some questions, my religion remained a source of joy for me.

Another childhood escapade I fondly recall was playing hooky from my studies one afternoon and going with a few other children to a town ice skating exhibition. The young skaters all looked so beautiful in their short skirts! When my father learned of this, he was extremely angry. From his perspective, not only was ice skating a worthless activity and a luxury which Jews could not afford, but also Jewish boys ought not to be watching half naked girls like this.

My childhood joys were tainted by two factors, poverty and anti-Semitism, both rising in the 1930's. In 1933 the price of food rose dramatically, especially that of bread. After a lengthy succession of meals made from beans prepared in an assortment of ways, my mother had only cornmeal left. I recall eating cornmeal for supper. Many times there was not enough for all of us, so my father divided the food among the children. He went to bed without eating.

Hunger helped me discover that the mulberries from the trees on the street were edible and free, and I began to eat them voraciously. Then I was told that they were not kosher, because they had tiny worms inside. After eating them, I felt guilty. One day I devised a plan to rid myself of this guilt. I decided to stuff myself with as many mulberries as possible so that I would get nauseous and forever lose my appetite for them. My plan worked!

Meanwhile as anti-Semitism was increasing, an ugly incident occurred one day while we children were playing. A Jewish boy cut the string of a kite belonging to a Gentile boy, and the kite flew away. The boy ran home and told his parents who returned with him and started beating the Jewish boy. A riot almost broke out, but luckily some other adults arrived who were able to restore order and resolve the matter.

During these difficult economic times in Europe, it was particularly hard for Jews to earn a living (Jews were legally prohibited from owning large parcels of land and were discriminated against in other ways as well). Therefore, some begged and were arrested on vagrancy charges. Wolfe Frankel, son of Isaac Frankel who had so generously helped Jews in our community, followed in his father's footsteps and used most of his money to help arrested Jews.

Meanwhile, the rabbis were hearing of more and more problems from members of their congregations. On the Sabbath and holy days, prayers reflected the terrible situation for European Jews in the 1930's. Jewish leaders realized the seriousness of our situation. Only a few Jews here and there were able to cross national borders and survive. For most of us, there was no way out of the country and our difficulties. During a time when all of Europe was suffering economically, no immigrants were desired, especially ones of a different religion and culture. Furthermore, the Nazis were creating anti-Jewish sentiment by their propaganda. Accusing us of causing economic hardship, they used the media to caricature and dehumanize us.

We felt that we could do little to change the situation except hope for

the best and keep the faith. Later our faith helped a few of us endure the concentration camps. Viktor Frankl, in his book, Man's Search for Meaning, mentioned that Jewish faith was so strong that even in the crematorium at Auschwitz, Jews were heard to say with their last breaths, "Shema Yisrael, Adonai Eluhaynu Adonai Echod." ("Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.") This is the holiest sentence in the Torah. Those who survived, including some of my relatives, continue to have a strong faith.

In his megalomaniac desire to have a German super race control the world, Hitler destroyed millions of bodies, but he could not destroy our spirit. We Jews believe that God created us for a purpose. We are not created to suffer in this world, but to contribute something of value to the world. I believe that it was our faith in God's purpose for us that gave us the strength to cope with unimaginable atrocities.

Becoming a Young Man

In 1935 when I was about twelve years old and beginning my studies for my bar mitzvah, my father sent me for a semester to a yeshiva, a school for religious studies, in the Carpathian Mountains in the town of Sighet. He intended that not only should I learn more about the Torah, but that I should develop more socially. A good rabbi must be practical and must have diverse life experiences which help him guide his people; he must not be solely a Torah scholar.

UncleYucateel, the head of this yeshiva, had received a large donation from a wealthy American which he had used to build a textile factory. Being very practical, UncleYucateel had the yeshiva students age fifteen and older trained in the factory to weave kitchen towels and tablecloths. Thus, they would combine religious study with learning a trade.

I had a room at the yeshiva, but I ate meals at different uncles' homes. (This was the custom in those days, because schools had no cafeterias.) We left the yeshiva at 11 a.m. for lunch and returned at 1 p.m. There was no supervision of students during the lunch period, and I would often forego lunch and hike into the mountains. I would be sure to return before the afternoon class began. I wanted to enjoy a beautiful, sunny day outdoors, not study inside the yeshiva. As so many youngsters have felt about their studies, I also felt that what I was studying wasn't "relevant" or "practical." My studies wouldn't feed, clothe, or shelter me. I enjoyed my hikes, despite

the fact that my religious dress, including fringed shirt and long jacket, identified me as a Jew, and caused people to harass me. I would occasionally meet another hiker--almost always a non-Jew--and I would be shoved, pushed, or even slapped in the face. I do not believe that these people were vicious, but they lashed out at me, a scapegoat for their anger and frustration over their economic circumstances. There were no police in the mountains to whom I could complain, but even had there been, this would have been futile because such acts against Jews were tolerated.

Nevertheless, I persisted in my hikes and recall occasionally listening to the local fire department's orchestra playing secular music as I sat on a mountainside. I was intrigued by this music which was quite different from the religious music to which I was accustomed.

I had another enchanting musical experience when I traveled to my mother's birthplace, Berbesht, about ten miles from Sighet. I visited an uncle (one of my mother's seven brothers) with whom my brother was staying. I recall walking to this small village at about sunset. The sky was brilliant. The air was calm. A villager happened to be outside playing his flute. It was the most exquisite flute music I had ever heard. I began to feel homesick. I thought about my walks in Tasnad and the poor young housekeepers of Tatarian descent. Daily while beating rugs and airing blankets and bedding, they sang Hungarian and Russian songs expressing their longing for home. These beautiful young women had families and boyfriends living in Hungarian villages far away. They worked for room, board, and a small allowance. All these memories and the flute player's music gave me goose bumps that day.

One Sabbath I visited a paternal aunt who lived in a small village near Sighet. In the synagogue, there were the usual prayers and reading from the Torah. As was their custom, the affluent Jews left in the middle of the service (which took about two and a half hours) and went to their nearby homes, ate coffee cake, and then returned to the synagogue for the conclusion of the service. I was surprised to see one poor family leave the synagogue at the same time as the affluent. I knew this family ate cornmeal all week. Surely they had not left to eat coffee cake. "Where did they go?" I wondered.

Curious, I quietly left the synagogue and discovered they were giving their horse a drink at the well behind the synagogue. This was the horse they used to earn their meager living, the horse which they used to take people to the border between Romania and Czechoslovakia. The man had taken off his religious belt and used it to pull the horse to the well. Although this use of the belt was sacrilegious, they probably justified it because allowing an animal to suffer is also immoral in Jewish teachings. Also they could not risk having their horse weaken from thirst during the lengthy synagogue service.

After studying for awhile I was ready for my bar mitzvah at age thirteen. This is the Jewish rite of passage for boys. It is the ceremony celebrating a boy's becoming a man and having sufficient knowledge of Jewish religion and law so that he can be counted as one of the ten men--a minyan-- needed to begin a public prayer service at the synagogue. In accordance with custom, on the Sabbath before my bar mitzvah I read aloud in the synagogue. The story was about the seventy-year-old King David

being brought young virgins to keep him warm. Although I did not discuss this with anyone, this story disturbed me. Religious boys were forbidden to talk with or have any contact whatsoever with any unmarried women, other than family members. This story created more religious doubts during my teenage years.

Even though I had doubts, I knew I was never to ask questions which would suggest my obedience to God was in any way dependent upon my understanding or agreement with His law. My entire upbringing stressed the importance of religious study and total dedication to God. I was taught we must be humble before God and that the Divine Plan requires neither human understanding nor agreement. Just as a soldier going to war knows he must follow orders without question and that he may, indeed, give his life for his country, so must a Jew commit himself to God and to following God's commandments, regardless of the consequences.

Despite my unspoken doubts, my bar mitzvah went well. I gave a half-hour speech in which I took a sentence from the Torah and explained it. A maternal uncle, Uncle Samuel, who was a very respected rabbi and who had encouraged my religious study, complimented me on my interpretation of the Torah passage. I was very happy. We celebrated afterwards with a bar mitzvah dinner at the house. We ate and sang some very moving and uplifting religious songs.

Having been bar mitzvahed did not exempt me from further religious study. Quite the contrary. Now I had to study very earnestly to learn enough to become a rabbi. Diligently, I studied the Talmud, and once again, I left to study at my Uncle Samuel's yeshiva in Care-Mare for a semester.

This time I lived with Uncle Samuel's family.

Uncle Samuel was a particularly adept yeshiva leader. Not only was he a very good commentator of the Torah, but he managed to attract 100 students from the surrounding area. He was astute and compassionate. He easily surmised when a student had a need not being met, either physical or spiritual. He would approach the student, find out if he needed food, clothing, or some kind of encouragement, and see to it that the student got what he needed. I had the greatest respect for my Uncle Samuel. His instruction continued in more entertaining fashion on Saturday nights. After a light supper of herring and borscht, we would listen to his engaging stories. People used to come from all over to listen to his stories.

For example, one of his stories took place near the town of Tokai in Keristur, Hungary, at the home of Uncle Samuel's father-in-law, a famous rabbi, during World War One. Everything was rationed and food was scarce. Most people ate bread with a little bit of oil spread on it. Uncle Samuel's father-in-law welcomed the hungry into his home and shared bread and oil with them. The oil was contained in a ceramic pot. One day while a villager was taking some oil from the pot, he dropped it. The pot shattered into many pieces and the remaining oil was lost. The other villagers shouted angrily at him, but Uncle Samuel's father-in-law said, "He feels badly enough. Do not shout at him this way."

I recall another more humorous story. There was a follower of a rabbi who was a successful business man. Every Sunday he would visit the rabbi for words of encouragement and would leave some money to supplement the rabbi's modest salary. One Sabbath, the rabbi's sermon dealt with the

futility of human effort directed toward material things and the importance of expending effort on prayer and Torah study. The following Sunday, the business man did not visit the rabbi. In fact, the rabbi learned on Tuesday that the business man was not at work, and the rabbi found the man praying in the synagogue. The rabbi asked the man, "Why aren't you at work?" The man replied that he had taken the rabbi's sermon to heart, had given up his business, and would spend all his time praying and not pursuing material goals. To this the rabbi replied, "That's the way we must think on the Sabbath, but after the Sabbath, we have to return to the world!"

Returning home after my stay with Uncle Samuel, I continued to study hard and to learn the Kosher laws from my father. He taught me how to check animals for diseases. Because Jewish law prohibits eating animal blood, I also learned how to treat meat so that all blood is drained away. I learned the laws about separating dairy foods from meat[7], such as how long one must wait after eating meat to eat dairy foods (6 hours) and how long after eating dairy foods to eat meat (1/2 hour, unless it is hard cheese, 6 hours.) It was believed that this amount of time was necessary for digestion to take place. I made great progress in my religious studies, but my father never complimented me. Many years later my relative, Samuel Teitelbaum, who also survived the concentration camps, told me how Father glowed with pride when he told others about my rapid progress in my rabbinical studies.

While I was studying to become a rabbi and leader of my people, the hard times continued, especially for Jews, who experienced more severe

[7]In the Torah it is written in three different places that lamb should not be cooked in its mother's milk. The Talmudic scholars interpreted this to mean that meat and dairy dishes shouldn't be served at the same meal.

poverty and more blatant discrimination. To make matters worse for me personally, I saw my mother's health declining. In 1938, when my father could not possibly scrape together a dowry for my oldest sister to marry, he decided my sister's dowry would be his position as the Hasidic rabbi in Tasnad. (Rabbis have to build their own religious following. There is no central administrative organization which sends rabbis to a particular locale with an already-established congregation.) So, my older sister married and her husband became the rabbi in the synagogue, in my father's place.

In 1939 we moved to a beautiful city, Oradea-mare, where there was said to be a Hasidic group with intellectual leanings. Although there were some Hasids there, Father couldn't find enough followers to earn a living. It was a very bad time for us, and my father obtained assistance from my grandfather's followers.

Despite the difficult times, I was able to find comfort and inspiration once again from my participation in Sabbath services. A famous rabbi of Vishnitz lived within walking distance from where we lived, so I walked to his services on Friday nights. He used to teach his followers by song. He composed beautiful melodies, with lyrics including a Torah sentence and an explanation of the sentence. He used to dance with his followers, and even danced sometimes by himself. He was very inspirational and his services would often last until midnight. Father approved of my going to this rabbi's services, because he felt it would broaden my horizons.

We Jews faced poverty, as we faced all other life challenges, with faith and diligent study. The Nazis did their best to make study more difficult for us when, in 1939, they revised the education laws and imposed a

quota for Jews in public high schools. In response to this Jewish parents enrolled their sons in yeshivas, because a religious education was the only one available to them. We all believed that it is vitally important to keep mentally alert.

The extreme poverty and discrimination was taking its toll on us, and Mother started to complain about pains in her heart. The doctors ran some tests, but they found nothing conclusive. Yet she continued to complain bitterly, and I was very worried about her.

My mother did not survive the Holocaust, but her memory lives with me. One particular remark she made is imprinted forever in my memory. I was nine years old. It was a Friday morning in the autumn, a very dark day. We were in the kitchen near a small window when Mother said, "In my family girls were not valued at all. My mother only bragged about my brothers. She was very proud of them, but we girls were considered valueless." I can never forget the sorrow in her face and voice. At that moment I promised myself I would never treat my wife or daughters like that.

My mother taught me two very valuable lessons that stay with me to this day. She warned me to beware of religious fanatics. Their motivation is not devotion to God but a desire to judge others and to refuse to forgive. She also cautioned me to avoid the sin of dedicating so much time, energy and money to community service that I might sacrifice time, energy, and money needed for myself and my family.

Another valuable lesson came from my father in 1940. One of my father's followers had told him that his son had played cards all night with

me. Father came to me to ask if this were true. It was not, and I told Father so. Father believed me and in a very compassionate way explained, "Son, be careful. It's not how you actually behave that matters but how you are perceived by other people." I realized as a rabbi's son I was being held to a higher standard of behavior and that it really behooved me to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. If not, one might live with an undeserved yet tarnished reputation.

The lessons I was learning from my parents and my religious studies were to be a fountain of wisdom and knowledge from which to drink in the most difficult of times that lay ahead of me. Nazi furor was rising to a crescendo, and concomitantly the condition of Jews was plummeting.

In 1941 Germany gained military and political control over most of western Europe and we received news that Germany was advancing in Poland and planning to attack Russia. My paternal grandfather, a rabbi and chief judge in the Jewish Court in Poland, and my paternal grandmother, were clearly in jeopardy. I had only met my grandfather once, when I was eleven and he visited us for three days. I remembered him as an intelligent and just man. I had never met my paternal grandmother, but many years later in America, an acquaintance who had known her, told me she was very kind and would give him, a poor boy, attention and some cake on Saturdays.

One day we received a postcard from Russia from my paternal grandfather. I saw the distress in my father's face as he read it, so I asked him, "What is it, Father?" Silently he handed me the postcard. My grandparents had fled Poland for Russia. Grandfather had not complained at all about leaving his house or position and now being a refugee. His only

concern was his fear that they would die without a Jewish burial. My grandfather's fear became a reality, and my parents ultimately shared my grandparents' fate. The Nazis murdered all of them somewhere in Russia.

In May, 1941, Father had an insufficient number of followers to make his living as a rabbi, so he bought a small knitting machine. Hungarian industry was almost dead, because it was virtually impossible to get raw materials. With the knitting machine Father planned to make socks and sell them on the black market. He never did produce any socks because he received a deportation letter.

Transylvania had been returned to Hungarian rule. Because Father had been born in Poland, he was ordered to return there. At first, he ignored this. Later, the police came, took him to jail for a couple of nights, and told him to prepare his papers. They also said to Father, "We will solve the Jewish problem. You are like fish in a lake from which we will drain all the water." After this they let Father out of jail, and we hired a Jewish lawyer to fight the deportation order. I talked to the lawyer myself who told me the situation was very serious. The Germans had already advanced into Russia. It looked like we would be taken to a camp for non-citizens in Hungary. For the first time in my life, I made my own decision and was determined to carry it out, whether or not my father approved. I told my father that I would not go with the family to the camp. I would run away and hide from the authorities. My reasons were: 1) If I were free, I would be able to help the family from the outside. 2) If we were together in the concentration camp, it would break both our hearts to see each other suffer. My father did not argue with me nor discourage me from carrying out my plan.

A few weeks later on a Saturday afternoon in June, 1942, at about 2:30 p.m., two detectives came to our house. I was in the corridor and saw them in the front room. I heard them tell Father that we each had a right to take 10 pounds of clothing and a very small amount of money. When I heard this, I knew this was it. I had to run now.

I ran out the back of the house and to the Lefkowitz family, followers of my father. They lived three doors down from us. Mr. Lefkowitz was a wealthy grocery wholesaler and had a brother who also lived in town. That evening I learned that because one of my older sisters had pneumonia, the two detectives had not taken my mother and sick sister. They had intended to take my other brother and sisters, but when the children started to scream, the detectives just took my father and left. All of my healthy sisters ran away to other families. My brother ran to the Lefkowitz's, too.

The detectives returned later that day for my mother and sister; they put my sister in the hospital. My parents were put on a train. When my father's followers came to the train to say good-bye, Father told them to have me go to the Szatmar Rabbi who would take care of me. He also said that my sisters should scatter to different maternal uncles we had living in the area.

That evening while hiding at the Lefkowitz's, I had to be especially careful because of the anti-Semitic janitor of their apartment complex. I recall that all my sisters, except for the one who was in the hospital, came to see me that night. My sisters were frightened and were used to Father

making all the decisions. They didn't know what to do, so they turned to me. I told them to go stay with various maternal uncles.

The next morning at 5 a.m. I couldn't sleep and I heard Mrs. Lefkowitz on the telephone say, "Let the poor children sleep." I knew at once something was not right. I asked her with whom she had spoken on the telephone. She told me that her brother-in-law had telephoned to warn us that the police were looking for my brother and me. I took my brother, who was then eleven years old, and ran to the train station. I don't remember how we got the money to flee, but we did.

We took the train to Szatmar. My brother was taken in by a relative and I rented a room for myself. My brother was eventually sent to Auschwitz where he died. My sisters also perished in Auschwitz.

Needing money to support myself, I went back to Nagyvarad [called Oradea-mare when it was under Romanian rule] to our family's previous apartment. To avoid being recognized, I went at night and wore glasses and a different style hat. Because the apartment was unlocked, I quickly succeeded in retrieving the knitting machine, my mother's inherited pearls and ring, our Sabbath candlesticks, menorah, and silver cup. I took them to my rented room in Szatmar, and for about a month I made socks which I sold to my cousin who had a small sock factory. Then Uncle Samuel and Uncle Yucateel, both very respected rabbis, told me that they had talked with the Rabbi of Szatmar's wife, who was unable to have children. They had arranged for the Szatmar's to adopt me. My uncles encouraged me to agree to the adoption and when I objected, they insisted. They said I would be banished from the religious community if I refused, so I gave in.

It was an honor to be adopted, but I encountered many new problems. I was given a room attached to the synagogue and beautiful new religious clothes--a long jacket and fringes. I ate my meals with the rabbi's family. Despite meeting all my material needs, the Szatmar rabbi isolated me from the other yeshiva students so that I had no friends. The rabbi's sister, her daughter, and niece lived with the rabbi. The daughter and niece were about my age and were beautiful young ladies, yet the traditional ritualistic separation of the genders prohibited me from talking with them.

Furthermore, I resented the fact that in the privacy of the rabbi's home, the rabbi's valet did not have this ritualistic separation imposed upon him; he was allowed to speak with the young women. As a young man not allowed to converse with the young women at the dining table, I felt tortured. Because of the distance of the kitchen from the dining room, each silent meal could last half an hour to an hour. In the past, despite the somewhat isolated life my father had insisted upon for me, I had managed to satisfy my social needs by going outdoors and talking with others on the street as much as possible. Yet, at the Rabbi of Szatmar's home, I had no such outlet. Although the rabbi had found a Torah study partner for me, we ate at different times and places. I was very lonely and despite my best efforts, I couldn't concentrate on my studies.

I resolved to change my living arrangements to provide for more social interaction, I approached the rebbitsin and pleaded my case first to her. I explained that I felt isolated, that I was having a hard time concentrating on my studies, and that I was afraid I was wasting the most important years of my life by not properly preparing myself with adequate

education. I told her I wanted to live in the yeshiva with the other students and eat with them. She arranged a time for me to speak with her husband. This was the only time I spoke with the Szatmar rabbi the whole time I lived with him.

The rabbi's refusal totally devastated me. He explained that he couldn't accept the arrangement I proposed, because he would be unable to properly supervise me. I was 19 years old at this time. I felt rejected by the man I most admired. I stopped eating, started smoking, and fainted twice.

Uncle Samuel came to the rescue and helped me reach a compromise acceptable to the Szatmar rabbi. I would share a room with the rabbi's valet near the synagogue, and my meals would be sent to this room where I would eat completely alone.

Of course, this solution acceptable to the rabbi further isolated me. Blaming myself for my loneliness and sadness, I searched for a solution in the Scriptures and the writings of moral philosophers, especially The First Wisdom and The Obligation of the Heart, both written by Sephardic sages. Reading moral philosophy helped comfort me. Looking back on this situation, I realize the rabbi was probably overly concerned with reputation. He would not permit me to be too close to other congregation members lest they see my human frailties. The rabbi apparently believed that such exposure would make it more difficult for me to assume my role as a rabbi because the congregation might trust me less and take me less often into their confidence.

Meanwhile, during this time of personal turmoil I was also subjected to abuse by the Nazis and local Gentiles. The Nazis had taken away my

father's citizenship, and I had no legal identification while I lived with the rabbi of Szatmar. Young men, before the draft, were required to hold identification cards and attend pre-military training, called "Levente," weekly. At each weekly training session the card was stamped. I had received an identification card from a male cousin who lived in a distant town--Debrecen--and he obtained a duplicate on the pretense of having lost his. Moreover, there was another student at the yeshiva who was an excellent forger and who forged the weekly stamp for me.

One morning while returning from the ritual bath, I was stopped in the street by police who asked for my identification. I showed them my cousin's card. They suspected a fraud and asked me what I was doing in Szatmar. They ordered me to follow them on foot while they rode their bicycles. They led me to the police station. Then they stopped and told me to hold a heavy stone, which I did for what seemed like hours. Then they tormented me by saying they would cut off my earlocks. (These long, curly locks, worn in front of the ears, symbolize a Jew's total dedication to God.) I protested, and they finally decided they had tortured me enough and let me go.

Meanwhile, during the past year, 1943, the Nazis had forced my brother-in-law, Moses, to join a working brigade, a forced labor group used by the Nazis for cleaning the mine fields and doing other undesirable tasks. He had been torn apart from his wife (my sister Rachel) and their newborn child. While with the working brigade in the Ukraine, my brother-in-law had been fed very little. One night he broke away from the group and ran to a house that had lights on. He knocked on a window and an older Ukrainian

woman who lived there let him in. She gave him water and a wash basin to wash in and fed him. She told him, ”My son is in the army. I hope someone does for my son what I am doing for you.” After a year of servitude, Moses was released. I decided to make a trip to visit him, my sister and the baby.

The ill-fated trip began when I took the train to Tasnad. In the train car with me were three women and a man. They were middle-aged, Hungarian farmers. The man looked at me and started yelling things like, “All you Jews are crooks!” His harassment of me increased in severity until one of the women interceded. She argued with the farmer, ”What do you want with him? He is only a youngster. He has not hurt anyone. Leave him alone.” It was abundantly clear that Nazi propaganda was having its desired effect. We Jews had become the scapegoat for all the frustrations of non-Jews in Europe. I sighed in relief when I finally got off the train.

I visited for a day with my sister, brother-in-law and the baby, and the next morning took a carriage from Tasnad to the train station, a mile outside of town. I was the first passenger on this carriage, and the driver did not tell me that he was stopping for another passenger at the camp for new recruits to the working brigade. This camp was a central location for all new workers who were being sent to join the brigade in the Ukraine. I waited inside the carriage while the driver went to get a passenger. Suddenly two gendarmes pulled me from the carriage and accused me of being a spy. They took me to a nearby shed containing axes, shovels and other large tools. They threw me onto an iron table and started to beat me brutally with a thick cable. I begged them to stop, but they made fun of my begging. At that point, I swore to myself that I would never beg again for my life. Next

they said they were going to cut off my earlocks. I told them, "You can kill me, but don't cut these." The gendarmes eventually tired of their sadistic acts, and let me go. I was lucky enough to run and catch the only train scheduled that day to return to Szatmar.

Meanwhile, intent on abandoning a life as a rabbi, I sneaked out one day and went back to the city of Nagyvarad, where my father's followers still were. I tried to find employment as a physical laborer. However, everyone knew I was the rabbi's son and none of them would give me a job.

Having failed in my first effort to become a manual laborer, I returned to the Szatmar rabbi. Despite my frustration with rabbinical life, I realized what a privilege and comfort it was for me to spend every day with him. I watched him tend his flock. His followers came, burdened and overwhelmed with problems; they were trying to earn a living despite the mounting obstacles. The rabbi was very responsive to them. His prayers with them expressed the deepest pain and yet, at the same time, hope. He also gave practical advice, because as the community leader, he knew everyone and was able to direct people to available community resources. I witnessed the dramatic change in his visitors during the course of a visit. They came looking dejected and left feeling inspired.

Despite his loyalty and helpfulness to his congregation, he did not know how to help me overcome my depression, so he sent me to a psychiatrist in Budapest. The few therapy sessions I had and the prescription medication did not help me.

Still trying to find a means to relieve my depression, the rabbi of Szatmar finally decided that I should go to Sighet to visit my maternal Uncle

Yucateel, whose yeshiva was affiliated with the weaving factory. During the time I stayed with Uncle Yucateel, one of my paternal great uncles, Uncle Aaron, decided that some rest and relaxation would cure me. He offered to take me to his family house in Valova, deep in the Carpathian Mountains.

The rest and relaxation were short-lived. Only a few days after we arrived, the gendarmes knocked on my window and yelled anti-Semitic remarks. They took Uncle Aaron's daughter, Leah, and me to the police station. Some Jews who had been sent on a work brigade had fled, and the police were seeking replacements. Uncle Aaron was able to convince the police to release us, but the entire family was told to leave the area immediately. Leah survived the Holocaust and is the wife of a famous rabbi today.

I returned to the home of the Rabbi of Szatmar, but I remained depressed. After awhile Uncle Samuel returned and said it had been arranged that I should leave the Szatmar rabbi and go live with him. It was very sad and disappointing for me that although the Szatmar rabbi was quite adept at comforting and counseling his followers, he was unable to assist me, his adopted son. Despite my disappointment, to this day I hold him in the highest esteem.

After leaving the Szatmar rabbi's home and living with Uncle Samuel and his family, I considered the increasing acts of anti-Semitism and focused my thoughts on how to escape. Some people who had succeeded in fleeing from Poland to Hungary told us about the deaths in the Polish concentration camps. Concluding I had the best chance of escape if I fled to Romania, where I believed Jews were safe, I discussed this with my uncle. He

discouraged me because, although it might provide an individual solution, this was no solution for the entire Jewish community. He could not advise me to do something that he would not advise all his followers to do.

My cousins and I brainstormed daily trying to think of a means of escape. My cousin, Jehuda Frankl (no relation to Isaac Frankel of Tasnad nor of Dr. Viktor Frankl), suggested we go to Israel, but we already knew it was virtually impossible for a Jew to travel safely through Europe and be granted permission to emigrate to Israel. Even assuming we could overcome the obstacles and reach this safe harbor, we knew that in Israel Jews did not strictly adhere to the laws of the Torah. Considering this, I told Jehuda that I did not see Israel as a solution. I stated, "I'd rather die than live without values." I didn't know it then, but I have been forced to address these issues repeatedly in my life. Today Jehuda lives in Jerusalem.

The likelihood of successful escape diminished with each passing day. A Jewish business leader warned my uncle that a friend of his, a Gentile train engineer, told him that the engineer had taken Jews to a Polish concentration camp, not a Hungarian one. We all knew that the Polish camps were death camps. My uncle's sole response was, "God will help us."

In 1943 on Yom Kippur, the rabbi of Szatmar gave a shocking sermon. In the synagogue he stood in front of the doors of the Ark of the Covenant (an enclosure containing the Five Books of Moses handwritten on parchment scrolls). Wearing his prayer shawl and a white gown (kittel), he faced the congregation and in a trembling voice said:

> When we sinned, God cast us into a pit surging with snakes and scorpions. Yet, with every sincere prayer and every good deed, we steadily rise up, above the vermin, and move toward the light shining from above the pit. Let us be sure to pray our most ardent prayers and lovingly perform the most difficult of good deeds to assure that we will emerge from the pit in triumph over the snakes and scorpions. We are almost at the last step before emerging from the pit. Let us pray that we are not thrown back into the bottom of the pit.

This ending horrified people. The rabbi's speech reflected the reality of the time; yet it was tempered with hope.

A true spiritual leader, the rabbi from Szatmar held fast to his principles and stood by and with his congregation throughout this hellish time. Even though survival was becoming more and more difficult as the Nazi influence increased in February 1944, he rejected an offer from a Zionist organization to immigrate to Israel. The group had managed, with great difficulties, to get three certificates (like passports) to allow safe passage through all the countries of Europe and permission from the British consulate to emigrate to Israel. The certificates were for three rabbis --- the Rabbis from Szatmar, Beltz, and Munkatch. I witnessed his refusal to succumb to the pressure. He ignored the pleas and cries of his wife who wanted to flee, and told them that he would stay with his congregation. Of course, I also knew that he strongly opposed the Zionist way of life, which he believed to be Godless because of its abandonment of some Torah laws. I was very moved by his dedication, his refusal to abandon his followers in

their hour of need, and his unwillingness to compromise his principles to save his own life. The other two rabbis accepted the offer.

Eventually, I learned that the rabbi of Szatmar was sent to a concentration camp at Bergen Belsen. There he was told he was not allowed to have a beard, but he kept it anyway. One day the SS in charge of the camp told him, "If I see you tomorrow with a beard, I will send you to the crematorium. The next day at the morning counting of prisoners, the Szatmar rabbi appeared with his beard. However, there was a different SS in charge, unaware of the former SS's statement. The rabbi survived the camp with his beard intact.

The most remarkable aspect of the increased exploitation and oppression of Jews was the Nazi's systematic and combined use of psychology and laws to create a social environment in which such behavior was acceptable to the majority of the population. The Nazis had been slowly and steadily preparing the German people to think of Jews as "the enemy," worthy of defeat by complete annihilation. Hitler's political base of support was garnered from groups who were disillusioned, frustrated and bitter about their relative poverty. Like the Hungarian farmer who had rebuked me on my train ride to Szatmar, they sought a scapegoat to hate and blame for their unhappy circumstances. History is repetitive; today I am always leery of politicians whose campaigns are based on what they oppose rather than what they propose.

By March, 1944, Germany started occupying Hungary. New laws provided for routine confiscation of our homes which were then assigned as quarters for German soldiers. As more and more German soldiers arrived,

more and more homes were confiscated. The circumscribed area where Jews were allowed to live -- the ghetto -- became progressively smaller and our living conditions became progressively more crowded. Exacerbating matters were other newly enacted laws prohibiting Jews from any gainful employment.

Because I already lived in the core neighborhood designated as the ghetto, I did not move for a month. Single family houses were being occupied by several families; we shared our housing because there was no place else for the dislocated Jews to go. Despite the overcrowding, we were not as badly off as the Jews in Poland where the people in the ghetto were cut off from food and actually starved to death. In contrast, we had a grocery store in our ghetto and we shared the available food. Hearing the news about Polish Jews was so distressing that we tried to deny the stories we heard. We comforted ourselves with the thought that while the Hungarian government was forced to follow Nazi orders, we hoped that the Hungarian population would influence the government to resist.

While the daily mistreatment of Jews under Nazi influence was escalating, my youthful ideals were disintegrating. For months now a law was in place which deprived Jews of any legal way to earn a living. We, who had for years been prohibited from farming and had been forced into being merchants, were no longer allowed to own a business. Some Jews circumvented this law by silent partnerships with Christians who legally owned their businesses as sole proprietors. My widowed aunt who had five children did this. She had two business partners, one Christian, who had a license to sell garments, and one Jewish, who helped finance the business.

She complained bitterly that the Jewish partner exploited and cheated her. I was shocked and distressed that a Jew should exploit another Jew who needed support and help. I recalled a statement from Exodus 22:22-24:

> Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.
> If thou afflict them in any wise--for if they cry at all unto Me,
> I will surely hear their cry---
> My wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword;
> And your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

I soon became disillusioned again by a story I heard while living in the crowded ghetto. A Jewish man who had lived in Germany after World War One told us about his former business dealings there and laughed about cheating people. It disturbed me to think that such behavior may have helped fuel the anti-Semitic fires fanned by the Nazis. I wished that we religious Jews, who had been so immersed in our faith, had been more alert to the reality of the world around us.

Meanwhile, rather than remain idle while purposeful employment was denied to us, we gathered together to study the Torah and pray. We would recite the entire Book of Psalms two or three times daily. After awhile, I became discouraged and believed our prayer was meaningless. God was not listening. Despite my discouragement, I continued to pray for want of anything else to do.

While praying, we continued to be forced to deal with reality. People were being sent away and the prospect of their surviving was unlikely. We were prohibited from walking on the streets at night. One evening my Uncle Samuel received a message from his brother, Hananya, who had been

ordered to go to the forced labor camp the next morning. Uncle Samuel asked me to convince him to avoid the forced labor camp and come to live with us. There was so much chaos at the time,that Uncle Samuel thought his brother's absence might not be missed. I went alone at night to deliver this message to Hananya. However, because I believed his chances of survival were greater if he joined the forced labor camp, I advised him to go. He did go, and he was liberated near the end of March, 1945. His wife and children, like most women and children, were sent to Auschwitz and did not survive.

The overcrowding in the local ghetto resulted in our being moved, near the end of April, 1944, to another ghetto in a larger city, but we only stayed there ten days. Then the Nazis came for all of us, including my Uncle Samuel's family and me. They took us from the ghetto and loaded us on freight trains, sixty to eighty people in each car. We rode for six days without food, water, or sanitary facilities.

My Experiences in the Nazi Concentration Camps

We arrived at dawn at Auschwitz. The SS first separated us into three groups: strong men, strong women, and old people and women with children. It became clear from the way they screamed their orders at us in German and menacingly carried clubs, that should we even hesitate to carry out their orders, we would die. Since most Jews speak Yiddish which is similar to German, communication was not a big problem. The men were then marched off to a separate area where we waited in lines for our hair to be cut. (To facilitate identification and capture of any concentration camp escapees, the Nazis had our hair cut to about one inch in length, except for a swath that was completely shaved lengthwise down the middle.) Already frightened, people were further distressed by the young Polish barber who had been at Auschwitz for a longer time than most and whose job was to cut our hair. Looking at our group he muttered, "You stupid Hungarian Jews! Why did you let yourselves get fooled into coming here? Why didn't you flee?" Hearing his remark, some people said he was very mean. Yet, seeing the pain in his eyes, I defended him and said, "He only said that because it really hurts him to see us in this situation."

Next, the SS ordered us to discard all our clothes, which meant we were headed for the disinfectant chamber or the gas chamber, we didn't know which. Disrobing was difficult for me personally, because I was then confronted with the first in a long series of life-or-death choices. They ordered us to discard all our possessions. The last thing I held in my hand

were my phylacteries, (tefillin) handwritten copies of the holiest prayers. These prayers are so holy that if one accidentally drops his tefillin onto the floor, he must fast all day. My phylacteries had been given to me, as with all Jewish boys, upon my Bar Mitzvah, and I carried them in a velvet pouch which was embroidered beautifully to signify the great worth of the pouch's contents. While a religious Jew prays for a half hour to an hour each morning, he wears these prayers on his forehead and left arm. Three times the SS ordered our group to let go of our possessions. It became clear that those who failed to obey would immediately be sent to the crematorium. Then, I finally let go, because although it is a sin to leave behind the phylacteries, it is also forbidden to commit suicide. I had to determine how best to obey God's will. At the time, I was devastated by my release of the phylacteries, which were a part of my identity.

I also was thinking that I had been unwise to seek my uncle's approval for my idea to flee to Romania. I now believed I would have been better off if I had relied on my own judgment and acted upon it. I resolved that from then on I would never seek others' approval for my decisions about my own life. I would be guided only by God.

After leaving behind all our clothes and worldly possessions, we filed into a huge room. Suddenly, I smelled a strong odor and was terrified that it was the fatal gas. However, it was a disinfectant added to the water for our shower. We were then given blue-and-white-striped clothes to wear. Extremely relieved, we joked about the ill-fitting garments.

Nazi dehumanization techniques included referring to us as Haeftling, neither workers nor slaves; I believe it means the dregs in German. The

number inscribed on my shirt was 71286; I became that number and had no other name. I later learned that by this time in the war, the Nazis had chosen to inscribe numbers on prisoners' shirts rather than tattooing numbers on their arms.

Thirty-six hours from the time we disembarked from the freight train, showered, dressed and been assigned barracks, they served us our first meal in chamber pots. Some people were so appalled by this that they realized what lay ahead and committed suicide by running and throwing themselves against the electric fence.

Refusing to inform us of future events was another favorite Nazi intimidation tactic. We heard shots, smelled the smoke from the crematoriums, and waited in our barracks to be told what to do next. Our guards and intimidators came from three separate groups. First there were the SS soldiers, part of the brutal commando team, who were sadistic killers. Second were the Kapos, fellow prisoners chosen by the SS to act as foremen, with whom I had the most interaction. Some Kapos wore yellow triangles, which meant they were Jews; some wore red triangles, which meant they were political prisoners, usually dissenting Germans. The third group were the Wehrmacht, regular German soldiers who had fought the Allies, and with whom I had the least interaction.

From fellow prisoners I learned that you improved your chance of survival by being selected for work and working. Nevertheless, survival at Auschwitz was always precarious, because the Nazis liked to fill the ovens. Not looking especially strong -- I am 5 foot two and have usually weighed about 105 pounds -- I was afraid I would not be selected for work. Standing

outside the barracks I was told by a fellow prisoner, “Three blocks from here they are selecting people to go to work.” Because there were no names or lists yet, I decided to make a run for that barrack. I looked all around and there was no guard, so I ran to that barrack. Three SS guards were picking out workers. They were looking for men who appeared strong enough to withstand the work. I was put aside with a group of five other people. I looked at them and saw that they were old and weak-looking or young and pale. I realized where this group was headed.

What should I do? As if God were directing me to use my brain to assist in my own survival, I suddenly recalled a Talmudic statement, “It is better to be the tail of the lion than the head of the fox.” While this statement really means one should associate with persons who are better educated than oneself, to stimulate and challenge oneself to experience wider horizons, I interpreted it in this situation to mean that I should take action. Noting that there was no SS guard around and only a sympathetic Kapo, I boldly put my foot out to go back to the yet unselected group. The Kapo winked at me and let me return to this group. When the SS guards approached me in line this time, I flexed my muscles and tried to look as strong as possible. Compared to the other people in the unselected group, I looked strong. They selected me to be a worker.

After five days in Auschwitz, they transferred my group of workers to Mauthausen. There we were separated from the Prime Minister of Hungary by a wire fence. Although he had given up Hungarian Jews to the Nazis, he had rejected further German demands and had subsequently been incarcerated with us.

Because Mauthausen was a central organization camp where workers were assigned to different locations, I was there for only a few days. Then I was sent to a camp in the town of Melk, located between Vienna and Linz. The Germans had decided to build a Messerschmidt airplane factory there. When we arrived in Melk, French resistance prisoners told us, "A year ago, we were 5,000. Now we are only 100." I burst out, "If only three people survive, I will be one of them!" I was shocked by my own statement, but the memory of it stayed with me.

Nazi fanaticism and sadism were clearly reflected in their counting procedures for inmates. We were aroused before our shift, given a cup of coffee at the barrack, and counted. Then we walked to a central gathering place where we were again counted. The count had to be accurate. Kapos would call out the number of persons there yesterday, the number of persons present today, and the number who had died in the past twenty-four hours. (Hearing this last number always brought a chill to my bones, regardless of the weather.) Whenever the number of those present plus the number of those who had died did not add up to yesterday's count, there was big trouble. Everything stopped until an accounting was made for any missing persons. We often stood in the cold for hours. The Nazis didn't care if we froze to death. Once the count was completed to Nazi satisfaction, we walked to the train station, took a freight train to a train platform near the hills, and then walked to the construction site five kilometers (3.1 miles) away.

The work we did was both physically demanding and dangerous. We dug out tunnels in the sand hills where the Messerschmidt factory would be

built and concealed underground. We also built a camp for the civilian management who worked at the factory. Once when we were digging in the sand, the Allies started bombing us. Everything shook and I realized we could be buried alive. I prayed, "God, if I survive, please don't make me crippled. I don't want to be forced to depend on charity." After the bombing, former yeshiva classmates and I comforted ourselves spiritually by gathering together and reciting the Torah from memory whenever we could.

Because of the unsanitary conditions, lice and typhus spread throughout the camp. In keeping with the Nazi intimidation and humiliation tactics, sometimes when we would return from work we would suddenly be told to strip and walk outdoors in the cold. Naked and shivering, we were led to the disinfectant chamber.

After a few months of working at Melk, I got sick and experienced yet another example of Nazi humiliation tactics. I went to the infirmary and waited in line for medication. I was ill, hungry, and dirty. I looked up and saw on the wall inside the infirmary the following statement: "Besser in Ehre zu sterben als in Schande zu leben." ("Better to die in honor than to live in shame.") This humiliation spurred me to resolve that should I survive this concentration camp experience, I would never let a human being do this to me again. Should an enemy try to catch me, I would not be caught alive. As it happened I arrived at the infirmary during a very rare time --- a time when they actually had medication to dispense. Moreover, I was deemed ill enough to receive medication. Once again, I was lucky to survive.

At the beginning of November, 1944, I was selected for a special worker group called "The Punishment Group." There were forty people in

this group, three Jews and thirty-seven Polish Christians who had revolted against German occupation. We were told to cover the sewer lines outside the barracks being built for the civilian foremen. The ground was frozen like a rock, yet notwithstanding the futility of our task, we were forced to stay outside there all day. This lasted for over a month. Of the forty people, thirty-five froze to death and only five survived. We survivors carried the dead bodies back to the train station and the camp. One Jewish man, who had longer experience in the camps than I, told me how best to survive, "When you feel as if you are starting to freeze and especially when your consciousness starts to get hazy, start moving; otherwise, you'll freeze to death." Because we were on starvation rations, we had little energy and couldn't possibly move constantly. Yet, movement at critical moments saved the five of us.

While suffering from yet another incident of inhumane conditions, I was reminded that there still was some humanity left. The shoes issued by the concentration camp were made of wood and plastic. One evening after work while I was walking the five kilometers from the construction site to the train platform, one of my shoes fell apart. There was ice and snow on the ground then, so I took paper and tried to cover the holes with paper. This, of course, was futile; the snow disintegrated the paper. A German soldier, from the Wehrmacht--not an SS--saw my problem. I heard him say to himself, "Oh, my God! How can this happen?"

Realizing I would not survive without shoes, I lay awake that night. I knew that if I walked the next day without shoes, my feet would become frost bitten in a few hours, and I would become disabled. Then, I would be

sent to the gas chamber. At about 11 p.m., I heard a whisper from the Kapo in charge of our barracks. He announced in a very low voice that the people who needed shoes should queue up for them. I ran to get into line, but there were ten people ahead of me. I was the last person in line. When it was my turn, there was only one pair of shoes left. The same Kapo who had given me a pair of shoes only a month ago recognized me. Cursing at me in German, he reluctantly gave me that last pair of shoes. I felt like I was miraculously saved again.

Another life-threatening incident followed shortly. In the barracks I slept on a top bunk. The roof began to leak and my blanket got wet from the rain. I developed pneumonia. My teeth were chattering. Nevertheless I went to work. Our group was laying the cement floor of the barracks for the civilian workers. I had such a high fever that I stood by the wall. The Kapo advanced toward me and said, "Go to work or I'll club you to death." I took the wheelbarrow and begged my co-workers to fill it quickly. Then I ran back and forth like crazy. I sweated and sweated. I must have sweated my fever away.

The cumulative effect of the humiliation, intimidation, and surrounding deaths caused me immense spiritual anguish. Then one day we were standing on the platform waiting for the freight train to take us back to the barracks. It was snowing, hailing, and sleeting. I was wearing the regulation clothes -- a thin shirt and a pair of pants and the sleet felt like needles piercing my skin. At that moment I thought, "God, why are You doing this to me? I have tried to serve You honestly and to the best of my ability. I have fasted, prayed and studied the Torah. I have been totally

dedicated to You." Despite my despair and suffering, I could not believe that God is a sadist. Suddenly I remembered studying that when humanity degenerates to a certain point, God gives Satan the power to clean out the barn. Satan destroys and cleanses with no discrimination between the innocent and the guilty. I also recalled the mystic teachings that the feminine part of God, the Schina, suffers with the innocent Jews during this time. At that precise moment I felt two warm rain drops on my shoulder, as if Heaven were crying with me. This experience stayed with me throughout my ordeals in the camps.

Despite the fact that many people might think that I imagined the warm rain drops, I truly believe I felt God's compassion and Presence. My faith strengthened and enabled me to endure and overcome hardships. I perceived that from now on, to survive both spiritually and physically, I had to help others. Because there was rarely anything I could do physically to help someone suffering, I tried to give each person some hope.

My spiritual experience strengthened the beliefs I was taught as a child. The world wasn't created to please us. Our real joy in life comes from contributing to others and our community. Also we need to learn which desires we should nourish and which we ought to manage and control. Our capacity for physical joy increases in proportion to our tolerance of physical pain. There are no limits to spiritual joy.

One afternoon I entered the "washroom," a bleak room with a few faucets, cold water, and no soap or towels. While washing my hands I observed a Greek and a Spaniard trying to communicate but neither knew the other's language. They didn't know much German either, but they

thought they did. Their effort to communicate in "German" was hilarious. One tried to help the other find the right word in German but really couldn't. The "German" words they used didn't mean anything. They had no idea what they were saying to each other. To this day, I have no idea either.

I found some comfort in having a family member in the same camp with me. My cousin Betzalel, Uncle Samuel's son, and I were like brothers, because I had lived with his family for a semester when I had gone to his father's yeshiva and spent time with them after leaving the Szatmar rabbi's home. By nature Betzalel was very quiet and had a somewhat passive personality. Because I had already experienced much emotional pain before the war, when I had felt isolated at the home of the Szatmar rabbi, I knew I could comfort him. I used to go to his barracks after work and we would talk about how to get through this. Also, as starving people do, we talked frequently about food and reminisced about his mother's cooking.

When the Nazis started to experience defeat, their viciousness in the camps increased. One evening in January, 1945 when there was no work that needed to be done, they took our group of about forty people to the entrance of the tunnel, gave us rubber baskets, and told us to move the gravel about twenty meters and empty the baskets.. Then we were to refill the baskets from that same pile and return the gravel to the original spot. The sole purpose of this "work" was to humiliate us. I did this for one or two hours. I have never been suicidal, but I couldn't tolerate this senseless brutality any longer. Therefore, I waited until a Kapo would not see me, and then ran into a tunnel of the Messerschmidt factory. I sat down in a corner and dozed off.

My brief escape and nap came at a price. Awakening to silence, I knew I was in deep trouble. My heart pounding, I ran outside in the dark and saw my group being counted by the Kapo who was already reading off the list of numbers. I quietly sneaked back into the group. Someone assured the Kapo that a person had come back into line. Glad the count was now accurate, he took us back to the barrack. The next day before beginning work I saw the Kapo comparing the two lists: the list of the numbers of persons he had taken to do the basket "work" and the list of those he had recorded on the return count. I knew that he had identified me as the latecomer. To avoid the likely punishment, death, I volunteered when another Kapo asked for volunteers for a special project. My fellow prisoners thought I had gone mad, because no one ever volunteered for the "volunteer" jobs, which were the worst jobs one could possibly imagine. This ploy worked and I never got into trouble for my temporary defection and nap.

It was common knowledge that the so-called infirmary rarely dispensed medication, and patients usually were left to die. I saw many people with serious medical conditions, yet they avoided the infirmary. In February a wound in my foot became infected. The pain was so extreme that I considered going to the infirmary. However, a man I barely knew and to whom I owe my life said, "Rafael, don't give up. If you survive this, life will be worthwhile again." Luckily my body eventually fought off the infection.

Later that February I had a wonderful dream. I dreamed that I was at home with my entire family celebrating the Sabbath and having a fine dinner. It was a very comforting dream. When I began to wake and opened

my eyes, I saw the high electric fence and the guards. This shocked me into complete wakefulness. I cannot describe the horror I felt at that moment. I thought, "Will I ever get out of this alive?"

When the Russians advanced, the Nazis transferred us from Melk concentration camp near Vienna to the Ebensee concentration camp in the Austrian Lake Country. In April, 1945, we learned from other people who were brought to Ebensee that none of the women and children who had originally been at Auschwitz with us had survived. My brother-in-law, Moses, had been brought to Ebensee after he had spent additional time on the working brigade. He was crushed by the knowledge that his wife and baby had been killed. I tried to comfort him. What do you say to someone whose spouse and baby have been brutally murdered? Once again I drew upon my faith and religious training to help me speak with Moses. The Talmud refers to depression as "the bitter darkness," which is considered anger toward God turned inward. According to the Talmud, whatever happens to a person, he or she must not be angry with God. Whatever happens, God will give one the strength to deal with it, if that person turns to God. No one has the right to throw one's life away. Thinking all this, I said to Moses, "What has happened is very horrible. Please do not throw your life away; I have lost my sister and nephew, I would hate to lose you, too." Despite my efforts to help him gain courage to continue, a few days later he went to the infirmary. The frostbite in his foot was so severe that the tissue had been damaged. He did not survive.

Brutality, starvation, and death were the norm in this environment. The brutal treatment included starvation-level rationing which became more

severe as the Germans headed toward defeat. At the beginning of my imprisonment, we were given two "meals" daily, breakfast and lunch. Breakfast consisted of weak, black coffee and "bread" that tasted like sawdust mixed with some unknown substance. Lunch was Gemuse Suppe, which consisted of a few dried vegetables mixed with a large quantity of water. Each prisoner had to carry his mess tin with him at all times. In the last months, the Suppe had diminished in both quantity and quality. It was made with more water and potato peels only. We ate no dinner.

Tension mounted as the Allies advanced but German brutality did not diminish. At this time I was placed with a group of people in a small oil refinery. It was warm inside but there was no work to do, so we would occasionally doze off. One day a young Kapo -- the young ones were usually more brutal than the older ones -- accused another man and me of sleeping on the job, a potentially fatal infraction. He took me with him to the SS. The SS ordered him to take us back to the refinery and beat us in front of the others. He started to beat me with a cable. Because a Kapo's job was also to weed out the weak, beatings frequently resulted in death. I started to scream but soon realized this made no difference. I intentionally collapsed. He stopped beating me, which was the only reason I did not die that day. When I returned to my barrack, I saw the other man sitting on his bunk. I asked him what had happened to him. He told me that he had managed to escape the beating by bribing the Kapo with a cigarette.

The next day at the refinery the Kapo who had beaten me was surprised to see me alive and started to pick on me. I realized he was determined to kill me. I was very scared but I stood up straight and stayed

very alert, so as to give him no excuse to report me. I noticed that the man who had successfully avoided the beating was not at work. Yet, he appeared that night at the barrack. I asked him what he had done to be relieved from work. He confided to me his successful scheme. Everyone had to go outside to be counted each morning. Those who had just been released from the infirmary stood in a separate area with their hat in their hands, so they would not be taken to work. They then were allowed to return to the barracks. The strict order previously set by the Nazis in the concentration camps was slowly disintegrating as the war was drawing to an end. Because my life was in imminent danger from the sadistic Kapo, I decided to try my fellow prisoner's scheme. The next morning I stood with my hat in my hand. I got away with it. I continued to do this.

The last two weeks before we were liberated were extremely bleak; there was starvation and death everywhere. One day I saw my cousin Betzalel walking by himself looking dazed. I asked him, "Betzalel, where are you going?" He told me that most of the people from his barrack had died, they were closing his barrack and he had been ordered to go to Barrack 11. Because I was not working those last days and had had conversations with other prisoners, I knew that Barrack 11 was the killing barrack --- the one where they overcrowded people and clubbed them to death for the slightest infraction. In contrast my barrack, although dreadfully overcrowded and chaotic, was not the scene of imminent assault and murder. Nobody was recording prisoners by their registration numbers. We were sleeping three in a bunk. One of my bunk mates had just died and the Kapo didn't know that yet. I told Betzalel to come with me and pretend to be my

bunk mate. He followed my advice and survived. Today he lives in Jerusalem and his son told me that his father had told him this story.

In the last few days before liberation while we were standing in line to be counted, a Kapo told us that an abominable act had been committed; someone had cut off the behind of a dead prisoner and eaten it. He asked, "Who did it?" We were all fully aware of the collective punishment that would likely ensue -- execution -- if there was no reply. Yet we all stood mute. Surprisingly, we received no collective punishment.

The last few days breakfast consisted of watery coffee. Lunch was about 100 grams of bread mixed with sawdust and a bowl of soup made from a minimal amount of potato peel. A very famous (religious) sage at the camp was actually arguing with others as to whether the soup was made from one tablespoonful of potato peel or two. In our condition, the difference between one or two tablespoonfuls was significant; the more peels, the longer we might survive. At this time I recall making a circle with the thumb and middle finger of one of my hands and being able to completely encircle my upper arm with it.

About three weeks before liberation, there were 821 prisoners in my barrack. A few days before liberation less than 300 still survived. Near the end I felt we were existing like animals. Starving and searching for something edible, I found some grass growing by the barracks where the SS had their office. I ate it.

To the bitter end the Germans adhered to their fanatic bookkeeping and brutality. Outside the SS officers' building there stood a bulletin board with a listing of 18 countries of origin. In two columns to the right of each

country was a chalk entry of the number of prisoners alive yesterday and the number of prisoners alive today. It is important to remember that the Nazis exterminated people of many different religions from many different countries.

Hope arrived the next afternoon when I was told that the night shift was not going out to work. This had never happened, so I knew that this meant we would be liberated soon. I already knew that the Russians were advancing, because people from more eastern camps had been arriving here. That night I was greatly comforted by a dream about the rabbi of Szatmar, from whom I had learned the importance of faith and of bringing hope and comfort to others. He asked me, "Why are your clothes so dirty?" I told him, "I'm coming from a very difficult journey." He nodded solemnly. When I woke up I knew we would be liberated very soon.

The next morning as we were walking to the counting area, we were fortunate to have to walk by some alert Spaniards in the two barracks closest to the camp exit. These Spanish Gentiles had revolted against Franco, who had allied himself with the Nazis. They were treated somewhat better than the rest of us. As we walked by them, the Spaniards shouted and warned us, "Don't go! Don't go!"

At first, we didn't know what they were talking about. Then the SS commander told us, "The American army is coming. Go into the tunnel to be saved." At this point the Spaniards screamed, "We won't go!" Then the entire camp revolted, chanting, "We won't go!" The three SS commanders and two remaining guards fled. After the SS ran away, we saw outside the electric fence of the camp a few old Wehrmacht soldiers. Later that

afternoon we heard a big explosion in the tunnel which had been wired with a time bomb. Years later I read in Paul Johnson's *A History of the Jews* that this was the only Nazi concentration camp where prisoners revolted and survived!

About 5 p.m. on May 7, 1945, two American tanks arrived in advance of the American army. We all ran to the tanks; we were so excited. I jumped onto one and was lucky I didn't get run over! After this moment of jubilation and weak from starvation, I started searching in the SS barracks for food. I found some ground chicory coffee beans and shoveled them into my mouth. Then, unfortunately, I found a bottle with a few drops in it that smelled like alcohol and drank it. It had a bitter aftertaste. Someone came in, saw me drinking it, and told me it was shoe polish. Since then, despite the fact that I am not a picky eater, I cannot stand the taste of cilantro, which reminds me of the taste of the shoe polish!

While the two American tanks waited for the rest of their unit to arrive, Betzalel and I left the camp to find food. We walked like 80-year-old men, not like the 20- year-olds that we were. We asked local farmers for food, and one gave us a potato and a small piece of bread. Then another came out with a gun. Realizing this was too dangerous, we stopped asking for food and returned to the camp.

Upon our return, we learned that a particularly brutal and sadistic Kapo -- luckily, I had never had any dealings with this Kapo -- had been at the camp at the time of liberation. A mob of prisoners captured him and killed him by skinning him alive.

The next day, after the American army arrived, they cooked us a very

excellent and nourishing dinner, a beef stew. I woke up in the middle of the night and felt like I was choking to death. It seemed that my stomach was incapable of digesting solid food. Sadly, some people actually died from their first real meal in such a long time.

Because the Americans were understaffed, they asked for help assisting the bedridden that night. Despite my stomach problems, I was still capable of moving and working and felt well enough to help the less fortunate. That night I helped turn the bedridden over, take them to the restroom, and feed them. The next day I helped with burial tasks.

In the morning, I had another initially satisfying, yet ultimately disturbing culinary experience. The Americans served us bacon for breakfast. I got severe heartburn. I felt angry that now, when I finally had the opportunity to eat, I had to go through this! I became extremely careful of what and how I ate.

Continuing in their efforts to help us regain our health and dignity, the Americans, with the assistance of some young, local women, fed and cleaned people who were too ill to move. They also brought trucks with showers for those of us who were mobile. We needed showers desperately, because we were all full of lice. While showering, I became startled and frightened when I realized that at 21 years of age, I had just seen young, beautiful women and had not had a normal masculine response. During my imprisonment, I had feared the Nazis would castrate us. Now I feared I would never have a normal life. A more knowledgeable man assured me that this was normal for our physical condition and that when we got our strength back, we would be all right.

We stayed at the camp for a few more weeks. The American military authority told us that we had two choices: to stay in the camp and wait to see which countries would accept refugees, or try to go back to our own native countries. Despite the fact that returning to my family would make it more difficult to break with tradition and the family plan for me to become a rabbi, I felt compelled to return to my birthplace to see if I could find any of them. There were some people who knew that they would not find anyone, so they stayed in the camp and waited to see which countries would accept them. Those who chose to leave were transported in American military trucks to the Russian-occupied side of Austria. On arrival, we all started talking excitedly. Suddenly, a female Russian soldier started screaming at us from the window of her office, "You loud Jewish people. What do you think? You are in the synagogue?"

Returning Home

Immediately after World War II, chaos ruled Europe. The Russian-occupied side had only military authority, and trains were the only form of mass transportation available. There was high demand and short supply of every imaginable resource, including trains. Therefore, people actually rode on top of the trains as well as inside them. To return to my birthplace, I rode on top of a train. Because of the scarcity of food, public kitchens were created to feed the hungry.

When I arrived in Budapest, I found a small Jewish community and recognized one of my cousins, Jehuda Frankl, with whom I had brainstormed about escape before our capture during the war. I was so excited that I gave him a hearty slap on the back. He was so weak that this blow almost caused him to faint. I then realized our joy in surviving and seeing each other again had to be celebrated very, very carefully.

I was filled with more joy upon finding other surviving relatives in Debrecen. My Uncle Naftoly and his entire immediate family had survived intact. They had been taken a little later than I, and they owed their survival to the ingeniousness of Uncle Naftoly's wife, my Aunt Malka. Because the Russians destroyed many train tracks to Auschwitz, the Nazis were forced to decrease the number of Jews they sent to Auschwitz and increase the number they sent to occupied countries to work on farms. The selection process involved visual inspection by the SS followed by stamping some people's hands and not others. One group was destined for Auschwitz, the other for the farms. No one knew which, but Aunt Malka had observed that

the older, weaker persons had been stamped. She surmised that she and her family had received the mark of death. Surreptitiously she rubbed and rubbed till she had erased all traces of her family's stamps. The Nazis didn't notice this, so my aunt's family were all sent to farms to work.

Aunt Malka, the daughter of a rabbi, had been taught to be charitable. Her family was famous for feeding the poor. Today in the United States there are still people who are grateful to her, because she took from her own rations at the farm and gave to others who might not live if they didn't have more to eat. My aunt lived in Brooklyn, New York for a while and then moved to Florida where she lived until her death a few years ago. She was often visited by the children of those she had helped during those terrible times.

Continuing on my journey home, cousin Betzalel, another acquaintance, and I eventually arrived in Care-Mare. Typical of the disorder and lack of resources, there was a blackout when we arrived. As we walked through the town, our acquaintance walked in front of us and acted as a look-out on the dark streets. Suddenly we heard him screaming. We ran to help him and saw that he was being beaten by two Gentiles who claimed he had tried to steal their watch. Our acquaintance said this was not true. We were furious and started to fight them. (The reason that Jews received such a bad reception upon returning home is that all of our homes had been taken over by Gentiles.)

Hearing the commotion, some Russian soldiers approached and yelled, "Stoi!" ("Stop!") We all froze. They took us to their headquarters. To our surprise the Russian officer in charge was Jewish. He took Betzalel,

our acquaintance, and me aside and spoke to us in Yiddish. "You deserve to be put in jail," he told us.

"Why?" we asked innocently.

"Because you should have killed those guys! They've killed enough of us!" We were speechless. Of course, we knew that many Russian Jews had lost family members during the Nazi occupation of parts of Russia, so even though he was a soldier, his situation was not so different from ours. "Stand up for yourselves and don't let yourselves be abused! Get out of here now, and don't let me see you again, or you'll end up in jail!" he admonished us. Meanwhile, the Gentiles were booked.

After this episode, we three decided to go our separate ways. I continued on my travels and sought other relatives in the midst of the chaos, which reigned for several months. Many people had been displaced, inflation was rampant, and in Budapest you had to have a suitcase full of money to buy a loaf of bread.

From Uncle Naftoly I had learned the remarkable fate of his and my mother's sister, Aunt Malka, (not the same Aunt Malka who was Uncle Naftoly's wife). Aunt Malka and her immediate family had lived for a while near Tasnad and moved to Timasura some time before the war. When Hungary regained most of Transylvania during World War II, it did not, for reasons unknown to me, regain a few small towns, including Timasura. Romania retained this small area, and the Jews who lived there were not touched by the Nazis. Eventually, in 1951 Aunt Malka and her family decided to leave Romania and immigrate to the United States. The family traveled on two different airplanes. Unfortunately, her son Rafael and his

wife did not survive a plane crash. Their infant son, Jacob, was swaddled in a pillow which broke loose from the plane and soared safely onto a tree branch. Aunt Malka raised Jacob, who grew up and worked as a computer programmer for the New York Times and now owns a print shop in Brooklyn, New York.

Upon reaching the town of Berbesht where my mother's family grew up, I located another maternal uncle, Uncle Lipa. I was especially happy to see Uncle Lipa, whom I greatly admired for his unflinching honesty and compassion. Many years later Uncle Lipa consoled me when I was worrying about my success as a parent. His son had gone to a yeshiva, while my children received a secular education. I complimented him, "You have raised your son more responsibly than I." I said this because his son appeared to be more disciplined than my children. He responded with total honesty, "No, our system is very disciplined until the age of 15 or 16; then we lose control of our children and they behave irresponsibly." I was impressed by his admission which few religious persons would make.

After spending a short time visiting with Uncle Lipa, I steeled myself to return to Szatmar. It was unbearable to see the empty houses. I was haunted by memories of the people, probably all dead, who had lived in them. I did not find my father's second cousin, Joel Teitelbaum, the Szatmar rabbi. However, I did meet a distant relative who warned me, "Don't stay here. The Russians will take over and you'll have to stand in line for every little thing, even a shoe lace." I located the Szatmar rabbi's synagogue. The roof was damaged, the floor was broken up, and there was grass growing in the cracks. I was reminded of a Talmudic passage in which

the destruction of the temple is mourned. Standing there in the deserted synagogue with grass growing in it and knowing that the community was completely destroyed filled me with overwhelming sorrow.

During the course of my travels in Szatmar, I had another disturbing experience which convinced me to leave the town and consider leaving the whole area. I went to a small restaurant for breakfast. The owner was a concentration camp survivor. I witnessed his business dealings with a local peasant woman who had walked into the restaurant to sell butter. When negotiating the price, the restaurant owner claimed the butter was not fresh and had water in it. He used every argument he could to drive down the price. The woman argued back but eventually they agreed on a price for the butter, based on weight. The owner weighed the butter in front of her. Then he gave her some money. Taking the money and counting it, the woman became very angry and cried out, "What, do you think I don't know how to calculate the price?" This upset me very much. The same atmosphere of hostility from before the war had returned.

Analyzing this upsetting experience, I realized that sales are intrinsically adversarial. The buyer and seller each try to maximize the value received from the transaction. Hard feelings develop when one party feels the other has taken advantage of him or her. When a minority, such as the Jews, are the merchants, they frequently become a scapegoat for the business and personal frustrations of the majority. I was not eager to assume the potentially dangerous occupation that Jews had been forced to assume for centuries. I was all the more determined to leave my native land and not be a merchant. Perhaps I'd be a factory worker or a farmer, but not a

merchant. I was more interested in dedicating my life to making and keeping the peace.

I decided to return to Care-Mare where I met up with Betsalel at his family's house. We broke a hole in the cellar wall where we had stored the family valuables before we went to the Ghetto of Szatmar and then Auschwitz. We recovered my mother's ring and ritual pearls, our candle holder, menorah, and silver cup, and Betzalel recovered his family valuables. Because the Russian soldiers would rob you of everything of value you carried when they let you board a train, we did not want to take these things with us. They were the only reminders I had of my immediate family. I decided to sell them to my uncle Lipa in order to keep them in the family. Since they didn't have much money, I sold everything for a fraction of their worth.

Pessimistic about the likelihood of a positive change for Jews occurring in Romania, grieving the loss of my immediate family, but determined not to live under communist rule, I was the first of my extended family's survivors to leave our homeland in search of freedom. With no money, no trade, and not speaking any western European language, but with much hope and no fear of hard work, I put a few pieces of clothing in a back pack and left on my journey.

Being a "Displaced Person"

Having only a vague idea where I could catch a train, I walked along a farmer's field and asked him where the Hungarian-Romanian border was. He told me I was on a border. (People were supposed to cross countries only at border checkpoints, not at the edge of a farmer's field. However, there were insufficient soldiers to enforce this, and the civilian police of each country were disorganized and ineffective.) I was too tired to walk to the border check point, so I walked through the field, got to a village, and took the train to Debrecen. Then I transferred to another train for Budapest.

From the Jewish community in Budapest I learned that there was an underground Jewish organization called the Briha (in Hebrew: "the runners"), who smuggled young people over the borders and helped them get to Palestine to help fight the British. At the time Israel was not yet a country. Palestine was under British control and the British did not allow Jews unlimited immigration. There was a long history of tension between the Jews and Arabs in Palestine, dating from the 1500's, when the area was owned by the Turks. In 1918 Turkey was defeated and the British took over Palestine as a mandate from the League of Nations. Initially the British gave Jews the right to settle in Palestine, although not to form an independent state. The Palestinian Arabs felt threatened, even though the region where the Jews settled was primarily swamps and deserts. The Arabs knew that Jews relocating to Palestine did so because they wanted eventually to create an independent Jewish state. To ease tensions, in 1936 the British instituted a quota for Jews coming to Palestine.

I joined up with the Briha and they arranged for a group to travel to a displaced person (DP) camp in Vienna. There I met Uncle Naftoly and his family from Debrecen and joined them. From Vienna, we went to a small village, Brno. At the time, the eastern side of Austria, including Vienna, was under Russian occupation. The western side, including Salzburg, was under American occupation.) Because the Russian side was under Communist control, most Jews didn't want to stay there.

I rejoined the Briha who arranged to take a group of Jewish refugees to a small river where they would try to smuggle us across in the middle of the night. Carrying all of our belongings in suitcases and backpacks, we boarded a boat and crossed the river. All of a sudden we heard an American soldier shout to his commander, "People are here!" These were the first English words I had ever heard. The commander came and told the Briha leader that we had to go back. They weren't allowed to let refugees come over to the American side. We returned to Brno.

While living again with Uncle Naftoly's family, I was encouraged to return to my old religious lifestyle and become a rabbi. I knew that if I stayed with my uncle, who was also a rabbi, my fate would be cast. Resolved that I would not become a rabbi, I told Uncle Naftoly that I wanted to go to Palestine. Because his own life had been so shattered and he was totally uncertain of the future himself, he did not try to hold me back. So within a few days of the unsuccessful effort to cross to the American zone, I joined another group of young people trying to sneak over to the American-occupied side of Austria. I knew I had to act quickly lest I be enticed by the comfort of family to return to a life I really didn't want. This time our

crossing was successful, and because no one after the war had identification cards or passports, I was free to stay.

I stayed in Salzburg a few days and then traveled further west into Germany. The German people avoided refugees who were reminders of the war and whom the locals could not assist anyway. We were personae non grata, and we were treated like homeless people are often treated in the United States today. The local people would pretend they didn't see us, hold their children close to them, and go on their way. I recall once walking on the streets of Nuremberg in the spring of 1946, looking for a train station so I could continue my journey. Most of the buildings had been reduced to rubble. As I passed by Spandau prison (where German war criminals were being held), I saw a man walking in the street and asked him where the train station was. He told me it wasn't far. I walked for two hours before I arrived at a working train station!

Consistent with our status as outcasts, we lived in displaced persons camps created outside of towns in former military forts or other institutions. On the institutional land, there would be several buildings. The military authorities segregated us from the locals because they feared violence might erupt if we mixed. In the DP camp I promised myself that I would never have children. We Jews are a minority everywhere in the world and whenever our host country has bad times, we are blamed. I did not want to bring children into a world where they would be subjected to this prejudice. I did not yet know that Israel would become a country. When this happened in 1948, my feelings about becoming a parent changed.

From Nuremberg I took a train to Munich, where I found out about a

refugee camp named Fernwald. A distant relative, Rabbi Halberstam, had set up a religious study group there, and I joined it. While I had rejected the very strict Hasidic lifestyle, I certainly had not rejected Judaism altogether. Rabbi Halberstam had met with General Eisenhower during the occupation and told him that we Jewish refugees in Germany needed a synagogue and Torahs. Eisenhower arranged for one of the buildings in the Fernwald DP camp to be designated a synagogue and yeshiva.

Yet the religious study was quite discouraging to me. Here we were, primarily young people in their 20's who had survived concentration camps, discussing pilpul --i.e. arguing over hair-splitting interpretations of the Torah. This was not practical. How would we earn a living in this world? I wanted us to use our religious study as a springboard to become teachers or kosher slaughterers. Yet, this desire for vocational training was not shared by most of the people in the camp. When I circulated a petition to create vocational training at Fernwald, the rabbi told us that if we focused on vocational training in lieu of religious study, we would be rejecting our heritage. His condemnation of my petition ensured its failure. Feeling embarrassed and rejected, I left the Fernwald synagogue and yeshiva.

Uncertain of future goals, many displaced persons drifted in this environment. It took up to five years to arrange to go to the United States or other countries. Also, because of the British quota on Jewish immigration to Palestine, it also took a long time to get there. Many people stayed in the DP camps for years; I left within three months.

Yet, I, too, experienced a period of drifting while I waited for a chance to go to Palestine. Four times I took advantage of the black market.

I bought cigarettes from American soldiers in Germany. Then I took a train to a town not far from the Czech border. I crossed the border at night through a forest to a town called Ash in the Sudeten, where I sold the cigarettes. Though I realized I could stay and earn a good living as a smuggler, I resisted the temptation, discontinued smuggling, and looked more diligently for a way to get to Palestine.

My efforts were rewarded when I located the Briha again; they were much more focused on getting people to Palestine. They took us on freight trucks from near Frankfurt, Germany to the town of La Ciotat, France, near the port of Marseilles on the Mediterranean coast. There, for the first time in my life, I saw an ocean. We traveled through beautiful mountains and arrived on the Riviera. We stayed there in a DP camp for about six months which was organized by the Briha, not the military authorities, and which we ran ourselves. We planned to stay until we could find a boat to smuggle ourselves into Palestine.

At this DP camp, I was reunited with my cousin, Betzalel, who had met Jehuda Frankl's sister and married her. Betzalel's wife is very lovely and has a very positive and pleasant disposition. They managed to get on a boat which succeeded in avoiding the British blockade and settled in Jerusalem.

Still waiting for our chance to break through the British blockade, we withstood the uncomfortable conditions at the DP camp. We covered ourselves at night with blankets to avoid the mosquitoes which overran the camp, but they persistently bored right through the blankets. I was frightened at first, but eventually I got used to them. Once again food was in

short supply. Our stay was brightened by the periodic delivery of Hebrew newspapers from Palestine, which I read and began translating for others who could not read Hebrew. Fortunately, there was a fellow in our group who knew modern Hebrew. (I had studied the Hebrew of the Torah). Joseph was tall and slim, had blond hair and wore glasses. He came from an educated, orthodox Jewish family which had been Zionist before the war. (Zionists believed Jews should establish a Jewish state in Palestine.) He explained to me that there is a big difference between modern and Torah Hebrew and that I had turned the stories upside down! Although I was glad he told me this, I was immensely disappointed because my knowledge of the Hebrew language was the one thing I had learned as a child that I thought would be of practical use.

Resolved to be prepared for life in Palestine, I studied modern Hebrew daily. Still wearing my earlocks, I sat on a small cot in the DP camp barracks and studied a book about Jewish history, written by Dubnoff in modern Hebrew.

Another group that helped me achieve a modern outlook was called "Enlightened Jews" from Lithuania. They had developed a philosophy combining religious ideas with the latest scientific advancements. They felt scientific study and knowledge were instrumental to our survival. This group had become increasingly widespread and popular. They also were Zionists and believed that the only way for Jews to survive was to build a Jewish homeland in Palestine. We had long discussions about faith and philosophy. They had extensive knowledge of the secular and I had deep knowledge of Jewish tradition, law, literature and mysticism. They

explained to me the difference between values and faith on the one hand, and tradition on the other. I concluded that tradition and blind adherence to ritual can be negative when people are inflexible and use it as an excuse for failing to accommodate to changed circumstances. Indeed, in Jewish literature it is written that there are times when it is necessary to break religious laws in order to serve God.

While studying, discussing, and thinking about our future in Palestine, we still had to take care of our daily needs at the DP camp in France. As a member of a group of three in charge of sanitation, my daily routine was to take out the garbage in the morning and clean up the mess hall after each meal. In the afternoon, we went to an abandoned beach for a swim and more conversation.

Planning for our future home in Palestine, we searched and finally obtained a boat which we hoped would enable us to sneak into Palestine. If we failed to break through the British blockade, we hoped that at least our attempt would demonstrate to the world the plight of displaced Jews. In the middle of an October night in 1946 we boarded the boat, which was originally used for transporting animals along the Mediterranean coast. The Briha had constructed three levels of bunks and squeezed 650 people into this boat. Our voyage was met with a number of obstacles. First, when we left the port, we hit a rock which made a hole in the boat. The lower level filled with water. Everyone got seasick and the smell of vomit became intolerable. People ran from the bottom level of the boat to the top deck. The Briha leaders constantly directed people from one side of the boat to the other to avoid capsizing. We endured this for 13 days while trying also to

prevent detection by the British who watched the shores for illegal aliens.

Aggravating the situation was the sea water constantly seeping into the boat. One day it reached the middle level. We opened a door to bail out the sea water, when a sudden storm arose. It was very difficult to close the door, but absolutely necessary to prevent sinking. We barely managed to get the door shut.

Then another problem presented itself. The toilets located on the middle level of the boat clogged and overflowed. The Briha leaders called the sanitation group from the DP camp up to the captain's cabin. They offered us a bottle of cognac and explained the seriousness of the situation, that we could all get typhus if the mess were not cleaned. We went down to clean the mess, but the other two in my group couldn't stand the smell. They ran out and I was left alone. I remembered how the Gentiles used to make fun of us and humiliate us by saying things like, "You Jews can't do your own dirty work. You will always need servants to do your dirty work for you." The bitter memory of this taunting gave me the strength to clean the mess. I didn't stop until I had cleaned it all. My personal victory tasted sweeter than the cognac.

Our final obstacle was being detected one night by the British. They sent a destroyer, boarded our boat, and told us we must follow them to Cypress. At first we tried to resist and threw sweet potato cans at the boarding British soldiers. We were so close to our new home for which we had endured so much. They left the boat and used their destroyer to tilt our boat at a 45 degree angle. They threatened to continue tilting the boat until we sank if we did not follow them to Cypress. We ultimately relented.

At Cypress we waited in yet another DP camp to go to Palestine. We were promised that 1500 of us a month would be allowed to go. However, other refugee boats had managed to break through the British blockade, and the British reduced the number of our group who could leave for Palestine each month. Worried that we would never get to Palestine, we demonstrated and tried to open the gate of the camp where we were essentially imprisoned. The British retaliated by shooting at the legs of the first few who tried to escape. We backed off. We were lucky we were dealing with the British, I thought at that time, because had it been the Russians, they would have shot to kill.

During my time in Cypress, I widened my horizons with secular education from books and discussions to increase my vocational opportunities. I desperately wanted to get to Palestine where we Jews, if not completely safe, could at least defend ourselves.

My Life In Israel: From Farmer to Soldier to Urban Dweller

After about six months in Cypress, I finally was allowed into Palestine. For a month I stayed in a British DP camp called Latrun, where the British supplied us with identification cards. During this time I grappled with several questions burning in my mind: 1) Why did God let such horrible things happen? 2) Why had I survived? 3) What should my life purpose be?

I thought of my grandfather who had died in some unknown field and had not received a Jewish ritual burial. I thought of my father and how he had not eaten dinner at times so that we children could eat. I thought of my mother working hard to scrub and clean clothes for eight children. I remembered my sisters doing their homework together and my kid brother playing soccer with neighborhood friends. I thought of Rachel, my oldest sister, and her baby and my brother-in-law, Moses, going to the infirmary. They were all good people with a deep faith. They had all perished. I couldn't understand why God would let such misfortune befall them. I cried openly.

To assist us in reconstructing our lives, we each met with a counselor who helped us decide what location and occupation would best suit our individual skills and needs. The Israelis tried to prepare us for the tense environment we were entering --neighboring Arabs were very hostile to the major influx of Jews to the area. We were warned that Sabbath laws were regularly violated by the military in the interest of our survival, and we were encouraged to join the military. Having had my life on the line every

moment that I was a concentration camp inmate, I did not want to do this. I considered joining one of the few Hasidic settlements in Israel, but these were the butt of many jokes made by other Israelis. So, I continued to slowly relinquish my religious lifestyle. It was a very big step for me to go to a barber and have him cut my earlocks. Then I joined a modern -- not Hasidic --religious organization.

For my first year in Israel I chose to work on a private farm with animals because I had become terribly disillusioned with people. Of course the Holocaust experience was the major reason for my disillusionment, but another was my post-war experience as one of many displaced persons, shunned by the majority, whose guilty conscience led them to segregate us. Also I had noticed the clear class divisions between workers, merchants, and politicians. I disliked the ill treatment the so-called upper classes gave the lower classes. I reasoned that I could avoid all this if I spent most of my time with animals.

In addition to farming skills, I improved my social skills. The private farm where I worked from May 1947 to May 1948 was owned by a couple who had emigrated from London. I felt very comfortable with them because they also came from very religious backgrounds and had come to Palestine to help create a sanctuary for Jews. They had three sons. Although the farmer's wife was very busy with housework and the care of the children, she made a special effort to talk with me. (Having been brought up to become a Hasidic rabbi, I had spent all my time in religious study and had had no interaction at all with women.) She also prepared very delicious and nutritious meals. That year, in contrast to recent years of eating slim rations

of institutional food, I ate my fill of home-cooked meals and felt like a king. I also enjoyed talking with the farmer and helping him add two rooms onto his house.

I remember fondly my first Sabbath there. I had walked out through some fields towards the houses of a nearby kibbutz. As I passed by a tree near the houses I suddenly found myself facing five playpens with babies in them, all about the same age, smiling at me. The warmth that this brought to my heart overwhelmed me. From May 1944, when I arrived in Auschwitz, until now, I had not seen a child up close who had smiled at me. I have very good memories of this year.

In addition to relearning to trust people, I also benefited from the farm skills I learned. The farm consisted of a few acres. On one acre sat the house, barn, garden and chicken coop. The remaining land was used to produce crops. The farm was part of a collective located about 60 miles from Haifa. Every day the farmer would collect the farm products from the local warehouse and drive his truck to the distribution center in Haifa where he would leave them to be sold. He also bought and brought back the items needed by the farmers. He trained me to care for the animals while he traveled. I took care of the chicken coop, fed and milked the three cows and tended a small orchard with orange, apple and peach trees. .

While time and my work gradually helped increase my trust in humans, my naive trust in animals was diminished one day. I was letting the cows out of the barn when one cow abruptly turned and threw me into a corner. I could have been killed. I realized then that even four-legged animals can be unpredictable.

When the United Nations declared that there would be a Jewish state, hostilities between Arabs and Jews erupted. Again I felt the survival of my people was threatened. I wanted to volunteer at once for the "undeclared army," but was advised that food production was critical because we were being cut off from the Arab supply. Therefore, I fulfilled my year's commitment on the farm. To assist my people further I volunteered four hours nightly as a watchman at the village fortress.

One night I was holding my rifle and looking out a peephole of the fortress. I saw something moving. It gave me one hell of a scare, because I had only the most minimal military training for this volunteer position. Shortly thereafter, I realized it was only a donkey and was quite relieved.

Discussions with the Lithuanian Enlightened Jews and the Briha had prepared me to change my attitude and perceptions of life. I couldn't survive with my old religious ways. I became a Zionist and believed that the only place where we Jews could live and realize our full potential was Israel. I also realized that Israel had to be run on a somewhat secular plan. Strict adherence to the prohibition against bearing arms on the Sabbath would result in our swift defeat. If your enemy knows you won't fight on the Sabbath, that's exactly when they will attack.

On May 15, 1948, the British left Palestine which became the independent state of Israel. Immediately the Arabs attacked and I volunteered for the Israeli military. My number was 24916. After three days of getting organized, I was with a group of about thirty people when an officer asked for volunteers to work with explosives and putting up mine fields. He explained that you can make only one mistake on this kind of

assignment. You never get a chance to make another.

First I thought, “I’ve suffered enough. Let somebody else go.” But no one else volunteered. After the second call, I argued with myself, “People who have a father, or mother, or wife, or children, or brothers and sisters, if they get killed, there will be family to grieve them. I have nobody, so it’s my obligation to go.” Standing in the third line from the front where the officer stood, I said in a very low voice, “I’ll do it.” I spoke so softly that under normal circumstances I probably wouldn’t have been heard. But the group was so quiet that he heard me immediately and picked me out of the group.

As with farming, I again sought to obtain practical, modern training to help my people survive. This kind of training was quite different. The explosives team was taught to recognize all kinds of mines from different militaries because the enemy used all kinds. We were trained in explosives so that we could go behind the enemy lines and destroy or damage their fuel tanks. Without fuel, the enemy could not attack. In learning how explosive devices were built to increase their potential for damage, I also learned how to use the minimum explosive material for the maximum effect. We explosives team members wore special, noiseless rubber shoes and carried a special knife for digging to place the mines. We were very proud to walk around the camp in our outfits. Unlike a few who tried to horse around with their weapons and actually lost fingers, I had a great deal of respect for my rifle and detonators.

Another weapon which we carried on our backs were flame throwers containing napalm. We used the flame throwers to destroy attacking tanks.

The flame throwers used gas pressure to project flames. We had to wait until a tank was about 40 meters away and then,by aiming at the opening of the tank, we could project the burning napalm into the tank and burst it into flames. Because of the vow I made in Melk, I was determined not to let a tank get by me nor get caught alive. I would never be a prisoner again.

I recall vividly one harrowing assignment we had on a Sabbath night. Our group was ordered to place mines in an area between an old deserted British camp and the hills where Arab forces were in control of a narrow strip of land. The enemy would come out of the hills, climb on top of the British barracks and snipe at the road which led from Tel Aviv to Haifa in an attempt to split Israel in half. Our mission was to mine the area between the hills and the barracks to prevent the enemy from reaching the barracks.

Unfortunately, the enemy in the hills spotted us laden with mines and started shooting. We crouched down in a dried out creekbed and our commander ordered us to put down the mines and lay on top of them. He explained that if a bullet hit any of the mines we were carrying, our whole group would be killed. But if we lay on top of the mines, then more of our group was likely to survive. With the arrival of supporting troops who managed to divert the enemy and draw their fire, we ultimately succeeded in mining the area. Only one of our group was wounded, and no one died.

Occasionally we were given a few days off during the cease fires. People would go visit their families. I would usually go to visit the farm where I had worked before and help out. They would pay me with food, because food was scarce in the cities. Afterward, carrying gifts of food, I would rush to Tel Aviv or Jerusalem and give the food to my relatives.

During one military leave, I decided to feed my own soul. I visited the ancient, mystic city of Safad, in the Galilee. This city is well-known because Isaac Luria, the sixteenth century creator of Lurianic mysticism, lived there. Luria revived Jewish mysticism, added his own interpretation to it, and helped it grow. I went to the Luria synagogue, still intact and in the same condition it had been hundreds of years before. The low-ceilinged synagogue was dark inside. Near a bench by the ark was a podium where the prayer leader would stand. There stood some ancient scrolls with Luria's message about the cleansing of the soul. I admired Isaac Luria, who has been called, "The Lion," and I was deeply awed by this place. I studied Luria years ago, but never dreamed I would ever see his synagogue. I imagined Luria still alive, taking a group of people to the Mountains of Galilee to sing melodies, including the entrancing Lecha Dodi, "Welcome the Bride, the Sabbath Queen." This song is still sung on Friday evenings at sunset to welcome the Sabbath. It is said that Luria's melodies acted like a meditative mantra, raising people to a higher level of consciousness. Luria believed that if ten people would dedicate themselves selflessly to the praising of God, they could hasten the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of the Jews. He never wrote his interpretation of the Zohar, the main mystical work, but one of his followers, Chaim Vital, wrote about Luria's contributions and influence. My visit to Safad and the synagogue was a very rewarding spiritual experience. It helped fill the void in my soul created by the Holocaust.

The last military battle I fought was in March of 1948, and was an attempt to capture an Arab village located in the middle of the Sinai Desert.

Faluja was a thorn in Israel's side because, although we had captured the area surrounding it, we had not captured Faluja itself from the Egyptians who had fortified it against us. Abdel Nassar, who subsequently became President of Egypt, was the commander in charge of Faluja, which was being supplied at night by caravans from Egypt. For three nights we cut off the supply caravans. On the fourth night, exhausted from lack of sleep, we approached and captured three Egyptian soldiers. Our officer's orders were to execute any prisoners caught at night because it was too difficult to keep track of them in the dark. This posed a moral dilemma for us. Although our officer was probably right that to succeed in battle and win freedom for our people we would have to kill these men, it required a very cold heart to look at an unarmed human being, and shoot him to death. The man who was assigned to kill the POWs did not carry out his orders. When one of the Egyptians saw his chance, he pulled out a concealed gun and started shooting at us. There was mass confusion for a while but the POWs were eventually disarmed and executed.

We managed to capture part of the village; however, a corner of it had not yet surrendered. We posted men throughout the captured area. Standing by the outside wall near the gateway to an Arab home, I suddenly heard a big commotion. We were being fired upon by Arab troops who suddenly materialized from the village corner. We were ordered to retreat. I was the last to jump the wall and flee through a muddy creek bed. I was wounded in my shoulder by shrapnel but I continued to run until I reached our forces in a safe area. They gathered the non-critical wounded and transported them via freight train to a hospital near Tel Aviv.

My memory of this is very hazy, and I next remember waking in a hospital, totally disoriented, with no idea where I was nor what had happened to me. After a few minutes, I began to remember and prayed that I was in an Israeli, not an Egyptian hospital. I leaned over the hospital bed and looked out the open door into the corridor. When I saw Israeli nurses bustling about I was greatly relieved. The battle was a terrible loss for us. We started with about 500 in our battalion, and lost about 100. The Arabs recaptured the area. I believe this battle was the biggest Israeli defeat during the war.

In the summer of 1949, still convinced I must dedicate my life to the survival of my people and Israel, I responded to an appeal from the Jewish Agency for people to become "farming soldiers." These people were needed to settle on the troubled borders, farm the land, and protect the borders. I recognized that in this mission I could combine my two newly-obtained practical skills, farming and being a soldier. Near Afula I joined a moshov shitufi (cooperative settlement). Each settler would eventually own his own house and farm, but the farm products would be marketed and distributed collectively. I was attracted to this group because they were ready to use every ounce of their strength to ensure Jewish survival. They had recently transferred from a settlement near Beersheba, where they had been totally surrounded by Arab forces. For months this group had lived in underground bunkers and fought the Arabs while dealing with constant shortages of ammunition. This took a great deal of stamina and determination.

One day I was plowing a field with an older farmer who taught me a practical lesson. It was lunch time and he stopped working and called me to

lunch. I said, “I have to finish. It’s only another half hour’s worth of work.” He replied, “Rafael, Listen. If you always want to finish something, you will never have a life. Don’t be a slave to circumstances. It is time to eat. Stop, eat, and finish later!”

In the moshov everything was done as a community. We lived in tents while family housing units were being built by the entire group and we all ate in a common kitchen. Besides farming we performed outside tasks as needed to supplement the moshov income. A construction project nearby needed some manual laborers and I eagerly volunteered. The contractor would pick us up in his truck and drive us to the building site. Five of us were assigned to build a cement roof for a warehouse. There was only one small cement mixer and, unfortunately, after a few hours it broke down. Because we were building a roof we couldn’t stop in the middle. We worked feverishly, mixing cement with our hands, until we completed the job late at night.

When we arrived home, there was a meeting in progress. The family housing units had been completed and the moshov members agreed to dissolve the common kitchen and assign each bachelor a family to eat with. I was assigned to a very nice, childless couple, but I felt uncomfortable, like a fifth wheel at meal-time, the only time the couple had to share their day with each other. I decided to leave the settlement. I had focused on basic survival issues for my people long enough. It was time to consider my individual future.

I went to visit my relatives in Tel Aviv. Wanting to earn a living by working with my hands, I spoke with Chaim Mannheimer, who was married

to my second cousin, Rickel Goldberg. Chaim was making a living by changing the oil in cars and greasing the wheel bearings. He asked me if I could get money from an American relative to buy another machine and suggested we could be partners. This didn't work out because the income was too meager to support both his family and me. Being single, I was free to walk away from the business and consider other ways to earn a living.

Having always been attracted to physical labor and the outdoors, I moved to Haifa, rented a room, and became a construction worker. I learned to work as a carpenter on construction sites, building frames for cement. However, my bliss as a blue-collar worker was spoiled by the continual pressure I received from my extended family members, especially a woman cousin. She had lived at the Rabbi of Szatmar's home before the war, and now she tried to convince me to return to religious school and become a rabbi. I explained to her and to my extended family members, "When I am in my working clothes, I feel like a king. I live from my labor, even though my hands sometimes bleed from the cement." Nevertheless, my cousin persisted in her efforts to bring me back into the fold and even tried to make a match for me with a niece of the Szatmar Rebbetsin.

I evaluated the situation from every angle and realized I had two choices: 1) return to my old lifestyle, renew connections with my family and cut myself off from the secular world or 2) break away from my family and go my own way. I spoke with the niece of the Szatmar Rebbitsin and told her that if I had to choose between holding a job requiring work on the Sabbath, or being a rabbi financially dependent on the Hasidic community, I would choose to work on the Sabbath. This was clearly unacceptable to her.

Even though I wasn't clear where my own way was leading, I decided I had to blaze a new trail for myself.

Although I rejected a religious lifestyle, I did not reject all values nor the fundamental value of a life of service to others. I had seen too many Holocaust survivors decide to pursue only pleasure and it seemed to me they had degenerated into a meaningless existence which I myself could never tolerate. Painstakingly, I examined each value and decided whether it would permit my survival and fit with the times, or whether I must dispense with it. This evaluation required rigorous honesty and determination to follow through with my decisions. I felt like I was taking a machine gun apart and putting it back together in the dark. The values I would not give up included the following: 1) Adhering to moral codes having to do with relationships, i.e. not lying, cheating, stealing, etc., 2) Helping those less fortunate, 3) Helping those in spiritual turmoil. The values I decided I could let go included: 1) Not working on the Sabbath,
2) Ritual praying every morning with tefillin (phylacteries), 3) Eating only strictly Kosher food, 4) Dressing in traditional ways.

Not long after making these decisions, I awakened to a new outlook on life. I went for a walk in Haifa with Samuel and Moses Feig, two brothers with whom I had worked in the Messerschmidt factory. Haifa is a port town including both a valley and hills. The older section of the city is in the valley and includes the business section. The famous Technion of Haifa is located there and many Arabs live in this area. The hilly sections of Haifa were settled later, primarily by relocating Jews. We walked in the hilly neighborhoods and Samuel and Moses kept remarking on the beauty of

the lush, green, rounded hills and how happy they were to be living in such beauty. When I looked at the hills I thought, "It's just some hilly land. Why are they going on like this? I'm getting tired of politely saying, 'Yes, it is beautiful." Then Moses started singing a prayer of appreciation and gratitude for God's creations. The song was beautiful. I felt my annoyance completely dissolve. As I listened and looked around, I began to enjoy the natural beauty of the area. I realized that for a long time I had ignored the scenery, never really stopping to appreciate it. I decided to change my attitude.

While working in Haifa in 1950, I made another life-changing decision. Every day I would see a neighbor, an older bachelor, taking out his trash. He looked tired, lonely and lifeless. Contrasting the look on his face with the lively expressions on the faces of the married apartment dwellers, I realized that I did not want to live my life as a bachelor. At that time I was working for a remodeling contractor. One day I met a beautiful young woman, who was the daughter of the owner of the house we were remodeling. Not knowing how to approach her and not having access to a matchmaker, I agonized about whether I should write her a letter to see if she had any interest in me. I finally did write her a letter but she never responded.

In 1951 inflation in Israel was getting out of control. It was almost impossible to rent an apartment in a city. One could only buy an apartment. The government, the principal owner of housing, intentionally refused to rent apartments to residents, only to new immigrants. The reason for this policy was to encourage young people to settle on the borders and become

farmer-soldiers. I didn't have enough money to buy an apartment and found myself cornered. I wasn't sure I wanted to join a kibbutz.

While trying to resolve my housing and employment dilemmas, my cousin Jacob Gross from the United States came to visit and urged me to emigrate. (His father was Uncle Michael, the grocer.) Jacob owns a construction company in Allentown, Pennsylvania. I gave this considerable thought, but couldn't bring myself to leave Israel. Even though I had already served in the Israeli military, I felt a moral obligation to stay. The worsening economy and continued military threats made Israel very unstable. I wanted to help build a solid foundation for a Jewish state so that something like the Holocaust could never happen again.

Romance and Life on a Kibbutz

After a lot of soul searching, I decided to join a kibbutz in the Galilee near Tiberias on the Jordan River. This kibbutz was quite isolated and there was no radio or television. The fifty or so members used to read books from different cultures translated into Hebrew. There was a friendly competition of who could read the most books and we spent most of our free time reading and discussing these books.

Life on the kibbutz was laborious. We would get up, have breakfast, and then divide into groups to work in the fields, the laundry, or the kitchen. The field workers were the largest group, growing vegetables and grain. However, there was not enough other foods because of strict rationing in the whole country. Those who worked in the kitchen added water to the marmalade to stretch it, and the rationed serving of eggs was 1/2 egg per person per day. We joked that the chickens all had razors in their behinds because they could not lay a whole egg at once!

I recall one young Polish woman who had been part of a test group at a concentration camp in which the Nazis wanted to see how long children could survive without food. Even though this experience had occurred six or seven years ago, she always took an extra slice of bread and placed it in her pocket after breakfast before she left to go to work.

In addition to the constant back-breaking labor, we were frequently threatened by Arab snipers. One day a beautiful runaway horse wandered onto our kibbutz. It had apparently forded the Jordan River and obviously

belonged to an Arab. We kept the horse. A few days later at dusk, a kibbutz member named Yoshua was in the outhouse near the barn when he heard unfamiliar voices. He ran to the barn and saw two Arabs jumping onto the horse. They fired at him and then galloped away. The military commander of the kibbutz heard the shots and ordered all kibbutz members to arm themselves and prepare to defend the settlement. After awhile we realized the two Arabs had come solely to reclaim their horse. We were all relieved that it was not an attack.

During this tumultuous time, I met and fell in love with another kibbutz member, Violet Sorani. She was a few inches taller than me, had long black hair which she wore in braids, and a smile that lit up her whole face. I admired her for her uncompromising dedication to her ideals. She was from Iraq and I was fascinated by her background which was quite different from mine. At the age of two, she had been seriously ill and was thought to have died. While she was being taken away in the wagon for the dead, someone saw her moving, so she was returned to her family. Her mother never quite recovered from this upsetting experience. Violet's strong-willed nature contributed to her black sheep status. As a Jewish child in an Arab school, she was discriminated against by her Arab teachers and was held back without apparent reason. She began playing hooky at the age of eleven. At the age of sixteen she was attracted to the cause of Zionism and joined an underground Zionist organization. She worked for them zealously, which helped her as much as them. Her mother bitterly opposed her participation in the underground. If caught, she and her entire family would be killed. The trainer for the underground was an Israeli. His

superiors falsified papers for him and Violet and they left Iraq posing as an Arab couple seeking the services of a European physician. Violet eventually emigrated to Israel in 1948 and arrived at the kibbutz in 1950 where she organized orientations for Iraqi immigrants. In 1950 there was a large wave of Iraqi immigrants to Israel, including Violet's parents.

During one of their visits to Violet on the kibbutz, I learned more about her family. Violet's father was a merchant from Baghdad. I liked him because he was an honest, unpretentious family man. Violet told me he used to walk through undesirable, crime-ridden neighborhoods to get to the synagogue and would study and pray there for hours. When there was a riot in Baghdad in 1939, his store was robbed and burned down. He came home after losing everything and assured his frightened family that they would be all right. "Even if I have to be a water carrier for the coffee vendors, I will make sure you have all the food and clothing you need."

My enchantment with Violet continued and heightened during Passover that year. The bountiful Passover feast and the happy, spirited hora dancing afterward was the culmination and reward for a year of hard work. In the recent past, many of our group had been starved and worked almost to death by Hitler's fiends, who had been bent on annihilating us and our faith. More recently we had been challenged to carve a homeland for ourselves out of a small desert and swampland. We had labored long and hard and had willingly rationed our meager food supply. This night was different from all other nights. On all other nights we ate chicken in only one of two situations: the chicken was sick or the person was sick. But on this night we all ate chicken. On all other nights women and men dressed alike, in the

drab yet practical kibbutz attire, khakis and shirts. But on this night everyone wore his or her best, and color filled the room as the lively dancing began. On all other nights we pondered the problems of raising enough food for our people and preserving our new homeland against the threat of enemies. But on this night, grateful to God, we focused on all that we had achieved, creating farms out of the desert and successfully defending our home against enemies. On this night we remembered the words of Isaiah:

> And it shall come to pass...
> ...He shall judge between the nations,
> And shall decide for many peoples;
> And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
> And their spears into pruning-hooks;
> Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
> Neither shall they learn war any more.

We sang a lively song to our new homeland:

> A song for you, my homeland, my country
> The hills will be full of blossoms
> At the time the hora is danced
> And all the flowers will surround us
> As we dance to you.

After singing and dancing together, Violet and I went outside, walked under a starry sky, and discussed our future. We talked of marriage. I told her that I was a person who liked taking chances and was not afraid of change. I told her that because of this, our life together would probably be difficult, but it would also be interesting. She cautioned me that she was a very steadfast person; indeed her family name, Sorani, means “rock.” She would accept change only when necessary to further her ideals.

Violet had taken out a government loan so that her parents could leave their temporary residence at a refugee camp, buy a place to live, and start a grocery store. Because the Israeli government needed young working soldiers on the kibbutzim, it would lend to kibbutz members more readily than others. However, a member couldn't leave the kibbutz until the loan was repaid. These loans were somewhat different from ordinary loans. Essentially, it was a government vehicle to assure that young, healthy people would patrol our ever-threatened borders. No regular payments were required or expected, and the loan became due and payable only when the kibbutz member chose to leave the kibbutz. Violet and I made about $10 a year, over and above our room and board at the kibbutz, so the chance of us ever being able to repay the loan was nil. I was not comfortable with staying on the kibbutz indefinitely, or until my in-laws would become sufficiently successful in their new business to retire the debt.

In January, 1953, I went to Jerusalem to see the rabbi of Szatmar who was visiting some of his followers there. (He had survived Bergen-Belsen and relocated to New York.) I heard that he had helped many people get settled. I planned to tell him of my engagement and ask for his help so that Violet and I could marry and leave the kibbutz. When I arrived, his wife took me to his room and said, "Here is your Rafael." "No, he is your Rafael," the rabbi replied. I felt horrible, like the black sheep of the family each wished to attribute to the other and disown. The rabbi asked me about my situation. I told him I was living on a kibbutz. I tried to make it sound not as secular as it was. Of course, I couldn't fool him. I told him about Violet and our plans to marry. He did not approve because she was not

European and, more importantly, she had not had a religious upbringing. He told me he wanted to speak with my uncle. Thinking he would help us, I returned later with Uncle Lipa. Surprisingly, the rabbi proceeded to make derogatory remarks about me and belittle me in front of my uncle. Upset, I left the room. Then I overheard him telling Uncle Lipa that our part of the family had always been a burden. I was terribly crushed by his remarks. Nevertheless, to this day I believe he was a good and wise man. After I came to live with him during the war, he had soon realized that it was not my destiny to become a rabbi. After the war he never tried to persuade me to join him, because he knew how much I admired him and how influenced I would be by his desires.

Without the rabbi from Szatmar's blessings, Violet and I married on February 27, 1953. The ceremony took place outdoors at the kibbutz. Rifles served as the poles for the canopy. Violet wore a simple, knee-length white dress and I wore the best khakis and shirt I could get from the laundry. In accordance with Israeli law, a rabbi performed the ceremony. He came from the town of Bet She'an near the Jordan River. Suddenly a storm blew in. The rain and dust created mud everywhere. The bride's family, dressed in wedding clothes, had a difficult time getting from the ceremony to the kibbutz dining room.

During our time on the kibbutz, Violet and I both kept quite busy. As suited our different personalities, I held a variety of jobs while Violet focused primarily on receiving the training and credentials to work with troubled youth as a counselor and teacher. My first assignment was working on blue prints and building, because of my past experience with construction

in Haifa. I helped build a chicken coop, a building for the sheep, a barn for the cows, and a garage. (In 1983, when I returned with my son Chaim for a visit, I noted with pride that the garage still stood.) After a year of construction work, I attended a week-long seminar in Tel Aviv on bookkeeping and then worked for a few months as a bookkeeper on the kibbutz. I found I had no patience for sitting long hours, so I volunteered to be a shepherd, a job which most people disliked and avoided because of the mosquitoes and odor in the summer and the rain and cold in the winter. I was quite successful at this. When I started there were 250 sheep. After a year there were 500. It was difficult work, milking the sheep early in the morning and remaining outside all day, regardless of the weather. After each day of milking, my fingers were so stiff I couldn't bend them. A year later I took up gardening and miscellaneous farm work. During this period Violet continued her training and was completing a year and a half program in Jerusalem to become a credentialed youth counselor. I saw her on weekends when she would return to the kibbutz.

One day while admiring a new tractor for our kibbutz, an event occurred which could have dramatically altered my life path. One fellow was driving the tractor and five or six of us jumped on it and were hanging onto the sides. As we ascended a hill, I lost my grip, fell under the tractor and was trapped. Fortunately for me, the driver immediately realized the problem and stopped. Another man grabbed my shirt, but couldn't pull me out. An ambulance was called and the paramedics were able to extricate me.

I was taken to Afula Hospital, about 15 miles away. I couldn't move my back or my fingers without excruciating pain. Three doctors consulted

about my condition and on the second day they told me it was serious and that I might be paralyzed. I refused to believe the doctors. I don't know why. Perhaps it was the belief of personal indestructibility that young people have. I simply said, "I don't think so. I think I'll be okay." I never despaired. The third night in the hospital I had an urgent need to urinate, so I jumped out of bed and ran to the toilet. A nurse saw me and almost fainted. The next day I was sent home but told not to work for four weeks. They had taken X-rays, and now realized I had no broken bones nor permanent spinal injury. I was told that if the tractor had gone one inch further, I would have been paralyzed for life. When I returned to work I lifted a sack of wheat that weighed at least 80 pounds and loaded it onto a truck. I was thrilled as I realized I was pain-free and fully recovered.

The kibbutz consisted of several distinct groups which created tensions that ultimately led to its demise. One group, who had started the settlement, consisted of young, educated Iraqi Jews. A second group was young people from Hungary who had escaped to Russia but had been sent to remote villages where they were refugees and faced starvation due to food shortages. A third group was young people from Poland who had survived concentration camps. Despite our youth, idealism, and shared religion, we came from very different cultures and had very different expectations and attitudes. This caused much friction among the members of the kibbutz.

The Iraqi group wore Arabic dress and spoke Arabic languages. The Hungarian and Polish groups dressed in European fashion and spoke European languages. Each group reminded the other of non-Jews who had oppressed them. Specifically, the European Jews reminded the Iraqi Jews of

the British and French who had controlled Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. They had been ill treated by the British and French and saw little or no difference between those Europeans and the Hungarians and Poles. The European Jews had a hard time distinguishing between Iraqi Jews and "the enemy."

Aggravating the tension was the fact that most of the European Jews had lost their entire families, whereas the Iraqi Jews had families. The Iraqi kibbutz members received frequent visits from family members who would spend several days at the kibbutz. This caused the European Jews to be regularly and painfully reminded of their own losses. They also resented kibbutz guests who did not offer to help with the demanding physical labor required to feed everyone. Further conflict arose because many of the European Jews, who had been deprived of an education earlier, were eager to study and looked forward to continuing university studies in the city and eventually leaving the kibbutz. Most of the Iraqi Jews were content to remain in the kibbutz. Even in the laundry room friction began to grow. The Hungarian and Polish laundry workers showed favoritism by distributing the clothes which were in better condition to other Hungarians and Poles. When the European Jews started assigning the more menial tasks to the Iraqi Jews, tensions erupted.

Our kibbutz held an organizational meeting every Saturday night usually lasting about two hours. At these meetings we would decide on work assignments, determine what supplies were needed and who would buy them, who would take and sell our products at the market, what new crops we would grow, who would attend which seminars off the kibbutz to bring

needed training back to us, etc. I observed a number of European men and women vying for the opportunity to attend the seminars which would lead to adequate training for city jobs. I knew they were planning to get the training and leave. This upset me because I believed that everyone should be willing to make sacrifices to make our homeland safe and prosperous. Since we were quite isolated on the kibbutz, there was little entertainment other than conversation with our fellow kibbutzniks. If they left, I would sorely miss these ambitious and intellectually stimulating members. Also the increasing dissension caused by cultural differences discouraged new people from joining our kibbutz. I sensed that it might fall apart.

I was deeply troubled during this time. Because of the loan, I felt trapped on the kibbutz, where there was no sense of community and no chance for advancement. I felt torn between my allegiances to both the European and Iraqi groups. I couldn't sleep. I felt nauseated and couldn't eat. I lost 20 pounds. My military rating went down from "A" to "B" and I wasn't considered fit enough to go out for maneuvers.

The conflict had grown so much that the United Kibbutzim Headquarters sent a committee of three to visit us and listen to each group's grievances and impose a solution. The committee observed our Saturday night meeting. The next day they met separately with a representative from each group in a barrack room. I was not a representative of either group because I had been trying to get everyone to stay on the kibbutz and make it a success. I went to an adjacent room and eavesdropped through the thin wall. Violet did not approve of this at all. She thought it was immoral. But I believed I was acting out of a need to survive.

The Iraqi group representative stated that they felt they were not being treated fairly by the European group. They felt that the Europeans looked down on them. More importantly they complained that some European kibbutzniks were being trained at the expense of the kibbutz and then leaving it for city jobs. This left the kibbutz with fewer people and fewer resources to train other kibbutzniks for the same skilled work.

The European group representative tried to justify the European position by claiming that the Iraqi group invited their family members for visits and that the family members used resources without contributing labor. He disagreed with the Iraqi group's complaint that they were being treated unfairly. He stated that assignments to undesirable tasks were not made disproportionately and that this was only the imagination of the Iraqi Jews who he believed had an inferiority complex.

Despite the United Kibbutz Headquarters' efforts, our differences were irreconcilable and our kibbutz fell apart. Violet and I were faced with the choice of going to another kibbutz or finding work elsewhere. We decided we didn't want to go to another kibbutz with an already established group in which we would be newcomers. The government forgave our loan and the United Kibbutz Headquarters offered us a stipend to sustain us until our first paycheck at a new job. Violet had completed her training to be a youth counselor and she accepted a position as a camp counselor for troubled and orphaned youth. I accepted a position as secretary to the camp manager. We moved to Camp Kiryat Yaarim, about 10 miles from Jerusalem near Abougoush, an ancient city.

Jerusalem and Disillusion

With renewed faith in our ability to survive, Violet and I decided to have a child. Our son was born in the Old Hadassah hospital in Jerusalem on January 20, 1955. We named him Chaim after my father. The word "chaim" means "life" in Hebrew. Violet's mother was with her and her father arrived in the next few days for the bris, the circumcision ceremony.

Despite this affirmation of life, we continued to experience the bleak effects of a war-torn country. One day while I was taking a walk, I came upon a child about nine years old laying in the road. I said, "Get up!" A car could come and kill you!" "I don't care. I want to die," he replied. I was shocked to hear such a statement from a child this age. Later, because of a rabies problem, a representative from the health department in Jerusalem came and told us to destroy all the dogs. This same child owned a dog. When he was in school, his dog was put to sleep, along with all the others. When he found out his dog was dead and learned that I had helped put it to sleep, he threatened to kill our baby. We were very nervous and watched Chaim like a hawk, never letting him out of our sight.

We also lived in fear of the Fedayeen, the suicidal Arab terrorists who would enter civilian areas of Israel at night and toss grenades into houses. In addition to my duties as camp secretary, I was also in charge of the night guards. One night one of the usual guards was off duty and we had a substitute. The guards were under strict orders not to open fire unless they

were certain there was an intruder, but at about one in the morning underneath the window of our house, we heard a shot. We grabbed the baby, who was three months old, and put him in a corner. Luckily, he was very quiet and didn't make a sound. After a while, I looked out the window and saw the young substitute guard. I asked him what was going on, and he said that he had been scared by something running which turned out to be a dog that he had shot.

At its inception, Israel had many political parties and a coalition of parties was needed to get a majority to run the government. Brotherhood among all Jews was emphasized, because we knew that if we did not stand together, Israel would fall. The political parties I knew about included: the Agudat Israel, the Eastern Group, the Freedom Party, The Progressive Party, and the Labor Party.

Because these political parties hold different religious beliefs, they do not readily compromise with each other. This is a source of tension in Israel today. For example, the Agudat Israel is a very small group whose members adhere to all orthodox Jewish laws. The Eastern Group is also orthodox, but does permit some deviance from Jewish laws, such as not requiring men to have beards or wear garments with fringes. Quite different is the Freedom Party which is secular and works to protect property rights. Also secular is the Progressive Party, which broke from the Freedom Party, and tries to reconcile the interests of business and labor. The Labor Party is socialist and created a system of universal health care while it was in power, which was for quite a long time.

I was a member of the Labor Party, so when the Progressive Party

came into power, I was laid off.[8] Although Violet was not laid off, we chose to leave because we could not both be employed in that area. We moved to Beersheba, the principal city of the Negev, a desert area where teachers were in high demand. Violet accepted a non-licensed position as a special education teacher. (Non-licensed teachers did the same work but were paid much less than licensed teachers.) She was praised by the principal of the school every year at the graduation ceremonies. She has a unique ability to understand and help troubled children learn. Meanwhile I became a bookkeeper at a nearby farmer's cooperative. I began work at 3:30 a.m. I received the products from the farms, organized the fruits and vegetables in preparation for the auction to merchants and kept track of the accounts. Later I progressed to managing the dairy, an 8 to 5 job.

At this time we made day care arrangements for Chaim and placed him in a nursery. He started having frequent colds and ear infections and unexplainable health problems. We tried to feed him every night but he refused to eat. I took him to the doctor one evening after work. The only doctor available then was overworked and simply gave Chaim an antibiotic prescription. In 1956 many Polish physicians immigrated to Israel because of rising anti-Semitism in Poland. This was lucky for us because before this there weren't enough doctors in Beersheba. As Chaim continued to be sickly, I decided to take a day off from work and take him to one of the new physicians. The doctor undressed him and took one look at his big belly and

[8]Israeli politics operated on a spoils system, i.e. the practice of regarding and treating appointive public offices as the booty of the successful party or parties in a coalition government. Job opportunities and other opportunities for profit were distributed to party workers and members.

told me this was a sign of malnutrition. I visited the nursery and learned that the children were only fed farina, because of the food shortage. We withdrew Chaim immediately from the nursery and hired a nanny to care for him at home. We made certain there was enough food at home to feed him properly.

On September 29, 1957, we were blessed with another child, this time a daughter. We named her "Orna," which means pine tree, after a famous actress, Orna Porat, whose performances my wife and I both admired.

I left the dairy when I found a better paying job as a bank teller. I never thought that I would have to deal with my feelings about Germans again, but in 1963 I was forced to face the issue when Israel began allowing tourists from Germany to enter Israel. One of my duties was to exchange foreign money. A young man came up to me to exchange his native currency. As part of the transaction, he was required to present his passport and I saw that he was German. This stirred up some horrible memories. As I had to leave my station to go to a drawer to get the money, I had time to think. I thought, "He's young; he personally had nothing to do with what happened. If I treat him like an enemy, I will only spread hatred. I don't want to have any part in spreading hatred." So I did my best to treat him courteously and in the same manner that I would treat any other bank customer.

There were a number of upsetting issues raised in Israel regarding its relation to Germany. I recall that an Israeli company contracted with the German government to sew military uniforms. When the general public learned about this, it caused quite a stir because some concentration camp

survivors had been forced to sew German military uniforms while in the camps, which brought back painful memories. There was also a big hullabaloo when the philharmonic wanted to play some Wagner pieces. Many Israelis were violently opposed to this because Wagner was known to be an anti-Semite. Then a series of events disturbed me so much that I decided I couldn't live in Israel anymore.

First, I read in a reliable Israeli newspaper a story about a family from Morocco with eight children, who immigrated to Israel and lived in Ramala. The husband was hospitalized in an insane asylum. The wife was totally uneducated and she and the children had no means of support. She asked for help at the Social Services Office. The Director of Social Services was a member of the religious party Agudat Israel. The custom at that time was that parties participating in the government coalition were rewarded by having party leaders appointed as directors of various governmental departments. Each would-be-recipient of assistance from a specific department was required to register as a member of the director's party. This poor woman didn't understand the system and was denied assistance. She became so desolate that one Sabbath evening she hanged herself.

The second event which deeply affected me was the killing of a butcher by his fellow union members because he refused to pay his Labor Party dues.

The third incident involved our daughter, Orna. We were sending Chaim to a good Israeli pre-school and we hired a new nanny to watch Orna. Violet was feeling very pressured at work and didn't notice anything wrong. But I noticed that the baby seemed very weak and listless. One night when I

got home, Violet told me the nanny had broken her wrist-watch. The next night Violet told me the nanny had used one of her skirts to wipe the floor. I told Violet she must fire this nanny and find another. I am so glad we did, because after we hired a new nanny and carefully watched her, Orna's health dramatically improved. Later, a neighbor confessed to us that she had been aware that the first nanny was not taking proper care of Orna. She said that she had seen the nanny leave Orna on a plastic sheet and not change her. She also saw the nanny take the food meant for Orna and feed her male callers. I was very angry with the neighbor for not telling us about this much sooner.

The fourth incident occurred when Orna was old enough to attend school. The condominium in which we lived was located one block from a very devastated area where the people had very little education and were very poor. The school serving that area was totally neglected by the Board of Education. For political reasons the school district was changed and all the people from the newly-created district, which included us, were ordered to enroll our children in this neglected school. (This did not affect Chaim, who was already enrolled at a better school.) The intent was to force the Board of Education to improve the school by having the children of more affluent families attend the school. However, most of the affluent families found ways to avoid sending their children to the neglected school.

Because my wife was a teacher in a different part of the city, we tried to take our daughter to the school where her mother taught. The principal of her school told her she couldn't do this. We decided to leave our condo empty and rent from a bachelor who owned a condo in the neighborhood

where my wife taught. In addition to a good school Orna would also have access to a ballet school in that neighborhood. Unfortunately, before the year ended the owner of the condo told us he was getting married and needed to have his condo back.

Another disillusioning incident involved a neighbor who owned and operated a tractor used in building new roads. He had hired an Arab helper and bragged to me about mistreating him. I confronted him, "Why do you treat him that way?" He justified his behavior by telling me that when he was a child growing up in the Galilee, his family had had frequent trouble with Arab neighbors regarding property rights. I was very disturbed by his attitude because I had been trying to convince our Gentile neighbors not to stereotype and mistreat Jews, and here was a Jew stereotyping and mistreating Arabs!

The final incident and last straw involved my wife's trying to get a teaching license. Like many teachers in Israel at the time, Violet did not have a teaching license. Although completely satisfied with her job otherwise, she pursued a license to command a higher salary. She had successfully completed all requirements for the license except for the oral exam. When she went to take the test --- which was given to one applicant at a time --- the examiners could see that she is a Sephardic (middle Eastern) Jew. The Jews in political power in Israel were all European Jews. They asked her a question about European literature. Having been raised in the Middle East, she was familiar with Middle Eastern history and literature. She was also thoroughly familiar with Jewish history and literature. But she had not had any courses in European history or literature and there was no

requirement that she know this for a teaching license. She did not pass the oral examination because of this one question and was devastated. I reassured her that she was indeed an excellent teacher and deserved the license. Hadn't she received annual commendations from the principal of her school? I was absolutely furious because I was certain that she was the victim of discrimination. European Jews were mistreating and exploiting non-European Jews.

Hope arrived with Cousin Isaiah who lived in Brooklyn, New York, but was visiting at the time. He told us that teachers were in high demand in the United States and that Violet could easily get a green card. We had to decide if we wanted to abandon Israel. We were totally disillusioned with the current state of affairs and too exhausted to make any further contribution. As the head of the family, I decided to return to our religious roots, which meant going to America where some of our surviving family members now lived. Violet and I felt our hearts ache and we both suffered stomach aches the day we left Israel in 1964.

Adjusting to American Life and Raising a Family

After arriving in New York we went to live with my Uncle Naftoly's family in Brooklyn, who were living the Hasidic lifestyle. Chaim was nine years old and Orna was six. Violet needed a recommendation from the rabbi (from Szatmar) in order to get a teaching position. I went to see him and asked for his blessing. He asked me why I had left Israel. I told him that I had left for spiritual reasons. Then he took my hand, blessed me, and wished me and my family the best of luck.

Our situation with my uncle's family in Brooklyn was very demeaning. I realized how bad things were after a series of incidents involving the ritual bath. In the United States people still used the ritual baths but no one was especially eager to clean them. When my relatives asked me to help clean the ritual bath, I willingly did so. Eventually, I was no longer helping to clean it, I was cleaning it all by myself. Then my relatives asked my children to help clean the synagogue. My seven-year-old daughter asked me one day, "Dad, are we their servants?" Shortly thereafter I overheard an aunt declare in a dinner conversation, "Only stupid people will clean the ritual bath." I knew then that we had to move. We left our relatives' upstairs apartment and rented our own apartment in East Flatbush in the summer of 1966. I also left my job in my relatives' print shop and found another job as a trainee in a knitting factory.

Even though we lived separately from our Hasidic relatives, my children still attended the religious school. Chaim was very bored because he knew Hebrew and the other children didn't. They read and recited very

slowly and Chaim used to doze off and get into trouble with his teacher. Violet also was having difficulty as a teacher in the religious school. One day she read the students a story which took place in a small Ukrainian village where Jews were in the majority and one Jew had been beaten up by a Gentile. She wondered aloud why the other Jews let this happen. One of her students replied, "We Jews are being punished for our sins. We have to wait for the Messiah and accept the punishment in the meantime." Violet could not agree with such a statement and this got her into trouble at the school.

Other things led me to consider abandoning our Hasidic lifestyle altogether. I saw that my relatives emphasized giving to charity and eating kosher food. But they paid little attention to what I felt was most important in our Jewish heritage -- *The Ethics of the Fathers* (a book of concentrated wisdom from classical rabbinical sources about how to lead one's life), which has been handed down to us from generation to generation. Indeed, it was the recitation from memory of passages from *The Ethics of the Fathers* that helped me and some others in the concentration camps to survive spiritually.

I also decided that I wanted to put the children in public school. Violet resisted and kept making excuses for not enrolling them. Finally, I took time off from work and did it myself. I was quite relieved and pleased that my children -- unlike me -- would get a secular education, including world history, mathematics and science, and that they would be prepared for life in the modern world. Violet was forced to quit teaching at the religious school because our children were not attending anymore. She was unhappy

at first, but later admitted that the children were much happier in public school and were making excellent academic progress.

Not long afterwards I found it necessary to further abandon my strict religious lifestyle in order to provide better opportunities for my family. I was working nights as a trainee in a knitting factory in a very bad neighborhood in Brooklyn. A German immigrant also worked there. He was a mechanic and was very knowledgeable about machines. He also spoke three languages, German, Spanish, and English, and liked to read all the newspapers, so I made a deal with him. If he would teach me how to fix the machines, I would run both of our machines and he could read the newspapers. When I became more skilled at my job, I asked my boss for a raise, but he refused. I found another job at factory where they paid 50% more, but I would have to work on the Sabbath. I decided to take it. Working twelve hour nights, I would be able to provide for the family without Violet's having to work.

The East Flatbush neighborhood where we lived had become progressively more dangerous, so after Chaim came home one day with a black eye, we decided to move to a nicer neighborhood in Queens in the summer of 1968. Violet found a job in Long Island teaching Hebrew School. She wisely insisted that we celebrate religious holidays to keep the children aware of their heritage. At the time I thought it was unnecessary, but now I realize she was right and that the children benefited from her efforts.

In order to reestablish a connection to our roots, we joined a synagogue where I enjoyed sharing experiences with more modern religious

Jews. My daughter Orna who was in high school at the time, suddenly started attending synagogue regularly, even though she was not very religious. I discovered she had a boyfriend with a biblical, Hebrew name. Unlike typical American boys, he never took her out on the Sabbath. I suspected that he might be a member of the Jewish Defense League, a group who used illegal means, including firearms and bombs, to harass Arabs and fight Arab propaganda in New York. I investigated and found out that he was a recruiter for the Jewish Defense League. I had a heart-to-heart talk with Orna and assured her that I was not anti-Israel, and that if she felt strongly about going to Israel, that was fine. If she wished, I would even buy her a ticket to move to Israel. But I did not want her doing anything illegal in New York and ending up in jail. Orna understood and told me she would stop seeing the boy. I was quite relieved.

Although we both loved our children very much, Violet and I did have some marital difficulties over the years. As I look back on it, I realize that we were extremely idealistic when we met. We each respected the sacrifices that the other had made to help bring about the establishment of Israel as a sanctuary for Jews. However, Violet was annoyed by some of my European cultural habits and attitudes and I was irritated by some of her Middle Eastern cultural habits and attitudes. Despite the fact that these were often minor differences, they occurred daily and caused continual friction and tension. For example, I know that it is an Arabic custom to exaggerate in conversation, but I found this constant stretching of the truth quite irritating. It also disturbed me that our home was cluttered with too many rugs, furniture and knick-knacks. I believe Middle Eastern culture encourages the

display of one's prosperity, measured in part by the number of things you own. Although I do not know which specific European customs and habits of mine annoyed her, it was obvious to me that Violet felt just as uncomfortable at times as I did. She did not enjoy spending time with my European friends and I was uncomfortable with her friends. Despite this, we worked hard to make the best of it for the sake of the children. We both sensed, however, that we would eventually break up. (In the 1950's and early 1960's almost ninety percent of Israeli marriages between Levantine and European Jews ended in divorce.)

After Chaim graduated from college he moved to Denver, Colorado where he had a job with a computer company. Violet suggested that I fly out there and spend some time with him. He and I vacationed together in the Southwest, traveling by car through Ouray and then on to the Grand Canyon. I was overwhelmed by the majestic beauty of the southwestern United States. We continued on to San Francisco and went sightseeing in Chinatown. We had a long talk about the future. I wanted him to know that I was proud of him. I told him that if he was content and felt good about himself, it didn't matter to me if he was a CEO or a laborer. The most important thing in life is to challenge yourself and do the most that you can do without burning yourself out or becoming bitter or regretful. I am grateful to Violet for suggesting that I spend time with my son. I believe Chaim and I both benefited from this.

Returning to New York, I realized that the rapid growth of textile imports in 1979 was causing a decline in New York's textile industry. The loss of jobs and the increasing taxes were causing financial stress for Violet

and me. I thought we should relocate to Colorado. Not only was Chaim there, but Orna also had gone there to see if she might want to attend the University of Colorado. Violet told me that she did not want to move to Denver. After twenty-seven years she finally admitted to me, “Yes, life with you has been too interesting.” I asked her if she wanted a divorce and she said “Yes.”

From the Carpathian Mountains to the Rocky Mountains

I moved to Denver in the fall of 1980. It took several months before I found a job as a bookkeeper with a restaurant equipment company. I had difficulty making new friends and felt extremely lonely and isolated. I tried attending a synagogue. The first thing I saw in the hallway was a big sign saying, "Remember the six million Jews." This pained me deeply.

Forsaking the synagogue, I sought a way out of my isolation through membership in a wonderful organization, the Colorado Mountain Club. Although the club's main purpose is to promote appreciation of the mountains, it also helps newcomers to Colorado, like me, make new friends. While hiking, they often engage in intellectual and personal discussions. I have never experienced a place where people are so open and friendly. Also, the membership is so large that it is unlikely you will hike with any of the same people on your next hike unless you specifically arrange it. Such anonymity removes inhibitions from discussions. It took years, but I found myself being healed by my hiking experiences in the Colorado Mountain Club.

Chaim lived in Colorado for six years but Orna only stayed for six months. She worked as a waitress briefly and did not go to the University of Colorado. She returned home to her mother in New York City and enrolled at the State University of New York (SUNY) at New Paltz.

In 1983 I decided to take a vacation trip to Europe and Israel. I wanted Chaim to go with me because he was born in Jerusalem and did not understand my European background. We visited Tasnad, the city where I

was born, then toured Europe for two weeks, after which we went to Israel. While waiting at a bus stop in Bet San one Sunday, I noticed a young Israeli man with a back pack and asked him where he was going. He replied that he was going to Egypt. I was surprised that an Israeli would dare to go to Egypt as a tourist. He told me that anyone could go to the Egyptian consulate in Tel Aviv and find a tourist organization arranging a tour of Egypt. I was very curious about Egypt and decided that I wanted to go.

Chaim did not share my interest in seeing Egypt, so he stayed with friends. A couple of days later I was on a bus with a group of thirty people from different countries on my way to Cairo. We traveled through the Gaza strip. The view of the sea from the desert was incredibly beautiful.

I was fascinated by the Egyptians against whom I had fought while a soldier in the Israeli army. I wanted to find out more about their culture and social structure and to understand why they gave up so easily in their battles with us. The tour group planned to stay in Cairo for three days and see the museum, the pyramids, the bazaar, etc. The first night in the hotel I couldn't sleep from excitement. At sunrise I got up and took a walk on Embassy Row along the shore of the Nile. I noticed two young children with a donkey and a small wagon collecting garbage. Later the same evening, I saw other children also collecting garbage. During the day I saw impoverished-looking people living on rickety boats on the Nile. The second evening as our group strolled along the Nile, a uniformed soldier armed with a machine gun approached us and begged for money. A European soldier, no matter how badly off, would probably have too much pride in his country to beg in his military uniform. I suspected then that

Egyptian soldiers entered military service to escape extreme poverty and probably hated their superior officers who mistreated them. They were not fighting for their beliefs and most likely that is the reason why they surrendered so readily. .

After this trip I returned to Denver. I was encouraged by fellow hikers in the mountain club to take college courses. Since I had always dreamed of obtaining more secular education I enrolled in college and took classes in psychology and philosophy. I was so engrossed in these studies that I temporarily put aside all other activities. I requested a change in my work hours from 8 to 5 to 10:30 to 5, so that I could attend a morning class. The manager of the store where I was working at the time said that he couldn't let me change hours. I had to choose between work and study. I chose study. I was able to live on my savings until a year later when I turned 62 and was eligible for early retirement benefits.

In 1985 Chaim met Amy, a young woman from Minnesota who was in Colorado temporarily working as a staff attorney for the ACLU. They became romantically involved and he decided to move to Minnesota to be with her. They eventually married and had two children, Sam and Maggie. Chaim started his own computer business which became quite successful.

While Chaim was in the process of moving, I was feeling restless. Although I enjoyed my classes, I wondered what I would do in retirement. Getting a degree seemed pointless at my age and my life lacked meaning. I had no goals, no involvement in a community and no obligation to anyone or anything. I realized that the rejection of my religious lifestyle had left a huge void in my life. I reflected on the Hasidic lifestyle, whose beauty,

certainty, and spirituality I missed. For example, I loved the beauty of the Friday night Sabbath celebration. Candles are lit. Beautiful songs are sung. The family eats dinner together. Everyone feels very close, happy and protected. I missed the rituals such as the community's morning and evening prayers. The morning prayers are ones of praise and appreciation for God and all that He has created. I used to find that starting my day out with praise and appreciation invigorated me and channeled my thoughts as to how I might accomplish good during this new day.

I tried moving back with my Hasidic relatives, now living in Florida, whom I hadn't seen for about ten years. They were very kind and encouraged me to return to the Hasidic life. They told me that the community had split into two groups: those who continued to follow the rabbi from Szatmar's widow, and those who were led by the rabbi from Szatmar's nephew. They made it clear that the split had not been caused by theological differences, but by personality conflicts. I arranged an appointment with the rabbi from Szatmar's widow. She encouraged me to let go of any ideas which challenged my Hasidic roots. I could not do this. After a year of living with Uncle Naftoly's family in Florida, I decided to return to my secular life in Colorado.

I continued to meet new people through the Colorado Mountain Club. In time I met a younger woman whom I dated and wanted to marry. We lived together for a while but eventually decided that it would not work out. Emotionally vulnerable because of this disappointment in my love life, I once again sought the comfort of Uncle Naftoly's family in Florida. Realizing that I could not adopt the Hasidic lifestyle, I chose to live in my

own apartment near them. Although not part of the Hasidic community because I had forsaken traditional rituals and procedures, I still felt a strong desire to contribute to that .I believe we helped each other lead better lives by sharing our ideas and experiences. In this way I felt I was fulfilling my duty to God, Whom I believe has a purpose for each one of us which gives our lives meaning in our community. Yet, even though we held the same basic values, they refused to accept me so long as I failed to follow all the traditions and customs. Feeling like an outsider and unable to make a meaningful contribution to the community, I returned once again to Colorado where I still had many friends.

The rabbi from Szatmar, my adopted father, had died in 1979, but I had been unable to attend the funeral. More than a decade later I felt a strong desire to visit his grave. I bought a plane ticket to New York City and hired a taxi to take me to the cemetery. When I entered the mausoleum I felt a rush of emotions as if I were young again and innocent of the ways of the world. I felt the deep admiration I had for him and my attraction to the Hasidic life. Feeling as if my non-Hasidic life after World War Two had been an egregious mistake, I was overcome with remorse. I ran out of the mausoleum, grabbed another taxi back to the airport and returned to Denver.

In spite of the doubts that have plagued me in my adult life, I have striven to serve God by helping others. Perhaps my contribution to society is humble, yet it might please God who values every servant. An episode narrated by Baal Shem Tov, the Father of the Hasidic movement 200 years ago, illustrates this point. He realized that scholarly Jews looked down on average Jews. He wanted all Jews to treat each other well. He had a vision

in which he was seated in Heaven next to a person who used to carry drinking water from the well to the village. He wondered what this person's contribution had been that he deserved to sit near him in Heaven. He asked one of his followers to investigate the life of this person. The follower didn't find any major contribution, but he did see that the person went outside the village early in the morning and stood on one side of a ditch. He heard him say, "God, I am not a scholar. I cannot study Your laws. I don't have money to contribute to charity. The only way I can serve You is to jump from one side of the ditch to the other." Because he sincerely meant it, God valued this person as much as all the other good servants of God (including Baal Shem Tov, a rabbi and scholar).

I have struggled with the question of why Jews remain faithful to religion after all we've been through. I recall hearing about a Polish woman who survived the concentration camps. A Polish soldier had offered her an opportunity to convert to Christianity and avoid the camps. Even though she was not particularly religious, she declined. She explained that being Jewish, for her, was her identity and culture. She could not just give it up.

Despite my decision not to live a Hasidic or Orthodox lifestyle, I also cannot let go of my identity and culture. Nor can I let go of my faith, which gave me the strength and courage to endure the worst. Just as I felt the warm rain drops on that hailing and sleeting day I was returning to Melk, I still believe God is compassionate and I feel a duty to serve God by doing what I can to help others. By sharing ideas and experiences, I believe we help each other lead better lives. In so doing I feel I am fulfilling my duty to God, Whom I believe has a purpose for each one of us which gives our lives

meaning.

The Talmud explains that it is not a choice to be a Jew or not. When God offered us the Torah, we didn't want to accept it, but He forced us and said if we would not accept it, He would destroy us.

In May, 1995, my children and friends helped me celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of my liberation from the Nazi concentration camps. I celebrated primarily that in that horrible time my spirit was strengthened, not destroyed. Present at my party in Boulder, Colorado, were my hosts, Susan and David Furtney; my children and their families; my religion professor from the University of Colorado; my former employers, the Kaufman Brothers; friends from the Colorado Mountain Club; some of my daughter and son's friends and their families; June Farone; Judy Furtney; Miriam Rosenzweig and Yves deToustain; George Beck; Bill Kemper; Sheldon Sands; Richard and Linda Loose; and Jim and Lou Speiers.

A band played Klesmer music. We ate challah bread, cholent, and capanota, an Italian eggplant dish I like.

This is the poem my daughter-in-law, Amy, wrote and read to me at the party:

“To Rafael, Lovingly” a Poem

By Amy Silberberg (Rafael’s late daughter-in-law)

Some crack like raw eggs under the weight of evil,
Their pasts oozing from the fissures,
Leaving cool and sticky pools of themselves behind.

Some become fragile and sicken,
Waiting forever to heal,
Not trusting.
Never touching or feeling again.

Some go wild with pain,
Hurting and hating others reflexively.

Some ingest the sympathy of others and chew the cud of injustice.

Some do not remember, or so they say,
Although they must.
What are we to do with them?
They are not here.
They are not anywhere.

But not you
My elder/father/friend.
You let the evil course over your soul like water on rock.
It shaped you, but the essential you remains.

You have chosen,
And somehow you rise to serve as teacher/teller/survivor of evil.

Text of Rafael's speech at the celebration of the 50th anniversary of his liberation from German Concentration camps

I'm celebrating the fiftieth year of my liberation from the concentration camp by the American forces. I thank heaven for having good and honest children who know right from wrong and truth from falsehood. However, when I go to the synagogue, I remember the cries of horror from my family and my people, and this is more than I can tolerate. I miss the prayers and the reading of the psalms with their ancient, heavenly, beautiful melodies.

I thank the Creator that my soul was saved from the flames of evil, perhaps because it was covered with the ancient mystic books that I studied from early morning to late nights, and the values that I never gave up. I thank my friends who have helped me see the good side of human nature.

Epilogue: My Philosophy

The entire time I was in the concentration camps, I had a very strong will to survive. I really don't know why at Melk I blurted out, in front of the one hundred surviving French resistors, "If only three people survive, I will be one of them." And I really don't know why some of us were so driven to survive, and why others, like my brother-in-law Moses, could not endure. Yet, I saw people give up, first emotionally and then physically. A couple of weeks before liberation, I was astonished at all I had been through. Yet, we survivors experienced things that heretofore no one thought a human being could endure. I am firmly convinced that we can withstand physically a great deal more than we think so long as our spirits are strong.

So how did I keep my spirit strong and avoid despair when it looked like there was no way out of a situation? I believe my turning to prayer calmed me enough to become receptive to solutions.

I experienced despair after the rabbi from Szatmar refused to allow me to live with the yeshiva students and insisted I remain isolated. I did what I could to extricate myself mentally from my situation. I searched for solutions to loneliness in the writings of moral philosophers, where I found some comfort.

In the camps, faced daily with life-threatening choices, I asked myself, "What can I do to get out of this? Is there a solution to this problem?"

At Auschwitz I listened and heard about the selection of workers three

barracks away and risked my life running to the area. After being put in the non-worker group, I sneaked back to the unselected group to be reconsidered for work. Had I not done this I would have gone to the crematorium that day.

At Melk I heeded the advice of a long-time inmate to avoid freezing to death.

I kept alert and heard the very quiet call for shoes on the night when my life depended on having shoes the next day. I could quite easily have panicked and failed to hear the solution to my problem.

In Ebensee I decided to sweat out a high fever by running with the wheelbarrow as I worked, which saved my life.

I sought out my co-sufferer from the sadistic Kapo and used his hat-in-the-hand trick to avoid further confrontations.

Because I had been listening carefully to all the talk in Ebensee, I knew the reputation of Barrack #11 and the confusion there allowed me to save Betzalel by telling him to join me in my barrack.

On the illegal boat to Israel when we were in danger of contracting disease from overflowing toilets, my will to survive and determination to do what needed doing saved us for another day.

I felt discouraged when I was living in Israel. After doing everything that came my way to help Israel survive as a nation -- providing food as a farmer, being a member of the explosives unit in the Israeli military, being a farming soldier, etc., I saw political in-fighting and witnessed my wife's being a victim of discrimination because of her middle eastern background. Since Israel was not meeting our expectations and losing hope that things

would change anytime soon, Violet and I changed and made the gut-wrenching decision to leave Israel and come to the United States.

I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to refuse to get trapped in despair, which immobilizes you from solving your problems. Negative labels, such as "I'm depressed," or "I'm a victim of circumstances," merely give you an excuse to wallow in self pity instead of coping with your problem.

I felt depressed when I reached retirement, was divorced, and my children no longer lived near me. Yet, I sought solutions. I considered rejoining my Hasidic extended family. After careful consideration I knew this was not the solution. I found kindred spirits in the Colorado Mountain Club and my university classes introduced me to a new circle of friends.

I have learned an important lesson which I want to pass on: Don't blame God, life, or others. It is you! No matter what happens, you have a brain and can always choose how you will act or react. We are here to serve each other in whatever way we can. We are not here for the world to meet our needs. We each have a duty to contribute to this world. Recalling Rabbi Baal Shem Tov's story about the water carrier who dedicated his ditch-jumping to God, I have known since childhood that God does not expect everyone to make earth-shattering contributions. But it is important for each one of us to decide how to contribute and to exercise the willpower to do so. We can avoid despair by focusing on our desired contribution and on the tasks necessary to achieve our goals.

Prayer makes it easier for me, throughout the day, to avoid despair and to stay focused on solving daily problems. One particular prayer has

special significance for me, because God literally delivered me from the pestilence at the camps and kept me whole.

> The breath of every living being shall bless Thy name, O Lord our God, and the spirit of all flesh shall continually glorify and exalt Thy memorial, O our King; from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God; and beside Thee we have no King who redeemeth and saveth, setteth free and delivereth, who supporteth and hath mercy in all times of trouble and distress; yea, we have no King but Thee. He is God of the first and of the last, the God of all creatures, the Lord of all generations, who is extolled with many praises, and guideth His world with loving-kindness and His creatures with tender mercies....O Lord our God...Thou didst redeem us from Egypt, O Lord our God, and didst release us from the house of bondage; during famine Thou didst feed us, and didst sustain us in plenty; from the sword Thou didst rescue us, from pestilence Thou didst save us, and from sore and lasting diseases Thou didst deliver us. Hitherto Thy tender mercies have helped us, and Thy loving-kindnesses have not left us; forsake us not, O Lord our God, for ever. pp. 315-7 Daily Prayers with English Translation by Dr. A. Th. Phillips (rev. ed. Hebrew Publishing Co. New York)