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OUR ONLY CHOICE

BY

ZOFIA SIERPINSKI

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OUTLINE

IN POLAND

Brief family history of parents, married after WWI; author's childhood, complicated by parents' divorce, an unheard of social scandal at the time; schools, meeting German Jews fleeing to Poland in 1938, developing interests in literature and languages; outbreak of WW2, German and Soviet invasion, life and school under Russian occupation in Eastern Poland; historical reference to the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact; the Soviet army, secret police and civilians in Tarnopol; meningitis epidemic strikes the youngest sister.

IN RUSSIA

(p. 30) Brief documentary references and background to the USSR invasion, the NKVD policy on eradication of "anti-Soviet elements", including the mass deportations into the USSR; comparison with the African slave trade.

(p. 36) Family is arrested at night and taken to the train station; Mother allowed to visit the hospital to say farewell to her isolated child; sixteen days in cargo train with 83 persons, part of 26 wagons with 2,000 people; disembarking in Pavlodar, Kazakstan, first encounter with the Kazaks; ferried across Irtysh, truck ride to Djolkoduk sovkhos; settling down, exploring local conditions; reactions of some companions.

(p. 52) "Uncle Vasya", a miller from nearby kolkhoz makes a visit; Dr. Viera invites author to her place, long discussions about mutual interests; Djolkoduk and the Kazaks' attitude to us.

(p. 59) First job, reconstructing an abandoned and ruined village for the nomadic Kazaks; Mother as camp cook; local VIP visit; whispers about village history, fireside chats; return "home".

(p. 73) The Kazak village life.

(p. 75) Sovkhos system; new job, converting animal waste into fuel; becoming an assistant to Manzoor, a local character; life of the animals.

(p. 83) Hay harvesting, two months of camping out; kitchen helper, tool sharpener, shepherding 78 oxen; Kazak, Russian and Ukrainian women; slaughter for food, grass tents, getting lost; Mother condemned and imprisoned; meeting Soviet teenagers; Soviet payroll system, as applied to my wages for the season.

(p. 93) Housing, food and barter situation back in Djolkoduk; news from families, my sister; symptoms of malnutrition, deaths; working with a Volga German on the pig farm; naive hopes and brutal reality for half of our group.

(p. 102) Life of unemployment, daydreaming; civic duties in national elections; becoming a beggar; Siberian winter life.

(p. 110) New job: night watchman for calves, their health problems; trying to steal milk for my sick sister; Mother returns from prison, with some dry bread! She entertains with her adventures, persists in saving Basia from dying, successfully, both leaving me in Djolkoduk; Mother becomes a pianist at the National Kazak Theatre, both allowed to remain in Pavlodar.

(p. 116) The communist rationale for future happiness and practical application to the post-revolution youth (mental institutions); my calves are dying, I am accused of criminal actions, fired: local VIP conducts the trial, but my strategy gets him into trouble.

(p.123) My roommate, motherly Mrs. Ginsberg reveals her matchmaking scheming on behalf of Manzoor (see p.75), to marry me; running scared.

(p. 125) Another April comes, seasonal work in another farming center; field clearing teams with "simulant" strategy; cooking for sixty; moi?! highly mechanized farming technology with thirty tractors; my raking technology with a Kazak prince for tractor driver; Oh, my God, you saved us; the honest, eyewitness, basic truth behind the Soviet agricultural and industrial achievements.

(p. 131) After nine months, first cake of soap; conspiring to escape to Pavlodar.

(p. 134) Pavlodar! "Before we touch you, de-louse!"; Ukrainian landlords kick us out, scared to harbor a deserter; police is after me, trial under preparation; finding job as public bath attendant; June 1941 war with Germany saves my own unimportant desertion, but the mobilization of public bath for men -I refuse to : tend to naked men -makes me a political subversive - Holy Lenin! The truth is, another matchmaking scheme. Erotic dreamsabout food lead to a chamber-pot cleaning job in hospital, paying in leftovers. July 1941: Poland and Stalin sign an agreement, including our liberation. The local population reacts to the war and the Polish pact with Stalin.

(p. 140) Pavlodar receives first liberated Polish prisoners, coming to re-join families; their reluctant story-telling; first official visit of Polish delegates and my volunteering to help them; rationale of stealing a lamp; I am an official trustee for the Polish Army and the Polish Embassy, paid in kind for my services.

(p. 144) In charge of interim Delegation, awaiting arrival of the official Delegate; two months of handling queries, visitors, victims of rumours about organized evacuation to Iran; the Delegate rescues my sinking efforts; a tiny glimpse of a civilized England; my job with ration cards, tied to Mr. Weitzman, a Polish communist; Mother's new "friend"; a wagonload of goodies from UNRRA helps our naked and hungry bodies; a Polish priest visits to do the same for our souls.

(p. 153) War in Russia - the stupid Germans! Now is the turn for the Volga Germans, shuttling in a long cattle train, throwing out their dead onto the rail tracks. Thousands of Polish orphans, efforts to evacuate them to Iran. Author organizes a "Society of the Green Beetle" for literary discussions.

(p. 156) 1942: the Polish Army leaves USSR, Red Army stops German advances, Soviets resume a tough attitude towards Poles again; forced to show a spirit of war cooperation, the Delegate sends me and a colleague to the Second Front for two months; the Delegate and entire staff arrested, we return expecting the same; permitted to deliver a parcel, the NKVD conducts a night-long interrogation; the entire group is released three weeks later, secretly transported to the Polish Embassy.

(p. 165) My colleague offered a job at the Embassy, and when the Soviets refuse to let her go, I receive an offer instead. Soviets say nyet, I give up trying but Mother takes over for the next two months, until she wins for me.

(p. 168) January 1943, preparations for travel, stopover in Omsk to see the human cannon fodder on one side of the door and experience - personally - how the other side lives; the power of youth; Kuibyshev; pre-requisite to admission is de-lousing.

(p. 177) The war capital of USSR; my new job; my article is published; Mother imprisoned; Polish Ambassador T. Romer, in his daily meeting with Molotov, demands her immediate release, but Molotov denies holding any foreign prisoners; depression and melancholy.

(p. 182) Meeting Mieczyslaw - Mietek - Sierpinski; my dentist and her bill; warnings against being alone outside; Mr. Freyd's problem, resolved by Mietek, my savior - his story, our friendship.

(p. 193) The missing Polish officers found murdered in mass graves in Katyn forests; USSR retaliates by breaking off diplomatic relations; the Ambassador and his team return from Moscow, to prepare staff evacuation to Persia. Soviet police tactics; how we evaded them transferring money to the Australians; my imprisonment on the day of departure, meeting friends in jail.

(p. 201) Five days in a sealed train from Kuibyshev to Ashkabad; discovering that Polish orphans still waiting here; May 15, 1943: three years, one month and two days of prison-country life is over.

(p. 204) Out of Russia, but without my family; Badjigiran, Meshed, with dangerous moments en route to Teheran; villa Entezam; staff transfers, Mietek accepts a post in Chungking Embassy; working

with a Juvenile Court Judge on reports about the Polish children in Russia; Mother and Basia arrive safely; the Teheran luxuries and problems; accepting a job in the Chungking Embassy, departing in October 1943; Mother and sister await a convoy transport of families to East Africa.

WARTIME TRAVEL

(p. 211) Going one stretch at a time; to Ahvaz, Basrah, then waiting two weeks for a British flying boat to Karachi; train to Bombay and stopover; train to Calcutta, where the "great famine" is in full rage; what do the three monkeys really stand for, methinks? DC-3 "over the Hump", stuck and locked up in Kunming, finally landing on Yangtze river.

IN CHINA

(p. 218) The war capital, Chialing House, housing problems, the streets. Plans to build the Embassy, Brother Florian Pytka; face-saving games; other foreigners; actual building process and its consequences.

(p. 229) Arrival of three Poles; Feliks Topolski's BBC assignment; Jan Fryling; politics of housekeeping; the French Ambassador, the British delegate of His Majesty's Prime Minister. Mid-1944, hope that the WW2 is almost over, Polish Underground Army stages an uprising in Warsaw; the Chinese front, other missionaries, Father Szlachtowski; a Chinese doctor treats author's paratyphus; convalescence in India, visiting Mother and Basia settled in a refugee camp in Kolhapur. The Mexican diplomat stages war on the Polish Military Attaché; the Koreans, just like the Poles?

(p. 240) February 1945, Yalta conference kills all our hopes; local consequences: attaboy, Stalin! What is our future? Count Poninski; where do we go from here? The National Day, our last hurrah; Father Szlachtowski returns inland to die. Departure for Calcutta one day after the Nagasaki bomb, starting a life of politically stateless non-persons.

THE FAMILY

(p. 250) In love, Mietek and author plan their future together; the Sierpinski family history, father Waclaw Sierpinski as a Professor of Mathematics at the Warsaw University and founder of the Polish School of Mathematics; their life in Warsaw during the WW2; the University goes underground, smuggling salaries to a Jewish colleague at the risk of own life; the uprising, German reprisals, First letters from Waclaw and Anna after six years of war. Waclaw asked to introduce marxism into pure mathematics - just like the Orwellian 1984 - and refuses, but in constant fear.

IN INDIA

(p. 268) The British India's last two years in the State of Bengal; the politics of "Divide and Quit!", the "great Calcutta killings"; glimpses into the local society; job-hunting, Mother and

Basia join us. The day of national independence from the British also a licence for mass murders. The religious, ethnic and political fanaticism is the reason why Mietek gets an important job. Married in January 1948, we leave for Pakistan, via New Delhi; Gandhi, and his assassination.

IN PAKISTAN

(p. 287) Personal views on the scenario of partition (without the gloss of Masterpiece Theatre). The Punjab National Bank wants Mietek to close down all its provincial branches on their enemy's territory. We live in Rawalpindi, learning about the social distinctions of living in the Cantonment, not unlike in the Kipling's Hillstation. The Muslim society, the British, the Pakistani, the German and Austrian friends, the Bara Club. Our daughter is born, making it clear to Mietek that Our Only Choice is to emigrate to the USA; ... "twain shall never meet"; especially for women. Closing down all his banks, Mietek works himself out of his job, is hired by a French multi-industrial company, we move to Karachi.

Meeting Shaheed Suhrawardy, former Muslim Prime Minister of Bengal, now the only member of the Parliament in opposition to Jinnah's Muslim League, making him a political pariah; we become household friends. Alleged to be the most famous lawyer (after Jinnah) of the sub-continent, he puts all his income into organizing a United Front of all political parties, wins, becoming the Minister of Interior, then Prime Minister. Later, he makes an after-dinner speech in our NY home: "Planning the political future of Pakistan, I read about the capitalist systems and the communist system; both had much to offer and much to condemn, I didn't know which one to chose, until I heard from Mietek and Zousha about their life in Russia. This is why I decided against communism in my government."

Our second daughter is born in 1952. I accept a job with UNICEF in Karachi; after five years of waiting, the immigration visas are granted; departure for USA in May, 1955.

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IN POLAND

My parents were married after the First World War and their life became very different from the style and traditions of their own families. I was born five years after the war and, as far as my memories take me back, the subject of the good old times was ever present in the conversations of the adults, because the family lost everything in the war and we were poor.

Father was born in the Smolensk Region where his family owned a large estate, providing dairy produce for the Moscow market. He was fifteen years old in 1914, but he cheated about his age to join the Tsar's army; as soon as the Polish army was created, he joined their ranks. He decided to remain in the newly independent Poland, although it meant separating from his parents and the land which became part of the Soviet Russia. Father wrote home about his decision, but as Mother said, he wrote too much about his war activities and the high military awards he received; there was never a reply to his letter and to this day we do not know what happened to his parents, his older sister and younger brother. Father's name was Wladyslaw Sawicki.

Mother lost her parents very soon after she married. Her only sister Zofia died two years earlier, leaving a baby daughter whose father also died as an officer in action. His side of the family took care of the orphaned girl whom I never met. My maternal grandfather, Stanislaw Chrzanowski, had a degree in agriculture and forestry, managing the large estate of a Polish magnate Count Baworoski near Trembowla, in the South-Eastern part of Poland.

Trembowla was famous for defending itself against invasions from the East by Tartars and Turks. In 1675 the commander Jan Samuel Chrzanowski was fighting a losing battle against the Turks and his wife, Anna Dorota helped her wounded husband by taking charge of the military action and chasing the Turks away. A monument was erected to her on the spot, next to the fortress standing in ruins, when Mother showed the place to me, proud of her heroic ancestor.

Mother's dowry consisted of a suitcase full of shares, not worth the paper they were printed on. She managed to retain some furniture and the piano from her parents home which was plundered by bandits taking over homes in the name of communist revolution. They were lucky at the time to have escaped with their lives. Mother and her parents were kept for two days in the yard with their backs against the barn wall, held under pointed rifles by two of the bandits, while the others were getting drunk inside on the cellar stock. Finally a newly arrived gang leader recognized the family as good people who helped him once and allowed them to live. As soon as all the casks and bottles were empty, the bandits left to spread the revolution to other families.

I remember the sideboard, very elaborate with a white marble top, a gallery of brass trimming running around it, its many drawers of different sizes containing all kind of things, including the family documents in absence of a desk. The bed headboard and front had many carved pillars, all easily unscrewed for moving from one place to another in some thirty separate pieces.

The piano was sold when I was very young. I recall it only when Mother played it with a group of friends standing around.

From then on I would listen to her play at some social functions in other people's homes or as an accompanist at the theatre. Once I was included in a ballet group of children dancing on stage as the smallest one, dressed in white to look like a snowflake, feeling very self-conscious and more like a snowball than a gossamer-like starry flake. Chopin's music remains with me forever associated with Mother's concerts. The Minute Valse, she explained once, was really about a dog turning round and round, trying to find a good place to settle down to sleep. Without a piano at home, I lost my chance to learn to play.

Father stayed on in the army as captain of infantry, posted to different part of the country. In my earliest memories we lived near Warsaw in Góra Kalwaria. Basia, younger by some eighteen months, had diphteria and had to be given steam inhalations. Once the teakettle used for this treatment spilled boiling water on her left hand, scarring it for the rest of her life. We also both went through scarlet fever. When I was three years old my sister Stefcia was born in a Warsaw hospital. About then I fell absolutely in love with a most beautiful doll, standing erect on a pedestal which was also a music box. The doll stood on the counter in the shop where Mother used to take me sometimes to buy things from the owner dressed in black, wearing a hat over side curls and a long beard.

In 1927 we moved to Odolanów, a small town in Wielkopolska. Father bought a goat to provide us with milk considered to be less contaminated by tuberculosis than the cow's milk. Father also had all three of us girls shaved bald because of lice. I remember the bright red dresses with lace collars to visit a

very old parish priest on his nameday, carrying as a present a large bouquet of equally red peonies in our arms, and reciting a poem suitable for the occasion - by then we had new hair and I felt very pretty.

One night I woke up because of the loud voices in the next room. The guests must have been already at the door and the room was empty, the table still covered with plates and glasses. I started to drink this delicious stuff from each unfinished glass until somebody must have noticed and picked me back to bed. Also by then I was big enough to be sent alone to the store. If it was to buy a glassful of cream, invariably half of it would be eaten on the way, that's how I loved it. Because of that and after spilling on the ground a pound of sugar, Mother ordered the servant not to use me again for shopping errands.

We had a visit from Mother's Uncle Franio, his wife and their son Zbyszek. Uncle was a wonderfully kind and gentle man but our cousin was a detestable brat we just couldn't stand. They travelled to us from the other end of the country, so now they stayed for several weeks which to me seemed much too long.

Mother's best friend was Marta Schaufelein, a dentist who was a widow. Her house was stuffed with a lot of carpets and cushioned furniture, all filled with powerful smells contributed by her cats and dogs. But what I loved most was a radio she had, a truly magic box to me, filled with elves and dwarfs playing music inside. My life was entirely tied to a friendly dwarf who was always there for me, to help in any kind of trouble life brought my way.

Trouble was brewing at home, between my parents.

After less than two years in Odolanów Father was transferred to Ostrów, some twenty-odd kilometres away where he was assigned to the 60th Infantry Regiment. Once he brought home a machine gun he studied about and practiced dismantling it and assembling together. After I asked what this thing is for, I started having persistent nightmares about people being shot and falling to the ground just like wheat being cut by a scythe, not missing a single stalk; stories of war were a frequent subject of conversations at home, especially when other officers came to spend an evening together.

I was sent to the kindergarten in the regimental compound. There were games, songs and stories, but what I remember best was the weaving of criss-cross strips of a newspaper; I think this was the reason I was later very good at darning holes in socks or stockings.

Apparently because of the crisis created by the 1929 Wall Street crash Father was dismissed from the army and became a reserve officer. He got a job as commissioner of the border patrol on the Polish-German frontier and took over the post located at Silna, a village two kilometres away from the border. Mother refused to come with him. Soon afterwards Father sent for my two sisters and I remained with Mother in Ostrów. We spent the next summer all together in Silna, but then Mother and I returned to town. From then on I would be sent by train alone to be with my sisters during Christmas, Easter and some summer holidays. Other summers I spent at a place organized for two hundred children of government officials by the wife of General Skladkowski, the Prime Minister. We learned to sing *la Marseillaise*, because the general's wife was French. We were

regularly weighed and some children put stones in their pockets to be rewarded with more candy for gaining weight. One summer Basia was there with me, but she was not happy in this beautiful hunting lodge. The little girl was wetting her bed every night and was regularly punished for it in front of everybody, called names and jeered at by other children, once even made to walk around with a chamber pot tied to her waist. Even if at that time it wasn't recognized as a medical problem, therefore not treated, I felt the injustice of such a scourge, helpless to stop the cruelty of adults. Some other children had the palms of their hands dyed with ink, apparently for being caught with hands busy under the bedcovers.

The elementary school started at seven years of age, but at six and half I was begging to start my education. I was accepted, spending six happy years. I must have been a good girl because I don't remember any punishment nor reprimand from my teachers. It seems that I was full of my own ideas, because one teacher asked me once why must I always do things differently from the way other children do it. Another teacher took me home every day to eat a proper meal with her. I was happy to spend time among adults who treated me well, talked with me without being rude or patronizing, did not make me feel ignorant or stupid. In fact, for the first time in my life I heard praises. When the country mourned the death of Jozef Pilsudski, a national hero, I was very surprised when my essay about him was circulated among the teachers, because they thought it outstanding for a twelve-year old child. My grateful reaction must have bordered on the ludicrous. One cloudy morning a teacher asked me to run over to her house for an umbrella. When I returned to the class soaked to the bones, she asked why I didn't use the umbrella? How could I, it wasn't mine.

My parents filed for divorce. This was possibly the most unprecedented event in this small town and I, for one, never heard of anyone else in such a family situation. I felt it like a stigma, even if I don't remember anyone saying anything to me about it. Mother moved us from the apartment to a furnished room, without electricity and without a bathroom. The owners gave us constant trouble for crossing their apartment to reach the bathroom. We were allowed to boil a teakettle once a day in their kitchen. After a few weeks Mother found an unfurnished room, a much better one because it was more independent. The room filled up with Mother's sideboard, her bed, an ottoman for me and the dining table with chairs in the middle. One corner of the room was an improvised kitchen behind a wardrobe serving as a room divider, with a curtain strung on a rope to close the corner. A single primus stove stood on the table for cooking. The water was carried three flights up from the water tap in the backyard. A washbasin stood on a small stand by the door, emptied into a pail and carried one flight up to be emptied in the toilet. The sewing machine stood by the window. There was no space to walk around, especially when a six-by-six wooden frame with a curtain stretched for embroidery had to be carefully manoeuvred around. The dining table was always covered by sewing, cleared in one corner for my homework or a plate of food.

Father's salary was too small to support two households, besides he was heavily in debt for gambling, so Mother had to earn a living. She graduated from a conservatory and gave piano lessons, but there were two pupils only. Mother also had a teaching diploma, but with the reputation of a divorcee she could not obtain a character certificate qualifying her as a suitable person to be associated with children. Like any proper young

woman of the time, she knew how to embroider beautifully, but this did not pay enough either. She joined a dressmaking workshop to learn sewing. After my classes I often went to the workshop where a dozen women sat around a table finishing the garments with fine needles and I read to them from a book, one or two chapters every afternoon.

There was too little money to eat well, never enough to have meat at the table. Sometimes I stole coins from Mother's purse to buy some sweets, thinking that she did not notice it. Only when I was preparing for my first confession and asked Mother to help me remember any sins I forgot, she suggested - very gently - that I confess to stealing money. Each time I went on vacations, Father took me to a doctor who always found me anemic and I was then forced to feed on raw liver or some other horrid stuff. Father's housekeeper took good care of my two sisters and she cooked much more than Mother did, so I would visibly recuperate until returning home to the same evidently inadequate diet. It was believed that adults needed more and better food, so occasionally I was sent to the butcher for one veal chop. I don't think it was like that in every home, of course. At one home I watched a boy of my age being forced to eat at the table, vomiting it and being forced again, myself quite happy not to be him and cleaning my own plate to a shine. The food problem must have existed at that time for many people, because it was customary for the better-off families to give a poor child a meal at their dinner table. I ate this way first with one of my elementary school teachers and then with the city mayor, whose wife was friendly with Mother.

The divorce proceedings lasted some five years, and the sordid details of marital problems leading to it were Mother's chief subject of daily conversations with everyone she knew, but most often I was the one handy to be talked to and educated about all the wrongs done to her. My indignation grew so great that I felt it my duty to reprimand Father as soon as I saw him. Father would then give me his side of the story, with equally damaging accusations. I learned then, at the age of eleven or twelve, that there are always at least two sides to a story and moreover that it was dangerous to be a go-between, because I was punished by Mother for repeating what Father said. Yes, Mother did have a short temper with me.

I was greatly embarrassed by our lifestyle. In their youth my parents lived in luxury, had fun and plenty of everything, the servant_s carried water and cooked the food. But most of all, the whole family of father, mother and children stayed together! My own life was really nothing to talk about and what was I going to tell my children about the insignificance of my own adventures? One evening I passed by a small house with a window giving on a lit-up room where a family of father, mother and three children sat around a table: I swore there and then that this is the way it is going to be when I grow up.

The elementary education was free of charge, but this was not the case with the secondary level of state schools. Mother had no money for the tuition and this could well mean that my education would end after seven classes, then looking for a job. Fortunately Father's military cross of *Virtuti Militari* entitled his children to free secondary and university education, so I was confident about my future.

There are many good memories from gimnazjum. Math I barely squeezed by with, I hated gym, sciences were fair and so was religion. My favorite subjects were Polish, French and Latin, history and geography, also English which came later as an optional course. My passion for reading knew no bounds, I couldn't wait to finish the homework to lose myself in a book, the thicker the better. The school librarian finally limited me to borrowing once a week only, saying that I should spend more time on school subjects. Of course she was right, but I was quite upset because Mother had no books at home and those she borrowed I wasn't supposed to read. There were no such problems at Father's home, he built quite a large library in his village office, lending books to all his neighbors. None of these books were out of bounds for me, mostly classics and many translations. Once I overheard that a new book arrived, a novel written by Mussolini, entitled something like the "Cardinal's Mistress". It must have been some story, . . . arousing my juvenile curiosity almost to a pitch, but this book was so well hidden from me that I never could find it. The editor of my schoolpaper asked for my articles, but I was too shy to use my own name for them, signing them with a pseudonym Aza. Once, when we went to the boys' gimnazjum to attend a lecture, I happened to sit at a desk where "Aza" was carved in large letters. I looked at it incredulous, especially because I did not know a single boy from this school, so who was he, carving my pen name with a bigger heart and an arrow through it? I was one happy girl then. Whenever later I heard the song "Somebody loves me, I don't know who..", I remembered this moment.

Aware of my particular family circumstances, I never sought any friends in school, but a few girls befriended me and they seemed to like my company. Hala Tokarska stayed in Ostrów with her relatives, because her parents owned a large flour mill near Bydgoszcz and lived there as well. Her other relatives in Ostrów also owned a flour mill and one day I met her cousins, three very handsome boys. I fell in love with one of them during our school excursion to Kraków. He must have liked me to, because he often sat next to me and once squeezed my hand. Unfortunately it cost me my scout's badge, when punished by the group leader who wanted the same boy to pay attention to her and when she noticed his attention to me, accused me of being too flighty to be a girl scout. That was the end of my scouting career but I was undeterred and often stood at the fence of the family mill, hoping to see the object of my affection from afar. Once I walked that way with Mother when Andrzej passes us by, bowing to me with his school cap. I became incredibly confused and red in the face, Mother noticed it and started teasing me, but I hated that my secret was revealed and refused to say a word. We never saw each other again and my ardent sentiments for Andrzej cooled down soon afterwards.

One summer Hala's parents invited me to spend the summer vacation with them. Hala had two brothers and their friend was also there. We bicycled the countryside, walked for miles, picked fruit in the orchards and watched large groups of German teenagers making excursions on bicycles, singing Hitlerjugend songs and behaving like arrogant tourists. Our evenings were fun around a fire, singing all the latest hits. The visiting boy had a very good voice and knew all the songs. One afternoon

he cornered me in the mill and started kissing me when Hala's mother walked in; I was sent home under a cloud of disapproval.

My other friend was Janka, also out of town and staying with her relatives who owned a tavern. Once her parents invited me for a few days: they also owned a tavern. Janka's cousin, a boy one year older than myself, started corresponding with me for the next two years, declaring his great love and a desire to marry me. I suspected a little his mental stability, especially when he dropped out of school and became involved in some political activities, boasting about making a lot of money. This was too strange in our society, so I simply stopped answering his letters and never saw him again.

Mother was offered a job to run a boarding house for some thirty out-of-town girls attending my school. A big apartment for the girls came with a smaller one for us in a house opposite the school. A cook and a cleaning woman were hired, the meals became less casual affairs. Still, what seemed great to me, made the boarders grumble about and soon the boarding house started losing one girl after another, until it became empty after two years. The grocer, the butcher and the baker were each day at our door for the money owed to them, until all was gradually paid off. Mother retained our apartment, a better place to live in than the single room we had before.

In 1938 I was sent to spend a year with my sisters at Father's home. By then he left the government service and was given a franchise for a tobacco store in Tuchola. Since there was no secondary school in town, I commuted by train each day to Chojnice.

One autumn evening my train was very crowded with hundreds of passengers just arrived from Germany. They were Jewish families with their belongings, permitted by Hitler to leave Germany during twenty four hours after their homes were attacked by the Nazis. To my greatest surprise, all these people spoke Polish.

After the First World War, when Poland became independent of its German, Russian and Austrian occupation for over a century, there was a plebiscite in the former German occupation zone, resulting in a shift of population between the two countries. A vast majority of Jews opted for Germany and left Poland. They did not seem to share in the historical hatred of Germans by the Polish people who felt in constant danger of aggression by the Germans wanting to expand eastward - *Drang nach Osten* - without any respect for our country. In Ostrów there must have been a very large Jewish community before 1918, because a large synagogue stood there in the center of the city. A cemetery with hundreds of graves looked abandoned and overgrown with weeds. One of the streets was called Zydowska, but in this city of thirty five thousand there were three Jewish families only, and only one Jewish girl was a classmate of mine. Now, twenty years later, these people wandered back into Poland in desperate search for friends and safety from Hitler, like apparently a few Jews did also running away from the Vienna Anschluss. All the families on my train headed toward Warsaw and Lodz, two largest cities in Poland.

In early 1939 I was back with Mother in Ostrów. Her financial situation must have improved and this time we had a large, comfortable apartment including a big kitchen, a luxurious bathroom and three rooms, one of which Mother managed to sublet.

New furniture made our bedroom very comfortable and, for the first time, my sisters could join us to spend the summer vacations in the city. We went swimming, to the cinema, made long walks combined with picnic lunch in a nearby forest. I have just graduated from my school, exempted from examinations because of quite good grades, ready to start the last two years of secondary education in liceum before going to the university.

The year was dominated by news about the imminence of war with Germany. Ostrów was thirty kilometres away from the German border. There were many German families, most of them suspected of spying, including the rich family of a girl in my class. These suspicions reminded me of one German woman who came each summer to spend her vacations with relatives in Silna. Every afternoon she was in Father's home, sitting there for several hours, not saying much but listening all the time to what was said between the members of our household, particularly when Father would come in from his office next door. We didn't think much about her except that she must be very bored with her relatives and prefers, as a teacher, to stay in the company of young girls. But come to think of it, Father was in a sensitive government post of border guard and anything heard or seen in his home could be interesting to the Germans. The woman claimed that she did not speak Polish, so our conversations were very limited, with just one semester of grammar and der-die-das of some nouns I was taught in the fifth grade.

Towards the mid-year the radio and newspapers became full of ominous-sounding news and preparations for war. The Civil defense issued instructions on how to protect ourselves, driving through the streets with posters and megaphones blaring warnings against

gas attacks. The people were told to stay absolutely away from the ground floor in taller buildings, never in the doorways. Unfortunately a group of curious people in our building disobeyed the order and the passing Civil Defense truck threw a tear gas bomb to teach them a lesson. The odor of the bomb stayed in the upstairs rooms for over two days.

The city filled with crowds of young men, mobilized and wearing a mixture of military and civilian clothing, apparently due to a shortage of uniforms and boots. Father was called into service back to his regiment, and he asked Mother to leave Ostrów with us right away to stay with our relatives in the East until the war is over. Mother decided to send me and Basia first - she would follow a few days later with Stefcia, after finding someone trustworthy to watch over the apartment and our belongings.

We departed from Ostrów the thirtieth of August, knowing that there is no direct train to Tarnopol and that the timetables will not be adhered to because of the mobilization. The passengers in crowded compartments talked excitedly about the situation, everywhere the groups of recruits kept together, singing military ballads. The train was very slow, often stopping on sidetracks for several hours. We had to change trains twice and, after some thirty hours without sleep it was becoming quite tiresome. At dawn of the second night aeroplanes started flying low over our train and around it, accompanying us off and on until we reached the Lwow railroad station. This was due to the German invasion of Poland a few hours earlier, at dawn of first of September, 1939.

All the passengers were ordered off the train which became fully mobilized, with the civilian travel cancelled, unless a

special pass was obtained.

With a long way still ahead of us, the first thing was to find the municipal office to obtain our travel permits. The city streets were deserted, most of the shops were shut down. In front of one building a German bomb killed its first victim. We obtained our passes easily, found a small cafe to have our first decent meal since leaving home and returned to the station, determined to get on the first available transport for Tarnopol. An officer in charge told us to see him in early afternoon. We settled down in the vast waiting room, where someone was saying that this is the most dangerous place during air attacks, especially when the roof of this big hall was also its ceiling, consisting of corrugated metal sheets. At noon the radio broadcast the President's declaration of war with Germany.

The train arrived in Tarnopol late in the evening. The city was in complete darkness due to the imposed blackout, the streets were empty of people and without any traffic. Someone at the station pointed us in a general direction towards the address I mentioned. We walked and walked, it was too dark to read the street names in a city we didn't know at all. Finally, a soldier standing on duty in front of a building looking like a school, pointed accross the street to the house we were looking for. It was after ten p.m., so the entrance to the house was locked for the night. While we waited for Uncle Franio to come downstairs, a group of military men were asking us about Lwow. One of them, a very young sub-lieutenant, after listening to my story came up close and announced in no uncertain terms that he could shoot me for spreading such defeatist stories. As unbelievable as it sounded, this pompous little fellow looked quite ready to do it too..

The civil defence had two kinds of protection for the people. The first were the trenches dug out along some streets, to jump into during the air attacks. An alert sounded about an oncoming air attack, another one after the airplanes flew away. My personal reaction to air attacks was pretty dumb, but I could not do anything about it: I would go into a fit of cold fury, awaking my adrenalin flow to such a point that I jumped out of the ditch and shook my fists at the German plane. This was my first experience in finding out that one's reaction to an unexpected situation can be truly unpredictable.

The other effort of protecting the population was against the poison gas, expected to be dropped from the airplanes. Ideally, each citizen should be equiped with a gas mask. The day after my arrival in Tarnopol I volunteered my services with the Red Cross to distribute masks to anyone asking for one. Except there were no masks such as shown on display or in the instruction leaflets. The best alternative was a small supply of gauze pads - not unlike those women were familiar with for quite different reasons. After less than two days this supply was exhausted and my job as a volunteer ended very soon afterwards. How fortunate for all of us that there were no gas bombs used by the Germans on us.

Mother and Stefcia reached Tarnopol ten days after we did. They travelled more than one week on a train for refugees, stopping many times to escape into the forests or fields, when the German Luftwaffe bombarded the train and killed many women and children.

Schools were reopening. My registration took place in the school's cellar during a particularly nasty air raid, shaking the foundations of this large, solid building, covering us with flying plaster and clouds of dust. Still, school was meant to

go on and catch up with the two weeks' delay in starting the school year.

There came two days of a more quiet life without any bombarding, suggesting that things were somehow settling down. But on the third morning we were awakened at dawn by artillery shooting, coming from right across our house, where the Polish soldiers stayed in the school building. This time we saw some strangely dressed soldiers laying on the pavement and spreading bullets from the machine guns into an empty-looking street: very likely their targets were already cut down, but it was difficult to ~~see~~ see the bodies from our windows into a curved street. We were witnessing the invasion of Poland by the communist Russia.

The shooting lasted over two days, forcing everybody to stay in the cellars of our apartment building. During a brief lull we would run into the backyard to fill a bucket with drinking water, but on the way back the bullets went whizzing past us, without a way to hide from them. Upstairs, the entire bedroom of my relatives was destroyed by bullets.

These events took place because one week before the outbreak of German war with Poland, on August 23rd, 1939, Germany and the USSR signed an agreement in Moscow on the mutual non-aggression pact. A secret annex to this pact was a Protocol, in which Article 2 stipulated their decision on Poland on following terms: "In the event of a territorial and political rearrangement of the areas belonging to the Polish State, the spheres of influence of Germany and the USSR will be bounded approximately by the line of the rivers Narev, Vistula and San ..." *

* quoted from STALIN AND THE POLES,
Dr. Bronislaw Kusnierz, London Hollis & Carter, 1949

This was the basis of what became known as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Line, dividing Poland by giving Germany almost 73 thousand square miles with twenty two million Poles, and the USSR occupied the remaining 77 thousand square miles with 13.2 million Polish citizens.

On the first quiet day we went outside, to see what happened to the city. Others must have wanted to do the same and the streets were very crowded. The ordinary citizens walked around, stood chatting with each other, the shops were partially opened. We all watched groups of Russian soldiers, armed and looking at us without any attempt at fraternizing: they acted like hostile guards, watching out for any sign of suspect behavior among the civilians. And then there was something else. Literally hundreds of young men, dressed in shabby civilian clothing, wore red armbands on their coatsleeves. Scattered in twos or threes among the crowd, some had Slavic features and spoke Ukrainian with each other, and many were clearly semitic. It felt scary, much more so than seeing the foreign soldiers; they must have been the communist underground, now surfacing freely under the protection of the communist invaders.

Mother found for us an apartment, fully furnished and unoccupied by a newly married couple: he was at war and she stayed with her parents. Living with the relatives was over for us and we were all better for it. I started school, curious about its coeducational system, a first for me. The mystique vanished quickly, watching a group of adolescents in different stages of intelligence, behavior, attitude to others, also some unkempt types. Anyway, I felt like a stranger in this school myself, treating this stage of my life like a transit.

Some drastic changes entered into the school programme. The traditional morning prayer was officially forbidden. We tried to circumvent this rule by coming into the class a few minutes earlier than the professor, all standing up and reciting the prayer in front of the classroom wall where the cross used to hang. After a few days someone denounced us, we were punished by having to attend an extra meeting on the communist dogma; we had an idea who the judas was but decided not to react because, after all, we could still say a silent prayer. The subjects of history, literature and introduction to philosophy were replaced by intensive lecturing on marxism and communist ideology, principally spouting all kinds of invectives at any other political system. Every few days we were sent marching in massive parades through the streets where the loudspeakers, strategically located throughout the city, polluted the air with unending music of communist fervor for the international brotherhood of workers. Grouped by classes, marching four abreast, each class carried a big banner proclaiming slogans glorifying Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin. Someone quickly decided that the group was put together when they stood in line awaiting their turn in a barber's chair. Nobody wanted to carry these banners, of course, but it would be useless to protest; instead, we came to the parade grounds without gloves, showing our half-frozen fingers taken out of the pockets. Our other sign of protest was removing the white collars from our navy blue uniforms. Vive la revolution!

It was sad to watch the professors, holding their post under an evident threat to either go along with the communist orders of propaganda or lose more than the job: political disobedience was the most serious crime, punishable by an imprison-

ment and concentration camp for the offender, and penalizing the entire family by sending them to Siberia. It was unbearable to watch and listen to the professor reading from a sheet of paper an appeal to all the students to join the Konsomol, with an introductory meeting the same evening. Nobody in the class volunteered and I saw how she looked at us, sat down and covered her face with both hands. After the class I walked up to her and asked to put my name on the list for tonight's meeting. I did not have the slightest intention of going and did not go, of course, yet something made me to pretend, hoping she will not be punished for not fulfilling her quota of the ideological kidnapping.

This parody of education was a total waste of time, actually dangerous if one wasn't sufficiently hypocritical or opportunistic to hide one's true feelings about these goings on and suffer the propaganda garbage pushed down one's throat ad nauseam. When Mother decided that I will not return to school for the second semester, I saw no reason to complain. My help was needed to keep the family together, especially when the simplest tasks of daily life became very complicated. Our refugee status under the Soviet occupation was a temporary one, we thought, because Mother registered us with a Soviet-German commission established for the purpose of re-evacuation. Once back home, I would be back in my school. On the other hand, some of my classmates were already in jail for one kind of protest or another non-participation in the intensive communist training.

A few days after our registration for returning to Ostrów, we began to receive daily visits from a Russian officer. Politely but expecting an answer to every question, he spent the afternoons looking at everything in the apartment, asking us to sell him

whatever he wanted. We could not sell things which did not belong to us. Finally he declared that his wife will be joining him next week and he must ask us to get out. It was all very matter-of-fact and never was there a cross word said between us.

The new place was much too small for the four of us. The tiny kitchen was crowded with the landlady's bed and her belongings. The only other room was just as small, filled with a single bed, a small table and one chair. Why this woman agreed to rent the room to us I will never know, because she hated us for not being Jewish, not eating kosher, using butter and pork fat; a simple old woman, yet she knew very well that now she could get away with all the batty remarks about the catholics her little heart contained.

Stefcia was invited to stay with her schoolfriend for as long as we were so crowded, sharing one bed with Mother, Basia and myself, filling it by one of us laying in the opposite direction. The comfort facilities consisted of a common toilet half-flight up, but at least there was a cold-water tap in the kitchen.

Hunting for food was a full time job. The shops were losing fast their merchandise, showing bare shelves at the bakery, in the grocery and, at the butcher's, the hooks lined up along the white walls had nothing spoiling their symmetry. The best time to expect something was to arrive at the store before it opened and wait for any delivery, firmly standing one's ground in the line. For sugar one joined a line before midnight, even then sometimes too late behind a hundred people ahead, with just one bag of sugar delivered to the shop at eight in the morning.

A small group of young people joined in a natural bond of coping with the situation as best we could. Standing in line all night by taking turns in the freezing snow became part of the new solidarity. When two of us went out shopping, it was like a hunting trip. We would inspect all the neighborhood of ritual butchers by separating first and then calling out to each other in case of a lucky strike like finding tripe, lungs or other intestines. But with lack of cooking facilities and Mother's disgust at the filthy, unwashed tripe with all the mess of cooking, this system did not work for us. After a few weeks of taking a pot of raw vegetables to be cooked in the kitchen owned by Mother's former classmate, we decided to depend on cooked meals provided by a housewife at very low prices to many people in similar circumstances to ours. Every noon I marched across the town to the poorest outskirts of Tarnopol, to pick up three portions of barley, cabbage and noodles swimming in fat, slightly congealed by the time I uncovered the lunch pails at our table.

The city streets became the best source of education about the changes around us. The military uniforms of the Red Army were shabby and unkempt, with threads hanging down the unhemmed overcoats. The NKVD soldiers looked slightly better. The Russian women were easily recognized by overly tight and skimpy clothes on usually heavy bodies, with more makeup than the two prostitutes we had in Ostrów wore at the beginning of every business evening. I was now nostalgic about seeing them, appearing regularly on the main street around six o'clock: this signalled to us kids that it was time to go home for supper and finish the rest of homework. One such evening the two of them chased me and Hala all the way home, after they heard me say to Hala "watch out for fresh

paint". Oh, those were the good old days, after all.

Russians filled the small local cafes and bars drinking and piling vodka bottles on the marbletop tables in front of them. Occasionally they staggered outside to relieve themselves into the half-frozen snow banks in the middle of the sidewalks, unperturbed by passers-by trying to navigate around the urinating soldiers, the dirty ice patches and other pedestrians, without breaking any limbs. Other soldiers would stop anyone to ask what we could sell them, because by now all the shops were completely sold out and shut down. These foreign men and women were ready to pay roubles for anything: shoes, shirts, socks, underwear, hats, coats, suits and dresses. People who just returned from Lwow swore they saw Russian women decked out in silk nightgowns with lace and embroidery for a gala concert at the theatre.

The most sought after merchandise were watches, especially wristwatches. The Swiss watch Cyma seemed to be the best known mark in Russia, pronounced in its cyrilic equivalent "suma", almost like a synonym for the word "watch". Some enterprising street hawkers made easy money on their eager clients, often selling useless timepieces. Many soldiers paraded around wearing several watches on each arm, proud of themselves; one joker had an alarm clock tied to his wrist as well.

Sometimes we engaged in casual conversation with these men, curious about the country they came from. To any sort of question they had a pat answer, telling us about the most wonderful country where there is plenty of everything one's heart could possibly desire: "vsio iest". This drill in communication reached occasionally beyond the realm of good lying when they told us that there are many lemon and orange factories all over

the country. This whole business of our cultural exchange with the proletariat's heroic defenders was too grim to be funny after a short time.

Some of my friends disappeared to join small groups crossing the frontier over to Roumania, expecting to fight in the Polish army on the Western front in France. There was nothing for them to do here and no future either, except for what the communists would decide for them. I was asked to join the conspiracy as well, to leave with them in a few days' time. As interesting and adventurous was this offer, I decided against it. We were still hoping to return home, I was not ready for such an independent life and I did not enjoy anything of a conspiratorial nature.

One day we received a brief postcard with information about Father. Only now, some five months after the outbreak of the war, we found out that he was seriously wounded on the second day of the battle and taken prisoner of war by the Germans. For reasons we never understood he must have camouflaged his officer's rank and was imprisoned in a stalag; at least this is how someone explained it to us, because apparently Germans had oflags for the officers. But Mother never made any enquiries about it.

With all the problems of daily life, there was some time left to read books, borrowed from friends or the library. I tried to learn the rudiments of bridge and played it quite often, without really involving myself seriously or trying to become an expert at it.

In February 1940 we heard one morning about mass arrests of people, all packed into cattle trains for deportation to Russia. We ran to the railroad station and saw some twenty

wagons standing on the sidetracks, with doors barred from outside, the small windows with iron bars filled with heads of men, women and children calling out to the growing crowd of on-lookers. They were from the rural areas, families of forestry and farm workers, with many of their men arrested and imprisoned earlier.

At home we had a new Russian visitor, a fatherly-looking, middle-aged man who explained to us that he simply wanted to meet some Polish people; he was here all alone, missed his own family of daughters we reminded him of. He was a polite, quiet and kindly looking type, so we saw no reason to be rude and inhospitable to him. Almost every afternoon he sat in our only chair, we would settle on top of our bed and, trying hard to understand Russian, asking the meanings of this word or that expression. He seemed to understand everything we were saying. He never introduced himself to us, so we did not know his name, where he lived or what his position was. One thing was obvious, from seeing different uniforms on the street and the newspapers, that this man was a high-ranking official in a dark blue, unmarked uniform, always fastidiously buttoned up to the high collar. Once, our tiny room was very hot, he was perspiring and we asked him to take his heavy jacket off. He opened the jacket but could not remove it, there was no shirt underneath. Embarrassed, he explained that he does not own any shirts. He did not own any socks either, he said pointing to his feet in high leather boots: a pitiful commissar if I ever saw one!

Mother renewed many friendships with people in Tarnopol and Trembowla she went to school together with, mostly from the convent of Immaculate Sisters, a boarding school in Lwow. One

of the friends was a jolly Jewish lady who was as blond as my sister Basia. Since I grew up without meeting any Jewish people in Western Poland, now I saw that some Jewish people were not only blond but also attended exclusive catholic convent schools. Some other friends from Trembowla invited Mother for a few days and she left in the beginning of April. We could very well take care of ourselves and even looked forward to a little more comfort sleeping only two in our narrow bed.

First thing the next morning Stefcia was brought in by the lady who kept her at her apartment. My poor sister looked very ill, barely able to move and talk, with high fever and a killing headache. It took until the next day to get a doctor, while Stefcia was getting worse and had to have her head held high all night for some slight relief. The doctor diagnosed her illness as meningitis, asking to bring her to the hospital right away. He could not offer much hope for her survival because the hospital was out of serum at the moment. There was an epidemic of meningitis brought in by the Red Army, hardly known in Poland before the war with an average of two cases per year at most.

The hospital for contagious diseases was at the other end of town and there was no transport available: no ambulances, no taxi, no private cars and no horse buggies either. All the boys I knew were either in prison or run away. Adam was the only friend who borrowed a wheelbarrow we both pushed and pulled through the muddy ice and piled up snow on the unkempt streets. The hospital regulation demanded bathing the patient before being touched by a doctor. Adam helped me to carry the

unconscious girl into the tub, sponging a body which seemed to be turning grey, and then carry her to the doctor's office. Yes, the spinal fluid confirmed Stefcia had meningitis which by then burned her hearing forever. Yet we were lucky, said the doctor, because in a few hours' time she would also become blind: the hospital just now received a new supply of serum which gives her a chance to live.

The next dawn a hospital orderly read a list of names to the crowd standing outside the main gate, in order that the relatives collect their dead. But Stefcia pulled through, just as the doctor said. No visitors were allowed in, so the only way to follow her progress was to be at the gate every dawn: her name was not called out. After three days of treatment she was able to walk to a window on the third floor, wave to us and signal with gestures that she was deaf. It was too much to bear alone, I traced Mother with great difficulties because of bad telephone connections and it was somewhat easier when she returned home.

Friends were dropping in to show their concern, including our commissar who looked genuinely upset by my sister's tragic illness; he held his head down when I was saying that his soldiers were responsible for this epidemic, not saying a word of reply. The next afternoon he came again, asking for my sister's health, sat down as usual in the chair paying no attention to the fact that I was very tired and tried to rest on the bed. He began to stroke my head and I saw tears running down his face, silently and for a long time. Too sleepy to say anything, I was touched by this kindly, lonely man without his own family, sharing in the sadness of our family. It was much later only, when I tried to re-live the day's events, that I understood: he knew

what was to happen to us and was helpless to do anything about it. The reasons for his visits to us were not due to homesickness and a desire for friendship.

Mother and Basia returned home in the evening with two women, friends of Mother's friends visiting from another town without a place to sleep. There was a narrow space on the floor and with overcoats wrapped around, they settled down for the night.

IN RUSSIA

From the first day of the Russian invasion on September 17, 1939, the Soviets made no secret of their hostile attitude toward the Polish population. Terror and murder were committed by the Red Army, usually assisted by criminal elements - Polish, Jewish and Ukrainian - among the local population, with a purpose "to destroy the enemies of the people", a saying repeated endlessly through the megaphones and large printed banners. Much has been written on this subject and I chose a clear and concise source of official information and documentation in the book written by Dr. Bronislaw Kusnierz Stalin and the Poles *.

The Soviets started with arresting all the members of the Polish armed forces, deporting them into Russia where some nine thousand men were interned in Kozielsk and Starobielsk. Additional group of almost six thousand six hundred policemen, military police and border patrol servicemen were deported and interned in Ostaszko. In total, these fifteen thousand men became prisoners of war, a paradox of terminology, because they were not at war with the Soviets.

The occupation authorities established the "Temporary Administration" with members of the Soviet secret police NKVD and the Red Army. As the Moscow Izviestia reported on September 25th, 1939 : "It was not so easy to clean up Tarnopol. When the Polish Army left the town, gendarmes, priests, young Jesuits, and agents of the intelligence service remained and went into hiding. They hid like rats in houses and crevices." And, on November 29th, 1939 all Polish citizens living under Soviet occupation were declared to be Soviet citizens, in accordance
* London, Hollis and Carter, 1949

with a decree of the Praesidium of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union, based on the 1938 Soviet Citizenship law.

The occupied Polish territory, according to the NKVD, had to be purged of people considered by them to be dangerous or undesirable in the communist system. Among such undesirables, mainly in the rural areas, they murdered all men and women working for the local administration, the teachers, farmers and tenants. Others were arrested in such massive numbers that the prison system became severely overcrowded, creating inhuman conditions of food shortage and unsanitary filth.

Another method in purging the occupied country was the Soviet system of mass deportations. Their definition of persons liable for deportation was outlined in the Circular No. 0012,23 of the Soviet Central Political Police. The NKVD Commissar for the Lithuanian SSR, Gusevicius, issued the Regulation No. 0054, dated 28 November 1940, referring to "the survey of anti-Soviet and socially unadapted elements", with a particular emphasis to enter into the records the following "anti-Soviet elements":

- (a) members of non-Communist Parties, including both Anarchists and "Trotskyites" and the Parties of the Right;
- (b) members of Students' Corporations, shooting clubs, Youth sporting organizations;
- (c) former gendarmes, policemen and prison employees;
- (d) former officers of non-Soviet army;
- (e) former volunteers of "White Armies and other anti-Soviet armies;
- (f) refugees, political emigrants, re-emigrants, repatriates and smugglers;
- (g) nationals and former nationals of foreign countries, representatives of foreign firms and officials of foreign governments;

(h) persons maintaining contact abroad, or with Legations and Consulates of foreign States, including stamp-collectors and esperantists;

(i) former civil servants (especially the higher grades);

(j) former employees of the Red Cross;

(k) members of religious communities, the clergy and members of religious societies;

(l) former nobility, landowners, businessmen, bankers, industrialists who profited from the work of hired labor, and all owners of undertakings, hotels and restaurants.

There were also separate instructions for the deportation procedures, given by the Central Office of the NKVD and signed by M. Sarov, People's Commissar for Security of USSR. Considered as a "problem of great political importance", detailed directions were provided on how to carry out the operations without "noise or panic" and to avoid any demonstrations or disturbances. Local Special Executive Group of Three and their "staffs" were organized in military fashion and received special files with names and addresses of persons listed for deportation. The members of the Executive Group were armed and with transport prepared in advance. They always went to the homes at night-time, strictly instructed to conceal the real reason for the visit, and break the door if not opened willingly. The members of the household were to be put together into one room to render any resistance impossible. The house was then searched for weapons, counter-revolutionary literature, foreign currencies and valuables. Independently of the results of such a search, the listed deportees were told that "the Government had decided to deport them to other regions of the Soviet Union."

The instructions allowed the deportees to take clothing, footwear, underwear, kitchen utensils, food for one month, a small sum of money and restricting the total weight of luggage to one hundred kilos per family. The farmer deportees could take a small number of tools with them, but these were to be loaded separately in order to avoid their use in resistance; this provision, however, was never applied and no tools could be taken at all. After two hours permitted for packing, the deportees were driven to the railway station before dawn. All the possessions left behind were taken over by the Soviets.

If the deportees included an entire family, adult men were loaded in separate trucks, in accordance with the instruction: "Considering that the majority of the deported men will be arrested and scattered over special camps, whilst their families will be sent to places assigned to them in distant regions, the separation of members of the families from one another must be carried out without any warning."

In Poland the orders for deportation were executed since early 1940, as follows:

- On February 10th, a total of 230,000 men, women and children were carried on 110 trains, each train averaging two thousand persons. All these trains were despatched to the region of Archangelsk in unheated freight wagons, with temperatures recorded minus forty degrees Fahrenheit. This group consisted mainly of families of public servants in road maintenance and forest guards, also small land settlers. These people, caught completely by surprise, had no food supplies for the trip and, exposed to the freezing weather, suffered a death toll of over ten percent among them.

- On April 13th another transport of 320,000 persons, mostly women and children whose fathers, sons or brothers were already imprisoned, was despatched in 160 trains to Kazakstan. These deportees were the families of the armed forces, the police, public servants, social workers, landowners and peasants. Our family was among them.

- In June and July of 1940 other transports of 240,000 persons consisted mainly of refugees from the Western part of Poland, now occupied by the Germans.

- During the second year of Soviet occupation, the deportation included 200,000 family members of arrested intellectuals, railwaymen, craftsmen and others living in the districts of Vilno and Lithuania.

Unlike the Germans who maintained scrupulously written records on all their activities, including the most atrocious ones, the Soviets either did not follow such bureaucratic procedures or - it can be entirely possible - all such records are well hidden, far from the public reach. According to the best estimates made by Polish scholars, some one million seven hundred thousand people were arrested and deported into Russia, with a large number forcibly recruited into the Red Army. The death toll among among the prisoners is estimated at seventy percent, while the high number of death among the deportees is estimated to be approximately the same, based on the following criteria:

Two hundred and fifty thousand persons were arrested and imprisoned. In July 1941 the Soviets produced a list of 71,481 Polish citizens in Soviet prison camps only. This number of survivors means that seventy percent of prisoners died, including those who were condemned to death.

The deportees consisted of some 560,000 women, 380,000 children under the age of fourteen and 150,000 men. In October 1941 the Soviet reported that the total of deportees comes to 291,131 *. If this figure is correct, thirty percent of the deportees only remained alive.

The conditions of transportation were standardized to the use of freight wagons, allowing for twenty-five persons per wagon; the actual average of persons per wagon was double or triple of the norm. The adaptation of these wagons, normally used for transporting cattle or freight, for human use consisted of a small hole cut out in the middle of the floor for toilet purposes and several tiers of wooden platforms on each side of the doors. During the trip, lasting anywhere from three to six weeks, each wagon was hermetically barred from outside, with the only source of air and light coming from two tiny, barred windows on one side of the wagon. People were expected to live on their own food supplies; every two or three days some half-baked black bread or a bucket of soup, sometimes a bucket of cooked oatmeal or hot water would be provided to sustain the entire wagonload of prisoners. The water shortage was permanent: a bucket of water for drinking was provided every second or third day.

Someone made a comparison between this Soviet system and the convoys of African slaves, pointing out that the slave merchants had a vested interest in the physical conditions of each slave for trading and profit, but the Russians couldn't care less about the fate of their captives.

* Dr.B. Kusnierz

Loud banging at the entrance door woke everybody up in the middle of the night. Mother, Basia and I put something over our nightgowns to open the door, because the landlady, sleeping right under the door, buried herself under the featherbed, including her head and arms.

Five uniformed NKVD men, armed with rifles and guns, were at the kitchen door, telling us that we are hiding arms and ammunition in the apartment which they came to confiscate. Three men with bayonets stayed with us in the kitchen and two officers went inside our room, chasing out our two guests to stay together with us. After a lot of shuffling noise and what seemed like an eternity, out they came and ordered us to dress and leave with them to travel right away to the Moscow district. "You don't need to pack and take anything with you, because the train is fully equipped with everything you need for the trip. A house is waiting for you near Moscow, fully furnished and with plenty of food. You - they say to Mother - have a teaching job waiting for you and a school is waiting for your daughters."

The room was in shambles. The mattress, slashed into strips was pushed against the wall. Clothes were thrown all around, Mother's handbag lying open on the table, the walet gone, the change purse emptied of all coins. We gather all our belongings into the suitcase and a wicker laundry basket, then start to collect our things from the kitchen: a small enameled bucket, two saucepans, the remnants of bread and sugar, a few spoons, forks and knives. We hear a truck driving up to the entrance and an order to hurry up. The terrified landlady pops her head out from under the covers to ask if she is supposed to come as well: no, she is not included. The woman relaxes visibly,

watching us leave without a single word or even a friendly gesture. But our two guests are not that fortunate - they are ordered to come with us, both without a thing to pack on this one night's visit in town. My God, why did I pity them more than ourselves?

The open platform truck drove us to the railway station through the still dark and empty streets. At the station dozens of similar trucks and crowds of police stood in front of the building. Inside, a line of people were boarding a wagon while we were stopped on the platform to wait our turn. Next to us I recognized a family of my former classmate, a boy imprisoned a few days ago; they were told by the police when picked up at home that their son is waiting for them at the station so that they can all travel together. This was a lie, of course, to keep them calm during the arrest, especially because the family included the father, a professor.

Mother starts an energetic action, accosting any policeman near her to let her go and see Stefcia at the hospital. Finally an officer nods in agreement, Mother gets into a car with two armed guards and they drive away. Other guards pushed me and Basia into the nearest wagon, the door slid shut behind us and we found ourselves in the middle of the floor, between two parts filled with people occupying all available spaces on the platforms all the way upto the ceiling. Mother returned two hours later, satisfied that she could see Stefcia, admitted to her ward despite the strict rules against visitors. We tied together a bundle with her dress, a sweater, some underwear and a pair of shoes, because she had nothing of her own clothing at the hospital. On a piece of paper we wrote a brief message, pinned it and pushed the bundle through the bars in the window. Much

later we found out that the things reached Stefcia intact.

The train was very long and it took a day and half of shuttling before leaving the station. Crowds gathered along the wire-fenced embankment next to the tracks and people inside took turns to speak to someone they knew through the barred windows.

As strangers in Tarnopol, we did not expect to find anyone we knew among them, but at one moment I did notice a familiar looking man, wearing a shabby coat, a hat pulled down over a raised collar and hiding his eyes behind a pair of dark glasses. I met him recently at friends' home. Wladek Witwicki was a young lawyer, trying not to attract attention of Russians in town, especially because of his very handsome looks and expensive clothing, branding him as an obvious capitalist. He did not work now, went out only to borrow books in the library or visit friends in the evenings. During one of such evenings we spent talking with a group of friends he asked me at one point to accept some money because he knew how difficult it must be for us to manage, and he had more money than he knew what to do with. He acted out of genuine concern and sounded sincere, but it was just not done to accept money from a man, now matter how honorable he was; this I did not tell him, of course, saying that I must think it over and giving my answer the next time we meet. This next meeting was now, the situation was different now too, and I called out to him.

Wladek leaned over the wire fence, as surprised to hear me as I was to find him here. He said that he slept that night in the attic of his siter's home, so the police did not find him when they came to arrest the family. I asked if he remembered

his offer to lend me money, because all I had were two coins found in my coat pocket, Mother had nothing after her money was stolen by the NKVD goons and Basia never kept any money. Wladek pulled out his wallet out immediately, looking around how to pass the bills to my window, when a woman standing next to me said: "Don't worry, Wladek. I have enough money so I can share with her." This was his siter Halina, arrested with her husband and their eight-year old son.

The people inside were behaving calmly, making the best of the situation. They were mostly women of all ages, wives, mothers, grandmothers and sisters of imprisoned men; there were a few men, mostly elderly and many children, some babies. Eighty persons in all occupied an allotted space of fifty centimeters each on wall-to-wall platforms built at two levels. We were the last ones to enter the wagon, increasing the number of passengers to eighty three, but there was not a single space left for us on the platforms.

The space in the middle equaled the width of the sliding doors, about eight feet wide on each side of the wagon. Without any seats, we settled down on the bare floor, only to realize that we are too close to a hole in the floor, obviously to serve all of us as a toilet. The hole was as public as you please and anyone using it was going to be practically on mine or Mother's lap. The hole was also very small, unprotected and impossible to keep clean, messing the rest of the floor especially during the rocking ride. Somebody offered a bedspread to curtain off the shocking lack of privacy. To keep the floor as clean as possible we sacrificed our white enameled bucket to be used and emptied into the hole. There was no water to drink or to wash,

let alone to clean the human waste. During a few nights of freezing cold the hole froze, blocking the outlet and creating an ankle-deep slush, soaking our linen wicker basket and softening the suitcase we used to sleep on in a huddled position. Because of embarrassment, most of the people tried to use the toilet at night and because of total darkness they did not realize that the hole was frozen over.

Who knows, maybe it could be worse if we ate normal meals? Our food consisted of one bucket of cooked barley for all of us, given every second day at different times of day, depending on the train stop at one station or another. Usually the second bucket was filled with hot water from the station's tap, for our drinking.

No one bothered to ask the guards where the train was taking us. It was obvious that we were outside of any law or any protection, we had no right to expect a civil word from these men, let alone the truth. The only thing to do was to take each day one at a time, trying to survive, not think too much and keep one's wits together. The guards were eyeing women when they called us to carry sometimes a bucket, some of them joking about us as if we were not there to hear them.

What did I feel towards these strangers who suddenly took charge of my life? Hatred, with all its burning fire, was not in my nature. I rather felt contempt for their base, primitive nature and uncouth behaviour, similar to what I saw sometimes in a Polish village: loud, cursing, spitting, belching and quick of temper, especially when drunk. But most of all I was repelled by their vicious jokes and remarks about God and my catholic religion. Without ever being a religious fanatic or a bigot, I was very happy with my religion, feeling that living with it and by its rules made eminent sense of logic, ethic

and patience to cope with life's problems.

All seemed like a nightmare, yet it was real and people held their despair in check. The young were more curious than scared by what looked to them like an adventure of sorts; they spent time talking, singing, sometimes joking. The adults seemed to come from all different backgrounds, none of us seemed to have met before we ^{were} put here together. Four persons were in their seventies and two were over eighty years old. The eleven children were quiet most of the time, more often holding close to their mothers than playing with other children. Mothers seemed to have some private stocks of food prudently brought from home like raw eggs, sugar, butter, biscuits and pork fat. Everybody watched when she whipped a raw yolk with two teaspoonfuls of sugar into a kogel-mogel, eaten slowly and deliberately, especially when the last egg was used. There was one newborn baby whose mother could not breastfeed: she had one litre of milk which she used to dilute with water, keeping the bottle inside her blouse to warm it up before feeding the baby, but after two days the milk was finished and the baby had to subsist on water mixed with sugar.

A few days into the monotony of our journey someone suddenly realized that our train changed direction from going east now to the west. Immediately rumours and a heated debate started about the Allies who discovered this heinous crime and ordered Moscow to return us immediately to Poland. Alas! The train soon changed back to ride eastbound. At some stations other trains stood on the tracks just like ours, except that they came from Bialystok, Wilno, Wilejka, Nowogrodek and Lwow.

It took sixteen days to travel like this, without seeing anything of the country we travelled through. Unwashed and

unkempt except for an occasional hair combing, we must have developed an immunity to normally offensive circumstances of human uncleanliness in a crowd like ours. Once only the train stopped in some fields, the door was open to let us out and we used the snowpatches to rub faces and arms with. This stopover gave us a chance to count the number of wagons: our train was twenty-six wagons' long, with roughly two thousand people.

The train finally arrived in Pavlodar, met by waiting trucks to drive us, in the same order as grouped on the train, to the edge of Irtysz, a wide river with rushing, muddy water. We are waiting a few hours to be ferried to the other side. The water looks undrinkable with all this mud which makes the Russians poke fun at us, pelting insults at our bourgeois attitude; with nothing else to drink there is no choice but wait a few minutes until the mud settles down at the bottom of the glass, giving us the first taste of the water source for the rest of our stay in Kazakstan.

Some people are frightened that we shall be drowned here and now. Children begin to cry, some of them beside themselves with hysteria, until someone manages to calm them reasoning that if they wanted us dead, they did not have to take us this far nor waste the trucks or a ferry, just turning in our direction around the river's bend.

Our first sight of Kazaks was something of a shock. Just like the Roman parents used to cry "Hanibal ante portas" to scare their children into obedience, the Polish history was filled with the savagery and cruelty of Tartars invading Poland since time immemorial, killing women and children by impaling or beheading the whole communities, robbing and burning everything in the way. Now we were surrounded by people who

looked exactly like the Tartars and acted in a hostile manner with us, yelling and pushing our groups for no apparent reason. These short, dark skinned men with slanted eyes and sinister look were dressed in some native garb and floppy caps with hanging down ear covers: to the children they well looked like devils incarnate, hiding their horns under those hats, a stick in hand instead of a pitchfork.

Separated from the rest of the train transport, we are now ferried across the river in two trucks, riding in the open air in a fortunately sunny weather, watching a very plain, flat countryside with uncultivated fields: no trees, not even bushes in sight, the horizon is an endless steppe. Winter must have just ended here because among the dirty patches of snow there wasn't yet a blade of green color on the ground, just the sparse tufts of brown weed stubble. We saw no houses, no buildings of any kind, no animals and no people in hours of riding. The truck ahead of us left clouds of dust from the unpaved road, covering us with yellowish dust all over. The wide open space around us was something of a novelty after more than two weeks of being locked on the train. When finally we did pass one or two farm buildings close to our road, they seemed only to enhance the vastness of the country we travelled through. Now I recalled an expression read somewhere or heard in conversations about the "deep interior of Russia", understanding much better what the saying meant. The day was slowly coming to an end when, on the horizon we saw some ruins, then the road divided and followed a narrower path along these mysterious ruins enclosed by a pretty deep ditch. The ruins were quite tall and could well be the remains of a church or mosque. A few minutes later the trucks came to a stop.

Nothing was further from my mind than the idea that this was our destination. We saw no houses, just some piles of clay, straw and manure. Yet the drivers came out, opened the back flap and ordered everybody to get off because they had to go back tonight.

Mother, Basia and myself had so little to carry that we could help others with their bundles, particularly the most desperate ones. Mrs. Golebiowska was utterly miserable, clinging to me and crying "Zosia, my dear child, what will happen to us now? I am so afraid, we will all die here from hunger, I can't take any more of it." This tall, handsome woman was the wife of the public prosecutor in Tarnopol, dragged from her house where she was bedridden with an agonizing arthritis and breast cancer. Her son, a boy of my age was with her, coping with their luggage. It was too hard for her to come down from the truck platform without any ladder, so we carried her down.

"My God, where are we going to live?" What could I say to this poor lady, clinging to my arm, bent in half with pain, trying to ignore a crowd of bedraggled Kazak men, women and children watching us without coming too close.

We had to walk very slowly in her obviously agonizing effort toward a group of Poles standing and listening to a tall Kazak in the middle, gesticulating and speaking Russian with a strange sounding accent. I did not speak Russian anyway, using a mixture of Polish with a few Russian words picked here and there. This man was using a similar method, of course with more Russian than I could muster, except that the rest of it was Kazak. Unable to follow him, Mrs. Golebiowska pulled me toward the Kazak group, wanting to speak with an older woman; she would certainly understand what we need. But as we came close,

the woman panicked, starting some frightened sounds and running to hide behind the back of a man. What were these people told about us? But we just had to find out something, so I spoke to the first man next to us "listen, tell us what this place is called?" They started to laugh and nudge one another, saying something completely foreign sounding. "We are from far away, very tired. Where can we stay?" Again a strange response, without a hope of understanding a word they said.

In the meantime Mother found out what to do. Mr. Wisiecki was appointed as our group leader for twenty people, all to be settled in one house. She and Basia went ahead, but I just watched in what direction they went, deciding first to help my sick friend to settle down, unfortunately not with us. She was assigned with her son to another group of twenty five persons. I went with them, in the opposite direction from where my family went. It was obvious that Mrs. G. was much more comfortable with a young woman than her son who was besides already burdened with their belongings which looked very big, especially compared with our own. After all, they were taken away from their own home, certainly a wealthy one, maybe given a little more leniency in the number of things allowed with them, including some bedding for this invalid woman. She told me that she was carried from her bed to the arresting truck and the train station by the NKVD men.

The group leader stopped in front of a piled up stack of straw with manure, showing us the entrance. Holding my companion by hand I went first, feeling that my feet are deep in mud, wading in a slush of water, animal excreta and chunks of filthy ice. A long walk in total darkness toward the piles of straw next to a muddy wall with a low ceiling, where rough beams

supported more straw for a roof. The room was divided by a dirty whitewashed wall half-way up, which turned out to be one side of a big stove.

"Oh, God" and a heartbreaking sob came from behind.

It was a depressing picture of crumbling walls, loose wisps of straw mixed with huge cobwebs hanging from the beams, filthy floor full of animal waste. Our expertise with space for humans, developed on the train, saw that maximum fifteen people can sleep on this floor shoulder to shoulder - where would the other ten sleep? It was useless to worry and complain. By the time I was leaving, people were busy settling down for the night.

Walking in the general direction where Mother and Basia went earlier, now I knew that each stack on the way was really a house and not knowing which one is for me, I wandered into each one stumbling in the darkness over piles of something lying on the ground or an animal settled for the night. Finally I heard voices and opened a door. Basia stood in the middle of the room but there was no way to even get inside, with people and bundles taking over every single inch of the space; she was saying something to Mother and hopping over the piles, balancing her arms in the act and touching people in squeezing through.

"Good thing you came because Mother is very tired and we must find some hay to sleep on. Mother will watch our space."

"You must be joking - what space? Are we going to sleep standing up? I couldn't get inside with everybody now standing or sitting, so how can twenty people expect to lie down here?"

"What else can we do? Anyway, if all things are piled up on top of the stove, we can fit next to each other on the floor - maybe only the breathing will be a problem."

A few more people joined us, all unsure which way to go to find straw or hay. There was a Kazak standing outside to show us the way; we struck a conversation because he spoke Russian, someone in our group also knew the language.

"What can we buy here?"

"There is nothing"

"Any food?"

"What's that?"

"Food, things to eat, some produce."

"Ah, produce - yes, sometimes."

"Is there bread?"

"No."

"Milk?"

"No."

"Potatoes?"

"Potatoes? No, never."

"Eggs?"

"Oh, no."

"Meat?"

"There is no meat."

"Then what do you people eat here?"

"I don't know" - there was a silly-looking grin on his face.

"This is some fool" - I said imaptiently, not realizing that he understood: the Polish "duren" was similar to Russian "durak". The man jumped with fury, nearly hitting me and, with his face twisted, started to yell:

"I am not a fool, you are the fool. I am going right away to the chief to report on you. You are a bourgeois, a capitalist and I am a communist. In the Soviet Union it is forbidden to talk that way to communists."

He scared me so much that I hid behind the back of my companions, just like the old Kazak woman did a few hours earlier when we tried to speak to her. They started pleading with him and I learned a lesson to keep my mouth shut.

Basia and I used our coat belts to carry the bundles of straw back, losing more than half on the way. That night we slept dead to the world.

Our lodgings were much better than others were given, because ours was the village community house called "krasnyi ugalok", equivalent to a local "red club". The hut was neat, built of willow brakes filled with clay, freshly whitewashed. A large meeting room with clay floor had a podium and a few benches. Our group and another one were ordered to occupy two smaller adjacent rooms. There was no kitchen, no bathroom, no lavatory, no light, also no running water.

I was the first one to wake up in the morning. Taking some laundry I remembered seeing last night a river below: yes, there it was, the same Irtysh we crossed yesterday at another point. To go down to it I had to look for a path along a very steep, rugged sandy wall. The twenty-foot high embankment was a chance to find some privacy after those last few weeks. The river was icy cold but who cared, the sheer luxury of being able to wade in it, splash and keep on splashing till the body felt alive again: it was a good feeling. Some local people came down to the river watching me curiously, then filling two buckets with water, tying them to a yoke and slowly climbing back, balancing their steps not to spill a drop on the way. Then Mother called from the top, proudly showing a loaf and half

of bread she just bought at the village store.

Things seemed better than imagined, it wasn't an end after all. Feeling clean, with a bundle of wet laundry, we were ready for hot tea with a thick slice of bread for breakfast; someone kindly shared their lard to spread the bread with. For cooking, we searched for two stones and some twigs, dried grass or straw. For lunch, a family next to us cooked their last six potatoes when Janka asked if she could have the potato peelings lying on the ground. She boiled them for her mother and herself. Janka was illegally with us: her mother, countess Malachowska was the only person arrested for deportation, but as soon as Janka heard about it, she sneaked onto the train and refused to leave her mother's side. Although Janka was some ten years older than myself, we became friends.

The experience of individual family cooking became impossible. There was a small stove in one corner of the house, so the people decided to pool all the food supplies - barley, sugar, salt, flour and cooking fat to prepare one large pot serving everybody. We had nothing to contribute, so Mother and Basia volunteered to do the cooking.

It was May 1st, a holiday, and it looked as if we were the day's main attraction. Kazaks filled our rooms, settling down on their haunches under the walls, watching silently every person busy with adapting to this new life; after one or two hours they would leave, making room for a new group of spectators, and so it went on until the end of the day.

I wasn't needed for the cooking, so I went to visit Mrs. Golebiowska. The initial shock of yesterday seemed to have worn off. The cobwebs disappeared, the floor was swept clean and sprinkled, men were trying to repair the mud stove and the women

worked around their bundles, some of them gone with the laundry to the river. My friend looked better, resting on a straw mattress, with a rolled up bedding next to her. She had an earlier visit from a village official, promising to send her away to a hospital where they were supposed to treat her arthritis.

Halina Kulanda was in this group. She remembered her promise of money and offered me thirty roubles. Even not knowing when I can repay this loan, I was happy and grateful. For twenty eight roubles we could buy one pood of whole wheat flour and this quantity of sixteen kilos could last the three of us for a few weeks.

On the way back I visited another group, settling down in a larger space, sufficient for each family to occupy a piece of the floor with the wall as well. In one corner all the belongings were piled up, giving more room for the children to jump around ^{and} play; a group of adults discussed loudly how to share two buckets of water among all of them; a teenager argued on top of his voice with an old woman lying next to his own bedding, who kept on spitting on the floor and looked very dirty.

Outside I run into Nelly who grabbed my arm, crying. She is the mother of a boy and girl, both a few years younger than myself, here together with her sister-in-law Mary and Mary's daughter Krysia. They are refugees from Warsaw, living in poverty in Tarnopol, without any job and no means of support. They both knew Russian very well and used it yesterday to convince the local villagers to give them a separate lodging so that they can get some family privacy after the trip. Nelly begged me to come and visit Mary who was beside herself, could not stop crying which made Krysia cry as well out of despair for her mother.

Their place was worse than anything I have seen until now: very small, with a ruined stove in the middle, the walls all broken down, the tiny window without glass panels. In the corner, on a filthy floor with a handful of straw sat Mary and Krysia, both with red and swollen eyes from crying. They did not sleep at night because of crawling bedbugs, afraid to be attacked and robbed in a room without a door and the broken window. "You at least are better off not being alone, in a large group it is safer and more cheerful" - they said and that's obviously how it seemed.

Somehow it seemed to be the right moment to sit down and take stock of the situation. There was no way to console the distraught women, wailing about their beautiful home back in Warsaw, Krysia's room full of toys and clothes, what would Daddy say if he saw them now, living a hundred times worse than any animal in Poland?

First thing first, and that was our prospect of immediate survival. Well, said I, we are in a village of living people and if they can do it, chances are we can survive as well. We were young, healthy and fairly strong for physical work.

"Mark my words, ladies. Just the way we were taken out at night and forced to leave, one of these days the same NKVD will load us back on the train and send everybody back home." This wasn't just my idea - absolutely everybody believed in it, or wanted to: we shall all be back home, sooner or later. "Sooner" meant in two months' time, somebody even knew it will be on June 23rd. Others - the blackest pessimists - said that it will take three years before we go home. To me it seemed that two months is unlikely, being so far away from home that it felt like the edge of the world with a bottomless precipice. But

three years? Impossible, nobody will survive even half that long under such conditions of slavery, hunger and filth, without books, without schools and civilization!

In front of our hut a crowd of Poles stood around a tall, heavy-set Russian. He was "Uncle Vasya" from the next village, visiting to meet with us, making us feel more at ease because he was another Slav. He looked like a man happy with himself, talking gregariously and waving his arms around for a better effect. He was in charge of the windmill for all wheat farmers in the district. We heard later that he was notorious for pocketing most of the trade with the Kazaks who lived in the kolchoz and to whom, according to the law, also belonged the profits of the mill: the miller felt racially superior and got away with much for this reason. Now, acting magnanimously, he promised to sell us some potatoes he will send over later in the afternoon.

"Please, tell us what you know about what is planned for us? Nobody told us anything, we don't know what we are to live on and are we expected to live like this forever?"

"I don't know, I don't belong to this farm. Our kolchoz is separate and you belong to one of the five farms of the Djolkoduk sowchoz." Now we found out the name of our village. "I think you will have to work just like everybody else here, you will earn money to make a living - he tried to speak slowly and clearly to make us understand - the only problem is the produce: it's hard to buy any food now."

- "How do you people live then?"

- "We manage. Before the war with Finland there was plenty of bread, sugar and even candy, also much easier to get meat. But the Red Army took all of it. At one time a pood of wheat flour cost nine roubles. Then the price went up, now it costs

twenty eight roubles. Our workers in kolchoz don't get paid in money but only in produce and that's how they make a living. When they need money, they sell flour, milk, eggs or hay. The sowchoz workers receive salaries and there are stores to buy produce ..."

- "What produce? We went to the store this morning and all we could get was half a loaf of bread per person and some salt - there was nothing else." This man, a teacher deported with wife and two young children could speak Russian.

- "Don't worry, everything will be alright. All you have to do is work. Work, do you understand? You do know our saying "who does not work does not eat"?"

We sure heard that one, ever since the communists came to Tarnopol last September. It was obvious there was no point in talking longer with this man, not a genuine good neighbor but somebody belonging to the local powerful and mighty. He will report on what was said by us and we were in no position to expect any goodwill from this person and others like him, all warned in advance that we were the counterrevolutionaries and Polish capitalists.

"Uncle" Vasya turned to us women. "Maybe some of you could come and visit us later today? I am going with my wife today to another kolchoz for two days, but Viera who stays with us will be home. Viera is our kolchoz doctor, she is very young and bored without company. It's easy to find my place. Can you see the windmill from here? It's mine and the house is next to it."

I was curious and told him that yes, I will come and bring along anyone who will like to come with me.

Two boys and a girl agreed to come. We took a narrow field path along the Irtysz valley. In some deeper folds of the sandy

embankment the snow was still on the ground. In the middle of one snowpatch lay a half-eaten skeleton of a large dog. Thirty minutes later we stood in front of the windmill, with a low hut next to it, its roof covering also a barn and a pigsty. The yard in front was full of chickens, ducks and geese. Other huts were spread further away, scattered without any special pattern or symmetry, a few hundred feet away from each other and standing on the bare land without fences or greenery of any kind.

A dog barked at us, obviously acting like a doorbell, because a young woman came to the door. She was dark-haired with typical Russian features, neither ugly nor beautiful; she couldn't be more than nineteen years' old. Viera invited us in. The corridor was lined with benches, buckets and various farming tools, the ceiling overhang with bags full of some dry foodstuffs or herbs. The first room was a large kitchen, looking neat and tidy. Behind the kitchen was a room with a large stove similar to the one in the kitchen, the floor also plastered with clay, a thin runner decorating it in the middle. The walls were whitewashed, the sun was coming through a small, sparkling window. Except for lack of any religious pictures decorating the room, this could very well be a Polish peasant room kept for the visitors. It was furnished with a wide wrought-iron bed at one end and another, narrower one which belonged to Viera. A table, covered by a bright cloth stood under the window; a few chairs, a large wooden chest, a record player in one corner and some photographs on the wall - all made me wish that something similar could be had for us in Djolkoduk to make the life a little more tolerable.

Without much Russian on my part, conversation was not easy. Viera soon went into the kitchen, lit up a primus stove, put on a frying pan with plenty of salt pork; when it began to sizzle, in went a few eggs fried on top. Then she heated a kettle for tea. What a feast it was after all this time!.

"Does everybody here eat that well?"

"I really don't know. It used to be much better with more food around. But since the Finnish war we have food limitations, so the only ones who eat well are those who stocked up on produce. We have enough eggs because that's how the kolchoz people pay me for their visits and treatment. We also have enough bread, because Vasil Vasilievitch manages the only mill around for several villages."

"Could we buy flour from you?"

"I suppose you could" said Viera.

"How much is it?"

"I think thirty two roubles a pood. One year ago it was six roubles a pood, but after the war the price of flour went up." Viera seemed to have a hesitant manner in stating simple information and I said nothing about the price of flour she quoted, different from the miller's information; what did matter more was that we could buy it here.

The sun was coming down, we were afraid to get lost on the way back in darkness. Still, I wanted so much to listen to some music but Viera said she had no needles to play and the store was out of them too. We said goodbye, inviting her to visit us the next day.

It was dark when we got back, the village looked deserted

except for some dogs barking. We kept stumbling into haystacks or piles of manure, finding our quarters after what seemed like an endless search. Everyone was worried about us. Apparently the village chief found out that we were away and threatened punishing us for going without his permission. Viera came the next day, inviting me to have dinner and going fishing together. The chief gave me permission to go but warned me that this was the last day of easy life. "There is a meeting tonight and I will tell you about the work."

Somehow the language barrier was no longer a problem. We understood one another much better, recognizing words similar in both languages, occasionally checking each other's meaning, getting the drift like a tune or a sound familiar to the Slav diction.

I was telling Viera about Poland and about these abnormal to us Russian restriction. Why is it forbidden to walk to another village? Why are we brought here to farm labor we have no idea about and no wish to learn it either? What is the meaning of these forced resettlements of foreigners to such God-forsaken places?

She listened politely, never answering any of my questions. I am sure she did not believe what I was saying about Poland: that cattle lived better than what we were ^{be}given to live in here; that nobody was forced to live where they didn't want to; bread and food were aplenty; no forced labor for the sick, the old or the schoolchildren. It seemed pointless to go on, so I started asking Viera about her life instead.

"I have seven years of elementary school. Those who want to go to the university must complete ten years of schooling. But I decided to switch to the medical school which lasts two years and is free of charge, except for a signed pledge to work for two years anywhere one is sent. This is my seventh month here." For me, this was an interesting insight into the educational system of Soviet medical profession: as incredible as it sounded, Viera believed herself to be a full-fledged doctor.

"Do you have any plans for later?"

"Sure I do. My family is still in the Moscow district. I can't wait to get back there, away from these yellow apes." She hated the Kazaks.

"Kazakstan looks like an awful place to me too - I hate being here."

Viera reacted, now on a more familiar to her ground. "Better don't talk that way, you don't know how lucky you are to be here instead of being sent to the Hungry Steppe. It's a horrible place, hundreds of kilometers of nothing but sand and rocks, not a living soul around because you can't eat rock." She told me what she heard from people who went there and I shivered listening to the stories of human and animal skeletons they saw.

We waded Irtysz at one point to the other side, apparently a better one for fishing. Viera settled down with the rod, dangling a worm from the hook and I started circling the fields, overgrown on this side of the river with tall grass and low bushes. Looking for anything edible, maybe berries or mushrooms, was a hopeless thing to do at this early spring season. Walking

a bit further there were ducks suddenly taking off from the ground, flying away from the nests they sat on. Feeling like a thief, I emptied four nests of their spotted eggs into the lap of my skirt, walking carefully with the treasure inside the improvised basket between two ends of the hem. Viera did not catch any fish, we parted in opposite directions because it was getting late.

In the middle of the village was the village square, surrounded by huts on three sides and facing the river. In the centre of this empty space, raised on a slight elevation, stood a monument to the modern civilization, a latrine constructed out of transparent wiring for the walls. This seemed like a pure symbol of scientific enlightenment, not desecrated by any user. Living in the vastness of the steppes, the Kazaks saw no reason for such ridiculous foreign customs. Earlier in the day they spied on one of our men trying to look for privacy, carrying a few sheets of a newspaper. This was so funny to them that they staged a pantomime in front of the latrine on this very subject; to them, we were the ridiculous savages.

Yet the same Kazaks were overwhelmed by our presence, particularly the things we had. Touching the clothes we wore to feel the fabric, eyeing the scruffy-looking footwear, wanting to see the contents of our bundles and suitcases. The bedding, with the soiled pillowcases and bedsheets after the journey seemed to fascinate them by the embroidery and ruffles trimmed with lace. The men's suits, slacks, shirts and underwear many women brought for a promised reunion with husbands and sons, became subject of passionate offers to barter for meat, eggs, cheese, butter, bread, sugar and lard. Socks were a special hit in the country where the foot-clout was the best substitute

for their shortage in the civilian and military life. Our own luggage had nothing like that, but a young Russian woman wanted to buy things for herself, like a blouse, a nightgown and some handkerchiefs we gladly parted with for some lard.

It was time to go to the meeting. A few groups stood around, waiting for the chief. There were no friendly faces among the Kazaks, shouting at us that we are not welcome here because they know we came here to take their jobs away and eat their food. Miserable and feeling utterly lost, looking for some sympathy in our tragedy, we realized that anyone of us, no matter how miserably looking and shabbily dressed, looked better than this group of Kazaks and a few Russians living in Djolkoduk. The children were in rags, barefooted, unwashed, scratching their heads and scrawny bodies. The village had no school, no church, no mosque for the Muslim Kazaks. But that we knew already: religion was declared by the communism to be the opium of the poor and any kind of a religious display was strictly forbidden. I saw later on how the Kazaks circumvented this prohibition: at night, practically each Kazak hut showed silhouettes of men kneeling on the flat roof, bowing and with arms outstretched toward the sky. Someone said once that half of these people were dying of tuberculosis.

The village chief was a Kazak, striking with his tall figure among his short people. It was hard to follow his non-Russian accent in a very long, tedious speech. When it finally came down from the ideological convolutions to the specific instructions, we were told to volunteer fifteen men and ten women to leave the next morning for another farm some eighteen kilometers away. Our job was to prepare the housing for pastures and calves

during the grazing summer season. There is housing and a mess hall with plenty of food for all of us. The job will not take more than five to seven days, so we better tell him now who are the volunteers. He points with his finger at my Mother: "This young woman with her two daughters have to go tomorrow too."

We did not protest; hardly delighted with the present, the offer sounded like an interesting change. Being without any means, it was obvious we had to work to make a living.

It was a warm, sunny day with a blue sky above us for our ride in eight ladder wagons pulled by two oxen each. A nice way to relax, we were given a pound of bread and a bottle of airan, a typical Kazak delicacy of skim milk, boiled and fermented to the consistency of thin yoghurt. It was very sour and tasted of burnt milk, so we chose the Irtysz water instead.

The group had mostly young people. With us travelled a family of two brothers Tadzio and Bronek, both in their twenties, with their sister Danusia who was the same age as Basia. They were from Tarnopol, deported after their parents were both arrested; their father was a policeman. These young people were a lively group, joking and singing. Bronek had a good singing voice and he played a guitar brought from home. Tadzio was an authentic vagabond who ran away from home at the age of seventeen, travelled all the way to Warsaw as stowaway on the train, surviving an entire year by his own wits. This was a fascinating stuff to all of us, we begged him to tell us how he did all that. "One day I will tell you about it all, when there is time and

better opportunity..." Here was something to look forward to in the evenings without a lamp or a book - to listen to long stories, starting with what sounded like the story of a prodigal son.

The trip seemed to go on forever, in a slow procession across a flat land without a trace of road to follow. The Kazak drivers must have followed the sun for directions, the oxen pulling the wagons loaded with boards, lumber, wicker and hay with people sitting on top of all this building material; the empty buckets hung outside, moving rhythmically with the squeaking wheels. To break the hours of monotony we would jump off the wagon to walk beside it, then climb back to doze off under the heat of the sun. The whole world around us was empty of any other trace of life, the touch of sparse fresh greenery and last year's grass stretching out all the way to the horizon.

Not to despair I remembered what Viera said about the "Golodnyi Step", a worse, emptier, stony instead of greening, deathly quiet place. I started to feel a cold of death but, summoning all my strength to look at the sky I began to pray, begging not to die until I could be buried on a Polish cemetery.

The sun was already setting when the driver pointed ahead to a ruined hut: "That's where we are going." A little later more similar ruins, each some one hundred and fifty metres away from the other. We were incredulous.

"What are we supposed to do here?" someone asked.

"Work." - the driver spoke briefly but laughed a lot.

So they lied to us again.

Not a single house had a roof or a whole wall. The sunset followed by a rapid darkness and we all decided to spend the night on the wagons.

Everybody woke up at the crack of dawn, to see the ground covered by thick white frost. Close by was a large lake with white mud which turned out to be the evaporated salt. This lake water was too salty, so a few men started digging the ground for water. The women began to offload the bulding materials from the wagons.

The ruins around us were the remnants of mud brickwalls, the interior levelled to the shape of the ruins with blown-in dust, overgrown with weeds. Our job was to restore these ruins to decent accomodations for the newborn calves and their caretaker families. Our manpower consisted of one teacher, one accountant, one employee of the sugar factory, one butcher and two young men - none of them with any experience in manual labor. The women were just as experienced and we were supposed to resurrect this graveyard of a habitat during the next seven days.

By noontime there was water in the well, yellow with the mud falling in lumps from the walls into its shallow bottom. The water source was weak, giving less than a bucketful every few hours. We ate the remnants of yesterday's bread, drank water and refused to think about tomorrow. It was decided to work as fast as possible in order to to stay in this God-forsaken place a moment longer than absolutely necessary: we began to miss Djolkoduk with its roofs over our crowded quarters.

The day was gray, windy and cold but we did not feel it, working clumsily with heavy shovels to dig the hard, solid,

overgrown by weeds soil, to prepare it for our sleeping space. Arms would go numb after a while, I was becoming tired very quickly. By the end of the day we could put our bedding on a cleared ground, but sleep would not come. Looking up into the dark sky, we wondered what will be next because it looked as if we were brought here to be left to die far away from any human settlement. If not, what were we supposed to live on? Will anybody come to bring us food and fuel to cook with, because there wasn't a twig round, no cooking pots either, for that matter. But fuel could be had, somebody said. The field had some dried up cow dung which burns very well, so all it takes is to gather it. For the pot, if it comes to the worst, we can use one of the buckets.

It was still dark when everybody jumped up to some screaming Kazaks right above us: "Vstavai, podnimaisa, rabochyi narod!" *, starting a routine, repeated every morning to get everybody up. Early in the afternoon our Kazak chief arrived from Djolkoduk on a horse-drawn buggy, bringing us bread and a large iron pot, flat and round at the bottom.

"Now you must select a woman to do the cooking and start the mess hall I told you about." The man looked very proud of himself. We asked for meat and potatoes.

"That is not easy, there are no potatoes on our farm and you know the difficulties with meat. The sowhoz director will come tomorrow with the chief veterinarian and you should talk to them - maybe they can do something I have no power to do myself."

Indeed, the director did arrive the next day. Tall, heavy and even had some Ukrainian exuded arrogance of a high official,

*Get up, raise, you working people!

ignoring us completely at first, to talk with the Kazaks in their own language for a long time. Finally he turned to us, addressing us in Ukrainian, a language much like Polish. Looking down at us, he used the tone of a master confronting his slaves.

"You know well that you came here not for vacations but to work. In the Soviet Soyuz everybody works, so you must too. If there is anything you need, let me know and I will try to get it for you."

We all started telling him about our problems and the hard work. That we were deceived, sent here for one week when dozens of qualified masons couldn't do it in three weeks. We didn't have enough water or food, no roof to sleep under, no fuel, nothing. Besides, said I, we had absolutely no idea how to do this work.

"What do you mean you don't know this work - it's impossible"-he sounded quite surprised.

"I never learned about construction, have no idea how to milk a cow, no clue about any farm work."

"Then what did you do in Poland?"

"I went to school and my father worked to support me."

"This is possible in a capitalist country only, because here every single man and woman work in whatever the State demands of them. You too must get used to it, you must work for the state and you have no right to refuse working or saying that you don't know how to do something. You won't get away with freeloading here. As for the potatoes and meat, I will send for it and you should get it tonight."

The chief veterinarian seemed like a much nicer person. He stood next to the director, observing our group and particularly the women. He was the first Kazak showing some human warmth and a smile, obviously capable of kindness and understanding in our predicament!

The visitors wanted to see us working. That morning the second hut was cleared of sand and weeds: our job was to plaster the walls men repaired with "samany", bricks of dirt put together into a large rectangular shape. Each of us had a bucketfull of wet plaster made of sand and salt lake water, mixed by a pair of oxen wading for hours in this slush, with a yoke on each skinny back, driven around by a whipping Kazak. Dipping both hands in the bucket, we threw the plaster on the bare wall, smoothing it with palms and fingers.

The director went with the men, leaving the veterinarian who didn't like our work: we should spread a thicker layer of plaster because the brick joints were showing through, the plastering was not even, with too many fingermarks.

"We really don't know how to do it better, plastering with hands only is very hard. Maybe you could send us some trowels? I remember that in Poland ..."

"Forget Poland. Here you must work with your hands and that's that."

"Maybe you can show us yourself how we can do better? You are not afraid to get your hands dirty, are you?" I meant every bit of sarcasm I could muster by now.

Wiesia was there with me and now she run outside to fill another bucket for the man. The moment she left he caught me from behind, trying to turn my head to him. He was too strong to get away, my hands messed up his dark coat and I started

yelling for Wiesia on top of my lungs. He let go immediately, trying to brush the stains off his sleeves. My voice did not carry as far as Wiesia went, but the man must have been afraid, so I won and run out of the hut. When I saw him going out later, I returned inside where Wiesia wished I didn't miss the fun: the man carefully unbuttoning the shirtsleeves, delicately dipping his fingers in the bucket, explaining the method which looked like a mess, much worse than ours, then quickly leaving saying that he must be going now.

I was angry at myself for not giving the animal at least a slap in the face, if not a good kick where it hurt most. What a goose to yell and run, when I had such an occasion to vent all my fury at violating my life. All I could do now was to threaten him with all of my mental power, hoping to catch him one day face to face and tell him what he deserved to hear. So much for the stupid ideas about the guy's human warmth and friendliness!

Mother became the camp cook. Her job was to boil the water in the flat, open pot, over a hole dug out in the open field, extended to fit her feet in it, next to the smouldering cowdung fuel, called kiziak. The night before we collected enough kiziak to start the fire, but it was always too damp from the night frost to burn, even with handfuls of dried grass. Mother kept on blowing into the pile which would then start smoking, an acrid cloud getting her to cough and squeeze tears out of her eyes. It took more than an hour to keep watch over a feeble fire, keeping her feet a little warmer but with her back freezing in the cold wind.

The mornings were so cold that nobody had the courage to

take off the sweater slept in or to wash in the icy water. We waited for the sunrise and boiled water to drink, to warm us up. A mug of hot water was a wonder of mysterious flavors, concocted of the cast iron pot, the sand and weeds blown in, always with taste of smoke. With each sip the energy would slowly spread, helped by a slice of dry bread. Basia and I would start gathering kiziak for the next cooking, but with each day we had to make wider circles to find it in these steppes, abandoned for years by people and the grazing cattle.

Ahmed was an older man, working closely with the group of our men and women. He told us that we are now rebuilding a Kazak village, destroyed almost twenty years ago.

"There used to be many many cows, horses and sheep. Every Kazak was a rich man, travelling all the time with his herds. When the cattle ate all the grass in one place, Kazak moved to another place and another, as he wanted. All Kazaks lived that way. But then they had to fight against the Red Army which wanted to take over. Every single settlement and each Kazak fought, including this village. But finally they had to surrender and everybody was murdered. The villages were razed to the ground, just these few ruins here is what's left. Now Kazaks are going to come here again, but this time not with their own cattle."

"So now you are not as well off as before, aren't you?" somebody asked. Ahmed said nothing, pretending he did not hear the question.

Our presence here took on a new meaning, like finding ourselves on a battlefield, inhabited by ghosts of men fighting an impossible force and dying right here, without the rest of the world knowing anything about it. The clearing of mounds of

earth inside the huts became more careful, expecting to find some memorabilia of the past, afraid to break maybe a human skeleton with the shovel. Nothing was ever found, except for a large bundle of banknotes with the portrait of Catherine the Great and some other papers, all badly damaged. Tadzio who found them inside a ruined stove, took them for a souvenir.

The workday ended with dusk when we would gather around the cooking pot in the field, munching again on a piece of bread and sipping kipiatak. At noon the soup was served, with a consistency depending on what was available: sometimes a few potatoes, on other days the water thickened with a few handfuls of flour. The piece of meat sent by the director was sufficient for one meal, cut up into small pieces and boiled for soup. Relaxing around until the cooking fire would turn into ash, we talked and sung for a while, then to sleep with Mother and Basia all under one cover to keep warm. But sometimes it seemed that getting away from the ever-present crowd was the only way to stay sane. I would walk into the darkness of the empty steppe, resting on the ground with eyes glued to the sky, thinking or not, praying wordlessly or wondering what will become of us all. The insignificance of a small human being in this incredibly vast world seemed here more obvious than ever. Somehow it was easier to return to the lair afterwards.

There was nothing to read, so I pestered Tadzio to tell us his story, like he promised. Remembering reading about the boys who ran away from home to go to America or to the Foreign Legion, it was strange to sit here close to a real-life adventurer.

"I was always an independent character and both parents

who worked had a lot of trouble with me." Tadzio went on. "One day the older boys started telling me to run away with them; they were trying to go abroad, maybe as far as America, of course as stowaways. (Just like in a book, how exciting!). I finally said yes, asking mother for money to pay for something at school and taking this money for the road. The five of us kept being chased around by the train conductors, but that was easier than riding under the carriage. One boy was caught, others had to change trains to get away from being chased and by the time the train got to Gdynia, I was all alone. Scared to go to America by myself and ashamed to go back home, the only thing was to go to Warsaw. But once there, I had no idea what to do without any money and nobody to turn to. I stayed at the station's waiting room, waiting I don't know for what. I was hungry and tried to become a porter, but nobody would take me. After three days a man came to me saying he has been watching me for the last two days and asked if I needed help. He was well dressed and looked like a decent person, so I was happy to accept his invitation to eat dinner with him at the station. I invented some silly stories to explain my situation, he listened and after dinner gave me ten zlotys, asking to come and see him when I settle down.

"With this money to last me a few days I wandered around Warsaw looking for work, but it was very difficult. I met many different people, some also trying to find a job. We stuck together for a while, then with another group sleeping under the Kierbedz bridge, until the police would chase us out in the morning. A few times I managed to get a small job,

finally becoming a messenger in a radio store. There were days I managed to earn five zlotys, but it was rare; normally I had no money to live on. Sometimes I would go to a night shelter where a bed cost ten groszys. With food, it depended. If I had one zloty, this would let me splurge on one litre of milk and a bag of crumbs from a bakery."

"What crumbs?"- any subject related to food was important.

"It's a super stuff. In each bakery you could buy for a few groszys a bagfull of broken cakes, pastries and cookies which were unfit for sale. In one bakery there was a charming salesgirl Miss Frania. If I smiled especially nicely, she would throw into the bag an extra nice pastry or a doughnut. Ah, the taste of milk and cakes!"

" It was worse without money for food, when hunger made you steal. You know, in Warsaw it was still dark when bread would be delivered to the stores and milkmen delivered the milk bottles. When the driver went inside, this was the time to run to the open cart, grab a loaf of bread or a bottle of milk and run. If the driver caught you at stealing, the police would let you go, because only a hungry person would steal bread. But they did punish for stealing the milk."

This was hard to believe - how can you steal and not be punished for it? But Tadzio swore he wasn't lying or fantacising - he knew all about it. When I remembered Jean Valjean condemned to hard labor for stealing bread and agonizing over the Dumas' story of so much misery, my heart filled with love and pride for such wise legislators.

"I lived that way for a full year. My father finally traced me and convinced me about returning home. But I would not go

to school again and went to work instead. And that's the end of my adventure."

Tadzio's story seemed so interesting, I asked whether he wrote about it. No, he didn't, so I promised him that one day I will do it.

With each day it was harder to cope. Every morning the steppe was all white, covered with frost. The barrel, used to carry water from the salt lake to mix clay, had a thick layer of ice, the icicles hanging around it. Twice the snow, mixed with rain, chased everybody indoors. After a few days of smearing the walls with my palms, the icy cold salt water and the roughness of clay turned my hands into red, gray and green fat cushions, with bleeding cracks under each nail. The swelling crept upwards into the arms, doubling the size of my wrists. Any side twist of the hands cracked the skin, making blood run in streaks all the way to the armpits. I slept with both hands held upwards under the cover, because any other position was too painful. There was no ointment, no bandages, no soap to clean the wounds. Asking to be relieved from my job made the Kazaks laugh like crazy; they slapped me on my back and pointed the way to my bucket of mud.

On May fifteenth the boys wanted to celebrate my nameday somehow. They caught a seagull which was roasted for the occasion. The hunger notwithstanding, I simply could not think of putting a bite of it in my mouth, even before the bird's stomach was sliced through to reveal a mouse inside it. Ashamed to feel ungrateful, I run away before getting sea-gull sick.

After three weeks the work was finished. Each former ruin became a hut with a roof, an opening for the door and another one

for a window, both left open. Nobody believed, however, that these buildings have a chance of standing up for any length of time, or even a good stormy few hours. The mud bricks were barely set on the outside and often falling apart in hands when they were used for the walls. There was no joining with any kind of cement or a layer of wet mud between the bricks, just one piled on top of another all the way up; they were held together only with the layer of plastering we gave to the hut's interior. After this experience, how can I even think to list masonry as one of my professions?

After these few weeks it felt like going home back to Djolkoduk. Compared to the sorry sight we all were, the people in the village seemed to have settled down somehow and look clean. The first day back was spent entirely on bathing in the river and laundry; we then demanded two more free days, claiming that for the last three weeks we worked without a single day off. At that time the Soviet week was called "shestnidniovka" composed of five days' work and one day of rest, with total disregard for the Sundays or any other days of a normal week. Our request was denied, we had no rights to ask for anything and one day later we were starting on another job.

Our overcrowded isba was the same, but with the Kazak families moving out to the place we just rebuilt, some new accommodation became available for us. When our turn came, we were allowed to move to the other end of the village, into a room with two other families only. True, it was quite far from Irtysz, making it harder to carry water, but otherwise it was much better. The two small pictures in our luggage were the first thing to come out and hang over our floor space.

In the other corner, occupied by Halina hung a small shelf

with some dried field flowers tucked into a broken bottle, next to the image of Saint Mary. Halina's four-years old boy lay in an iron bed. I have never seen such a beautiful child before, who was bedridden, quiet and never crying, looking at everybody with these big brown eyes, seldom speaking and then mainly to his mother. The Kazaks seemed to enjoy looking at the little boy but what I really suspected they couldn't get enough of was the sumptuous embroidery and lace on his bed linen, a silk quilt and his night dresses, all speaking of a royal luxury they never saw before. Halina slept on the floor next to her son , whose legs were paralyzed. She was a professor of Polish, captured as wife of an army officer who was captured by the soviets and deported to Kozielsk. We all developed a special protective attitude towards Halina, because she had tuberculosis and one of her lungs was already removed, looking so fragile, almost transparent.

The other family was Mme Malachowska with her daughter Janka. These two enjoyed a very special kind of mutual love, something I may have been jealous of if I saw any point in nurturing a feeling of envy for any reason. The mother must have been in her late sixties, short and stout, with beautiful long white hair, tied up in the back in a conservative knot.

We all managed to keep our spirits up, joking and telling long stories in the evenings. Only once, after the first funeral in our group, Mme Malachowska broke down, crying that she too will not be buried in Poland.

The village architecture was quite different from what I ever saw before. Built of the local soil, the huts blended in color with the earth around them. They were low and flat-roofed.

A small window was set inside a thick wall, with the glass panels installed without any way to open them. The outside walls were dotted with dark pancakes of fresh cowdung, picked by women to dry this way for cooking fuel. If a Kazak housewife wanted her floor renewed, she would mix some of the fresh dung with trashed straw and some clay, to spread it all over the old coat of the same kind. It did seem pretty disgusting and some women couldn't resist telling the proud Kazak housewife how the floors looked in their homes. They would point to the shiny wood surface of a mandolin hung up on the whitewashed wall, saying that the parquet floors looked just the same way, only to be shouted at for being such incredible liars and kicked out from the indignant woman's home.

The hut had no entrance door visible from outside. The entrance was through a space in the tall mud fence into the interior yard, most of which was covered with a thatched roof, large enough to provide space for the family and any domestic animals they happened to own: an always mangy mongrel, a very unfriendly cat, sometimes a cow and seldom a horse. One or two doors led into the living quarters, furnished sparsely with simple frame beds, a chest holding their clothing, seldom any chairs. In the middle of the room a low, round table served for eating, drinking tea and socializing, with people sitting cross-legged on a straw mat.

The Kazak women wore their own style of dress, with a high bodice, long sleeves and long, loose skirts. The clothing was poor, worn at the seams and patched a lot all over. They walked barefooted or in primitive sandals. They wore no underwear.

The children's clothing was a raggedy version of the adult garments, some clearly hand-me-downs from the adults. Even the infants wore tight-fitting bodices and long sleeves, sometimes made out of some woven, tapestry-like fabric. The infant's low, wooden cradle had an opening carved like a small toilet seat and for the same purpose, allowing the waste to go through to the floor. The diaper was not necessary this way and I don't think it was even heard of. The baby's dress was buttoned from the waist up only, the skirt did not close in the back and this is how it was kept relatively clean. Women spent their time between housework and breastfeeding the brood. The grandmothers shared the household duties somewhat beyond a routine concept: I saw a four-year-old child running up to his grandma who resignedly opened her bodice to suckle the tired and hungry boy to sleep. As their Muslim tradition demanded, women did not work outside home, even on the farm the way the Russian or Ukrainian women did.

On the second day after our return to Djolkoduk we were called to another meeting, again to be lectured on the obligation to obey The Party, the great leader Stalin and the great words of the socialist trinity Marx, Engels and Lenin. After this ode we received an introduction to the communist economic system of agriculture, based on the sovkhos and the kolkhoz organization.

Djolkoduk is part of the sovkhos, which means that all the land, cattle, pigs and the produce belong to the state. People

are not allowed to own anything and must work for a salary. The village next door, where the Russian "doctor" lives, is a kolkhoz. There the land belongs to the people as a common property who cultivate it all together. The harvest is partly given to the state and the rest is divided among the farmers to live on and to sell to the sovkhos and city population; the money for the produce can be used to buy all other necessities of life.

As simple and logical as it sounded, the system did not work well in practice. The State imposed its quota on the produce from the farmers a year before the harvest was due, regardless of the actual yield. Such things like drought, floods or any other reasons for a poor harvest did not have the least effect on adjusting the state quota, leaving a farmer with too little to live on, let alone anything to sell. On the other side of the coin were the state farms, managed by people who were paid money for appearing at the job, without necessarily giving their heart and soul to this noble task of communion with the earth.

Djolkoduk had a fairly large agricultural industry in dairy and meat. Some five hundred cows gave milk to process it into cream and butter, a big pig farm was run for pork produce, and all these goodies were strictly for export only. In a guided tour through the milk plant with several separators, we are allowed to drink some skim milk; with swarms of flies buzzing around and biting, a sour and pungent smell everywhere, there was little enthusiasm to stay too long and drink more than a pint of this gray-looking fluid.

The Kazak nomads moved away with all the cattle, leaving the huge barns empty. All of us, with the exception of small children and some old people, were put to cleaning the interior; there were only a few pitchforks to go around, so the rest had to work without.

The floors of the barn were two or three feet deep in manure, so thickly glued together with straw that it felt like thick rubber underfoot. Here and there protruded the tops of feeding troughs running all along the inside walls, the rest covered completely by the same filth. The hardest was to pierce the pitchfork through the top layer, women did not have that kind of strength in them and the work went very slowly. The loose piles were put on wheelbarrows, taken to the yard right outside, where a mountain started to grow. One day a herd of squealing pigs was let outside from their barn to be castrated. They run around and wallowed in the dunghill until caught by men, emasculated and returned back to their stys. There was a lot of laughing and chattering among the Kazaks during this job for which they not only were paid but could also keep the testicles, a cherished delicacy, evidently excluded from the export quota.

The growing dunghill served as a site for another meeting to lecture us on the socialist world of the working class. Under the merciless sun, making us sweat in rivulets streaking our faces, impossible to wipe with hands full of cow dung and urine, we are given a long story about the hardship of winter in this Siberian corner of the world, and how we must prepare for it. We owe thanks to the generosity of the village communist leaders who are now allowing us to prepare our winter stock of fuel out of this golden source, to see us through until the

next season, cozy and warm inside the quarters they are planning for us. Long live Stalin and now let us salute the memory of Marx, Engels and Lenin!

The reaction was quiet, like shrugging one's shoulders to a hopelessly stupid argument. I don't think anybody seriously considered that we shall stay in Djolkoduk as long as that. The matter was seldom discussed among us, preferring to believe that we shall be rescued from this hell any day now. The best thing was to wait patiently for the world's reaction to the letters written to our families and friends in Poland: the truth about our conditions would move stones, let alone Churchill, to rescue us all from certain death, starvation and banishment to this savage place. So, in the meantime, we might as well obey the orders.

The barn cleaning group was now reduced to finish the little that was left, assigning the rest of us to the outdoor brigade. The wheelbarrows were slowly reducing the dung hill to spread the ground evenly with a thick layer, pouring hundreds of buckets of water over it and, with an oxen tied to the treadmill, after a few hours the mixture reached the right consistency to be used for the manufacturing stage.

Wheeling a cartload of the raw material to one of the strategically located group of people was assigned to men or women whose job remained to do only that for the duration of this work. Each member of the group had a wooden frame to make kiziak bricks, two at a time. Each brick approximately twelve by sixteen inches large and some six inches thick was well patted into the frame with both hands, carried to its drying spot on the ground to dry there for several days. At first the fresh kiziak patties kept falling out of their bottomless

frames through one side or another during the walk to their drying place; they had to be picked up and done again under the screaming insults of the supervisor, until one became pretty skilfull at mastering the job, with thousands and thousands lining the surrounding fields, like giant dominoes. Each individual was assigned a daily norm of four hundred and fifty kiziaks. Mother managed to exceed the quota by more than anyone else, earning for herself an official title of the kiziak queen.

In the beginning I was picked to carry water for mixing the dung, as an assistant to Manzoor in charge of the barrel with a capacity of five hundred buckets, as I once counted. The barrel was installed on a four-wheel cart, pulled by two oxen. We rode to an easy spot of the Irtysz enbankment where the animals could stand with the bellies touching the water on a solid piece of the river's bottom. Manzoor's job was to lift the lid of the barrel and hand the bucket to me, sitting on the cart and supervising my work. I had to stand waist-deep in the river to fill the barrel to the top, return to the working spot and empty the barrel - fortunately the barrel had a hole to unplug for this purpose - to repeat the routine until nighttime. This was a clean job and, in the scorching summer heat one would not believe possible for Siberia, standing deep in the cool river was refreshing.

Rather than keep on ruining my only skirt and stay for hours in wet underwear, I started wearing to work my bathing suit underneath and when I had to wade into the water, I would take my skirt and blouse off until the job was done. Manzoor was quite shocked at this immodest behavior, begun to sermon me about my immorality and call me an uncultured person. Once

another Kazak rode by with his oxcart, watched me filling the barrel and only later I asked what they were talking and laughing about. Manzoor said that the man asked whether I was his wife and why was I so indecently exposed in public?

Manzoor was very much into culture. Riding to Irtysz and back gave him a lot of time to teach me about culture. I thought I was a satisfactory worker because he never lifted one bucket of water himself, not that he ever said an encouraging word on the subject. Our first encounter must have been a very strange thing to him, in the beginning he was uneasy sitting next to a young woman who acted as if it were a normal thing. Only after a few days he became talkative. To him culture was everything, including civilization, education, ethics, morality and religion. As he was saying, the uppermost symbol of culture is man's ability to read and to write in moments free from work, holding a newspaper in a public place, for others to see and listen to comments on what "stands in the newspaper." "In our village, -he explained, the culture belongs to such people as the director, the manager and the accountant." As for the rest of the Soviet Union, everybody knows very well how very cultured it is, but the oriental culture is much, much higher than the western one, because no decent oriental man would allow his women to parade half-naked in public.

Nobody could even hold a candle to the misery showing in the animals in Djolkoduk.

All the village dogs adopted the Polish group from the day we arrived. They followed us everywhere and guarded the huts we stayed in, without ever giving them anything to eat under our own famished circumstances: they were simply reacting

to a kind look, a pat or a few words. All these dogs looked alike, smaller than a German shepherd, with short black hair and a few brown and white patches, covered in dust, thin, never washed, eyes filled with puss and flies feeding in swarms on the wounds from beating and fights. One dog only never left his master, following him like a shadow, running miles alongside the ladder cart on the way to our construction job earlier. One late evening we heard a horrid yelp of a dog, coming from the Kazak group sitting around a fire, then a choir of men laughing like crazy. The crying dog was running in our direction towards the steppe. When he came close, we recognized the faithful dog, his tail cut off and bleeding. Manzoor was the dog's master who decided to entertain the crowd, using the large pocket knife on the animal laying next to him. Next day the dog was back at Manzoor's heel, barring his teeth at anyone coming too close to his master.

The barn animals were thin, filthy from their own excreta, the skin hanging down from the protruding spine and sharply outlined ribs, an image of the seven biblical lean cows. The oxen were much worse. Used as traction animals, not a single one had its skin intact because of beating. The Kazaks used sticks or whips, exercising their arms accross the backs of each beast almost non-stop. The wounds seemed to excite the men more, they could never heal from such beatings. Flies and mosquitoes buzzed and fed on the oozing blood and festering puss... I remembered a story about a horse which could not pull the heavy wagon uphill, too thin and worn out, yet his driver went on whipping it mercilessly. Another man who stood

by saw it all, run up to the driver, tore the whip out of his hands and began to whip the driver. Too scared to act like that, I felt like a coward, ashamed of myself.

The idea of working with bare hands, and walk barefooted to save the shoes, with the cow and pig excreta seemed pretty disgusting, making me appreciate my water assignment instead. But after ten days the supervisors decided that my job was too easy, gave it to someone else and I was sent to join a kiziak brigade. Closing the eyes when time came for the first dip upto the elbows, the rest became routine, like with all the other companions.

Gradually, the dried kiziak blocks were stacked into a pile, twice as tall as the huts, in the middle of the village between two houses. Instead of posting a guard to watch over it, we were warned than anyone coming too close to the kiziak mountain, will be shot without any questions asked. Thus closed another chapter on the communist theory of the proletariat rule.

Next came the haymaking. The other side of Irtysz was like an island with a much richer growth of tall grass, shrubs, trees and even a pine forest, the same place I explored for duck eggs along the river bank. Seventy eight oxen were led across the river to pull the harvesting machinery; the working brigade consisted of some thirty men and about twenty women. The men were mostly Kazak, with a few Russians and Ukrainians. The women were Polish, Russian and Ukrainian; the Kazak women did not belong to the brigade of workers, they came later to join their husbands in the camp.

Mother and Basia remained in Djolkoduk where I could return the first few nights. Then our family became separated when Basia was sent with another group to weed the wheatfields in Barakbai. We managed to give her provisions of twenty eggs, bread and a piece of cheese, with all the instructions how she should take care of herself, alone for the first time in her life. Mother had to stay with the kiziak group to finish stacking it, then assigned to another group of women to start clearing fields in another, distant place of the sowkhoz, she also left.

In something like two months of this work the camp moved three times. My job was to stay at the camp as kitchen helper, sharpener of knives, scythes and all other cutting instruments, also the pastor for all our bullocks.

It was easy to learn how to pedal the grinding stone, keeping it moist with water at the bottom of its cradle. There was a lot of sharpening to be done each day and since this was a clean, light kind of work, surrounded by an aroma of cut grass and a mongrel at my feet snapping at the flies, it all felt

quite good. During an occasional break the Kazak women would smile in a friendly way, speak to me in their tongue; if there were no men around, some would take off their dresses and swim nude or bathe in the pond next to the camp.

Some meagre food supplies were provided for the camp canteen, prepared by the woman in charge, working out in the open over a large iron pot. The common eating place was under a roof made of fresh branches and twigs and overlaid with fresh hay, the entire structure supported by a few beams. A counter and two low, round tables completed the interior. Each worker had own cups, plates and the cutlery for whatever food was rationed out. Most of the time we ate soup or a slightly thicker version of the same, called stew, with barley or potatoes, cabbage and pickled green or red tomatoes, also airan and some bread.

What seemed to me and other Polish women to be a pretty decent way of feeding, was not good enough for the men who were grumbling a lot. A few days after settling down in the first camp the local head of the party came with an official visit. Ready to start his lecture, he was confronted by the group of hungry men demanding better food, especially some meat. The argument was won, the victory was crowned by slaughtering a cow in our cattle herd. Some Russian women watched the process, returning upset saying that they slaughtered a pregnant animal. That night, each worker tasted some boiled beef with its fat, bone and marrow, a treat remembered for a long time.

A hole was dug out in the ground to conserve the rest of fresh meat, covered with the hide and a layer of dirt, supposed to protect the meat from spoiling during the summer heat. Next

day, another ration of meat, barley and cabbage, all swimming in fat soup caused some remarks about the gamey odor, offensive to some overly discriminate ladies. With all the game hunting ~~father~~ used to do - deer, hare, rabbits, pheasant, partridge or wild duck - the taste wasn't all that offensive, rather similar to the accepted aroma of viands after hanging for some time in the open air: I asked for a second helping.

On the third day the cooked chunks of meat were served separately from the broth. The meat was boiled together with white maggots around each bone. Hardly anyone touched this dish, but I was a very hungry, growing girl ... My last taste of this slaughtered animal was on the fourth day, when a young Kazak couple with their first baby, invited me to their tent. They offered me a soup plate full of dark broth, with a large piece of intestine, half filled with something looking too suspicious to stand a close inspection. I closed my eyes, thinking that it was very boiled and that it would be rude to refuse the dish.

The sleeping tents had to be constructed at each site out of fresh tree branches, tied together at the top and covered with a thick layer of fresh hay, entered through an opening just big enough to crawl through. It looked like a green igloo, the size of it depending on the number of people to sleep in it, with the bedding rolled out on the ground. My first tent was built with friendly help around and it seemed so easy that the last one I decided ambitiously to erect by myself. By then Basia was with me, helping to carry the the branches and hay to the chosen spot. First we measured the ground with our bodies stretched next to each other, then begun to push into the ground one stick after another, tying the tops together into arches. Next came

layer upon layer of freshly cut hay, all the way to the top where an extra thickness was needed to make the roof pretty solid. Feeling like a part of an adventure in which somehow Robinson Crusoe strayed into an Alaskan igloo, we crawled inside after first pushing in the bedding. The fresh twig arches sunk so low that sitting up was out of question. The other problem was the length: even with our heads propped against the back wall, our feet were sticking outside. During one midday break, used for sleep in the hottest time of the day, I woke up with a sharp stab in my left toe and jumping up, saw a field mouse running away. No sooner did I lay back to close my eyes, the other toe was bitten exactly the same way, by what looked like the same mouse. The deep, painful wounds stayed with me for many weeks, untreated for lack of any medication, bandage or shoes. Then, in the deep sleep of the tired youths, we woke up covered by rain water around, the pillows and thick quilt soaking through. The very hot sun dried the bedding for the next night, but Basia became ill for a few days.

There were more chances to fantasize on the literary adventures of James Fennimore Cooper or Jack London in my cowgirl job, according to the Kazak version: this meant doing the job without a horse.

When the men returned to the camp for the noonday meal and rest, they released the bullocks to graze out in the open. I was supposed to collect all the animals back together for the second part of the day's work. How was I supposed to do that was my business, as long as all the seventy eight beasts, scattered five here, three there and the rest somewhere else altogether, were all lined up for the job in the next

fifteen minutes. Starting with the nearest three I slapped the back of one with its head pointed toward the campsite, making the animal move forward and be followed by the other two. When they were on their way, I walked fifty feet to another eight bullocks, but in the meantime the first three ones wandered off to the right. It was useless to lose one's temper and take it out on the dumbos, I just kept on shouting at them the Kazak sounds and slapping this or that one, totally ignored. Finally I heard a few Kazaks, galloping astride on the captured bullocks to chase all the others and be done in a jiffy. The next few days I dedicated to imitate the Kazak technique of jumping up from behind and ride the animal bareback, holding the tail with one hand, the ears with another, make them gallop with kicking my bare feet into their ribs and yell up in the air. To do all that I spent half the morning trying to spring myself upwards on one of the more patient beasts, but it just didn't work for me even once. Charlie Chaplin, I thought, would make a fortune on this routine. Still, nobody ever fired me and for a few weeks, feeling like a clown, I started out each afternoon and returned resignedly to camp long after everybody was gone to the fields.

Once I did get lost, following a herd of thirty-odd oxen into the forest. It took longer than usual for somebody to round them up. The forest was a nice place to explore for berries or mushrooms, just as we did every summer in the country at home. But there was nothing to pick, the ground had no undergrowth except for fallen pine needles and cones, I did not hear any birds above and no rustling by any forest animals on the ground. Suddenly I realized that I was lost, an unpleasant

feeling I never experienced before. Basia was too ill to do anything or maybe even notice that I was missing, Mother was who knows where, the camp people were hardly interested in anybody except their own precarious life. Looking up for the sun's position was impossible, the treetops were too thick together and by the time I reached a small clearing, the sky was heavily overcast. Only then I remembered that the forest touches the edge of Irtysz, meaning that the river might have overflowed and leave marks on the ground. Yes, there were some, faint at first and growing in size of the curled edges of parched and cracked patches of dried up mud. In less than an hour I found the river, turned right to follow its current and reached our camp: Basia slept already, so did everybody else and nobody noticed my absence.

The working day started with the dawn and ended with the sundown, just before the nighttime, to use the rest of the light for eating. There were very few kerosene lamps and no candles, we all went to bed early. Occasionally a group stayed up, we would join the Russian and Ukrainian women talking about themselves: they all were here for the same reason as we were. Their husbands were somewhere in prisons and concentration camps, they were automatically condemned to deportation to Siberia. The story of the Ukrainian women was blood-curdling. Sent to Asia to break the kulak revolt, they were describing the starvation they went through, losing their children dropping dead. One woman only dared to admit to cannibalism of small children: "I saw on my plate of chopped meat a baby's tiny finger". Most of these women were illiterate, normally not

communicating with each other, they never chatted or gossiped, there was no singing of folk ballads. We forgot, in fact, that there is such a thing like dancing. These social evenings were so unbearable that I preferred to stay inside the hay tent, quiet enough to lie and think, waiting for sleep.

A few weeks after the start of this work two uniformed NKVD men turned up at the camp in a buggy, telling me that in the next few minutes Mother will be coming to see us before going away to serve her sentence. Another buggy carried Mother with two guards, she was allowed to explain what happened, watched by the four men from a close distance.

Once the kiziak production was finished, Mother and some fifteen other women were taken to the other end of sovkhos network, hours away from Djolkoduk. They were put up in one of the barracks and their job was to clear some of the fields of stones, so that they can be used for agriculture. Carrying each stone to the edge of the road, they had to break it and add to the pile, without any tools, just by hitting one stone with another for as long as it took. An armed guard stood over the women watching that they do not simulate: this verb and its derivative noun "simulant" were very prominent in the communist terminology. After two weeks of such nonsense, as Mother put it, she could not take it any longer. First she started to complain and protest by herself, then tried to organize the women: they were too afraid, so finally she refused to work altogether, explaining to her slavedrivers that she is not a stone slave, her profession is music. She was arrested there and then, put in jail and tried for "progul" which made her a "progulshchitsa", therefore a criminal, deserving a jail

sentence of at least four months. This was the first case of crime and punishment in the Polish group, turning ^{it} into a bit of a sensation even among the natives, which was the reason she was generously permitted to return and say her goodbyes. Even when this is what the NKVD said, it was actually to serve all the rest of us as an example of soviet justice we can all be served, if anyone dares to peep a word of complaint.

Mother's sentence was to be served in Petropavlovsk, hundreds of kilometres away. We were too stunned for words or any other remonstrations, listening to the sympathizing neighbors, reassuring us that four months will pass very quickly. Two Russians told us that Mother was very lucky, in fact: she will stay in a warm building without the need to search for the fuel, do some clean work and receive regular meals, all of it a real chance in comparison to what our life was. Evidently these men knew what they were talking about and it helped our morale. We calmed down, decided not to agonize over Mother's fate and just go on living the best way we could.

The last two weeks of the season I was assigned to work on a raking machine. It had a metal tag "Made in U.S.A. 1928". Perched high on a seat, it was easy to operate a lever to make it gather hay into more or less orderly rows. I was already familiar with using reins, driving a pair of Father's horses from our village to the nearest town Miedzychod. But now the reins for the two oxen were thick ropes, broken and tied together a foot apart, cutting into hands enough to draw blood and grow blisters which gathered thick puss. The two animals couldn't care less about my yelling and waving the stick, so I was always behind the other seven rakers.

My raking companions were all youngsters, boys not from Djolkoduk. They were my age, so I was curious to talk with them, but it took time to get them used to me. The first few days they amused themselves by urinating while facing me and watching my reaction to it, each one of them competing with one another in juvenile vulgarities. Finally they calmed down somewhat and we could talk. These were their school vacations. I kept asking about their school: what languages they learned? "German." Remembering my few lessons from the fifth grade I said something in German, but they had no idea what I was saying; I scratched a simple German word on the ground, but they did not understand the Latin alphabet, nor did they ever hear about it. In history the only subject was the biography of Stalin, nothing else. But they were outstanding in their attacks on God and religion, provoked by the tiny gold cross around my neck. In the end, they started asking me questions about Poland. To put it into the simplest and specific context I spoke about my own life, until they said what a bloody liar I was, and that was the end of our conversations. All these boys were Russians, bragging about their superiority over the Ukrainians and all the Asian apes.

A few days before the end of the season somebody brought a gramophone and a few records with popular Russian songs. This first concert sounded just divine. One tuneful, happy melody was called "Dachnaia Zyzn". Suddenly I started to howl, unable to stop, for the first time since leaving Poland.

The last haystacks were piled up, the camp was ready to move back to Djolkoduk. On the last morning we were told to

stand in line to pick up our pay for the season's work. This was a nice surprise, completely unexpected: no one told us at the beginning of hay harvest that we shall be paid for it and we never received a kopeck for the previous jobs. When my turn came at the table, I saw a register with names and numbers in it. The Russian clerk sitting at the table said: "Zofia Wladyslavovna, you earned very nicely for this season, a total of one thousand nine hundred and sixty five roubles." I must have looked starry-eyed and very happy with this vision of solvency, thinking how many poods of flour this money can buy. "But - he went on after a moment - you and your sister were fed by the state all this time, for which you owe two thousand six hundred roubles. So you must pay me now the difference of six hundred and thirty five roubles." But I did not have any money! "If you don't pay, I will report you and you will go to jail". By then all I could manage was to tell him to go to the devil, because I just didn't care any more.

Our boat with thirty returning laborers rowed back across Irtysz where two officials awaited the group. The Russians and Ukrainians went straight home, the Polish group was told which way their quarters were to be found. By the time our turn came, myself and Tasia the last ones in line, there was no room for us. The men sent us a few hundred yards to an isolated hut which turned out to be the veterinary hospital for sick cows. One stall was vacant. It had a roof over a partial wall, with a space of two feet on top for fresh air. The September nights were cold, we woke up in the morning with frost around us on the walls and the straw we slept on. The first thing was to trade our last pillowcase for eggs and flour, enough for two meals. By now our stock of things for barter was practically gone: no more sheets, the tablecloths were long gone, our two linen towels were too threadbare and torn to have any value. As for clothing and the underwear, we had a minimum to start with. The school uniform, made of solid gabardine wool, I kept for colder days. I also had one skirt and two blouses, the only cotton dress was showing wear and tear after the summer work. The stockings were all darned at the heel and toes, protected like a treasure in those days when girls did not wear trousers. I had a pair of shoes; the sandals used during the summer I kept on mending as best I could to hold the worn straps from disintegrating altogether. We had a sweater each and Mother's large white shawl she knitted and decorated with fringe. As for our winter schoolcoats, it seemed prudent not to trade them.

The village was lively with everybody back from the summer work. The Kazaks were also back with the cows, grazing during the day in the fields around the barns. The Poles were placed here and there in Kazak huts, usually given a room to

to share by two families. Finally, a space was found for the two of us as well.

Half of this room was occupied by a typical Russian stove, with an extension to be used for storage or for sleeping. This space was taken by a man and his two young sons who were here without their mother. The other side of the room was filled with two beds, with two feet of space between them. One bed was occupied by Mrs. Ginsberg, her twelve-years old daughter and ten-year old son. Mr. Ginsberg was in prison, "but not on any political grounds", the lady said, implying that she had nothing in common with the likes of us. It really made very little difference who was here for what, the subject never came up again. We already knew something about the soviet penal code, in which for example a petty theft was punishable by one year in prison. Mr. Ginsberg was expected to rejoin his family in April 1944.

The second bed was for Basia and me. Two wooden planks were missing from the base, but it wasn't too serious if all the others were put with a bit of space between them, leaving the main gap at the foot of the bed. A jute sack, filled with straw was the mattress. Our one last pillow and the quilt completed the bed on which we also sat and lived during the day, with a nearly empty suitcase pushed underneath.

There was something new added to the main village square, close to the ever pristine looking latrine. The addition was a hole dug out in the ground, at least twenty feet wide and thirty feet long and twelve feet deep, surrounded by the excavated soil. The village chief was close by when I looked at it, asking what was it for?

- "All this summer we kept the entire Polish group busy with it - he began to cackle, slapping his thighs - this is a grave for all of you". I never saw any point in discussing the subject with anybody.

The letter sent home resulted in parcels we were allowed to receive. People were cheered by bags of sugar, flour, dried egg noodles, tins of lard and salted butter, soap, thread and whatever the families could spare from home. We could not expect anything from our orphaned Stefcia who, God only knew where she now lived after her release from the hospital. Our letter was addressed to our relatives asking to find Stefcia and deliver our letter to her, but frankly they were not a friendly lot and we had doubts they will do it. If, on the other hand, the letter came to them when Uncle Franio was alone at home, he would certainly help us, maybe even at the cost of being denied his dinner by the virago of his wife: he was such a sweet, timid soul.

Yes, there was a package for us. People who unearth a treasure chest must behave the way we did, first looking at the carton for a long time, then untying the string carefully not to damage it, more valuable for the trade if in one piece. The letter from Stefcia was inside and we were torn between reading it first or see the things inside: we decided to put the letter aside, it was very long, and we were so hungry for a sign of anything from a civilized world. The parcel weighed at least twenty pounds containing sugar, flour, lard, tooth powder and a large cake of laundry soap, the first piece of

soap since leaving Tarnopol. In the morning I went down to Irtysz with a bundle of laundry, rubbing each piece of grimy clothing with this wonderful symbol of civilization. Not more than half an hour into the work, a wave came by and swept my soap away, too fast for any chance of rescue.

Stefcia's fate in Tarnopol was a sorry one. Left all alone recuperating from meningitis, deaf and with one set of clothing we tied for her together on the train, she had nowhere to go after her release. The director of the hospital and his wife, both doctors, took pity on Stefcia and brought her home. There was a grandmother and small children, keeping our sister working day and night without any pay. To pay for a parcel she sent us, she took in darning of socks and stockings at night. It was too early for this thirteen-year old child to be confronted with so many problems of life, the worst being her isolation from the family or anyone close and sympathetic. Her letters were full of stories about being mistreated by these strangers; after six months she was taken by another family. They allegedly were promised money from the state for taking care of a homeless child, but the money was never paid to them; the people took it out on Stefcia by not giving her our letters, for months at a time. All we could do was to forbid her thinking of another parcel for us, not writing in too much detail about our problems. She was being sent from one family to another, finally finding some decent people she stayed with until the end of war.

A few weeks after our arrival in Djolkoduk one of our companions died. She was a frail old lady, with a daughter and

two granddaughters, a very poor Jewish family named Blum. Mrs. Blum used to sing some Jewish hymns on the train which I thought were just beautiful. When her mother died, I was asked by Mrs. Blum to help and organize her burial. Our prayers were not Jewish but it did not seem to matter. It was the first time I came in touch with a dead body in a loosely wrapped bedsheet. Three of us young people carried the body to a pushcart, with a procession of mourners following us to a ground outside the village, designated for burial by the village chief. The clay soil was very hard to dig with the one shovel we could borrow.

It was now six months of living without any decent food and the results of malnutrition were beginning to show more and more. All women stopped menstruating. Everybody, men, women and children developed large, angry red boils with puss, mainly on the legs. Those at the back of the leg were the most painful ones when walking, pulling at the calves' muscles in such a way that one had to tiptoe or find the best personal method of walking without too much pain. The open scar healed after ten days to two weeks, leaving a large, purple, hollow mark in its place for several years on those who survived. The children were all strangely subdued, living mainly, I suppose, because the mothers fed them all they could possibly provide, sacrificing their own portions.

The first ones to die were from among the teenagers. There were nine of us, hardly knowing each other. Our upbringing had a large element of formality, the social position completely unrelated to a financial situation, finally the type of schooling, it all seemed to dictate how much we had in common with each

other. Andrzej Golebiowski and myself were the only ones following a classic secondary education leading to university studies. Andrzej was busy all the time nursing his mother, whose breast cancer was eating her body, with open sores on her chest. They were given a room to themselves, where he went on changing and washing linen bandages every few hours, but even that could not suppress the sickening odor of rotting flesh. There was never an opportunity for the two of us to talk, but actually there seemed to be no point to say anything anyway. Andrzej's entire life was given to the care of his mother, just as if he were a mother with a dying child. When I was there visiting, it was obvious that nothing else mattered to him: he talked very little, calmly, his large hands looked clumsy for nursing or cooking, but they were actually nimble in preparing a plate of food or rinsing out a linen table napkin in the washbasin, squeezing out the excess water and placing this bandage on mother's chest. He was tall, with dark eyes and black hair; when later I saw Stewart Granger on the screen, he reminded me of Andrzej. I have never met another person - let alone a teenage boy - with such a total sense of self-denial. So, as long as Mrs. Golebiowska had been taken care of, all she needed were occasional visits of a young woman she seemed to like and trust, to talk and to cry.

One day a seventeen-year old girl died in her bed. She was weak for a few weeks, did not complain of any pain, stayed mostly indoors. Except for an occasional smile and some banalities, we never had a chance to know each other.

One week later somebody walked on the street together with a teenage boy who fell down and died there and then.

A few days later it happened again. A boy joined me walking froma friend's house to the village store. We hardly knew each other and we talked, when suddenly he stumbled and fell backward on the ground, his face gray but otherwise without expression. At first I thought that he fainted, but he was dead, without ever uttering a sound to make me realize - or himself knowing - what was happening.

The days were getting shorter and the weather was becoming cold. It seemed lucky that my next job was in a place kept warm by several hundred pigs in a large barn. The place was very well organized with wooden platforms and pens, the floors cleanly swept of any animal waste. The pigs were clean, fed with chunks of fresh pumpkin and plenty of grain. The pumpkin must have been imported because there were none growing around and none could be bought. Determined to survive at any cost I stole a piece each time I could, hiding it inside the blouse; others were doing the same. Basia was showing signs of fatigue, staying at home and mostly in bed.

The manager of the pig farm was a Volga German, here all by himself. Although born and bred in Russia, he spoke with a heavy German accent. In his thirties, he had a raw-pink and freckled skin, albino-like hair and eyelashes around pale-blue eyes. He never spoke to us in a normal voice, either screaming in a high pitch, or hissing and jumping at us from behind. When there were a few of us together, we would invariably be addressed as "you Polish swines", using a singular version if only one of us needed an order.

It was impressive how this place stayed clean and orderly. Every single sty was scrubbed each morning with a fistful of straw, the trough neatly filled with feed, then scooping and mopping up each excrement, still warm and steaming, as it seemed to be an unlimited talent of these animals to produce. There were no rubber hoses, just we, the Polish swine, with a bucket of water in one hand and a fistful of straw in another: naturally, the German genius for law and order was evident in this Cherman's pride and reign over his reich.

To save my overcoat for better circumstances, I would run to work wrapped up in a white, large shawl Mother knitted two years ago in an elaborate pattern called "peacock feathers". With all the constant running around on the job it was too hot sometimes and the shawl would hang on a nail by the door. One afternoon this Polish pig was met at the entrance by the screaming boss, to run fast and pick a bucket and straw. Rushing like a well trained pig should, I threw my shawl over the sty gate, not wanting to muck it kneeling on the floor. When I turned around, five piglets were chewing the shawl on the floor. I picked up the remnants, crying hot tears: this was just the right excuse for the boss to kick me out of the job. With now a lot of time on my hands and the daylight, I managed to undo the poor shawl, tying each piece of yarn, including the remnants of fringe, to knit a skimpy sweater.

There were no more discussions about our rescue, but there was no despair either, just an unspoken wait-and-see attitude. I never heard anyone saying "well, let's be realistic, forget about the knight riding on his white horse ever coming to save us".

One evening we heard a noise of truck engines, an unusual sound in Djolkoduk. Neighbors run in, excited that the trucks came to take us, certainly back to the Pavlodar railway station to start the trip back home. We waited for someone to come and tell us to start packing, but nobody came. The truck drove away with twenty families, about half of the Polish group; these were mothers with young children, the oldest people and few invalids, all of them unable^{to do} physical work. Where did they go? Nobody knew what happened to these people and asking anyone of the locals was out of the question: none of us had any authority to speak on behalf of another person and any attempt would be punished as suspicious and tampering with the law. About a week later somebody returned from the kolkhoz next door, where he did some trading for food. He said that he met one of the group, an old man. The next day I went to see for myself.

At the furthest end of the kolkhoz stood a hut next to the road, looking new. This was a hospital for calves, condemned by the veterinarians as unfit for sick animals, because there were too many cracks in the mud walls and the doors were smaller than the building entrance, providing insufficient protection from cold weather. Our people were sprawling against the walls, some on the ground and a few on wooden platforms. All of them wore their heaviest clothing and huddled under the bedcovers, except when food had to be prepared. That night the first snow of the season covered the ground outside, and those people who slept facing the door, woke up covered by a layer of snow on their bedding as well, blown in by the strong wind. In one corner I saw a patch

of unswept, half-frozen snow, mixed with straw on the dirt floor.

The communist dogma "who does not work, does not eat" was applied here as clearly as any idiot could see: the communist state was no place for such parasites, so let's nature take its course, and good riddance to them - the world belongs to the proletariat!

As a laborer on the pig farm I was entitled to the daily ration of two hundred and fifty grams of bread which I shared with Basia, who was not entitled to any food ration because she did not work. The bread was distributed every day at the village store, empty of any merchandise except for the loaves of bread on the counter. The salesman cut a loaf with a sharp knife, put a piece on the scales, adjusting the weight either by slicing off or adding a piece to match the allowance. The value of this weight differed, depending on the degree to which the bread was baked. Twice, when sugar was added to the ration allowance, we had a demonstration of human cunning: the weight of a sack of sugar was almost doubled by pouring a bucket of water over it, then selling it at the store by the ration weight in a wet lump. This way the excess weight was a net profit to the salesman and his team of suppliers, and our ration was proportionately less valuable, but officially correct.

When I lost the job we had to find some other means to get food. For the first few days I couldn't do anything because I got my second attack of malaria. For three days my body went through a high fever or a shaking cold, a headache of monumental proportions, sweat or thirst. There was no doctor

around, not even Viera who stopped associating with us completely. I had these symptoms appearing regularly every few weeks, until they stopped for good. Nothing mattered when I had these attacks.

A Kazak woman hired me to whitewash her hut. She was alone occupying three rooms, the place looked neater than others I saw; she acted with me like with a servant, not fit to be talked to except for being told what to do. Once she gave me a bowl of tea with milk. For three days of working from early morning to dinnertime, nonstop because it was too cold to walk home at noon, I was paid one cupful of flour.

Basia's overcoat had to go. We reasoned that she does not go out at all, because of her growing weakness and, if she had to, I would stay home and give her my coat to wear. The money for the coat paid for half a pood of wheat bran. A cupful of bran, boiled in one litre of water filled me quite well, creating a sense of satisfied hunger, provided it was eaten very slowly. By then the price of flour was too high for us; bran was cheaper, more available and used mainly by Kazaks to feed their domestic animals.

A job was found for me, on condition that I bring my gloves to work. Wicker barriers were being woven to protect the village from snow blizzards, blown from the steppe onto the huts. My woolen gloves were in shreds on the second day, the sharp strips of wicker bark cut through the skin, it just couldn't be done anymore, and again I was unemployed.

Something had to be done for the legs. The thin cotton stockings were full of holes, meticulously darned, yet insufficient to protect from cold and freezing wind. The head was covered by a cap, a raised collar and a scarf. Hands were

either kept in the coat pockets or kept warm by waving arms and slapping shoulder blades, to keep blood in circulation. But keeping legs warm was a problem, without slacks. The only thing I figured out made Basia call me a crazy nut, and Mrs. Ginsberg pursed her lips with a shocked disapproval. We had this lovely, soft, green sweater Mother did not take to prison with her, with long sleeves. By putting my feet into each sleeve and pulling the bodice upwards, there I had the leggings and woollen underwear, covering my body all the way upto the armpits - voilà! Sewing together the neckline, and with a pair of laced ankle boots Stefcia sent in her parcel, I was fairly better off.

The news from outside were scarce, coming through a copy of local newspaper or letters from home. Some Poles could read Russian and told us about the war in the West. In their letters the relatives wrote more about what they heard on the radio from abroad. The news were grim for the Allies, the Finns lost their war to the Russians - all we could do was to bid our time.

The absence of school and books became a problem for me. To keep my mind occupied, I decided already earlier to learn Russian by the simplest and the only available method in Djolkoduk, which meant listening and speaking, irrespective whether my words were correct or not. My interlocutors were more than happy to point to all my mistakes. For reading I could always borrow a newspaper, consulting my own page of the two alphabets. The other pastime was taking turns and talking about the plays or films we saw, stories we heard, books we read or places we visited. Women discussed the fashions, but

the food they used to cook was the most favorite subject of all. I never liked to memorize poetry, but when we read Pan Tadeusz, each student had to recite from memory one chapter of this epic. Most of my classmates learned by heart the first chapter "Litwo, Gjozyzno moja, Ty jesses jak zdrowie ..." My choice was Book Twelve on the banquet, going on and on about all the delicacies served at the party. Now, two years later, some of the verses were still in my head, creating around us a mirage of viands, fruit, pastries, cream and sugar icing, not unlike for the girl with matches from the Andersen story. The illusions of the Venetian table centerpiece, a cartwheel-size filled with glass figurines, the spectacle of changing seasons and all the fanciful details blended with the realities of frost, sparkling on the walls inside our quarters.

The newspaper carried articles, information and orders to vote in the forthcoming elections. This made us realize that it was more than one year of the soviet domination, because the farce of elections held in Tarnopol was well remembered. About two months after invading Poland the communists were rounding people to vote at the polls, threatening anyone with arrest for refusal. The houses were searched one by one for every single resident, the invalids and bedridden people were transported on stretchers. Somehow they missed me then, although my classmates were caught and had to vote, none of them eighteen years old et.

Now the matter of voting seemed to us academic, since we were outside the laws. We were not Soviet citizens, not registered as legal residents, not entitled to any rights, making us de

facto outlaws and prisoners without visible bars around us. But the local authorities thought otherwise, ordering every single person to go and vote.

The polling place was a two hours' ride by sled. Basia had to wrap our quilt around, because I wore our coat. Each person was admitted inside the voting room one by one. First a policeman led me to the first desk, where a man had a list with names of the voters. Checking my name, he handed over a piece of paper with Stalin's name printed on it, and a line for my full signature at the bottom. The same policeman took me then to a second desk where a man scrutinized me, my ballot and my signature: it all looked alright, he smiled and directed me, together with the policeman, to the third table. On each side of the table stood an armed man, a wooden ballot box watched by the two of them: now it was time to drop my ballot in under the scrutinizing three pairs of eyes. Then the policeman conducted me out of the room.

The next few days carried an extraordinary coverage of this patriotic and historic event of the communist democracy at work. The results of district elections: 102.5 percent for Stalin, zero percent for the opposition!

The only way I could explain this miracle of political mathematics was through the fact that 2.5 percent of voters were the unregistered Polish deportees.

My unemployment was truly a bad thing, because without the few roubles or the entitlement to bread rations Basia was getting worse. Nobody had anything to share any longer, each family eating so that the others did not see what was cooked, as if embarrassed about having too much or too little, much

more the latter than the former. The only solution for me was to go begging.

I calculated that my best chances were in the kolkhoz village. There the payment for work was in kind, meaning that some scraps of food can always be around. In some houses I was turned away, but the people were polite, even kindly when doing that. In another house I was let in, invited to sit at their low round table. They probably just finished eating, a scrap of unleavened bread was still there. We talked for a while, then I was left alone, finally the man of the house returned with a few kilos of bran. He saw me looking at the bread and gave it to me as well. This was the first time I felt that these people were capable of treating us like normal human beings, without malice or suspicion. Was hunger the language we had in common, rather than the esoterica we lived by?

The same evening every Polish family was investigated by three agents visiting each household with a suspicion of somebody stealing a large quantity of bran from a warehouse. When they saw my bag of bran, I was expected to give them the name of man to confirm my story. This was impossible, I did not know his name nor could I describe the house, identical to all the others, so my fate was hanging on their goodwill to believe my story. They did.

The story of my begging must have spread around, because the following day Tadzio, our friend from the time of building the village, came with a visit. He brought some food, also he took my leather school briefcase to sell among more affluent people than I had an access to.

One morning we woke up to complete darkness inside: the window was blocked by a wall of snow, which also covered the huts upto the rooftops. It wasn't until the following day that narrow passage could be dug out to the outside. That's how the real winter started, with a Siberian snowstorm, buran. The Kazaks warned us not to walk in the open during a buran or we surely get lost in it, with the snow so thick that it blinds one, even a foot away from the house. Indeed, a few people were missing, one of whom was uncovered two feet away from the wall of our hut, after the snow started to melt away in the springtime. With Irtyysz completely frozen, we used snow to melt for water.

The typical Russian stove in the middle of our room would be a wonderful source of heat, provided there was some fuel. But nobody dared to risk life to take some kiziak from the huge stockpile we prepared in May and June - with everything else we were told being a lie, we had no doubt that the threat of being shot was the truth. We watched the huge pile from a respectable distance, gradually growing smaller, used by our masters. We cooked with straw and hay, strewn around inside the covered barn and yard. Boiling a few pints of water did not take much fuel. But the room was cold. The breathing of seven persons in a small room condensed the moisture on the walls which sparkled with hoary snow, at first like specks, then thick and even, waiting for a playful hand to make graffiti - but nobody was in the mood.

The clothing was kept on all the time. Going to bed we

removed shoes and the overcoat to put it over the quilt, keeping a scarf or cap to sleep in. Mrs. Ginsberg was scratching her body more often than all of us, particularly from the waist up. "Nerves", she was saying each time if we happened to watch her. It was only then I realized that we were being eaten by lice. I did not remember itching or scratching myself, nor did I notice Basia doing it. One morning, when staying in bed longer, I noticed the quilt move a little. I turned it up to have a close look and saw hundreds of whitish lice crawling in the quilt's stitches of its flowery design. It was absolutely clear that nothing could be done about it, not even fainting or screaming bloody murder; after thinking a while with all the cool I could muster, it was certain that the best way out was to ignore the situation and not even mention the subject to anybody.

This was just one more reality of our new life. We saw how the Kazaks dealt with it, apparently due to their religion which forbade their blood to be sucked by any foreign body: a man or a woman searched for each vermin in the garment with teeth. I saw them doing it deftly along the seam of a shirt - the favorite place for lice to live in - running their teeth every inch of the way, the lips stained with blood spots from the cracked vermin. Then there was this joke, popular among the prisoners. "There is only one way to solve the bedbug problem", says a veteran prisoner to a new companion who complained that he cannot sleep since he was arrested: "get to like them."

At long last I got a job, replacing a night watchman in calves' barn. He was kicked out of this job and arrested for allowing one third of the calves to die during his service.

The calves lived in an L-shaped barn. One part was occupied by pregnant cows and a nursery for the newborn calves. Even when the cows and their babies were separated from the calves by a wall, it gave me a feeling of security to know, that behind the wall was on duty old Mr. Kaminski, a night watchman for the newborn calves.

Two men gave me instructions on how to handle the animals, of whom there were two hundred and thirty^{six} left after my predecessor allegedly destroyed over one hundred of others. The calves had to be checked for the position they were laying in: if their legs were sideways, it was alright. But if the front legs were tucked straight under the body, they get numb, cannot get up and die within three to five hours. The technique of picking them up was to hold the tail with one hand and one ear with another, pulling both upwards at the same time. Indeed, the method worked for me, even with the biggest ones.

My plans to spend the long nights on reading borrowed books had to be cut down to almost nothing. The only light was a lantern, with an allowance of one quarter litre of naphtha, just enough to inspect each animal three times during the shift, turning the light off for the rest of the night. The best thing about the job was the warmth of this barn, emanating from the bodies of animals around me, myself sitting there like one more of them on a pile of damp and soiled straw. The worst thing was looking at these creatures,

all bags of skin and bones, with distended, bloated bellies, a dull coat of hair with patches of some skin disease. Every single calf was crawling with lice, just like I was.

For about ten days all went well, no animal died but I told the men that these calves must get some better care and food to survive at all. I suggested they bring in a few cows to provide milk to these starving animals who would normally still suckle a mother. Nothing happened, until two calves did die and only then a yearling was brought in to stay. The animal just gave her first birth, she was hardly bigger than her nurslings, her udder was very small. The calves fed on her and followed her around all the time, when she seemed to want to run away and be left alone now and then.

Aha! I thought that since this was my idea to save some starving calves from death, at least my starving sister can also get some benefit from it. Going to work I hid a small jar inside the coat. During the second round of inspection I located the cow standing in a group, went back to my usual place some fifty feet away, turned the lantern off and walked back with the jar in the total darkness, stepping over the sleeping calves, scattered all over the place. Slowly I reached to spot, stretched out my right hand and, indeed, there I touched the standing cow. Unscrewing the lid I put it in my pocket, then guided my left hand with the jar under the back legs, reaching for the udder with fingers of my right hand. Actually, I have never milked a cow before but I watched it done very many times. After all, I wanted just a glassful,

really not a big deal, so this was going to be an easy thing to do. My hand touched what seemed to be the right part of the cow's anatomy, but something was wrong, there was nothing feeling like teats. I moved my hand until I grabbed something hairy and dripping wet - something was wrong. I struck a match and recognized a male calf, standing there right after urinating, and my cow nowhere in sight. This got me so hysterical with laughter that I couldn't stop for a long time. Finally I did find the cow and returned home with half a cup of warm milk.

Basia never complained of anything in particular, but she was getting worse and worse and there was nowhere to turn for help. According to the local medical rules a person was not sick if there was no high fever. Basia would have convulsions at night, at first just once, then at least twice or three times. Her entire body shook so badly that I could hardly hold her in my arms, half conscious and, as far as I could feel, with no fever. My only hope was that Mother returns home before things get worse - I could not think in more concrete terms about my sister's condition, evidently blocking my mind against doom and gloom of her dying.

Just a few days before Christmas Mother returned from prison. The snow was very deep and I worried how she was going to travel and walk in her high heel patent leather shoes she wore leaving for her sentence. But there was no need to worry about it, she returned wearing knee-high felt boots. As soon as she left the prison in Petropavlovsk with a return ticket,

she knocked at the doors of some houses to trade for a pair of boots. The women demanded her elegant shoes and the gray suit skirt she had on for a pair of pretty wellworn boots. Mother had an overcoat with buttons running all the way down in front, able to open and take it off only now, wearing a blouse over a slip underneath. Such felt boots were the object of my dreams, now fulfilled because Mother was going to share them with us. Even with some parts almost worn through, I lined the inside with the newspaper and it made for a cozy, warm feeling walking in the snow.

Those Russians who were trying to cheer us up about how lucky Mother was to go to prison, were actually right. She brought with her a pillowcase full of dry bread she saved from her daily food allowance. She looked clean, healthy and had many stories to tell.

The Petropavlovsk prison for women was tolerable, providing regular daily meals, a bed for each prisoner in a large barrack, with clean bedding. They all worked in the same prison building on finishing wood furniture, so the work was light and there was no exposure to the winter cold. Mother befriended some women, imprisoned for all possible reasons. Their favorite pastime was spiritualism and Mother became quite enthusiastic about it too. She told us many interesting stories about the seances they conducted, but I remembered just one of them. Two beds away from her was a woman who kept to herself, did not talk to anyone and each evening before bedtime conducted her own spiritualistic seance. The second evening after Mother came and before there was any opportunity to talk about personal

matters, the recluse woman turned to Mother asking:

"Are you Stefania?"

"Yes, that's my first name".

"Is your father's name Stanislaw?"

"Yes, but he died over twenty years ago" explained Mother.

"He wants to tell you not to worry, but you must take good care of Zosia who is very dear to him. Who is Zosia?" she asked.

"I have a daughter Zosia, born much later after my father died."

Well, this was so thrilling, I didn't know what to think of the story and I still do not know, but true or not, I felt happy.

We were now three to one bed, but my job kept me away at night. I have always been fortunate to sleep without anything capable to disturb me, so sleeping during the day when others moved about and talked was no problem. Basia was in bed all the time, her convulsions subsided with the bread Mother brought.

Everybody wanted to hear about Mother's prison experience, her stories breaking a little the stagnant existence. There was a social protocol of prison life, she said. When she said something to one of the guards, addressing him "comrade", he told her off: "To you I am not a comrade - you can call me "citizen" next time".

Life for us was not only sad, tragic and strange, but also very boring. With nothing much to hope for, women spent time

having their fortune told by one who always carried a pack of cards with her. "A long, long journey is ahead for you" was the most frequent prophecy. Mother livened up the group, teaching them the rudiments of spiritualism. If somebody had some naphtha for the lamp or a candle, we would sit together for two hours or more. A table had to be found, without any nails in them, where letters of alphabet were chalked on the top. An inverted saucer had an arrow marked on it, we all joined hands around, waiting for things to start happening. Invariably, the saucer started to move from one letter to another, at first slowly and hesitating, then faster and with more confidence. We asked questions, the saucer wrote the answers. One evening the saucer spelled out a name which Danusia recognized: "Michal? I haven't seen you for three years. I didn't know you were dead?" "I am not dead. I live in Warsaw now and think of you very often." answered the saucer.

Basia was not getting better and Mother took courage in her hands, knocking at each door of any local executive, to get medical help. After three days of indifference or plain refusal, somebody finally agreed to have Basia examined at the district centre. A large sled with a pair of oxen came to the door and Basia, laying on a thick layer of straw under our quilt, left with Mother at her side for some tenkilometres ride. The felt boots stayed with me, Mother took the leather ankle shoes. My winter coat served for the quilt to sleep under. After two days I received information that they were sent to Pavlodar because Basia could not receive the necessary treatment at this small health centre. Two weeks later Mother wrote that Basia is getting better at the hospital and Mother found a job, waitressing

in a restaurant, allowed to get a meal for herself and take some also to the hospital for Basia. In the next letter my sister was already back on her feet. She received no medical treatment of any kind, but was put in a room with five women, three of whom were too ill to eat their hospital food. Basia ate their dishes, in addition to her own, also what Mother brought from the restaurant: on this intensive diet the girl recovered completely, regaining her beautiful complexion and her normally cheerful nature. They rented a room from an elderly Ukrainian couple who had a small house.

The other important news was the permission they obtained to remain in Pavlodar, because Mother got a job for which nobody else was available in this regional capital. In the restaurant one day, two men were standing at the piano, trying to play it, but they did not know how. Mother started to talk to them and said that she played. They looked at this miserable looking female and did not believe her, until she gave a concert on the spot. There and then they offered her the position of pianist at the National Kazak Theatre, which travelled all over the region. In each new place she was allowed to sleep in the theatre after the performance, among the props and other paraphernalia. There was no way to lock up the place from inside and, the first night she stretched out on one of the benches for the night, somebody stole her - mine, too - shoes right from under her head.

The permit to live in Pavlodar was not extended to cover me, and I was told categorically not to even think about joining my family. My place was in Djolkoduk and my labor

was needed here. In the Soviet Union nobody has the right to move from one place to another without a militia permit and the offender goes to prison.

Meetings with village people were few and far between, there was no reason, nor anything in common to share. Sometimes, when the weather was better, before the burans paralyzed the village traffic, a few people would meet in the open, usually combining an almost daily trip to the store for bread ration or, if the bakery broke down, a substitute in flour. Sometimes the village chief would be there as well, leading the group discussion to political subjects. By now he saw that we were a group of quite ordinary people, nobody was a rich capitalist, sucking the blood of the poor, oppressed proletariat. As a member of the communist party, determined to justify the reasons for our being there, his arguments invariably ended with the same refrain: "People must suffer now, so that the future generations live happy in the socialist world." Twenty two years since the communist revolution have already passed, but our attempts at dealing with such propaganda tripe usually ended with a resigned shrug.

On one such occasion we were joined by a Ukrainian and his teenager son. We listened in shock when the boy began to speak excitedly, then shouting and crying, accusing the soviets of cruelty, persecution, injustice and the prohibition to pray. He was actually saying openly everything we felt and knew about this country, but we never heard a soviet citizen to talk this way and in such a place. We watched the boy and the two government agents, who said nothing, just listened. The boy's father tried

to stop the boy, but it didn't work, the boy was beside himself. He finally broke down, the crowd dispersed; next day he was taken to the mental hospital.

This young man was the future generation, born years after the communist revolution. His father was a poor man, a farm hand, telling his son about the past and how the family used to live; the boy did not cry for money or a better job and power, just to speak freely without being afraid to be jailed for it, and to pray openly in a church. What I saw in the young man was the local version of Don Quichote, but to the communists this was definitely a crazy man if he thought he could take such an attitude against them; for crazy people, the only place is a mental hospital.

The nighttime job gave me a few hours of daylight to do some reading. I borrowed some Polish books from friends, re-reading some of the classics. My Russian was also coming along to the point of easy reading and speaking, feeling ready to read Pushkin, Lermontov and Tolstoy. No such books could be had in Djolkoduk, another reason why I wanted to get out of this place.

The calves were not doing well at all, practically every night one died out of pure starvation. The carcasses were taken to an improvised butcher shed, offering chunks of skin and bones for sale. No degree of hunger could make me go even near the place, all I could do was to tell the people where the stuff came from and not look at who went to buy it.

It must have reached a point when the scandal of dying animals could no longer be officially ignored: over eighty calves

died since I started working there. My predecessor was fired and put in prison for similar problem, now it was my turn to face the responsibility. When I came to the barn to start my shift, three men waited there, began to shout and push me around, saying that I am a criminal and a renegade, undermining the Soviet Union and the socialist society, a blood-thirsty parasite, so on and so forth. As of this minute I must return immediately to my home, stay there awaiting summons for the official investigation, to start criminal proceedings against me.

Waiting for the wheels of justice to crush my counter-revolutionary behavior, people were showing their concern and a lot of advice on what kind of strategy I should use in my own defense, because during the investigation I will be there alone with my accusers.

It was something of a relief to be confronted two days later by the chief investigator, whom I already saw twice before. He was the highest-ranking communist in the district, the same Ukrainian who spoke to us on our first job at the reconstruction site; I remembered his manner, speaking to us like to a bunch of unworthy social outcasts. The second meeting was late at night in the barn, where he came drunk to rape me.

A few weeks earlier, just when I was making my second round of inspection, I heard the door opening with a squeak of rusty hinges, and a dark silhouette standing there against the wall. Raising the lantern I recognized the man and, thinking that this is an inspection, I walked to him, some twenty feet away. He grabbed me by the neck, towering over, kissing my face and hair, very drunk and unsteady on his feet. A confrontation

with a drunk man wasn't a new experience for me, such things were pretty common in Polish culture, somehow less frightening for this reason. First I told him that if he does not let me go, I will set fire to the barn with the lantern in my hand. He let go, forcing me ahead of him with one arm, holding drunkenly onto the wall with another. I led him toward the usual place where I stayed, because on the other side of the wall could be my only savior, Mr. Kaminski, staying with the newborn calves. The moment we got there, I started shouting at the top of my voice, which had absolutely no effect on my assailant, sure that we were too far away for anybody to hear me. My kicking was no match for this big, heavy man who was tearing at my coat and clothing, pinning me against the wall. All of a sudden my savior appeared, slapping the drunkard and pushing him away. He left, without a word.

I did not tell anyone about this incident, holding it like a secret weapon for a possible future use. Now it seemed like a right moment.

Somebody who knew about such things, explained once how one becomes a member of the communist party. It is not enough to apply for membership to be admitted. The test of loyalty to the party included denouncing somebody for a political crime of any kind, and the degree of importance of the accused criminal is proportionate to the grade of loyalty recognized by the party. The party membership opens the doors to any advancement and power, yet it is always vulnerable: no member of the party can afford a public scandal. My commissar knew

it and this was the reason he left the barn when Mr. Jaminski appeared, without a single word, sobered enough to walk away.

At the hearing two men, whom I did not recognize at all, testified that during the time of my employment as night watchman, the calves developed a strange ailment, resulting in a steadily growing number of animals found dead upon the arrival of the daytime crew. They did not know why these animals were dying and hoped that the disease - whatever it was - would go away. But then they realized that it wasn't so, explaining how hard they worked and tried to care for the calves - there was just nothing they could do. There was just one way to find out what I was doing, by investigating my activities.

The commissar had me seated at the table he occupied at the head. I sat to his left, facing the two witnesses whose fractured Russian was hard to follow. Anyway, it did not seem to really matter to me very much. It was more interesting to watch the Ukrainian, his performance of going through the hearings, then repeating the accusation to me in a stern voice, demanding my explanations.

It seemed useless to point out the Alice-in-Wonderland nonsense of the situation. Instead, I chose a strategy of attacking the commissar for allowing his minions to hire for this important job somebody as incompetent as I was. It worked like a charm. Not only the tactic, but also the sound of the word had an important ring to it. The man just did not expect anyone, let alone me, to talk to him like to an equal. To underline my words, I leaned closer, putting my face as near as I could to his, trying not to blink even once.

"What do you mean, incompetent?"- the man stared back.

"I have never been near to a live calf before, I am a school student, learning from books in a city school, and here some of your employees you trust so much expect somebody like me to be responsible for over two hundred animals, with just a few minutes of training and without a single inspection or supervision. You have hired these men, so ^{YOU} carry equally the blame of having an incompetent worker like me. Logically, you are an incompetent executive." Said I.

The commissar's beefy face turned white. His own fate now depended on all people in the room, witnessing this session: if any of these men aspired to the party membership, here was their ticket to join the diabolical fraternity. No meeting of any kind could take place without being reported to the NKVD, and no party member could afford a public humiliation. Either way, he looked pretty worried.

There was no need to reach for my secret weapon and denounce him publicly as a rapist. I was not interested in a revenge anyway, just in saving my own hide. The investigation ended with a weak reprimand and a formal dismissal from the job I was found to be incompetent to perform satisfactorily.

Mrs. Ginsberg was a motherly type of a woman, interested in her family life only, sighing each day for her husband, the most wonderful man that ever lived, handsome like a film star. There was enough motherliness in her to include me, always kindly and nice to talk to in a friendly way. I was now alone, unemployed, staying indoors in this never-ending winter, trying to hide from the reality between a borrowed Russian newspaper to learn new words and a borrowed volume of Sienkiewicz trilogy. It felt good to know that the person sharing the room was a warm human being.

One late afternoon Mrs. Ginsberg signaled to me to come outside the door, obviously wanting to say something in private.

"I am coming from a meeting with Manzoor, whom I saw for the third time, because of you: he wants to marry you. He said that he is in love with you and will treat you like a princess. He will carry you in his arms everywhere you want to go, you won't have to lift a finger in his house, he will even milk the family cow himself."

"Manzoor told me everything about himself. He said that he was always wild and crazy, but now that he finished his prison sentence for killing his first wife, he plans to settle down. You should really think about it, because at least you won't go hungry and maybe even you can help your family."

I almost forgot this man existed since I worked with him, transporting water for kiziak production. Now it all came back. A filthy, unkempt head of black hair over barely an inch of forehead, slits of slanted eyes in a stubby face, abnormally long arms on a short body, made still shorter by a pair of

very bandy legs. His black, yelping dog running across the steppe, with blood streaming from the tail Manzoor just chopped off, to amuse all his chums sitting around the fire. Then few flashes of his sermons on culture in general, and my lack of any in particular. Now I also hear that he murdered his wife.

This matchmaking procedure did not seem to include my confrontation with the man: Mrs. Ginsberg was expected to take my answer back. I saw that she was scared to go back with my categorical NO, understandably so: never have I worked harder to spin a tale she should repeat to Manzoor, saying that my hand was already promised to somebody else, that the family honor was at stake and suchlike balderdash. Unbelievably, the woman was very angry with me, she stopped her friendly manner for the rest of time we lived together. Could such a simple - to me - concept of morality and ethics, even propriety and common sense, carry a different meaning to Mrs. Ginsberg? We both were born in the same country, spoke the same language, and none of it made us think alike. One feeling we did share: I, too, was scared to go outside, especially in the dark, bidding my time to get away from Djolkoduk as soon as possible.

April brought a promise of spring, cloudy and cold but with enough sun to melt the snow, reducing the icy mountains of it down to a few muddy piles in some shady corners. Again, it was time to start fulltime farming, with people organized into various brigades. My lot fell to go to the same farming center where Mother went last year to clear the stone fields. Without any transport available to get there, people just explained which way we should start walking. Kazik, my roommate and I were the only two persons delegated from Djolkoduk, so we decided to walk together. Starting early in the morning, we walked and walked, each left with one's own thoughts, through a dull, plain and very boring, endless stretch of space. When nighttime came, Kazik spread the blanket he carried on the ground. I had nothing with me, except for some bread in my coatpocket rationed for the trip; Kazik asked me to share the blanket. Laying there, I reflected on the incredulity of the situation of a young man, alone with a young woman, sharing one blanket and the moon, a full moon, shining above: will anyone ever believe that we never touched?

Late the next day we joined at least sixty other people, all spending the night under one roof, until everyone was organized the next morning. Men and women, strangers all, already took up the entire floor space in the izba before our arrival. The only place was the top of the kitchen stove, unfortunately built with two levels, easy for two persons to sit on, but impossible to lie down even in a foetal position. Kazik, with his blanket slept on the porch outside, but it was too cold for me. I found two paddle-like shovels, put them criss-cross at 40° level, covered them with some straw and, once a balance

was found, I slept till morning.

Apart from two barracks, one for men and the other for women, there was a separate hut for the messhall, with an adjacent kitchen. For breakfast we were served a piece of bread and some tea-colored water, brewed out of tea bricks, made out of tea leaf dust and specks of crushed herb.

The work was to clear the fields for sowing. There was nothing but fields as far as one could see on this flat land, each one marked in a symmetrical parallel to the dirt road, running in the middle. The fields closest to the barracks must have been the same Mother spoke about, still full of rocks, now to be cleared again by the women. The group was supervised by two men standing over us, until they would get bored and disappear, leaving us alone to pick and carry, pick and carry, pick and carry to the side of the road; the other half of women knelt at the roadside, hitting the stone on the ground with one they held in both hands.

By that time we all knew the full meaning of the epithet "simulant", used on all possible occasions to be chastised or warned not to think that we can get away with the simulation. The idea was to pretend that one is working, going through the motions either slowly or just playacting, stopping altogether when the supervisor turned his back. This was just what we were doing now, instead of complaining or protesting, like Mother did imprudently last year. The supervisors, returning to work half an hour before closing down for the day, saw that the pile of gravel wasn't any bigger than what they left us with, started yelling and insulting us for as long as they had the energy for it, just like the nasty buzzing flies. This became a daily ritual, until the end of the season.

Waiting for dinner wasn't for me, I was called to cook it. A bag of flour was waiting in the kitchen and one of the men brought in a bucket of water: "You make noodles for us tonight." Sixty people waited hungry, including myself. I put all the flour on the kitchen table, made a pocket in the middle to add water and salt, mixed and kneaded, taking forever with such a quantity, convinced that this mess will fall apart anyway in cooking; according to my own, limited experience, an egg was a must to keep it together. People must have noticed my uselessness, three men took over. The next day a woman cook arrived, a mature Russian woman, making me her assistant at breakfast and the dinnertime, before leaving for work and coming back straight to the kitchen in the evening.

This was a large scale farming operation; as the district director for agriculture told us during a meeting one of the first evenings, the entire proletariat of our glorious state awaited record-reaching crops we are going to produce. Thanks to the wisdom and goodness of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, we have here a wonderfully mechanized system of agriculture: tractors, heavy equipment and trucks, all much superior to the bullocks, used before. The fields had to be cleared for spring sowing of wheat, first raking them of tumbleweed and other stuff, then ploughing the earth. There was certainly a lot to do in a limited time, conveying to us the urgency of the task to fulfill this year's sowkhoz plan. The district owns for the job a total of thirty tractors, twenty eight of which are in urgent need of repairs. Some of these repairs can be

taken care of without any problem, but the main difficulty are the wheels: they are all beyond repair and there are no spare parts to rebuild them, all made in USA, vintage 1928. But work must be done, so there is only one solution: fortunately there is enough timber in the sovkhos central warehouse, so our brave mechanics will make wooden wheels for all these tractors. "Together, Comrades, we shall conquer the capitalist, bourgeois, bloodthirsty enemies of the Proletariat, long live our true benefactors, Joseph Visarionovich Stalin and the glorious Communist Party!"

It was my luck to be assigned to one of the two working tractors. I started to protest this time, knowing nothing about driving or the mechanism of a five-ton tractor, or any engine, for that matter. But this time I misunderstood them: my job was to stay with the tractor driver, to take care of the attachments only. Four iron rakes, with four more attached to them, were pulled by the tractor picking weeds and masses of tumbleweed dancing all over the fields. I sat at the back, facing the rakes and watching how they filled with pickings. I had to jump off the moving tractor, making sure to avoid the wall of iron five feet away, which meant turning right and running sideways to skirt the rakes. The cleaning had to be done by picking two rakes at a time with one hand, clearing the iron teeth with the other, each of the four sets, all that without the tractor allowed to stop. I honestly tried to do it, but lifting one rake was heavy enough, let alone two, even if my arm could reach that far to pull out the tangled weeds from every spike: each rake was something like three-feet square.

The tractor driver was a young man who took pity on my useless exercise; instead of reporting me for being so useless, he would have me hold the steering wheel of the slowly moving tractor, while he jumped off and cleared the rakes himself. This man did not seem to fit into the typical pattern of behavior: soft-spoken, courteous and seemingly better educated Kazak, he was tall, neatly dressed and groomed, with beautiful hands. All he said to me once was that he lost all his family. A woman in the barrack whispered to me something to the effect that he came from a family of princes, the only survivor after the rest of the family was murdered by the communists.

With the mechanical problems of the twenty eight other tractors, the farmwork was falling tragically behind the annual plan, so our tractor had to work nights as well. Not to waste time for returning to the mess, we were brought some food; with a break long enough to eat, we resumed the work for another few hours, all alone in the dark emptiness around us, driving up and down the field. At one point the driver must have had enough of it, stopped the engine and declared rest time. The night was very cold for sleeping out in the open. This nice fellow taught me the trick of first building a fire with all the weeds we gathered, then brushing the dying ash aside and, sure enough, the ground was warm to lie on, using my overcoat to sleep under.

We were expected to work this way every night, but on the second night the driver stopped the tractor abruptly after two hours of driving in the pitch black night; he said he refuses to be made a fool of any more. The second tractor

driver, a Russian, did not work last night and, unless all the workers are treated the same way, he will not allow to be exploited just because he is the only Kazak here. We walked the long distance to the barracks. I made him laugh with my story of Kazak hospitality one day, when the man of the house offered me a glass of kumiss. I saw that only men milked their mare, a strange sight, but now I understood why and why they laughed, seeing me gulp the milk down: it was fermented and it made me tipsy.

The next morning we returned to the field at dawn. The tractor stood there as left last night, three feet away from a hole twenty feet long, twice as wide as the tractor and some ten feet deep, similar to the hole dug out in Djolkoduk - we looked at each other, standing there speechless.

There was no more night work, the management could not afford losing their last working tractor - the twenty-ninth one was out of commission as well.

The custom of digging holes is very common in sovkhos system. Each sovkhos receives money to operate according to its budget, prepared a year earlier. If there is a balance left at the end of the fiscal year, it is imprudent to return it to state treasury, because this is proof of the local planning incompetence and, it also means that the next year's budget will be automatically reduced. The only way to get out of this trouble is for the management to order excavations in the fields, using the money for as much labor wages as the savings can afford. This way, at the end of the fiscal year they can report that the work plan was fulfilled one hundred percent, also be decorated for the outstanding, heroic, proletarian victory, with a shiny medal on a red ribbon.

Our tractor broke down for good, so my next job was with the sowing brigade. Except for me, the entire group was Russian, riding a contraption filled with grain, releasing it through a kind of sieve while the oxen pulled it all ahead. After a while the sieve became empty, but there were no sacks to refill it with new grain. The ride went straight on and on this way until the noon break, the comrades telling me: "the fields do not belong to us and they don't belong to you either, so who cares?" Now, this was a perfect example of simulation: anybody could see that we were doing our work, riding the sowing machine, singing a catchy tune about the happy communist workers, building a socialist society. We covered many wheatfields that way.

More than half of the people stayed in the repair workshops. Some of these mechanics and tractor drivers were women. They behaved as if they could hold their own: strong and loud, these liberated women were a match in masculine vulgarity, carousing and drinking without any inhibitions reserved for public places. But they didn't bother me, so it seemed more like a spectacle to watch, without an obligation to participate in this social setup.

May first was a solemn holiday, celebrated by a day of rest so that we could share in the spiritual, moral renewal of speeches and ceremonies. We received our pay, the visiting dignitaries brought one boxfull filled with soapcakes and cotton goods; we had a choice to either buy a cake of soap or two meters of printed cotton fabric.

This was my first piece of soap since receiving one last year from Stefcia, eight or nine months ago, loosing it to a brisk river wave. That soap was an ordinary, household laundry cake. Now the choice was limited to one kind only, a small toilet soap in a violent pinkish and red, smelling strongly of cheap candy - still, holding it felt like a piece of pure gold.

The problem in this place was to find where to wash. The water well near the kitchen was too public. On the wall, by the entrance to the mess, hung a metal pot with a lever to push up for water - a "rukomoika". The next morning I got up before anybody else in the camp, walked some distance to a small ditch with partly-melted snow and two feet of water. One side of the ditch hid me from view. I undressed completely, lathering the body from head to toes, first time since last summer. I washed my underwear, laying it on the ground to dry in the rising sun. My dress could not be washed: it was a navy blue top and a pleated skirt, my school uniform which, already tight, would shrink in water beyond my size. With my coat on, I decided at least to kill the lice inside the dress seams. They were easy to find on the dark fabric. I went at the job systematically, counting one killed after another, until one hundred - then I had to give up, in a crying fit of self-pity.

Among all these strangers there were some friendly people; I told one of them, a woman occupying the bed next to mine, that I am determined to get away to join my family in Pavlodar. She promised to help, provided I kept it a secret. Because of many trucks coming to the camp, it was quite possible. Apparently some drivers had to go occasionally to Pavlodar and for money, they were ready to take an illegal passenger. About ten days

later she whispered to me to sneak out at night and wait for the truck some two kilometres away, to be picked up at the crack of dawn. The price was forty roubles.

The driver made me hide in the back of the open truck, covered with straw. Several hours later he told me to get off at the edge of town, and walk the rest of the way looking for the place where my family stayed.

With a euphoric feeling of happiness and anticipation to be back in civilization, I started walking along the streets of Pavlodar, occasionally stopping to ask for directions. The streets were unpaved, with sandy roads and hardly any traffic. The sidewalks were actually extensions of the road, with here and there a shallow ditch separating the pedestrians from the vehicular traffic. The houses lining the streets were one-level huts, some plastered but mostly similar to those in Djolkoduk, only neater looking. On the central square stood the town's tallest building, a former orthodox church with its onion dome, converted into the regional motor repair workshop. This was apparently done with all other churches in the Soviet Union, as people told us. There was no cross on the church.

My family lived at the other end of the city, in a clay peasant hut. As surprised as they were to see me, Mother and Basia handed me a basin and soap at arm's length to take care of my ablutions and de-lousing in the shed before I could come into the room. Basia actually burned my navy blue uniform, giving me something of her own to wear. Wow!

The tiny room was sublet from the Ukrainian owners, an elderly couple of peasants, he with thick gray hair, she wearing a kerchief on her head, tied in the typical peasant manner. They became very scared when they heard about my running away from the sovkhos and asked us to leave. It was less than ten years since they were deported themselves from Ukraine, the only survivors in the entire family. They agreed,

however, to sell to us half a litre of milk every second day, from their own cow.

A few houses away lived a Russian woman, a widow with her grownup daughter. We sublet a room from them, a room so tiny that, after spreading our straw mattress on the floor, there was hardly room to stand in. For the day the mattress was folded in half under a narrow table. Our cooking was done in the hut's passage, on the clay stove built close to the entrance. There was no plumbing in the house: the water came from the well outside, right next to the privy in the middle of the yard. There were no kerosene lamps available, even if we had the money for it: the only store in town was empty. But we discovered that the pharmacy had plenty of cod liver oil. Basia used it to make pancakes which she could eat, but I could not put it in my mouth. Ever since I remembered being fed every day a tablespoon of cod liver oil, it ^{always} made me sick and this violent aversion remained with me even now. But the oil served another purpose. By pushing a string through the cork, the apothecary bottle filled with the cod liver oil could be a lamp of sorts for a brief time, until the tip of the string burned down and had to be pushed upwards again. The flicker was impossible to read by, but it was better than absolutely nothing.

Three days after coming to Pavlodar the militia turned up at the house, looking for me. I was a deserter and the law demanded a stern punishment for it. Mother was at home just then and she talked to the two men, explaining about my youth, my loneliness at the farm without the family and asking for some consideration. The result was that they allowed me to stay at home, pending preparation for the trial.

They came every few days to check whether I did not escape, knowing that I had nowhere to go anyway.

Mother's salary as pianist at the Kazak theatre was too small to support us and I needed to work in order to have a food ration card. Our landlady was an attendant in the city's bathhouse; she promised to find out if there is a vacancy. The next day I was told to report for work at four o'clock in the afternoon.

Pavlodar had no plumbing and bathrooms were non-existent in the apartments or family houses. Thus a public bath was a very important institution.

The building had two storeys, the ground floor serving women and the top floor reserved for men. After buying a ticket at the entrance booth, women came into a large room to undress, then to come to the counter to get a washbasin. My job behind this counter was to make sure that the customer was absolutely naked, handing over to me her bundle of clothing, in exchange for which I gave her a zinc basin, to be taken by her to the next room, together with her own cake of soap. There the women had hot and cold running water, coming out of numerous faucets installed along two walls. They could sit on wooden benches rather than the stone floor. Adjacent to this large room was a smaller steam room. After the bath the women returned with the basin to get their bundle and their own towel in it, to dress back and leave.

After a while I overcame the embarrassment of looking at the nudity of strangers which these women did not seem to mind in the least. Only once a young girl started to cry and hid

behind her mother, obviously her first experience with this national cultural custom. Some women gave me a tip, something I also had to get used to: it was easy and most welcome, giving us extra money to go to the cinema once a week.

Every few days the bathhouse mechanism broke down, when either cold water only or boiling hot water only could run. Then, once a month the entire staff had to work at cleaning sludge from the outlets. Now and then, lifting the railing over the canal, we found embedded in this horrid mud a piece of soap somebody lost; carefully removed to dry out, it greatly resolved our problem of soap shortage. But the supreme bonus of the job was the moment when the place closed up at nine p.m., leaving the entire place to myself, to enjoy for as long as the hot water kept coming from the tap; for the few months I worked there I must have been the cleanest person in this capital city, if not in the entire Pavlodar region.

In June 1941 the war broke out between the two friends who swallowed Poland. Even the biggest efforts at propaganda of lies about the victorious Red Army, could not cover up the fast pace of advancing Germans into the Soviet interior. Our Ukrainian and Russian neighbors prayed for the liberation from Stalin and the NKVD terror, to be achieved by the German invasion - to them this was to be their salvation and hope to return home. Once an airplane flew over the city: it was impossible to recognize whose aircraft it was, but the Ukrainians began to hug each other and dance, convinced that this was a German military plane, soon to be followed by others to take

Pavlodar over as well.

One month later the Polish community was shaken by the news that Stalin and the Polish exile Government in London resumed their diplomatic relations. This agreement liberated all Polish prisoners, locked up in prisons and concentration camps, allowing them to chose any place they want to travel to in the USSR. The deportees like ourselves were also now free, entitled to move to any place of our choice in this country. This was the moment to begin hoping for an end to the misery of those who managed to survive so far, and an enormous moral uplift to hold on: God, let the Allies defeat the Germans quickly, so that we can all go back home!

The day after the news of the Soviet-Polish agreement appeared in the newspapers, Basia returned from the Ukrainian neighbors without the milk. They refused to sell it to her, she said : "They don't want to see us ever again. Poland was their hope for liberation, they trusted us and now they have been betrayed."

The proceedings against me for desertion from the sovkhos were dropped a few days earlier, because the militia was very busy with the war, particularly the mobilization. The city filled with men, drilled and marching through the streets. A little while later the mobilization was extended to the use of bathhouse as well. The staff was informed that as of next week it will be closed to the civilian population, to serve the army men only. In preparation for this new phase, two delousing wagons were installed in front of the building.

I told my landlady that I must be released from my job, because I cannot possibly work for men in the same capacity as I do for the women. She went with my message to the manager, only to return with a flat refusal. Again, I pleaded with her to explain to him that it's impossible to even consider working this way, but the woman said to forget it: she and all the other women were staying on. "Don't expect to get the manager's permission, he is trying to arrange for your marriage to his son. Maybe you saw the boy here last week, the blond one?"

The day when the army took the bathhouse over I just didn't go to the place, making me a saboteur of the war effort, a crime punishable by execution. Luckily, in those early days of the Soviet-Polish alliance the local authorities were not quite sure how to treat us. They stopped bullying us, meekly listening to Mother's and my own words of indignation about their indecency and shamelessness to keep me on this job.

"Why don't you give me something else to do instead?" The matter was dropped with a parting shot: "What would Lenin say to this?"

For a few days I had a job at the city's hospital, hired as a sanitarian, to clean the floors, empty the chamber pots, change sheets when a new patient was coming, clean the kitchen and carry big pots of cooked meals to the distribution point, then serving plates to the patients. The pay was beggarly, but the attraction was a chance to get a bowl of leftovers. Food was a lot on my mind. What apparently the normal young people consider an erotic dream, in my case such dreams were frequent and only about a plate of food.

Soon after the Polish agreement was signed, ^{the} number of families in Pavlodar increased from almost none to very many; now we met them everywhere, exchanging a few casual words about where we came from or ~~what~~ sort of work were we doing now. Mostly women, many with children, all came to await here the return of men from the concentration camps and prisons. During the next few weeks many families became re-united, but many others were told to wait. These men looked like ghosts: thin, pale, with sunken eyes and shaved-off hair slowly growing back, most of them lost their teeth, shabbily dressed in oversize garments, their feet shod in sandals or shoes made out of rubber tyres. Some men brought a companion who had nowhere else to go. Each family adopted one such man to provide him with one meal a day. Our guest was a forty-five year old judge, a man who looked at least eighty. Basia cooked a cabbage for him, he wanted it very soft and she simmered it for over three hours - still, it was too tough, he complained.

The men didn't like to talk about the concentration camp life. Most of them came from the labor camps located around Ural mountains, in the North, cutting down forests, far away from any towns and watched day and night by armed guards, with dogs trained to tear a man apart at a command. Dysentery killed more than half of them. The men were encouraged to work harder and exceed their daily quota of forest cutting, because for that they will be rewarded by an extra ration of bread. But no bread could compensate for the physical strain, and those men who wanted to be champions were the first ones

to pay with their lives.

They found out about their release by reading a notice, posted on the guardhouse, and their right to decide where they wish to go in the Soviet Union; the state will give them money to purchase the railroad tickets. Many men chose the farthest point on the map to receive more cash for the ticket, leaving to the fate what will happen next. They were not informed by the camp militia about the newly organized division of the Polish army, made up of some liberated prisoners of war under General Anders. But a word of mouth among other prisoners met at the railroad station, and bits of information from some local Russians, helped most of the Poles to buy tickets for Buzuluk, where the army begun to get organized.

In the meantime I hired myself to pick vegetables in the garden plots, owned by the Russian families on the outskirts of the city. For a day's picking one was paid a bucketful of potatoes or some heads of cabbage. This was also the watermelon season which was a treat, eaten at dinnertime with bread and some salt. The local housewives were pickling tomatoes, watermelon, cucumbers and cabbage.

Toward the end of August I was invited to a meeting, held by a group of Polish women. They were told by the local militia that the Polish government is sending to Pavlodar two delegates, to find out about the Polish citizens in the region. Somebody had to help the delegates during their stay here. Since I was unemployed at the time, I volunteered for the job.

Two officers of the new Polish army arrived the following week, met by a large group of us at the railroad station. Barely

a few weeks out of the Kozielsk camp for prisoners of war, they wore some improvised uniforms, picked and borrowed from other officers to look as official as possible, because the shipment of military stuff was still en route from Great Britain to Murmansk. They were sent here, they said, to find out during these few weeks as much as they could about the Polish population and return to the Army. They cannot help us in any way now, they have no such authority and no money either. Our high hopes for the rescue had to be laid to rest for some other time.

It felt great to become part of this group, even when they told me right away, that they have no money to pay me: they received just enough money to pay for the tickets, cost of the hotel and food allowance. There was one hotel in Pavlodar, a very modest, one storey building with cell-like rooms, with a privy outside in the backyard. One room, furnished with a small table and two chairs was our office. When it got dark in the afternoon, an attendant brought in a small kerosene lamp to work by. Some notebook paper, an ink bottle and pen completed the office stationery. I could practice again my calligraphic skills. The two men spent most of the day visiting local offices, the hotel management discouraged most of the visitors to come inside, leaving me plenty of free time in the luxury of peaceful solitude, in a clean and comfortable place.

A chance of having a lamp for the evenings became a source of temptation to get hold of such a lamp for our home, at any cost. What would I give to be able to read a page or two at

bedtime! I started to watch the ritual of hotel servants and personnel. Leaving the office in the evening, the lamp was turned off and left on the table, its glass chimney half blackened with soot. In the morning the lamps were taken out into the far end of the corridor to be cleaned, filled with kerosene and put in the window frame opposite the manager's desk. Somehow this was proof that the Soviet economy did work sometimes, capable to put together the several components the lamp had, all fitting one another. "Well, you see, the main reason for shortages in stores is the policy of economic independence between one region and another. If one region produces glass chimneys, you can get them easily at the store. If the lamp base is manufactured in another region, it is very hard to buy it here, because there is no provision for importing it here. Besides, you never know if one item would fit the other one." This was how one of the local comrades gave us another insight into the Soviet economy.

The obsession with owning a lamp took better of me, at the risk of my freedom if caught and condemned for petty theft, punishable by one year in prison. My rationale was very simple: you communists monsters, I never owned anything but you stole even that, trying to turn me into your slave - so there, this is my small revenge. One morning I walked into the hotel with my coat unbuttoned, and seeing that the manager bent over some papers, I swooped the lamp with my left hand under the coat, walking without a change of pace toward the office. Hidden all day behind a pile of newspapers, the lamp

lit up our room for supper. I unceremoniously threw out the apothecary bottle with cod liver oil and its . . . saturated piece of yarn.

The visit of our delegates came to an end, without anything certain about what will happen next. Two days before their departure I was thanked for all the help and asked what they could get for me from the special store they had an access to. Did they see any butter in that store? Next day I was happily presented with a full kilogram of beautifully yellow and rich butter, a sight for sore eyes after more than one and half year of vague remembrance, a royal salary for two months of work.

I like to think of it as my first encounter with public service, rather than all the other jobs performed for my slavedrivers. It is still my cherished piece of paper, certifying that Zofia Sawicka, citizen of the Polish Republic, is the trustee to the Delegate of the Polish Army and the Polish Embassy in Moscow, for the purpose of organizing social care for the Polish population on the territory of the City of Pavlodar; this position includes secretarial functions for the temporary Polish Committee. Signed by the Delegate of the Polish Army and the Polish Embassy in Moscow, this document is dated October 27, 1941.

The hotel room was no longer available after the departure of the Delegates, and there was no place where we could get together or try to provide some help and support for the increasing number of people, drifting in from prisons, concentration camps and remote villages. They were searching for relatives

or their children, deported after a mother or both parents were arrested, also the fathers returning to what was left of their families. It was necessary to keep a list of all names, to help people to trace each other.

The Soviets allotted to us an empty house on Mayakovsky Street. I settled down in the front room, furnished with a table, one chair and a few empty wooden crates for additional seats. A school notebook, the only stationery, served me for all the record keeping data; the office had to close at dusk for lack of lamp or even a candle. To boost my own courage in this official capacity held all by myself - nobody else had the time for it - I made for myself an armband in red and white, with an embroidered white eagle and the words "Polish Delegation" on it. I felt that wearing it, on the left sleeve of my navy blue coat, added some stature to my otherwise insignificant looking persona.

There were many people coming in, all hungry for some news and a glimmer of hope that somebody cares and can help somehow in their misery. A brother helped his sister to come in on her crutches, both teenagers deported all alone. He decided to join the Polish army and brought his sister to be taken care of, because she had tuberculosis of the bones in her knees.

Towards the end of November I was alone at my desk when I happened to look through the window behind me, giving on a usually empty and quiet street. There was a caravan of some twenty sleds pulled by oxen, with men and women walking alongside. They stopped in front of my window. I went outside, with a horrible suspicion which was tragically confirmed: these Polish families heard a rumour that a special train is

on its way to Pavlodar, to transport all the Polish people to Persia, where we can await the end of war in better conditions. They sold everything they owned to buy these sleds and oxen, determined not to live through another winter in Siberia.

Telling them about the falsity of this rumour was bad enough, but ^{it} was worse to think frantically what can be done to help them now. The daylight was nearly over and the people could not sleep on the snowy street. I turned the entire office building over to them to spend the night in and stay there until I could find some quarters for nearly fifty persons.

With my armband for support in authority, needed to confront total strangers and to be taken seriously despite looking ^{even} younger than my age, the next morning I began to knock at some larger homes to ask for rooms. After a few days all of the families were able to move out of the office, a few of them even decided to return back, to await another chance to get out of Kazakstan.

Just when I was beginning to realize that this job looks like a bit much for me, scared to be confronted with another calamity and my morale slowly sinking, a telegram came to expect the arrival of a full fledged delegate of the Polish Embassy, coming to Pavlodar to open an office. Everybody cheered up.

Stanislaw Lickindorf was to us like a vision from another planet: a dashing young man in elegant English tweeds, with shoes so well shined that eyes almost hurt to look at them, a healthy, rosy and well-scrubbed face, exuding an aroma of fresh, new and clean clothing! He was sent here straight from

London, a city bombardel by the Germans, but where civilized life was evidently available between the air raids. This glimpse into a possible future for those of us who will manage to survive was just what we needed.

With shameless sentimentality, basking in Mr. Lickindorf's personality was like finding a quiet, warm room sheltering from the brutalities and indignities of the world around us. He conveyed an authority of his position without being arrogant, confident that his diplomatic immunity shields him from the local bullies; he even went to the point of making demands to improve the sorry conditions of the Poles. An entire villa was given to him for the office, also some desks, chairs and cabinets. The Delegation staff grew to about a dozen persons. As the responsibilities were assigned in an orderly manner, it was impressive to watch, how much such a group of people could do, in comparison to my feeble, single-handed and half-baked attempts a few weeks earlier. All the personnel were adults, they all had degrees and experience in office work, especially when compared with my own background. The result was a gradual feeling of not being needed any longer in the office, although nobody had the nerve to tell me so; after all, I was the only one holding the fort, without any salary, and it didn't seem very decent to throw me out now that money was available to hire such a large personnel.

Without any experience in office work, I didn't even know about the protocol of law and order in bureaucracy, including a blind obedience expected from the lowest and youngest member of the establishment. I didn't know that I was breaking the

rules by speaking out to my superior about what I think should be done as one of the basic functions for our people in Pavlodar. The food rationing was in the hands of one Soviet office, where each person had to appear once a month to collect the ration book for the family. The waiting lines for many thousands of Pavlodar residents were a torture, exposing people standing a whole day out in the open to rain, snow and a freezing cold. If we explained to the authorities that, by taking care of the ration cards for the Polish people, we are actually helping the overworked Soviet government in their own war effort against the Germans, we might be permitted to do it. I suspect that the Delegate never found out whose idea it really was, but a few days later the supervisor gave me the job of distributing the monthly rationing cards for our citizens. By then there were a few hundred Polish families, all dependent on the bread uniquely available through the ration cards; occasionally, cards were also issued for sugar, but these couldn't be used even once, because there was no sugar for sale at all.

The system of obtaining the ration cards consisted of presenting to the Soviet office a detailed list of persons who registered with us at the time; on that basis I was given a number of cards, against a signed receipt. Because some names were added during the month, I always had a few extra cards. I maintained a register of each recipient and a signature against each name. At the end of the month my duty was to present a minute accounting for every single card, returning any unused ones at the same time.

My reporting officer was Mr. Weitzman, introduced to me by a Russian liaison officer, with a friendly remark that Mr. W. is Polish. He wore a military uniform of a colonel, sat alone in a large office, behind a big, elaborate desk, with comfortable armchairs and a table next to a roaring fireplace. Mr. Weitzman looked very carefully at each page of my report, checked the figures as well as the attached cards, then gave me a written authorization to pick up a new supply of cards for the next month. He was a fatherly, soft-spoken man with a fat stomach. We chatted for a while after he examined my report and, to my complete surprise, I saw him feed the entire bundle of my papers to the fire. I suppose I owe my life to him for this reason. The law for cheating in ration cards was execution - five persons were already shot. I could not look at some of the families who had absolutely nothing else to eat, beside their bread ration. A woman with four children still living and three others already buried, now also had her husband who returned from the concentration camp, crippled and sick. Few other such families, with barely surviving old parents, did not seem to have a chance to survive long enough to travel, and so on - oh well, I must have inherited a gambling instinct from my Father. It seemed absolutely foolproof to add a fictitious family name here and there among the several hundred; who would possibly take the trouble to check every single name? But there it was: Mr. Weitzman looked at me, said nothing and burned my report, repeating this process each time I came. I still think of him and cannot understand why this intelligent and educated man became a communist?

About the time I became active in the Polish Delegation, one evening Mother brought home a new friend. She was a Russian woman, tall and good looking, with an unmistakable appearance of class, very intelligent and charming. Her husband was the editor of Moscow Pravda, she was a reporter herself, as she told us; after his arrest she was deported from Moscow to Pavlodar. She was barely surviving on her menial job, her clothes were worn out, with patches and darning. Mother begged me to help this poor friend with an extra bread ration, and I agreed: it is hard to explain, except that we had a hope to get out of this hell, but she had to wait until it freezes over. This new friend became our source of learning more about the Soviet society which we had no way of meeting. She was well educated, had a good job once; they had no children and, because of the danger of associating with political criminals like her husband, the rest of the family broke off with her as well.

We asked her about life in Moscow. She explained that the cities were categorized into a first, second and third class, where only a certain class of citizens was permitted to reside; the definition of social class was based on the degree of political loyalty to the communist party. If a member of a Moscow family was arrested for a political crime, the family was expelled from the capital - city of first category - usually for good. For deportees such like her or ourselves, Moscow was absolutely out of bounds. There were no official legal publications we could read and find out whether what anybody was telling us was true, either about themselves or

about any civic regulations, but others would say similar things, so it must have been true. Our friend was allowed to use the library, bringing me some classics to read. I tried to read one or two contemporary novels, but they were so full of propaganda garbage, I just couldn't stomach them.

Our landlady became ill and had to stop working in the bathhouse. She had cancer which ended her life a few weeks later. Once, during my visit she whispered to me to beware of the Moscow friend. By then I already had a feeling of suspicion myself, she was much too inquisitive about us but never critical of her own experiences with the Soviet justice system, never talking about the mass persecutions and the tyranny of the communist world. It was rude to ask her not to come to our house any more, but I asked Mother and Basia not to mention a word about my work to her, and not to discuss any other people, the war or politics with her. I realized, that it would be dangerous to antagonize this person, since she could denounce me for giving her a bread card.

Was it really true what a Polish friend said once? "I am an old man who lived and worked in Russia before the revolution - he was an engineer, running and industrial development in Crimea - we had a wonderful social life, plenty of receptions where Russians were also the life of the party, ending them with swearing their eternal friendship to you. The next day they would betray you, always ready to denounce you for any personal confidence, to the superiors or the police." If that was before the revolution, how much more true now: after all, everything in everybody's life in the Soviet Union depended on the whim of the secret police, making it very tempting to

ingratiate oneself with this absolute power.

In the early spring of 1942 we received from the West a magnificent gift, a wagonload of clothing, shoes, blankets and cooking oil, sent by UNRRA from England and the USA. The fat looked like lard, but it was strange on a slice of bread, so we finally guessed that it should be used for cooking only. Most of the clothing was from the British army: black grained leather shoes, absolutely new, lined with white cotton cloth inside; I didn't feel a bit silly carrying my pair around like a pair of glass slippers, keeping them next to my pillow on the floor at night. There were enough blankets to give each family. Large, knitted scarves came in gray and charcoal colors, enough for each person. Mother unwound the yarn of our three scarves to knit a dress with elegant stripes. There were also bales of American dresses, suits, and coats for men, dainty ladies' shoes we forgot existed and could not use them now, in the mud and sand of the local streets. The Delegation was told to expect one such wagon every month, making us feel rich beyond imagination, especially because all these treasures had a great barter value for eggs, meat, milk and butter. But only one more wagon came to Pavlodar some six months later. All the welfare assistance shipped from England to Murmansk was put on a train to ride across Russia to the Asian regions where the Polish Delegations were to receive one wagon each. The trains were apparently intercepted on the way, and all the goods were stolen.

Emboldened by these whiffs of human rights, some people went as far as asking the Delegate to have a Catholic priest visit Pavlodar. As skeptical as everyone was to get a permission from the Soviets, a few weeks later a big crowd went to the station to meet the train and greet a Polish priest.

There was no church in Pavlodar, except for the filthy looking motor repair workshop in the Russian Orthodox church. The Soviets offered a building with several large rooms and a courtyard to celebrate a mass. Personally, all I remember is a huge number of people, more Russians and Ukrainians than the whole Polish community, all standing inside the rooms and spilling into the yard outside. Some people cried, I was numb and unable to concentrate on the liturgy or what the sermon was about.

The war was going very badly for the Russians. The Germans were advancing deeper and deeper into the country, Leningrad was invaded long ago, Moscow was surrounded. The newspapers and radio blared propaganda about the heroic battles and monstrous atrocities of the Germans against the civilian population. Our Ukrainian neighbors started to suspect some truth to these news, incredulous about the stupidity of Germans: they were saying that Germans could have Ukraine just like that, if they only showed a sign of wanting to liberate it from Stalin.

Pavlodar, this out-of-the-way rural, provincial town started to see the war closer, with an increased railroad traffic from the West. The heavy industry was being evacuated from the European part of the USSR deep into Asia, to save the factories from the Germans. Then several trains of cargo wagons shuttled by, with human skeletons looking through the barred windows, some waving at us: they were the Volga Germans, deported from

their homes. I wondered about the fate of my Volga German pig manager from Djolkoduk.

From the beginning of the war with Germany the Soviets created the Second Front, a compulsory civilian effort to support the military in food and other essentials. Entire brigades of women and youngsters were mobilized to do collective farming.

For the Polish community, there was a special problem of thousand of orphaned children, some of them the only survivors of a deported family. Negotiations were started to organize a group of five hundred orphans and evacuate them to Iran, then to find a quiet place to shelter them until the end of war. Several weeks were spent by the Delegation, searching through the region's villages and gather all the children in Pavlodar, then to organize the transport to the frontier with Iran. The young girl, crippled with tuberculosis of the bones who arrived with her brother the previous year, was included in this group as well.

No matter how important and purposeful my life seemed now, there were nostalgic moments of memories of school, meetings to discuss books, listening to learned people, learning something new. This missing link to civilization had to be filled one way or another, but not with the local "diesiatiletka". We were not permitted to attend school, but we had a pretty low opinion about its educational standards anyway, what with the communist propaganda forced down everybody's throat, the censorship of literature, paranoia about the rest of the world - a girl who just graduated from the local school never heard

about a microscope.

Tomasz Zan, a poet and writer in the early nineteenth century and a friend of Adam Mickiewicz, organized a society of philomaths at the University of Vilno, in order to train young people in the arts of literature, science, morality, modesty, honesty and friendship. Next he became president of Philarets, a society dedicated to the cultivation of patriotism and virtue among the young people. I suggested that we organize a similar society now, to give us some guidance about the world and help us this way to get through the hard times. Zan's own dedication to the young spirits cost him a few years of imprisonment in Siberia too, yet he managed to return and carry on. A few people agreed to my idea, which I then formalized, naming it "Towarzystwo Zielonego Zuka" (Society of the Green Beetle). Closest to the initials of Zan that I could think of, it also suggested a glowworm, cheering up the darkness and - last but not least - the office happened to have a bottle of green ink I could use to make official membership cards for the entire number of ten of us.

We had a few and sporadic meetings about what should - and could - be read from what was actually available. Others spoke about books they remembered reading, or any other ideas, anything to sustain the morale and simple human instinct of self-preservation. We talked about the future and what we want to do in life. Many wanted to travel before returning to Poland; I wanted no travel, just to go back and stay there for good. This is where I heard for the first time about the survival of the fittest, rationalizing that the weaklings have no right to expect a survival: this was not the

speakers credo, just his lecture, opening the young eyes and minds to realism of nature. Was this the reason why a cat or a bitch refused to feed a newborn, not behaving like a healthy rest of the litter? But then, how about Voltaire, a man with many illnesses, each apparently capable to kill an ordinary person, yet keeping a spry and brilliant mind alive for over eighty five years? And what about the people in Djolkoduk, killed by the cruelty of other people, simply by not giving them food, by isolating everybody from what was actually a large production center of meat and dairy produce, strictly for export into the stomachs of a privileged few? Finally, some of us also decided to do some writing of articles and short pieces for "Polska", a paper published by the Polish Embassy in USSR.

The Polish Army, organized out of the prisoners in the USSR, decided in 1942 to leave the Soviet Union in order not to fall under Stalin's command. The reason for this decision became more obvious when an army unit, organized out of Czech prisoners, was sent to an apparently hopeless battle, wiping the entire division out of existence. The Russians in Pavlodar were very matter-of-fact about Stalin's war strategy: win by the sheer quantity of human meat, an abundant commodity in this huge country. There was every reason to believe that the Polish Division would be treated the same way. General Anders decided to join the Western front instead.

The Soviet attitude towards the Poles was changing for worse from the moment they found out about the Polish army moving out. New restrictions were imposed on what we could and could not do. Mr. Lickindorf felt quite safe with his

diplomatic immunity, but he finally felt that some concessions had to be made to placate the angry and rude local officials. One such concession was to have the Polish Delegation join officially the Second Front efforts.

He called in Nina Sajewska and myself, the two youngest staff members of the Delegation, to tell us that after many months of pressure from the Soviets to demonstrate the Polish solidarity in the war against Germans, he must agree to their demands. For this reason he decided that Nina and myself must join the Second Front by going to a farm and work there until the end of the season.

We travelled some six hours by train, to a large farm center. All the workers lived in barracks; the women in ours came from all walks of life. There was a canteen and altogether more tolerable conditions from those in the Djolkoduk sovkhos. Among many Soviet nationalities, there wasn't even one single Kazak: "Thank goodness, because these Kalbits are not even human beings", was a common opinion. The epithet "Kalbit" came from "excreta" and "beat", possibly related to the Kazak pastime in fuel production. The other nickname was "voshoied", lice-eater.

After some two months of helping the war effort, thousands of cabbage heads grew nicely, only to be chopped off for borstch to feed some poor fellows marching to their own execution: these cabbages were my contribution to make their life a bit more enjoyable before they were sent to their certain death.

A small unit of the Red Army was stationed at the farm, as liaison between the military and the Second fronts. To our utter disgust, we met among the Russian soldiers four Polish

men: it was shocking to discover our own people, working for this enemy, killing innocent civilians, children and old women, their own neighbors and relatives. After all, these men were baptized as children and, even if they did not practice their religion, it was not the same as associating with those who spat at God. But they explained what happened: if they refused to be mobilized, they would be shot for treason, and their families too.

Nina and myself felt very isolated from any news about the family, the Delegation or the war, until one day the local NKVD agent informed us that the Polish Delegation had been closed down and the entire staff is gone. As soon as we fully understood the meaning of this message, we requested permission to return to Pavlodar; the permission was granted.

The train was met by a large crowd of people at the station, dominated by uniformed militia, military and NKVD men. I was surprised to see Mother: how did she know about my coming? She had a bag with some warm clothing for me, convinced that I will be arrested and taken straight to jail from the station. But nothing like that happened, Nina and myself could go home without being stopped.

Mother gave us the news. A few days ago the Delegation building was sealed, after the police emptied it completely of all papers and files. Despite his diplomatic passport, Mr. Lickindorf was arrested and so was the entire staff, all of them locked up in the NKVD and undergoing investigation. There was every reason to expect Nina and myself to be also arrested at any moment. Inasmuch as all the arresting is normally done at night, I kept a packed bag next to my bedding.

A few days passed, awaiting the NKVD each night, until one became used to the idea and tried to resume a normal life. There was still some stuff at the warehouse, to which I had the key at home, so I could open it for people who came to ask for whatever was available. I selected a few items of clothing to make two parcels for our arrested friends. Nina and I went to the NKVD to request permission to deliver these parcels; we were turned down and instructed to come back in a few days' time. This process was repeated several times, until one morning the guard behind the small window said yes, come with the parcels tonight at seven o'clock.

Basia came along, just in case. The NKVD building was surrounded by a high, solid wall, topped by wires, hiding from the outside any kind of building in the interior. The entrance was through a doorway with a small window. We reported to the uniformed guard behind the window; he took his time checking out with someone inside, finally allowing us to enter into a small waiting room. After a few moments another door opened to let Nina and me ^{in/} with the packages. Basia remained sitting on the bench in the waiting room. Two agents took our parcels, then each one led one of us separately into the interior of the building. I saw my friend go into the second door on the right of the corridor and I followed my caballero a few doors further, until he opened for me a door on the left.

The man sitting behind a desk kept his head bent down over some papers, as if he did not hear us coming in. I was standing in the middle of the room, dark except for one lamp on the desk. The guard left, softly closing behind him the door, thickly

padded in dark, leather-like oilcloth. The office was non-descript with a few chairs, portraits of Lenin and Stalin, some communist posters.

After a while the man must have decided that I have fully grasped the situation and now was the time to notice me. He was young, in early thirties, short, with blond hair and a pink face, light blue eyes. He introduced himself as captain Novikov and allowed me to sit down in the chair opposite. Turning the lamp fully at my face, he started rearranging some papers on the desk, then picked something from the shadows: it was a revolver he put between us in such a way that the handle was near him and the nozzle in my direction. He didn't offer an explanation why I was here and I knew better than to ask. After all, being on the of the Delegation seemed obvious that I was expecting a treatment similar to what the others received. We all thought it peculiar that I was left alone until now anyway, making me hope that this time it wasn't more than an investigation.

Starting with asking my name, age and place of birth, Novikov kept writing in long hand saying that this is a report of his investigation which I am expected to sign. Suddenly, his quiet official manner switched to a hissing, aggressive tone, telling me that I stole bread ration cards. I denied it, of course. I run quickly in my mind through the specific events: every single monthly report was burned in front of me by Mr. Weitzman, there were no duplicates in the office files, I passed the job on to my successor without any mention of my own doing, before my departure to the Second Front. He just couldn't have any proof, so I started demanding from him that he produce one.

He went on writing the report, then switched to a friendly, jolly attitude, jumping out with "what is the Society of Green Beettle"? question. So they knew about it too, I was quite surprised, but answered it with as much ease as I was capable of. I told him, many times, that it was my idea, hoping to set the record straight, so that others would not be punished for it. "You have taken away from me my education, my schools, my books and I miss all of it. What is the harm in wanting to talk, to listen and to read with friends about things we like?"

An orderly came in with a glass of hot tea, a sugar bowl on the side. They gallantly offered me some tea as well; I curtly said no, thanks, trying to remember the taste of sugar Novikov was piling into the glass: four heaping teaspoonfuls!

The orderly went out, leaving the door half-open. A moment later I started hearing screams of a woman from a nearby room, as if tortured alive. The screams went on and on. I sat still in my chair and when I looked up, Novikov was watching me without saying a word. Then he pushed toward me five handwritten pages for my signature, allowing me to read the text first. In the meantime he took the revolver into his hands, stroking it gently at first, then pointing it at my head. Go to blazes, thought I, reading the paper. Some sentences were twisted and untrue, so I said that I refuse to sign the report. Novikov took it calmly, not a bit angry. He put the revolver back on the desk, went to close the door, and the initial process started again. The man was capable of switching moods from official to familiar, from polite to rude, from soft to loud, from hand gestures to banging both fists on the desk. My answers were

repeated as many times as he asked. The second report was better, but by now I was damn determined to stand my ground - I saw how this man seemed to thrive on trying to frighten me. He didn't use the revolver the first time, so I saw no reason to worry about it now, during the second act of this sick show; again, I showed him the sentence I objected to and Novikov declared, in a very matter of fact tone, that I had a right to a mutually agreeable text. The door opened about then, a man came in to whisper with Novikov, then he went away, leaving the door open half-way, just like before. This time it was a man, screaming and shouting some incoherent words, from one of the nearby rooms. Was I supposed to think this was Mr. Lickindorf, like maybe one of my female colleagues being tortured earlier? I refused to let him see that I heard anything, although I could not vouch for looking inscrutable.

It was many hours by now since the session begun, and I was beginning to feel the physical strain; this I could endure somehow, but it would be worse if I couldn't go to the bathroom. Our dinner before coming to NKVD was a slice of bread and watermelon, some ten hours ago; it was now a problem in which the sense of modesty and pride was pitched against physical limitations. So, when the orderly came in with another glass of tea for Novikov, I broke down and asked to be shown to a bathroom. Novikov became quite a gentleman about it, conducting me out of the office through a long corridor, until he opened a door into a large yard. In the middle of the yard stood two latrines together, on a cement base with a few steps. I realized being in the prison compound, empty, with small barred windows facing on two sides. The inside was dark, with

barely visible graffiti on the whitewashed walls. Novikov waited in the open doorway where I left him; now he forbade me to look around.

The session resumed, again with the questions and answers on stealing bread cards. It bothered me, how could they know anything about it: I could not believe that Weitzman would say anything. This man burned each of my reports on his own initiative and, whatever reasons he had for being a communist, he obviously had some decency left in him, especially knowing that I did not take any money for letting people have some extra food. Then I remembered Mother's Russian friend and now understood, why she befriended us in the first place: to spy on me and provoke me into doing something illegal as a member of the Polish Delegation. My heart sunk there and then, I felt like a criminal caught red-handed. As I went on, denying stubbornly everything, for the first time I felt that my fate was sealed, there was no way I would leave this place alive: this woman had proof against me, enough to be executed in accordance with the law.

Then, again about the Green Beetle, interrogating me for some hidden secrets and conspiratorial intentions. Feeling already defeated on the bread count, I blew all caution to the wind and started shouting: "Tomasz Zan was punished and sent to Siberia a century ago, for teaching the young how to love their country. Now I am a young person who loves the same ideas he did, and I am in Siberia already - what more are you going to do to me?" What did I have to lose now anyway?

Novikov kept writing for some time, the daylight started coming through the window and I sat waiting, realizing with some

surprise that I stopped feeling nervous, or even tired. After he finished, new five pages were turned over to my side of the desk for reading and signature. This time the revolver stayed untouched, while I looked at every single word, in a familiar by now handwriting. The report had nothing objectionable, I put my signature to it, next to his own.

Novikov tidied the desk and said that the meeting is over. I sat there, looking at him, so he explained that since the meeting is over, I can go home. "This is not a safe time for a young lady to be out alone, so please allow me to walk you home." I had no problem deciding that I would rather confront a drunken soldier than risk being seen with an NKVD agent.

Basia decided hours earlier that I was arrested, especially when Nina was released after two hours of interrogation, so she went home and I truly surprised them, turning up for breakfast. Later some friends came to find out what happened; one of the men kept nodding his head, saying that my description fitted the pattern of NKVD methods he read about. That day I unpacked the bag I held ready for my arrest since my return from the Second Front. We always lived in the same hut, but after the landlady died, her daughter rented to us the larger room where we had enough space for separate beddings.

It wasn't more than three weeks later that all the Delegation staff was released from prison. The NKVD allowed them to return home just to pack during the night, waiting there to take them immediately to the train station for Kuibyshev, the war capital where all the embassies were transferred in 1941.

Nobody knew about it, until they left and we found out from their families what actually happened. The Polish Embassy made arrangements to have all the Pavlodar personnel evacuated to Iran; Mr. Lickindorf remained in Kuibyshev a little longer, assuring Nina and me, by telegram, that we are not forgotten.

Indeed, a few days later arrived another telegram from the Embassy to Nina Sajewska, asking her to travel to Kuibyshev and join the Embassy staff. Nina agreed, deciding to leave her mother in Pavlodar until she could be evacuated to Iran. The next telegram from the Embassy was sent to the local militia, requesting that a permit be given for Nina to buy a train ticket for Kuibyshev. This was a routine Soviet procedure, without which no travel was permitted. One week later the request was denied, on the grounds that Nina Sajewska is not a Polish citizen, because she is of Russian Orthodox faith. As Nina explained to me, her father was of the Orthodox rite and she was baptized in his church, but both her parents were Polish. An appeal was made both by Nina and the Embassy, categorically rejected on the grounds of her religion.

I was the second choice on the Embassy's list, as it looked from the telegram I received a few days later. Of course I accepted the offer, starting to go about the formalities to leave as soon as possible. My work with the Embassy would make it much easier for Mother and Basia to leave for Iran as well. By then many families already joined the transport south going to the Polish Army; now it was our opportunity to get out as well.

The militia refused the Embassy's request to let me go. I asked for the reasons why, but the man just said nyet and

that was that. The head of the militia was a captain who received petitioners once a week. He also refused to let me go. I saw no point in hoping to ever get a permission and stopped my pilgrimages to the militia headquarters. Then Mother took over. Setting out once a week after dinner, to spend a few hours of waiting her turn and arguing to let them grant a pass for me, it became part of her routine, always with the same, predictable result: nyet. To Mother it was a kind of necessity but I stopped waiting up for her return late at night.

Toward the end of 1942 the Russians started a new campaign directed at the Polish people, telling some of them that they should apply for Soviet passports. A friend of ours, a trustee of the Polish Delegation, was arrested in early December, allegedly for refusing to accept such a passport, carried by every single person in the USSR as identification document. So far the Polish people were excluded from this system, we had no I.D.s of any kind; now, this shift in the government policy became highly suspicious. Most of us were convinced that once the war is over and the Polish Government demands our return, the Soviets will deny that they are holding any Polish citizens. Rumours were spreading that some regions - Petropavlovsk and Semipalatynsk - have conducted the passportization campaign by intimidating most of the Poles into accepting it. In Pavlodar, it was less widespread at the time.

The situation was worsening, like a trap tightening around, ready to slam the cage shut. I tried to recall the reasons why we didn't jump at the opportunity of going south a few months earlier to Jangi-Jul, where General Anders concentrated the army for departure from this terrible country. At that

time, however, I was working at the Delegation and feeling protected and useful. Besides, we had no money to buy train tickets and nothing to sell to pay for them, even if the militia gave us then the travel permits. The times of easier travel were over now, the chances of working for the Embassy were growing smaller, we had to wait now for the end of war and I needed to think about a new job.

Mother never stopped her weekly appearances at the militia. In the middle of January, 1945 she run into the house, calling me that I have a permission to travel to Kuibyshev. How did she do it? "Well, again I got hold of the captain, saying how wasted your life is here, without schools or any future. The Embassy offers you an opportunity to do something useful with your life; the captain is the same age as I am, he has children too. I asked him, like one parent to another, to understand my request. He heard me a few times before, he knows how stubborn I am and finally gave in, maybe to get rid of me as well."

I run to the post office the next morning to send a cable to Kuibyshev who might have forgotten about me after all this time, or gave the job to somebody else; after all, my protector Mr. Lickindorf left Russia by then, there must have been thousands begging for a job at the Embassy and I was probably the least qualified among them. When no reply came after three days, I went anxiously to enquire at the post office.

A few postal workers sat in a row of windows; one woman heard my enquiry, walked around the dividing counter to my side where I was the only client at this moment. She was tall,

very thin, wasted-looking; in a soft voice she said yes, there is a cable for me, but "it will take at least two more days before you can expect it delivered - surely I don't have to explain to you the reason?" Then she whispered that I can start packing for the trip. Two days later a postal messenger delivered the telegram to my home address.

It took a few more days to be ready. As an employee of a diplomatic institution, I had to look as elegant as I possibly could, of course. The British army black boots were a few sizes too large, but then they could be stuffed with a layer of newspaper against the January cold; a pair of heavy, knitted military socks also fitted in, covering the worst parts of the heavily darned stockings. The dress was the one Mother knitted out of three military scarves, in elegant stripes of light gray and charcoal, blending nicely with the gray shades of my socks. The school winter coat, navy blue with a beige lamb fur collar was a bit tight at the shoulders and on the short side, but otherwise it still fitted. A knitted cap, a woollen scarf and British army gloves completed my wardrobe.

Friends helped to round up a whole chicken, cut up into fricassed pieces; a loaf of bread with a slicing knife; half a kilo of sugar in a tin; some salt for the bread; an enamel cup for water and two cakes of toilet soap. A towel and change of underwear completed the luggage, all fitted into a backpack; this way both arms were free to push with the crowds and climb or descend very high train steps.

All my friends came to say goodbye. One of them said: "Do you remember what I told you? You kept seeing off every single person you knew, and that one day it will be your turn."

Asking for information about train schedule could suggest that I am a spy, so Mother and Basia were prepared to wait for my letter to know how long it took me to get to Kuibyshev. Anyway, this was wartime, when nobody could expect to travel on schedule.

The departure from Kazakstan was definitely more luxurious than the trip from Poland two and half years earlier. This was a train for people, filling the wooden benches to full capacity. Bundles of all sizes and shapes covered the floor, overflowing from under the bench seats. Two additional bunks were built above the seats, the top one just about able to fit a person horizontally. For the day all passengers had to sit on the lowest bench, so crowded that I felt lucky to find a spot for myself. With my backpack pushed underneath, the ride on the hard wood seat was not cushy, but quite tolerable.

It took two nights to reach Omsk. The first night I spent sitting up, the second one on the very top bunk, offered as a gesture of friendship by my companions. All the passengers were Russian, most of them dressed like typical peasants, stoically enduring the trip which for some started two weeks earlier. The women mothered me, warning against thieves roaming the train day and night, especially when everybody was asleep. Indeed, with my backpack for a pillow, I felt it pulled from under my head, just in time to scare the thief away.

One family of five was returning home after many years of forced deportation. They were originally from the Smolensk region, so I asked whether they heard of my father's family: yes, of course, they said, but not more than that. They were not going to take risks talking to a stranger, especially on their way back from the sentence just served. As it was, Smolensk was now under the German occupation and I didn't have the courage to ask where they were going to live.

At one station came in a middle-aged man, looking like a civilized professional. He was an engineer, returning from a field trip to the southern Kazakstan. He was telling me about the beauty of Leningrad where he used to live and his story about a church, entirely cemented brick by brick with whites of chicken eggs, apparently the solidest of all glues in construction. In exchange, he listened to my building experience at the Kazak village. I could never check whether his story was true, but he knew that mine was. What made me somewhat suspicious of him was his surprise at hearing that some two million Poles are kept in this country as prisoners and deportees: could he possibly be that ignorant? Did the educated class choose not to know, to stay out of trouble in this police country?

The train reached Omsk late on the third day, after interminable stops. Here I was supposed to change trains. After pushing and shoving in a crowd, I found an official who said that there is no train today, nobody knows when one will be available, ask again tomorrow.

The railroad station was a large building, with a restaurant on the second floor. I could get there some noodle soup, a nice change of some warm food after the trip. Noone could give me any information about a hotel in town, until a militia guard said that the town hotel was not available for transients like myself. The only thing was to remain at the station, which was the closest thing to a snakepit I could imagine. The ground floor, the top floor and the staircase between them were filled with hundreds of people, mostly men, behaving like vicious animals: drunk already and still drinking, shouting, fighting with each other, many with bloody faces and some with knives in hand. All these men were criminals, offered freedom for the price of volunteering to go to the front: if they survived the war action, they were pardoned. This amnesty was offered to all the murderers, bandits, thieves and every other law offender, with the exception of political criminals, excluded as too dangerous to be let out. I decided to spend the night, sitting on the ground floor as close to the policeman and a group of harmless looking people, as possible.

It was definite that the train was not coming that day either. How was I to spend another night at this station, among the violent madmen whose behavior could only get worse and spill over to the innocent bystanders? There were no guards to protect us or try to control the situation. In a society where not a single soul is allowed to exist without a permit, these criminals had nowhere to run: they would be immediately reported to the police, and anyone trying to protect them from the police would become criminally liable as well. Consequently, it was redundant

to keep guards over them. As for these criminals, there was no reason for them to control their instincts anyway, Germans or no Germans.

On the second floor there was an area, separated from the lobby by a glass partition, heavily curtained so that nothing could be seen from the public side. At one end, next to the only entrance was a small plaque with "hotel" on it. I stood in front of it for a while, finally deciding to try and get in, no matter how forbidding the place looked. The door wasn't locked, I knocked on the nearest door inside the partition. A middle-aged woman sat at the table immediately near the door, explaining curtly that, without a special pass, this place was not permitted to enter. Who can issue such a pass? The station manager, said the woman, anxious to get rid of me. There wasn't any noise coming here from the outside.

Jumping between bodies in all stages of repose - some looking quite dead - I found the station manager's office downstairs, determined to get a pass for this hotel. It was about nine a.m., the manager wasn't there. I explained my problem to a young woman, showed her my travel documents, explaining that I was travelling officially and expected a more decent treatment. "Are you really a Secretary of the Polish Embassy?" - she looked impressed by my documents. At this moment I realized, that in Russian both a humble secretary and a diplomat with a title of secretary must be synonyms; so, without blinking my eyes, I said yes. Why she did not notice my age and a school uniform coat was not my problem, I thought. "The manager will be at the office in the afternoon - come back then."

A few trains stood on the tracks, some empty, others full, with people milling around. I went from one train to another, asking whether they were going my way - none were. Outside[✓] still another train stood a group of army officers, young and obviously bored, glad to chat with me. They were going west, not all the way to Kuibyshev but in that general direction. "Could I come along?" "We can talk to our colonel, maybe he will agree." They went away, returning a few minutes later with a permission for me. "We are not leaving tonight, but keep in touch with us tomorrow."

The afternoon came, but the station manager did not show up. I decided to stay in his office for as long as it took to get my permit, confusing the woman assistant who would rather see me outside, but wasn't sure how much she can boss a member of a foreign diplomatic mission. She called the manager on the telephone, explaining at length what I wanted. Then, telling me that the manager was not coming in today because of illness, she passed the receiver to me.

It didn't take long to recognize the type of his illness - he was drunk. But I got my wish, conducted by the young woman upstairs and introduced to the same person who turned me away in the morning. This time she took off my backpack, carrying it for me and leading me to the nearest armchair to sit down. The room was very large, with Persian and other carpets on the floor, curtains and paintings on the wall, leather sofas and club armchairs, smooth, shining and soft. She asked whether

there is anything she can do for me. "Yes, I would like to have a bath." She took me behind a large, elegant screen which was hiding a bed of incredible comfort and cleanliness with white bed linen, a silken quilt, a bedside table with a lamp, and a rug. She left me to change and then came back, saying that my bath is ready. My soap and towel were very useful; now, this was living, stretched out in a long bathtub with just the right temperature of water, all alone and with no need to rush. Afterwards the woman asked if I would like a hairdresser and manicurist: I was very tempted, but decided to turn this offer down, not knowing how much it would cost me.

But this was not the end of the night of wonders. The moment I was dressed, the attendant asked whether I would be kind enough to let her introduce me to the other guest at the hotel, the vice-president of the Ukrainian Republic?

We sat together in those heavenly-soft fauteuils getting acquainted, the dignitary most graciously interested in my story. When I started telling him about the Omsk experience and sleeping among the cutthroats, he became very concerned and started scolding me in a fatherly fashion: "Why didn't you come here last night? To think that I had to be here all alone, bored with nobody to talk to ..." - my new friend was quite heavily into self-pity.

A discreet waiter whispered that dinner is served. In an alcove a few yards away stood a dining table with a white tablecloth and damask napkins, the silver, crystal and porcelain looking unreal, yet there it was. Several courses included

caviar, butter, veal, an elaborate dessert, Caucasian wines. We were joined at the table by two new guests: a woman of cabinet rank and a young Soviet hero, a pilot decorated with many medals, wearing a big sheepskin coat.

In the morning, a spread of freshly baked rolls, butter, honey and jams, eggs to order, all served with an elegance reminding me of a romantic Hollywood film. Was this the Siberia I knew? Was this the same world I lived in during the last three years, from the time communists came to Poland?

The Russian woman attendant couldn't do enough for me. I had nothing to repay her with, even a tip of few rubles was too much for me. In the privacy of my bedroom I gave her one cake of my pink soap instead, thanking her for her kindness. The woman took the soap, looked at me, knelt down and started kissing both my hands, crying silently.

I wasn't exactly bothered, but rather curious about the way I was treated yesterday by the station management and also this woman. It was not customary to treat young people with so much deference; quite the contrary, the young Poles were expected to treat their elders this way. The only reason I could think of was how important the young were in the Soviet Union's political arena. The school teachers collaborated with the secret police, asking children what their parents talked about at home, using the information to incriminate a father or a mother. The konsomols, a communist junior league, were encouraged and rewarded for denouncing their parents for any critical attitude to the regime. This was the society which

erected a monument to Pavlik Morozov for denouncing his parents who were helping some peasants, banished from their homes. Many konsomol clubs were named in his honor. Since the people saw in me an important official, I must be a ruthless and dangerous person!

An orderly was sent to find out about the departure of my army train: I was reassured by my exalted companions at the hotel that the train will not leave without me, I shall be escorted to my compartment in due time. The commanding officer greeted me in front of the train, I was settled in his pullman first class compartment, entertained by some young dashing officers, singing and enjoying the trip for all its worth. But then I had to change twice more, finding my way back to earth very fast, my backpack slashed with a razor and all my food supplies gone.

The Kuibyshev station was practically empty. I looked for a porter, not for carrying my small backpack, but to show me the way to the Embassy. It was quite a long way through a European city, with solid architecture, a mixture of houses and some apartment buildings. It was dark by the time we reached the Embassy. At the door a woman asked for a ticket stub to prove that I am coming straight from a bathhouse and delousing; she refused to let me in to sleep with the rest of personnel, allowing only to leave my backpack in the entrance lobby. Two hours later I could produce a piece of paper, attesting to my physical purification. To me, this permission to enter the Embassy paralleled a transition from purgatory to heaven.

The German military advances into the interior of Russia made Moscow an easy target for Hitler's invasion. Kuibyshev became the war capital for the USSR, where some of the Soviet government and all the diplomatic missions were moved for their own protection.

The city was formerly known as Samara, renamed in 1935. Situated on the Volga River, it remained its own witness to the former affluence as a port and a trading center - there were wide, paved streets, beautiful buildings, parks and theatres. The Polish Embassy occupied a stately town house, built before the revolution by a rich merchant for his residence. Many rooms of different sizes, were not only comfortable, but luxurious, suitable for a civilized and socially busy life. Now the building was overcrowded at its three levels, serving a large staff both as offices as well as living quarters. In fact, the house was too small to accomodate everyone, so the Polish Military Attaché had another building, within an easy walking distance. The female staff had sleeping quarters at the Embassy and the men stayed in the other house, all sleeping in one large room. There were no families at the Embassy, just the staff.

When I arrived, all the sleeping space at the Embassy was occupied. A bed was found for me at the Military Attaché's building, in an empty room adjacent to the bathroom. To give me some privacy in this room which served as a transit for everybody to the only bathroom, my bed was pushed against one corner, behind a tall screen. In the morning I woke up, hearing the men lined up for their turn; the last one out knocked at the screen panel to let me know that I can be next.

During the trip I caught a heavy cold, worse than anything I knew. Too sick to function normally, the housekeeper called a doctor who decided that I had bronchitis. After a few days in bed the coughing attacks subsided enough to let me get up; it was very bad at night, my whole body shook from the coughs; there was no medicine for it, but someone suggested drinking the Caucasian wine, sweet like a syrup. For the next few weeks I kept a bottle under the bed: when the coughing fit woke me up, a sip straight from the bottle worked, calming me back to sleep.

Finally ready to start working, I met my director Stefan Gacki and his deputy Emanuel Freyd, of the Social Department. I was taken next door to an office, filled with desks and tables, occupied by almost twenty persons. Most of them were lawyers, judges and officials, now responsible for the assistance to the Polish people stranded in Russia; all of them were recruited from the same situations.

I was apparently expected to be a full-fledged secretary and typist, something I certainly wasn't and never pretended to be: why Mr. Lickindorf gave the Embassy such an impression, or how it came about is a mystery to me until today. True, Father bought a typewriter and I sort of played with it, I may even have mentioned it to Mr. Lickindorf. Anyway, after less than one day I was removed from this particular post and taken downstairs to the dining room. A very old and dilapidated typewriter stood there, for me to use in filling out shipping forms, receipts and vouchers, something apparently easier and less prestigious. Although I did not feel guilty of any cheating

about my qualifications, I decided to learn to type at any cost. After dinner, when the Social Section was empty for the night, I sat at the typewriter for several hours at a time, copying any available text, slowly acquiring speed and accuracy, even if I had no clue about the correct use of fingers. My other job was addressing hundreds and hundreds of envelopes in Russian, by hand: my handwriting was approved by Mme Zoltowska, the lady in charge of the office.

About three weeks after I came to Kuibyshev, the Embassy came out with its latest monthly newspaper POLSKA. On the last page I discovered my article, taking up half of the entire space. Happy and proud, I asked the editor, Jan Erdman why he chose this article instead of the other one, both sent in the same envelope: I didn't want my friend Irena to think that I was influencing personally the editor, now that I was here. But he said that his choice was based on which article was a better one and anyway, he didn't know that I was the author. As far as I know, this was the last issue of POLSKA. On the next day I was asked to come to the editor's secretary to pick up the money for my article - I was completely surprised by it and said that I don't want any money; I was so greatly honored by being published that any hint of a monetary reward would only tarnish my noble sentiments. This prompted a visit from Teofil Parnicki, our Cultural Attaché and deputy editor, trying to convince me to accept the money. By then I must have sounded, if not also looked, like a complete ass, but I stood my ground, exactly like one - all for the sake of a silly, young idealism.

There was still no letter from Mother in reply to mine; even allowing for censorship and the irregular transport, it was almost a month from the time I left them and I wondered how my family was doing. Finally, a telegram explained the situation: "Your mother visiting uncle George stop Basia remained home stop greetings John."

George was the trustee of the Polish Delegation, arrested in December 1942 for refusing to accept a Soviet passport, therefore the message read that Mother was in jail, for the same reason. John was a friend of ours, obviously helping my sister to keep me informed.

I went with the telegram to Mr. Zawadowski, the Chargé d'Affaires and head of the Embassy during the absence of the Polish Ambassador, away in Moscow on protracted negotiations with Molotov. The Soviet-Polish relations were undergoing a very strained period, there were many serious problems between the two governments. The most important problem was the disappearance of many thousands of Polish officers, arrested by the Russians in September 1939. The Embassy had been receiving letters from the families who knew, that their men were taken "prisoners of war" by the Soviets - even if they never fought them - to such-and-such a camp, but after the so-called amnesty they never got in touch with their families. Where are they?

During the next one of his daily communications with Moscow, Mr. Zawadowski informed our Ambassador, Mr. Tadeusz Romer about Mother's arrest. Two days later I was called to the Ambassador's

office, to listen on the telephone to the following words:

"During my yesterday morning session with Mr. Molotov - said Mr. Romer - I told him that the mother of my Embassy staff member has been arrested and is being kept prisoner by the USSR government. This is an illegal act and must be corrected immediately. Mr. Molotov replied that the Soviet Government is not in the habit of arresting foreign citizens. In the Soviet Union the only prisoners are Soviet citizens, therefore the woman must be a Soviet citizen; as such, she cannot be subject of any negotiations with a foreign government. My reply was, that the Polish Embassy employees are Polish citizens, and the mother of this Polish employee is Polish as well. For this reason I must insist that Mr. Molotov examine the case and issue an immediate order to release Madame Sawicka from prison. During this morning's session I asked Mr. Molotov about the matter again. The Foreign Minister stated categorically that there are no Polish citizens in Soviet prisons at all, therefore the matter is closed as far as his government is concerned." This was the end of the message, because immediately after these words some happy sounds of music started to play through my receiver.

Mother's case was but one of the glaring examples of the communist attitude towards our people. Thousands of others who refused Soviet passports were imprisoned, and only the fact of my being at the Embassy allowed to raise a protest on this point, for all its futility and frustration, because the communists had not the slightest intention of doing anything about it. The task of the Polish ambassador was hardly an envious one. Occasionally rumours went around the Embassy

about one incident or another he and his team in Moscow had experienced. Once the entire group was drugged at dinnertime, falling into a dead sleep soon after dinner; the only person who was not drugged was a woman who did not drink her glass of beer. It seems the Russians were after the briefcase with the coding manual, but they failed to lay their hands on it. When Mr. Romer asked one day on the telephone, how everybody was doing, this is how one of our staff members replied:

"Tout va très bien, Monsieur l'Ambassadeur,
Tout va très bien:
Nous n'avons ni pain, ni citoyens,
Mais tout va très bien!"

My colleagues tried to cheer me up by showing interest and kindness, ready to listen if I felt like looking for a sympathetic ear. But everybody had some problems; besides what was there to say? Time was best occupied by learning something useful, like typing and handling paperwork, apparently an essential part of any office function and still a total novelty to me.

My boss, the shipping and transport officer was also from Pavlodar. Apparently he was a very rich man before the war, an owner of merchant ships on Vistula river. His daughter was the same age as Basia and they were friends with each other. To cheer me up, he bought tickets to the Bolshoi Theatre: I was invited to join him, Miss Komarnicka and Mietek Sierpinski.

The name sounded familiar : yes, he was the son of Professor Sierpinski, one of the founders of the Polish School

of Mathematics, to me a symbol of superior knowledge I will never reach. When the evening was called off because Mietek Sierpinski was sick, I was quite relieved: another silly attitude of mine, especially after he confessed later that his mathematical talents were similar to mine.

After several years of total neglect my teeth needed a lot of attention. I was given a recommendation to a dentist, an elderly Jewish lady who lived with her daughter in a very crowded, shabby apartment. In their two rooms they lived, cooked and had the dental office. The doctor was very gentle in her ministrings, including an incredible type of treatment she applied to my mouth. She explained that my gums were overgrown with a lot of "wild meat" which she was burning out inside my mouth with a matchstick wrapped in cotton wool, dipped in alcohol and lit up. It did not hurt and I did not feel any burning sensation either.

My visits were coming to a close and I began to worry about the bill; my salary was very modest, almost all of it spent on boarding and lodging. Two visits prior to the last one I asked the lady, how much will I owe her?

"It is I who will owe you a lot of gratitude for buying me some matzoh in the diplomatic store for the foreigners and Party members. It seems that they have now a supply of matzoh, but I am just an ordinary person, without the privilege to shop in the only place one can get such things."

"But this must be very inexpensive, certainly nothing compared to what I owe you for ten visits?"

"You don't understand. I don't want any money from you - here is my money which please, take from me to buy me some matzoh - I beg you."

We argued about the money which I refused to take. I did not have a pass for "the shop with yellow curtains" but I asked the Embassy housekeeper to buy as much matzoh as she could. When I took it on my next visit, my dentist cried.

Instructions were issued to the staff about not walking alone in the city. Several Polish visitors to the Embassy were arrested and jailed, especially those who happened to walk alone. Chances were that if one of us was to be arrested, the other person would at least know and report it to the Embassy. In the mornings and after work I would wait in the lobby for someone to walk with between the Embassy and my living quarters.

As awkward as it was under such circumstances to make my dental visits, someone always volunteered to walk with me; in fact I never even needed to ask, feeling good to be protected by one of the men, most often from the Embassy guardsmen. My appointments were always for early afternoon. We ate lunch at an enormous dining table, sitting down at any available place during the lunch break, served by the kitchen staff as and when people would turn up from their offices.

As I was ready to leave the dining room one day for my dental visit, Mr. Freyd also got up saying that he would like to walk with me today. It was an honor to walk with my director and also a pleasure, because he always seemed like a very kind person. He was apparently quite famous in political circles.

Mr. Freyd had a problem. The Russians agreed that the Polish Embassy can have a total of eighty people on its staff. Right now this quota has been exceeded by one person, and this is causing a lot of diplomatic problems: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is demanding that the rules be obeyed. I am the last person who joined the Embassy staff and therefore I am the one who should leave. "You see, what happened is that just before you came, we agreed that Wiesia also come. You know, she is the only child of our maid, both were deported and when the mother started begging us to let Wiesia come and also work as another maid, we agreed. Now I must make a decision between Wiesia and you. Please believe me, I am in a terrible situation not knowing what to do. "

"Yes, I believe you. I just read about two sons whose mother was asked by the terrorists, which one of them should be executed first. Now you must decide about Wiesia or me. If it is me, I will not return to Pavlodar and I will not let them arrest me. I will kill myself first."

Freyd saw I meant what I just said.

That evening I sat at the dining table, looking around at the few people busy with their lives, thinking that soon

it will all be over for me. I didn't notice anyone sitting next to me until I heard being asked why am I looking so sad? Mietek Sierpinski sat on my left, looking at me curiously. It took me a while to want to talk, trying first to think how to say it without sounding melodramatic or becoming hysterical.

"Would you mind if I talked to Mr. Freyd about it? I will invite him tonight to the restaurant, and in a friendly atmosphere we can talk much better. Don't worry in the meantime."

Next morning Mietek found me at my typewriter. I didn't need to worry about being sent away, nor did the other girl, Wiesia, he said. They decided to terminate instead the services of the Russian maid, one of the Soviet group employed in the kitchen, counted as part of the Polish quota. I knew this was Mietek's idea and wondered why this big, famous and wise Mr. Freyd did not think of it himself?

That evening we celebrated by spending it together. My boss and I were invited to Mietek's room, distinguished by the fact that he was perhaps the only person in the Embassy who did not share his room with anyone else. The room was next door to his office I already visited once before, occupied by the accountant and Mietek as finance officer and treasurer. The Financial Attaché left USSR a few months earlier and Mietek awaited a formal nomination in his place. The office was very small, in a converted bathroom, with pipes still running along the walls. Two desks and a very corpulent accountant - notorious for his copious appetite - left standing room only for one visitor at a time.

Mietek's room was no larger, perhaps it was one of the servants' quarters. With the narrow bed against the wall, there was one chair near the window. To reach it, it was necessary to circle around something like a cubic meter - or close to that size - of banknotes. This was part of the one hundred million rubles, paid by Russians as a loan to cover the needs of the Polish deportees and prisoners. The bills were tied up in small bundles, organized into larger packets, finally put all together into this small mountain, held by rope around it. Quite a roommate: it was a great deal of money, to the point of abstraction, particularly in this country where there was nothing to spend it on. On the other hand, this was the only way to ensure that the Polish people could have it when they needed money, rather than risk another easy way to paralyse the social and administrative actions of the Embassy, by simply refusing to honor a bank cheque.

Mietek was at the Embassy since January, 1942, arriving a few minutes after midnight on January 1st, his nameday: everybody was still up, celebrating. He was seconded from the Polish Army in Buzuluk, where he worked at the GHQ: this was the only job he was accepted for, because the medical commission declared him unfit for military service after two years of imprisonment and labor camp in Northern Ural.

"What was your crime against the bloody reds?" - a standard way of getting acquitted.

"I was evacuated from Warsaw to Lvov with the entire Ministry of Treasury a few days after the war began. In Lvov I met my childhood friend Stas Natanson whom I didn't

see for a few years. We went to the same school since we were little boys, but then he went to Cambridge and now he returned to Poland to join the army. But by the time he came the war was over in Poland, he became ill and I went to visit him. When I rang the bell to the apartment, the door was opened by an armed NKVD man, ordering me to put up my hands, another one searched me and then pushed me inside the room. Some strangers were already inside, captured the same way. We stayed there for three days, and more came; one man said that he was going to an apartment on the third floor and only by mistake rang the doorbell on the second floor. We were all accused of underground conspiracy, transported to prison and that was that.

"It was dangerous to admit to my profession. As a lawyer and officer in the Ministry of Treasury, my crime against the proletariat would be much bigger. I lied, admitting to elementary schooling and being a shoemaker. From Lvov we were transferred to Cherson, where they put us in a prison built by Catherine the Great. On the way through the city we walked all tied up not to escape, and I heard a woman standing with a little boy on the sidewalk, telling him to look at all these bandits. I couldn't blame her, by then I and the others were wearing the same clothes day and night for the last four months.

"During six months in Cherson I went through sessions with the interrogators, too many to remember their exact number.

The guard would lead me through many long corridors, always absolutely empty. If somebody would be coming from the opposite side, the guard stopped and ordered me to turn to the wall, until the other party passed. But one day the guard pushed me into the first open door to wait inside. There, I couldn't believe my eyes, stood a bucket full of steaming hot barley, who knows why. I crouched by the bucket and started to eat, scooping the food with the hands. Nobody was coming, I went on and on eating, until I saw the bottom of the bucket. Finally the guard remembered me, he picked me up for another session with the investigator; nothing happened to me about the barley, I suspect it was already stolen by somebody and any investigation could mean trouble for the thief.

"After six months the investigating officer read me the sentence: fifteen years of hard labor for counterrevolutionary activities against the proletariat."

Mietek was the only person I ever met whose way of telling about the camp experience made people laugh at some of the stories.

In the labor camp he was immediately sent to help the shoemakers; the same evening he was kicked out. He then explained he really was a tailor and they believed him, also for a few hours. Then he lied about being a cook's assistant and all of it ended by running out of excuses not to join the rest of the working brigades.

When other men were getting parcels or had something to barter for food, Mietek was desperately hungry. After a few months he bartered his only pair of trousers for a kilogram

of bread, remaining in the long johns. He knew that the camp bosses will give him another pair, out of pity or for decency's sake. Oh, but was he wrong again! These people were not stupid, they knew the game, and the next few months in the camp Mietek spent sans pantalons.

Each morning the prisoner brigades left the camp to cut trees in the forest, supervised by armed guards and trained dogs. In the arctic climate the winters were hell, but what was much worse were the microscopic black flies in the summer. The problem was serious enough for the camp managers to provide each prisoner with a face mask, otherwise nobody could work in the clouds of this pestilence, invading the entire human body. But these masks had damaged nets, letting the flies inside to penetrate eyes, nose, mouth and ears, biting through the skin, unable to get out through the same holes in the mask. The flies were inside the clothing, hair, everywhere.

The first men to die were those who were promised extra rations of food for working harder to exceed the daily quota, and believed that this was the best way to gain some other privileges and respect in the eyes of the jailers. Except that the energy required to cut down a forest was never replaced by the slops and few extra slices of dry bread; in a few weeks all these men were dead.

At one time the evening meal consisted of rotten salted herring. The next day everybody was very sick. At the first sign of diarrhea Mietek stopped eating any food, until the symptoms disappeared after three days of fasting. Others went on eating regular meals, ignoring their illness; fully one half of these men died, and Mietek's job was to pull the

bodies from his barrack to the ditch, serving for common grave.

The empty beds filled soon with new arrivals. This time it was a group of several hundred men, all Russians. Each man was an invalid with amputated limbs they lost as soldiers during the war with Finland. They could not be allowed to return home, for people to see that the glorious victory of the Red Army had been won at such a shameful price.

The camp infirmary was fully staffed - even if without any medicines or supplies - by professional prisoners. One of them was Dr. Radek, sentenced after her husband Karl Radek was expelled from the communist party and died in prison. Mietek saw her when she received a telegram, informing her that the initial sentence, due to end in a few days, is hereby being extended for ten more years. Even when she herself was a communist, just like her husband, therefore enjoying the consequences of their own religion - or getting a dose of their own medicine - this kind softie Mietek, himself a victim of people like herself, was talking about this incident with pity for the woman.

Completely cut-off from the world and news, one day somebody run in to say that there is a notice hanging on the office wall about amnesty granted to all Polish citizens, and this is how they were informed about their freedom. At the first large railroad station Mietek, Stas Natanson and another companion met other Poles who were going to join the Polish Army, so they also decided to do the same. "When I was getting ready for my medical, there were lice even in my eyebrows."

We often went for a walk after lunch; each time Mietek would somehow twist his foot and fall down, two or three times during the hour. I thought at first that he was slipping on an icy patch, but no, it must have had something to do with his health and the malnutrition. He was saying that his legs were very swollen all the time in the camp, and his skin on the legs lost the capacity to grow a single hair.

I felt spoiled by getting from him a medicinal bottle, filled with lavender cologne or some facial powder, packed in an empty box of typewriter ribbon; these goodies were available to high ranking persons at the diplomatic store, provided the customer brought his own container for packaging. Many people swore that the Russians drink the cologne. I believed it, because Mother was telling us about men in Petropavlovsk, stealing the furniture finishing fluid to get drunk on. There was a verb in Russian, describing this peculiar native ritual: "naodekolonitsia".

One day Mietek invited me to come to the shop, to see if I can find something of women's garments I could use; a few handkerchiefs were all I could find. They had much less than one could expect in a normal store but much, much more than in a public store, where a pile of potatoes laid on top of the counter and some alcohol bottles filled one of the shelves. In this diplomatic shop, hidden from the street by thick yellow curtains, the personnel was very polite as well, a quality completely absent from the public trade.

Kuibyshev, as the wartime diplomatic capital, had many exotic looking people, including the Japanese diplomats. Rumours

went around about the Allies, mainly the USA providing arms and ammunition to Stalin to fight the Germans, and Stalin selling half of the American arms to the Japanese, to fight the Americans in the East.

Shocking news! Germans announced that they found mass graves of thousands of Polish officers, buried in the Katyn forests. Here was the answer to all the families awaiting the return of their men. The Ambassador in Moscow demanded an explanation from Molotov. The communists not only denied the accusations of knowing anything about it, but resented the insult to have the Poles suspect them of any wrongdoing. This was just the excuse to get rid of the Polish Ambassador; they broke the diplomatic relations with the Polish Government, at the time exiled in London.

Mr. Romer returned to Kuibyshev, informing us that we have one month to wind up the Embassy affairs, after which the entire group will be evacuated by train to the Iran border. The families of the staff members are allowed to leave Russia as well, provided all the names, their relationship and exact addresses are presented to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by the Ambassador.

This was a very important news to all of us whose families were still in the Soviet Union. It wasn't clear how the relatives will travel but the fact that they could mattered more at this moment. The idea of leaving without Mother and

Basia would seem like deserting them altogether, so I felt very happy I don't have to worry about it. But did I really have a choice in the matter? Not according to the Soviet law: the Polish Embassy staff was legally banished from the Soviet Union.

Such is the communist version of adding insult to injury!

It was a busy month for all of us, particularly for the Ambassador and the senior staff to organize some kind of care for over one million and half of Polish citizens remaining in the Soviet Union, mainly in Siberia and Asia; there was also a lot of packing, burning papers and organizing the departure.

An unusual amount of activities started in front of the Embassy. Normally a couple of militiamen guarded the diplomatic buildings, but now there were at least fifty uniformed men and a few dozen of dour civilian faces. An army truck and two cars were parked on the street, on full alert. The militiamen were undergoing their military training, marching up and down, then forming for action, aiming their carbines, all together, at the front windows of the Embassy; they were drilling like this all day, every single day.

The Australians agreed to represent the Polish interests in the USSR after the Embassy's departure. For this purpose part of the money had to be left with them as well. I watched through the upstairs side window into the Embassy courtyard, how this matter was handled one mid-morning, but the entire strange event was explained to us much later.

First one driver pulled up to the side door: two of our staff got inside and the car turned left on the street. One police car waited for them and followed closely.

A few minutes later a second Polish car left with two men inside, turning right from the gate into the street. The police car was ready and waiting for it, following it closely behind.

The tall gate closed for a while, and then a third car pulled up to the side door, picking Mietek and somebody else, with bundles of rubles packed in suitcases. There was no third police car on the street to follow Mietek to the Australian Legation, and the two previous police cars were still on the sightseeing trip around the city.

The departure from Kuibyshev was set for May fifth, 1943. The morning started with a brief prayer meeting for the soul of the Ambassador's uncle who died three days earlier: this very old gentleman and his wife Mme Zofia Romer were saved by their nephew from a certain death in a remote Siberian locality. Mme Romer had every single staff member sit for a penciled portrait, presented to the Ambassador in an album. Her husband was too ill to participate in the Embassy life. The first time I saw him was when his body was kept in a small room next to where I slept. After a brief service, the family left for the funeral.

The train was to leave in the evening. My own bag was packed the night before and I was instructed to be in our building early in the afternoon to help others with last

minute chores, to leave for the station at six p.m. Trucks were transporting wooden cases since morning, there were so many bulky boxes that one had to watch the nails catching at clothing.

Before returning to the Military Attaché's building I decided to send a telegram to Pavlodar, to reassure Mother and Basia that we will soon be together in Tehran. Money has already been sent to them by the Embassy for the trip. I had no news from them, hoping that Basia had a chance to keep in touch with Mother in prison, maybe even they were already together?

The post office building was some three hundred feet away, accross an empty field. It was a little risky to go alone, but it was so close, in the middle of the day. On the way out of the post office a man stopped me, asking for documents. He was short, shabbily dressed, with a gold front tooth. I decided to run, but he caught my arm and blocked the way. I had no documents on me, all the papers were at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to be handed over to us at the train station that evening."Come with me to the Embassy, you will see that I am telling the truth." But he took me in the opposite direction to the nearby police post; there he telephoned and a few minutes later a car pulled up, to drive the two of us away from the city, to the central prison.

This was a large building, where the offices and the jail were on the ground floor, with the prison cells below the street level. During the initial interrogation by my own agent and two others I was informed that I cannot be Polish,

because I was born in that part of the country which now belongs to Russia. My arguments about their grave error in arresting me were postponed for the decision by prison director, who should be back from lunch pretty soon. In the meantime, my agent led me to jail. I realized, all of a sudden, that I am laughing like crazy, walking with him towards the end of this wide corridor, where an armed guard opens a barred gate and gives me such a push that I fall in, over somebody's outstretched feet inside.

"Good afternoon, Miss Zosia - what are you doing here?"

The surprise was mutual: I recognized the man who spent a few days at the Embassy and yesterday we sat together at the dinner table. He was an engineer, came to the Embassy to get some help and said goodbye to us all before taking train back to his family in Siberia. Five other Poles were in this cell, each one arrested on the way out of the Embassy during last week. They were all brought into this cell, left with some thirty other men and women, without once being called by any officer for investigation.

The cell was crowded, narrow, without any furniture, with a barred window at the other end. People sat on the floor against the two walls facing each other; with their legs straight out, there was no space left on the floor between the two sides. They shifted a little to make room for me between two pairs of legs, but there was no wall room to lean against; it was all taken up by bulky human shapes in their winter coats.

People did not talk, there was nothing to say. The youngest

of the Polish group, a man who came from Barnaul, went on singing Polish hit songs. I sat quietly, trying to concentrate my thoughts on how to get out of this place before the train leaves tonight. Normally, someone would notice by now that I am not at my typewriter. But today was not a normal day, with frantic moving and the last minute packing, even my typewriter was gone by now. So it was out of the question to expect any help from the Embassy now. I had to hope that the prison director will let me go, provided he does come to the office today. The guard at the door kept saying that he is not in yet.

Brief conversations helped to pass the time: what was new in the world since my countrymen were arrested? Well, the war went on, the Russians were now on the winning side, the Western front might as well be on the moon, as far as we were concerned. "What about us?" There was no answer to such a question.

"I know that you will be released in time to leave tonight - said one friend - the director will soon be back, you will see. But what about us? What can I tell you about my feelings? I don't understand what is happening to me and why. Still, I have a favor to ask you."

What did he want from me? A food parcel? Doesn't he know that the Embassy is closed down and, come to think of it, some people right now are on their way to the train station? Oh God, I am here just another prisoner, why does he bother me? I held myself from screaming at the man.

"You will be travelling together with Ambassador Romer. Maybe you will see him one day - could be on the train, still in Russia or maybe in Iran - it doesn't matter to me. When you

get a chance to tell him about your own arrest and meeting other Poles here, please remember to tell him one thing: "morituri te salutant". Please don't forget - do you know Latin?"

"Well, yes, from school"

"Please, do remember it then."

How could I not remember Quo Vadis, a beloved book which gained the first Nobel prize for a Polish author? Especially the scene Sienkiewicz described, of the Roman arena and the gladiators, calling out to Nero before their deadly game:

"Ave, caesar imperator!
Morituri te salutant!"

I sat close to the barred entrance, drawn to it constantly, until the guard was becoming annoyed with my insistence. Behind him I saw men walking into and coming out of the toilets on the opposite side of the corridor. A young, well dressed man stopped, asking the guard why I was calling out. He went away, then returned to the guard, told him to let me out and said that he is taking me to the director.

The office was in the same corridor, large, with two desks, one occupied by a tall, completely baldheaded man. The young man was his secretary, sitting at the other desk. I was permitted to sit down and explain my problem. The director picked the telephone to check with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whether indeed my passport and documents were with them: the telephone was out of order. I sat, talking incessantly,

trying to hammer into him the urgency - the train is waiting, I am banished from the country and must leave tonight, it is a serious mistake to have arrested me in the first place.... He picked the receiver again, the telephone wasn't working. Finally he told me to go.

Now I realized that being on the street alone will end in another arrest; I asked for an escort. "Don't worry, if anyone stops you tell them you are coming from me."

Never even asking for his name, I run all the way through the entire city on wings. Just before turning the last corner, I felt another attack of fear because of the agents surrounding the Embassy, stopping anyone trying to get inside. The driveway gate was wide open, nobody stood near it; a mad dash accross the street and I was safe!

My earlier speculations/^{were correct:} nobody missed me except for the man in charge of packing who yelled where the blazes was I all this time, instead of doing my job. Finally, squeezed between the boxes on the truck to get to the station, I had to stand outside, until five NKVD agents decided to let me in; then some clerical error about assigning my space on the train, which was the last straw for the day, a good excuse for a lot of self-pity and tears.

IN IRAN

The train provided for the evacuation of the Ambassador and his staff was a regular Pullman, with first and second class compartments, a luxury for those of us who experienced other Soviet transport facilities. One railroad car was occupied by a Soviet general and his staff, escorting us and sealing us off the rest of the world for five days. Meals were served in a restaurant car.

The time was relaxed, visiting each other's compartments. Emanuel Freyd was the rare person who spoke English, trying to start classes. I tried hard to remember the little I learned in school: "Save Our Souls" for the S.O.S., "Time is money", some of the alleged number of two hundred and ninety seven irregular verbs - or whatever their number was. Mr. Romer now had the time to see each staff member. When my turn came, waiting in the corridor for the other person to leave, I began to tremble uncontrollably. When talking with him, my speech was incoherent, the words came out either in stammer or muffled, there was no loud and resounding ring to the message from the jailed gladiators. I just made a complete fool of myself.

One woman among the Embassy staff had with her a teenage daughter with a severe case of schizophrenia which erupted after seeing her father murdered the year before. The girl attempted suicide in Kuibyshev, resulting in a full-time watching over her by volunteers among our men. For this travel she was provided with a Russian nurse, the two of them in a separate compartment. After three days the nurse needed at least one night of sleep; the mother was not allowed

to help, because the girl went berserk at seeing her. I volunteered to stay the night with this poor girl in a straitjacket. We talked through the entire night. The worst for me was her begging to untie her jacket straps, something I was absolutely forbidden to do. To top it all, she was on a hunger strike, forcing a doctor to feed her through the nose. When a few months later we happened to be together in the car, she repeated to me the entire conversation we had that night, asking so sadly " Why didn't you help me and untie the jacket?"

The train brought us to Ashkabad, on the Soviet frontier with Iran. We were lodged in an empty building, next door to the orphanage where the group of five hundred Polish orphans were staying, one year after they were supposed to have left Russia. The excuse for it was that they missed the chance to leave with the Polish Army.

Next day Mietek was given a car to go to the bank and deposit the remaining money left from the one hundred million roubles grant. He was away for the rest of the day, making me understandably anxious after my own experience in Kuibyshev. This time the delay was due to having to count each banknote with the bank cashier and waiting for a receipt. There were no adding machines, all the calculations were made on the abacus.

After three days we were getting ready to cross the border. Mietek and some others were grumbling that we should not leave before the orphans are safely out, but orders were orders, everyone was piled onto open military trucks and driven up into mountains on the frontier.

Except for a small customs building, the place was deserted and nothing could be seen in the night. Hours passed waiting, the night was cold in the high mountains. Mietek managed to find a few small tins of sweet condensed milk, tasting like delicious liquid candy, sucked through a pierced lid.

By the time my name was called, the sky was getting lighter on the horizon. Inside the customs a group of people stood ahead of me and I joined the line, holding my papers ready. A Russian woman walked toward me, took me to another room, asked a few routine questions and checked the passport. Then she tugged at the scarf around my neck, so I untied it. The woman pulled at the gold chain with the cross I wore since my baptism, tore it off through my head and said: "If you ever get a chance to return to the Soviet Union, you can claim it back." My property disappeared in the pocket of her coat, there wasn't even a hint of a chance to get a receipt from the ape!

One hour later we crossed the frontier. It was May fifteenth, 1943 or three years, one month and two days in a country converted into one, big prison.

Badjigiran was our first stop in Iran. A large barn, with plenty of hay and straw managed to fit everyoneⁱⁿ for the night. It was the feast of my Patron Saint and two other Zofias, celebrated by over fifty of us sitting on the floor in a circle, with Persian dishes in the middle, served on large trays. A few of the men celebrated too much, entertaining the rest of us by prancing around and being plain silly.

The feelings were wonderful, except for worrying about my family, still in Russia. What if the communists lied again? A few weeks ago Molotov denied the existence of a Polish citizen in the NKVD jail; letting my Mother out now would only confirm that he was a liar. And if Mother was going to be detained for God knows how long, what will Basia decide to do? She was always protected in a special way by the entire family. It was a clear case of leaving the problem in God's hands, praying for their safety.

The next morning we were all piling into three military trucks, together with the archives, the typewriters and personal belongings, to take us to Meshed. This was a very risky trip in the Himalayan mountains, our drivers were young boys, the hairpins and narrow roads, without any barriers, caused earlier several disasters killing busloads of Polish refugees who were then buried in the ground below, called the Polish cemetery. I chose to keep my eyes closed at each U-turn, some of them maneuvered back-and-forth several times, nearer to the sky than to the bottom of ravines.

After a three-days' stopover in Meshed, most of us staying at a silo farm, the trip to Teheran was an easy one, along practically flat roads. But here one truck did overturn, landing in the field, together with three most senior ladies of the secretariat, the typewriters and the filing cabinets with documents. Mietek was in charge of the unit. All four passengers suddenly found themselves landed in the field, the two drivers jumped out to avoid a possible explosion. One woman broke her hip, the other one was badly bruised, and the third one sat dazed, with the entire white hair scalped, hanging on a thin piece of skin. Mietek, unhurt, was the first one to get up; all he could think of was to put the scalp back, like a wig. A passing car alerted an ambulance from Meshed, all victims and the drivers were taken back to the town's hospital, without any loss of life. Two women remained in the hospital until their recovery, others resumed their trip the next day.

A large villa, named Entezam, was rented for part of the personnel and their families. In the manner typical for the local architecture, the villa was surrounded by a high brick wall, with a garden inside full of shrubs and flowers unknown in the Northern countries; the weather was beautiful enough to have our food served outside, under the trees. Several men who worked at the Embassy, were lucky enough to have their wives and children join them on the way from Kuibyshev. Others united already in Teheran, within a few days of our own arrival. One of them was Tadeusz Koziol, a young lawyer^{who} married Melania, a schoolteacher, just when the war broke out. Now Melania came from Russia in the first group of families.

The Polish Legation in Teheran shared its space with the Kuibyshev staff, until all the personnel could be relocated and assigned to other jobs. The largest number was sent to London, where our Government resided. Others joined the Polish army. Mietek was already disqualified for military service and my doctor said not to even bother to apply for military duty, because of anemia. The Polish Embassy in China needed somebody to take care of the financial, consular and administrative affairs, offering the post to Mietek; he agreed, provided he was given a diplomatic status to which he was fully entitled on the basis of his qualifications, yet because of the inter-ministerial rivalries, particularly typical in the Foreign Affairs, it took a while to have this business settled.

The Ambassador terminated my services on May 25th, 1943 with a three months' notice. My main job was to work with Irena Wasilewska, typing her reports on the interviews with the Polish children she met in Russia, during her own imprisonment, her ~~so~~khos farm labor and when she joined a Polish Welfare Office after the Polish-Soviet agreement. Irena was a judge in the juvenile court of ^{Vilno} district. (She was not related to Wanda Wasilewska, a communist poet and writer, notorious for collaborating with Stalin on organizing a puppet government known by historians as Lublin government.) Thousands of homeless children roamed the entire country in small bands, living on their wits, and some of these children were Polish. The reports were translated into English and published in 1946*. At that time typing these stories was easier, as part and parcel of our lives then - but now

* SUFFER LITTLE CHILDREN, Irena Wasilewska
London, Maxlove Publishing Co.Ltd. 1946, 135 p.

I dare anyone to read this book, told entirely in the words of children, without becoming ill.

Mother and Basia finally arrived, one month after me, happy and besides themselves. Mother spent over four months in the NKVD prison, interrogated each night and forbidden to sleep during the day. Completely cut off from the outside world, she knew nothing about what happened to me and that she can leave as well. One day she was called late morning to her interrogator - Novikov, the same man I already met - and told that she must catch the 1 p.m. train today, or otherwise return to jail for good. As farewell, Novikov asked Mother to have me write to him, as an old friend!

The train station was almost a mile away. Mother turned around for the gate. There, under the wall, sat Basia with a small bundle by her side, just about ready to start for the station alone, helpless to do anything else, too dejected to take the family album and the alarm clock with twenty-four hour dial: this was Father's latest invention, for which he already had a patent and a manufacturing contract with a German company, planning to start the production as of September 1, 1939.

Mother arrived looking particularly pathetic. In jail she had winter clothing and felt boots only; on the train she traded it for a flimsy summer dress in lilac shades and a pair of unmatched, both right-foot men shoes on bare feet. Apparently one shoe was rescued from a dead passenger when others were stripping the body, and the second shoe was found on the Novosibirsk train station.

Teheran was to us the most wonderful city in the world, free to walk and ride in, day and night, not afraid to be arrested. The tree-lined streets had ariks running along the sidewalks, with water coming down from the mountains. People believed that the water purifies itself every few feet, permitting the stream to be used for any purpose without fear of illness. The city center bustled with shops and restaurants, outdoor cafes and street vendors. In the middle of some streets laid Persian carpets, exposed to the wheel and pedestrian traffic, apparently to achieve a better look. A few streets away was the Persian bazaar, all under a roof, seemingly endless with shops and stalls, full of exotic sounds and colours: silver, gold, brass, copper, mother-of-pearl, jewels, furs, silks, leathers - just about anything one can dream about from Sheherezade's Thousand and One Night tales. Looking closer, the poverty and misery of the city filled with beggars, street children - and the other children, chiefly working at weaving the Persian carpets - stories of cruelties in the upstart reigning family, svastikas decorating the ceiling of newly built by Germans railroad station, the escaped Shah exiling himself in South Africa, etc. ; - quite a kaleidoscopic picture.

The other aspect of the city was the presence of American, British and Soviet uniforms, all three powers practically occupying the country. We were warned at the Embassy, that Russians are trying to hire agents to work for them. It was true, some suspicious looking characters roamed around the Polish Legation's garden; when I was once sitting alone near a fountain, a seedy-looking man got out of his car to invite

me to a party that night at the Russian embassy and he offered to pick me up. He didn't even leave when I said no, waiting there for another chance.

And then there was all this food: fruit, vegetables, milk, butter, sweets, iced coffee, ice cream, bread of all kind, meat, fish, caviar. One of the most beautiful restaurants had the interior all inlaid with mirror and colored glass; the tables were around a pool with white swans. Lamb shashlik was served next to a bed of white rice, mixed with butter and a raw egg, also sliced onion and cucumber. The wine flowed at every occasion. Once a Persian host, complimented by Mietek about the Persian wine tasting as good as the French one, reprimanded him saying : "The French learned the art of winemaking from Persia." Every Persian seemed to speak also English, French and Russian. At that time Russian was the easiest for me to use in the shops, but several times I was asked to speak French instead: "We do not like to use Russian", they would tell me. Anyway, for me this was a good opportunity to reach back into my memory of leçons, slowly to recover a lot of forgotten sounds.

Towards the end of summer most of the embassy staff left for new jobs, their departures depending on what kind of transport could they get, complicated by the war. Finally, my turn also came. All women who were offered a position of secretary at the Chungking Embassy, refused to go there: it was too far and what was worse, nobody knew how to travel there during the war. So, one morning I was asked if I am interested:

the ambassador had to agree to accept me as a last resort - better Zosia than nobody. Actually, by then I was a very good typist, fast and accurate in Polish and French, but it was not easy to erase the initial reputation I had. Now one of the women, an old hand at foreign service mechanics, taught me the rest of the bureaucratic procedures, asked me to keep in touch, so I really felt quite confident. This offer was particularly interesting to me because of the mystery about travelling to Chungking in 1943: the Japanese occupation, the war in the Far East, travel via India, a pretty adventuresome picture. Mietek and I were to travel together, another reason for happiness. My official appointment became effective October 1st, 1943.

Teheran was filled with thousands of Polish refugees from Russia, mostly women and children whose fathers and sons were in the army. Arrangements were being completed at that time for the evacuation of all these families to India and Africa, for the duration of war in Europe. My family was included in the group going to Africa, due to leave Iran in early 1944.

WARTIME TRAVEL

Provided with official documents and a sum of money to cover our expenses, we started from Teheran to Ahwaz, reputed to be the hottest place in the world. In a small hotel people were discussing the strange American rules of throwing away a mountain of perfectly good canned food, just because the date on these cans expired! I was genuinely shocked by such wastefulness, especially when some people ignored the Americans from the local base and helped themselves discreetly to anything they could lay their hands on, without getting ill. The next day we continued on to Basrah.

Our next destination was India. We were hoping to go there by air, yet it was practically impossible during the war, without any civilian airline, at least in this part of the world. The alternative was to travel by boat, but there were no ships of any kind planning to go to India. We were resigned to stay and wait, not suffering any hardship in a modern and comfortable hotel; the food was excellent, my room was very clean. Actually, for the first time in my life I had a room all to myself. At dinnertime the dining room filled with British officers and the evenings were a lot of fun, even if our command of English was almost none, but fortunately some Englishmen spoke a little bit of French. After they got to know us better, we were offered seats on two military flying boats going to Karachi. Mietek was given a seat on one boat, apparently filled completely with soldiers. In my hydroplane the only other passengers were a few Arabs. A young boy kept insisting that I share his basket of dates.

It was time to leave this alleged cradle of the world which

held no trace of paradise. The town was very dry, very hot and very dusty, with shabby-looking buildings and one restaurant, patronized by all the soldiers and sailors, interested in belly dancing. In the middle of each table stood a large container with toothpicks, forced onto the clientele after the meal was over. A fat damsel swerved around the tables with a lot of uncovered flesh, gyrating and kicking her feet to some caterwauling - evidently this art wasn't for my taste. Now, flying low over the Persian Gulf, I saw some incredibly green and turquoise rocks at the bottom of a pure and clear water.

Karachi was a large Indian port, very hot and humid, with sandy streets, most of them lined with greenery in the central part of the city. Even when covered with thick dust, the palm trees and buganvillia looked lush, particularly around the large residences, - opulent and surrounded by carefully landscaped gardens. In contrast with the Iran's architecture which hid homes behind high walls to provide maximum of privacy, here the houses could be admired through the open gates or low fences. These houses were occupied by the British and other foreigners.

The Northeastern Hotel was an airy building, with ceiling fans. I was given a suite of three rooms, with terraces and many windows giving onto the garden, the white curtains gently billowing in the night's still. Indian servants, in starched white uniforms and barefooted, glided on the shiny stone floors without a sound. I remembered a series of films about Indian tombstones, fakirs and turbaned men sticking a knife in somebody's back, making me feel scared silly, sitting up on my bed with arms around my knees and headfull of bloody images lurking behind each curtain.

Karachi was used as a distribution point for Polish refugees coming from Iran, to be shipped from this port, in large groups, to more permanent camps. In October 1943 there was already a camp outside the town, with a group of women and children awaiting a ship for East Africa. A Polish administrator took Mietek to visit the camp, and I was invited for a sightseeing tour of the beaches and fishing villages.

Two days later we boarded the train for Bombay. This was a long, tedious and noisy trip on a crowded train. Each of the many stations was filled with crowds of beggars, mostly children and women, all looking hungry, stretching out their thin arms and crying "bakshish, memsahib, no mama, no papa". On almost every station a few trees grew so close to the track, that the monkeys just clung to the open windows, ready to snatch anything from one's hands, and climb immediately on a higher branch. The people on the train were chewing some stuff, spitting out a lot of red color, staining their lips with it like with dried blood - I found out later it was .betel, a native delicacy of spices, including opium, wrapped in a leaf.

Bombay was quite metropolitan, with beautiful residential sections, mingled with a horrifying misery of teeming shanties and filth. The tropics seemed to me to be the main difference in the way poverty looked like here, in comparison with what I experienced in Siberia. In other words, the hot weather allowed everybody to be seen on the street, to live and sleep out in the open, unlike in the northern cold which kept everybody indoors. In Bombay one just couldn't miss seeing everything,

the rich, the poor and the in-between.

All the hotels were fully booked by the military. Mietek agreed to share a room with a Pole working at the Consulate General; I was invited to stay at the Consul General's residence, a villa in a beautiful part of Bombay. It took a few days to obtain train tickets for Calcutta. The time was well spent on the last shopping before going to China, where apparently nothing was available: the country was virtually cut off from the rest of the world by the Japanese in the East, the Himalayas in the ^{North} South, and the USSR everywhere else. Such things as soap, cosmetics, combs, shoes, socks, stockings etc. were not available except in black market, too expensive for us. Bombay was one big shopping place even during the war, at least for our modest needs.

Two days and nights on the Indian train, even in first class, were stifling hot, despite the ceiling fan. At one station we managed to get some blocks of ice to keep our feet on. Passing most of the time in a dozing torpor, I tortured our English companions with my ambition to speak their language. Obviously, I believed in learning without the least concern for making errors.

A countryman living in Calcutta was advised about our coming and he met us at the station. Zygmunt Kahan came from Poland via Russia and Japan, working in Calcutta as shoe store manager for Bata, a Czech company, with a large factory nearby. We were registered in Grand Hotel, a palatial establishment in white marble and polished brass, managed by Kahan's Czech friend. That night, the twelve course menu was in our honor,

with some Polish dishes. The rooms were large, with high ceilings and cooling fans. I was awakened by some commotion on my bed: a few rats, as big as I ever saw! For the next night a mosquito net was hung around the bed for my protection. The Grand Hotel, I found out later, was out-of-bounds for the US Army because of this rat plague.

It wasn't until the next day that the somewhat abstract quality of the newspaper articles about the "great Calcutta famine" became a stark reality. Groups of skeletons in rags were absolutely everywhere, quiet and tragic with their outstretched hands, huge black eyes in skull sockets, laying under the building walls of Chowringhee Road, or shuffling slowly, the women with quiet babies next to the shrivelled breasts.

It didn't make any sense: why could I have a twelve-course feast last night and these people were dying of hunger? The answer was easy: there was no rice in Calcutta, where the people would rather die than eat anything else. There was wheat, fruit, vegetables, milk, eggs, butter and meat, the markets were full of things to eat for anyone who could buy it or beg for it. We were on our way to Firpo's, a most luxurious Italian restaurant, able to order anything we wanted without hurting these wretched people in the least. The only food item all restaurants refused to serve was rice. Innumerable thousands of people must have died in those months, apparently all due to a simple speculation move of the local merchants; it was discovered later, that the warehouses - godowns - were bulging with rice, locked up to obtain a better price.

The local shops with Indian art had the three carved monkeys,

symbolizing "see no evil, speak no evil and hear no evil". What a striking jewel of Oriental philosophy, yet something bothered me about it. When I heard about the rice swindlers, it came to me: there was no fourth monkey to say "do no evil". The result was, that in such a context the three monkeys turned out to be a clever symbol of tyranny.

The C.N.A.C. was the airline to carry us on the last leg of our journey. From Calcutta's Dum Dum airport we flew to Ramgarth, to change planes; the airport had a metal runway, something we read about and admired as the American ingenuity, capable to create landing strips in such a jungle. Mietek and I were the only civilians on this DC-3 airplane, with benches running against the walls and all the luggage piled up in the middle. We travelled with two unpacked office typewriters which kept sliding from one end of the floor to another, when the pilot navigated between the Himalayan peaks or encountered an air pocket. Finally we kept our feet on and around the Remingtons to keep them still. Without a pressurized cabin we were often short of breath. This, and the fact that we flew over Burma during a very bloody war with the Japanese, where some passenger planes were shot down, made the flight more interesting than we really cared for. Except for the flying boat experience, a smooth one, this was our first flight, hoping that the American pilot, with a Chinese co-pilot, knew what they were doing.

Oh China, the land of the legend and old culture, beauty, arts, emperors, wise men, the gardens and the nightingale - all this wondrous world of Good Earth, now to be my home! Very good excuse for the excitement and feeling like Cinderella, saved from the human garbage heap in Kazakstan, to be allowed

a comfortable and protected life: how could I be scared now?
Just airsick.

Somewhat worse for wear, we landed in Kunming, the final stop for the night. All the American officers filed out to the waiting cars to take them to their base. We, with our luggage and the typewriters were the only passengers searched by the customs officers. Maybe, they said, the plane will fly tomorrow to Chungking. The town had no hotel for civilians and no transport between the airport and a restaurant. The Chinese officials produced two quilts, pointed to the long customs tables, leaving the building and locking it up from outside. We were virtually like prisoners, the place had no water tap, no bathroom, nothing to eat or drink.

It was amazing - the next day - how the airplane landed in Chungking on a narrow strip of sand, in the middle of Yangtze River. The airport consisted of a small roof over four beams, with two primitive wooden benches for the waiting room. A fishing boat took us accross to the left bank: we arrived.

IN CHINA

After two months of this pretty adventurous travelling I was ready to start a more settled way of life, also curious about my new job.

Chungking was the war capital of the Kuomintang Government, headed by Chiang Kai-shek. This provincial city was overflowing with refugees from all over the country, particularly from the Japanese occupation. Housing was a serious problem for the Chinese and the foreign diplomatic missions as well. A few weeks earlier a Japanese air raid killed many people, although Chungking boasted of the best possible shelters against bombs, inside the mountains full of deep caves, running along the many levels of the city. On a clear day it was possible to see a zigzag of five levels, with roads leading from the highest peak down to the Yangtze valley below.

Chialing House was a hotel outside the city, housing the Polish Embassy as well as a few other foreign delegations. One large corner room on the ground floor was our office, and next door a small room served as the Ambassador's office. In the large room two Polish officers and a Chinese secretary now had to make room also for us.

The black market devalued the Chinese currency to such a degree, that my seemingly high salary of US\$300 per month was about half of what a simple room cost in the Chialing House, and there was no other accommodation available. Before something could be arranged for me, I slept in the Ambassador's office: after the office hours the servants stretched two boards between two chairs, easy to remove in the morning, and the bedroll hidden

in a corner. All the personal belongings stayed inside a military duffel bag, kept during the day in the large office. Only once I overslept, waking up to the Ambassador's knocking at the door. Mietek's salary was considerably higher, but also insufficient to pay for a room, so he had a bed moved into the office, partitioning it with two filing cabinets.

Apparently noone else could afford the official state bank channels to transfer foreign currency to China, where the government itself seemed to manipulate the black market of its own money, much too complicated to be understood by most of the people. Since it was legal to be paid in the US dollars, all the Embassy expenses and the staff salaries became solvent with hard currency in hand, usually received through a bank in India. Only then it was possible for me to have a room of my own, unpacking after two months of duffel bag.

It did not snow or freeze in winter, yet the air was damp, with much fog and rain. In the unheated rooms the only way to stay warm was to sit around a charcoal brazier, kept usually in the middle of the office. In the mornings I had to admonish myself: "what's this cold and dampness compared to Djolkoduk!"

The two colleagues of ours left soon after our arrival, and new ones were expected at a later date. The London office approved a better accommodation for the Embassy and staff, building a new house, large enough for the official use and the residence for the Ambassador, his wife and all personnel. Only the Military Attache decided to remain in Chialing House.

The foreign community held close together, both for reasons of protocol and resulting social contacts, as well as the cultural and linguistic estrangement for most of us. Some of these contacts turned into friendly and personal relations. For cultural activities, the two main ones were evenings spent in restaurants with friends, also browsing and shopping in the flea market. There were no concerts or cinema, except for rare performances of Chinese plays, too little understood to be appreciated by foreigners.

The streets were overflowing with crowds of people, ignoring any traffic rules; fortunately for the pedestrians there was very little of motorized traffic, mainly due to lack of gasoline. Public transport consisted of small, dilapidated buses for longer trips. In the city people used rickshaws, pulled by men, or were carried on the uphill - and downhill - stretches in a litter held by two men, the bamboo sticks carried on their shoulders. The street vendors were selling hot chestnuts, jasmin flowers encased in wicker containers, or anything else, including the tiger ointment; tiny old women walked around with a spiked stick, picking the garbage lying around, mostly peels of mandarines. Shops with beautiful silk fabrics - which were cheaper than hard-to-get cotton cloth - embroideries of incredible precision, slaved over by young girls, gave the streets a touch of color, with a promise of luxury to the buyers. By contrast, the pharmacies were somber looking, especially in the interior: hundreds of dark drawers lined the walls upto the ceiling, filled with mysterious herbs, roots and other secret ingredients, ministered to the clients in a subdued atmosphere. Food shops were bulging with delicacies of all kind, many lined with large casks of rice wine. Piles of

earth-covered eggs, a very special Chinese delicacy, were certainly something I could live without.

The Chinese children, especially babies, were beautiful to look at. Pampered by grandmothers and the entire family, they were easy to observe on the street and inside their shacks, opened wide onto the street, in hundreds all over the city. The babies wore the brightest silks, their outfit ingeniously self-opening in the crucial parts of the anatomy when necessary: a dog waited nearby to feed on the excreta. The favorite domestic pets were cats, usually held on a leash, fat and content, never hungry thanks to the rats plaguing the city.

The dogs were an unhappy lot. Ruuning around the city in packs or skulking timidly on the street, they fed on the city's garbage and human waste, half-wild, filthy and covered with raw sores. Fresh graves had to be protected from these packs, roaming the cemeteries.

People were the beasts of burden: everything that had to be carried from one place to another, went on the backs of men: food, building materials, people, poultry, pigs, just everything. The coolies hummed, groaned, grunted or called out in unison, when a group had to synchronize their steps in carrying a large and heavy block of wood or stone. Thin like grasshoppers, men pulled or dragged a rickshaw on the many levels of the streets, often connected by wide stone steps.

The only Polish citizen in Chungking was Maya Rodziewicz, niece of Maria Rodziewiczowna, a favorite novelist of mine. Maya married a Chinese diplomat in Warsaw, they sailed home together. On disembarking, the newlyweds were met by the diplomat's wife. Maya decided to manage on her own, moving with

the Kuomintang Government to Chungking. She worked as an interpreter and translator with the US Army, sometimes also helping us in the Embassy. "I lived in Peking, made many friends and learned much about this society. Once someone gave me a wonderful little puppy, but it disappeared and I was quite upset. A few days later my next door neighbors invited me to dinner at their home. Everything was delicious, and one dish was new to me, so I asked what it is. The hosts, very pleased, started laughing and said that it was a puppy's stomach."

It was difficult to cope with practical matters of daily life without anyone familiar with China, especially when the house was being built and housekeeping needed to be organized. Some very helpful advice in such matters often came from the Bishop of Chungking, a French missionary who lived at his church and parish for the last forty years. Thanks to his help, we managed to locate the Polish missionaries, scattered around the country.

Brother Florian Pytka joined the Embassy to become an indispensable help as a translator, an interpreter, a go-between and the trouble-shooter for any type of practical problems between the inscrutability of the Orient and our Slavic nature and culture. His command of the language - according to our Chinese friends - was such, that in the darkness no Chinese would know that they are talking with a foreigner. Brother Florian was equally fluent in Italian; he went away from his village to Rome as a fifteen-years' old boy to join the Franciscan

order, was offered a missionary post in China with an Italian monk. The Italian priest was captured by a group of Chinese bandits two years ago, and - although apparently alive - was completely isolated from the rest of the world, in the caves of some mountains. One year later he was released and turned up at the Embassy, to stay a few days with Brother Florian. The only language we had in common with him was Latin, very much forgotten since our schooldays, making the conversation pretty hilarious, ending with "Gaudeamus igitur, iuvenes dum sumus..."

Most of the other diplomatic missions staying at the Chialing House consisted of just one man, an ambassador or his chargé d'affaires. Only Mr. Alf Hassel, the Ambassador of Norway was there with his wife, a princess née Orange. We often ate together at dinnertime with these two charming, elderly people. Madame Hassel was a very wise lady who told me what to do when I discovered that both pairs of my stockings, brand new, were stolen from my room. Accordingly, I waited the next morning until the Number One Boy came to tidy my room and confided my problem to him: these stockings were all I had - except for the very darned pair I had on - keeping them for very special occasions and the terrible cold. The man did not say anything, but the next day one pair was back in the drawer. Quite a lesson on the face-saving strategy.

Meeting so many foreigners was a new experience, actually very enjoyable and educational. No matter what anyone else thought, we, the Poles, knew unshakably to be the center of the universe! Adding to this the ongoing war, especially bloody and viciously conducted both by Germans and the Russians against

the Poles, we felt ourselves here surrounded by an aura of sympathy, making us feel to be among friends. What was equally gratifying, were the good manners and courtesy, an essential ingredient to the diplomatic lifestyle: not only in the way one speaks, acts and writes, but in the protocol of receiving people, arranging their places at the table and working very hard at such seemingly trivial things, to create good feelings at every formal occasion. The art of decorating the table and planning a menu, one year after just a piece of bread was all of that and then some, was like a mysterious experience of revenge on the recent past, a spiritual punch right-in-the-stomach to the enemies of mankind.

Then there were other interesting customs, enjoyed by the Chinese. Such a fabulous food we never imagined could exist, was accompanied by showing to the chef how much it was enjoyed: leaving a messy table after eating. The cook would then come out of his kitchen, grinning from ear to ear, wearing an apron caked with food stains, as old as his profession was, a proud badge of his seniority.

The only other - friendly - Slav mission was the Czech Embassy, also with its government exiled in London. The two men were quite different from each other. Mr. Emanuel Mazac was a professional diplomat, polite and courteous as the Secretary to the Ambassador, Mr. Stanislav Minovsky, who was quite a character. The first evening we spent together, he kept slapping us on the back and explaining, how the Polish people

are very good at dying, but have no idea how to live. Well!!! This was just the right moment to mention, how the entire Czech division, organized from the prisoners in Russia, was wiped out on the Soviet front, a good enough lesson for our General Anders to get the hell out of Stalin's command, still fighting and winning battles on the Western front. Mr. Minovsky, a shoe salesman by profession, was exceptionally friendly with the Soviet Embassy, by far the largest of all the foreign missions in Chungking.

With our inadequate English, we associated mainly with those who also spoke French. In the British Embassy, which permitted us to use His Majesty's diplomatic courier, many people did speak French as well, so we could carry on. The Ambassador, Sir Horace Seymour, was considered to be an eccentric who rarely went out. Since this was wartime, formal evening wear was not acceptable, but Sir Horace went a bit beyond the conventional, appearing always and everywhere in the same tweed jacket: a uniform of his in a way, I suppose. Lady Violet was a Catholic, stopping each Sunday morning to take my Ambassador's wife and me to church in her limousine, staying afterwards a little while at the Bishop's residence for a chat.

The most interesting to me were the Americans. As different as each group was, Americans were much more so, always unmistakably themselves; they had a carefree manner of speaking - none of that servility and stiffness - even moving differently. I have never met any Americans, knowing of them through their books, which spoke of a world unlike any other. Woodrow Wilson was a national hero in Poland, more so than the founding fathers;

our heroes of the American Revolution were Kosciuszko and Pulaski. The Americans we met at the parties were mostly young men I enjoyed listening to and deciding, that they were an eccentric lot: one of them used to send his shirts to San Francisco, to be laundered by a Chinese! Then I also decided that they were witty, saying that the two greatest errors America committed in the Second World War were Pearl Harbor and Pearl Buck.

With so few foreign women in Chungking, I was often a guest of the Military Attache Col. Morris B. De Pass, Jr. attending official parties. His residence was far outside the city, on a hill where two coolies carried me in a litter from the point where the car stopped, accross a muddy and slippery path. A litter transport was not a very good thing, awkward to sit in, difficult to relax when humans were the beasts of burden - yet that's how they could make a living - and the best place to catch a disease, because that's how people were transported to the hospital, sick with cholera, typhoid or anything else. The Colonel had daughters my age back in the United States, he was a charming man.

Between the Chialing House and the city run a road, less than a mile long, carved in the side of a mountain. Four roads could be seen from this point, and Chialing River at the bottom. The other side of this road was the top of the mountain. About half of it was a cemetery, followed by a group of buildings housing Wai Chai Pu - the Ministry of Foreign Affairs - and the American Embassy. The hill had also many caves, perfect for hiding during the Japanese air attacks.

The soft soil of the hill kept eroding, particularly after each and frequent rain, the crumbling earth lumps falling onto

the roadside and revealing wooden coffins, broken down by age, with the remains of skeletons sticking out of them. The very top of the cemetery was offered as building site for the Polish Embassy, with a solemn commitment by the contractor to have the house ready in two months' time.

I really have no idea how the building and construction materiel reached the building site, because it was tough enough to climb it without anything to carry as well. About eighty degrees steep, I would labor from one tree root to another hoping that other roots were still embedded well enough to hold my weight. The hands and clothes would be coated with yellow mud, the shoes caked completely around and inside. Closer to the construction site human bones and skulls lay around, scattered by the excavations made to level the building ground. Gradually, these sad remnants cleared away with the help of dogpacks, but it took many months, often stumbling in the night over a shinbone. Our building was reaching completion when work started on the Australian Legation next to us. This was reason for double pleasure: first, at least we had some company in this weird place, and secondly, the Australian envoy was Mr. Keith Officer, transferred from Kuibyshev where Mietek met him handing over the money for Polish refugees.

The last touch to our residence was a staircase from the main road up the mountainside, made of 145 granite blocks. Seldom were they behaving the way they were supposed to, sliding every which way in the loose mountain mud, sometimes disappearing a few at a time for another needy construction cause. Our guests would arrive at the door worse for wear, not amused. One

exception was Sir Horace, laughing his head off and wiping the yellow mud off his tweed jacket.

The new address was Chiaomenting, Lian Fu Lu, an achievement for this outpost in comparison to the austerity of Chialing House. The two storey building had the offices and reception rooms on the ground floor, the upstairs were private quarters for the Ambassador and his wife, my room and three others. One of the two bathrooms was for the Ambassador, but as the only woman, I was allowed to use either one. There was no running water; normally, a bucket with water stood next to the W.C. for flushing, but filling the bathtub with water was a full time job for one coolie, responsible for water supply only. Each morning he also brought from the market a thick slab of ice to cool the refrigerator we bought, with a very dead motor.

✓ The plaster was still wet when we were permitted to move in and the construction began to crack, particularly at the corners. The large, front corner room which I was given for the secretariat office, developed a gash about six feet high from the ground, wide enough to shake hands with a person standing on the verandah. The floor boards were laid with wide spaces in between, without any foundation underneath them. Rats used the place during the day, coming out through the cracks in full splendor at night. The only way to protect myself was to sleep every night under a mosquito net suspended from the ceiling, tightly tucked under the mattress all around. The rats ate my soap, gnawed at all the clothing, even a piece of a gorgeous lilac taffeta waiting to be turned into something absolutely stunning - the dress had to be cut not quite like I dreamt about it. A Chinese friend made me a gift of a kitten,

but it was stolen in no time. Then a dog adopted me, a white mongrel with yellow spots. She had a face like a monkey, so that became her name. Unfortunately she was half wild and always smelled cadaverous, even after shampoo.

The view from the terrace compensated for all the problems inside. A bamboo screen helped to protect from the intensive daytime heat, raised in the afternoon to relax after work on the terrace, with a view downhill all the way to the sprawling Yangtze, watching the airplane landing on the sandy strip in the middle of it. On the very rare occasions when the government was forced to give an outward example of anti-corruption, our men used binoculars to watch from the terrace, how the victims were executed on the other side of Yangtze: each one carried in a separate litter, then kneeling on the ground with hands tied in the back, shot; much publicity followed the whole process.

One day after moving into the new house, three new men landed in Chungking: Dr. Jan Fryling arrived as the counsellor, Mr. Pawel S. Kittay as the Press Officer, and Feliks Topolski, as visiting war correspondent of the BBC.

Not cutting a military figure despite his army uniform, topped by a black beret, Topolski's war reportage was also rather unorthodox. Instead of writing, the man scribbled, scribbled and scribbled some more in brown ink on a notepad, coming out with a living, fairly jumping-out-of-the-page image. A word or two, name and date, gave more than an entire page of text, describing what Topolski saw just at that moment. He already produced a volume on Russia at War in 1941;

this time he worked on a similar opus for China and Far East. Away each day on his sketching trips around the town, he seemed pleased with the material he produced, except for his sessions with Madamissima: she could not sit still ^{for} a single moment because of a skin disease. Her husband the Generalissimo was a much easier model. To me, a young secretary, the Chang Kai sheks were very remote and impressive personalities, although whispers and allegations about the first lady's greed and corruption sounded very bad indeed. One evening Topolski was with us, ready to sketch anything we asked for, so I requested his autoportrait. On another occasion, during a Chinese dinner, he surprised me with my own portrait, both still dearly cherished.

Jan Fryling was an authentic diplomat and a man of great erudition, witty, with an inexhaustible supply of jokes. He was never boring and I was quite in awe of such an intellect. He had a reputation of having read and - unfortunately - memorized the encyclopedia. After three months of entertaining us every evening with new jokes, some started to reappear: one day I found a small notebook, with all of the jokes written down in his neat hand. This sort of relieved me from my worshipping respect, now giving me a chance to pull his leg now and then. But it was Fryling and Brother Florian who made a comedy team, to everybody's great time.

We were beginning to live in a more civilized and pleasant manner. I was also given the responsibility for housekeeping, which meant discussing all the problems with the Number One Boy and deciding on the menu of the day. Everybody contributed for

our food expenses, all sharing alike and eating together. In the evenings, free from formal occasions, friends would drop by for long conversations. Once a week we went out for a Chinese dinner, a different one each time especially when the refugees who lived in Chungking opened restaurants, catering to their own provincial cuisine.

The servants quarters were in a separate building which also housed the kitchen, a laundry and a storage room, constructed parallel to the main house. The narrow path between the two buildings was the only way to the Embassy's front entrance; I didn't like that, because everyone could look inside the wide open kitchen, a messy place. The cook was a testy character, bossing everybody around while sitting on the kitchen table and trimming his toenails with the kitchen knife, the one normally used to make noodles. Under the table laid shards of broken plates, covered with inches of dust. Both of us, Boy Number One and myself, were too scared to say anything. There was some very confusing business going on, involving feuding between different dragon societies, to which the cook and the Number One Boy apparently belonged to. My worry was to maintain some dignity in appearance, but how could we if, say, the Dutch Ambassador happened to walk by such goings on? I realized the triviality of my concern, in the face of real drama the Chinese had to live in our servants' quarters. These people were happy to have a decent job and a decent treatment by the foreigners, at the same time afraid to be murdered in the dark by their own countrymen. The reason for this problem was

that the Number One Boy came to us from the French Embassy, highly recommended, indeed quite experienced as a waiter on a luxury boat before the war. It must have offended our cook, not included in making this decision.

The French did not have an embassy in China, although we called it that way. The Provisional Government in London, headed by General Charles de Gaulle, had its delegation to the Chinese Government, represented by General Z. Pechkoff, a personality in his own rights. A career officer of the Foreign Legion, he was a gentle, quiet man, son of the writer the world knows as Maksim Gorkiy. We shared a passion for browsing in the flea market: the first thing before a dinner reception, the Ambassador walked around the rooms to see our latest trophies, sometimes complaining that he had his eye on this scroll or that agate sculpture for a long time.

One of the curiosest coincidences was a bond between Gen. Pechkoff and the Personal Representative of Sir Winston Churchill to Generalissimo Chang Kai-shek, Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart. Each man lost an arm on the same day, on May 9th, 1915: Ambassador Pechkoff lost the right arm, the General Carton de Wiart lost the left one.*

People wondered about the strangeness of the assignment, created by the British Prime Minister in a country ^{with} fully staffed British Embassy. The diplomatic experts were predicting mayhem among the British representatives of His Majesty and that of His Majesty's Prime Minister, but the personalities of Sir Horace

*Happy Odyssey The Memoirs of Lieutenant-General
Sir Adrian Carton de Wiart, V.C., K.B.E., C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O.
Pan Books Ltd., 1955

and Sir Adrian were much above such petty minds, unfortunately doing nothing for the entertainment of our diplomatic enclave.

One day I listened to the conversation in our living room, between the Ambassador and a very tall, slender man in a military uniform, with an empty left sleeve, a black patch over his left eye and an elegant gray moustache. The men spoke a mixture of French and Polish. The Englishman was General Carton de Wiart, just arrived in Chungking and making his first, still diplomatically unofficial visit to our Embassy, as a friend who lived many years in Poland between the two World wars.

The daily news were packed with messages from the European front, showing clearly that the winds were shifting in favor of the Allied forces. It was just a matter of weeks for Hitler to capitulate. The Soviet Army was gaining rapidly as well, chasing the Germans away from Russia, into the Polish territory. When the Soviet divisions reached the Vistula River in August 1944, the Polish Underground Army attacked the Germans in Warsaw. The risk involved seemed worth the bloody game: the advancing Red Army was just across the bridge, the British and Americans had an easy air access from Italy, so the Polish capital could be liberated by Poles, not by Stalin. But the Russians waited patiently, watching their two enemies doing the dirty work for them. In sixty three ^{days} the uprising was over, with close to two hundred thousand men, women and children dead, and Warsaw demolished by the Germans. Hitler still had many months on his throne.

In Chungking the heaviest bombardments took place in 1943, before our arrival. Then the Japanese slowed down to one or two air raids only, although the alarms were more frequent. We all

went to the caves for several hours, unconcerned about the bombs in such safe hiding. There seemed to be an intensified mobilization. Platoons of bedraggled peasants tried to march to the orders, barked out by soldiers with bayonets, wearing straw soles tied with a rope, some men escaped from the ranks. When the soldiers discovered someone missing, a substitute would be captured in the next village because the number of recruits had to be correct, even if that meant drafting a child.

Did these soldiers ever see the war action? Hard to tell. The arms came by air in the American military transport because of the country's blockade, while the Stillwell Road was still under construction. Flying "over the Hump" was full of obstacles from the Himalayan peaks and from the Japanese, operating in Burma. Sometimes the Americans were ordered to give priority for some mysterious cargo, destined for the Chinese Government; occasionally a crate broke open at unloading, revealing lipsticks, silk stockings and suchlike essentials for the First lady of the land. The arms and ammunition were stockpiled at strategic points until the Americans raised questions. The Chinese officers in charge would then say: "if you want to deliver the stuff to the front, do it yourself." It hurt and bewildered these brave men, laying their lives for people at the other end of the world who couldn't care less, took the Americans for granted and, by the same token, decided they are stupid.

Our life in general felt good, there was hope that everything will turn out well, it must, once all the bloodshed is over.

Of course there were some nasty moments of pettiness and bickering in the group, but nothing important enough to upset anybody for too long. Mietek had an uncanny way of calming anybody's stormy outbursts, getting a lot of mileage out of his relaxed way of looking at life. I was discovering that Mietek's method was a much better one than my own, so I started working on curbing my occasional flareups. His other peculiar attitude to the chain of command was listening to all the long, involved instructions of the Ambassador, but doing it his way, without ever being reprimanded or proven wrong for it. I was the one who argued with the boss.

Other Polish missionaries turned up at the Embassy from the remote parts of China. Isolated from the rest of the world for several years, these men were starved for contacts with their own culture and language, or some decent food they were much too poor to eat normally, also some housekeeping comfort the Embassy could offer. A few weeks with us were like a luxury holiday for them, before starting a ten days' walk back to the mission.

Father Szlachtowski remained at the Embassy to help in some matters nobody else could handle. An austere, very serious and solemn personality, he was to us a saintly figure, reminiscent of biblical prophets. In rare moments of conviviality I dragged out of him the story of his vocation. He was a young engineer with a promising future in the industrial complex growing in Southern Poland, living a perfectly normal life, without care about the future. During a ski trip in the mountains he received

his calling and left everything behind, joined the Franciscan order and came to China. The rest of us were quite casual about our religious obligations, I was undergoing a period of confusion about life and God, not realizing that those were quite normal growing pains. The Father was wise enough not to admonish anyone, speaking out only in reply to a direct question.

Brother Pytka became an indispensable part of the household, handling everything so well that we forgot what problems could there be. But one day he became ill with trachoma, isolating him from the rest of us. I became ill as well.

Chungking was not a good place to get sick and expect a medical care with Western standards. The only doctor was an Englishman attached to the British military personnel, away in India just then. High temperature, headache and pains, general weakness made me half-conscious, so after a few days Father Szlachtowski brought a Chinese doctor to my bedside, staying with us as an interpreter.

The Chinese man, dressed in black silk and wearing a skull cap, settled down on the edge of my bed, rested my left arm on a pillow and held my pulse for a very long time, in complete silence. Finally he began to speak in a slow, measured tone, with breaks to allow for translation. This man gave an entire story of my life, with a particular emphasis on the horrors of my life during the last few years. To this day I don't know how he did it, a complete stranger to all of us until now. He left instructions for my treatment, a mixture of roots and powders boiled together to drink three times a day. The black, hot liquid was unbearably bitter,

impossible to swallow even with any amount of sugar. Fortunately three days later the British doctor was back, said I had para-typhus, gave me some pills and I recovered soon afterwards.

I was ordered to take a few weeks' rest in India, and visit my family in Kolhapur. When Mother and Basia waited in Karachi for a ship to take them to East Africa, another group of women and children were destined for Kolhapur, via Bombay. When I spoke with the Ambassador about it, he readily agreed to ask on my behalf that my family remain in India, to be closer to me. Now, one year after leaving Teheran, I could see them again.

South of Bombay and Poona, the British Army vacated their base and barracks, now occupied by several hundred of Polish families. The place was well kept, airy with roofs over low walls, a few partitions separating a very large interior into smaller areas for the families. A separate barrack held showers and bathrooms, another one was a mess hall. Next to the barracks was a tiny Indian village; all of them learned to speak Polish fluently, just like the Indian postal clerks, handling all our transactions in Polish. By then Mother learned the infirmary routine, working a few hours a day at the local health post. Primitive, simple and a pretty dull place - compared to my own life by then - it was a haven from Russia and the war.

A trip to India was an occasion for everybody in Chungking to give the traveller a shopping list, starting with toothpaste and ending with mustard, or a bottle of cognac, a book or some cotton fabric, none of which were available in China. Women

enjoyed a dress piece of lace, printed silk or linen, to change from the plain Chinese silk, an embroidered one or a traditional brocade, not practical for daily wear and laundry. The Chinese tailors knew how to make an exact copy of any dress, maybe too exact sometimes. For my first long dress they copied a short one I gave them with suitable instructions, making it just a few inches longer; this was a disaster to a young woman, unable to show herself like this at a reception in the Prime Minister's palace.

The Military Attaché departed in late 1944, before the arrival of his replacement. Colonel Aleksander Kedzior stayed all the time in Chialing House, coming to the Embassy only to dictate his weekly reports. Another Embassy residing at the hotel was the Mexican one, with a young chargé d'affaires, a handsome and dashing companion on many parties. His ambassador was finally due to arrive in a few weeks' time, to stay also at the Chialing House. Mr. Alfonso Castro Valle was determined to get the best room for his boss, deciding that the one he wants is occupied by our Colonel, who refused to move. And then the trouble started: Don Alfonso begun to threaten him, swearing that he will have all the Polish orphans from Russia kicked out of his country, if the room is not surrendered right away. Another time he fired several times at the door, sending the Colonel to stay under the bed until the ammunition run out. But before the Mexican Government could declare an official war against Poland on the Eastern Front, the matter was settled by the room occupant leaving the country.

A small group of Polish prisoners of war in Russia managed

to escape their death in the Katyn Forest massacre. Colonel Jerzy Grobicki caught 'flu, which sent him to the camp infirmary for a few days: this was^a decision made by the Soviet officer, filling the first train with the Polish officers. "You will be transferred with the last group", the sick man was told. Fortunately, the last group was saved from the execution, already performed on the eleven thousand of other officers.

The Koreans, also invaded by Japan, had their exile government in Chungking. A young Korean princess often visited our Embassy, becoming very friendly with me. Once she invited me and Mietek to meet the President of Korea and the entire cabinet of ministers, in a formal yet very friendly reception in the local Korean restaurant. It was such an honor to be a guest of honor, treated like a very important person. Mr. President - a kindly looking, gray-haired man was Korea's national hero. The Princess explained, that the history of our two countries was similar in many ways, although it was embarrassing not to be able to speak with him and know precious little about Korea. But he was smiling all the time and chatting, serving my plate with all the delicacies, including the evening's pièce de résistance, very old eggs, quartered on the most prominent dish. When the Princess noticed my protests, she explained that this was the most expensive dish they can never afford to order, but tonight it is served in my honor. Mr. President held a piece in his chopsticks with a blissful smile, until I agreed to have it on my plate. Everybody watched me putting it in my mouth, where it began to grow and grow - I started a coughing fit, grabbed for my handkerchief to wipe my eyes, and the food landed inside my Indian evening bag of black velvet, embroidered in gold and silver. If I ever think of the most embarrassing moment in my

life, nothing comes close to this experience.

The Soviet Embassy, where we never went, was notorious for its lavish parties and plenty to drink. Vodka and other foreign liquor flowed, the Russian hosts making sure that no glass was ever empty; they drank just as much, except that it was water, at least during the parties. These stories came to us through friends, one of them a young Chinese diplomat who was a frequent visitor and we enjoyed each other's company. Somebody made a wager with him, that I have a very strong head and can drink him under the table. I went along with the prank, drinking solidly during the entire evening from one of the bottles, full of pale tea. Our friend had to spend the night on the verandah furniture, unable to return home; the Polish womanhood gained a solid reputation of being just as tough as the Russian men.

The war coming to an end was a good time for the Allies to plan the world's future, free of the horrors experienced in the past five years. Millions killed, millions enslaved, displaced, homeless and desperate. Our tiny group of survivors waited for the moment of returning home, rejoin the families, go back to school, start a normal life and build a solid future.

The Yalta agreement took care of such ideas for us. In February 1945 the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of Great Britain made a magnanimous gift to Stalin, giving him many countries in Europe - none of which were ever theirs - including Poland.

What were our feelings? Like drowning on a stormy sea, too incredulous to have been kicked overboard by the same captain of a refugee boat who promised to save us. Nobody talked about it.

We carried on our daily routine, awaiting more information and instructions from London. But changes took place in the attitude of other foreign missions. Of the Big Four who sold us to their fifth partner, each government, one by one, presented official diplomatic notes to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London, informing them that the exiled Government is no longer recognized by them. The Chinese Government was the last one. A Waichaipu official came to our Embassy, we all gathered around the Ambassador to hear the reading of the diplomatic note, terminating the Chinese Government's recognition of our government. A courteous reassurance of their good intentions to help us in any way possible to liquidate our affairs, before the new diplomatic representation arrives, closed this message.

One of the consequences of this change was an official diplomatic boycott; the invitations to formal occasions stopped coming, and that attitude was adopted by all the foreign missions, not only the "Big Four". Once, the Ambassador of Netherlands, Mr. A.H.J. Lovink invited the entire staff to dinner. He pointed to the closed shutters in his house, asking us also to be discreet about it, but he said: "My country has just been liberated from Hitler's invasion by a Polish Division, and this is our way to show our gratitude."

Attaboy, Stalin! How can one not admire his diabolical talent of spreading pale fear around the small countries, when the biggest ones danced to his tune?

A few months later Mr. Lovink represented Queen Wilhelmina in handing over their Indonesian colony to Sukarno.

The date for closing down the Embassy was set for the end of July. What about the personnel?

If anyone wished to stay, the Polish communists would be only too happy to agree - apparently some of the Polish diplomats in other countries did just that. In Chungking, only Mietek and I lived through the communist experience, so our own revulsion was understandable. We seldom talked about it even with our colleagues, particularly after we heard from other survivors like ourselves that in London, many of our own people refused to believe them.

Hitler and nazism were much easier to understand and simple to believe in their atrocities: Mein Kampf was loud and clear, SS actions were subject of the German propaganda, these atrocities were happening in the middle of Europe, talked about, photographed, filmed and documented. The communist tactics are much more secret, happening almost on another planet, practically impossible to prove even by eyewitnesses; they are also committed to the tune of propaganda about the social justice, creating the happiest society under the sun. It really made no difference whether people didn't believe, or didn't want to believe us; it all came down to a sense of helplessness, wanting to warn everybody against the danger they were running. Mr. Roosevelt: would you have believed us? If yes, would it make any difference in your Yalta meeting? Frankly, I doubt it: Mrs. Roosevelt went to visit Stalin and the Soviet prisons, where she couldn't find anything wrong with a man who murdered his own wife and millions of others.

The Ambassador, Count Alfred Poninski was a timid soul, in his fifties, a man without much future outside a government job.

He was far from a brilliant mind, apparently chosen for the post because of personnel shortage. At the receptions people were ducking him as best they could in order to avoid being literally buttonholed into a corner and have to listen to an endless monologue, recited in a nasal monotone: Polish, French or English, all sounded the same. His main job was writing weekly reports, I doubt anybody could sit long enough to read through - in Polish there is a word for such a writing style: grafomania. On some mornings I found a love poem tucked into my typewriter, written by hand and signed, with strictly Petrarchan overtones: "You vision of alabaster in your cloister cell you are like a happy smile in the sea of obstacles fly with me on poetry's waves, into the skies and above the blood-drenched earth ..." The man seemed smitten, but I certainly was not and told him so in no uncertain terms; he accepted it meekly, from that moment just staring wordlessly and tragically, which I decided best to ignore.

One evening after dinner Mr. Poninski threw at all of us the question of staying on. We all said "absolutely no" and his Countess started her protests as well. For the sake of discretion we all left the drawing room, winking at the loud noises coming through the flimsy doors. Never again was the subject brought up. In all honesty, I could understand his fear about the future. Not young, handicapped with one short leg, sick with stomach ulcers, impractical and without any profession, now condemned to live in some foreign place, without comforts and protection he was accustomed to - a pretty depressing future for him and his wife who underwent a drastic cancer surgery two years earlier.

Our plans were unclear, except for the fact that Mietek and I were in love and wanted to be married. Some friends offered to arrange visas for their countries, also we could ask to remain in China.

The Brazilian Ambassador gave a visa for Mietek: as a man he had a right to it, unlike a single woman which meant I could not travel to Brazil. Europe was out of question in 1945. As for England, first of all nobody offered to help out, a logical consequence of Churchill's role in Yalta; secondly, we were not interested in swelling up the ranks of Polish refugees in London, notorious for their bickering and intrigues. Our Australian friends offered visas to everybody, which we gratefully accepted.

China seemed very attractive, with many good friends we made here, a country with a fascinating culture and art, beautiful countryside and still so much to see. But there were two serious problems. Each day the communists were gaining ground and there was no hope to contain them peacefully. At one time Mr. Wendell Willkie flew with Mao Tse Tung to Chungking for negotiations with Chiang Kai-shek, but the meeting broke off and we watched the airplane flying back North a few hours later. The second problem was facing a life in China without the protection we now enjoyed at the Embassy; without the language, no money nor any skills, it all added up to a lot of trouble. So, Australia was the only viable place for us.

What is actually a citizen of a non-existing government? It doesn't make sense, of course. Yet we needed something to replace the diplomatic passports - and my own service passport. In his

consular capacity, Mietek issued regular Polish passports for each person, hoping that the immigration authorities will recognize them on a goodwill basis; for all legal and practical purposes we became stateless and displaced persons, strictly at the mercy of any official we happened to deal with.

In accordance with protocol, a country's national day was always a special occasion. May 3rd commemorated the Polish Constitution, ratified in 1791 - first such a document in Europe. Officially, we were still recognized by our hosts which was another reason to organize a big reception. The communists abolished this day, replacing it with May 1st.

The job fell in my lap, from writing and sending out the invitations, to planning the menu and space to accommodate all the guests.

The house had to be practically rebuilt after a typhoon we experienced three months earlier. Most of the roof was blown away, the downpour brought the ceilings down. The plaster kept falling in big patches and the only safe way was to walk and sit under an umbrella. After all the repairs were done, the house was clean again, in time for Easter.

That was our first Easter in the Embassy, celebrated with as much tradition as the Polish custom had it, the practical circumstances notwithstanding. The Easter Sunday mass was celebrated in the dining room by Father Szlachtowski, then the table serving for the altar was cleared to become a buffet. Planning and preparation for the Easter dinner took many weeks, because everything had to be scrounged for either through somebody just leaving for India and due back in time, or through

the local black market. It became a community project, each person pledging a particular dish, none of them even remotely related to the Chinese cuisine. The toughest item to get was mayonnaise, until the Countess admitted she had a can of Italian olive oil. The Number One Boy was the only one person who actually knew how to make it. He sat importantly in the dining room, with the Countess hovering over him, to make sure he didn't steal a drop of the olive oil - one cupful was all she rationed out - he did it, without curdling it once! It was taken by the oil owner and hid away in a safe place until the table was ready. The day before I suddenly remembered the existence, and the importance, of mustard, and how wonderful it would be to have some now. Mr. Jaworski, our First Secretary, disappeared for two hours, returning with a small tin of Colman's powder. On Sunday morning he invited me to his room to mix it, something I never did before. The mustard competed in importance with the mayonnaise, both a source of many jokes.

If a small affair like Easter cost so much work, how were we to arrange a reception for over two hundred guests? The invitations went out to the Chinese officials, diplomats of a few missions who may still be brave enough to come, and a large number of friends we seem to have made. They all accepted, bringing with them over fifty bodyguards for the Chinese dignitaries.

The cooking was a matter of logistics, since the food was plentiful and the cooks knew how to organize the work, with a team of hired help. The problem was the bar. The idea was to have a great time, a farewell to our friends, with food and drinks to do it well.

If one felt like a glass of beer, that meant waiting to go to Calcutta. Rice wine was available for special occasions, it was sometimes good, but often quite bad, depending on the vintage of the stone jar it came from, available at that moment in the market place. The rice liquor, maitai, was banned by me from our house after a bottle of it broke by accident, polluting the air almost as badly as a skunk would. The decision was to buy as much of the genuine stuff as the black market had available. Brother Pytka used all his hunting talents, buying out the entire stock: eight bottles of Scotch, a few assorted liqueurs and some vodka. Mietek, given the responsibility for the bar, decided to use the bathtub and mix everything into a cocktail. Rice wine was added to make the volume, estimated to satisfy a crowd of over two hundred and fifty guests. The Countess - this time - hovered over Mietek, making sure he didn't drink anything on the sly.

The party was wonderful, if I say so myself. The only victim of the liquid dynamite was our dearest friend the Bishop of Chungking, who was the first guest to appear. For this tiny wisp of a man, one drink was enough, after which he smiled from ear to ear, settled down in the nearest armchair and slept blissfully. After the party was almost over, the poor darling man was lovingly settled in a litter and carried back home.

The date for Father Szlachtowski to return to his mission was set for mid-May. He was supposed to get a ride in the morning, but the truck broke down. That day a group of Chinese artists were coming to lunch, set for twelve persons. Madame

Poninski became very upset that the Father was still with us, because this meant thirteen persons at the table. Everybody's nerves were frail that day, including the Father's, and such talk seemed like the last straw to a religious man; he sat ostentatiously with all of us at the table, eating his food in a black mood. He left in the afternoon to ride the first leg of the journey, promising to send us news from the mission.

A month passed since then, without a sign from him. We knew that he will travel one week, all by foot in the mountains, so by now we should have some news. Instead, rumours started circulating in the city about a murdered priest. To allay our own anxiety, the Waichaipu was officially requested to confirm the whereabouts of Father Szlachtowski. Two weeks later, a diplomatic note informed us that the Father was murdered by a group of men who were afraid he will report them for cultivating poppy fields in the mountains; he was decapitated, with parts of his body scattered around. "But" - said the note - "the two guilty men were caught immediately by the police and executed, so that justice was done." We had several people swear to us, that the executed men were not the ones who murdered Father Szlachtowski.

The Ambassador's wife left Chungking to stay with the Princess of Hyderabad, until she could join her husband to travel together to Australia, where they decided to settle down. Other staff members were leaving gradually. The plan was for the Ambassador to fly to Calcutta with me and Mietek. Dr. Fryling was to stay at the Embassy together with Brother Pytka, until further orders from London.

In the morning we read that yesterday, the 9th of August 1945, Nagasaki was hit with an atomic bomb. In the afternoon we boarded the CNA3 DC-3 plane. The unpressurized cabin was hard on the Ambassador, gasping for the thin air. He should have a right to rent an oxygen mask, but the cost was too much: every kilo of excess baggage cost thirty five US dollars, and an oxygen tank was very heavy.

A troopship was to leave for Australia on August 22nd, to take us from Calcutta. In the meantime a few formal receptions were given to the Ambassador by the local Chinese dignitaries where we accompanied him. His prestige demanded staying in a decent hotel, but we found rooms in an Indian boarding house.

With each day getting closer to the departure, we could not put our hearts in such a long trip, taking us further away from Europe, afraid never to be able to afford a trip back, separating from my family which was still in Kolhapur. By that time, with armistice in Poland, Mietek started receiving news from his family, uncertain about their fate. The result was, that on the morning of August 22nd, we unpacked instead of boarding the ship.

THE FAMILY

Franciszek and Julia Lapinski received an opulent album of royal blue velvet, resting on silver knobs, the cover framed in elaborate silverwork, with an inscription "XXV, 1861 - 1886". This was a gift on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary from the employees of a printing press which belonged to the Sierpinski family. Dr. Konstanty Sierpinski was married to their oldest daughter Ludwika, sister to Julia, Kazimierz and Aleksandra.

Konstanty and Ludwika had one child, Wacław, born in 1882. Three years later Ludwika died of tuberculosis. Dr. Sierpinski had an office in his apartment, but his coach became part of the Warsaw scene, stopping in front of one building or another on house calls, the coachman patiently holding reins.* His sister Zofia established a private school for girls, with fully accredited academic standards, starting from the elementary through the matriculation diploma.

The widower eventually married a widow Weinert, who also had a son, Franciszek. This union produced a daughter they named Maria, who became known as Marysienka.

Since the end of eighteenth century Poland disappeared from the map of Europe as an independent country, until it re-emerged in 1918; Germans, Russians and Austrians partitioned all Poland between themselves, and the residents of a particular locality, regardless of their race or creed, automatically became citizens of the occupying power. Warsaw was under the Russians, who had a lot of problems with the Polish population. Revolts, conspirations

* In New York, in late fifties, some countrymen were asking me, "Are you related to Dr. Konstanty? When I was a young boy, he was our family doctor."

and uprisings were constant demonstrations for freedom from the tsarist tyranny which included prohibition of using Polish language in schools. Death sentences, or Siberia, became part of the Polish life, touching most of the families.

Waclaw attended schools in Warsaw, graduating with a diploma, caligraphed on a white, bleached calfskin; the gold medal was promptly sold to pay for his studies in Cracow, because his father's medical profession had too many non-paying patients and many more too poor to pay at all. He studied mathematics in Warsaw with G.F. Voronoy, but since the only two universities at the time were in Cracow and Lvov, he received his doctorate in Cracow in 1906, passed his teaching exams in Lvov in 1908 and there he became a professor in 1910, until 1918. As soon as he received his professorship, he married in July 1910.

Adolf-Konrad Lesniewski and his wife, Eleanora née Dabrowa, were well-to-do landowners in the vicinity of Minsk, with a family of five sons and one daughter, Anna Kazimiera. She was born in the family home, Nowy Dwor, in December 1888. One of the brothers had a young classmate, forever endowing this son of the local gentry with his drawings, until it became a local joke which, in turn, turned into a bigger one when Chagall grew up, and became famous.

Waclaw and Anna settled down in Lvov. Their first baby died in infancy; their second one, Mietek was born in Warsaw in January 1912, surviving as their only child.

Before the First World War there were a few Polish mathematicians, teaching in foreign universities, but they all had to study physics and astronomy to become mathematicians. This, privately,

irked Waclaw who categorically believed in the autonomy of this science, and he began to take stock of the situation. When in 1911 there was another congress of Medicine and Natural Sciences held in Cracow, the section of mathematics was included and represented by its entire corps of four men; after delivering their respective lectures, they would meet socially in the evening to talk of everything but their profession, because they had nothing in common, meaning that they could not collaborate on any problem which had some potential for mutual support. This led Waclaw to plan working with young graduates, encouraging them to embrace one particular field of studies. In 1913 Stefan Mazurkiewicz defended his doctoral thesis, based on one of Sierpinski's queries, concerning the theory of sets of points. At the same time Waclaw invited Zygmunt Janiszewski, a recent Ph.D in topology from the Paris University, to become his assistant in Lvov. The three men met, in 1919, as the first three professors of mathematics in the newly established University of Warsaw. There and then they decided to start a publication, dedicated to the theory of sets, topology, the theory of functions of a real variable and the mathematical logic, published as Fundamenta Mathematicae in French, English, German and Italian.*

Why only in 1919? The summer of 1914 was spent in Nowy Dwor. Mietek was the first grandchild in the family, enjoying country life on the grandfather's estate; his main interests were with the local stable boys and urchins, learning very fast all the new words and expressions he would never be able to hear from mother.

The Warsaw School of Mathematics, W. Sierpinski
lecture read in the Polish Institute of Arts
and Sciences in America, April 1959

Waclaw particularly enjoyed sending his little pride and joy to ask Grandfather about the meaning of this or that, especially when there were many ladies around as well.

The World War One broke out before the family returned to Lvov and, since Waclaw was then an Austrian citizen, the Russians interned him to Siberia. Anna and Mietek went with him, spending over two years in isolation from the rest of the world. But then the conditions were tolerable, living in a warm peasant hut, receiving food shipments from Nowy Dwor, leading a social life with other internees, and Waclaw working on mathematical problems. They returned to Warsaw during the communist revolution, in understandably harrowing circumstances, via Sweden. Anna's father turned up in Warsaw, sick and penniless. A friendly peasant woke him up one night, threw at him a woman's peasant dress and shawl, saying that a group of drunken bandits are on their way to kill him, as one of the enemies of the proletariat. He fled into the night through a back window of his house, just in the nick of time. A broken man, he lived his last few years bedridden in Anna's home.

Waclaw returned to Lvov in February 1918, registering immediately for military service, but he was rejected on medical grounds. In 1920 he was mobilized to work with the army intelligence.

To paraphrase a Polish mathematical genealogy: Sierpinski beget Kuratowski, Kuratowski beget Ulam, Ulam invented the H-bomb ... Here we digress, to reminisce on Mietek's correspondence with

S.M. Ulam, after his publication of Adventures of a Mathematician*

"Another interesting fact which would, in a way, complement some of your stories about "mathematical victories" is possibly one you did not know:

"On page 15 you write: "During the Polish-Russian war in 1920 the city (Lvov) was threatened again. Budenny's cavalry penetrated to within fifty miles, but Pilsudski's victory on the Warsaw front saved the southern front and the war ended." Of course, it is all true. It is a fact, however, that Budenny stopped fifty miles short for quite unknown reasons and never resumed his march on Lvov. This stop lasted two and half or three days, allowing the Polish army under gen. Lesniewski to come to Lvov's rescue, at the same time as another division counterattacked in Warsaw. The reason for Budenny's sudden stop during these crucial three days was "mathematical"; my Father and Professor worked since the start of the Soviet offensive at the GHQ coding section. I remember Father coming home one night and telling Mother "well, we broke the Soviet code". I was eight at the time and didn't quite understand what breaking a code meant, but years later Father explained it saying, that the Chief of the Section, Lt. Col., after agreeing on a plan of action with the Commander-in-Chief, formulated a message in the same Soviet code, ordering Budenny to stop his march on Lvov. As history knows it, Budenny did obey this "Moscow instruction" and stopped as ordered.

"If you consider that in those days there were no machines,

* Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 314 pp.

nor such coding tables as developed since, just ciphers, it meant dealing with the unknown patterns only."

The creation of the Polish School of Mathematics became a source of an abundance of new mathematicians, producing far too many to be absorbed by the Polish universities. In the course of the next twenty five years many have emigrated, with a majority finding positions at the American universities:

- Anthony Zygmund, a professor at the University of Chicago;
- Alfred Tarski joined the University in Berkeley. He was also Chairman of the American Society of Symbolic Logic, and later became President of the International Union of Philosophy and Science;
- Samuel Eilenberg, first a Professor and then the Dean of of the Department of Mathematics at the Columbia University;
- Nachman Aronszajn, professor at the University of Kansas, Lawrence;
- Jerzy Splawa-Neyman, professor of Statistics at Berkeley;
- Mark Kac, professor at the Cornell University, later with the Rockefeller University;
- Stanislaw Ulam, Senior Scientist at the University of California Laboratory at Los Alamos. Among the cognoscenti, he is called "the man who invented the H-bomb".
- Otto Nikodym, professor at Kenyon College, Ohio;
- Stefan Bergman, professor at Stanford University;
- Matthew M. Fryde, visiting Professor of the history of Mathematics at Yeshiva University in New York.

But the most unusual story, by far, is that of Stefan Banach, which reads like the Cinderella story. This is how Waclaw told it in his lecture on the Warsaw School of Mathematics:

"Stefan Banach, undoubtedly the most distinguished mathematician Poland has produced, born in 1892, was a student of the Polytechnic in Lvov. After some time he abandoned his studies and tutored privately in Cracow. One evening in 1916 in the "Planty" park he sat down on a bench, occupied by three mathematicians: Hugo Steinhaus, then a docent at Lvov University; Otto Nikodym, a former pupil of mine from Lvov; and the late Witold Wilkosz. They were discussing some mathematical problem which had not been solved at that time. Banach eavesdropped, introduced himself into their conversation and offered his opinion as to how it could be solved. Steinhaus and Nikodym became interested and suggested future meetings. They also recommended some books. Soon Banach began to solve difficult problems and publish his scientific work. I accepted one of his first studies in 1920 for the first volume of Fundamenta Mathematicae. We decided that Banach's work was sufficient for a doctor's degree, but, because he had not gone through the prescribed university studies, it was necessary to obtain a dispensation from the Ministry of Education in order to permit him to take the doctoral examinations. These he passed with honors. Then began his ^{ly}lighting scientific career. A year after he obtained his doctorate, he wrote a new work solving problems which had puzzled the greatest mathematicians, and was made docent of mathematics at the John Casimir University in Lvov. Less than a year later, having published new work, he was appointed associate professor and the following year, at my insistence, chosen as a corresponding member of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 1927 he became Professor left about sixty mathematical works and studies

"In America, Banach is most often cited in the so-called "Banach Space". The paradox is that this man, who always lacked money, had his own space - but only in the realm of mathematical abstraction. It would be difficult to explain simply what these Banach spaces are. I shall mention one, ^a more easily understood proposition, formulated by Banach and Tarski. They proved that each sphere K can be divided into a few parts, so that after certain moves and revolutions of each of these parts, one can obtain two full spheres. Each of these spheres will be of the same size as sphere K . In short, by proper division into several sections, one can obtain two spheres of the same size. It is easy to imagine what revolution there would be in contemporary physics and in the everyday life of the individual if this proposition could be realized. Unfortunately, the proof of this paradoxical proposition is a pure proof of existence and does not offer any possibility of even approximate realization. K. Gödel proved later, however, that this proposition never leads to contradiction with generally accepted axioms, so that all efforts to disprove Banach's and Tarski's proposition were from the beginning doomed to be unsuccessful."

Banach also initiated The Scottish Book, which became a legend in itself. As Professor Ulam recalls *, the Lvov mathematicians and their visiting colleagues met formally almost once a week, to share with each other the latest work and results. They also met informally in local coffee houses, one of them called "The Scottish Coffee House". In 1935 Banach decided that they must keep track of some of the mathematical problems and he bought a thick notebook, holding it always in the Coffee House, kept The Scottish Book, a typed manuscript, private communication

in a safe place by the headwaiter.

The book holds 193 problems, the last thirteen of them dated after September 1939. A few of these entries are by some Russians, written in Russian and French, proving that during the Soviet invasion of Poland these scholars were in Lvov. Prof. Hugo Steinhaus, one of the "Scottish donors", was later a visiting professor at Notre Dame University. He explained to me once, how he applied mathematics to teach a Polish football team to win a game with East Germans, successfully.

Stefan Banach became a friend of the family, bearing witness to the formal baptism ceremony of Mietek, after the war. Very ill for many months, he died in Lvov in 1945.

The first few years after the war were hard on the young family, in an acute housing shortage and very limited income, with two sick fathers. Mietek's mother started to work at the Sierpinski school, where he also attended in the beginning, the only boy in the sea of girls. He did not show any special scholastic gifts, best defined by his own recollection: "How can you, son of such a mathematician, be so hopeless in math?" asked a teacher. "I took after mother", the tyke replied. A few years later the family clan bought an apartment building, at 73, Marszalkowska Street, where Mietek's parents also moved in.

They led a busy life, both parents working, Waclaw travelling extensively half of the time. Mietek, never punished, remembers one trashing only, when he went to visit the body of an assassinated Soviet diplomat. Their home became the center for visiting scholars

and social affairs, some with funny memories. Once, an absent-minded and timid scientist went around to look at the paintings. In front of an Italian oil, showing a gorgeous semi-nude, he asked reverently whether this is the honorable maman? Another time the family Scottie ate from several platters the caterer prepared for a buffet to serve over two hundred guests. The Cardinal refused to give a dispensation for the reception held that Friday night and had to pretend not to notice the meat dishes passed around him. And when a small group of closer friends got together in the cabinet for business, they sometimes started with the record player, each one astride on a chair, prancing around the room to the Radetzky march.

After his graduation from Law School, Mietek definitely decided against going into practice or judgeship, choosing instead a government career in economics. About that time Germany introduced a system of foreign currency control, by the same token starting a trend in Poland and other countries. Mietek became one of the officers in the Ministry of Treasury, working in the department handling individual and business requests for transfers of Polish currency abroad. He truly enjoyed the work, confidently building his future on such service. His actual love was history of art, but the family council did not see any serious future in such a profession. The young man was of such a happy disposition that a family advice was always gladly received, as a most natural part of family life.

Now that he became an eligible young man, it was time to think of a wife. Among many friends of the family, there was a large family of professors and teachers in Lvov, intermarried with the local Armenian society. One young woman of his age,

Lesia, became engaged to Mietek and they married in 1937. As he says, the initial sentiments of love cooled down to indifference by the time of the wedding, but he did not have it in his heart to disappoint his parents. They found an apartment, Mietek spent the days at work and the evenings preparing his doctoral thesis; it was to be defended in the first week of September, 1939, but the University buildings were bombarded and the papers burned in raging fires.

After five days of war, the government began the evacuation from Warsaw. All the Sierpinskis decided to go to Lvov. Three days later the parents decided to return home, while Mietek went on and remained with his parents-in-law, until he was arrested, never to see his wife again. As soon as the news about Mietek reached them, Lesia's mother packed her for the night into the laundry hamper, the next day arranging a phony marriage registration of her daughter to a family friend, all that to protect her only child from being deported to Siberia. This initial formality turned into a strong lifelong relationship, apparently much closer to Lesia's heart than her marriage. The news about it reached Mietek after his release from the concentration camp.

Almost at once at the outbreak of war, the Warsaw University buildings became converted into hospital wards, at first managing to avoid too many serious damages from the bombs. But when the water supply broke down, there was no way to save the buildings from fire, which particularly destroyed the complex of various departments close to each other, with similar fate for the other university buildings spread throughout the city.

The Germans began by looting, destroying and vandalizing the university property, depending on what they found interesting or useless. The newly built hall of the Law School was turned into a stable, with boxes built out of the University Library reading tables; its auditorium burned down during one of the libations held by the German police, stationed there.

Next came a wave of German scientists who, either in the name of their institution or for private reasons, started robbing the most expensive laboratory equipment, the museum exhibits and book collections. But there was still hope, that the initial fury of mad devastation will subside, especially because the Germans hinted about reopening the university, and asked for personal data of each professor, even appointing a curator's office for that purpose, until it was found out that the curator's function was to become the caretaker of the remnants of the property. By February 1940 Germans gave some passes to enter a particular sealed-off room, but any activity connected with teaching or lectures was strictly verboten. A few months later they permitted the use of some high-school laboratories for practical purposes, tied to the industrial needs only, followed by the same tactics at the university; anyone disobeying these orders was banished from the grounds. But this period of semi-tolerance ended in September 1940, with an official order, retroactive to end-September 1939, closing down all the schools of higher learning and forbidding the professors, as well as all other staff, to pursue their professions.

The University went underground, with danger of being caught, as it did happen in some cases which resulted in executions. The

student groups were very small, many of them having enlisted in the Underground Army. Waclaw Sierpinski was nominated head of the mathematics section, which started teaching in 1942, with fourteen students by 1944. They met in his apartment, under cover-up of a social gathering, interrupted a few times by a German inspection. He was also receiving transfers of cash for the salaries of all his colleagues. Since Kazimierz Kuratowski was Jewish, in hiding for the entire duration of the war, Waclaw sneaked the money to him, fully aware that he could pay with his life if caught doing it. His official function, effective 1 August 1942 and valid until 1 August 1947, was clerking as a book-keeper in the municipal office.

The entire two months of the uprising were spent in the cellars of their building, amidst the canonade above the street level. The family of women and small children included a teenage nephew, in an incredible agony of the last stages of brain tumor, which mercifully caused his death during this time; another nephew was killed in action. When it was all over, the survivors were rounded up and sent walking out of Warsaw, with hand luggage only. On the outskirts of Warsaw, Waclaw suddenly realized that all his manuscripts were left in the cellar. His wife run back, found them and just as she managed to cross the wide street, she witnessed the four storey family house being blown up by the bomb squads, systematically destroying one building after another, to punish the Poles for their disobedience to the Generalgouvernement.

The war losses to the mathematics were a disaster. Half of all the mathematicians perished, twenty of whom were tortured in concentration camps of Russia or were murdered by the Germans,

some died in gas chambers.

Once during the war the parents managed to receive a parcel from Mietek, sent via Red Cross. As soon as the war ended, friends travelling to Poland took news of Mietek to them, and slowly a contact was established. News about delicate personal or political subjects had to be avoided because of censorship in Poland. More concrete information could only be exchanged during their rare visits to scientific conferences in Western countries, or through a trusted person, writing on their behalf from abroad.

The first post-war letter to Mietek is dated November 28, 1945. It carries a pencilled message, dated February 16, 1946 from Mlle Sophie Picard - a mathematician in Berne, niece of the legendary Emile Picard - that she just received it from Mr. Z., with an oral message not to send anything to Warsaw, because nothing reaches anybody by mail or parcel services. Waclaw writes:

"Dear Mietek! There was no way to write to you for over six years. During those horrible years I lost many of my friends, among them these mathematicians, murdered by the Germans: Antoni Lomnicki, Ruziewicz, Stozek, Bartel, Hoborski, Saks, Rajchman, Lindenbaum, Schauder, Auerbach, Jacob, Wilk, Kaczmarz, Zalcwasser. Others died as well: Dickstein, Wilkon, Kempisty, Przeborski, Kozniewski, Kwietniewski, Zaremba and - a few months ago - Mazurkiewicz and Banach.

"The Warsaw Society of Sciences lost some eighty members.

"During the German occupation the Warsaw University functioned underground, where I lectured until the uprising. Now I am included in the so-called list of merit.

"The last nine months we spent in Krakow where I lectured at the Jagiellonian University. For the past few weeks we are back

in Warsaw, having already started lecturing here.

"Did you happen to meet a Hindu mathematician, Professor Advanesh Narayan Singh from the Lucknow University, who was in Warsaw at one time? "

Kaczmarz and Banach, also Nikliborc, used to play chess without the board nor chessmen when alive - do they still keep at it?

Mother wrote on the family life:

"After we parted with you in Dubno on September 9th, we walked 450 kilometres, which took us five weeks. The house was still standing, but all the windows were smashed, so we lived for one year in the cellar. Then we could move upstairs, only it was too cold and the bathroom being the warmest place, became your Father's office where he could write. I found a job in a pharmaceutical warehouse, and my salary of 180 zlotys was all we had to live on..."

"The last six years were spent under constant threat of death from these German beasts, but last year was the worst one of all. From August 1st to October 2nd, the continuous bombardments brought ruins all around, engulfed in flames. Our house was hit by a mine with six simultaneous explosions, demolishing half of the building in the rear and our apartment in the front, killing four persons and wounding some fifty others Stas Dabrowa (cousin) died of heart attack during the march from Warsaw, so did Franio (Waclaw's half-brother) ... Janusz, Franio's son and Jedrus, son of Anielka from Uhrusk, died in the uprising We were prodded and pushed by the Germans when marching 18 km to Ursus, fainting with hunger after five days in this horrid camp they put us on a train, kicking everybody out into the fields ... we were lucky to find a hospitable family where we recovered enough to walk 50 km to Cracow Thank God our health is alright, but we are very poor right now, without a stick of furniture, no

clothing, no underwear either but it's not important, really, when others lost their lives"

We gathered that they decided to remain in Poland, despite many possibilities to teach and work abroad. But Waclaw was running scared. He not only refused to join the political and administrative machinery, but also categorically turned down an order to introduce the marxist doctrine into the teaching of pure mathematics. He lived under constant fear of being punished for it. On Sundays he attended the mass, but lost his temper with the housekeeper when she blabbed out into the telephone why he is out on Sunday morning, to the Minister of Education of all people.

Sadly, too many of other eminent people yielded to the communist pressure, publishing odes to Stalin and his cohorts - Waclaw was disgusted that some of his best friends have shown themselves to be such opportunists. Few of them true communist sympathizers, they would later defect to the West, many with bombastic stories of political persecution, especially when rumours started spreading that the West awaits them with practically open arms. Intellectuals, poets, scientists: aren't they supposed to be above evil, corruption and opportunism?

Despite such problems, the mathematics began to flourish after the war. What was planned before but could not be done because of the war, in 1948 the National Institute of Mathematics became a full-fledged body of 150 specialists. Its Scientific Council included examinations for doctorates, conferring titles of doctors, professors and docents, with a great advantage over such functions performed at the university level, where only a small number of such caliber can be available for this kind of work.

Whatever qualities of this man filtered out into the open, a caricature of the Wroclaw Mathematical Congress in 1946 depicts thirty three Polish participants, with Sierpinski in a papal cassock, holding firmly onto a staff, his head larger than the rest of the body, crowned in a bald patch resembling a skullcap. But as the family knows it, he was quite a regular guy.

With fame, notoriety is close to follow.

Human nature being what it is, some radical newspapers declared that Sierpinski must be Jewish, because he is so good with numbers. Waclaw's side of the family was smaller than Anna's, at least that was Mietek's impression. Many of his favorite relatives lived in the country as small landowners, descendants of Italian settlers some centuries back, and their original name Vinci became Polish Winczy. There was . . . a document, relating that a Sierpinski, in the rank of Lt.Colonel, fought with great valor in the Kosciuszko uprising of 1794. There was also Waclaw's cousin, another Sierpinski, with a distinction of being a black sheep of the family, thus becoming the family's chief source of indignation and prim disapproval. He was always in some kind of trouble and penniless, settling down finally in one of the spare rooms of the large family apartment. Mietek found a particular delight in this uncle's spinning of tales about each relative: "Sure we must be Jewish! After all, just look at your Aunt Zofia: doesn't she look like a typical one?"

On the other hand, he was accused of anti-semitism. In face of all his actions, the subject does not seem to merit much attention and, besides, I do not have any first hand knowledge about such matters, except knowing that it does exist and that it is a serious problem. My realization of the seriousness of this

horror was closest in witnessing the tense solemnity of some intimate meetings. Before Waclaw left Warsaw for a tour of lectures in the USA, he was entrusted with a mission to end the animosity between two Polish mathematicians, one a Jew and the other one an alleged member of an anti-semitic activist group. Both men lectured at Notre Dame University, each one avoiding the other. To Waclaw, this was a more important mission than anything else he accomplished. I accompanied his travels and lectures, too much in awe of what I was witnessing in the always overflowing lecture rooms, but these missions of peace were too much to discuss. I don't know the results of these efforts, I was afraid to ask any questions, sitting next to an old man deep in meditation.

IN INDIA

The first order of the day was the legalization of our stay in India. The British police officers were very decent about it, with a condition that we report to them regularly, like on a probation, extending the validity of our residence every few months.

We had some money, thanks to the Chinese magic tricks in the foreign currency transactions. The Embassy staff were permitted to transfer their savings upon departure. My own US\$ three hundred, deposited in the Chungking national bank, produced an equivalent of some fifteen thousand rupees, a miracle not unlike the biblical story of loaves and fishes. This was a security blanket, before finding a job or deciding on what to do and where to go.

Moving every few weeks, staying in apartments when the owners were away on leave, the best one was a large, comfortable place on Chowringhee Road and Park Street, facing Maidan where the soldiers trained every morning, their military music filling the air together with the screeching monkeys on the tree branches. How did one big monkey find its way into the kitchen on the fourth floor one morning, nobody could explain: I started jumping up and down, the monkey turned back and it was a relief to have it gone.

Mietek began to take English lessons, tutored by an Oxonian clergyman; I sat quietly listening, already with some advantage over his beginnings, but still far from feeling confident about the language. Job hunting was my main project. When an ad appeared in the newspaper, friends encouraged me to get it: the American Merchant Marine Club needed a secretary, these people - I was told - were semi-literate anyway, "with your diplomatic experience you are too qualified for them anyway, but it's better than nothing."

From the moment I sat down at the typewriter I knew I was in trouble, with a language and terminology completely unrelated to a few, brief diplomatic formula letters I already knew. I was very gently dismissed three hours later, miserable beyond consolation for a long time. There was a strong racial barrier in this complex society, and there wasn't a big market of employment for white women. Thinking hard about what else I could do, I joined the morning classes at the Singer sewing school, and the afternoons learning some shorthand, in a large class of Anglo-Indian students only, eyeing me with some suspicion.

Mother and Basia, still remaining in Kolhapur, agreed to move in with me and go into some business together, also providing a more normal life for my sister in Calcutta, buzzing with social life and young men. We found an apartment on Chowringhee Road, facing the elegant Anglican Church, with a large terrace and airy rooms, and a small apartment next door for Mietek. We began making dolls, starting from scratch. For stuffing the bodies with cotton we found a young girl, happy to be with us. She lived in one of the garages in the yard, with her parents and a younger sister. After a few weeks, when she did not come in the morning, I went the next day to see her. Happy and flustered, the mother explained that her husband is preparing to leave for the family village, with the bloodstained bedsheet to prove to her daughter's betrothed that now they can be married; waiting for the ceremony, she did not return to help us and soon she left to become an eleven-year old bride at the home of her parents-in-law. The rest of the garages in our backyard was all rented to the families of poor servants; they did their cooking outside in the open, washing under a pump

in the middle of the year. A young Bengali man from the cast of untouchables lived there too, washing our floors and bathrooms twice a day for a pitiful pay; we would be very criticized by all our friends for paying more - "just spoiling them and ruining the servants' market for everybody else", an offense similar to ignoring racial barriers in any Southern State of USA.

With Mother's abilities, we were contracted by the Czech shoe factory to make plastic raincoats out of this newly invented material, imported from America. The factory gave us some thirty industrial sewing machines and regularly delivered bundles of cut-up coat parts, converting our apartment into a makeshift workshop for several months. I ran the business side of production, starting with hiring the tailors and ending with folding each coat for sale, about ten thousand of them. To avoid complaints about such an activity in a residential building, we worked as discreetly as it was possible, the machines humming under the furious pedalling during the daytime only.

Calcutta was divided between two main groups of population, Hindu and Muslim, on an almost equal basis. They lived in separate sections of the city, spread around in large clusters. We lived in a Hindu neighbourhood and our workers, who were Muslim, travelled a long distance to work. For an entire week they did not come, when the riots paralyzed the entire city. This was an ugly struggle for independence of one minority from another, parallel to the efforts of independence from the British. The Muslims demanded a separation from the Hindus, their leader Jinnah using a slogan "Divide and Quit" addressed to the British. The two societies engaged in a vicious fighting, knifing each other without any mercy for men,

women or children. The streets were littered with bloating corpses, the rivers swelling with floating cadavers. The sky was black with flying vultures at first, too satiated to fly a few days later. What may well have been the goriest issue of Life magazine, was banished from local sale. This was strictly an Indian business, no white resident was touched. After one week all our boys returned safely, none of them hurt.

My first commercial venture looked very nice at first, although it did not work out exactly that way financially. Our friend who secured this contract, took us to the bank to make sure that his commission we knew nothing about earlier, was paid first, fully one third of the total payment, in cash. After the remainder covered all the costs of operation, precious little was left as profit. It wasn't as bad as what the communists did at the end of summer season farmwork, but it left two lasting impressions: a lifelong conviction that I wasn't born for the business profession, and a bad taste in my mouth about some friends.

There were many friends around, mostly men. Large contingents of the British and American officers awaited recalls for the demobilisation; the G.I.s had a favorite place in a shady spot under the wall of Firpo's restaurant, whistling at passing women. Until then I knew about whistling at a dog only, so it didn't seem flattering at all. Then I also noticed that the Anglo-Saxons talked a lot about the weather; where I came from, weather was discussed only when the people you talked to had nothing interesting to say. But once such cultural barriers were overcome as quite insignificant, we spent hours of great fun. Dancing out every second night was the greatest pleasure I discovered, making up for many years of wartime misery, when such things were frowned upon

by our elders. One dance I just couldn't get into was boogie-woogie, being thrown up over the frenzied partner's shoulder, then up to fly overhead and things like that.

With two cinemas showing mostly American films, it was a great entertainment to see so many beautiful films made during the time we couldn't even find a cinema. The British friends were telling us that, until recently, an evening at the cinema required evening wear, now relaxed to just the Sunday best. Whirring fans kept the air tolerable, unless one went for the second show of the day.

Abe Finkel, a US Army sergeant, took a particular liking to Mietek and swore that as soon as he is demobilized, he will get married to his darling Myra and return to Calcutta as Mietek's business partner, with a lot of American merchandise this city is crying for. In the few months before they managed to arrive, Mietek started receiving cartons of American neckties, a testimony to Abe's flair. Possibly because of the tropics, the colors on the wide pieces of silken fabric run into electric blues and yellows, brick reds with rust and green, some violet, others purple. On two or three mornings a week Mietek walked out with a briefcase of samples, and I never dared to ask what he had to do to sell them to anybody with a normal eyesight. We kept one tie for years and years, a wonderful, golden yellow sun rising on a blue horizon.

Abe also came back with a great American concept of an essential item no woman could live without: Lipmir! A wide, metal half-band to fit snugly over a lipstick, with a tiny mirror in a rectangular frame. First, the idea and design had to be sold to our Czech friend who owned a workshop and agreed to have the tools made for it;

this was expensive, half of Mietek's savings went into financing it. Boxes piled up in the apartment with tiny, sharp-edged mirrors which had to be fitted by Myra and myself into the frames, each wrapped and packed in a fancy box. The company spirit was just great, speculating on a dizzy success, not like that other stupid American guy who imported a fortune in silk stockings, because he didn't see any in the Calcutta shops; the dumkopf forgot about the Calcutta heat, the reason why women didn't want to wear stockings. A cinema ad was created, Myra and I made fools of ourselves spending afternoons just to let other viewers see us using the Lipmir, making loud comments about it. Abe and Mietek told us that they managed to sell one hundred boxes, but we didn't believe even that. After six months of this venture and all the money dried up, Abe and Myra packed back for the good old USA, occasionally writing how well everything is with them, in the shoe selling profession.

We had many interesting Indian friends, letting us have some closer insight into the world we became a part of - or did we? The British presence set a pattern of relationship between the cultures in this part of the world and the white man's empire.

The Indian society, as huge as it was in numbers, was quite divided through its Hindu cast system and dozens of dialects. The Muslim religion had its own sects, but there were no casts. Other ethnic and religious groups abounded - Sikhs, budhists, Parsees, Christians - to enrich the social pattern with infinite shades of folklor. The splendor of incredible wealth in the hands of maharajas and merchants - marvaris - was displayed in ostentatious way through a lifestyle. Clothing, especially on women, was the main status symbol for the family; bedecked in all the gold and every imaginable

kind of jewels over shimmering, elaborate saris, the women displayed their man's material pride. Once back home alone, every single item, down to the smallest trinket, was shut behind lock and key. The woman had nothing to call her own, not even a paisa, a custom apparently prevalent in every home, including that of the nawab of Hyderabad, as tearfully confessed by a Turkish princess married into this allegedly richest-in-the-world man's family.

The invitations to Indian homes were rare, usually reserved for big gatherings on a special occasion. If the man spent some years in English schools, his westernization would show in some stuffed furniture, displayed in the reception areas of the house. The normal Indian tradition meant sitting on the floor, covered with a mat of any type; cross-legged, barefooted in a flowing pair of cotton pantaloons, playing with his own toes, conducting the business of the day with a similarly clad visitor. A pankawallah kept the room cool, swinging back and forth, non-stop, a large woven grass screen suspended from the ceiling. The room walls, bare of any decorations, were kept free from flies and insects by green lizards darting around, sometimes mating en route or fighting with each other, often losing a tail in the process.

Invited to a large, official party at the hotel, I was sent a car with chauffeur to take me there. This was my first ride in a Rolls Royce. At one point I saw three large cockroaches crawling up on my white evening dress. The driver wasn't a bit concerned, explaining that this was a much cleaner car, because in the other Rolls chickens like to lay eggs and the whole interior is really messed up. I preferred taking a taxi back. By then I got used to the Calcutta taxis, all in the hands of somewhat wild-looking Sikhs.

These men seemed too big to fit into one of their taxis, their long hair carelessly tied up, too hot for a turban. Now here were some strange-sounding religious grounds for all this hair: they swore, apparently, not to shave or cut hair for as long as a single Muslim is alive on earth. Seeing a clean-shaven, turbaned Sikh in a Western suit was rare; as to the impact of such external appearance on the man's spiritual convictions, I thought it none of my business. As a woman, I was much more interested in looking around to see, what it would be like if I were born in India.

Girls born into a family were, generally speaking, not a reason for rejoicing and pride. The customs demanded a dowry, as a rule disproportionate to the parents' financial means. By the same token, a son was always a means to the family's financial solvency through his marriage. The value of having a son was far superior as an investment in future for the old parents and their comfort, where social security did not exist. The decision on whether a girl is welcome in a family or not did not rest with the mother; in the extended-family system, her mother-in-law had the last word. In the very poor families I saw twin brother and sister, the boy plump and well developed for a two-year-old one, his sister a picture of a malnourished one year-old, unable to stand up, let alone walk and run like her brother did. The mother was absolutely helpless, utterly dependent on her husband and his family. Herself brought up in such a tradition, she awaited her own turn at becoming important and powerful when her son brings a bride one day.

The British law forbade three practices against women: child marriages, trading little girls for sexual exploitation and burning of the surviving widow together with the body of her husband.

The first prohibition was modified by the Indians; the marriage ceremony among the children continued, but the children were kept with their respective families until puberty. This way the children had their future secured in case the parents died suddenly; in view of very high mortality, caused by poverty and violence, this custom had a degree of rationality. How the law against the sexual abuse of little girls was complied with, is hard to prove: to circumvent it, it was sufficient to be less conspicuous - do it more privately, but use such restrictions to your life style as a perfect excuse to blame the white man for his imperialism. The burning of women was too public to get away with, but a development of epidemic proportions of accidental deaths of women by fire may have some connections with the deep, old culture, confused by the superficiality of Western ideas about women.

Until then, the only birth in the stable I heard about was that of Jesus, "because there was no room at the inn ..." I simply could not accept any of the invitations by women who saw my interest in them, to watch another woman in labor, sent out of her own home to go through her "dirty business" on the dust floor of a chicken coop. Afterwards, I started having doubts about how overbooked the Bethlehem inn really was? When it comes down to that, how would Mary chronicle Her own Christmas eve?

Calcutta had another, separate minority of Anglo-Indians. These people, born out of union between the Indians and white people, were not accepted by either side of their families. Usually employed in low clerking jobs, as shopgirls, policemen and in nursing underlings to the English or other Europeans in supervisory positions, their inferiority complex was a very sad reality. Those who could easily pass for whites, attempted to

cover up their mixed blood by introducing themselves as "born in Australia", sometimes pinpointing it to Tasmania. As a rule, anything to do with their Indian roots was to be ignored as inferior, and the blood of white parentage being the only hope for a better life. Unfortunately, the human cussedness made them victims of contempt by everybody - suicides among young women were not uncommon: they hoped that seducing a white soldier will lead to a marriage and a life in England, or America. A fact of being born in India carried a stigma of suspicion about one's parentage, which the British avoided by having their babies born either in England or - at least - on a British ship.

Everybody crowded in his own tin of sardines, drew a certain sense of security about knowing one's place under the sun, even the Anglo-Indians increased and multiplied to become their own power, with roots in India's Christian minorities. Against all odds, a huge subcontinent filled with so many cultures and languages, begun to gain momentum in a growing process of opposition to the British Empire which - ironically - was the only unifying idea for all of them. The independence from the British, now that the politicians had the English language to communicate with each other, was to become the foundation of a united, colossal society.

Gandhi, a spiritual leader of almost Christ-like dimensions, was a household name around the world. Not only did he achieve to convince the world's opinion about the evils of colonialism and the human rights of the poor, but in India he became the only hope for peace in this maize of Babel tower proportions.

Everybody listened to Gandhi, wanting his approval and his advice. When violence erupted, Gandhi would appear to declare his

hunger strike, until arms were laid down, like a living Daniel in the lions' den. The biggest lions' den was Bengal, torn apart by the Muslims against the Hindus. Gandhi came to Calcutta, began his hunger strike, scaring the world for his life when the carnage went on and on: this time such a passive resistance will not work, this old, frail man will not live so many days, let alone until the independence day comes. But he won again, the fiercest of them surrendering when looking at this motionless body under a sheet. Calcutta was practically jubilant, after a long time of suspense, dreading the loudspeakers to announce Gandhiji's certain demise.

The independence of India took place at the same time as the partition of the subcontinent into two separate states. In August 1947 the Viceroy of the British Empire, lord Mountbatten, passed the power into the hands of Nehru for a new Indian nation, and the same ceremony took place for Pakistan, with Jinnah taking over the power to govern a Muslim nation.

What immediately followed in these two independent nations, could well compete with some of the greatest human slaughters in history. While the entire British colonial service staff were packing to leave for home, the administration, the police and the army passed into the local hands, not necessarily prepared to carry on with full confidence of authority, rooted in long years of experience.

Millions of people decided to move to live under the government of their choice. In Calcutta, the Howrah railroad station became impassable from the entrance to its building, and all other possible means of transportation turned the roads into practically camping grounds. Hindus fled from the territories under the Muslim power, and the Mohammedans travelled or walked to settle under

the protection of their religious leaders, fortified by army divisions. (It was about that time when Stalin asked his ironic question: "And how many divisions does the Pope have?") Many groups were attacked and killed, whole trainloads were ambushed and every single passenger massacred. What was earlier just a local bloody skirmish, now it spread to become a source of fanatical hatred on an international scale, too deep to allow for any kind of dialogue or diplomatic relations.

Our contacts with the family in Poland gradually improved. Mietek introduced me to his parents and declared his intentions to marry, asking them for help in getting a divorce from Lesia. She was also anxious to marry the man she loved. The main problem was the distance between Poland and Calcutta, finding a lawyer and be patient with the slow process of communication between Warsaw, Cracov, Calcutta and London: Mietek's lawyer - brother to Dr. K. Kuratowski - lived in England since the war.

My youngest sister was also found, working as nurse's aid in a hospital, alone, deaf, without any help nor chance to return to school. When Mietek explained this to his parents, they took her in. By then Waclaw was allotted a decent three-room apartment, each one converting at night into a bedroom, with the housekeeper sleeping in a large kitchen. Stefcia was sent back to school, followed by a business training in accounting and a job.

Mother and Basia did not see any future in Calcutta for themselves and decided to return to Kolhapur, to join the other families to be shipped to East Africa. There, the British

were still a colonial power, able to offer the Polish war refugees a transitory shelter, before finding something permanent where to live and work.

Our own savings practically gone by now, something had to turn up. All our friends were on a lookout for us, but times were very hard. The long-established tradition in India for the white men was a salary at least double of that received by the natives in an equivalent post. The standards of living were one of the reasons; the extended family system saved the Indians expenses for rent and services. The climate was too brutal for physical work, even cooking and the laundry, practiced in primitive conditions. There was no way for a white woman to even take her children for a daily outing, because such things were in the hands of servants only, with their own meeting places where a white woman would be made uncomfortable. The cast and social prestige were very strictly observed by the Indians among themselves, which extended to everybody else's code of behavior. Any foreigner, determined to live his own way and do his own cooking or cleaning, would be treated with a profound contempt, especially by the poorest; this meant depriving them of their livelihood. Besides, the foreigners treated them much better, also paying better wages, more punctually, too. In our case, we made an economic compromise for this social pattern, less concerned with the prestige than the English were. A Bengali untouchable cleaned the apartment floors and the bathroom; it was against the law - practically - to ask him to touch anything else, so

we did the dusting, cooking and dishes. Once a week a laundry boy picked the wash, bringing it back pressed and folded; there was plenty of mending and replacing buttons every time, after each garment was tortured against a flat stone. Whatever robustness a housewife required to do such work herself, was not in me, still possibly affected by three years of living in the workers' paradise.

Scanning the English language newspapers for employment opportunities, Mietek answered one, with a post box address in New Delhi. The following week he received an invitation for an interview at the main office of the Punjab National Bank. Due to the partition, many branches of this bank were now on the Pakistan territory, the most dangerous place for any Hindu to visit, let alone work in. This bank, fifth in size among all the Indian banks, was known for its ultra nationalism, to the point of not employing a single foreigner. The 1948 annual report lists a total of two hundred and sixty two branches and offices, headed by Indian nationals, with just one, single exception: M. Sierpinski, Esq. Their balance sheet for the same year carries almost one third of the total under "Bad Debts Written off and Assets lost in Pakistan". Shri Yodhraj, the Bank Chairman, hired this one European to close down the bank's affairs in the enemy territory. Mietek was to start the job in January 1948, in Rawalpindi.

Our wedding plans could finally be set, after the court in Poland granted a divorce. Few weeks were needed to process the local formalities, so that it was possible to depart from Calcutta as a combination of honeymoon, with a farewell to many good friends and a hope for a better future.

Mietek's best man was W. Bujakowski, a RAF test pilot, residing

in Calcutta during the last few years. Before the war he was a correspondent in China, returned home to get married, packed his bride into a motorcycle sidecar in Warsaw and rode together like this back to Shanghai. She returned to visit her family - but not by motorcycle - when the war broke out, separating them until early 1947. The lady was my matron of honor.

Mme Bujakowski was the only person in Calcutta who witnessed the Polish communist takeover in 1945. People believed that there is a way to overwhelm the communist system by a massive enrolment in the party, under false pretenses, dismantling it from within. But they very soon found out how naive such an idea was, not passing the party tests anyway. As she explained, a party membership was not necessary unless one wanted a more prestigious position; to exist without persecution, it was enough to become something akin to the three Indian monkeys, especially the "speak-no-evil" one.

Our small wedding reception included the neighbor from downstairs, Dr. Patel; he was a good friend and family veterinarian to my beloved Pimpus, a wirehaired terrier Mietek gave me as a present. My first maternal instincts came to surface with this puppy who got his shampoo every second day and slept on my pillow. Still too young to lift a leg against the tree, he demonstrated his libido practically from birth at the slightest encounter with any size or gender of the canine society. Dr. Patel saw him through a lot of health problems, to the point where Mietek, if sick, trusted his advice much more than that of a stranger with an MD title. Dr. Patel was now our greatest authority on keeping Pimpus happy on his trip by air to New Delhi, then to Pakistan.

Two other wedding guests were demobilized RAF officers, both Polish, now flying Air India. The transition from the military to civilian flying was subject to tests, on how a pilot is supposed to treat a planeful of passengers in comparison with a routine bomb squad returning to the base. Very few pilots passed this kind of test. Our friends, the captain and his co-pilot, were on this routine Calcutta-New Delhi itinerary, flying with us the next evening.

This was one of the most memorable trips. The tranquilising drug had an opposite effect on Pimpus, packed in a large wicker basket and given an empty seat next to mine. For entertainment, I was invited into the cockpit, shown the Dakota steering mechanism, reassured that there is nothing to it and invited to manoeuvre the plane. When I returned to the seat, all faces looking at me had a greenish tint. The landing was very bumpy, too, possibly because of the hangover from the wedding party.

Our departure for Pakistan meant travelling to a foreign country, needing visas. There was no such precedent in the brand-new Indian government, so a query had to be sent to the London Colonial Office, by air mail. The banking briefings were over in a few days, yet we could not depart for what seemed like an eternity, making us worry that the job will go to somebody else.

It was now more than three weeks of staying in an Old Delhi hotel, doing some sightseeing and listening to the gossip about the changes taking place within the newly independent

state. All the British officials used to live in New Delhi, where splendid residences were built for the families, usually moving to Kashmir for almost six months of the hottest season. The national takeover included allocating the residences to the families of new ministers and dignitaries, not used to the urban lifestyle of sahibs and memsahibs, converting the ground floors with the drawing rooms, into shelter for the family buffalo.

Most of the residents at our hotel were recently demobilized British pilots, recruited by Pandit Nehru to fly Indian troops from New Delhi to Srinagar, fighting to steal Kashmir from Pakistan. This jewel of the British Empire just had to be now a jewel of India, no matter what the British decided in partitioning the land. Cleverly, Indian soldiers deplaned at the Srinagar airport, the Muslim maharaja was put under house arrest and the daily air transport of additional Indian soldiers established a firm enough power to seal Kashmir's de facto political destiny for good, despite the international negative reaction. The pilots went back and forth in one day, bored to tears but financially better off than most of their countrymen, recovering from war and plodding under socialist ideas about the future.

Finally, the visa problems were straightened out, the job was saved, ready to leave for Lahore in a few days' time. Relaxed and in a better frame of mind, I wanted to go the next afternoon to Birla House: Gandhi lived there, receiving visitors every afternoon without any ceremony, glad to see as many people as he possibly could; what a great honor to be able

to speak a few words with him, what a memory to pass onto our grandchildren! But the morning newspaper carried a brief notice about Gandhiji's trip to a nearby small town, so we put off our plans for the very next opportunity.

The news item was carried from the previous day, because that afternoon Gandhi was assassinated in Birla House, during a routine open-house public gathering in the gardens. How could it happen! The thought was impossible to accept, but the city's streets and homes filled with wailing loudspeakers and blaring radio communiqués, more than enough to have the truth sink in.

Who did it? God knows, no white man had any reason to hate Gandhi, but what if there was someone demented among the British who did not leave India? Our pilots had no doubt about the fate of any of us, there was no way to dream about self-protection from an angry mob in this flimsy bungalow hotel. It was an uneasy evening until the next morning, when it was officially declared that the assassin was a Hindu, a bank watchman.

Why did he do it? Speculations were endless, slowly narrowing down to a fairly simple theory. In the terms of partition, one stipulated that India will pay a large sum of cash to Pakistan, as reparation for the material losses incurred by the Muslims who moved from India. Gandhi made himself again a champion of justice, demanding that India release the money, threatening to go on another hunger strike, until Pakistan receives its due.

This was too much for many people, particularly the members of a nationalistic party Hindu Mahasabha. Some of the most prominent members and leaders of the party were the owners and directors of Punjab National Bank, whose watchman murdered Gandhi. Requiescat in pacem.

IN PAKISTAN

It is hard to understand why the people of the same race, living together for centuries, and now separated, can behave in such a different manner as we felt it from the start, in Pakistan. From the moment India became independent, most of our Indian friends distanced themselves from us, and with some demonstrations of unfriendliness, we lost touch with several of them altogether. By contrast, in Pakistan everybody was very friendly to us, making us feel happier, of course: such things do matter to people who have no passports and nowhere to go.

The way Pakistan was created did not seem to make much sense. Two uneven and widely separated parts of the subcontinent were unrelated geographically, with the barbed wire of the long-haired Sikhs in the middle, the best possible fortification against any Muslim attempts to use the land for a corridor between the East and West Pakistan. Granted that the geo-political pattern must have been terribly hard to come up with, I had no doubt that this country was a proverbial stepchild in the British politics of partition. Much of the public glossing cannot hide the affair between Nehru and Lady Mountbatten, depicting them in a perfect harmony with the cuckolded Viceroy. The lady had a strong personality and strong political opinions, tinged with an antipathy for Mr. Jinnah. Whatever configuration one can envisage under such circumstances, there is no way one should ignore this bedroom ménage-à-trois, in shaping the political map of this subcontinent.

Our first stop was Lahore. The bank business lasted a few days, interwoven with a guided tour by a senior Muslim bank officer. In the main square, the statue of Queen Victoria was pushed off the pedestal, beheaded; I wondered whether they had

also Lady Mountbatten in mind? Muslims have very strict rules about women's behavior, observed equally sternly by both sexes. Now they had a problem on their hands: in one of the side streets stood a house apart, filled with some fifty women of all ages, victims of rape during the partition violence. Such a stigma is hard to live down, the women knew that and seemed quite stoical about it, just as they also seemed not to protest about becoming an object of public curiosity in this house, open for inspection, almost like a house of ill repute. But these women looked well cared for, neatly dressed and not starving, sitting calmly around or doing some household chores.

Rudyard Kipling worked in this city as a reporter - now we came, to live his Plain Tales From The Hills.

Rawalpindi was our destination. This city had a strategic significance as the headquarters of the British military Northern Command during the war; even now, as an independent country, the army's commander-in-chief was an Englishman, with General Ayub Khan yet to take the command over the following year. A large number of British officers still remained in charge of many sections, gradually passing their positions to Pakistani officers, some of whom were either graduates of Sandhurst, or well qualified through active service in the war fronts of Europe and the Far East.

The town had strong characteristics of traditional separation between the "city" and "cantonment". The city had the residential and commercial buildings, interspaced by the temples, missionary churches, the mosque with its minaret and a muezzin chanting regularly the prayers to reach the farthest corners of the Islamic community. The rich, the poor and the middle class seemed to live next to each other, there was always a lot of loud voices, horses,

mules, donkeys, honking vehicles and barking mongrels. The cantonment was a residential part of town, occupied by the foreigners. The city part was crowded, the cantonment existed in a dignified splendor of bungalows inside well-tended gardens, with a respectable distance between each family's residence. Everybody used bicycles; Mietek was driven every day to the bank in the city by a tongawallah, hired on a monthly basis.

The Punjab National Bank, in the heart of Pindi city, re-opened with our arrival. The few employees were all men, just as in any other office of store: the accountant, the cashier, the typists and a few babus were all Muslim, except for the office boy who was an Anglo-Indian Christian. At the time of our arrival the cashier was away, due to be released six months later, serving the rest of his prison sentence for embezzlement. He returned to his job with one arm cut off, in accordance with the law; once he paid his dues to the society, he was welcome back with open arms, in accordance with the old tradition and the logical attitude of having learned his lesson.

In the Indian society the Muslims were the poorer minority, most of them small tradesmen, tailors, clerks, messengers and servants. With the Mogul empire crumbled, few families could claim anything close to the wealth of the Hindus. Most of the people did not speak English except for the few who went to school run by the missionaries or others, inspired by Western ideas. In schools run by the mullahs children were taught Koran only, memorized in its only lawful Arabic language, a practice that could only be analogous to Christians, teaching children nothing but to recite the New Testament and liturgy in Latin, without the benefit of translation or even the writing skills.

It looked like a long stretch of staying in Pakistan, worth spending some time on learning a local language, if only for practical reasons of feeling more at home among people who did not speak any English. Foreigners were always charged more for anything in the stores and the marketplace, but as the bargaining was part of the local culture and tradition, a language in common would also be of help. Many languages were spoken, but Urdu was the main one. Punjabi seemed to be the next in importance, with Pushtu used by the Pathans. These men seemed to be still at loose ends after the partition. Some efforts to gain a separate statehood of Pathanistan did not materialize and now, instead of returning to Peshawar, they became marauders and beggars in Pindi. The local foreign residents were visited regularly by groups of four or five strapping young men, each one with at least one rifle casually hanging around the body, expecting to be given money or else. It got me pretty mad and I decided to give them a piece of my mind: they didn't understand a word I said, but they surely got the gist of it, started to laugh and left, never returning again. There was something cavalier about these men who, after all, could easily enter any house and take anything, but never did. Stories abounded about them. The Pathans were homegrown smithies, masters at copying arms of any kind. (UNICEF exploited this talent a few years later, sponsoring local production of surgical instruments for world-wide use in maternal and child health care.) In local skirmishes between two groups shooting at each other, they invariably agreed to take a break if some strangers asked them nicely to let them pass through, resuming the shooting immediately afterwards.

In matters of local culture, our first mentor was Mr. Abdullah,

the bank accountant, a long resident of the city. A jolly and happy man, just like Mietek, the two men became fast friends, swapping stories and jokes. At their home, the family could not do enough for us. With due deference to the Western culture, I was included in men's conversation and only later escorted into the women's quarters where they all waited for me, beautifully dressed. Their youngest daughter, very shy at first, had just become old enough to wear a purdah. So young and beautiful, how does she feel about being completely covered up, with a thick net for the eyes only, to look through at the world outside? "In the West a young girl is very happy wearing her first long dress; our girls feel the same way about their first purdah" - explained the host. They all were genuinely happy people.

Mietek was always excluded from meeting the women. If any of his staff came to introduce his wife to me, my husband was unceremoniously escorted by the visitor into the garden, expected to sit there, with Pimpus, until they left; there was no way he could even sit in the bedroom next door. The refreshments were picked at the door from our Ahmed by the husband, manipulating it so that the bride, unveiled in our sitting room, was completely out of sight to the servant.

The cultural exchange was a two-way street. "Tell me, sir, something I always wondered about. In our tradition, we are never allowed to see the girl until the wedding ceremony. She is chosen for us by other people, so sometimes she can be very ugly; and if she is beautiful, we feel very lucky - kismet, we call it. But in the West, you always know the woman you are going to marry. So tell me, how come that so many white men are married to such ugly women?"

Mr. Abdullah recommended his friend, a learned man, to become my Urdu munshi. Without an ambition to become literate in the language as well, it was not a long process in managing the vocabulary, with an unexpected twist: not only could we understand each other with our cook-bearer Ahmed, but also argue from time to time as well.

Ahmed was a young Kashmiri peasant, with a fiery temper and a strong conviction that he was a professional servant. Myself not exactly a wimp, we differed on some things, arguing with much heat. Sulking at dinnertime, I wondered how I could send him away before this happened again. The next day he barely listened to what I wanted for dinner, serving us instead with a whole roasted leg of mutton, something we could never afford on Mietek's salary. After dinner, asked for an explanation, Ahmed said: "Ham apna namak khate hen" - I am eating your salt, combining an explanation with a hint of apology which cost him half of his monthly salary. The truce lasted for a few months, until another occasion. "But we invited so-and-so for dinner tonight!" Ahmed never missed a step: "He can come, there will be a lot to eat for dinner."

Servants were easy to get where there was no industry to give jobs to the poor and illiterate, saving men from resorting to crime and women from prostitution. But, according to all the free and friendly advice showered on this young bride, they could not be trusted, everything had to be locked up, they were all thieves. This did not make much sense to me and Mietek, keeping the few trinkets under lock and key, the same with food supplies. Each new employ^{ee} was shown by us all we had in the house and told that

we expect it to be taken care of. Nothing was ever lost or missing. Curiously, it was not only the foreigners who talked that way, because one servant would look suspiciously at another, locking up the sugar bowl before the babysitting ayah, so that we couldn't get at it late at night for our own nightcup. Our front door was never locked, Pimpus never barked at night, life was good to us.

The foreign community was considerably large, due mainly to the presence of British officers and their families. The 'Pindi climate was much more tolerable than that of Calcutta, New Delhi or Karachi. The proximity to the Himalayas, starting with the closest summer retreat in Murree, tempered the unbearable heat and provided a comfortable weather for most of the year. The wives entrusted the housekeeping problems to the servants, ayahs took care of the children, a gardener worked outside, leaving the ladies with many free hours for a relaxed, social life, centered around the Rawalpindi Club. This club, also called Bara Club, was for the officers and professionals; another one, Chota Club, was for non-commissioned ranks.

The direct result of such leisurerly life style was the institution of "elevenses". Women gathered regularly at each other's home, in a closely-knit group for about two hours of tea and talk, until it was time to return home for lunch with husband; usually the children ate apart, by then tucked away for their afternoon nap.

What did we talk about? Brooms-and-babies. Also gossip; who said what to whom last night at the Club, who is having an affair

with whom and what is her husband going to do when he finds out? Times didn't change much from Kipling's era. Some of our friends remembered those days very well, saying that the only difference was the length of time it took now to go to Murree in a few hours by car, instead of two-days' expedition by tongas before the roads were built and cars appeared.

Curious about the world and its customs, I reacted with a wholesome dedication to the superiority of all these good ladies, married much longer than myself, most of them much older and experienced, initiating me into the truth of marital relations, motherhood, social status and the do's-and-dont's of one thing or another. When it was my turn to entertain the ladies, Ahmed wore his white, starched uniform and a turban looking like a film extra, serving tea and dainties worthy of any other drawing room. For a change in the local cuisine, I would serve a traditional Polish version of cucumber or tomato salad with sour cream dressing. Such an extraordinary custom to all my English friends led to a spur-of-the-moment explanation that since olives do not grow in Poland, this is how we resolved the problem and liked it, too. That being the extent of intellectual curiosity tolerated by the group, especially with the tinge of foreignness about it, I welcomed occasional bouts of morning sickness as an excuse to send Ahmed with a note of excuse for the day's elevenses. Hard to say, how much of my nausea was due to my condition, and what degree of it was subconscious, not unlike my allergy to cod liver oil.

Our doctor was a Viennese which, at the time, stood for the quintessence of perfection in everything, but particularly the medical profession. At the end of our first visit he invited

us to his home for tea the next Sunday afternoon.

We met Dr. Gerstl's wife Charlotte and their close friends Dr. and Mrs. Presser, the dentist from Vienna as well. They were Jewish refugees from nazism.

Charlottle, her husband and two children were allowed to leave Germany and booked ship for Japan. Her husband fell ill on boardship, forcing them to stop in Bombay for medical treatment. Dr. Gerstl was treating the patient who died a few months later; a bachelor himself, he married the widow and took care of the girl and boy. They all spent the war years in India, working for the British army and living in an internment camp as German and Austrian citizens, now comfortably settled in Pakistan, without any intentions of going back to the fatherland. Dr. Gerstl, still a young man, could easily return for a long stretch of professional life in Vienna, but evidently he liked it here much better.

The first social meeting was a complete disaster.

Charlotte, our hostess, was a large, heavy set woman with masculine features, who only managed to mention her maiden name - Rotshild, before giving us a piece of her mind about Poland, the Polish people and all the evils connected with this awful country and its awful people. We were listening to a revival of a German political rally, directed at the worst political enemy of the Reich, updated after the war with all the suffering caused by the Poles. The woman was like a sponge for the German traditional hatred of Poland, oblivious to the tragedy of her own place in the German world. It was obvious that she finally found an outlet for old, pent-up feelings.

The five of us sat stonily through the session, incredulous and embarrassed. Walking back home, all the ghosts of the decade seemed to be with us, awakened by the surviving hatred. My usually cheerful husband could only say: "Imagine her in charge of Polish women prisoners in Auschwitz!"

Rawalpindi was not Djolkoduk, this time we were not at the mercy of a German pig farmer. Two days later Dr. and Mrs. Presser paid us a visit, begging us to have tea next Sunday in their home, so that we can receive an apology from the Gerstls. From that moment on nothing was good enough for us, the doctor even refusing to accept his fee for taking care of my health. The past was buried between us, limiting topics of conversation to the brooms-and-babies, especially my pregnancy.

Charlotte took for granted that my white race makes me as much of a racist as she was. Any mention of the Pakistanis was followed by an epithet "the Zulus", with possible origin from her ratherland's thesaurus on the lowest human form. I saw no point in even raising the issue with her, just wondering at the human paradox of a Jew, wailing about the world's racism against them only. In this case what was still more confusing, was her total oblivion to the consequences of German racism; why is the human nature so complicated? Wouldn't it be better to have just the all-good and all-bad guys, like in the American movies?

Thus I became object of close attention and utmost devotion by three women, all Jewish: Charlotte, the grandmotherly Mrs. Presser and Nicole, although the latter disliked the two others very much. Nicole was about my age, married to an English staff officer and she expected her second child about the same time as mine was due. Nicole came from the Sephardic line of

Jews, born in Egypt into a rich family of shipowners. She was a beautiful woman, vivacious and very elegant, making me extra happy to revive my almost forgotten French in this place, where nobody else spoke the language. If her baby is a girl, her name will be Paquita, she said. "Wonderful, said I, if mine is a girl, I will call her Anita", the Spanish diminution for Anna, her grandmother's name. Once I told her what I read somewhere about English husbands, that they are apparently limiting their lovemaking to weekends only. Nicole took it so much to heart, she said, that it always made her reject Douglas's advances on Saturdays and Sundays.

On its occasion of twenty-fifth anniversary, the Lucknow University invited Waclaw to give a lecture in January, 1949. He agreed to come, on the condition that he be accompanied by his wife as well as permitted a visa for Pakistan, to visit with us. This was completely unheard of under the communist rule, meaning that the Sierpinskis planned to escape and settle down abroad, especially because their only family was there. But evidently the people who knew Waclaw, also knew about his honesty and integrity. The minister of education, whose wife also held a cabinet rank, said bluntly to Waclaw, that his own and his wife's ministerial jobs were on the line for as long as the Sierpinskis were abroad.

They arrived in early January, making it one of the happiest family reunions. Anna stayed with us when Waclaw went to Lucknow, and Anita was born on January 30th, in the Holy Family hospital. A few weeks later the happy grandparents returned to Warsaw, even if a little disappointed at first that it was not a boy, their only hope to carry on the family name. The scars of war healed, both were rebuilding their life together for the third

time: 1918, 1939, 1945. Waclaw was resuming his quiet way of popping out with a limerick, even in the presence of his ladies. They were building our library, sending to us as many old books as they found until the time the law stopped such exports, also any new publications of his own, in literature and in philosophy written by his friends. ✓

The hospital recovery period for the mother lasted two weeks. My baby was brought to my room for feeding only, then returned to the nursery; the only white baby, the poor thing was hardly the prettiest one of them all. The brown babies had perfect skin, huge black eyes and thick hair, one Chinese baby was like a porcelain peach. My little Anita was absolutely bald, her tiny face had a few spots, her eyes seemed always closed. But what an extraordinary feeling to hold this tiny body next to me, peacefully craddled in my arms. Knowing absolutely nothing about babies, I had no idea that my baby was very ill. When Charlotte asked about the bowel movements, I casually said that just like any normal baby, she had a lot of diarrhea. The next day I was released home where the good doctor awaited us, examined Anita and explained about enteritis: most of the babies died of it, except for a very small percentage of those who were breast fed. The only remedy he had was water with a pinch of salt. Anita refused to drink it, taking plain water only, losing weight and crying helplessly. The doctor was with us four times a day, stopping his bicycle on the way between home and the office, each morning, noon, afternoon and evening. We were losing her very fast, nothing seemed to work, the little body was dehydrated. Finally, I locked myself

in the bedroom, sitting with Anita crying her heart out, refusing to suckle. It took hours, until suddenly she started to drink my milk, and that was the turning point in her quick and complete recovery. A motherly ayah taught me a lot, devotedly caring for every single need, scrubbing and washing, singing an Urdu lullaby:

"nini, baby, nini,
makhan, roti, chini,
makhan,roti hogia,
mera baby soghia"

Nicole returned with Paquita, born in her parents' home in Paris. As soon as everything was back to normal, I opened a dressmaking workshop to earn some money. There was a lot of work to be had, I hired two fulltime derzis with their own portable sewing machines, working cross-legged on the floor with the garments I cut and later finished by hand. This way I could be at home, sharing the baby's life between ayah and myself until the afternoon. The job also absolved me from the social obligation of elevenses; now I received visits from all my ladies when one or the other needed a new blouse, a frock or an evening dress. The 'Pindi club was within the walking distance, used during the day at the swimming pool by a few of young mothers. We have become something of a local attraction to the ... people, amused by the Western disregard for the public decorum, sitting around the pool in bathing suits. Sedate Pakistani couples, he in a buttoned-up suit and his wife in a strict , purdah, stood at the far end of the pool enclosure to watch the foreign women in and out of the water, having a good time in the heat of the day - these moments provided flashbacks of

Irtysk and Djolkoduk, being watched by the Kazaks in my swimsuit.

During the hot season Murree was filled with vacationing families. The walks around this large hillstation were the main pastime, with a few popular meeting places for food and refreshments. The nights were still, with a star-studded sky unless it rained, spreading a thick fog all around, isolating each bungalow from the next door neighbors. There were many smaller hill stations in these Himalayan foothills, awaiting travelling visitors to rest overnight . . . or spend a weekend in beautiful, green mountains. Nathiagali, close to the frontier with Kashmir, had a bungalow large enough to fit a dozen visitors, perched on the side of a mountain with an endless horizon, filling air with pristine air, and walks in wooded areas growing wild mushrooms, just like the ones I used to gather in Poland's forests.

Mohenjo-Daro, a legendary site of some six cities on the Indus river, was hardly touched by the anthropologists. Many people here had blue eyes and white skin, apparently the descendants of Alexander the Great whose army crossed the Himalayas to come ~~that far~~. Walking among the ruins and cell-like small enclosures was mystery enough, yet apparently a little more patience and curiosity could uncover coins and other artifacts of the millenia.

The banking closures were reaching their end. The 'Pindi branch was already liquidated, requiring Mietek to move to Lahore for several months. The weekend commuting was very hard without one's own transport, travelling either in a dilapidated

bus or shaking for some eight hours at the back of somebody's motorcycle. Prospects for another job were practically nil until, at the last moment, Mietek was offered a managerial position with a French company which had many varied interests in Pakistan: building the ammunition factory in nearby Wah, a textile plant in Karachi, and heavy industrial equipment.

The last few months before Mietek worked himself out of the Punjab National Bank, brought to surface all the difficulties of our precarious situation of living in Pakistan. All our foreign friends had a home country, returning there every two years for a few months, secure in a backing of a government or industry they worked for. Their children went back home to schools. Nothing like that was possible for us, particularly without any valid passports.

When Anita was born, Mietek had to argue with the bank clerk to go to the municipal office and obtain a birth certificate for her: "What for, she is only a girl", explained the man. Women were excluded from the job market such as it was, and if, by some stroke of luck, a job could be found, the salary would be pitifully small, much smaller than a man's. The world we lived in was foreign to our own culture, with too many contrasts to overcome the fundamental differences; should it be possible, our own culture would be expected to yield to the local one. We met dozens of European girls, mostly English, married to the Pakistanis during their stay in England. Poor and bored by the prosaic life of a shopgirl or waitress, they jumped into the romantic marriage with visions of palaces, servants and riches. Now, shunned by white families and harshly treated by

the husband's womenfolk, these were very unhappy women, often without families to take them back home, or even pay their passage back.

"We cannot make our home here, our only choice is America" - said Mietek, and everything started to look clearer from then on.

Just before Mietek left for Karachi to start on his new job, leaving us in 'Pindi until he found a place to live, Dr. Gerstl was found dead one morning in his house, apparently a suicide with an injection. Charlotte was spending a few weeks in Murree at the time, the servant discovered the poor man in the morning. Nobody knew why, what led this quiet, kind man to such a desperate act. We had too much respect for him and so much gratitude for saving Anita's life, deciding not to pry into his private life. Charlotte refused to return for the funeral, broken and in mourning again. After a few months she left for New York with her son and daughter, sponsored by a brother who lived there for many years.

For the Polish immigration quota the average waiting time was five years. Very little was known in Europe about the kind of life Americans led, as we could see from ~~Mix~~ the reaction by Mietek's parents. On his next trip away from Poland, Waclaw sadly confirmed that, even with his respectable social recognition, he is unable to vouch for our safety and a secure future in Poland. But do we have to go to America, where people start by cutting down the wilderness? Before the war only the poorest, landless and usually illiterate peasants emigrated in large numbers from the country. After the Second World War, it was

mainly the group of army and professionals exiled in the West, unable to settle down in England and refusing to return to a communist homeland.

Our feelings about leaving Rawalpindi were mixed. We liked living here, made many friends, although most of them either left or were about to. Ahmed wanted to become a police constable, something he could not get without our help; fortunately the Police Commissioner was a good friend of ours and a few words to him was all Ahmed needed. Ayah, a widow, wanted our help to find a job in another foreign family, convinced that her salary will be better and more regular, also she will be treated well; this could be arranged through our club connections. The only problem was finding home for our pet goose. She was given to us as a present for Christmas dinner by the bank's cashier, but the bird had other ideas. She grew into a plump, charmingly bossy pet, trying to take over from Pimpus the position of family favorite. When she wanted to sit in the living room next to my chair, she hissed away the poor dog onto the verandah for as long as it suited her, picking the green carpet threads like the grass; in the garden she protectively circled around Anita and me, gagging to warn of any danger in the garden. An elderly English couple took this wonderful pet into their home.

Karachi was anything but the sleepy town we saw eight years ago. Now as the capital, its population swelled sixfold, practically without the benefit of new buildings. Most of the government offices were quartered in military barracks, the housing for officials was also in corrugated metal sheds. The refugees from the partition came mainly to the capital in search of work, living in fast growing slums around the back waters. Drinking water was sold to them at two rupees a bucket, an unheard of fortune for these destitute families. Hunger and diseases killed many, even with emergency efforts organized by local groups and churches.

This government started without any money to pay salaries, even to buy pencils and stationery; poverty and dislocation of families created groups of goondas, : roaming the streets or invading government offices with violent protests. Slowly, after Europe started recovering from its own war destruction, a number of industrial representations from abroad, backed by their own governments, began to lend money to Pakistan for the development of commerce and industry. Karachi shops filled with imported goods of any kind, from items of first necessity like soap and toothpaste to cosmetics, wooden hangers from Sweden, luxurious toys and expensive cars. The industry had hardly any technical know-how, obliged to depend on foreign experts in technology and marketing. People worked hard, they were used to it, but had everything to learn about the problems of independence. In case of Pakistan this meant independence from the British, as well as from the Hindus who were richer, more advanced in many ways of business and management.

There was a great difference in the concept of independence between what the Polish people understood about it and what we saw in the Indian subcontinent. Our own was a small country, with one language, a common culture and religion. Even with its feudal past - which did linger on in the twentieth century - the country grew to understand the importance of a political society and unity over and above the private interests of clans or families; after all, countries like Italy and Germany were also united. In India, the three most important figures, Gandhi, Nehru and Jinnah, were all educated in England as lawyers and absorbed the concepts of Western philosophy with an evident great talent. But it was one thing to fight the British with their own political weapons, and quite another to teach their people about the concepts of Western democracy, trying to convince them about such values, as foreign to them as the Englishmen were. Whatever time it takes to learn about democracy, right now it was more important to become powerful and important by becoming rich. The first large social event we attended in Karachi was the release of customs director from prison for embezzlement. The family was happy, the charming man was very happy and so was a large group of his admirers for becoming and important and rich person: it was one of the happiest parties we ever attended.

The fear and hatred Poles felt against the two of its aggressors, Russia and Germany, was not equal in India against the British. Unthinkable for the Russian or German language to be used in any official communication in Poland, in India the English language was the only political link between all its cultures to the point that the official language of the two

new governments was English. But neither the unifying language nor the Western ideas about democracy could do much about the ferocious and fanatical intolerance of two main religions, Hinduism and Islam.

We were comfortably settled in a small residential hotel, with a large garden and courtyard Anita played in, with other children who lived there either as guests or in the servants quarters. I had hours on my hands, free to become acquainted with a vast French library owned by the French vice-consul and her Polish husband Marian Prause, who worked with Mietek in the French Transshipping Company. There I discovered Henri Troyat, starting a life-long affair with the literary creation, combining a warm, Russian soul with French elegance, producing characters strangely closer to me than Proust or Flaubert ever did.

A large diplomatic and foreign community of business world included the Tunisian government in exile, headed by Habib Burghiba, awaiting his chance to go back to an independent country; we often saw him, walking alone in the center of the city, recognized by his elegant, trim silhouette in the crowded streets.

It didn't take long before I was invited to join a group of volunteers, organized to help the poorest refugee children, sewing shirts and clothes for them. All women were British, wives of diplomats and businessmen, a new class inasmuch as they were not related to the former colonial service staff. They all lived in England throughout the war, some now re-married after losing their children in bombed homes and a husband in war action; but such subjects were a taboo among this no-nonsense, stiff-upper-lip, admirable society. They didn't feel it

necessary to brag, the way my countrymen did; or to trumpet about their superiority like the Germans seemed to. They just didn't feel they had to prove anything to anybody, and I liked it a lot.

A German boy played with Anita and other children, son of a pharmaceutical salesman who lived at our hotel with his beautiful, blond wife. Although next door to our rooms, we could never become even casually friendly with them, except for a polite greeting in passing. During one evening in the garden I overheard the German woman talking to someone about her wartime sufferings. She was stationed with her first husband in a Polish province near Treblinka, and it was just awful and very dangerous for all the officers' wives - they had to carry revolvers to shoot anybody who looked unfriendly on the streets. It wasn't easy to come to terms with the innocence of the two children playing together; both three years old, pink-cheeked, blond and angelic, none of them remotely aware of their parents' history. Once, when Anita went inside the Germans' rooms, I panicked. "Mummy, why can't I play inside?" - "Because I say so."

Several hotels and restaurants had dance orchestras where we went at least once a week, something Mietek indulged me with because I loved to dance. A few friends always joined for an evening of fun and carefree, good time. One evening we noticed being watched by a stranger. Boris Lateff, a correspondent of Agence France Presse invited him to our table, introducing him as Mr. Shaheed Suhrawardy. He was the former Muslim Prime Minister of Bengal, now a member of parliament, also an excellent dancer even if he did not look like one with his

short and rotund figure.

From that evening on we became friends, either going out all together or invited to his large villa. He was a widower, his daughter Baby was just married and also lived in Karachi, devotedly visiting her father to supervise his household. Baby, who looked just like Shaheed, was one of the most intelligent women I ever met, well educated and active in political life. Shaheed's younger son was away in an English school.

Jinnah and Suhrawardy, both reputed as the two best lawyers in India, were also together involved as political leaders in the creation of Pakistan. As Shaheed explained it one evening, the two men agreed to dissolve the Muslim League after the independence, as a no longer necessary political monopoly, allowing for other parties to become active in the new government. Jinnah apparently reneged on the promise, retaining his leadership of the Muslim League, holding on to the power at the exclusion of any other political party. Shaheed was the only member of the opposition in the parliament with the Awami League he formed, a role which made him the most unpopular man in the country, ostracised socially as well; his house was never visited by neighbors or former political allies. Dinners at his home were just with Mietek and me, occasionally including Baby and Munni, her husband.

Our friendship had a bit of a sticky wicket to it. Suhrawardy had the reputation of a ladies' man, to the point of being described this way in New York Times by Messrs. Rosenthal and Sulzberger. This very definitely could cast a peculiar light on my own reputation, something Mietek and I decided to ignore.

After a few close encounters with the chances of infidelity in 'Pindi, I discovered once for all that I am a "one man's woman" which was a great relief to me when one does not really know oneself until tested. On the other hand, Shaheed has always been a perfect gentleman toward me and one of the dearest friends we ever had. According to Time magazine he danced rumba all night, while New York Times claimed that he tangoed; as his dancing partner for some three years I can vouch that he was also very good at valsing, foxtrot and lambethwalk.

Shaheed was immensely interested in our past, the political life in Poland and in Russia. Our evenings together were spent on his asking us questions, then sitting back and listening to what we had to say - there were no arguments or discussions, no comments of any kind. For a break, one or a few of his records changed the tempo to twirling on a cool stone floor.

An Oxonian, he explained, in 1957, Pakistan to C.L. Sulzberger in following words: "On this subcontinent there are traditions of democracy peculiar in Asia. That heritage was Britain's single contribution. The reason why the majority of our people believe in freedom of the individual, democratic values and constitutional proprieties is that these were taught to us by the British."

What strange ways Britain had to spread its gospel of democracy, and I bet that the colonial empire was not founded on exactly democratic ideas. Ironically, the old colonies were emerging into independent states on one hand, while other independent states were becoming colonies of the marxist empire. Were these events taking place in the name of democracy? I heard that big word bandied about too often by now to consider it an unqualified panacea. What motivated the

Kazaks in their little, nameless village to fight the communist army? Did they ever hear about the Western democracy? Ourselves, natives of the West, were sold out by two biggest democracies in the world: where was the sense of it, who was the winner, did it really matter?

The 1952 was a memorable and difficult year in our family. The French company decided to pull out of Pakistan which was unable to pay back its debts to France for all the investments made in the last few years. Mietek saw himself unemployed in a few months' time, while we expected another baby in October. The only encouraging news was from the American Consulate that our visas will be ready very soon, so we were not too worried about our future in Karachi.

One morning a luxurious limousine pulled up at the hotel, with two prosperous looking Pakistanis, who came to offer Mietek a top-level job in their industrial complex. Mietek thanked them very much saying, that it wouldn't be fair to accept this position, because we are leaving for America in three months' time. We heard from someone that pregnant women are allowed to travel upto the seventh month only. When Mietek went to receive a confirmation about our visas in order to book our passage, a new vice-consul informed him that the other man made a stupid mistake: we must wait until 1955.

With all the immigration formalities completed by then, we went through all the medical tests, conducted by a Viennese doctor, who was our family doctor as well as approved by the US consulate for medical certification. Mietek's blood tests came out positive. The doctor knew that my husband had no VD, if only because I had a perfectly normal pregnancy under his care, but he explained that the Americans do not like positive

blood tests and could turn down our visa requests. He advised Mietek to reverse the blood to negative by a simple treatment with bismuth. Soon after the treatment the blood tests were negative, but the left side of Mietek's face became paralysed. Many weeks of treatment restored the muscles, leaving him disfigured for life. Our savings, kept for the passage to USA, all went for medical expenses.

In the meantime Pimpus started to act strangely and when one morning Anita ran in crying that he bit her, I took him to the vet. Two days later he died of rabies. Both my doctor and the veterinarian recommended an immediate treatment for all who were in contact with the dog: that meant six children in the hotel and myself. After one week of driving each day to the hospital, the children were allowed to stop the treatment, but I had to complete a set of fifteen shots, each day in 15 cc doses of serum, all given into the abdomen, already swollen in the second half of my pregnancy. This medical treatment wiped out our savings altogether.

Charles Ayton was one of those colonial service officers who decided not to return to England after the independence. He had no family, feared the cold weather and the post-war life at home, too hard for an aged man. He asked Mietek to manage a business he opened in Karachi as a general contractor. Their biggest job was building the race track, others were quite small, giving the two men barely enough to survive on, with irregular and always partial payments. I was unable to help except once, earlier in the year as an interpreter during an international conference on epizootic diseases, organized by FAO. I was practically forced into this job, despite my

assurances that my technical vocabulary on foot-and-mouth diseases and anything like that was nil in any language, including French; but they were desperate and I agreed to do my honest best, with a lot of friendly help from the local contingent of French friends. My own health was suffering, evidently because of limited resources of energy for my growing baby; all I could muster was to get up in the morning and spend the rest of the day in an armchair, watching over Anita.

My social work for the refugees had to stop earlier, but the group kept showing me their friendly concern for my health. One day Gwen McIver came to pay me a visit, with a message from her husband asking whether I could agree to work in his office. The present administrative officer had to return to Canada with her husband, the office was desperate for her replacement. We knew each other from the ladies' group, I knew that Gwen was Australian, a very friendly and cheerful person a few years older than myself, but that was the extent of our mutual acquaintance. Her husband Alex, said Gwen, was an American who joined the British Army, found himself in the Eastern front and was captured as prisoner of war at the fall of Saigon. He spent the entire wartime in most horrible conditions in a Japanese camp, coming out barely alive upon release in 1945. Now he was in Karachi as Chief of the UNICEF Mission.

Gwen had to explain what UNICEF was. We knew about the United Nations, of course, and about some of its technical agencies. It made sense to have an international institution for the doctors and medical services, for the development of agriculture, for the sciences and culture. But an international institution for children? How extraordinary!

The more I heard, the more extraordinary it all sounded - including the fact that the idea came from a Pole, a Dr. Rajchman. But I knew that this is not a job for me, I was completely unqualified. Gwen disagreed: "as soon as your baby is born and you are ready, come to talk to Alex."

Kasia was born in October, in the Karachi branch of the Holy Family Hospital, just as Anita was born in Pindi in the same American mission hospital. This time I recognized the symptoms of enteritis in my baby, leaving the hospital at once and curing her in a short time. Anita was overwhelmed by the baby, wanting to do everything I did, including breastfeeding.

Strapped financially, we lived at the time in a bungalow at the airforce base, vacant for a few months while our friends were temporarily posted in another city; both husband and wife were gliding instructors, trained before the war in Poland. Not interested in having children around, they expected us to leave before their return.

Marge and her husband John offered us a furnished room and board in their bungalow. It was the best temporary solution to stay with this large family of seven children. Marge was a plump, motherly type, patient and tolerant to everyone around her. But she cried a lot because of her husband, quite useless in earning a living and also very bad to her. They were chronically penniless and only our modest rent put the family's food on the table. John was a handsome, dark-skinned man, Marge was fair-skinned with light-brown hair, both were Anglo-Indian and their children run a gamut of shades in between; they were very proud that their oldest daughter married an American G.I. and lived

in Long Island.

Marge was a kindergarten teacher in the English Grammar school, obliged to work to support the family. But as she explained to me some time later, the school was also an outlet for all her domestic frustrations, satisfied through the sacred tradition of English discipline: caning other people's children. In this racially mixed-up and confused society, it seemed to add an element of particular vengeance on helpless girls, something I discovered on Anita's back and legs one afternoon after school. She had to lie on her stomach, too terrified to explain what happened. I did not discover my instincts for unmitigated fury until that moment. The silly principal was very surprised at my protesting against the good, old, English tradition but when I swore he will get caned by me next time it happens, he promised it will never happen again. Marge tried to mitigate the situation, explaining that the teacher had a handicapped daughter, while Anita's happy disposition, intelligence, blond hair and white skin were just too much for her; she accused Anita of stealing her sunglasses and before she discovered them under some papers on her desk, Anita was beaten raw in the classroom. Perhaps because somebody recognized the existence of sadistic tendencies in many people, corporal punishment was banished in Polish schools, replaced by reporting to the parents if the child was too difficult to handle: it seemed to work.

Margery's young daughter was not feeling well, she was pale and listless, the doctor mentioned a possibility of tuberculosis, which meant at least one year in an expensive sanatorium. UNICEF

had recently started a mass campaign against tuberculosis in Pakistan, running tests and BCG vaccinations in every city and village. In Karachi there was also an X-Ray equipment, which one of the WHO doctors suggested we use for the little girl, and have her tested as well. We took Anita with us; the next day the girl was declared perfectly healthy, but Anita's chest X-Ray was full of spots on her lungs.

Dr. Saltzman, another refugee from Nazi Germany, was our family doctor since the disastrous experience Mietek had with the Viennese medicus, and he was extremely interested in reading Anita's X-Ray. The next day he solemnly diagnosed the child's condition as a serious case of tuberculosis.

"You know, Doctor Saltzman, that it is impossible to diagnose TB on the basis of X-Ray alone, without any other tests, which you did not take. There are dozens of reasons for spots on the lungs, and one of them is measles erupting in the lungs after they disappear from the skin. Last month you came to the house when Anita was sick and told us that she had measles. Now you sit here, telling me such stupid, unprofessional things without even thinking what such news can do to a family."

I was learning a lot of new, interesting things in UNICEF and perhaps this incident was one of the biggest personal bonuses. Apart from any normal family tragedy confronting such a deadly disease, it also meant a refusal of visas to the USA. Of course, Anita did not have any TB.

Some six young Pakistanis were taking care of all the clerical, secretarial and accounting work which included large shipments of supplies and equipment for Pakistan as well as the land-locked Afghanistan. Hundreds of jeeps roamed the country

in the BCG and anti-malaria campaigns, with almost military tactics of Knud Christensen, applying his experience already gained in such mass health campaigns in the post-war Europe. Transport was absolutely essential in this work and we kept a stockpile of Willy's jeeps in Karachi for replacements in very bad road conditions around the country. At that time the new vehicles had to be broken slowly into full operation, especially in the first five hundred miles. Knud mistrusted the local drivers, for very good reasons, trying to release to the field only the jeeps with some mileage on it already. I learned to drive them too. To comply with the left-hand traffic regulations in an American vehicle, a two-foot wooden arrow was installed on the dashboard for the rightturn, operated with ^{right} fingers; a left turn needed an outstretched left arm only. We wondered whether this new country will eventually change its traffic rules, like apparently Sweden did as well just a few months ago, but the consensus was that the camels would certainly have too many problems with it.

The second Dane, Dr. Rolv Roelsgaard, was also a veteran in anti-TB campaigns, now running the Pakistan project and teaching the local medical and para-medical staff how to do it in future themselves. It was listening to him and Knud which taught me such a lot.

Every single project developed by UNICEF had a large element of training, starting with traditional rural midwives, taught to use soap and basic hygiene. to avoid tetanus at childbirth, to the nurses, teachers and mothers on how to reduce infant mortality and morbidity. Anti-malaria campaigns saved

the parents from being laid-up during the harvest season. Then this strange notion was introduced to the government, that not only boys, but girls as well, should be attending schools ... the list of basic problems was endless. But there was no way to do much without the local technical and administrative network. At the level of ministries even, the shortages of everything were pathetic. We shared the primitive military barracks with the Director of Health Services, starting the day at 7 a.m. to end at 2 p.m., inside the rooms heating up with each hour beyond tolerance, the papers sticking to sweating fingers, counting time to get under a cold shower at home. The health director Dr. Jaffee and his deputy, diminutive Mr. Dhamee could barely be seen from under the files for their immediate attention, piling up because they had no professional staff to carry out the medical work. It required a lot of courage to confront Mr. Dhamee with a pile of UNICEF outturn reports he tried to ignore for lack of time to even sleep a full night or spend a Sunday with his children. "Why do you demand all this paperwork, when the Americans give us everything just for the asking?"

The Americans. My boss was an American who preferred living among the British. Mac was a tall, ruggedly handsome man with a gentle voice and impeccable manners, unable to reprimand anyone. We were soon included in the McIvers' social life with many large parties, enjoying the group's friendly and relaxed atmosphere. They had a beautiful, modern cottage on the beach where we spent many weekends with the Christensens as well.

The Regional Director for Asia was an American, S.M. Keeny, a living legend of witty intellect, a genius in grasping the basic human issues and sharing them with others in wonderfully straightforward and simple terms. He was particularly gifted at

avoiding the bureaucratic and administrative entanglements; for that side of UNICEF housekeeping was Brian Jones, his deputy, another American. Very different intellectually, the two men seemed to share an enormous dedication to the humanity, interested in essential justice for the most underprivileged and vulnerable. Social frivolities such as dancing and cocktail parties were not among their favorite pastime, apparently because they were Quakers. To me, if these men represented through their life a religious philosophy, it was to be greatly admired, and more power to them.

The Executive Director was an American. One morning a very tall, slender man in a dark blue suit, with thick white hair, walked into the office bending his head at the low doorframe. Mac presented me to Mr. Maurice Pate and I thought he was joking when he said that I can speak Polish with him. But it was true, he lived many years in Warsaw with a Polish wife, as a businessman representing Pontiac. Before that, as a young Princeton graduate he joined Mr. Hoover's committee to help the victims of the First World War in Belgium, Poland and Russia. Mr. Pate said that I was the only staff member in UNICEF, survivor of the Siberian emergency assistance provided by UNRRA, which closed down after the war and gave the balance of its funds to create UNICEF activities. It gave me a strange feeling.

Such close encounters with Americans were very important because of our plans to emigrate there and our curiosity about this far away country. The magazines and newspapers became another, now a more relevant source of our American education. We were not concerned about work, thinking that Mietek's banking background will be useful; there were also plenty of jobs for

women, none of them restricted in the way it was here. And if it came to the worst, it did not seem necessary to pretend being rich because of one's social status, we would be free to live in accordance with our means. What was incomprehensible to us, was the curious attitude of the public towards the communists in the USA. To us, the matter was more pragmatic: millions of people became enslaved by communism and it was very clear to us that the American politics were infiltrated by the Komintern. It sounded ironic, under these circumstances, to hear about the sacred dictum of "innocent until proven guilty", and "better that a criminal run free rather than an innocent be punished". In a world power such as the USA, an undetected communist agent was not just an internal, domestic problem like a corrupt city official or a pickpocket. Nonplussed, we were very willing to understand and learn about many other things. But if the American Constitution guaranteed a political freedom, including an open communist party, why apparently so many Americans were not open about their communist sympathies? If they were hiding under a cover, why? What were their intentions? Finally, why did the press often euphemistically defined communism as socialism? I bet Karl Marx was turning in his grave, just because the American political pundits forgot about the Communist manifesto he so passionately produced.

On the other hand, if America could produce such people like Marshall with aid for Europe, Pate, Keeny and scores of others I never heard of in any other culture, our choice was more and more convincing.

The immigration law demanded an affidavit, something we were most reluctant to do, implying that a friend might become responsible for our keep in America. Mietek's father suggested some of his former students. Alfred Tarski at Berkley just sponsored another immigrant, explaining that he cannot do it again. But Samuel Eilenberg from Columbia sent us his affidavit right away. Waclaw's royalties for a book, published in Canada, were given to us for travel costs.

Surely it was going to be a very different life, in a different society. If not for us, America will become a true home for our children. Despite all the respect and friendship we had for Pakistan, we could not envisage such a future for our daughters here.

Our own culture, based on ages of tradition and ethnocentrism, was too deeply ingrained to replace it with any other way. My Father's family crest - Cholewa - dates from eleventh century, and so does my Mother's crest, Korab, if such considerations carry any meaningful genetic and cultural weight. The other part of our culture stemmed from the religion we were born into and lived by; at least trying to live by the rules of our Church.

Abstaining from eating meat on Fridays seemed to many catholics like too much of a sacrifice. The Pakistani Muslims observed Ramadan, fasting from dawn to dusk for twenty eight days: no food of any kind, not a drop of water to drink, no showers, no oily creams or lipstick, until the muezzin's chanting prayer announced the sundown. Only then fast was broken with a few dates and a drink of water, waiting until dinner was ready. Each person watched another for slightest

breach of this law, punishing an alleged offender by a public humiliation. Naturally, the society did not function with the same energy as during the rest of the year, but God's law was superior to any material considerations: this did not mean just a slower paperwork in this rural, agrarian and pastoral society. These people were not fanatical, just scrupulous in their religious obligations.

John, our cook-bearer was a Christian and Fatima, our ayah, was Muslim; they detested each other cordially, erupting into occasional complaints about each other to me. This required a lot of diplomacy because both people were very good, hard working, honest and devoted to us that it was important to have them tolerate each other somehow. None of them could report on the other's dishonesty to us or doing something wrong to our children, meaning that their relationship had some other reasons. The local protocol forbade any fraternization between the employers and the servants, therefore any probing into the real reasons why they hated each other was out of the question.

Sometimes somebody filled me with horror stories about children's ayahs, doing all kind of terrible things behind the parents' back. I had to find out for myself how my ayah acted when I was away at work. Instead of driving up to the door, I parked the jeep on the street, sneaking under the open windows one hour earlier than usual. My six-months-old Kasia and ayah were cooing to each other, getting ready for the afternoon nap. This woman was much better at baby talk than I ever was.

Ayah was a widow with two children, a refugee living in the worst slums, without a decent roof over their head, no water unless purchased from a vendor. God only knows how she managed to be fresh and clean on the job, even before I learned about her living conditions and asked her to use our bathtub and soap each day. She had two changes of shalvar and kamiz, a thin cotton shawl always covering her head and shoulders.

Two days after the first payday ayah arrived with a thick, embossed Koran, which must have cost her more than half of the monthly salary.

One month later ayah brought under her arm a brand-new prayer rug, requesting my permission to unfold it in the living room during her prayers.

On the third month she came with an elaborate, beautifully carved Kashmiri bookstand for her Koran. These things were her life's priorities.

This woman was illiterate, Koran was in Arabic, a foreign language. She knew the whole text by heart, reciting the prayers with such a concentration that nothing around could disturb her. In her place, thought I, my prayers would go through my thoughts, not just the words I didn't understand except for their sounds, because God was the only one patient enough to listen to a poor woman like me. When God hears me, I have something to hope for.

Verily, I have known many illiterate women among the Polish catholics, yet never one so utterly given to her faith. When I listen to the preachings about the superiority of one religion over another, I have some doubts about an unqualified

agreement. On the other hand, this woman had to make the best of a narrow, enclosed, rigid society; her poverty, illiteracy and subjugation to the male superiority gave her absolutely no choice for anything else.

Isham has two main sects, Sunni and Shia, subdivided into many smaller sects. One such sect is Ismaili, best known among the Western world because of its leader, His Royal Highness Prince Sultan Mahomed Shah, the Aga Khan. Famous for his legendary lifestyle among the high society of Europe, his racing horses and beautiful wives, Aga Khan was a favorite subject for gossip columnists.

The serious side of Aga Khan was visible among his followers in Pakistan. A majority of some ten million Ismailis lived here, generally recognized for being better educated and more progressive than the other sects. In 1954 Aga Khan celebrated in Karachi, his place of birth, the seventieth anniversary of his imamat, leading the Ismailis since he was eight years old. The celebration had its own special character, already preceded by two similar occasions. On his fiftieth anniversary of Ismaili leadership Aga Khan was publicly weighed in gold. Ten years later, also in Bombay, the same weighing ceremony used diamonds. This time the Ismailis decided to repeat the weighing ceremony in their city of Karachi, using platinum. Each time the value of gold, diamonds and platinum were destined for the social services for Ismailis, including schools, hospitals and aid to the poorest.

The organization of the event had to include shelters and

camps with tents for nearly fifty thousand visitors, many coming from as far as Africa. Surprisingly, the ceremony was a very modest spectacle, concerned with the economic problems of the country at that time. Even the use of actual platinum was symbolic with just fifteen ounces, supplemented by ordinary weights. I watched from a nearby seat, graciously and exceptionally obtained as a guest of Shaheed; a stocky, simply dressed old man addressing a rapt, awed crowd from a podium, followed by an elaborate weighing amidst jokes, in a relaxed, happy atmosphere.

Shaheed Suhrawardy, seeing that his stand on political issues will not get far just through a parliamentary dialogue, decided to organize a united political front with all the existing parties against the Muslim League for the forthcoming elections. The only way to raise the necessary campaign money was for him to return to the private law practice. Already famous for his talents, he could command exorbitant fees for his services turning all his income over to the campaign needs. The result was that he had no money

and the food, usually plentiful and excellent was like in poor people's home, a watery sabzi curry made of onions, carrots and potatoes, plain water instead of fruit juice - wine or liquor were never served in his home anyway. "We invited even the communists to unite with us - Shaheed was explaining to us profusely - we must win by the number of opposition voices."

Jinnah's party, being in full command of the government, had no financial problems in its political campaign, using the existing official facilities, paper, ink, postage, transport and

labor for its own party needs. Suhrawardy's Awami League and all its partners had to finance everything from their own pocket - they won the elections!

Things started changing around the winner. His always empty home filled beyond capacity with admirers and curious people, the government moved him to a larger residence in Clifton. Mietek and I were amazed at seeing Shaheed surrounded by a crowd. Chances were, we thought, that Shaheed no longer needed us; but he must have guessed our feelings, starting to visit our home almost every late afternoon instead, because there was no time to talk at the parties. He was happy, perhaps for the first time in his life, full of stories about his new projects for the country. The first official position as Minister of Interior followed by premiership, which took place after our departure from Pakistan.

Four years later, in our New York home Shaheed Suhrawardy revealed, for the first time, the process of his political thoughts:

"When I was planning the Pakistan's future, I read many books about the Western systems and about the communist system. Both had good and bad aspects built into their methods, I was honestly not convinced which one is best for Pakistan. Then I met Mietek and Zousha, listened to their story and their experiences, spending many evenings this way together; what I learned from them was the most decisive reason for rejecting communism as a political system for Pakistan." Zindabad!

After exactly fifteen years in Asia, the time came to say Salaam aleikum.

The passage to America included plans to spend one month in Italy with Mietek's parents, during Waclaw's tour of lectures in Rome and Sicily. Friends found us a small hotel next to the Spanish steps.

Anna was refused a passport to leave Warsaw; she took it very badly, ending with a heart attack. As soon as her condition stabilized, Waclaw was coming alone. We were meeting every single train from Warsaw, not knowing why he wasn't coming. After ten days we saw Prof. Leopold Infeld, the same one who collaborated with Einstein in the USA, who explained that the Italians are holding back Waclaw's visa, not knowing anything about his political affiliations: "They know who I am, but your Father is not in the Party" - said the physicist. Waclaw finally arrived after two weeks. He had rooms at the Polish Academy of Sciences, attended a reception in his honor at the Polish Embassy - we did not - also met with his Italian mathematical counterpart in Naples, who just happened to be the second in command in the Italian communist party; he lectured in Messina and in Palermo. Everywhere we went, even for a few days to rest in Taormina, we were followed by secret agents. The Italian professors were thoroughly investigated about what did Sierpinski really talk about in his lectures, suspecting naturally that the mathematical formulas were really coded messages, fascist or communist.

Our friends in Rome were also interrogated. Emilio was the owner of a printing press in Rome, with friendly business connections in Warsaw for many years. His Polish partner, afraid for his only daughter's life in German occupation, sent Janka to Rome. Janka

married Emilio, becoming very Roman, a stylish young woman, always wearing a trim suit with tight-fitting skirt, evidently the raging fashion. We noticed it right away; as Mietek said, these women reminded him that women do have legs, after all these years of saris and billowing pantaloons. Janka explained that the shape of the skirts is dictated by the tailor's alterations made on husbands' trousers, just like the jackets were altered from men's suits; times were hard for the people. Janka was a very highly-strung woman, saying how she envied me my own life. Three months later Emilio disappeared, his clothing was found on the beach. Another six-months' time brought the news about Janka's suicide.

There was a two-headed monster in Europe, fascism and communism, which led to the Second World War. Fascism was defeated, but communism was taking over like an epidemic, and Italy was a very sick country. The rest of Europe didn't sound too healthy either.

It was time to start a new life.

New York
April, 1989.

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ARCHIWUM WSPOMNIENIE

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Dr. Andrzej Krawczyk
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Szanowny Panie Komisarzu,

Parę dni temu dowiedziałam się o istnieniu Związku Sybiraków, co mnie bardzo zainteresowało z powodów osobistych, ponieważ przeżyłam trzy lata w Rosji, prawie cały ten czas na północy Kazakstanu. Wszystkie dane na ten temat podałam w ankiecie Związku Sybiraków, którą równocześnie wysyłam na ręce P. Romana Rybickiego w Bostonie.

Rok temu skończyłam pisać książkę na temat historii mojej rodziny, na tle Drugiej Wojny Światowej oraz konsekwencji ugód w Jałcie, jako głównego powodu, dla którego nasza rodzina nie powróciła po wojnie do Polski. Spędziłam bardzo pracowite życie jako żona i matka dwóch córek oraz na pełnej karierze przez przeszło trzydzieści lat w ONZ - UNICEF - pracując na kilku kontynentach i w wielu krajach. Obecnie jestem na emeryturze i owdowiałam w 1984 roku. Powoli zaczęłam odkrywać archiwa rodzinne oraz wiele moich własnych wspomnień, pisanych w różnych latach długiego życia. Mam trochę ogłoszonych artykułów na różne tematy, ale to jest moja pierwsza książka.

Przeżycia wojenne w Europie są ciągle tematem aktualnym w USA: poza pracami naukowymi istnieje obszerna literatura, są filmy i sztuki w teatrach i w telewizji na temat ofiar cywilnych, zamordowanych przez niemieckich nazistów. Niestety jest szalenie mało podobnych informacji na temat ofiar komunizmu. Ilekroć zdarzało się nam odpowiadać na pytania zaciekawionych o naszych osobistych przeżyciach wojennych, reakcje były przeważnie pełne zdziwienia, zaskoczenia czy wręcz wątpliwości. Zdecydowałam wobec tego napisać książkę o życiu ludzi przeciętnych, skazanych na warunki bytu dyktowane przez ideologię represji komunizmu.

Moja książka jest napisana w języku angielskim, p.t. **OUR ONLY CHOICE**. Dotychczas otrzymałam jedną ofertę wydawniczą, której dla różnych powodów narazie nie przyjąłam, ale spodziewam się również otrzymać inne oferty; faktem jest, że trudno jest wejść na rynek nowym autorom i trzeba dużo cierpliwości oraz determinacji.

...2...

W obliczu wydarzeń, jakie nastąpiły w Polsce krótko po ukończeniu mojej książki i przy obecnym, otwartym zainteresowaniu w losach ofiar komunizmu, pozwalam sobie przesłać na Pańskie ręce maszynopis mojej książki, jak również jej synopsis. Ponieważ liczę na możliwość uznania mojej pracy jako jednej z godnych włączenia do Waszego konkursu, zaczynam obecnie tłumaczyć zarys mojej książki na język polski i prześlę tłumaczenie w najbliższym czasie. Jestem jednak przekonana, że znajdzie się w Waszej grupie wiele osób, zdolnych ocenić moją książkę w obecnej wersji.

Zycząc Panu oraz całej Komisji jak najciekawszych odpowiedzi na Wasz konkurs, zgóry dziękuję za poświęcenie uwagi i czasu na ocenę mojej załączonej pracy. Będę bardzo wdzięczna za parę słów na ten temat i jestem gotowa do dalszej współpracy.

Z poważaniem,

Zofia Sierpinski

Zofia Sierpinski

Załączniki

Prekurano do A.W.

*Roman Rybicki
Boston dnia 20 IV 90r.*

ZARYS KSIĄZKIW POLSCE

Rodzice, poślubieni po 1-ej Wojnie Światowej; dzieciństwo, skomplikowane rzadkim wtedy wypadkiem rozvodu rodziców. Szkoły, spotkanie z Żydami w ich ucieczce z Niemiec do Polski w 1938 r. Zamiłowanie do literatury i języków obcych; wybuch wojny, inwazja niemiecka i sowiecka. Życie uciekinierów i szkoła pod okupacją sowiecką w Tarnopolu. Nawiązanie historyczne do paktu Ribbentrop-Mołotow, Armia Czerwona, tajna policja, cywilni przybysze z ZSSR. Najmłodsza siostra pada ofiarą epidemii meningitis.

W ZSSR

(str. 30) Krótkie nawiązanie historyczne do inwazji przez ZSSR, przepisy kierujące NKVD w niszczeniu "elementów anty-sowieckich", łącznie z masowymi deportacjami w głąb ZSSR; porównanie z handlem niewolników afrykańskich.

(str. 36) Aresztowanie rodziny w nocy i przewiezienie na stację kolejową. Matka dostaje pozwolenie i eskortę do szpitala aby pożegnać izolowaną córkę. Szesnaście dni w pociągu towarowym z 26 wagonami, zawierającymi ponoć dwa tysiące osób, w czym nasz wagon zawierał 83 osoby. Koniec podróży pociągami w Pawłodarze (Kazakstan); pierwsze spotkanie Kazaków; łodzie przez Irtysz, ciężarówki dowożą wszystkich z naszego wagonu do sowchozu Djolkoduk: pierwsze dni osiedlania się, eksploracje warunków miejscowych, reakcje niektórych osób.

(str. 52) "Wujek Wasya", młynarz z pobliskiego kołchozu, składa nam wizytę. Dr. Wiera zaprasza do siebie, długie rozmowy na wspólne tematy. Djolkoduk, stosunek Kazaków do nowoprzybyłców.

(str. 59) Pierwsza robota przy odbudowie porzuconej i zrujnowanej wsi, dla użytku nomadów kazackich; Matka zostaje kucharką dla całej grupy; wizyta miejscowych dygnitarzy; szept o historii zrujnowanej wioski, wieczorne gawędy, powrót "do domu".

(str. 73) Życie Kazaków.

(str. 75) Ustrój sowchozu; przerabiamy gnojowiska na opał; asystentka Manzura, miejscowego osobnika; losy życia zwierząt domowych.

(str. 83) Sianokosy, 2 miesiące poza wsią: pomoc w stołówce, ostrzenie kos i sierpów, nadzór nad 78 wołami. Kazaczki, Rosjanki, Ukrainki. Ubój dla stołówki, namioty z trawy, zagubienie w lasach. Matka skazana na więzienie; sowiecki kwiat młodości; sowiecki system płacy za robotę sezonową.

(str. 93) Powrót to Djołkoduk: sytuacja mieszkaniowa, jama wielkości wagonu wykopana dla nas wszystkich, żywność i handel zamienny. Listy i paczki od krewnych, również od naszej Stefci. Objawy niedożywienia, opłaty życiem. Praca w świniańni pod zarząd^{em} Niemca nadwołżańskiego. Naiwne złudzenia i brutalna rzeczywistość dla połowy naszej grupy.

(str. 102) Bezrobocie; obowiązkowy udział w wyborach; skazanie na żebractwo podczas syberyjskiej zimy.

(str. 110) Praca nocnego stróża dla chorych cieląt; próba kradzieży mleka dla chorej Basi. Matka powraca z więzienia, z torbą sucharów. Życie wszystkich urozmaiczone opowiadaniem Matki, ale wkrótce ona porusza wszystkie lokalne władze aby ratować życie gasnącej Basi. Obydwie zabrane saniami do Pawłodaru; Matka zostaje pianistką w Kazackim Teatrze Narodowym i otrzymuje prawo pozostać z Basią w mieście.

(str. 116) Filozofia szczęśliwej przyszłości w komunizmie i realny przykład dla młodzieży, urodzonej po rewolucji (szpital dla umysłowo-chorych); cielęta zdychają, władze mnie winią i wyrzucają z pracy. Oficjalne śledztwo przez miejscowego dygnitarza, ale strategia samobrony źle się kończy dla sędziego.

(str. 123) Współlokatorka, macierzyńska p. Ginsberg odsłania swoją misję swatki w imieniu zakochanego we mnie Manzura (str. 75); chwile prawdziwego strachu.

(str. 125) Kwiecień 1941, początek sezonu do pracy na roli. Najpierw usuwanie kamieni, przy metodzie "symulantów", wymagania abym gotowała kolacje na 60 osób, naturalnie fiasko. Mechanizacja rolnictwa przy pomocy 30 traktorów bez kół. Kazak z książęcej rodziny prowadzi traktor, z 8 bronami pod moją odpowiedzialnością; znak jasny z nieba, że czuwa i chroni. Rzeczywistość ducha pracy w agronomii sowieckiej.

(str. 131) Kostka mydła, pierwsza od 9 miesięcy; konspirowanie w celu ucieczki do rodziny w Pawłodarze.

(str. 134) Pawłodar! "Zanim wejdiesz do nas, kompletne odwszawienie w chlewiu!" Gospodarze Ukraińcy wyrzucają nas z chaty, zastraszeni moim przestępstwem dezercji; policja codziennie nas odwiedza, przygotowują mój proces. Znajduję pracę w łaźni publicznej. Czerwiec 1941, wojna z Niemcami zajmuje władze ważniejszymi niż moją sprawami, ale łaźnia zmobilizowana dla żołnierzy. Odmawiam obsługiwać gołych mężczyzn, więc nowe piętno wyrotowca politycznego w stanie wojennym, chociaż prawdziwy powód do odrzucenia mojej rezygnacji to plan dyrektora wydać mnie za swego synka. Znow bez pracy, sny młodości o erotycznej sile głodu, aż nadarza się praca sprzątaczką w szpitalu, opłacana resztkami z kocioła. Lipiec 1941: podpis umowy Sikorskiego ze Stalinem daje nam również prawa do swobody. Reakcje miejscowych ludzi do wojny z Niemcami i do paktu polsko-sowieckiego.

(str. 140) Przybywają Polacy uwolnieni z więzień i obozów, w poszukiwaniu swoich rodzin; niechęć do opowiadania o przeżyciach; pierwsza oficjalna wizyta 2 polskich delegatów, zgłaszam się do pomocy ochotniczej; racjonalizacja kradzieży lampy naftowej; otrzymuję nominację od moich szefów na męża zaufania oraz cenną zapłatę.

(str. 144) Prowadzę tymczasową Delegaturę, oczekując przyjazdu stałego Delegata Ambasady RP; 2 miesiące pytań i odwiedzin rodaków, ofiary fałszywych pogłosek o ewakuacji do Persji; przyjazd Delegata podnosi na duchu, również daje zerknąć na cywilizję Anglii. Pracuję z kartami żywnościowymi, miesięczne sprawozdania do p. Weitzmana, polskiego komunisty. Nowa "przyjaciółka" Matki. Pełen wagon zapomogi z UNRRA ratuje głodne i półgole ciała, a polski ksiądz odwiedza nas dla zaspokojenia głodnych dusz.

(str. 153) Wojna w Rosji - niemiecka głupota! Teraz nastąpiła kolej na nadwołżańskich Niemców, deportowanych w nam już znanych warunkach: żywe szkielety wyrzucają na tory swoich zmarłych. Polskie sieroty, zgrupowane dla ewakuacji do Teheranu. Dla pokrzepienia ducha, organizuję Towarzystwo Zielonego Żuka, aby rozmawiać o ciekawych rzeczach.

(str. 156) Rok 1942: Armia Gen. Andersa opuszcza ZSSR, Armia Czerwona powstrzymuje postępy Niemców i Sowieci powracają do agresji wobec Polaków. Delegat, zmuszony do okazania solidarności z wysiłkiem wojennym, wysyła mnie i koleżankę do pracy rolniczej "Drugiego Frontu". NKVD pozwala na powrót po 2 miesiącach, kiedy Delegat i cały personel zostali uwięzieni. Zanosimy paczki dla uwięzionych, zatrzymane na całonocne śledztwo. Wkrótce potem wszyscy tajnie wypuszczeni i wywiezieni do Ambasady RP w Kujbyszewie.

(str. 165) Ambasada powołuje koleżankę do Kujbyszewa, ale policja kategorycznie odmawia prawa wyjazdu. Następna oferta skierowana do mnie. Policja znów odmawia, tracę nadzieję, ale Matka nie daje za wygrane i po 2 miesiącach mam przepustkę na podróż.

(str. 168) Styczeń 1943: przygotowania do wyjazdu, postój w Omsku; ludzkie mięso dla armat oraz druga strona medalu, doświadczona z niedowierzaniem; tajemnica potęgi młodzieży w ZSSR. Kujbyszew: "Proszę najpierw przynieść bilet z łaźni i "woszobojki", a potem znajdziemy kącik w Ambasadzie".

(str. 177) Wojenna stolica ZSSR; moja praca i kwalifikacje bardzo kiepskie, ale gazeta Ambasady "Polska" ogłosiła dawno wysłany artykuł. Matka w więzieniu za odmowę przymusowej paszportyzacji sowieckiej, Amb. Tadeusz Romer na rozmowach w Moskwie protestuje u Mołotowa, który zaprzecza, że ich więzienia trzymają jakichkolwiek cudzoziemców.

(str. 182) Mietek Sierpiński; leczenie i rozliczenia dentystyczne; ostrzeżenia przed wychodzeniem pojedynczo. P. Freyd ma poważny kłopot ze mną, szczęśliwie rozwiązany przez mojego zbawcę Mietka S.; jego losy, nawiązanie przyjaźni.

(str. 193) Odkrycie masowych grobów polskich oficerów w lasach Katynia; ZSSR reaguje zerwaniem stosunków z londyńskim Rządem RP; Ambasador powraca z Moskwy, zaczynamy przygotowania do ewakuacji do Persji. Taktyki policji przed budynkiem ambasady; przewóz rubli do Australijczyków; ostatnie popołudnie w Kuźbyszewie spędzone w więzieniu, spotkanie rodaków.

(str. 201) Pięć dni w zamkniętym pociągu z Kujbyszewa do Aszhabadu; odkrywamy, że transport polskich sierot tutaj utknął. 15 maja, 1943 rok: trzy lata, jeden miesiąc i 2 dni życia w kraju-więzieniu poza mną!

(str. 204) Na wolności, ale bez rodziny. Badżygran, Meshed, niebezpieczne drogi. Teheran, willa Entezam. Przeniesienia kujbyszewiaków, Mietek przyjmuje nominację do Ambasady RP w Chinach. Praca nad raportami o dzieciach polskich w ZSSR, z sędzią sądu dla nieletnich, Ireną Wasilewską. Matka i Basia przyjechały; światła i cienie Teheranu. Przyjmuje nominację na prowadzenie kancelarii Ambasady RP w Czungkingu. Wyjazd z Teheranu w październiku 1943, rodzina oczekuje z innymi transportu do Afryki.

PODROZ W CZASIE WOJNY

(str. 211) Przystanek po przystanku, bez możliwości planowania: Ahwaz, Basrah, 2 tygodnie czekania aby polecieć hydroplanem wojskowym do Karachi, pociągami do Bombaju, postój; pociąg do Kalkuty gdzie ludzkie cienie przechodzą przez okres "wielkiego głodu"; symbolika trzech małpek nasuwa analogie do tajemnicy władzy totalitarnej. DC-3 nad Himalajami, niefortunny przystanek w Kunmingu, w końcu lotnisko na rzece Yangtse w Czungkingu, po 2 miesiącach w drodze.

W CHINACH

(str. 218) Wojenna stolica Chin; Chialing House, sytuacja mieszkaniowa, życie ulicy. Projekt budowy dla Ambasady, Brat Florian Pytka. Honor człowieka Orientu; inni cudzoziemcy; przebieg budowy, mało budujący.

(str. 229) Przybywa Jan Fryling, Feliks Topolski spędza parę tygodni jako korespondent BBC; gospodarka placówki; ambasador Francji, osobisty przedstawiciel JKM Premiera W. Brytanii. Lato 1944 budzi nadzieję wczesnego pokoju, ale w Warszawie wybucha powstanie. Chiński front wojenny, polscy misjonarze, O. Szlachtowski; chiński medyk próbuje leczyć mój paratyfus; odpoczynek w Indiach u Matki i Basi w obozie polskich rodzin w Kolhapurze. Operetkowy dyplomata Meksyku wszczyna wojnę przeciwko naszemu Attaché Wojskowemu; Koreańczycy.

(str. 240) Luty 1945, konferencja w Jałcie zabija nasze nadzieje na powrót do kraju. Reakcja korpusu dyplomatycznego: Stalin górá! Co będzie z nami? Ambasador Poninski; dokąd po Chinach? Dzień 3 Maja, nasze ostatnie Hura. O. Szlachtowski powraca na swoją misję, ale ginie tragicznie. Odlot do Kalkuty w dzień po zrzućeniu bomby atomowej na Nagasaki, a my zaczynamy życie ludzi bezpieczeństwa.

RODZINA

(str. 250) Planujemy z Mietkiem wspólną przyszłość; historia rodziny Sierpińskich, ojciec Waćław jest profesorem matematyki na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim i współzałożycielem Polskiej Szkoły Matematycznej; życie Waćława i Anny w Warszawie podczas wojny; powstanie, odwet Niemców. Pierwsze listy do Mietka po 6 latach rozłączenia. Waćław odmawia kategorycznie wprowadzić marksizm do matematyki (dokładnie jak w 1984 Orwella) mimo stałego lęku przed komunizmem.

W INDIACH

(str. 268) Prowincja Bengal podczas ostatnich dwóch lat jako kolonia W. Brytanii; hasło "Podziel i odejdź", masakry paraliżują miasto. Matka i Basia z nami. Dzień niepodległości narodowej wszczyna nową falę zabijania pomiędzy sektami różnych wyznań. Konsekwencje krwawego fanatyzmu między Indiami i Pakistanem stworzyły możliwości pracy dla politycznie neutralnego Mietka. Po ślubie w styczniu 1948 odlot przez New Delhi do Pakistanu. Gandhi.

W PAKISTANIE

(str. 287) Własne myśli o zakulisach podziału kolonii. Rawalpindi, miejscowe zwyczaje rozpoznane z opowiadań Kiplinga, świat muzułmański, Brytyjczycy, znajomi różnego pochodzenia. Rodzi się córeczka, wobec czego decyzja, że czas decydować o przyszłości: nasza JEDYNA MOZLIWOSC to emigracja do Stanów Zjednoczonych. Mietek zlikwidował wszystkie własności banku hinduskiego, więc i własne stanowisko, zaczyna pracę z firmą francuską, jedziemy do Karachi. Shaheed Suhrawardy, były muzułmański premier Bengalu. Nasza wieloletnia przyjaźń; po wygraniu wyborów, jako premier Pakistanu, twierdzi że planując przyszłość kraju, badał dobre i złe strony demokracji oraz komunizmu, ale dopiero po słuchaniu o przeżyciach Mietka i Zosi w ZSSR zdecydował przeciwko komunizmowi w swoim rządzie. Druga córka rodzi się w 1952. Zaczynam pracować na placówce UNICEFu, początek 30-letniej kariery. Maj 1955: opuszczamy Azję jako emigranci do USA.