Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors Residing in South Florida

A Child Alone in the Holocaust

Holocaust Survivor Bianca Perlmutter Lerner's Memoir

as told to Bobbi Kaufman

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Published by
The Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies
and The George Feldenkreis Program in Judaic Studies

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The information in this book is presented in good faith. It is not intended to be a history of the Holocaust. The words in this book are the words of Bianca Lerner as she recalled her personal experience in the Holocaust. This is her story and her truth.

On the cover: Bianca Perlmutter Lerner as a child in Warsaw
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FOREWARD

"For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time.…

"... I have tried to keep memory alive…I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we forget we are guilty, we are accomplices."

- Elie Wiesel

As time goes on, the number of Holocaust survivors alive today is rapidly dwindling. With their passing, the incomprehensible cataclysm known as The Holocaust, or Shoah, is fast morphing from a 'lived memory' into a 'historical memory'; from a personal experience of 'those who were there' into impersonal commemorative monuments and museums.

All too soon, there will be no one left to offer first hand testimony of what it was like to actually be there when all hell broke loose; all too soon, even those who knew and heard directly from the victims of the Nazis and their collaborators, will be gone.

It is, therefore, a matter of great urgency that we gather and preserve for future generations as much primary documentation and testimony as possible about the lives and experiences of those heroes who survived the Holocaust, managed to build new lives, and were willing to tell their stories.

Memoirs serve as a very important means of preserving these testimonies. Several years ago, Holocaust survivors began approaching Bobbi Kaufman, asking for help writing their memoirs, describing their lives before, during, and since the Holocaust. She began working with the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach (HMMB), writing the memoirs of Holocaust survivors who were docents and contributors to the memorial. This collaboration was instrumental in her developing a series of in-depth, book-length memoirs. Six books were completed and uploaded onto the HMMB website and the HMMB created lesson plans for each book to be used in teaching about the Holocaust.

Now, in collaboration with the HMMB, the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies, and the George Feldenkreis Program in Judaic Studies of the University of Miami, the series has been named Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors Residing in Florida. The existing books were graphically redesigned and several new books have been added to the collection, with the objective of continuing to expand the series. The complete series will be freely available to the public in digital form on the HMMB and Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program websites.

Our hope is that this series will make a significant contribution to the growing literature of Holocaust survivors' memoirs and serve as a tribute to their ability to make new lives for themselves while never forgetting.

Dr. Haim Shaked
Director, The Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program
University of Miami

DEDICATION

ABOUT MY PARENTS

By Hannah Senesh

There are stars whose radiance is visible on earth,
though they have long been extinct.
There are people whose brilliance
continues to light the world
though they are no longer among the living.
These lights are particularly bright
when the night is dark.
They light the world for mankind.

With my father in Warsaw, Poland. Circa 1931.

LIFE BEFORE THE WAR

My early childhood in Warsaw, the city where I was born on July 2, 1929, was almost idyllic. Being an only child, I had a lot of love and attention from my parents and the rest of my family. My mother was a pediatrician who graduated from medical school in Vienna. My father was a successful businessman. They met when they were both studying in Vienna and were married in Danzig. My mother was thirty years old when they married.

We lived in a co-op in a new suburban part of Warsaw at 78 Ulica Wawelska. The façade of the building still stands today. The apartment had four bedrooms, a dining room, living room, kitchen, maids' quarters, and two bathrooms. The elevator had piped in music and a velvet covered bench. The rooms were very spacious, decorated with oriental carpets and beautiful antique furniture. We had a telephone, refrigerator, and a radio. I have a copy of a page from the 1939 Warsaw telephone book with our name and address.

My parents were not very religious. My father went to services on the High Holy Holidays and supported many Jewish organizations. My mother lit candles on Friday nights. We were not kosher. My father always said that if you were a good person you were a good Jew. I attended a private school, the only Jewish girl out of 500 pupils.

I participated in many sports including ice skating, skiing, and volleyball. I loved to hike in the mountains, to read, and to draw. I was friendly with some of my schoolmates — Danka, Marta, and Zosia — but my special friend was Hanka Popowska. She was an only child, like me, and her father, Stanislaw Popowski, was a physician, like my mother. We spent a lot of time together in each other's homes. We were very close. To this day she remains my very special friend, a soul mate.

Before the war my parents and I toured all over Europe. Very often we would go to Vienna to visit my grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Everyone in the family was very educated and talented. My father's entire family was musically gifted. My father could pick up any instrument and play it. He would also conduct on occasion. One of my greatest pleasures was to go to concerts with him, which we did at least two or three times a week, and hum with him the different pieces of music on the way home. Each summer I would spend July and August with my mother in the Tatra Mountains in Zakopane or at the seashore in Danzig or Sopot. We also went to the Austrian and Swiss resorts. I favored the mountains. My father would come on some weekends or for a week at a time to our summer vacations. My parents frequently went together to Baden-Baden, a popular spa town, and to Bad Gastein, Interlaken, Zurich, and Geneva.

My mother, Stefania Kranz, was a beautiful, intelligent and talented woman. She had black hair and blue eyes.

She did magnificent embroidery that looked like paintings. I remember one of red poppies that she made for my father. She could also sew and knit and made many outfits for me. When I was sick she could whip out a new wardrobe for my doll in no time. My mother and I went to a dressmaker to have our clothes made to order. There were no ready-made clothes at that time. I remember not standing still — moving around — making her work more difficult. I resented always being overdressed and out of fashion. I never wore the styles the other children wore. When I was ten years old I had twenty pairs of shoes! My mother dressed in lovely materials but in very conservative style, as suitable for her profession. She was not very interested in fashion.

My mother was born in Warsaw. She had one sister, my aunt Ada. Her father died when my mother was very young. When she could not pursue her dream of becoming a physician in Poland because she was Jewish and a woman, she learned the German language and went to medical school in Vienna. To earn the money to make it possible for my mother to complete her education in Vienna, my grandmother rented rooms in their home to lodgers. One of my mother's professors was Sigmund Freud. She remained in contact with him and even translated some of his works from German to Polish. When I came to New York after the war, I found these works at the 42nd Street library in Manhattan.

After I was born, my mother suffered from what I think may have been postpartum depression. When the Polish

doctors could not help her, she went back toVienna to her old professors for help. I am told that when she returned to Warsaw I would not call her 'Mama,' but 'Pani Mama', an unfamiliar, formal name. (I was a brat!)

My parents were very over-protective of me. As an only child they gave me all their love and attention. I had several governesses — my mother kept firing them thinking they did not take good enough care of me. My mother did not practice her profession as much as she would have liked because my father worried that she would bring home germs from sick children that would harm me. I got sick quite often. My mother would listen to my lungs, look in my throat, and promptly put me to bed with a thermos of hot tea at my bedside. There was a light switch and a bell next to my bed that my mother urged me to ring so she could personally come and pour the tea for me. Only when I got older did I realize how that was very inconsiderate of me. Realizing my mother's anxiety over my health, her friend, Wanda, also a physician, eventually persuaded my mother to let her examine me and prescribe my medications.

When I asked my mother where babies came from she took out her medical books and gave me a scientific explanation plus showed me illustrations of the human procreation process. I did not have to learn from the other kids or anywhere else. Afterwards, I became very popular

with my classmates when I showed them those illustrations when they came to my home!

My father was born in a small town, Podwoloczyska, in the eastern part of Poland near Lwow. His name was Arnold Perlmutter, but everyone called him Nolo. I called him Nolo also — we were a very progressive family. When the Austro-Hungarian Empire took over that part of Poland, my father's entire family moved to Vienna. Those were the golden years under Austria's Emperor Franz Joseph. My father loved Vienna — its music — and everything about it. He imparted that love to me. Whenever I hear the songs like "Wien, Wien, Nur du Allein" ("Vienna, Vienna, Only You"), I get waves of nostalgia.

Nolo went halfway through medical school in Vienna but when his father died he had to quit his studies because as the oldest son he had to take care of his mother and his younger siblings. He turned from medicine to business. He was a brilliant man and a very good businessman. He began his career as a clerk and rose to become director and chairman of the board of an import-export business. The name of the business was Polnocne Towarzystwo Transportowe Warszawa, Northern Transit Company at Ulica Widok 6. There were several branches of his business in various European cities, and in 1939 he was in the process of opening an office in New York. He was an authority on tariffs and wrote articles on various business subjects. I remember he was offered a post in the Polish

government as a transportation minister if he would change his name from Perlmutter to a typical Polish name, but he refused even though it meant passing up such a prestigious position. His two brothers, Hermann and Dietrich (later called Dick), did change their name to Perner, though.

I loved my mother very much, but I absolutely adored my father. My father would bring me toys, and all kinds of books. I read most of the classics by the time I was ten. I had quite a library at home. I read them in Polish and then when I learned English, in the ghetto, I was able to read them in their original language and enjoyed it tremendously. My favorite books were *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *Heidi*. Later on I also read 15th century Moliere in French.

Once, I was hiking with my father in the mountains when a small avalanche occurred. I was not scared at all because I was with my father. I always felt completely safe with him; to me it was an adventure. We found a small shelter and stayed there overnight. I was looking for a St. Bernard dog with a keg of brandy to come to our rescue like in the books.

My father was a bridge and chess champion. He belonged to a club where he spent many evenings. When I went to sleep the door to my room had to be open at a certain angle. I would go to sleep but I would be listening for the sounds of my father returning from his club. He would

come in and sit on my bed for at least a half hour and talk with me about anything and everything. I remember those times as the best part of my day.

My father was a charming, charismatic, very handsome man who was always dressed meticulously and beautifully. He wore spats and gloves and carried a special cane. I was very proud of him. He had an English woman come to our house twice a week to converse with him to keep him fluent in English. He was also teaching himself Italian from records. Friday nights a manicurist came to our house to give my father a manicure. She dressed in very flashy clothes, very loud, which I thought were quite glamorous. When someone asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up, I would say, a manicurist. Everyone, of course, thought it was very funny, as my whole family was highly educated and intellectual. Even as a young girl I was aware of the many women trying to get my father's attention. This was a source of problems for my mother, who was quite jealous. One of these women gave me a Shirley Temple doll, trying to gain my father's interest. The doll was an American import, quite unusual in Poland at that time. Later, during the war, one of these women took me to see my father when he was in hiding.

My Viennese grandmother, Sarah (everyone called her Pepcia, an endearment), my father's mother, enriched my childhood in many ways. She was a wonderful woman held in great affection by her children and the rest of the family. Everyone gathered at her house on Sundays where

she held a 'salon' serving tea and coffee and cakes.

She came to visit us in Warsaw quite often, bringing all kinds of pastries and cakes. My favorites were *guglhupf* and *kaiserschmarren.* She was a fantastic cook and baker. When my father got married and moved to Warsaw, my grandmother taught our maid to cook all his favorite dishes. The maid, Maria, had worked for my other grandmother before she came to work for us.

With my governess. Warsaw, Poland.

With my mother, dressed in white, and my governess. Warsaw, Poland.

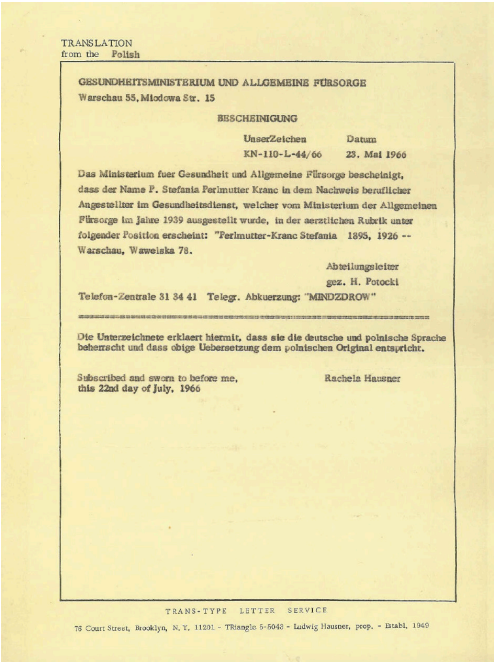
At approximately age six at a sea resort in Sopot, Poland. My mother knitted the skirt.

Ice skating as a child. Warsaw, Poland.

A pensive pose in my school uniform.

Holding the photographer's doll.

Professional photograph, Warsaw, Poland.



TRANSLATION
from the Polish

GESUNDHEITSMINISTERIUM UND ALLGEMEINE FÜRSORGE
Warschau 55, Miodowa Str. 15

BESCHEINIGUNG

UnserZeichen	Datum
KN-110-L-44/66	23. Mai 1966

Das Ministerium fuer Gesundheit und Allgemeine Fürsorge bescheinigt, dass der Name F. Stefania Ferlmutter Kranc in dem Nachweis beruflicher Angestellter im Gesundheitsdienst, welcher vom Ministerium der Allgemeinen Fürsorge im Jahre 1939 ausgestellt wurde, in der aerztlichen Rubrik unter folgender Position erscheint: "Ferlmutter-Kranc Stefania 1895, 1926 -- Warschau, Wawelska 78.

Abteilungsleiter
gez. H. Potocki

Telefon-Zentrale 31 34 41 Telegr. Abkuerzung: "MINDZDROW"

Die Unterzeichnete erklaert hiermit, dass sie die deutsche und polnische Sprache beherrscht und dass obige Uebersetzung dem polnischen Original entspricht.

Subscribed and sworn to before me,
this 22nd day of July, 1966

Rachela Hausner

TRANS-TYPE LETTER SERVICE
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Certificate of my mother's completing her studies.

My mother at the door of her medical school. Vienna, Austria.

My father, Arnold Perlmutter.

My father as a student.

My father in the Baltic Sea.

My father.

My father, on the far right, at the Berlin Tempelhof Airport on the first commercial flight from Berlin.

WAR THREATENS

I do not know when my father realized the threat to our safety and lives and decided to put all his energy into getting our family out of Europe and to the United States. The quota for émigrés from Poland to the United States in 1939 was very small (only 200), so it was an extremely difficult task. I do not know how long it took for my father to get us visas and affidavits, but in 1939 we had all the necessary papers for our departure. We even had tickets to sail to New York on the Queen Mary. My father had already arranged to rent office space in New York where he planned to open another branch of his business. He had sent money to New York and also to Switzerland for safekeeping. He had everything planned so well, but luck failed him.

Our family did not manage to leave Poland. Our visas and tickets for the Queen Mary were for October 1, 1939. One month earlier, September 1, 1939, when Hitler's armies invaded Poland, our escape was doomed. I grew up as a little princess, but the war knocked the princess out of me.

I do remember us talking about walking to Switzerland but my parents thought I was too fragile, pampered, and over protected to make the journey. It is ironic that my parents' belief that I was so fragile may actually have helped me survive. I knew so much love and support as a young child that the hope of finding it again may have been what got me through.

My father had also managed to get papers for his brother, my Uncle Hermann, who was an attorney in Berlin and his wife, Leska. Unfortunately, he could not get papers for Hermann's wife's elderly mother or her son from a previous marriage. My uncle refused to leave without them. Many years later I learned through the Red Cross that they all perished in Riga, Latvia, except for the son who escaped to Bolivia.

My father's other brother, Dietrich, had a knitwear factory in Vienna. Just before the war, he received an offer, which he accepted, to bring his machines to India. On the way to India he and his wife, Liesl, stopped in England where he was offered the same opportunity which he accepted. They preferred England, of course. Dietrich was able to get his mother, my grandmother, on the last ship out from Vienna to England. She died there of natural causes at age 60.

I always felt that my grandmother died of a broken heart because all her other children were under Nazi regime and were not heard from. I believe that if news of my survival had arrived sooner she would have had the will to live because we were very close. My aunt and uncle stayed in England and survived the war. I went to live with them

when I was liberated. Uncle Dietrich, Aunt Liesl, and I were the only survivors of the entire family.

I had an aunt, Clara Perlmutter Sternberg, my father's sister, who lived in Vienna with her doctor husband and their little son, Pauli. She was a concert pianist and Pauli was a piano virtuoso who played Mozart and Beethoven at the age of four. When the war began they hid in Brussels and then made their way to Switzerland. In Switzerland they were turned over to the Nazis and sent to Drancy, a camp near Paris. Later, I learned they all were killed in Auschwitz. After the war, in London, I met the wonderful Belgian woman who hid them.

NAZI OCCUPATION

As soon as the Germans occupied Warsaw they immediately started their persecution of the Jewish people. First, we were denied education. (My elementary school teacher right away sent a message that she would be happy to teach me privately. That never happened, though, because we had to move to the ghetto.) Then we were told to wear the Jewish star on our garments and were not allowed to go to the public parks, libraries, or other public places.

We were limited to a small amount of Polish money we could change into the occupation money. My father asked a Polish friend of his to change some additional money and the 'friend' took advantage and pocketed most of it. Our maid, Maria, who was treated like a member of the family, also robbed us as soon as the Germans came to Warsaw. For so many years she had complete access to everything in our house. She knew there was an envelope with money in it, American dollars, taped to the bottom of an armoire. She stole that envelope. (Later, when things got tough for her, she sent a message to my parents in the ghetto asking if she could work for us again!)

My father, a reserve officer, left for the front right after the Germans attacked. My mother and I stayed in Warsaw dodging bombs. In September 1939, just after my father left, an artillery shell hit our apartment causing the floor to cave in. My mother and I then went to my Aunt Ada's apartment, but that was soon hit, also. Fortunately, we were in the basement at the time. Every night the Germans sent incendiary bombs and soon the entire city was on fire. My mother and I ran from one building to another, trying to escape the fires that went on for over one month.

A month later, my father walked back from the front when Poland was taken over by the Germans. As he walked he saw bodies without limbs and limbs detached from bodies. When he finally arrived in Warsaw and found both our apartment and my Aunt Ada's apartment destroyed, he did not know where to find us. He kept asking people if

they saw two ladies and a girl. Someone told him about seeing two ladies but no girl; so, he thought I was killed. Finally, when he did find us, we were sleeping on a bare floor in a strange building.We were overjoyed at finding each other. Right away, my mother, father, Aunt Ada, and I moved to my father's office. At first, a nearby restaurant, where my father was a well-known customer, sent us some soup, but that did not last long. Then we subsisted on the fine chocolate and imported sardines my father kept to serve when he entertained clients. We stayed in my father's office for several weeks. Then we stayed with my mother's friend, Wanda, who lived on Jerozolimskie/Aleje. I used to play with her son, Freddy, who was my age. Before we went into the Ghetto, my friend Hanka's parents right away offered for me to stay with them, but I wanted to stay with my parents. We never dreamt that such horrible things would happen.

LIFE IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

Some months later, when the perimeter of the ghetto was announced my father was able to get us a three-room apartment. However, that street was deleted from the ghetto before we moved there. After that we were lucky to be able to get one room in an apartment inside the boundary that we shared with four other families. The building was a huge apartment house with two courtyards on Ulica Ceglana 6. Our room had two beds and a chest of

drawers. All five families used one bathroom and one kitchen. I remember one of the people, an elderly patrician man who was with his niece who took care of him. One day, he came behind me and put his hands around me on my breasts. I was only ten years old and was quite shocked at that.

The views on the street were awful. There were throngs of people starving, many without any shelter. But the worst to me were the bewildered small children without any supervision who were separated from their families. They had no food and no place to stay. They did not know what happened to them. I felt so bad for them that I was determined to find a way to help them. There was a farmer down the block who had a cow. I got the idea that if I provided food for the cow he would give me some milk for these children. I approached tenants in our building and the building next door and asked them to please save potato peels that I would pick up every day and bring to the farmer. They agreed and so did the farmer. So, every day the children knew they would at least get some nourishment. At ten years old I became a little social worker. Later on, the sight of bodies of small children, totally emaciated, just skin and bones, stacked on large wheelbarrows became the worst memory I would have from the war.

When the ghetto was first formed my father was begged to become part of the Judenrat. He absolutely refused. This proved to be an enormously wise decision because time proved that a position on the Judenrat brought tremendous responsibility and heartache. The Judenrat had to choose

who would be the next victims when the Germans demanded Jews to be given up for labor or death. Later on, my father did accept the job as director of the Umschlagplatz. The Umschlagplatz was the transfer point through which everything that entered or left the ghetto was recorded, disinfected, checked, and routed for delivery. His office was next to a railroad siding which served as the arrival port for all ghetto supplies and later on as the departure point for people being sent to death camps throughout Poland. He accepted the post at the urging of the elders of the Jewish community who believed that because of his perfect command of the German language and his reputation as a businessman, the Germans would have some respect for him, which they did. The Umschlagplatz was under direct supervision by the Wehrmacht, the German regular army. One of them even offered to adopt me when it became apparent what was happening. His name was Col. Denk. He showed a lot of respect for my father and he knew how much I meant to him. I did not accept his offer of adoption because I feared that one of his five daughters would denounce me. Thinking back, I am surprised my father trusted my judgment; I was only thirteen.

In the ghetto, my father said the only thing we could take away with us from this time and place was our education. Because of my father's belief in the importance of education, he hired teachers to teach me all the regular school subjects. I also had a woman teaching me French and a man teaching me English and Latin. So that's where I learned English —

in the Warsaw Ghetto! After a while I was thrilled to read in English and French some of the classics I had read in Polish originally. All the time we were struggling for normalcy. By the time I was twelve or thirteen I had my first crush. His name was Bruno; he was my age. We met while putting on a play with some other children. Suddenly, I was glued to our window waiting to see him pass by. We kissed on a staircase. One day he presented me with a gold bracelet that belonged to his mother. Bruno did not survive the war.

My three years in the ghetto went by very slowly with continuous fear, anxiety, stress, hunger, disease, and unrelenting deterioration of our living conditions. At first, we received meager food rations which were not enough to keep us alive. My family was lucky because we had money to buy food from people who smuggled it in from outside the ghetto. The smugglers were mostly small boys who risked their lives going under the ghetto wall to the city where they would get food and smuggle it back into the ghetto. They would squeeze themselves through the holes they dug under the wall. Many of them were caught and shot on the spot. That was the source of our food. We got potatoes, sometimes an orange. I was not starving then. I did come down with hepatitis toward the end of the time in the ghetto. I was jaundiced and very nauseous. If not for my mother's devoted nursing, I could never have survived. At the beginning of the German occupation my maternal grandmother became ill and succumbed to dysentery. We

always felt that she was spared a worse fate.

The number of people in the ghetto was dwindling all the time, not just from starvation and disease, but also from people being deported. Whenever my parents left the apartment I had a sinking feeling, not knowing if I would ever see them again. People were grabbed off the street and sent away all the time. In the spring of 1943, the Nazis perfected their ingenious killing system using Zyclon B gas and started a systematic elimination of the Jewish people. A train left daily from the railroad station at the Umschlagplatz headed to Treblinka, a nearby death camp. The SS was systematically emptying the ghetto. At the time the mass deportations began, my father, mother, and I were living in my father's office in one of the buildings at the Umschlagplatz. I remember looking through a small window and seeing people being herded onto the trains. One day I saw one of my teachers. Sometimes I saw other people I knew. We did not know from one minute or one second to another when our turn would come. It was extremely nerve-racking.

My mother attended sick children and treated them as best she could. There were no medicines or surgical facilities, and the Germans had no interest in keeping Jews alive. She was required, however, to keep careful records and statistics of the diseases she encountered and a tally of the deaths she witnessed. We had a small balcony off our room where she would burn all her clothes after treating sick children to prevent spreading diseases to my father or me.

One day in early April 1943, a small boy was very ill and his family begged my mother to look at him. She could not really do anything for him, but they said it would mean so much to them if she would just come and see him. That was the last time I saw my mother. Going to see him proved fatal for my mother. While she was examining the boy an SS unit broke in and took the boy, his entire family, and my mother and put them on a train. When my father found out that my mother was on the train, he wanted to jump on the train to be with her, but a friend reminded him that he still had a daughter to look after. As a physician, my mother was able to obtain a capsule of potassium cyanide, a quick acting poison. I always hope that she used it, but I will never know. Coincidentally, her sister, my Aunt Ada, was put on the same train. If they met and there was only one capsule, my mother probably would not have used it—but I will never know. People say that it is better to know the truth, even if it is bad news, but I do not know if that is true.

In April 1943 the Nazis started the systematic extermination of the Jewish population of the Warsaw Ghetto. With three-quarters of the people gone, the rest decided they were going to kill as many Nazis as possible before they were killed themselves. It was a brave, but tragic decision. They had no weapons, food, or medicine, so they resorted to throwing 'Molotov cocktails" at the German tanks. Ultimately, the Nazis set fire to each individual building. The uprising lasted for several weeks until every Jewish man, woman, and child was eliminated. Outside the ghetto

the Polish citizens of Warsaw watched the fires and smoke, and heard the sounds of gunshots and explosions. My father and I were fortunate to have left the ghetto before this all started.

ESCAPING THE GHETTO AND GOING INTO HIDING

This tragedy convinced my father of the hopelessness of the situation and decided to save me first and then himself. He enlisted the help of a trustworthy person in the Umschlagplatz to deliver a message to Dr. Popowski, my friend Hanka's father, asking him to "take me under his wing." Dr. Popowski urged my father to somehow smuggle me out of the ghetto. He would then meet me and take me to stay in his house. A few days later, that is what happened. My father managed to bribe some German soldiers guarding the gates. (They were Wehrmacht, not SS.) They stood talking to each other on the side and, wearing my best clothes, I just walked out of the ghetto. It was like a miracle!

Dr. Popowski met me at a designated place and took me home to his family. The Popowskis were wonderful people. I was very happy to see Hanka whom I had not seen for the past three years. They gave me much love and support. Time was going by and I anxiously awaited news of my father.

Meanwhile, with his wife gone and his child safely hidden, my father decided to leave the ghetto as well. He again bribed the ghetto guards and slipped out the night of April 18, 1943. Had he waited another day, escape would have been impossible. The ghetto uprising began on April 19, 1943. By May 16 the Nazis had destroyed the ghetto house by house and slaughtered the 60,000 remaining Jews. Before the war my parents had many friends, both Jewish and Gentile. These friends were, however, afraid to hide my father because hiding a Jew was punishable by death. Finally, one woman agreed to help. She persuaded her elderly mother to hide my father in her home in exchange for money. (Every few weeks the old woman, in a ploy for more money, would complain and threaten to put him out.) In desperation, he accepted the arrangement and notified Dr. Popowski of his whereabouts. The woman lived in a ramshackle building — really just a shack — across the street from a factory. Because everyone there knew the old woman lived alone and no one ever came to visit her, my father had to always stay on the far side of the room away from the window, not to be in view. The walls of her shack were so thin that when my father had a cold he had to muffle his cough and sneeze into a pillow. The woman would visit her daughter each day and padlock the door when she left. He lived there like a caged tiger for nearly two years. This was an extremely difficult time for him. My father was left all alone with his thoughts, hating himself for not doing things differently, not saving my mother, etc. Of course, he had done everything possible to keep our family safe.

From fall of 1943 until early winter 1944, while my father was in hiding, I was living at the Popowski home. I was able to see my father three or four times while he was hiding there. A woman who was in love with my father before the war, Czeslawa M., took me on the trolley once or twice and then I went by myself. I would go after dark and leave at dawn. One time when I was visiting, an SS car pulled up and three or four Nazis raced upstairs and dragged out a man clothed only in pajamas. We thought that was the end for us. Usually, when they found someone hidden they would empty the entire building of all the people and shoot them right there on the spot. They did not do it that time! It was another miracle.

Meanwhile, because many of the Popowski's neighbors knew me from before the war, and because anti-Semitism was widespread in Poland, it became dangerous for me, and the Popowski family, for me to remain hiding in their home. Whenever anyone came to the house I had to hide in a closet for the duration of the visit. Leaving the house was out of the question. After a while the good doctor decided that it was bad for me psychologically to live in hiding and decided I would be better off living openly under false identity.

I have absolutely no idea how much money my father spent in his efforts to save our family during the war. I know my father had a numbered bank account in Switzerland and that he sent money to New York where he had already rented an office and established a bank account. I also know

my father bribed the ghetto guards to arrange for my escape, that he paid the woman to hide him. Later on he donated some money to the orphanage where I was hidden.

HIDING IN THE ORPHANAGE

As a lung specialist, Dr. Popowski's duties included taking care of the children in the orphanage at the Hoza Street Catholic Convent. He approached Mother Superior Matylda Getter, the head of several orphanages whom he knew through charity work he did. He asked her if she could incorporate me into one of her orphanages and she said yes! I was not very happy about leaving my second family, but I knew it was in my best interest. Dr. Popowski got me papers under the name Janina Marzec, a typical Polish name. He also gave me a different background. If anyone asked me I should say I came from a small town, my father was a carpenter and my mother was a peasant and both were killed in the war. I could never let anyone suspect that I had ever traveled anywhere or that I spoke any foreign languages. He even told me my Polish was too refined and I should learn some slang. The girls in the orphanages came from low socio-economic backgrounds and I should blend in and copy their actions. I needed to become an actress. A new chapter in my life was beginning.

One evening, Dr. Popowski brought me to the orphanage. Everything seemed very strange to me. Mother Superior

greeted me warmly, but briefly, and sent me to Sister Josepha who was in charge of the girls. Only Mother Superior and her secretary, Sister Teresa, knew my true identity. Mother Superior apparently had hidden other children at the risk of her own life. She supervised a large area surrounding Warsaw and often traveled from convent to convent. By taking Sister Teresa into her confidence she could be sure her Jewish charges were protected while she was away. After the war I found out that Mother Superior saved 23 Jewish girls. None of the girls were ever told about the others so that if one were found out she would not give the others away. At first I was sent to a convent-owned farm in the country for two months to recover my strength. I ate well, picked flowers, and helped feed the animals. When I returned to the convent, Mother Superior made arrangements for me to be tutored in the city rather than go to a public school where my identity might be revealed. According to my father's wishes for me, I started attending a small private school.

The orphanage was on Ulice Hoza 53, in the middle of the city. There were 85 girls living there. We slept on bunks with straw-filled sacks as mattresses. At five o'clock in the morning we were woken by a bell, and told to wash up (in cold water) and make our beds. We were not allowed to talk at this time. I had never made a bed before, so mine ended up with valleys, hills, and mountains. Sister Josepha, disgusted with my effort, told me there would be no breakfast for me until I made it properly. It did not take me long to learn to do it properly. Breakfast consisted of lumpy oatmeal cooked in water with no salt or sugar. To

me it was a symbol of what had happened to my life. Until then I was a very fussy eater. I tried not to cry, but tears just rolled down my face involuntarily. I felt so alone and very sad. The entire time I spent at the convent I was hungry. There was never enough food for us. One morning when I woke up there was a rat sitting on my bed; he was cold and hungry, too. Once, I managed to sell, for a loaf of bread, a beautiful embroidered, monogrammed pillowcase from my mother's trousseau. I went up on the roof with a few of the girls and we devoured the bread!

A few days after I arrived at the convent a serious crisis arose: confession and communion. No one remembered to tell me what to say or do and I had no idea. Some priests and nuns were very anti-Semitic – no one could be trusted. I realized how important it was for me to say the right thing. After much deliberation I told the priest that I had "thoughts about boys." Everything about sex was taboo, so that was okay. The priest told me to say a few Hail Marys and God would forgive me. I began to carefully watch the other girls – I would make the sign of the cross when they did, kneel when they knelt, and rise when they rose. I repeated the Latin prayers, learned the rosary and studied the catechism. I knew my life depended on it. I had dents in my knees for years afterwards, from all that kneeling.

Only Mother Getter and her secretary, Sister Theresa knew my real identity. When I went outside the convent and took a trolley, they told me to bury myself in a book or buy a bouquet of flowers and keep smelling them so no one could see my face and possibly recognize me.

Mother Getter traveled often between the different orphanages under her care. Sometimes when she came to Warsaw she would send for me and ask me how I was doing. One time, when I was waiting for her in her office, there was a sugar bowl on her desk. I had not tasted anything sweet for months. I tried hard to fight it, but eventually I surrendered to the desire to have some sugar. I reached guiltily into the bowl and enjoyed the sweet taste.

A few months after my arrival a new girl came to the orphanage. Somehow, I was sure she was Jewish also. I did not approach her, however, because I was afraid she would not think that I was really a Jew and would think I was trying to trick her into revealing her identity. A niece of Mother Getter was also staying at the orphanage and we became somewhat friendly. I was dying to talk to somebody, but did not dare because I was afraid I would slip and she would become suspicious about my true identity and possibly denounce me. I knew that Dr. Popowski kept informed about me, but I could not see him or his wife or my friend Hanka. I was essentially cut off from my old life and all the people who were in it. I lived in the orphanage for almost two years. At Yad Vashem, the Israeli museum of the Holocaust, there is a tree lined "Avenue of the Righteous" dedicated to Gentiles who helped save Jews regardless of the threat to their own lives. Naturally, I wanted to have the Popowski family and Mother Getter thus honored, which I was able to do after providing details about their courage and character.

After all, it is because of them that I am alive today. After the war I found out that Mother Getter saved twenty-three Jewish girls. I also learned the Popowski family sheltered several Jewish doctors and their wives during that time, but none of those couples survived.

THE POLISH INSURRECTION

When the Red Army approached the Vistula River in August 1944 the Poles of Warsaw rose in revolt against the Germans. There was an agreement between leaders of the Polish underground and Soviet authorities that as soon as the insurrection began the Russians would shell the city to support the action and to force the Germans off the streets. But the Red Army guns were silent. (The insurrection was led by people loyal to the Polish government-in-exile based in London, which the Russians opposed.) It was to the Russians advantage to let the Germans and the 'unfriendly' Poles kill each other.

When the Polish insurrection began I immediately left the orphanage, with the nuns' blessings, and joined the Polish underground. I just reported to the nearest unit and volunteered to do anything and everything to help overthrow the Germans. I was passing myself off as a Polish girl, using the name Janina Marzec. At first I was a messenger, a courier, but when one of us was killed and I got his gun, I learned to shoot across the barricades. At that time my *nom de guerre* was Joanna.

When the entire world failed to help us fight the Nazis, I felt terribly disappointed and frustrated with the human race. I didn't care whether I lived or died. I just wanted to kill as many Germans as possible. We fought with hardly any food or sleep. We hurled bottles filled with gasoline (we called them Molotov Cocktails) and shot across the barricades. We fought with every breath in our bodies. During the insurrection a fellow partisan was severely wounded and lost a lot of blood. I had type O blood that is compatible with other types, so I offered to give him blood. A medic lay me down next to the patient and he hooked me up in a transfusion directly from my arm to his. I was happy to see him seem to rally. A priest came to bless him, but the patient thought the priest had come to give him the last rites. He became very upset and finally passed away. Another time I got some shrapnel in my forehead. There was no time to remove all of it, so I still have some of it left. The insurrection ended on October 2, 1944.

SAYING GOODBYE TO MY FATHER

Unknown to me, my father had left the dingy apartment when the insurrection started. He tried to make his way to the convent to see me before he also joined the Resistance. Having been an officer in the Polish Army before the war, his experience could be useful. One day, while darting across a street, a stray bullet caught him and lodged in his right lung. The underground fighters took him to a makeshift field clinic set up in an old school building.

Because the wound was apparently not life threatening and there were no facilities to remove the bullet, he remained unattended on a stretcher. When a man near him was treated and released, my father persuaded him to deliver an envelope addressed to me at the convent. When it arrived, Mother Superior gave it to an underground officer who passed it along to me. In it, my father wrote that he was hurt and told me where he was. Since I was supposed to be an orphan, he signed it, "Your Loving Grandmother." Between assignments I ventured to the field clinic. It tore me apart to see my father lying there, hungry for food and medical attention. I visited him as often as possible and brought him whatever I could pilfer. One time I even brought him a clean sheet I had stolen.

After one month of fighting, the Resistance ran out of food, ammunition, and, with the Red Army still stagnating on the other side of the Vistula, the will to go on. The Poles decided to evacuate the field clinic to try to save the wounded. My father and I said our 'goodbyes' and consoled each other with a solemn promise to meet soon. I did not want to be separated from him but he insisted I go with the underground. As I learned later, my dear father was finally given some attention, which, sadly, would lead to his death. While bathing him, a Polish nurse discovered he was circumcised and that was his death sentence. (Only Jewish men were circumcised at that time.) She summoned a German officer from the street who shot my father on the spot. My father was only three months from liberation. What irony.

THE CAMPS

The last time I saw my father he told me to give myself up to the Nazis with the rest of the Polish Resistance underground. I thought the Nazis would do what they always did when someone disobeyed them – finish us off with a few machine guns, but that did not happen. After the Germans overpowered the Resistance, they treated its participants as prisoners of war.

In 1944 as the Red Army smashed westward, we POW's were moved from prison camp to prison camp, sometimes on foot, other times by cattle car, squeezed in like sardines. Before the first march began, the only thing I grabbed was a change of underwear and my favorite small pillow (called a jasiek). I didn't take anything else because I expected to be shot. I was not with anyone I knew; there was no one to help me or care for me. I was fourteen years old. There were thousands of us on the march. People were lugging all kinds of things, fur coats, for example. The march lasted several days and they had to throw off most of their possessions. The Polish citizens stood on the sides of the road and picked up everything that was discarded. It was a sobering sight I will never forget. Over the next months we were imprisoned in one POW camp after another. The first camp in Germany was in Landsdorf. Then came Muhlberg and Altenburg. Altenburg was situated in a city and the local residents would come and look at us like we were animals in a zoo.

Next came Niederlangen and Oberlangen near the border of Holland. All in all, I was in seven POW camps. Those who survived these camps were finally delivered to the Bergen-Belsen death camp.

Upon arrival at each camp we were told to completely strip and take showers. Our clothes were disinfected but there were still epidemics of lice and other vermin. A short time before we were liberated I borrowed a pair of scissors and chopped off some of my hair. Because I did not have an extra pair of shoes (mine were completely worn out) or a warm jacket, when we were forced to stand outside for five hours at a time for an appell, roll call, when the Germans with attack dogs, pretended to count us, I felt the cold of the German winter in a bad way. People who were not well enough to stand were supposedly sent to a clinic, but were never seen again. I remembered how my parents thought I was so fragile and wondered at the irony of it. Altenburg was the only camp where I was assigned work. There was a munitions factory there where I was assigned to work making bullets. We tried to sabotage them as much as possible.

We slept on the floor of the barracks, 200 women in a barrack. When one woman turned, the other 199 had to turn also. We had to use latrines that were quite a distance from the barracks. We were constantly cold and hungry. Our food was a slice of black bread and some brew made from rotten turnips. (For years after the war I could not stand to look at turnips in the grocery store, but now I even use them in vegetable soup.) Sometimes, a potato peel would

be in the brew and that was better than Godiva chocolate is to me today. There would be fights among the women when one thought that another got a larger slice of bread. I shrunk from that – from being exposed to another ugly part of human nature. Because I was so sheltered before the war I did not realize right away what kind of people I was with in the POW camps. As my life lessons progressed I discovered that many of the girls were either lesbians or prostitutes, and almost everyone was a thief. I had to guard my few possessions carefully. When I first arrived I was wearing a gold watch and a ring my father gave me. One of the girls admired my ring and asked if she could try it on. Foolishly, I agreed, took it off, and handed it to her. She made believe that she dropped it into the straw on the barrack floor. I never saw that ring again. That was a painful lesson for me. After the war, I had a jeweler copy that ring from my description, but I always regretted my naiveté. Toward the end of my incarceration I traded the gold watch for a loaf of bread. I felt that if I survived the war I would get another gold watch.

I did become friendly with some girls in the POW camps: Grazyna Langenfeld, Dora Wielunska, Danuta Kostecka, and Eva Babinska.

At Niederlangen we were separated by a distance and a barbed wire fence from English and American prisoners of war. We could not speak to each other, but were able to tie handwritten notes to small rocks and throw them over the fence when the guards were not in sight. Since I spoke

several languages, including English, I became the translator for the barracks. The messages were friendly (How long have you been here? Where are you from?), hopeful (Hang in there, it will be over soon) and even flirtatious (Are you a blond or brunette? Can we meet when this is over?). It added a tiny sparkle to our dreary lives. I wrote about my background and mentioned that I had an uncle, my father's youngest brother, Dietrich Perner, who had fled from Vienna to England. One English soldier responded and suggested that I write a letter on official POW mail and he would send it to his sister in England—maybe she could locate my uncle. He was allowed to send monthly mail to England as I could to Poland. Unfortunately, I had no one to write to other than Dr. Popowski and Mother Superior, and I would not jeopardize them by writing to them. I followed the soldier's suggestion, wrote a letter for him to send to his sister, and, as I learned much later on, his sister somehow found my uncle and informed him that I was still alive.

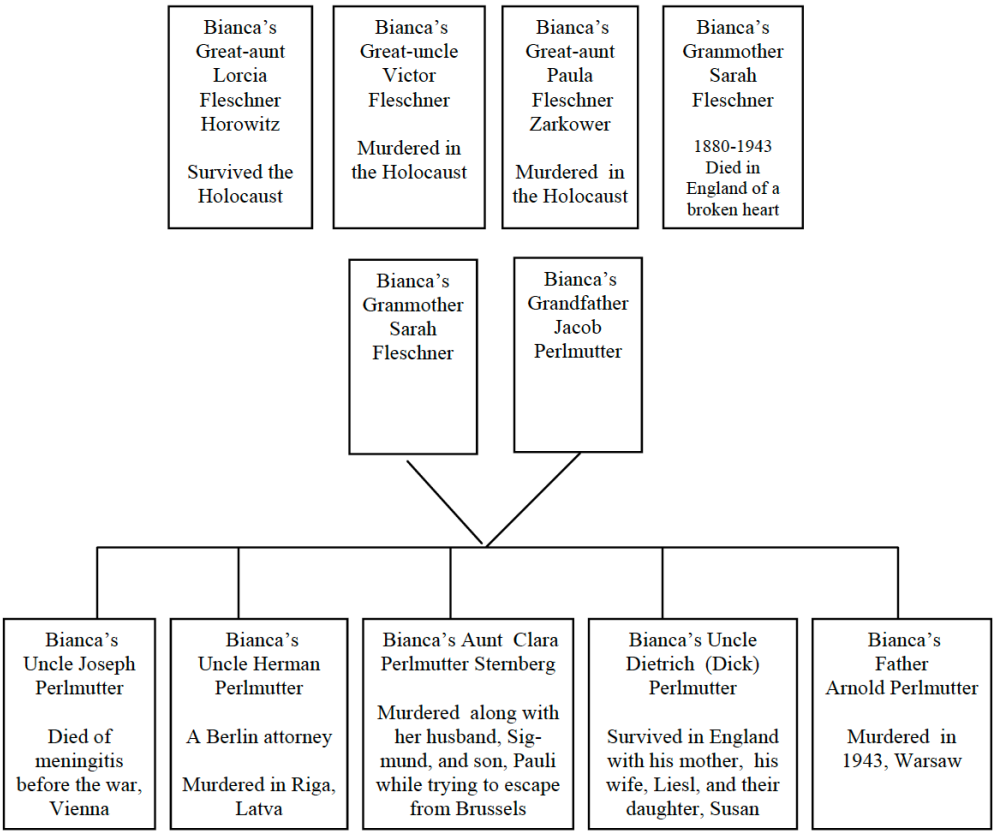
LIBERATION AT BERGEN BELSEN

Eventually, along with other prisoners, I was sent to Bergen Belsen, an infamous concentration camp near Celle, Germany. The walk to Bergen Belsen took many days. We heard American planes and hoped for bombs – hoped the war would be ending. Fortunately for me, we were liberated soon after my arrival there. A British tank division liberated us from Bergen-Belsen in April 1945.

I had pneumonia and would not have survived but I was given prompt medical attention by the British medics. For a while the allies did not know what to do with us. They issued us allied uniforms: khaki underwear, socks, shirts, pants and jackets. (To this day I hate that color.) We drilled every day. I remember a Canadian soldier who taught me my first English song: "You Are My Sunshine." I thought I would be better off as a Polish orphan, so I still told no one that I was Jewish. After a few months we were sent to a displaced persons (DP) camp in Niederlangen. Most of the girls there were Polish and planned to return to their families in Poland. I did not even consider that option. I knew that if either of my parents had survived they would not want to live in Poland with all its anti-Semitism. So I put all my energies into finding my uncle Dietrich in England. I did not know his address but I was determined to find him somehow. From the Niederlangen Displaced Persons' Camp I wrote letters every day to my uncle, Dietrich, addressed to the only addresses I had ever heard of in England—addresses I had

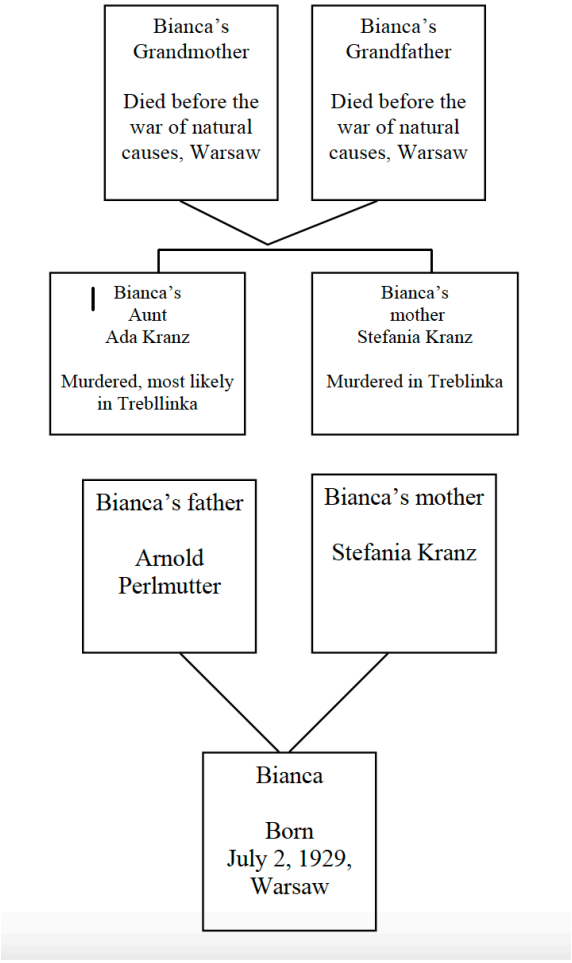
read in books—Bond Street, Downing Street, and Piccadilly Circus! Incredibly, the dead letters department of the British postal service noticed the numerous envelopes addressed to the same person and placed an ad in newspapers looking for my uncle. My uncle did not see the ad, but someone else did and told him about it. He collected a big bundle of my letters. Right away he wanted me to come to him, but the British would not issue me a visa. In desperation, my uncle contacted a distant relative in the United States who found someone to prepare the affidavit required for immigration to America. In the fall of 1945 the British finally granted me a temporary visa in transit.

Bianca's Paternal Family



Julius Perlmutter was Arnold Perlmutter's uncle.
Rudy Fleschner, Arnold's cousin, died in the Holocaust in Vienna.
Arnold's cousin Emil and his wife, Mitzi, survived in New York.

Bianca's Maternal Family



My Fleschner greatgrandparents with their children, Paula, Lorcia, and Michael.

Standing: cousins Anne and Fritz Fleschner. Seated: Victor with Paula on his right.

Sarah Perlmutter.

My grandparents, Jacob and Sarah Perlmutter.

My grandmother is the first woman seated on the left. The woman seated at the middle of the table is my Aunt Clara. Next to her is her son, Pauli. Standing behind Clara, wearing glasses, is her husband, Dr. Sternberg.

My grandmother is on the left. My father's cousin Emil is standing. In front of Emil is his wife, Mitzi.

My great-aunt,
Paula Zarkower.

My aunt,
Clara Perlmutter Sternberg.

My uncle, Dietrich Perner.

My uncle, Joseph Perlmutter.

My Aunt Liesl and Uncle Dietrich's wedding photo. Vienna, Austria.

Liesl Perner

My great-aunt, Paula, and her husband, Nathan Zarkower, on a European voyage.

Lorcia Fleschner, my father's aunt.

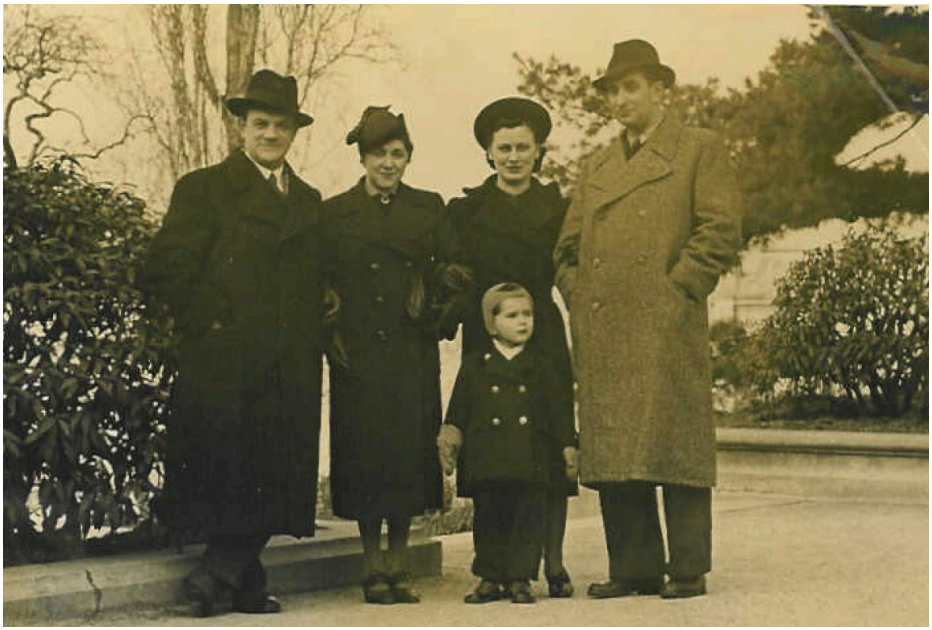
My uncle, Dietrich Perner.

Rudy Fleschner, my father's cousin.

A cousin, Oscar Perlmutter (in uniform) with Liesl and Dietrich (Dick).

My Aunt Clara Perlmutter on the left.

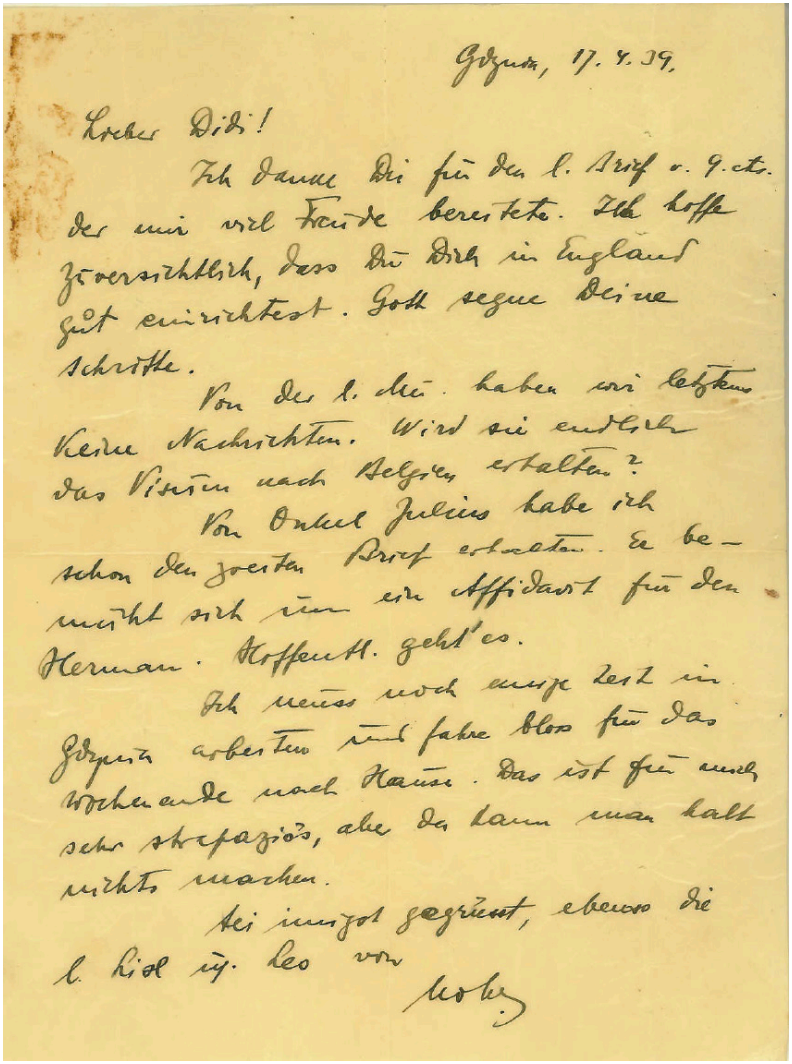
Cousins.



From left to right: Leo Posaner (Liesl's brother), Clara Sternberg, Liesl and Dietrich (Dick) Perner, their young son, Pauli.

Liesl, Dietrich and Pauli had escaped from Vienna to Brussels and were turned over to the Nazis as they tried to get into Switzerland. They died in Auschwitz.

Our family was at the airport to meet my father's business associate. I am sitting on the associate's lap. My father is next to me with his pipe. My mother's sister, Ada, is next to him. My mother is next to Ada. Ada's husband, Frank Friedman, is on the right.



Gdynia, 17. 4. 39.

Lieber Didi!

Ich danke Dir für den l. Brief v. 9. ct. der mir viel Freude bereitete. Ich hoffe zuversichtlich, dass Du Dich in England gut einrichtest. Gott segne Deine Schritte.

Von der l. Mi. haben wir letzthin keine Nachrichten. Wird sie endlich das Visum nach Belgien erhalten?

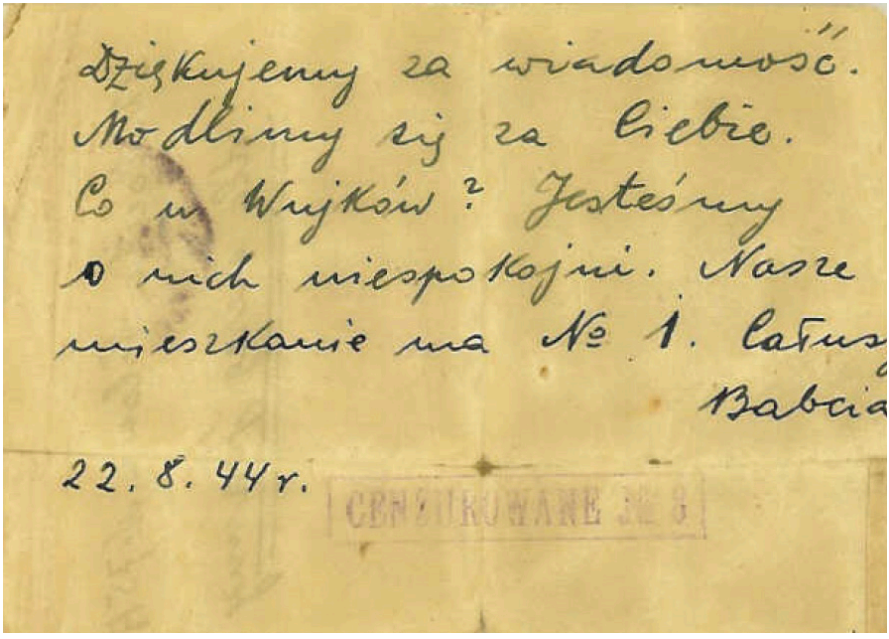
Von Onkel Julius habe ich schon den zweiten Brief erhalten. Er bemüht sich um ein Affidavit für den Herman. Hoffentl. geht's es.

Ich muss noch einige Zeit in Gdynia arbeiten und fahre blos für das Wochenende nach Hause. Das ist für mich sehr strapaziös, aber da kann man halt nichts machen.

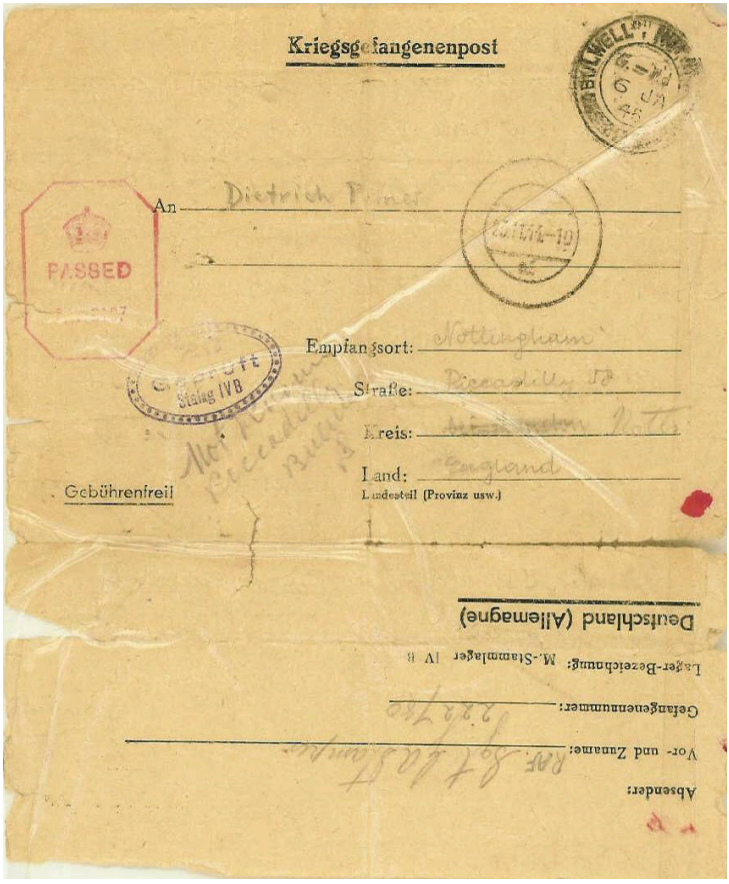
Sei innigst gegrüsst, ebenso die l. Lieb. Leo von

Mutter

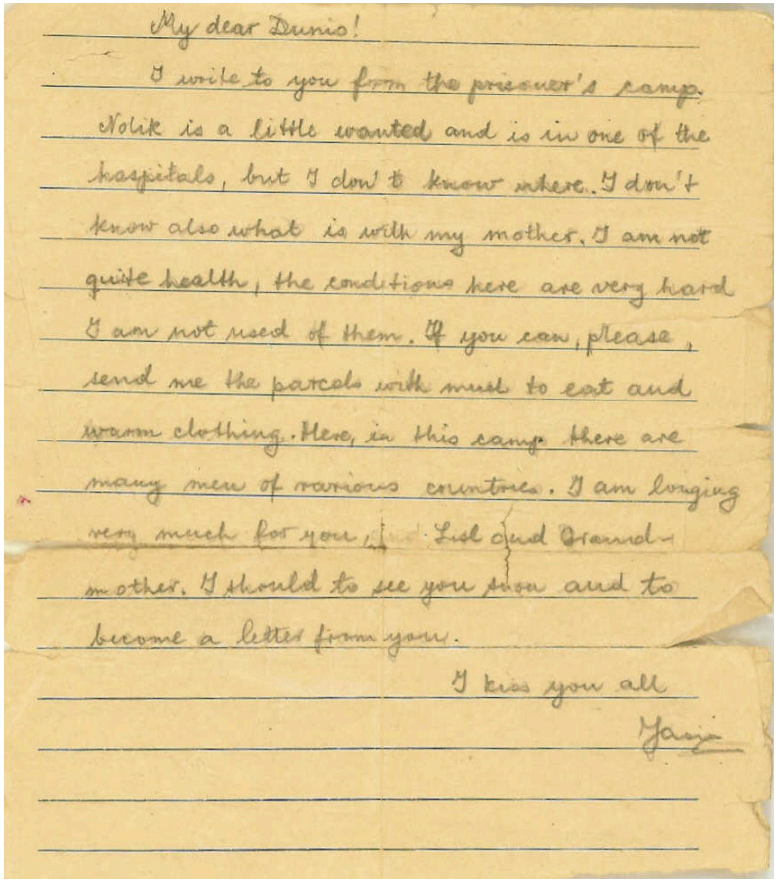
A letter my father sent to his brother, Dietrich, April 17, 1939. Gdynia, Poland.



A note my father sent to me during the uprising. He signed it "Grandma." Dated August 22, 1944.



The letter I sent to my Uncle Dietrich Perner from the POW camp.



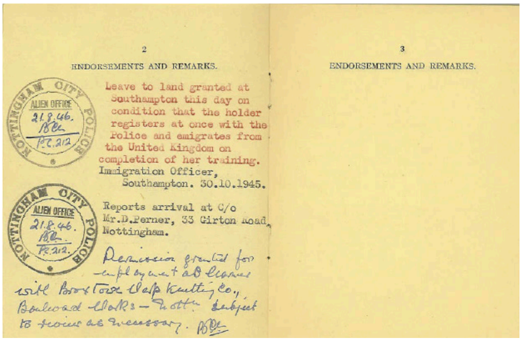
My dear Dunio!

I write to you from the prisoner's camp. Nolik is a little wounded and is in one of the hospitals, but I don't know where. I don't know also what is with my mother. I am not quite health, the conditions here are very hard I am not used of them. If you can, please, send me the parcels with must to eat and warm clothing. Here, in this camp there are many men of various countries. I am longing very much for you, Lisl and Grandmother. I should to see you soon and to become a letter from you.

I kiss you all

Yanja

A letter I wrote to my Uncle Dietrich from a POW camp, 1944.



2

ENDORSEMENTS AND REMARKS.

NOTTINGHAM CITY POLICE
ALIEN OFFICE
21.8.46.
P.C.212.

Leave to land granted at Southampton this day on condition that the holder registers at once with the Police and emigrates from the United Kingdom on completion of her training.
Immigration Officer,
Southampton. 30.10.1945.

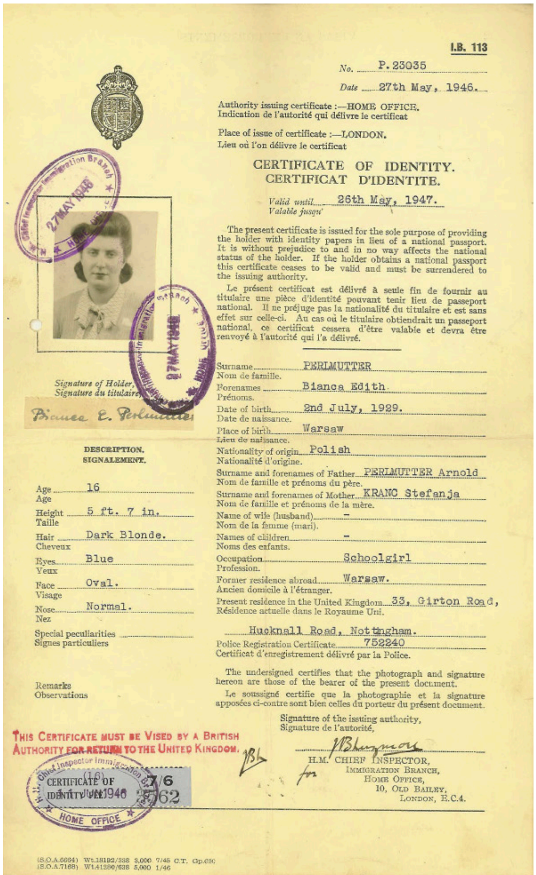
Reports arrival at C/o Mr.D.Perner, 33 Girton Road, Nottingham.

Permission granted for employment as learner with Broxtowe Warp Knitting Co., Boulevard Works – Nott. Subject to review as necessary.

3

ENDORSEMENTS AND REMARKS.

Permission granted to disembark in Southhampton, United Kingdom. October 30, 1945.



I.B. 113

No. P.23035

Date 27th May, 1946.

Authority issuing certificate :—HOME OFFICE.
Indication de l'autorité qui délivre le certificat

Place of issue of certificate :—LONDON.
Lieu où l'on délivre le certificat

CERTIFICATE OF IDENTITY.
CERTIFICAT D'IDENTITE.

Valid until 26th May, 1947.
Valable jusqu'

The present certificate is issued for the sole purpose of providing the holder with identity papers in lieu of a national passport. It is without prejudice to and in no way affects the national status of the holder. If the holder obtains a national passport this certificate ceases to be valid and must be surrendered to the issuing authority.

Le présent certificat est délivré à seule fin de fournir au titulaire une pièce d'identité pouvant tenir lieu de passeport national. Il ne préjuge pas la nationalité du titulaire et est sans effet sur celle-ci. Au cas où le titulaire obtiendrait un passeport national, ce certificat cessera d'être valable et devra être renvoyé à l'autorité qui l'a délivré.

Chief Inspector Immigration Branch 27 MAY 1946 HOME OFFICE

Signature of Holder / Signature du titulaire: Bianca E. Perlmutter

Surname / Nom de famille: PERLMUTTER
Forenames / Prénoms: Bianca Edith
Date of birth / Date de naissance: 2nd July, 1929.
Place of birth / Lieu de naissance: Warsaw
Nationality of origin / Nationalité d'origine: Polish
Surname and forenames of Father / Nom de famille et prénoms du père: PERLMUTTER Arnold
Surname and forenames of Mother / Nom de famille et prénoms de la mère: KRANC Stefanja
Name of wife (husband) / Nom de la femme (mari): –
Names of children / Noms des enfants: –
Occupation / Profession: Schoolgirl
Former residence abroad / Ancien domicile à l'étranger: Warsaw.
Present residence in the United Kingdom / Résidence actuelle dans le Royaume Uni: 33, Girton Road, Hucknall Road, Nottingham.
Police Registration Certificate / Certificat d'enregistrement délivré par la Police: 752240

DESCRIPTION.
SIGNALEMENT.

Age / Age: 16
Height / Taille: 5 ft. 7 in.
Hair / Cheveux: Dark Blonde.
Eyes / Yeux: Blue
Face / Visage: Oval.
Nose / Nez: Normal.
Special peculiarities / Signes particuliers:

Remarks / Observations

The undersigned certifies that the photograph and signature hereon are those of the bearer of the present document.

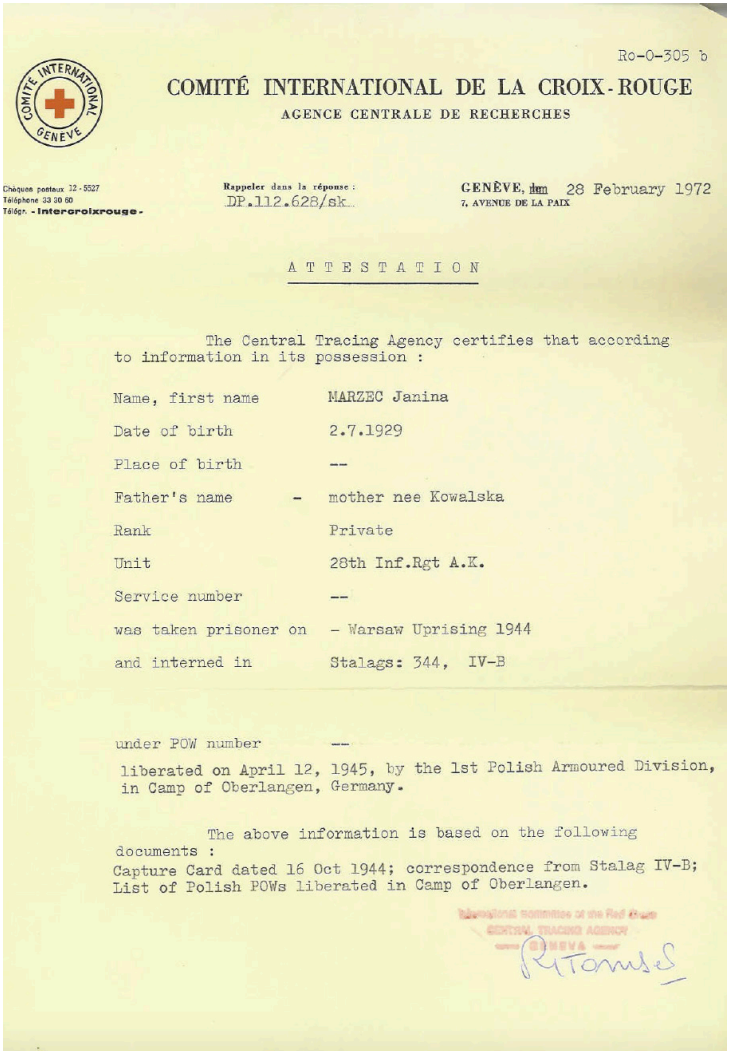
Le soussigné certifie que la photographie et la signature apposées ci-contre sont bien celles du porteur du présent document.

Signature of the issuing authority,
Signature de l'autorité,

for H.M. CHIEF INSPECTOR,
IMMIGRATION BRANCH,
HOME OFFICE,
10, OLD BAILEY,
LONDON, E.C.4.

THIS CERTIFICATE MUST BE VISED BY A BRITISH AUTHORITY FOR RETURN TO THE UNITED KINGDOM.

Identity paper issued in London, May 27, 1946.



Ro-0-305 b

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GENÈVE, 28 February 1972
7, AVENUE DE LA PAIX

ATTESTATION

The Central Tracing Agency certifies that according to information in its possession :

Name, first name	MARZEC Janina
Date of birth	2.7.1929
Place of birth	--
Father's name -	mother nee Kowalska
Rank	Private
Unit	28th Inf.Rgt A.K.
Service number	--
was taken prisoner on	- Warsaw Uprising 1944
and interned in	Stalags: 344, IV-B

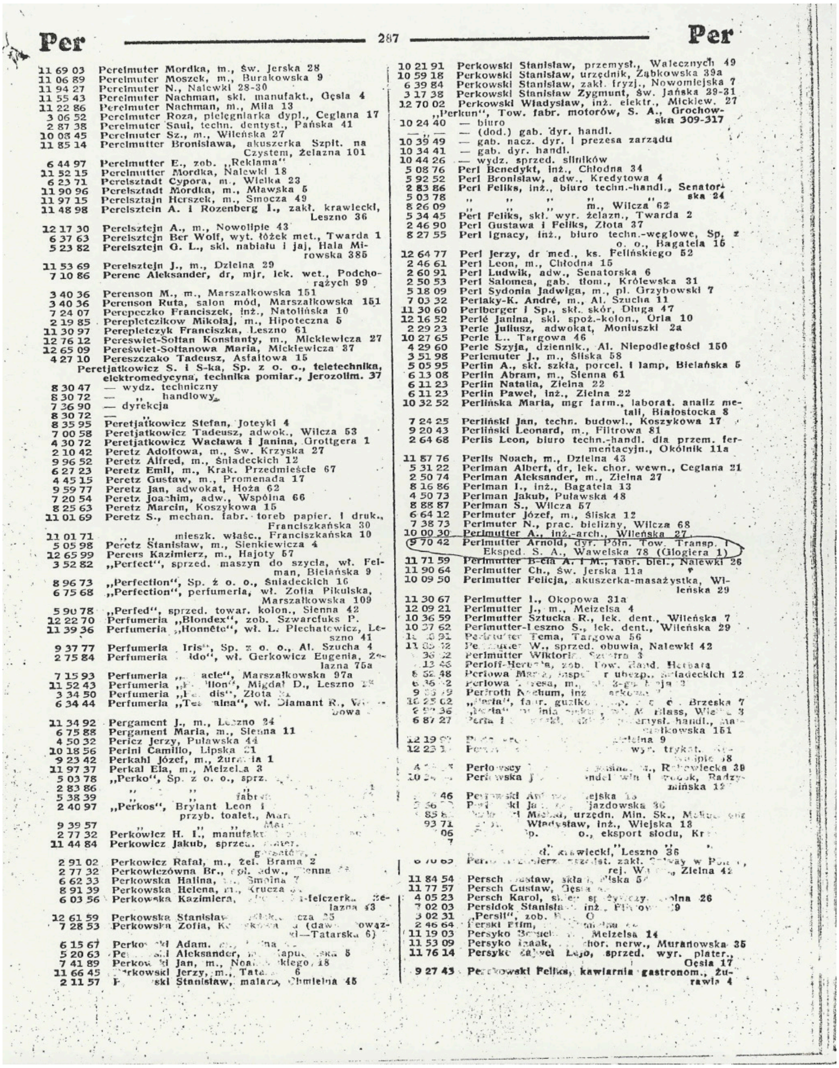
under POW number --

liberated on April 12, 1945, by the 1st Polish Armoured Division, in Camp of Oberlangen, Germany.

The above information is based on the following documents :
Capture Card dated 16 Oct 1944; correspondence from Stalag IV-B;
List of Polish POWs liberated in Camp of Oberlangen.

International Committee of the Red Cross
CENTRAL TRACING AGENCY
GENEVA

Red Cross documenting my capture during the Warsaw Uprising, my internment as a POW, and my liberation at Oberlangen.



Per — 287 — Per

11 69 03 Perelmuter Mordka, m., Św. Jerska 28
11 06 89 Perelmuter Moszek, m., Burakowska 9
11 94 27 Perelmuter N., Nalewki 28-30
11 55 43 Perelmuter Nachman, skl. manufakt., Gęsia 4
11 22 86 Perelmuter Nachman, m., Miła 13
3 06 52 Perelmuter Roza, pielęgniarka dypl., Ceglana 17
2 87 38 Perelmuter Saul, techn. dentyst., Pańska 41
10 08 45 Perelmuter Sz., m., Wileńska 27
11 85 14 Perelmutter Bronisława, akuszerka Szpit. na Czystem, Żelazna 101
6 44 97 Perelmutter E., zob. ,,Reklama''
11 52 15 Perelmutter Mordka, Nalewki 18
6 23 71 Perelsztadt Cypora, m., Wielka 23
11 90 96 Perelsztadt Mordka, m., Mławska 5
11 97 15 Perelsztajn Herszek, m., Smocza 49
11 48 98 Perelsztein A. i Rozenberg I., zakł. krawiecki, Leszno 36
12 17 30 Perelsztejn A., m., Nowolipie 43
6 37 63 Perelsztejn Ber Wolf, wyt. łóżek met., Twarda 1
5 23 82 Perelsztejn G. L., skl. nabiału i jaj, Hala Mirowska 385
11 53 69 Perelsztejn J., m., Dzielna 29
7 10 86 Perenc Aleksander, dr, mjr, lek. wet., Podchorążych 99
3 40 36 Perenson M., m., Marszałkowska 151
3 40 36 Perenson Ruta, salon mód, Marszałkowska 151
7 24 07 Perepeczko Franciszek, inż., Natolińska 10
2 19 85 Perepleczikow Mikołaj, m., Hipoteczna 5
11 30 97 Perepleczyk Franciszka, Leszno 61
12 76 12 Pereswiet-Sołtan Konstanty, m., Mickiewicza 27
12 65 09 Pereświet-Sołtanowa Maria, Mickiewicza 37
4 27 10 Pereszczako Tadeusz, Asfaltowa 15
Peretjatkowicz S. i S-ka, Sp. z o. o., teletechnika, elektromedycyna, technika pomiar., Jerozolim. 37
8 30 47 — wydz. techniczny
8 30 72 — ,, handlowy
7 36 90 — dyrekcja
8 30 72 — ,,
8 35 95 Peretjatkowicz Stefan, Joteyki 4
7 00 58 Peretjatkowicz Tadeusz, adwok., Wilcza 53
4 30 72 Peretjatkowicz Wacława i Janina, Grottgera 1
2 10 42 Peretz Adolfowa, m., Św. Krzyska 27
9 96 52 Peretz Alfred, m., Śniadeckich 12
6 27 23 Peretz Emil, m., Krak. Przedmieście 67
4 45 15 Peretz Gustaw, m., Promenada 17
9 59 77 Peretz Jan, adwokat, Hoża 62
7 20 54 Peretz Joachim, adw., Wspólna 66
8 25 63 Peretz Marcin, Koszykowa 15
11 01 69 Peretz S., mechan. fabr. toreb papier. i druk., Franciszkańska 30
11 01 71 ,, ,, mieszk. właśc., Franciszkańska 10
5 05 98 Peretz Stanisław, m., Sienkiewicza 4
12 65 99 Pereus Kazimierz, m., Hajoty 57
3 52 82 ,,Perfect'', sprzed. maszyn do szycia, wł. Felman, Bielańska 9
8 96 73 ,,Perfection'', Sp. z o. o., Śniadeckich 16
6 75 68 ,,Perfection'', perfumeria, wł. Zofia Pikulska, Marszałkowska 109
5 90 78 ,,Perfed'', sprzed. towar. kolon., Sienna 42
12 22 70 Perfumeria ,,Blondex'', zob. Szwarcfuks P.
11 39 36 Perfumeria ,,Honnête'', wł. L. Piechatowicz, Leszno 41
9 37 77 Perfumeria ,,Iris'', Sp. z o. o., Al. Szucha 4
2 75 84 Perfumeria [illegible]ido'', wł. Gerkowicz Eugenia, Żelazna 75a
7 15 93 Perfumeria ,,[illegible]acie'', Marszałkowska 97a
11 52 43 Perfumeria ,,[illegible]llon'', Migdał D., Leszno [illegible]
3 34 50 Perfumeria ,,[illegible]dis'', Złota [illegible]
6 34 44 Perfumeria ,,Tea[illegible]alna'', wł. Diamant R., [illegible]
11 34 92 Pergament J., m., Leszno 24
6 75 88 Pergament Maria, m., Sienna 11
4 50 32 Pericz Jerzy, Puławska 44
10 18 56 Perini Camillo, Lipska 21
9 23 42 Perkahl Józef, m., Żura[illegible]ia 1
11 97 37 Perkal Ela, m., Meizel[illegible]a 3
5 03 78 ,,Perko'', Sp. z o. o., sprz. [illegible]
2 83 86 ,, ,, ,,
5 38 39 ,, ,, fabr. [illegible]
2 40 97 ,,Perkos'', Brylant Leon i [illegible] przyb. toalet., Mar[illegible]
9 39 57 ,, ,, ,, Mar[illegible]
2 77 32 Perkowicz H. I., manufakt. [illegible]
11 44 84 Perkowicz Jakub, sprzed. [illegible]
2 91 02 Perkowicz Rafał, m., Żel. Brama 2
2 77 32 Perkowiczówna Br., [illegible] adw., [illegible]enna [illegible]
6 62 33 Perkowska Halina, [illegible], Smolna 7
8 91 39 Perkowska Helena, m., Krucza [illegible]
6 03 56 Perkowska Kazimiera, [illegible]-felczerka, Żelazna 43
12 61 59 Perkowska Stanisław[illegible]cza 25
7 28 53 Perkowska Zofia, K[illegible] (daw. [illegible]owąz[illegible]—Tatarska 6)
6 15 67 Perko[illegible]ki Adam, [illegible]
5 20 63 Pe[illegible]ski Aleksander, [illegible]apu[illegible]ska 5
7 41 89 Perkow[illegible]ki Jan, m., Noa[illegible]kiego 18
11 66 45 [illegible]rkowski Jerzy, m., Tata[illegible] 6
2 11 57 P[illegible]ski Stanisław, malarz, Chmielna 45

10 21 91 Perkowski Stanisław, przemysł., Walecznych 49
10 59 18 Perkowski Stanisław, urzędnik, Ząbkowska 39a
6 39 84 Perkowski Stanisław, zakł. fryzj., Nowomiejska 7
3 17 38 Perkowski Stanisław Zygmunt, Św. Jańska 29-31
12 70 02 Perkowski Władysław, inż. elektr., Mickiew. 27
,,Perkun'', Tow. fabr. motorów, S. A., Grochowska 309-317
10 24 40 — biuro
— ,, — — (dod.) gab. dyr. handl.
10 39 49 — gab. nacz. dyr. i prezesa zarządu
10 34 41 — gab. dyr. handl.
10 44 26 — wydz. sprzed. silników
5 08 76 Perl Benedykt, inż., Chłodna 34
5 92 52 Perl Bronisław, adw., Kredytowa 4
2 83 86 Perl Feliks, inż., biuro techn.-handl., Senatorska 24
5 03 78 ,, ,, ,, ,, ,,
8 26 09 ,, ,, ,, m., Wilcza 62
5 34 45 Perl Feliks, skl. wyr. żelazn., Twarda 2
2 46 90 Perl Gustawa i Feliks, Złota 37
8 27 55 Perl Ignacy, inż., biuro techn.-węglowe, Sp. z o. o., Bagatela 15
12 64 77 Perl Jerzy, dr med., ks. Felińskiego 52
2 46 61 Perl Leon, m., Chłodna 15
2 60 91 Perl Ludwik, adw., Senatorska 6
2 50 53 Perl Salomea, gab. tłom., Królewska 31
5 18 09 Perl Sydonia Jadwiga, m., pl. Grzybowski 7
7 03 32 Perlaky-K. André, m., Al. Szucha 11
11 30 60 Perlberger i Sp., skł. skór, Długa 47
12 16 52 Perlé Janina, skl. spoż.-kolon., Orla 10
2 29 23 Perle Juliusz, adwokat, Moniuszki 2a
10 27 65 Perle L., Targowa 46
4 29 60 Perle Szyja, dziennik., Al. Niepodległości 150
3 51 98 Perlemuter J., m., Śliska 58
5 05 95 Perlin A., skł. szkła, porcel. i lamp, Bielańska 5
6 13 08 Perlin Abram, m., Sienna 61
6 11 23 Perlin Natalia, Zielna 22
6 11 23 Perlin Paweł, inż., Zielna 22
10 32 52 Perlińska Maria, mgr farm., laborat. analiz metali, Białostocka 8
7 24 25 Perliński Jan, techn. budowl., Koszykowa 17
9 20 43 Perliński Leonard, m., Filtrowa 81
2 64 68 Perlis Leon, biuro techn.-handl. dla przem. fermentacyjn., Okólnik 11a
11 87 76 Perlis Noach, m., Dzielna 43
5 31 22 Perlman Albert, dr, lek. chor. wewn., Ceglana 21
2 50 74 Perlman Aleksander, m., Zielna 27
8 16 86 Perlman I., inż., Bagatela 13
4 50 73 Perlman Jakub, Puławska 48
8 88 87 Perlman S., Wilcza 57
6 64 12 Perlmuter Józef, m., Śliska 12
7 38 73 Perlmuter N., prac. bielizny, Wilcza 68
10 00 30 Perlmutter A., inż.-arch., Wileńska 27
9 70 42 Perlmutter Arnold, dyr. Półn. Tow. Transp. i Eksped. S. A., Wawelska 78 (Glogiera 1)
11 71 59 Perlmutter B-cia A. i M., fabr. biel., Nalewki 26
11 90 64 Perlmutter Ch., Św. Jerska 11a
10 09 50 Perlmutter Felicja, akuszerka-masażystka, Wileńska 29
11 30 67 Perlmutter I., Okopowa 31a
12 09 21 Perlmutter J., m., Meizelsa 4
10 36 59 Perlmutter Sztucka R., lek. dent., Wileńska 7
10 37 62 Perlmutter-Leszno S., lek. dent., Wileńska 29
[illegible] Perlmutter Tema, Targowa 56
[illegible] Perlmutter W., sprzed. obuwia, Nalewki 42
[illegible] Perlmutter Wiktoria, [illegible]
[illegible] Perloff-Herb[illegible]a, zob. Tow. Hand. Herbata
[illegible] Perlowa Mar[illegible], insp[illegible] r ubezp., Śniadeckich 12
[illegible] Perlowa [illegible]resa, m., [illegible] 3-go Maja [illegible]
[illegible] Perlroth N[illegible]chum, inż. [illegible]
[illegible] ,,Perła'', fabr. guzików [illegible] Brzeska 7
[illegible] ,,Perła'' [illegible] Blass, Wie[illegible] 3
6 87 27 Perła [illegible] przemysł. handl., Marszałkowska 151
[illegible]
12 19 [illegible] [illegible] Ceglna 9
12 23 [illegible] Per[illegible] wyr. trykot. [illegible] Nowolipie 58
[illegible] Perłowscy [illegible], Rakowiecka 39
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[illegible] Per[illegible]wski An[illegible] [illegible]ejska 15
[illegible] Per[illegible]ski Ja[illegible] Jazdowska 36
[illegible] [illegible] Michał, urzędn. Min. Sk., [illegible]
[illegible] 93 71 [illegible] Władysław, inż., Wiejska 13
[illegible] 06 [illegible] Sp. [illegible] o., eksport słodu, Kr[illegible]
[illegible] [illegible] ,, ,, ,,
[illegible] [illegible]d. krawiecki, Leszno 36
[illegible] Per[illegible]mierz, przedst. zakł. Solvay w Po[illegible], rej. W[illegible], Zielna 42
11 84 54 Persch [illegible]ustaw, skła[illegible], [illegible]ska 5[illegible]
11 77 57 Persch Gustaw, Gęsia [illegible]
4 05 23 Persch Karol, s[illegible] sp[illegible]ywczy, [illegible]olna 26
7 02 03 Persidok Stanisła[illegible], inż., Fi[illegible]ow[illegible] 9
3 02 31 ,,Persil'', zob. [illegible]
2 46 64 Perski Efim, [illegible]
11 19 03 Persyko B[illegible], Meizelsa 14
11 53 09 Persyko Izaak, [illegible]chor. nerw., Muranowska 35
11 76 14 Persyko Zalwel Lejb, sprzed. wyr. plater., Gęsia 17
9 27 43 Pe[illegible]kowski Feliks, kawiarnia gastronom., Żurawia 4

The page from the New York phone book showing my father's business number.

ARRIVAL IN LONDON

I was sixteen years old when I flew from Frankfurt to London and began to adjust to a normal living pattern. I was to stay in England with Uncle Dietrich and Aunt Liesl until I could go to the United States. I was very happy to be with members of my family after all the years of living among total strangers. I was absolutely thrilled that they had photos of my parents, me as a child, my grandmothers, my aunts, uncles, and cousins. I carried some of the photos, especially ones of my parents, around with me in my purse. Unfortunately, once while on a date to the movies someone snatched my purse with the pictures in it. I reported it to the police and even advertised a reward for the return of the pictures. I never saw those pictures again. As the years go by I treasure the remaining pictures more and more. They are my only link to my childhood and my former life. My aunt's family, her brothers and their wives and children, also originally from Vienna, were very nice to me and sort of adopted me. One of them was a dressmaker who made me some clothing including a warm blue robe. I am still in touch with two of their children.

A few days after I joined my aunt and uncle, there was a knock on their front door. I sat near a window in the parlor reading a magazine, but looked up as a young man greeted my uncle and asked to speak to him. My uncle invited him in and offered him a seat. The young man sat on the edge of a couch, cleared his throat and began speaking. He had been a prisoner of war in Germany, and at one camp had been in contact with a young girl via "rock mail" and had forwarded a letter on her behalf to his sister. Having just been discharged from the service he obtained my uncle's name and address and wanted to come by and find out what happened to the girl. My shriek supplied him with the answer. It had never occurred to me that we would ever meet. He stayed for a while and then returned to anonymity. I had forgotten to ask his name.

One of my first letters from England reached Mother Superior Matylda Getter. She was delighted that I survived. We continued to correspond until the early 1960's when one of my letters was returned marked, "Unable to deliver. Deceased." I also wrote to Dr Popowski to see if he and his family had survived. Although his home had been destroyed during the fighting, the letter reached him. He wrote to tell me they had been taken to a labor camp, suffered malnutrition and harsh treatment, and were finally liberated by the Russians. While searching for me and my father, Dr. Popowski learned the details of my father's death and passed it on to me as gently as he could. We continued our correspondence until he and his wife passed away.

Although my stay in London was to be a temporary stop on my way to the United States, I still had time to fall in love with a Polish RAF officer stationed nearby. When I left London a year later it was with a heavy heart and mixed feelings at leaving my aunt, uncle and boyfriend behind.

I met my Polish officer, Jozek, at the local Palais de Danse, where my aunt, Liesl, took me some afternoons. My experiences during the war years did not prepare me for normal relationships. Since I never learned the art of flirting, etc. I was typically a wallflower at these dances. I did, however, notice this young, very good-looking Polish officer. When it was a 'ladies' choice' dance, I approached him with a rapidly beating heart. We made small talk and he thought I was an English girl, not recognizing my accent. I started to ask him about where he came from in Poland and finally started to speak Polish. Even though he was twenty-five and I was only sixteen at the time, the difference in our age did not seem to matter. We started to date right away. It was a very exciting time for me. I relished the attention and enjoyed the strong emotions of first love.

With my visa expiring, I needed to leave England. Previously, when my uncle was helping to get me out of Germany, he had contacted his father's brother, Julius Perlmutter in Brooklyn, New York. They arranged for me to go to the United States.

EMIGRATING TO THE UNITED STATES

I left England from Southampton on the ship RMS *Aquitania* on a stormy day in October 1946. At first I was thrilled with the voyage and the good food, but soon I became very seasick and remained that way until the end of the five-day trip. I was doubly happy to see the skyline of New York and to be on solid ground. I was seventeen years old.

I was not greeted with any warmth on my arrival. My new family, Uncle Julius and Aunt Hermina, picked me up at the pier on a Saturday morning and dropped me at a local high school on Monday morning. I had no opportunity to orient myself in any way to life in another continent and country. Abraham Lincoln High School was a prestigious one, but they did not know what to do with me. I was quite advanced in my studies thanks to my education in the ghetto and the convent, but in some subjects (geometry, for example) I did not know the terminology in the English language. Finally, going according to my age, they put me in the last year of high school. I found the work very easy. When I graduated the following spring the dean begged me to make sure to go to college. I never did fit in with the other students. The only good thing to come from that time was a life-long friendship with a girl in my Hebrew class, Betty Friedman. I soon learned that my uncle's only interest in me was in making a name for himself in the synagogue as having saved me from the clutches of the nuns — a complete lie.

I did not know at the time that my uncle was pocketing the money the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), provided to help me resettle. The only money he gave me was for the trolley fare to school. One time, I asked him if I could buy a blouse of my own choosing, but the answer was 'no.' I had a friend, Lilly Trilling, whom I met on the plane from Frankfurt to London. We both traveled to New York the same year. Her family in New York was so different from mine. They helped her get one of the scholarships available for ex-GI's and refugees like her and me. Lilly went to Hunter College and became a psychologist. I feel that my uncle robbed me of a chance to complete my education and become a professional like my parents and the rest of my family.

When the money from HIAS was coming to an end, my uncle became determined to find a new source of income from me. At the time there was a shortage of girls who would marry yeshiva buchers, students. They would pay a reverse dowry to the families of girls who would marry them. In the spring of 1947 my uncle approached me with such a proposition. I became hysterical. What happened next was really quite predictable. Not being able to benefit any further from my existence, my uncle started throwing me out in stages. He even forbade me from corresponding with my Polish boyfriend who's loving letters kept me from being totally despondent. Even after all I went through during the war, I was not prepared for such treatment and rejection from someone in my own family. Julius' brother, Solomon Perlmutter lived in Seagate, a part of Brooklyn.

This uncle was well known in the Jewish theater and his wife came from a musical family. They had five grown children. It was a very happy home; everyone was very kind and loving toward me. One day while I was visiting Seagate, my Uncle Solomon asked me how I was faring living with his brother Julius. Before I had a chance to answer (I was very shy then and only spoke when I was spoken to), he answered himself, "Knowing my brother, how could you be doing with him? Go back tonight, get your things and come back tomorrow. You will stay with us." Once again, my luck did not hold out. That night his wife, Chana, had a stroke and died suddenly. That was the end of the idea of my staying with them. After a few months, my Uncle Julius sent his wife, Hermina and their son, Martin, to stay in a bungalow in the Catskills for the summer. He told me there was no room for me there. I did not realize that he was throwing me out.

A NEW LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

I had a boyfriend at the time named Louis Lerner who knew exactly what my uncle was trying to do. I had met Louis when I first came to New York at a dance my aunt arranged for me to go to at their temple, Young Israel of Flatbush. Actually, he appeared after the dance—he didn't know how to dance. He knew the girls I was with, and somehow, taken with me, he walked me home. It seems he was just recently discharged for the army and was trying to readjust to civilian life. While he was overseas his mother died of cancer. The Red Cross did not approve his leave to

see her before she died and he was very bitter about that. His father used the money Louis earned in the army to buy a bungalow colony in White Lake, New York. Louis was very sympathetic to me and felt deeply about my losses and my wartime experience. He wanted to marry me, but I was not ready for marriage. I needed time to try to complete my education and adjust to a new life, so I broke off the relationship with him. The next few months were very unhappy and difficult for me. Fate intervened again when I met Louis on a boat ride to Bear Mountain and we began seeing each other again. At this time I was without a family to live with, no money, no skills, no way of supporting myself, and no one to help me. My only other relatives were my great-aunt, Paula (my Grandmother Sarah's sister), and her husband, Nathan Zarkower. She was very loving to me, but practically speaking she could do nothing for me. Louis suggested that I spend the summer at his father's home in White Lake and then see what I would do afterwards. He promised me a carefree summer under his protection. I took him up on his offer and hoped for the best. For a time, at least, I did not have to worry how I would survive for a couple of months. Louis was so very sensitive to my needs, so caring, that I started to care for him also. During that summer we became much closer and, at the end, I agreed to marry him and we became engaged. We were married in October, 1947.

My wedding day proved to be a very strange and disappointing day for me. The Lerners invited many people to the wedding. I invited some of my distant cousins I had

met through my aunt. They had little meaning to me. There was no honeymoon. Louis and I moved into an attic room in his uncle's house. There was a hot plate in the room, but no sink. Amazingly, I was happy having a little place of my own. I started inviting friends over and we had some great parties in that attic. I could not cook at all. Before the war our maid, Maria, did not welcome my presence in the kitchen and during the war I had no opportunity to learn. Now, however, I happily started to experiment and surprisingly enough, everything was edible. I was eighteen years old when I started my life as a married woman. I was determined to make a success of it. I encouraged Louis to go back to college. He enrolled in Brooklyn College and our new life started.

A few months later Louis's father, while visiting his sister in Florida, decided that now that Louis was married he should be in business—not in school. The Lerner family did not value education like my family had. Louis's father's sister and her husband, who owned two laundromats, leased a store for us. Louis's father sent a telegram for us to pack up and move to Florida where we would be in the laundromat business. Very reluctantly, we moved. We rented a small apartment and once again I really treasured having a place of my own. Together, Louis and I had to arrange all the construction work for the laundromat—everything from the plumbing and electricity to laying the tile floor. Even though I didn't even know the words deposit or withdrawal, I became the bookkeeper and handled all the finances. Work in the laundromat was slavery. The store was open from 7:00 A.M. until 9:00 P.M. six days a

week. We did not have any help—we did everything ourselves. Soon we both began to hate the drudgery. Louis started going off and leaving me all alone in the store for hours on end leaving the burden of running everything to me alone.

When I got pregnant in 1949 I still had to work at the laundromat. During my eighth month my doctor told me to stay off my feet. This left Louis alone in the store and he could not manage it alone. Finally, when I was ready to deliver I drove myself to the brand new Doctors' Hospital in Coral Gables. Louis could not take me — had to stay in the store. Our son, Arnold, named after my father, was born October 12, 1949. When I got home I found utter chaos. I had never taken care of a newborn baby and was very unsure of myself. Louis had to go to work so I was left all alone to deal with this brand new situation. Sometimes I felt somewhat guilty that I was such an inexperienced mother to Arnold. Before his arrival I never had any experience with babies or small children. It was a terrible time.

When Arnold was a few months old we finally sold the laundromat. We spent that summer with his family in New York. At the end of the summer we decided not to return to Miami. We rented a railroad flat apartment not far from Prospect Park in Brooklyn. It was over a Chinese laundry and the entrance was through the alley.

Louis went back to Brooklyn College to continue his education and obtain his engineering degree. Three years later, in 1952, I became pregnant with my daughter, Susan. Susan was a very happy child from the very beginning. In school she was called "Twinkles" because she was always smiling. She was very studious and was never satisfied when she did not get an 'A' or '100' on a test. When I learned that a new building was going up, we borrowed money from Louis's insurance and moved to a new apartment in the Sheepshead Bay area of Brooklyn. We lived for many years in that apartment. I was busy being a mother, a wife and a homemaker. When the holidays came all my friends were with their families, parents, sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles. I had no one and I felt very sad and depressed about it. Strangely enough, after about three years that situation changed. I was very friendly with one of my neighbors, Hilda W. She and her husband had three children: two boys and one girl. The girl, Karen, was exactly Susan's age. Steven was Arnold's age, and Barry was older. Hilda would join me at times to go for a walk in Sheepshead Bay. Sometimes we would go for a piece of pie at Lundy's, a well known seafood restaurant. When the girls were about four years old Hilda became very ill. She became weaker and weaker and more and more ill. When Hilda finally passed away her children were ages four, seven, and ten. We were all heartbroken. I was so upset that I had to go away for a while. Throughout Hilda's illness I tried to be as helpful as possible and became more and more involved in caring for the children.

The first day of school I took both Karen and Susan to the elementary school. With mixed emotions I remembered how crazy Hilda was about her little girl — how she dressed her like a doll — and how it seemed so unfair that she was not able to enjoy her life. When the holidays came I became very busy preparing, shopping, and serving for both families. I was not depressed any more and was happy that I could do these things. Through the years I became like a mother to these three children. I took them to doctors and dentists. They came to my home for lunch every day. I took Karen shopping and went to school for her activities and conferences. My life was totally enmeshed with Mac and all the children. When Mac passed away many years later I was totally devastated.

As the years passed I started to have a lot of problems with my health, some of them caused by the stress of my marriage. I became deeply depressed. My whole married life was extremely stressful. My husband was very irritable and excitable. Much, much later he was diagnosed as compulsive-obsessive and had other problems as well, but no one realized that for the longest time. From the daily stress of living with him, my health was suffering.

When Susan was about one and one-half years old and Arnold was four and one-half years old, my former boyfriend, Jozek, phoned me and told me that he absolutely had to see me. He had immigrated to the United States and was living in Toledo, Ohio. Naturally, I wanted to see him also. My feelings for him were still quite strong. We

We arranged to meet in a Times Square restaurant, the Crossroads Café. With my husband working out of town that week and by hiring babysitters for my children, I was able to see Jozek every day. We danced on the roof of the Astor Hotel and I loved every moment of that brief episode. He begged me to leave my husband and join him in Toledo. Because I knew that Louis was a good father and I felt I had a responsibility to my children, I did not go with him. I did not yet fully realize the extent of my problems with Louis. After our rendezvous in New York Jozek and I stayed in touch with cards and letters until his death. I did not tell him for a long time that I was so unhappy in my marriage.

While living in New York I learned that it was possible for Holocaust survivors to obtain restitution from the German government. At first, I never thought of money, but a few years later, with two children and little money, I realized that I was entitled to some remuneration. I began the process of claiming reparations. During this time, someone told me about pre war European telephone books housed in an annex of the Forty-second Street Library in Manhattan. When I requested a copy of the 1939 Warsaw book I immediately found a listing for my father, our residence, and his business. I cannot describe how that affected me. Just seeing his name in print absolutely destroyed me. I felt like someone put a sword through me. I still remember how terrible I felt. One day, my neighbor, Stephanie, who was from Czechoslovakia, remarked to me about a German check she obtained through a Polish former law clerk who had contact with a German lawyer.

I immediately contacted him, but it was not so easy to get anything from Germany. First of all, I was told that the statute of limitations had run out for me and I would no longer be able to claim for my health, loss of my parents as a minor, loss of education, etc. The only thing left was for 'nerves.' I was plenty nervous! I suffered from frequent nightmares and headaches. In my dreams the faces of my loved ones appeared before me quite frequently and when I awoke I would be shaking and bathed in a cold sweat, afraid to go back to sleep. Living under the Nazi regime for six years did not leave me unmarked. I thought the only way to get reparations, to get my wiedergutmachung, would be through medical channels. With great anxiety and butterflies in my stomach I kept my appointment with Dr. W., the psychiatrist. It was a pleasant surprise. He was half German and half Finnish, but his heart was Finnish. He assuaged my fears and told me he would help me as much as he could. After that, I was granted a 30% disability and started receiving a monthly pension of $85. Over the years the Germans have allowed me a cost of living increase every year, so now it is a nice sum. Every year I have to prove that I am alive, though.

When my children got older I started to work for doctors in Manhattan. It was a long difficult commute by subway from Brooklyn where we lived. These jobs, where I held responsible positions, gave me confidence and a good feeling of helping people. At first I worked for a gynecologist on Park Avenue. (I already knew a lot of medical terminology from my own problems, so I pretended I had experience working for doctors in that field.) I devised my own shorthand and typed

with two fingers. My next job was for Dr. H., a hematologist at St. Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village on 5th Avenue. I did all the paperwork, answered the phones and made appointments. I once tried to assist him when he was doing a bone marrow test, but when I saw the huge syringe, I became dizzy and nauseous. It was very embarrassing. He never asked me to assist him again. I enjoyed this job very much. Sometimes I would walk around Greenwich Village on my lunch hour, other times I would 'brown bag' it at Washington Square Park (before it became 'needle park'.) I worked for Dr. H. for several years. My next job was with an alternative medicine physician, Dr. M., on Spring Street and 6th Avenue.

The salary I earned plus the small pension I received from Germany made it possible for me to have some wonderful travel experiences. I visited my aunt and cousins in England and traveled with my aunt to other European cities. I revisited some of the places I remembered from my childhood like Interlaken and other Swiss cities. I revisited Vienna, a city my parents loved, where they both studied. I loved Venice and the rest of Italy. We celebrated Susan's twenty-first birthday at the Adler Hotel in Innsbruck. Another trip was to Spain, Majorca, and Portugal. I visited Greece, Turkey and the Greek Islands. Another wonderful trip was to the Scandinavian countries. In the United States I traveled to California, the Rockies, New England and many national parks. I also took Susan to Hawaii where we went to all the islands thoroughly enjoying everything.

I planned each of these trips very carefully, looked forward to them, enjoyed them tremendously, and now remember the experiences with great joy.

MY LIFE TODAY

I have two wonderful children, Arnold and Susan, and a special granddaughter, Marissa. In college Arnold majored in history thinking he would be a teacher, but upon graduation he went to Canada because of the Vietnamese War. He worked at several jobs in Canada before moving to Washington and then Los Angeles where he lives with his wife, Marie. I wish they would live closer to me. Thankfully, Susan and her husband, Steve, live close to me in Miami and both have been a tremendous support to me in every way. Susan graduated from Brooklyn College. In Miami she met and married Steve Berlin, a teacher in a private school. Steve is more like a son to me than a son-in-law. I used to visit them every year at Christmas time when I would take time off from work. When she gave birth to their daughter, Marissa, I wanted to watch her grow up and to have a close relationship with her like I had with my grandmother. So, I moved to Florida, to my own apartment and I would be with Marissa every day. At that time I was separated from my husband and finally was on my own. I watched Marissa grow up and graduate from the University of Florida.

Since separating from my husband in 1984, shortly after Marissa was born, I have been living alone. It has not been

easy, but much easier than having the enormous stress of living with him. After our separation he had an unfortunate incident that resulted in his having a stroke and becoming very depressed. During his illness I had to be very active in his care. Louis passed away from bladder cancer. As sad as I felt, it was also a tremendous relief when he was finally gone from my life.

During the time Louis and I were separated I met a nice man, Milton P., who had lost his wife the year before. We were both lonely and started seeing each other. He told me he had cancer and I told him that I was married. I was at first very hesitant about this relationship because of his illness, but I decided that it was better to have love and companionship as long as it lasted. We never lived together but we spent time together every week. We spoke on the phone everyday. We went on several trips and enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. We were together for eight years. I miss him since he passed away.

HANKA POPOWSKA AND I TODAY

Hanka Popowska, my childhood friend, became a professor of literature specializing in the language and the customs of the people of Danzig, which was occupied many times by Germany and Russia. She has written several books and a dictionary about these customs and languages. Hanka's husband, Romek, is also a professor in a Polish university. His interest is in cultural exchange between Austria and Poland.

In 2000 I traveled to Poland to spend time with Hanka and her family. Warsaw had changed completely. After the Germans had practically leveled it, it was gradually rebuilt under the Russians: gray, depressing blocks of buildings. Before the war Warsaw was called the Paris of the East, but now it bore no resemblance to its former self. Hanka took me to some familiar areas. I stood in front of the house I lived in before the war. The facade still stood there. The feeling was so strange…I almost felt like it was not myself but someone else who had lived there. I visited the nuns at the convent. They had a new building and a new chapel thanks to the generosity of Pope John II, the Polish pope. The nuns had only heard of Mother Superior Matylda Getter and I knew none of them from the war. With Hanka's help I wrote a letter of thanks to the order. I had a wonderful reunion with the ladies I had known from my childhood private school. They all still lived in Warsaw. It was in 1936, over seventy years ago, that we started our education in that school when we were seven years old. In some ways it does not seem like it was so long ago – another lifetime, but in other ways it certainly does.I speak to Hanka and her daughter on the telephone quite frequently. I am thankful that we can be in such close touch. I still hope to be able to travel to Warsaw again to see them, but traveling is not so easy these days, and I am older.

SPEAKING OUT ABOUT THE HOLOCAUST

While living in New York I never joined any Holocaust Survivor groups, but when I heard of one in Miami that was forc child survivors, I joined and have been a member ever since. In 2004 my group of child survivors decided to write our stories. Twenty-six of us participated in this project. Each of us wrote our own story in our own words. In Miami, I met Arnold Geier, a survivor, who was interviewing Holocaust survivors and editing a book of their stories. He chose my story to be the first in his book. The title of the book is *Heroes of the Holocaust*. In 1994 Steven Spielberg's Survivors of the Shoah Foundation sent an interviewer and videographer to my house to tape my story for posterity. The tape we made became part of a wonderful project that will be available to future historians. The interviewer was Bobbi Kaufman who is now helping me write my story.

I always wanted to actively do something to prevent a holocaust from ever happening again, so when the Holocaust Documentation Center at Florida Atlantic University asked me to help educate kids by speaking in schools, I agreed. I was nervous about speaking in front of groups, but when they urged me to try because there was such a need, I did try. When I got up to speak before a group for the first time, to my great surprise, hearing a voice I did not recognize as my own, I somehow got through it. I have been doing it ever since and plan to

continue as long as I can. The responses from the students give me the strength to go on. They tell me they learned from me about prejudice and of the importance of not being a bystander when bad things happen. They also realize how lucky they are to have a family and to live in a country that allows freedom of all kinds. It seems to me that speaking to the students is the most important thing I can do in my life. I plan to do that as long as I am able.

Writing this, my memoir, I realize how I felt during the war time. I was so lonely, so sad. I don't know how I survived having those feelings. I think that I tried to feel numb and at times I partially succeeded. Now that I am seventy-seven years old, I still, and always will, feel the sadness, the heartbreak, of losing my parents. This emptiness still attacks me frequently. But, on the other hand, I remember my childhood, my mother and father, the wonderful life we had, and I consider myself very lucky to have these good memories, especially the love I experienced.

ABOUT THE WRITER

I began writing for Holocaust survivors in the 1990's when survivors I met on The March of the Living asked me for help writing about their feelings on returning to Poland for the first time. Later, survivors I interviewed for Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation asked me for help writing down all the things they did not speak about in their interview. Soon, other survivors began approaching me seeking help writing a book about their experiences in the Holocaust. I met with the survivors, recorded our numerous conversations, organized and wrote the stories in the survivors' own words, printed the books, and then handed the books to the survivors as my gift to them. The books were written solely for the survivors and their families; they were never intended for publication. They are being published now because my friends, Carol and Jaime Suchlicki, recognizing their historical value as first-person testimony, introduced me to Dr. Haim Shaked to discuss finding a wider audience for the books.

Thank you to Dr. Haim Shaked director of the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies at the University of Miami for agreeing to publish the books and for your guidance and patience as we worked together on this project.

I am grateful to the March of the Living for introducing me to the world of Holocaust education and finding a role for me in it.

Thank you to the Shoah Foundation for choosing me to be an interviewer and for mentoring me through more than thirty interviews of Holocaust survivors. Your training led me to do the work I do today.

Thank you to the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach for encouraging the docents at the memorial to work with me to write their memoirs. I appreciate your confidence in me and your respect for my work.

Thank you to the my dear Holocaust survivors for sharing your most painful as well as your most joyful memories with me. Thank you for answering questions that no one should ever have to ask or answer. Thank you for trusting me to write your memoirs accurately and respectfully. It has been my honor and pleasure to work with you.

—Bobbi Kaufman

"When the Polish Insurrection began I left the orphanage and joined the nearest resistance unit. We hurled bottles filled with gasoline called Molotov Cocktails and shot across the barricades. We fought with every breath in our bodies."

-Bianca Lerner

When Biana was ten years old, her family moved into the Warsaw Ghetto. After three years, Bianca was smuggled out of the ghetto and would spend the next two years hiding in a Catholic orphanage. Passing as a Christian, Bianca joined the Polish underground during the Polish Insurrection. When the Insurrection failed, Bianca was taken as a Nazi prisoner of war. She was marched from camp to camp until she was eventually liberated by the British at Bergen Belsen. She is the only one of her family to survive the Holocaust.

In 1946 Bianca emigrated to the United States where she married and raised two children.

There is a concept in Judaism of a positive commandment, something that is time dependent, something that must be done *now*. One must, accordingly, applaud this important effort by the Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program of the University of Miami to collect and publish Holocaust survivors' memoirs as there will soon—too soon—come a time when the last survivors will be no longer. Sadly, tragically, this testimony is not only urgent but timely because the world in which we live echoes their world and the quality of their witness. The very nature of their survival has much to teach today's generations. One must express gratitude for this project and in the sagacious words of Hillel say: "If not now, when?"

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