Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors Residing in South Florida

The Cellar

Holocaust Survivor Salomon Wainberg's Memoir

as told to Bobbi Kaufman

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

The George Feldenkreis Program in Judaic Studies
College of Arts & Sciences
University of Miami

University of Miami
The Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

The information in this book is presented in good faith. The words in this book are the words of Salomon Wainberg as he recalled his personal experience in the Holocaust. This is his story and his truth.

On the cover: Portrait of Salomon Wainberg by artist Nava Lundy

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FOREWARD

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

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

- Elie Wiesel

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

DEDICATION

To the six million Jews who perished during this infamous period.

To Mom and Dad who gave their all for the family's survival.

With gratitude to Dad whose wisdom, courage and ever-present goal of survival led all of us through trying periods. After the war his only thought for us was our survival as Jews. He devoted his life to our family and to assuring that we continued to live a traditional Jewish life.

— Salomon Wainberg

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to my friend, Bobbi Kaufman, without whose help and encouragement this book would never have happened.

Thanks to my havarah member and very good friend, Harvey Berman, whose artistry, insight and understanding enabled him to create the drawings of the cellar and the floor plan of my home in Zelechow — visions that existed only in my very old and nebulous memory.

Thank you to my family for their love, patience and support.

Standing in front of my childhood home in Zelechow on a visit to Poland in 1973.

MY LIFE BEFORE THE WAR

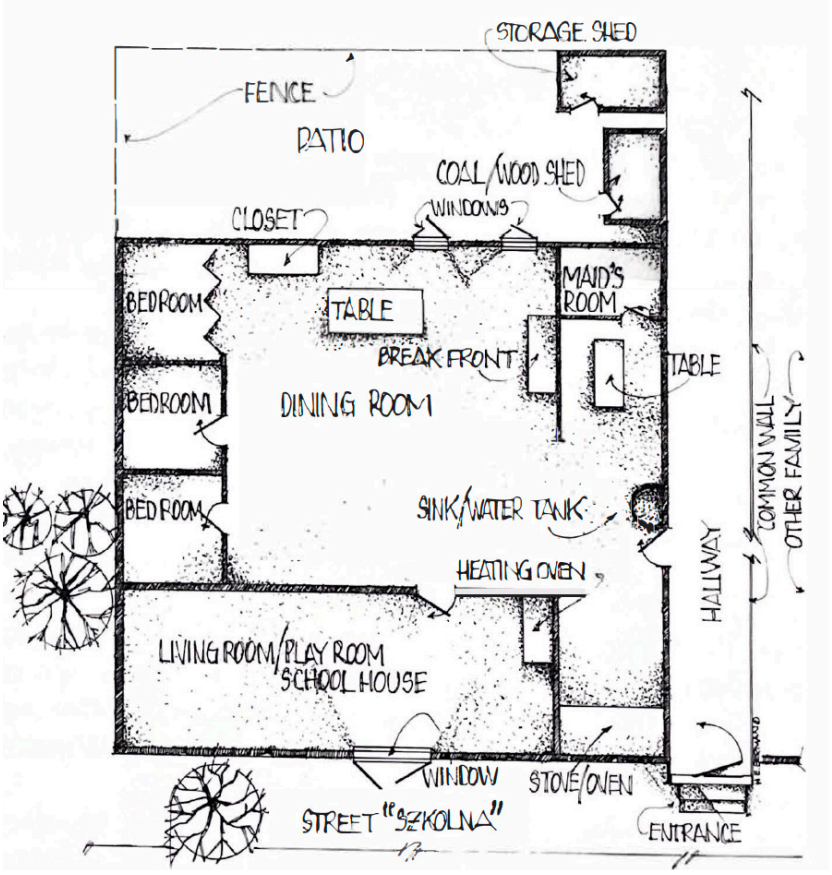
I was born April 15, 1936, in Zelechow, Poland. My given name was Szulim Wajnberg. My Hebrew name was Shalom. Today my name is Salomon Wainberg. My sister, Rivka, who was killed by Polish bandits seven weeks before liberation, was born in 1932. My sister, Sara, was born in 1934. My brother, Abraham (Alan), was born June 25, 1937. My brother, Bernie, was born in September 1945, after the war.

Zelechow was approximately seventy miles east-southeast of Warsaw. The pre-war population of Zelechow was approximately 5,500 people and seventy percent of the population was Jewish.

Our house was probably one of the nicest houses in town. It was made partly of wood and partly of bricks. We didn't have electricity in our house but we did have two lamps that used carbide. They gave off a very nice blue light. We also had regular oil lamps and some lights that used batteries or a small generator. We seldom used the generator except for the Pesach Seder and other holidays.

Mom had two tall silver candlesticks and four smaller ones for the children. All this was standing on a silver tray that was polished to the nth degree.

All our furniture was of very good quality. It was yellow and dark brown with a lot of carvings. We did not have built-in closets; we had armoires for closets. They were beautiful; they had inlaid wood. There was a breakfront where the dishes were kept. The dining room table was a yellow mahogany. It could open up to seat twenty people. The chairs were made of the same special wood. Pop sat on one side and Morn on the other. Usually Alan and I would sit on one side and my sisters on the other side. We would always sit very respectfully at the table. My sister says that in the living room we had a Persian rug that may have been very valuable. My sisters slept in one bedroom and the boys in the other bedroom. When my brother, Alan, grew out of the crib he slept with me in the same bed. My mom and my siblings used to say that I wandered around a lot when I slept. Alan and I may have gone to sleep lying next to each other, but we could have woken up anywhere. Our wandering around when we slept became a problem during the war.



Floor plan of my home as I remember it.

When Alan and I did something wrong Dad would sometimes hit us. He used his gartel, the belt Jewish men wore when they prayed. It got to the point where sometimes he would hit me and I would stand there laughing because I had gotten used to it. A lot of times after Pop hit us he would be upset and he would throw the gartel on top of the closet. lf he didn't remember to take it down, Alan and I would climb on Mom and Pop's bed to reach it and we would take it down and hide it.

Outside our house was a big patio and two shacks. One shack was converted into a Sukkah every year. We had a maid, Havah, who slept in our house, in a little room next to the kitchen. There were two stoves in the kitchen: a wood-burning cooking stove and a stove we used to heat the house. The heating stove had white tile on it with a chimney hidden behind the white tile. We filled it with coal or wood and it gave heat through the walls. If we wanted to really warm up we would have to stand against those white tiles. The tiles were very old and cracked. We were always warned to be careful because if we touched where a crack was we could get burned. The bedrooms were comparatively cold because we didn't have any heat in there, but we would sleep with down covers. We had no running water so Dad fixed up a little tank that hung in the kitchen with a very small white sink underneath it so we could have a little running water. It was a metal half-moon tank painted blue. It had a little knob that we turned for the water to run out into the sink. There was a

drainage tube that went outside by the steps. Dad had to fill up the water tank. There was a man with a horse and buggy with a wooden barrel on top who would bring the water from someplace outside the city and sell it to us. If we ran short there was another old man, with *payous* and a beard, who wore a wooden yoke with ropes and two wooden buckets full of water who would sell us water. There was no shower, just a big round wooden tub to take a bath once a week.

Every Thursday night Mom, or Havah, our maid, would boil water in a big kettle, pour it into the tub and add enough cold water so we could bathe in it. Then we took turns. This was the rule: one week the girls went first and then the boys, and the next week the boys went first. The water was not emptied in between each person. I didn't especially like the bath. Probably, the water wasn't warm enough and we never could play in it. We just had to wash and get out. When we got out, it was often cold. I don't remember my parents bathing in this tub. I guess they went to the public bathhouse and to the *mikvah.* We had an outhouse. We would use a ceramic chamber pot if we had to go at night. It was called a *notznik*, a night thing.

I can't remember getting anything new to wear except for getting new shoes for Rosh Hashanah and Pesach. My clothes were handmade — there was no such thing as going to the store and buying a shirt. We had to have everything made. I never got hand-me-downs because my cousins were so much older than me. Alan probably got my old clothes.

Across the street from the house was the store where Mom's family's business was. Her parents and their parents had established the business which consisted of mostly food items, wholesale and retail. The family had the monopoly in the region for sugar, salt, cigarettes, herring, and a few other staples of the Jewish people. Most of the buying for the store was done by telephone, by mail, or from traveling salesmen. The name of the region was Garwolinska Gobiernia. Garwolin was the biggest city close to us.

When my parents married, my father went to work in Mom's family's store. My mom's mother and father died before I was born and since Mom's older brother, Moses, had married in 1928 or 1929 and gone into his wife's family's dry good business, and her younger brother, Yehuda, had gone to israel in 1933, it was natural for my father to go into the family business. My father became like a father to my mother's younger sisters. Three of the sisters worked in the store while they were studying.

The store occupied warehouse space, possibly ten or fifteen thousand square feet. The store itself took up one entire side of the building, reaching all the way back. On the other side of the store, in front, was where my mom's uncle, Gadalia Yosef, a very pious man, had his bakery. (That's where we used to take *cholent* to cook.) Gadalia Yosef and his wife, Yehudes, lived upstairs from the bakery. On the ground floor, behind the bakery, was the house where my mother's sisters lived. There was a common hallway dividing the store from the bakery and my aunts' house.

My mother was born in Zelechow, Poland. Her maiden name was Perl Boruchowicz. Mom's family had been in Zelechow for many generations. Her mother, Rivka, passed away when Mom was eleven and her father passed away when she was twenty-nine. My mother's father was named Shalom. I am named for him. My sister Rivka was named for my mother's mother. My mother was the oldest of five girls. She had a brother, Moses, who was about two or three years older and a younger brother named Yehuda.

Mom probably never went to school. She had to take care of the family, so she couldn't go to school. Perhaps, when she was little she may have gone to Bais Yaakov, religious school for girls. There was a Polish public school in Zelechow where her sisters went. Her brothers probably went to *Cheder* (the religious school for boys). I believe my aunt, Foigel, actually went to Warsaw for some studies. My mom, up until the war, could only read and write Yiddish. I guess during or after the war she had to learn how to sign her name. That was the only thing she knew how to do in English, or Polish, actually. She couldn't read English or Polish; the only thing she could read was the Siddur, the prayer book. I don't think she understood what she read in Hebrew in the Siddur. After the war, when she moved to Costa Rica and the States, she read The Foward and Der Yiddishe Journal, the Jewish newspapers out of New York.

In our store there was no cash register, but Mom could add a list of numbers faster than an adding machine and she could write numbers. She was 'street smart.' After the war when we were liberated and my dad was in the hospital for

about six weeks, Mom ran the house and opened a restaurant at home to earn some money. After that, in Lodz she ran a small store.

My mother had three or four *sheitels,* wigs, that she wore only when she went to shul. She didn't go to shul every Shabbas like Pop and the boys did. When she worked in the store she covered her hair with a babushka, but when it was hot she would take it off. Mom always wore long sleeves, even during the summer. That was out of modesty. She had a white fur coat for the winter. Mom wore a watch and she had some rings and earrings and necklaces that she wore only on Shabbas or holidays. I know that the jewelry and whatever else of value Mom and Dad had was kept hidden in a hole in the wall of the store. They probably also kept the money from the business in a hole in a wall in the store. We kids couldn't know where.

Mom spent a lot of time in the store but the store was right across the street from our house so she did spend a lot of time at home. We would sort of cling to her, we loved her. When we did something wrong she would say,"Wait until your father comes home." Many times when our father came home we would hide behind her skirt. We had a lot of confidence and faith in her. We knew she was there to protect us. She enjoyed us very much. I remember her laughing with us, at us. We used to have a vacation place out in the woods about three kilometers from Zelechow. During the summer my mom would go out there with us kids, by horse and buggy. The idea was for Mom to spend time with us. She really enjoyed it very much. The place was

like a little colony, like the Catskill bungalows except there was no lake, just woods. It was nice and cool. We had beds called *lezhick* made with straw mattress. The bottom had wooden parts with hinges that allowed it to be folded up. Those beds were taken out into the woods and people took naps there. Dad would stay at home during the week so he could go to shul and Saturday, after davening, praying, he would walk to this place.

The woods had a lot of cut-down trees so there were all these trunks on the ground. We kids would always horse around and once I fell down and cut open my head on one of the trunks. When Mom heard me crying she ran outside and when she saw my head she wanted to carry me to the hospital, but that was not possible. There was no horse and buggy and there was no phone, so she fixed me up and I survived.

My father, Chaim Meyer Wajnberg, was from Maciewice, Poland, a little town about fifteen or twenty miles from Zelechow. His father's name was Barish. My grandfather passed away in 1938. Dad's mother's name was Gitel. Dad's only sister, Basha, and his mother were sent to Treblinka with the evacuation of Maciewice in September 1942. My father's younger brother, Simon (Symcha), was married before the war. His wife died in the liquidation of Maciewice. They had no children.

My dad was an observant Chassid, who followed a rabbi from Piesecne, a town just outside Warsaw. My father studied at the yeshiva (a Jewish school where students study

religious texts), but he also studied Polish. Very few Jews studied Polish. I only knew Yiddish and the Hebrew I learned from the siddur. We didn't need to speak Polish in Zelechow because most of the population was Jewish.

The *cheder* where I went to school was a very dark room lit by only a couple of candles. I think it may have been in the cellar of someone's house. The teacher was an old man with a beard and thick glasses. We would sit there in the candlelight with a siddur, a prayer book, and he would teach us the Hebrew letters. When the Germans closed the public schools it was difficult to close all the *cheders* because they were hidden in people's houses.

Many times when I was sick my father put bankes on me. Bankes is a cup that has a very thick lip. He would take a piece of cotton and put it on a wire and dip the cotton in alcohol and light it and put it into the cup and put it on my back. Bankes was used to reduce fever. Afterward, I would walk around for days with black marks on my back. This was the standard treatment for a cold. Dad was an expert at it. He never burned anybody. The other treatment, which Dad never did, was leeches.

Each week Mom would go to the market and buy live chickens that we would take to the *shochet* to be killed according to kosher law. The *shochet* would kill the chickens with a special knife. He had something that looked like a half funnel made out of tin with a can attached to it. He would peel off the soft hair and make the blessing. Then he would hold the chicken's head down and cut the throat. The

blood would run out the bottom into the can. When the chicken stopped kicking he would put the next one in. (Some of the more popular *shochet*s had two or three of these funnels and cans so people didn't have to wait.) Then we would bring the chickens home and the kids would help pull the feathers out.

In Poland we would buy laying hens. A lot of time we used to get un-laid eggs; we loved them. Each week Mom would buy a chicken or two, but before Yom Kippur she would buy six chickens—one for each member of the family. The males got a rooster and the females got a chicken. Before Yom Kippur we would do *Kapporis*. We would swing the chickens over our head, say a prayer, and then take the chickens to the *shochet* to kill them. We would cook them and then each of us would have a piece of the meat of the chicken that was swung over our head. My mother somehow had to mark each chicken because each child in our family had their own. The poorer families would have one rooster for all their boys and one chicken for all the girls.

Mom would come home on Friday to make *cholent*, the traditional Jewish stew that cooked slowly overnight and was eaten for lunch on Shabbas. We had to bring it over to my mom's Uncle Gadalia Yosef's bakery at the last minute before Shabbas. My uncle's oven was a big, old stone oven with wooden paddles to shovel the food in and out. His oven was used to make the *cholent* for many families. Each family had their own pot. If there were two pots that looked the same they may have had a different color paper to identify

them. I don't remember ever bringing home a *cholent* and Mom saying, "It's not ours."

Every Friday night we had fish, almost always gefilte fish. We would buy a live carp and kill it in the kitchen. My mother's gefilte fish was sweet and sharp with a lot of pepper and a lot of sugar.

We would have chicken soup with *locshen* (noodles), then chicken, then dessert. Every Friday night my father would bring home what was known as an *oirech*. This was somebody from shul who was either a poor man or someone from out of town who did not have a place to eat. Mom never minded. People even said that if Mom went to shul she would probably bring home four or five people because she could never say no.

On Saturday morning after shul we would have fish and chopped liver or egg salad which was ninety percent onions and ten percent eggs. Then, while everyone was eating fish, someone would have to get up and go across the street and get the *cholent*. (There was an *eruv* so we could carry on Shabbas.) The pot would be put on the stove and then Mom would go over and very carefully take off the paper that covered the pot. She didn't rip the paper because on Shabbas we didn't rip. She would open it carefully so the paper wouldn't fall into the *cholent*. It was a challenge and a question of luck to get the *cholent* just right. It would bake in the oven all night, but the oven had to be turned off for Shabbas so somehow they must have sealed it so the heat remained in there. Sometimes our *cholent* was too hot and

sometimes it was too cold, but always it was, "Oh! The *cholent* is good!" If it was good it meant we were good Jews that week.

Challah and rye bread were a luxury. Challah we only had for Shabbas. Everybody got a little piece. Most of the time, the bread we had was pumpernickel which was the cheapest bread. If we got a little piece of butter it was special. My favorite treat was taking the end of the pumpernickel bread, putting on some salt, and spreading it with garlic. Butter was almost non-existent. I remember that as a kid I sometimes wanted to get sick so I could get preferential treatment and get bread and butter as a treat.

Zelechow was a real *shtetl*, a traditional Eastern European Askhkenazi small Jewish town. It was drab, with unpaved cobblestone streets. We would see a car maybe once or twice a week. We mostly saw platform wagons drawn by horses. I didn't know what a radio was until well into the war. Zelechow had four telephones: one in City Hall, one in the police department, one in the fire department, and one in our store. We used to get calls from other Jews. When a baby was born or someone got engaged Dad would send somebody to notify the people immediately. When it was about a death Pop would go personally, not send somebody. People in town mostly used telegrams, but if they needed to make a phone call we let them use our phone.

The marketplace was in the middle of the town. It was rectangular, about one hundred yards by two hundred yards.

There was little activity in the marketplace except on Tuesdays when everybody came to the market. Around the perimeter were homes and businesses. There was a big building where my Uncle Moses had his store. I don't think there was a bank in the town. When people needed to change money, send money, borrow money, or save money they went to this Jewish man at the end of the marketplace and signed a note called a wexel. I think that when the Germans came he was probably the one who changed zlotys for ghetto money.

The marketplace in Zelechow in 1973.

BEGINNING OF THE WAR

I remember in 1938, almost exactly a year before the war started, Dad took me to Maciewice to see his father who was on his deathbed. My grandfather said something to my dad in a combination of Yiddish and Hebrew that I didn't quite understand. He said, "Shomer so you wouldn't be seen." On the way home I said, "Dad, what did he mean by that?" Dad told me that although my grandfather knew he was dying, he wasn't sad because he knew life was going to get much worse. I said, "Why?" Dad said, "There's going to be a war." Then I said, "What did he mean by 'wouldn't be seen?'" Dad answered, "My father believes that when the war comes I should try not to be visible. That's how I'm going to survive." And that was how he survived.

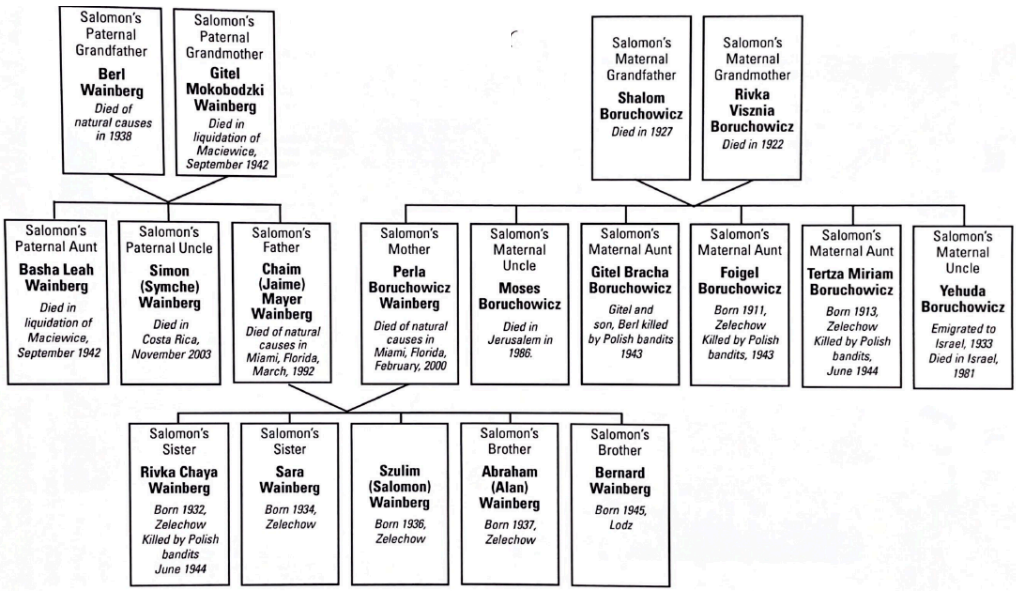
In 1939, just before Rosh Hashanah, we heard planes overhead so I went out and saw airplanes flying in formation. I had never seen or heard of an airplane before. All of a sudden we heard bombs coming down — not in Zelechow — but perhaps in Sobolew where there was a train station. That was the beginning. I was not quite four years old, but some of the memories I can see as if they were yesterday. I imagine that when everybody heard the noise they ran outside. My parents' store was right across the street from our house, and when Dad saw me he grabbed me and took me into the house. There was danger. I remember that everybody was scared; everybody was panicking. I did not understand why.

We had little information about the war. There was no radio but there were newspapers so I think my parents knew very well that there was going to be a bad time corning for the Jews. Later, in 1941 and 1942, refugees began bringing information. On Tuesdays farmers would come into the marketplace and tell stories about how they saw trains full of Jews going to Treblinka and coming out empty. They said at night they could see the burning ashes coming out of the chimneys and when the wind was blowing, they could smell the flesh. Morn and Dad would say they were just stories because who could perpetrate such atrocities?

My Aunt Sara, pict·ured in front of Bet Yakov in Warsaw where she was a teacher.

Berl, Hershel, Rivka, Rivka, Sara, Salomon, Alan, Berl. Zelechow 1939.

THE FAMILY


Salomon's Paternal Grandfather
Berl Wainberg
Died of natural causes in 1938
Salomon's Paternal Grandmother
Gitel Mokobodzki Wainberg
Died in liquidation of Maciewice, September 1942
Salomon's Maternal Grandfather
Shalom Boruchowicz
Died in 1927
Salomon's Maternal Grandmother
Rivka Visznia Boruchowicz
Died in 1922
Salomon's Paternal Aunt
Basha Leah Wainberg
Died in liquidation of Maciewice, September 1942
Salomon's Paternal Uncle
Simon (Symche) Wainberg
Died in Costa Rica, November 2003
Salomon's Father
Chaim (Jaime) Mayer Wainberg
Died of natural causes in Miami, Florida, March, 1992
Salomon's Mother
Perla Boruchowicz Wainberg
Died of natural causes in Miami, Florida, February, 2000
Salomon's Maternal Uncle
Moses Boruchowicz
Died in Jerusalem in 1986.
Salomon's Maternal Aunt
Gitel Bracha Boruchowicz
Gitel and son, Berl killed by Polish bandits 1943
Salomon's Maternal Aunt
Foigel Boruchowicz
Born 1911, Zelechow Killed by Polish bandits, 1943
Salomon's Maternal Aunt
Tertza Miriam Boruchowicz
Born 1913, Zelechow Killed by Polish bandits, June 1944
Salomon's Maternal Uncle
Yehuda Boruchowicz
Emigrated to Israel, 1933 Died in Israel, 1981
Salomon's Sister
Rivka Chaya Wainberg
Born 1932, Zelechow Killed by Polish bandits June 1944
Salomon's Sister
Sara Wainberg
Born 1934, Zelechow
Szulim (Salomon) Wainberg
Born 1936, Zelechow
Salomon's Brother
Abraham (Alan) Wainberg
Born 1937, Zelechow
Salomon's Brother
Bernard Wainberg
Born 1945, Lodz

THE GHETTO

In 1940 the Gestapo in Zelechow established a ghetto. Jews living outside the ghetto moved in; non-Jews moved out. The Germans organized each ghetto to have its own government and police, called the Judenrat. The Judenrat had to do whatever the Gestapo ordered them to do, including choosing Jews to be sent to the concentration camps. My father was very well known in town, the family names went back generations, so, when they formed the Judenrat they wanted him to be part of it, but he refused. He saw the potential corruption and abuse. The mayor came to him and asked him to be chief of police. He refused. They came back a few times. He finally said he would take the job if he could give a list of five people that would work with him so he would have an honest department to lead.

The Germans didn't want that. Mom and my aunts tried to convince him to take it. My Uncle Moses asked why he didn't want the job. Dad said that when his father passed away in the end of 1938 he said, "Shomer. Watch yourself so you are not seen."So, Dad thought being on the committee, or as chief of police, he would be seen. He didn't want that. It saved his life. Not one person from the Judenrat or the police department or the fire department remained alive. Although the Jewish police and firemen helped the Gestapo during the evacuation, the Germans killed them all. The Germans had their eyes on them; they were marked men.

The establishment of the ghetto made no real physical change in our town. We were just told somehow where the border was. They didn't put up fences or anything — they wanted to keep the boundary unclear so people would not really know where it was. People would step across it and the Gestapo would catch them and beat them up or kill them — whatever they felt like. A lot of the times even if people didn't step across, the Gestapo would kill them if they wanted to. One of the boundaries of the ghetto was a block or so away from our house and I remember my parents saying I could not go there when I was running around with my friends.

Restrictions started almost immediately: the Gestapo would give the orders to the Judenrat and the Judenrat would issue the edicts in bulletins in Yiddish. Right away we couldn't go out after sundown or before sun-up; we couldn't go out at any time without a specific reason.

To go anyplace out of town we had to get a pass, a *pszepustka.* The Judenrat president would sign it, but it would have to be cosigned by the Germans. If someone got a pass it was the talk of the town. There was an *eruv* (a wire hung around the boundary of the town to symbolically make the enclosed area part of the Jewish homes so certain activities should be carried out on Shabbas). To make sure the *eruv* was intact, a person would have to get a *pszepustka* and be accompanied by a Jewish policeman so he wouldn't get killed.

The marketplace was half in and half out of the boundary. In the marketplace there was a church and next to the church was the public school. The Gestapo took over the school building. It was a two story building with a big door. From what I saw, their offices were downstairs and upstairs was where they ate. There were about one hundred Gestapo guards. One always wore boots with a top shine; we would see him walking his dog. There were many trucks, and open cars — roadsters. There were a lot of motorcycles with sidecars. I think the majority of the Germans slept at nearby homes they had taken over, mostly from the Jews. There were quite a few Jews working in Gestapo headquarters. Other Jews worked in the homes outside the boundary cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, and shining boots for the Gestapo. They needed *pszepustkas* to go to clean those homes.

I didn't understand why the Gestapo would do something like hit a Jew, kick a Jew, or yell at a Jew. That was why Mom and Dad told us not to stay out too much, to play only on the patio. I think my parents had faith that we were scaredenough that we would listen to them, because we did see Jews beaten up on the street and sometimes shot. When we saw that happening we would run home to our parents or to a friend's house and the answer would be 'just stay at home' or 'this is why we want you to be careful and not to run around.'

Once I saw a Gestapo man hit a woman who was carrying a baby. I don't remember where I was going; I may have been going to get an ice cream for two cents. I was walking one way and a woman with a baby was walking the other way. She was all bundled up. There was a Gestapo coming toward her. When he reached her I was maybe ten or fifteen feet away. He was carrying a rifle. The Gestapo always had the bayonets on their rifles with the sharp side up. He hit the woman with the butt of the rifle. As the woman was falling down he grabbed the baby and threw it against the wall of a house. It is still very vivid when I think about it. All the other times I had seen the Gestapo hit men, but that was the first time I had seen them hit a woman. This was a tremendous shock. Once I saw three or four Gestapo men, they were very boisterous, maybe drunk, and one of them grabbed this old Jewish man with a white beard and with the bayonet from his rifle cut off half the beard. I remember saying to myself, "They could have cut him."

Soon, tanks started coming through town. Every time we heard tanks we would hide in the house because people would get run over — sometimes on purpose. Sometimes people would disappear or be sent to work camps. This would go on for almost two years.

Sometime in 1940 the edict was that all Jews needed to wear a yellow band with a blue Star of David. It said we had to wear it on our back and on our front. I remember my mom putting the armband on me. I think it was crocheted with the Jewish star and the word Jude. I think we bought it from a woman who made them. There were many varieties: some had two buttons and had to be buttoned on, some were easier to put on — they had two pieces of elastic sewn in.

The fact that I had to wear this all the time was burned into my head. Even if I were to go to the curb to play in the sand I had to put the thing on. We couldn't be seen without it.

Then there was the closing of the schools. We still went to *cheder*, but we had to do it more discreetly. About three or four of us kids went for a while, but then it wasn't allowed anymore. This was a problem because *cheder* was the only time us kids had a chance, in a safe place, to tell each other what we saw. In 1940 they created a kindergarten in the front room of our house. Teachers volunteered to teach the children of the refugees in the ghetto. All of a sudden there were fifteen or twenty kids in my house during the day coming to the kindergarten. The windows were shut so that nobody on the outside could know.

In the ghetto many of the things we were used to were no longer there. Often milk couldn't get in. Two blocks away from us, on the way to the marketplace and the synagogue,

there was a place to get ice cream. I would beg my mom to give me pennies to buy ice cream. All of a sudden there was no ice cream because the milk to make the ice cream had to come from the outside. Friday night we used to have fish but now there was no fish because the fishermen couldn't go out. I remember missing going to our place in the woods because it was outside of the ghetto and we couldn't go there anymore.

All the workers in the ghetto were Jews except for the *Shabbas goy* (a non-Jew who would do things for us we were not religiously allowed to do on Shabbas.) He came to our house to turn off the candles and in the winter to add some coal to the stove. There must have been several of these *Shabbas goys*, but the same one always came to our house. Strangely enough, during that time the Jews could not go out but the Polish people could come into the ghetto when they had something to sell or buy. The Polish people did not have much food either, so instead of paying the *Shabbas goy* with money, we would save something for him: a piece of bread or a piece of challah. He always used to come back.

Most of the supplies for our store were brought in by non-Jews. Probably ninety-nine percent of the food source from the ghetto was from the surrounding farms. They would sell us more than they were allowed to sell. They didn't have a system of keeping records so I imagine a lot more got in than was supposed to. Business continued although it was

much more restricted. People could not buy anything without a ration card and ration cards spelled out specifically how much someone could buy. I think maybe having some money made it easier for my family to have the things we needed. In the ghetto we never went without bread because of my great-uncle, Yossi, was a baker.

Ghetto money was produced in Warsaw and Lodz and then the Germans distributed it through the Judenrat. The farmers who sold us their produce did not want to be paid in ghetto money. My parents paid the farmers mostly by exchanging something like a suit for a bag of potatoes. Then the farmer would sell the suit. They could have sold their produce in other towns and gotten zlotys, but they probably continued to bring us their produce because it was too far to travel to another town.

As time went by, refugees started coming from other places. I later found out that in 1939 Zelechow had about 5,000 people and in September 1942, when we were evacuated, there were 15,000 people. The farmers could not provide enough food for everyone. The population increased but the food supply remained the same. If the town of Zelechow did anything to help the Germans it was to provide some food for the soldiers; we didn't manufacture anything like some ghettos did.

The refugees mostly came by train. From the train station in Sobolew they would have to walk about twenty miles to Zelechow. They would be carrying their bundles, all their possessions. By the time they got to Zelechow they were exhausted. They would be assembled in the marketplace and then the bargaining for housing started. The Jewish committee, the Judenrat, would try to find them housing. At the beginning it was easy because people were very receptive, very open. But, as time went on it was much more difficult — people already had roomers then. Later on, I learned from Mom and Dad that some of these people were able to bring along some valuables, not money (ghetto money was worthless), but they would have jewels and things that were worth something.

They would try to buy, bargain, or bribe someone to get housing. Some people just found a tree or an overhang and stayed there. There were a lot of people living in the corridors of the shuls. A lot of people were just outside. A lot of people didn't survive a week.

Because we had already given away one room for the school, the people on the Judenrat knew not to ask us to take in any more people. But every now and then a person or a family, especially in the winter, would come crying and we would take them in. We would sometimes have three or four kids on the floor in our room. A lot of people were sleeping and dying in the streets. In the summer we would have five or six families sleeping in the back of the house where we had the shacks. That would be impossible in the winter: anybody who stayed out all night in the winter would freeze to death.

When we would go out we would see limbs sticking out of the snow. It was very scary. It was hard to bury bodies in the winter because the ground was frozen so sometimes the bodies were there for months. In the summer it was more dangerous to have bodies around because of contagion. Some people worked as undertakers to earn ghetto money.

Some people lived in the cemetery. They would tie a string across from one tree to another in the cemetery and hang their clothes to dry. Their clothes were mostly white shirts. In the winter the shirts froze and they would look like they were sitting and waving. When we kids saw them we thought they were ghosts chasing us. At the very beginning when I would see a dead person I would start crying and be very afraid and run home. After seeing enough I guess I got used to it. The first time I ever saw a corpse I didn't know he was dead. I thought he was sleeping. I must have been with one of the boys, maybe it was Alan, and we commented,"Why doesn't he go home to sleep? Why does he sleep in the street?" I think I went home and told my sister. She said something to the effect that maybe he was not sleeping, maybe he had just fallen down and died. I remember that. As time went on we saw more and more of that and we became accustomed to it. So it really didn't bother us.

The first year of the ghetto it was okay to be generous because it was our people and we knew each other. But, in 1941 and 1942 when they started bringing in people from other countries it became more difficult. These people had

no connections in Zelechow, They didn't speak Yiddish. They mostly spoke French and Dutch. They felt like they were above us because they were the intelligentsia. They felt they were lowering themselves to eat with us. If we had ten loaves of bread in our store and someone originally from Zelechow needed an extra loaf we would sell it to him. But if a stranger came in, we would be afraid to sell him anything because we would be in danger if we sold him something and he didn't have a ration card. So the refugees were the first to start dying from starvation and malnutrition.

I think every Jew in Zelechow had the feeling of being welcoming and generous. When the war came and there was little food, everybody would help as best they could. In Poland a sign of a really rich person was someone who ate meat that was half fat and half meat. But, I guess in France and Belgium they didn't. I remember one man Dad brought home: Mom always served everybody the same, so if Dad got a piece of fatty meat the guest would get the same. This man cut away the fat and did not eat it. We didn't dare ask him because it was not polite but I remember when he left I said what a stupid guy he was to eat only the meat and leave the fat.

Typhus was going around and I got sick. I was sick for a week or two; it was touch and go for four or five days.

Rumors were flying constantly. A rumor going around was that people were being taken to Treblinka. From our area most of the people went to Treblinka. They were told they

were being relocated, going to a work camp, but it wasn't true. They never came back from Treblinka. People did different things to try to save themselves. People thought they would hide out and a month would go by and some miracle would happen.

When Mom and Dad first began to talk in Polish about doing something, we kids we knew it was a secret they didn't want us to understand. They were talking about what to pack to take along. This was when I first began to understand that there was a serious situation.

But, then toward the middle of 1942 we heard the truth form Dad's second cousin, a man named Yitzhak Bialebroda who lived in another shtetle not too far from us. He was a short man, very wiry, with a red beard. When they liquidated his village, he was taken to Treblinka. Treblinka was the biggest camp near us. Somehow when he got out of the train at Treblinka and saw what was going on and smelled the burning flesh, he was able to fall down under the train. Nobody knows how — he didn't even know how — but he grabbed onto the train's axel and held on almost all day until the empty train left Treblinka. When the train left, it traveled through a lot of forests, took a lot of turns and when it really, slowed he let himself down onto the tracks. When the train passed by him he went into the woods and he made his way back to Zelechow and told Dad what he had seen. That was when Dad started planning what we should do because we suspected that everybody was going to be evacuated. Up until then we still had hope that just like the people in the smaller towns had been evacuated to Zelechow, maybe we would just be evacuated into a bigger ghetto. Nobody could imagine what was going on. When

things started looking bad, Dad started looking for a place to hide. We had a long-time customer named Edward Turek who had a little store in Wilczisk. Turek used to buy a lot of sugar and beets at our store, so Dad sort of figured that he was making booze. Our store was the only place he could buy sugar within about a ten-mile radius because in Poland there were monopolies and our store had the monopoly for sugar. I am sure Dad gave him credit. He probably owed us money. So he and Dad had established a relationship.

At the beginning of the war when it was prohibited for anyone other than the government to make liquor, Turek had to hide his contraband booze. So, he prepared a cellar at his sister's, Mrs. Sokol's house, to hide the vats of liquor. (I am sure he paid his sister's husband to allow him to store the vats there.) Turek's house was within walking distance of the Sokol's house. Because the cellar was built as a hiding place, it had triple hidden entrances. Between the ceiling of the cellar and the floor of the room above, there was a layer of clay that was at least eight or nine inches thick. When the Germans came into Poland the penalty for making liquor was no longer just a fine or confiscation, they would burn down the entire house where they found any contraband. So, apparently in early 1940 Turek had taken out the vats and destroyed them because he was afraid for his life, his sister's life, and her family's lives.

In mid-1942 Dad approached Turek seriously and spoke to him about hiding us. Turek's first answer was, "I can't do anything because my son may go to the Germans, I have a

small house," and so on. Sometime later he came back and said there was a possibility that his sister and brother-in-law, Mr. and Mrs. Sokol, might be able to do something. Edward Turek arranged for us to use the cellar at his sister's farm as a hiding place.

My understanding is that whatever jewelry and valuables my parents had they gave to Turek for hiding us. They didn't trust Sokol, only Turek. We had silver candlesticks and at least two sets of sterling silverware. Mom had pearl earrings, a big pearl necklace and several rings. In Poland most of the time if people had money to invest they would buy gold or diamonds. My parents probably bought some on their trips to Warsaw. Turek or Sokol would sell our things on the black market to buy provisions for us. We never got any of the jewels back.

More than likely, my parents sent some clothes and provisions to the cellar in preparation for us going there. They tried to send food that would last. I guess they sent flour, some sugar, some preserves, but nothing fresh.

The family that lived in our house with us in the ghetto was a problem. We had formed a relationship with them even though they were very different people from us; Pop was very religious, they were not. When Mom and Dad were planning to go into hiding the problems were very diverse: on the one hand we were afraid the other family would overhear and insist on coming with us, and on the other hand we felt very bad that we couldn't take them with us. As

it turned out, while we were in hiding Mom and Dad sometimes said to themselves,"We fit in so many people, two more people could have fit in." But it was too late.

At the end of 1941 or the beginning of 1942, we would usually see only five or six Gestapo men at a time. But every now and then, usually on a Tuesday, they would descend on the town and pick up ten or twenty men they saw that looked strong enough to work. The Gestapo, who would be on foot or on motorcycles, would march these Jews for about seven or eight miles to a place called Wylga. Wylga was just a place where people worked; no one lived there. The men would work and after a few weeks the Gestapo would march them back to Zelechow. At first people didn't know where the men were being taken, but later we found out the Judenrat knew all about Wylga. We found out that a man named Mailech Sharfartz, the chief of police, knew way ahead of time what was going to happen.

When they first started taking people away to the work camps my father was taken. In those days there was an opportunity to pay someone to substitute for you. My father did that once or twice. But toward summer 1942 they finally took him to Wylga. The first time Dad was taken to Wylga they kept him there for about a week or two. When Dad came back he was completely exhausted. For about ten days the men had worked cleaning up the camp. They moved boulders and rocks and debris over to one side of the camp. They were told it was going to be hauled away. Dad said he sort of felt good doing the physical work. Being in a store all day he hadn't worked like that in ages. He was satisfied; he did a good job and he survived. That was important to him. About a month or six weeks later he was picked up again and taken back to Wylga. When he came back home this time he was despondent.

Dad realized that his work at Wylga was useless; he was just moving the rocks and debris from one place to another for no reason. He knew then that the only reason for taking people there was to break their morale. After that, whenever there was a rumor or he saw the Gestapo coming he would hide.

About three months later, the day before the liquidation, my dad was picked up to be sent back to Wylga. This was the third time he was picked up. I don't know why he didn't hide — maybe he was too tired and couldn't. As he was in line with the other eighteen or twenty Jews beginning to walk the seven or eight miles to work, Mom went to bring him some bread and a coat. That was when he told her, "Send the girls out tonight, and you and the boys go tomorrow night." Dad either had a feeling, or he had gotten some information from someone on the Judenrat. Years later I asked him how he knew, and he never really answered me. He said, "I just knew." I think that answer was, to some extent, to protect a confidentiality.

The first thing my mom did was send my two sisters to hide at Sokol's cellar. Somehow, she notified Sokol who sent his son, Zsdiszck, to meet her at the far side of the ghetto to take my two sisters to hide. Mom walked the two girls to the side of the ghetto at night. When they saw Zsdiszck they crossed over and he took them to the cellar. When I asked where my sisters were Mom just said, "Oh, they just went away for a few days."

Mom told us that she was going to prepare us, and tomorrow night we were going to go on a trip. I didn't know where we were going, but I realized that something was happening. My parents had been waiting for the right time to sneak out of the ghetto to get to the Sokol's, but apparently things happened faster than anticipated.

The next morning, before it got light, we were awakened by loud noises: dogs barking, bullhorns, and yelling. The Germans were yelling,"*Rois, Rois,* get out!" There must have been fifty or sixty Gestapo men with dogs. The capos, the Jewish police, were shouting and going door to door chasing people out to the marketplace saying that from there they would be relocated, *wiszedlenin* it was called. They spoke in Yiddish and they had bullhorns.

The liquidation of he getter happened on Hashanah Raba in September 1942. I don't think Dad built the sukkah because he had a feeling that we weren't going to be there. Dad's mother and his sister, Basha, died in the liquidation of the Maciewice Ghetto the same day the Zelechow Ghetto was liquidated. Uncle Simon, Uncle Moses, and Uncle Moses's two sons were not deported during the liquidations because they were with Dad at Wylga labor camp.

GOING INTO HIDING

The morning of the liquidation there were a lot more guards and dogs than usual. Mom panicked — literally — she didn't know what she was doing. She grabbed things — she was running like she didn't know where she was going. Mom told Havah, our maid, to come with us, but Havah said no, she would go with her own family. I do not know what became of her.

Mom gave Alan and me each a little bundle, not a suitcase, but a bundle wrapped in a babushka. (A babushka was about an eighteen inch square piece of fabric we often used to wrap things.) The only thing I remember having in there was my pocket knife. It was the Jewish holidays so the silver was taken out of its hiding place so Mom could use it. We were expecting to hide out until the war was over and return home and the silver would be there.

Everybody outside was running, getting lost, it was total panic. We were being pushed to the right, over to the marketplace, but Mom didn't want to go there. When Chiel, Mom's sister's fiancé, noticed my Mom's panic, he said to her, "Go to my shop." So we started going to the left toward the house where he had his shop. While we were walking a Jewish policeman stopped us and said, "You are not supposed to go this way. You are supposed to go to the marketplace." Mom said, "I'm looking for my two daughters." And we walked to the shop and went up to the

attic. There were already people up there. All I was told was that we were going to be there for a day or two and we had to be very quiet. I guess I was still half asleep.

The attic was above a shop owned by Chiel's brothers. They fixed bicycles and sewing machines. They had created the attic to hide some of the things they were working on from the Germans. One brother had invented a sewing machine bobbin which would become the double-stitch sewing machine.

There were no windows in the attic, but we could hear through the rafters and somehow see what was going on in the street: people were crying and yelling and getting lost. The capos were pushing people. We heard shots and cries. There were a lot of shots. People wanted to take more belongings with them, but the capos wouldn't let them. The Germans and the Poles were going house to house looting and finding people who were hiding. People were being herded into the marketplace. Some people were killed for not moving fast enough — with bullets and bayonets. From the marketplace, people had to walk about eighteen kilometers to Sobolew where the trains were waiting to take them to Treblinka. This lasted almost a full day.

Toward nighttime, things quieted down. Someone sneaked out of the attic and brought us some water. We had not been prepared. Chiel had planned on using the attic to hide his immediate family plus my aunt; he did not plan on us being there.

The attic could accommodate about six people, but we were thirty-nine people. Alan and I and the other children stayed in the part of the attic where the ceiling was lower because of the sloped roof. Alan and I both slept very actively and we would hit the tin roof when we slept. The third or fourth night Alan hit the tin roof while he was sleeping. Everyone was scared because making noise was very dangerous. Because they were afraid it would happen again and the noise would give us away, they tied our hands behind us so we couldn't hit the ceiling in our sleep. Alan and I would have nightmares and wake up crying. Mom would tell us we had to be quiet.

We thought we would only be there a day or two because we heard that in other liquidations the Germans looted the town and then moved on in a few days. It took them longer to leave Zelechow for two reasons: first, it was a long distance to the train and they had to bring everything to the train, and second, they found a lot to loot in Zelechow. Then they started selling the homes to the Polish farmers. The *Shabbas goy,* the one who spoke Yiddish, bought our house for an insignificant amount of money. By that time we were out of food, but people would sneak out at night and were able to get water.

One day Mailech Sharfartz, the Jewish chief of police, came into the shop with the director of the Polish Polytechnic School. He had heard that a man was working on a prototype of a spool for a sewing machine and he was trying to find it. They looked all over the shop and then Mailech Sharfartz

noticed some cracks in the ceiling. So, he took a broom and pushed it up into a crack and stuck his hands in. He figured they were going to find us anyway. Then the director of the technical school said in Polish, "There are people up there. Let's leave. We can come back later." I think they must have come back weeks after we left and found the prototype because in 1950 I read in a newspaper in the United States that a very famous German sewing machine company (Paff) invented that spool. Mailech Sharfartz was a bad man. He was killed at the end of the liquidation.

On the sixteenth day that we were in the attic, two Jewish policemen walked by on the sidewalk outside the shop. They were talking very loudly, in Yiddish, saying that the looting was completed and tomorrow they were going to start burning some buildings to see what was in the walls and attics. That was a sign to us. Those two policemen knew there were people hiding so they walked around the whole town talking like that. There were some good policemen. That night we left the attic. We do not know what became of Chiel and his family.

We left the attic on the night of the seventeenth day of hiding. Our goal was to get to Sokol's to hide. I don't know if Mom took a wrong turn, or I wasn't able to walk very much, or Alan needed to be carried, but we didn't make it to Sokol's that night. When it started getting light, Mom looked for a place to hide. She found a barn and went inside.

I am not sure if we knew enough to panic, but Mom kept trying to calm us. She would say to us, "We will go into the barn to spend the night where it is nice and warm." We climbed up to the hayloft where we waited all day with no food, nothing to drink, and nowhere to relieve ourselves. When it got dark we resumed our trip. I estimate that the distance from the attic to the Sokols farm to be about seven miles, but we must have walked ten miles. There was no road, just a path for the horses and buggies. But we couldn't even stay on the path because Mom was afraid someone would see us even though it was nighttime. Mom must have gotten disoriented at times, but not really lost. I think it took all my mother's strength not to cry.

This was the end of September and was cool already. I was wearing a coat and a hat and good shoes, but I was still cold. I was wearing pants that came to under my knees and then narrowed and went into my shoes.

When we got to Sokol's we saw a light on in the house. I don't remember seeing a light on in another farmhouse we passed. In the yard there was a clump of bushes. Mom left us sitting in the bushes and went to knock on the door. As soon as she saw it was Sokol, she came and grabbed us. We didn't run to her because we had been told to stay put. By then we knew what stay put meant. We went into the house and warmed up. Sokol, his wife, two daughters, and two sons were there. The older son, Zsdiszek, is the one who brought my two sisters to hide in the cellar.

The house had a stove with a clay hood and a burlap bag forming the door into what was the bedroom. There were no other rooms in the house. There was the kitchen and past the kitchen, without a door, was a table where they ate. The armoire, closet, and the first trap door leading to the hidden cellar were in the bedroom.

THE CELLAR

Right away Sokol led us down to the cellar. From the time Sokol recognized us until we were in the cellar was maybe five minutes. They did not feed us that night. They were afraid. In those days people went to sleep early; if somebody saw lights on so late at night it wasn't normal.

There were three different trap doors leading down to the cellar. The first was a false wall that was already open, so we walked right in. Then Sokol had to lift something in the floor — it was a difficult job because it had no handles. He had to pry it open with some kind of a metal hook. This trap door was between the floor of the bedroom and the ceiling of the cellar. We had to climb down a short ladder and then another door opened up and we had to climb down a few steps. Alan was probably handed down first, then me, then Mom went down.

As we were going down, the people who were down there did not know who was coming so they were very quiet. After they saw us it was pandemonium!

Dad, Uncle Simon, Uncle Moses, Berl, and Hershel were there. So were my two sisters, my mother's sisters, Foigel, Tertza, Gitel, and Sarah. Gitel's husband, Moses Shifman, and their son, Berl, were there, too. My dad, my uncles Simon and Moses, and my cousins Berl and Hershel (ages fourteen and fifteen), had been in Wylga when Zelechow and Maciewice were liquidated. They had only been in Wylga for one day when they were suddenly being marched toward Sobolew.

Dad realized something was wrong because the other times he was in Wylga he was there for a week or two. He had heard rumors about the ghetto liquidations, so he deduced that they were being marched to Sobolew to be put on a train to Treblinka. When it got dark, Dad somehow communicated to my uncles that when the forest was close they would just fall down and roll into the forest. They did this then made their way to Sokol's. Dad did not know we were alive and we did not know he was alive. When he got to the cellar and saw my two sisters and the Popowska family he couldn't believe it. He asked, "Where are my wife and sons?" No one knew where we were. We didn't get there until eighteen days later.

When Uncle Moses Boruchowicz and his sons were in Wylga, his wife, Aunt Layche, and her twelve-year-old daughter, Rivka, were hiding with us in the attic. When we fled from the attic they were going to Sokol's too, but she was afraid that Mom and two little kids would delay her, so she went on her own with her daughter. They never made it; Polish bandits caught them, robbed them, and killed both mother and daughter.

Unknown to each other, our family and a family named Popowska both made arrangements to hide in the same place. They were there on Sokol's behest, not Turek's, and that is what makes me think even more that Sokol hid us only for the money, not out of goodness. The Popowskas were from Zelechow, but we were not friends with them — they were 'intelligentsia' and not religious. The parents' names were Cheil and Faiga. Mr. Popowska had tuberculosis. They had four daughters: Leah, Malka, Hinda, and Devorah, and a son, Leibil. Leibil had been in a work camp. Hinda's fiancé, Hershel Winograd, and his father Noah Winograd, were also there. Hinda was nineteen or twenty. Malka, the youngest sister, was about fifteen. Devorah, the oldest sister, was in her late twenties. Devorah was the only one to survive.

The cellar was, at most, eleven by eighteen feet. Twenty-four of us ended up living and hiding there for almost two years. The only air we had was from an opening that was similar to a small window. Half of the opening was at the top of the cellar wall and half of it was to the outside at ground level. It was like a coal chute. There was some kind of bush on the outside that hid the opening. That was the only source of air and light that we had. When it snowed the snow blocked our light and air completely. At night it was pitch black in the cellar. We did have some candles but it was a problem because if we used a candle we would have to block the window so the light couldn't be seen from the outside and then we wouldn't have any air.

We had one main room and on the side there was a smaller room with the hidden door. In the ceiling of this smaller room was the trap door with the ladder. This smaller room is where the buckets were — our toilets. The room had a door we could close for privacy. That was the only privacy we had. It was horrendous. Twice it happened that we couldn't empty the buckets for three days. My father would carry the waste bucket up the ladder and hand it to Sokol. Sokol would hand my father a bucket with soup. The food was delivered twice a day. Sokol never came down to the cellar. The soup had been cooked on a wood-burning stove. On the bottom of the bucket was a little rim that was full of soot. Once when Dad was taking the bucket he slipped and the bucket hit him on the nose. The soot on the rim left a black mark on his nose that was there for the rest of his life.

At night we ate all together because the soup was hot. During the day we would have a piece of bread. Dad and Uncle Moses would pray a lot during the day so they ate a late breakfast — just a piece of bread and some water. Uncle Moses had a knack of taking a piece of bread and making it last an hour. Our food was mostly potatoes, cabbage, and beets. Sokol would sometimes send down milk. We didn't have glasses, what we had were little metal cups with something like a porcelain cover. All of them had chips and holes. The plates, forks, spoons, and knives we had were from Sokol but Dad and Uncle Moses kept theirs separate and pronounced the kosher. Nobody would touch them. My dad never ate any meat while we were in the cellar. Sometimes Sokol would put a small piece of meat in our soup and Dad would not eat it. He kept a calendar and on Passover he

would not eat bread. On one Passover Sokol brought us extra bread just to entice my father to eat it, but he didn't. We didn't have any matzos to celebrate the seders, but we would save up any food we could and do all the prayers. On Yom Kippur and other fast days, Dad fasted. Until the day he died Dad never ate anything that was not kosher — even after all he went through.

Uncle Moses Boruchowicz was even more religious than my dad. Uncle Moses tried to teach us religion. To help us he wrote a prayer book, a hand written siddur from A to Z with all the daily and Sabbath prayers. He wrote it in an eight by five inch notebook with a black cover — the type of notebook used in stores to keep accounts. He wrote on both sides of the paper. His son, Berl, brought the siddur to Costa Rica. That siddur is now in Yad Vashem in Israel. A copy is in the United States Holocaust Museum and I have a copy. I think one reason he wrote the siddur was to have something to do. I learned how to daven, pray, from this book. I read from this book every day in the cellar. When we returned to Zelechow I still davened from this book because it was the only one we had. There is a little story about my uncle's siddur: it says he wrote it because he was afraid that Hitler would destroy all the Jewish books and there should be one left.

The Popowska family basically stayed on one side of the cellar and our family stayed on the other. There was no partition — it was all one room. I am sure there were some

disagreements, but there were never disagreements about food. If anything, they would give us kids more than our share. I think somehow everybody understood that unless we cooperated we wouldn't survive.

The Popowska son, Leibil, and Hinda's fiancé, Hershel, would go out quite often at night and not come back for days. One time they came back and they had guns with them. To Dad that was the worst thing that could happen.

Our money was running out and Sokol kept complaining that he didn't have enough money to buy us food, but somehow Popowksa had money to give him to buy cigarettes. Dad insinuated that Leibil and Hershel robbed people to get money for the cigarettes and to be with women. (I didn't know what that meant at the time!)

Poland had very harsh winters and we had no heat. But that is only half of it. July and August were very hot. We were more than twenty people in this little room with the only air being from that little window. We kids wanted to get undressed completely, but Jewish people are very modest so we couldn't. Mom and Mrs. Popowska wore long sleeves and dresses all the time. Pop wore a collared shirt and pants. Everything we wore was ripped, especially the part where we sat.

When Sokol would open up the trapdoor we would climb up to get whatever air we could. We were afraid that if somebody was in the room up there the smell would go up and give us away. I can't remember taking a bath for the almost two years

we were there. I can't remember even washing — there just wasn't enough water. At most there was a wet cloth.

There were two wood benches stretching along either side of the cellar. There was also something like a table. I think it was two three-legged stools, like those farmers sat on to milk cows, which were somehow put together. It was too heavy for us kids to move. It was in the middle of the room where we could do things like eat and play. So we would congregate around it. At night it went to the little room because we needed the whole space to sleep. We had three or four straw mattresses we kept behind the benches during the day. They were just sacks filled with straw. Every few months we would get some fresh straw. Everybody slept together. Everybody lined up. On one side were the Popowskas and after them we followed. I think it was Alan and I, then my sisters, then Mom and Dad, then Mom's sisters, and then my uncles and the rest of the family. We slept in a line. It was pretty tight — if someone turned everybody was affected. The women were always complaining that Alan and I were 'roaming' in our sleep and disturbing them.

Life in the cellar was empty, drab, uncomfortable, and hard. We tried to entertain each other. We made playing cards out of paper. My aunts tried to teach us schoolwork. One thing we had to learn was Polish; in case we ever had to go out we had to know how to speak Polish. Most of the Polish I learned was from the occasional sortie upstairs to play with the Sokol girls.

I learned how to knit and sew; I guess my sisters taught me. First I could only do one knitting stitch, but then I learned how to do combinations of colors to make stripes. I learned how to knit sweaters and socks. After a while I learned how to make socks using four needles. I was pretty fast and pretty good! I remember my sisters saying I was better than they were. Sokol would bring us yarn. Most of what we made was for the Sokol family, not for us. After the war, I knitted things for my brother and me to wear. I think my mom and dad were too preoccupied with how we were going to survive to think about teaching us or trying to entertain us. Of course, they had to constantly keep us from making any noise. Before the war my brother and I used to fight constantly, but in the cellar we were very well behaved.

At one point we tried to increase the space in the cell. We started digging a hole, a space like a tunnel. We actually dug up a lot of earth before we gave up. The problem was two-fold: first, we didn't have any place to dispose of the dirt. The second problem was if someone, other than the Sokols, walked on the floor over where we were digging, they would hear a hollow sound which would give us away.

Occasionally, the adults would go up from the cellar and talk to the Sokols. Everyone got a chance to go upstairs, but the ones who went up most were the kids. We would go up late in the afternoons, mostly in the winter when it got dark early and nobody would come to visit. It was warmer upstairs because they had a stove. My sister, Rivka, would help the Sokol girls with their lessons. My Aunt Sara was a teacher so she would sometimes go up if my sister couldn't

teach them something. (I don't remember my aunt teaching me any lessons; maybe she taught my sisters.) I remember being up in that room and playing with the two Sokol girls. I would stay an hour, maybe two. I didn't know how to tell time yet. We all had Polish names. We had Polish names because if they called us and somebody happened to be around and overheard us, we didn't want them to hear a Jewish name. The Sokol daughters only knew us by our Polish names. The Sokol girls' names were Pela and Mietka. While playing we used to say that Mietka was my bride and Pela was Alan's bride. When I went to Poland as an adult and visited the sisters they called me Mietek.

Sometime in April of 1943 Mr. Popowska died. I remember it was horrible. He used to cough and spit out lumps of blood. His death coincided with Easter, a date that is etched in my memory. Because the Sokol family celebrated Easter for the entire week with relatives visiting every day, we couldn't bury Mr. Poploska for three days because the relatives would see us. I imagine Popowska's son, Hinda's fiancé, Pop, and my uncle carried the body up. I think they must have gone out first to dig a hole someplace near the barn. Probably two or three of them went because they didn't want to take too long. Another time there was a situation we were not prepared for: Sokol's mother passed away. They had a wake and relatives came to the house for several days. We were caught short of food and water.

After we had been in the cellar for eight or nine months, after Mr. Popowska died, Sokol brought home a Russian man. He had found him out in the woods, hurt. For a while

Turek was able to hide him in different places, but when Mr. Popowska died and we had the extra space, he brought the Russian to our place. This must have been in June 1943. His name was Tomaitey Tapielkin Voroshilow.

After the Russian came, things got much better for us because Sokol was much friendlier to him than to us. I guess that was because everyone assumed the Russians were going to come and if he helped a Russian it would mean something. Sokol brought him pieces of wood, cardboard, and a sharp piece of metal that looked like a blade and a grinding stone. The Russian would sharpen the metal to the point where I could carve out chess pieces. There was a time for about six or eight weeks when all my fingers were cut and bleeding. He would help me wrap my fingers. Once I had the chess set, he taught me how to play and I was pretty good. My brother and I carved at least four or five chess sets out of the wood. I would play chess with my dad. The Russian only spoke Russian so I am not sure how we communicated. He did teach us kids how to speak some Russian and to sing some Russian songs.I guess the Russian knew the adults resented him because he was another mouth to feed, but the kids loved having him there. He would teach me, my sister, and brother anything, but he wouldn't even say hello to the adults.

Every now and then Sokol would bring back news to us — especially from his son, Zsiszek, who had been drafted into the Polish army. Zsiszek was eventually captured and sent to Germany. I do remember Mr. Sokol saying he had heard on the radio, somehow, because radios were against the law,

that Stalingrad was finally turned around. I could never imagine what a radio was. When we heard that Japan attacked America we thought, Now that the United States is in, that's it! Oh! The war is going to end in a month".

With the siege of Stalingrad we thought, "Oh! The Russians are going to take over. Hitler will be gone in another week." I don't know whether Dad actually believed it — I think he did — but even if he didn't believe it, I think this is what gave us the courage to go on. Dad was so determined not to let Hitler win that he encouraged all of us, especially my uncle. My uncle was ready to give up many times. I've said it many times: "On that fateful day in September of 1942, if we knew then that we would be hiding in a cellar for almost two years, I don't think any of us would have wanted to begin it. It would have been much easier to just die. It is because while there's life there is hope." I don't know what Dad thought, but I know he didn't think it was going to be that long. As things dragged out and reality came, maybe he thought it was never going to end.

Then, Sokol became a problem. He was getting desperate because our money was running out. He couldn't get things for himself and he couldn't feed us enough. Many times I heard Mom and Dad talking between themselves about how Sokol said he wished he had never started this, and that he would sometimes say that if he had a way of turning us over to the Germans and getting the reward without the danger of being killed himself, he would do it.

Edward Turek helped us purely out of the goodness of his heart. I think the Sokols helped initially because Edward Turek asked them to and they did it for him. (Mrs. Sokol was Turek's sister.) They helped in spite of the fact that they hated us. They did it only for the money. They did take all of ours. They also kept helping because of a threat. Whenever Mr. and Mrs. Sokol would get mad at us and start yelling at Dad, my dad would say to them, "lf the Germans find us I can promise you that neither I nor my wife are going to say anything about you or mention your name, but with the children you can never tell…"So it was fear. But, I must admit that probably, to some extent, he had a conscience. His neighbor across the field did give people away.

Because Sokol's cellar was so small, Turek's brother, Wladislaw, for money, was convinced to fix up a place to hide some people. I don't think he had a cellar, he may have had a hidden room or an attic. For a long time he didn't want to help anybody. Wladislaw was a real anti-Semite. His farm was about a mile away from where we were hiding. Sometimes, when we were hiding in the cellar some of the people would leave and hide at Wladislaw's house. My mother's sisters would go there and so would my uncles Moses Boruchowicz and Moses Shifman. They would go back and forth between the two places. One day while they were at Turek's brother's house and we were in Sokol's cellar, my aunts, Foigel, Sara, and Gitel, my little cousin Berl Shifman, my two uncles, Moses Boruchowicz and Moses Shifman, and my cousins Berl and Hershel Boruchowicz were discovered by Polish bandits.

Somehow, my uncles and my cousins Berl and Hershel were able to run away. My aunts Foigel, Sara, and Gitel, and my little cousin Berl were killed by the bandits. We think Wladislaw Turek didn't want to be bothered anymore with the Jews that he hid and he turned them in. Their money was almost all gone and if the Germans caught them in his house then he would be killed along with them. But, if he turned them in to the Polish people, the Poles would kill only the Jews and not him.

Pop heard about the killings first. He waited for hours, or maybe days, before telling Mom. After that, almost once a day, Mom would faint. Dad would press on her temples and that would eventually revive her. There was a time when Mom would say,"Stop doing that." She didn't want to live. Pop would say to her, "Do you want Hitler to win? What's going to happen to the kids if you are not around? We must survive to show that..." He constantly encouraged us all to survive.

DISCOVERY

Early in the afternoon in June 1944, the twenty-fourth day of Sivan, on the Hebrew calendar, we heard unexpected noise outside, and we were concerned. We didn't expect anyone before nightfall. The Sokols were in the fields and their daughters always went directly out to the fields after school. The noise grew louder: we heard boots and then we heard the armoire above us move. This had never happened before in daylight. We were very concerned, but there wasn't anything we could do.

The trap door opened; we saw what seemed to be between fifteen and twenty Polish bandits known as *armiekrayowe*, People's Army. Leibil Popowska and Hershel Winograd had guns. They went up to the door and started shooting. The bandits killed the boys right away. In this commotion my sister, Rivka, and my last remaining aunt, Tertza, somehow went out the door and started running away. They were shot. Dad was beside himself. He didn't know what to do. He started pushing my brother out the little window-like opening we had to the outside. But when Alan stuck his head out, he was grazed by a bullet. He started yelling and Pop pulled him back in.

The *armiekrayowe* made us line up against the wall, sitting. Leibil and Hershel were lying dead by the exit. There was blood everywhere. It was very noisy and there was a lot of commotion. During all the commotion, Devorah Popowska was lost. Maybe she got lost when everyone was running around when they were still shooting, or maybe it was later. The Russian was with us in the cellar when we were discovered. As soon as the bandits found out he was a Russian they told him to go and he left.

The bandits started questioning us and searching for valuables. This took a very long time. Finally, I guess they were ready to kill us because they couldn't find any jewels, or money on us. So, my dad had a fantastic idea. He said, "What? Are you going to kill us? If we are not alive, all the jewels and gold that I have hidden in Zelechow are going to be gone forever." So they said,"You're going to take us to it?" He said,"Of course. If you leave my family here I'll go with

you." They were ready to do that but Dad said, "Before we do that, l have to bury the dead." By that time a dog had bitten part of my sister's arm. Burying them and cleaning up took a long time and by the time they were ready to go it was starting to get light. So Dad said to the bandits, "We will go down to the cellar and hide there and you come back tonight night and l will go with you to show you the gold." And they left.

As soon as they left, my mother, my father, my Uncle Moses and his sons, my Uncle Moses Shifman, my Uncle Simon, my sister Sara, my brother Alan, and I started a trek that would last about six weeks. At first Dad's idea was to go to Maciewice, a town about twenty miles from where we were, to try to find someone there who would help us. By then we had heard stories about the second front. We had heard stories that the United States had entered the war. So we always had the hope that maybe tomorrow... If we knew then it was going to take six weeks we probably never would have attempted it because it turned out to be quite horrible.

Initially, Hinda, Malka, Leah, and Mrs. Popowska tried to come with us. I think they may have spent the first night. Then, as far as I knew, they disappeared.

HIDING IN THE FIELDS

We spent two weeks walking every night toward Maciewice, the town where Dad was born. He thought one of the farmers he knew would provide us a hiding place. Along the way, at night we would stop at farms to fill our water bucket from the wells and sneak into cellars to find some food. On some occasions we were chased away from a well by dogs and had to fill our buckets from a pond. In the morning light we could see the water was full of worms and weeds, but because of the sun and heat we had to drink it anyway. During the day we hid in the rye fields. We chose to hide in the rye fields because rye grows about five feet high and wheat grows only about three or four feet high. Quite often we were unable to find food so we had to eat the rye kernels. We did not have shoes and our clothes were torn. Our faces and bodies blistered from the burning sun. When we finally reached the farm where Dad knew the farmer, we all stood a distance away with sticks on our shoulders pretending they were rifles. Dad knocked on the door. It took a while, but the farmer finally recognized Dad. But he refused to help us saying his neighbors were very nosey and would immediately tell the Germans.

A discussion ensued between Dad, Uncle Moses, and his sons. Uncle Moses and his sons wanted to continue westward toward Warsaw saying perhaps we could sneak into the ghetto. Dad said we had miraculously gotten out of a ghetto and we didn't want to go to another one.

By then, summer 1944, the Warsaw Ghetto had been liquidated, but we didn't know that. Uncle Moses and his sons decided to leave us and go west. We decided to go east toward Zelechow because it was familiar territory and it was closer to the Russian front. About ten minutes after we began walking we heard steps behind us. We got scared — who could be following us? Uncle Moses and his sons had decided to rejoin us.

About four weeks into our travels, in the middle of July, we had a scare. No sooner had we settled in the rye field, when we heard men talking. We crouched even lower and we were all very quiet. Dad picked up his head and observed a farmer and his helpers harvesting the rye. We didn't know what to do: Do we get up and run? Do we stay still? If we got up and ran they would probably catch us or get the Germans to catch us. We decided to chance it and stay quiet. We figured it was a big field and they were harvesting by hand so when nightfall came they would still be a distance from us, so we were safe for the moment.

We knew we could no longer hide in the rye fields, however. Dad said, "Even if the wheat grows a little shorter than rye we have to hide in the wheat."The next day we hid in a wheat field which Dad knew would not be harvested until about six weeks later. The problem was that wheat only grows to be about three to four feet high which meant we could not sit up without being visible. We had to lie down all day. We got sunburned on our backs; our eyes were completely burned. Some days we were without any water. From lack of nutrition Uncle Simon got a sickness called kurepatwa which meant he was completely night-blind. So, when

we were walking he would put either my brother or me on his shoulders and we would be the eyes and he would be the feet. Of course when he stumbled we would fall off.

We continued on the merry-go-round walking one way, walking the other way, hiding during the day, walking at night. For a few days we had been hearing artillery and machine gun explosions. We didn't know if we were hearing the Russians or the Germans. We didn't dare move.

On Saturday, Tisha b'Av, we were lying down in the wheat fields worrying about what we would do tomorrow if they started cutting the wheat fields, when all of a sudden we heard a lot of heavy machinery going by. Midday, August 2, 1944, we heard singing and we could distinguish the singing as a Russian song. (When the Russian was hiding in the cellar with us, we learned some Russian songs so we were able to recognize the song they were singing.) We got up and went out to meet them and joined them in their song. We had no idea what we looked like. My mom, before the war, weighed about two hundred pounds. At liberation she weighed seventy-two pounds. All of our faces were blown up from the sunburn. We were unrecognizable as human beings. Dad was completely lame because on one of his falls he had cut his foot and it was infected. The Russians picked us up and gave us a ride into Zelechow.

After we were liberated we found out that the Popowska family had gone back to Sokol. Mrs. Popowska and her

three daughters were too weak to go very far, so they went back to Mr. Sokol and begged him to take them back. He hid them in his hayloft. The Germans walked in two or three weeks later and found them. Sokol pleaded that he didn't know they were there. The Popowskas concurred and said they had gotten there that night and just snuck in on their own. Under normal circumstances the Germans would burn the house and barn and kill everybody. But, because everybody claimed that they didn't know, they killed Mr. Sokol and the Popowskas and left everybody else alive. They didn't burn the house. In Zelechow we found out that the Russian was alive and had joined up with the Russian forces.

My family always suspected that Turck' brother, Wladislaw, was the one who gave us away to the *armiekrayowe* and also the one who gave the Popowskas away to the Germans. My cousins and I used to fantasize about becoming big shots in the Russian army and killing Wladislaw Turek.

My cousins failed to acknowledge that if it weren't for my father during those six weeks we wouldn't have survived. He was the one who knew how to find his way in the dark. He was the one who knew those parts of the country. He was the one that figured out that we should go east because that's where the first Russians would come in. Planning how we would survive was constantly on his mind.

RETURN TO ZELECHOW

Out of the 15,000 people who celebrated the Jewish High Holidays in Zelechow in 1942, only fifty-three people were liberated in August 1944. Of the fifty-three survivors there were only three children: my brother, sister, and me. When we returned to our home, things were still intact. From that point of view we were very lucky. There was a Christian person from Zelechow who had been raised in a Jewish environment. He spoke Yiddish. I don't know how, but he happened to acquire our house. When we came back he didn't recognize us at first but when he saw who we were he just said, "Here," and he gave our house back to us. Whatever he could, he had saved for us: some pictures, a kiddish cup, a couple of mezuzahs, nothing really of great monetary value, but of value to us. Not only that, he had found a Torah scroll that was not burned. He had hidden it all those years and he gave it to my father. For that my father would have given him anything he wanted.

I remember when we got back, how we couldn't get enough baths to feel that relief. It was August; it was hot. I think we had water delivered to the house. As soon as he could, Dad went back to Sokol's farm with a few people and dug up all the bones and buried them in the cemetery in Zelechow. Mainly he went for my sister and my aunt, but once they were there they took everybody. Everybody had been buried in the same area. There

was the house and there was the barn and another barn and in between was a little place that was sort of unseen and that's where they were buried. Maybe the ground was softer there. Now they are in the cemetery in Zelechow. From the stories I have heard, the cemetery probably no longer exists. Most of the bodies were taken out and the markers were used for sidewalks.

Our business was gone. They had burned the building where the business was located when they were looking for hidden treasure. We started getting our lives back together. Dad's leg was very bad. The Polish doctor said because the leg started to get gangrene they would have to cut his leg off and if they didn't he would die. Dad didn't let them cut off his leg. He mostly stayed in the back room of our house. So my mom had to find a way to earn a living. She didn't have a store anymore — what else did she know? She knew how to cook. So she started cooking: gefilte fish and borsht and stuff for the Russian soldiers. When the Russians came, they bought. We converted our living room, which was the schoolroom during the ghetto, into a restaurant.We made what living we could. The Russian soldiers liked to drink but they didn't have any vodka. All they had was a contraband type of bad rum made of raw beets. We had nothing to do with that, but we did come across a keg of beer that we could sell. We didn't have a beer pump so the way to get the beer out of the keg was to put in a rubber hose to start it. I was the starter and that was the first and only time in my life that I ever got drunk. I was maybe nine years old.

One day, a Russian doctor came to eat at our restaurant. I spoke enough Russian to talk with him. He asked me where my father was. I told him he was in the house and he was sick. The doctor asked to see him. This doctor happened to be the hospital chief-of-staff and he was Jewish. We told him what happened to us. He said that he could not stand to see a man who had been able to save his family walk around without a leg. He took Dad to the hospital that had been taken over by the Russian army. This doctor must have stayed with Dad for three or four days. He saved my father's life. Six weeks later Dad walked out of the hospital on both legs. When the doctor heard some of our stories he could not understand how we could have spent about eight months in such close quarters with a man who died of tuberculosis without us having tuberculosis. I guess those were the miracles that did happen. Unfortunately, I don't know the doctor's name.

Dad, in all the time during the war, never ate any meat. When he was in the hospital, Mom would try to make him eat some. He refused. "Non-kosher!" he would say. So, about that time, Dad's cousin, Israel Yitzhak Bialebroda, showed up in Zelechow. He is the one who escaped from Treblinka and came back to Zelechow and told us what was happening there. I don't know how he survived. At the time Mom was pushing Dad to eat some meat because otherwise he wouldn't survive in the hospital. So, one day Yitzhak bought a little lamb and he said he was going to act as the *shochet*. He said he knew how to do kosher slaughter. I don't know if he knew how to do it or not, but he slaughtered the lamb and for the first time in two years Dad ate some meat.

My father finally got out of the hospital but he still couldn't do much of anything. On Tuesdays, market day, l would go out and sell matches in the market. My sister would help whenever she could. We started making a life for ourselves. Survivors came to Zelechow from other little towns because at that time Zelechow was the only Jewish compound. We had a little synagogue, so they came. Whoever came back to Zelechow after the war came to our house. Our house was where everybody wrote down where they were and what family they were looking for. Everybody had a story and everybody listened to how everybody else survived. Everyone who survived in the woods told about digging caves and running away from the caves and burning the caves. They spoke of how the Germans and the Ukrainians and the partisans were afraid to go into the woods because a lot of the people hiding there had weapons and if somebody came they didn't know they would shoot first and ask questions later.

At the end of 1944 the Jewish population of Zelechow was 250 souls. The anti-Semitism in Poland was unexplainable. My dad was wondering what to do — to stay in Zelechow or not. In the winter of 1945 there was a pogrom. I remember it was a cold Tuesday market-day morning. The farmers came in to town with axes, pitchforks, and rifles and started killing Jewish people. Nine people were killed. One of the men killed was related to us. His name was Leibil. There wasn't much we could do because the Russians had started moving toward the front and the government was given over to the Poles who were all anti-Semitic.

— ALBERT COYA Miami Herald Staff

Mr. and Mrs. Chaim Wainberg With Torah
... framed by Star of David

My parents presenting the Torah scroll from Zelechow to the Rabbi Alexander S. Gross Hebrew Academy in Miami Beach. February 17th, 1978.

Friday, Feb. 17, 1978 THE MIAMI HERALD 7-C

Torah Survives Nazi Scars

By ADON TAFT
Herald Religious Editor

The presentation of a Sepher Torah to a synagogue always is a significant event because the Torah contains not only the Word of God but the history of the early Jews.

But when Mr. and Mrs. Chaim Wainberg hand over one of the sacred scrolls to Rabbi Alexander S. Gross during 10 a.m. Sunday ceremonies at the Greater Miami Hebrew Academy, the Torah also will contain the marks of the history of the Jews during the Nazi Holocaust.

It is a very personal history for the 70-year-old natives of Poland.

The family first presented this Sepher Torah, especially scribed in memory of Mrs. Wainberg's parents — Shulim and Rivka Boruchowicz, to their synagogue in the village of Zelechow, near Warsaw, in 1938.

THE NEXT September, invading Germans burned the synagogue. But Wainberg, who was operating his food wholesaling business nearby, dashed through the flames and rescued two Torahs — one of them this one.

He hid them in his home where he and his friends met surreptitously to worship during the next three years of progressively stringent German occupation.

By 1942, the Germans were shipping out the town's Jews. It turned out that they were destined for the death camp at Treblinka. Wainberg suspected as much, so he and his family of four children hid out in the surrounding fields and forests. But he had to leave the Torahs hidden in his house.

GREATER MIAMI SYNAGOGUES

Wainberg was captured and sent to a work camp from which he escaped to rejoin his family and some 30 other Jews still hiding with the help of Gentile neighbors. But over the next two years, most of the group perished. Among them were Mrs. Wainberg's four sisters, the last of whom died just six weeks before the Russians overran the area and liberated the Jews from the Nazi threat.

MEANWHILE, the Germans had sold the contents of Wainberg's house — including the Sepher Torahs. He was able to track down the one he and his wife had given to the synagogue. Besides fire damage, it now had parts cut away. The parchment had been used to make book satchels for school children because leather was in short supply. But a Gentile sympathizer had preserved the remainder.

The Wainbergs, the only couple in survivors together from all the Jewish families in Zelechow, took their Torah scroll and emigrated to Paris. They hoped to go on to Israel, but that was impossible in 1947. So in 1948, practically penniless and suffering from the mistreatment and ailments of the Holocaust years, the family migrated to Costa Rica to start life over again.

The couple let the synagogue there own the Torah, but did not present it to that synagogue because they did not intend to live permanently in Costa Rica. They had already begun to send their sons to the United States to go to school where they could get a Jewish education. Their youngest boy, Bernard, was one of the earliest students in the Greater Miami Hebrew Academy, now located at 2400 Pine Tree Dr., Miami Beach. Their grandchildren, Sam and Rebecca Benson, also attended the Academy.

AFTER WAINBERG succeeded in a general merchandising business in Costa Rica, he and his wife joined their family in Miami Beach in 1971. They began attending services at the Hebrew Academy because of the institution's relationship to the family and Wainberg's conviction that a synagogue ought to be concerned with passing Judaism on to the younger generation.

The importance of the presentation Sunday will be underscored with the presence of Dr. Heinrich Klepfish, director of the Albert Einstein Institute in Panama. Recognized as one of the top Jewish scholars in the Western Hemisphere, Klepfish and Wainberg were classmates in Poland. They lost track of each other during the Holocaust, but met again in Costa Rica.

The scroll which will be presented to the Academy Sunday now also bears the names of Wainberg's parents, his wife's sisters, and other relatives who did not survive the Holocaust.

When the Russians left we were no longer safe in Zelechow. Once the Russians began to move west, Lodz began to become a Jewish center. So, Dad hired a horse and buggy and we put whatever we had on it and we started a trip from Zelechow toward Lodz. The trip by horse and buggy in those days took about three days. The second night out we stopped to rest in a house that we had known from before. We left all our belongings in the buggy and we went into the house to sleep. In the middle of the night we heard all this commotion; shots going off. When Dad went out he saw Polish bandits grabbing everything they could from the buggy. Some shots were fired at us but I don't know whether they intended to kill us or not. They just wanted to have whatever we had. I had started a stamp collection — that was gone. Whatever pictures we had, whatever memorabilia we had saved — everything was gone. They got everything but the Torah scroll, because Dad had taken it into the house with him. Right now that Torah scroll is at my sister's house in Jerusalem.

The next day we just continued straight through until we got to Lodz. In Lodz we rented a modern apartment at Mielezarskego 12. It had electricity and a bathtub with the first shower we ever had! We lived in Lodz for about a year. My father's cousin, Israel Yitzhak Bialebroda, and my father's brother, Simon, both lived with us in our apartment. Yitzhak was a young, very short, very well built man. He and my Uncle Simon were both widowers. They both started courting a survivor of Auschwitz whose name was Perla Mokobodski. She was Dad's cousin. She picked my uncle because he was tall. Their first daughter was born in our

apartment in Lodz. Her name is Gitl. She emigrated to Costa Rica where she became the headmistress of the Hillel School there.

In Lodz my mother got pregnant. She was very sick. The last four or five months of the pregnancy she was in bed. This was the time I learned how to cook: I would bring the ingredients over to her bed, like the gefilte fish, and she would tell me what to do. In my memory she carried that baby for eleven months. She had water on the lungs. They didn't think she would survive or the baby would survive. On Yom Kippur night 1945, everybody was breaking the fast at our apartment when Mom went into labor. All of a sudden the midwives started boiling water and getting towels. They closed off the room and we couldn't go in. Dad and my sister had to wait outside. I didn't go to sleep; I spent the night saying *telim*, psalms. I remember that my mother was too weak to yell during the delivery. Then, all of a sudden we heard this cry and everybody yelled, "Mazel tov! It's a boy!"

There were actually three children born in that apartment around the same time. The third was a daughter, Sara, born to a couple named Simon and Risha Fingezicht who were married in our apartment. What is amazing is that everybody gets spread out all over the world, so many people die, and then we come to Lodz, and Mom and Dad think they will never make a living, and all of a sudden they need a midwife — and she's Jewish. They need a doctor — he's there and he's Jewish. That was the miracle, that everybody we really needed could be found in Lodz. They even made a Jewish school and everybody spoke to me in Yiddish. It was amazing, really.

Although I had never been to school in Zelechow (except for *cheder* where I only learned prayers) for some reason when I began school in Lodz they put me in the third grade. I joined a youth Zionist group called Shomer ha'Tsa'ir. We had shirts like boy scouts. In that group was a little girl I liked. I remember only her last name: Cytrinowicz.

My family had a little store in Lodz. It took us a long time to get that little store. The political and financial situation had deteriorated when the communists took over. They put on price controls. They didn't let us make a living. For example, If we were paying thirty-three cents for a kilogram of sugar and price controls said we had to sell it for thirty-two cents, we could not make a living. One day an official of the government came into the store and when my uncle sold him a kilogram of sugar over the controlled price, he was put in jail. He stayed in jail without a trial until we were finally able to bribe enough people to get him out. Then the Polish government closed the border; they wouldn't let anybody out. Dad figured, "Here we go again." That's when we made plans to leave.

ESCAPING FROM POLAND

Dad said he would have to smuggle himself, my mother, and the baby out of Poland, but my brother, my sister and I, he would get out in a more legal way. At about that time the Jewish agency, HIAS, organized a convoy of orphan children

they were taking out of Europe and sending to Palestine. Dad arranged for the three of us to be registered as orphans. We were put on a train with about three hundred other children. There must have been about thirty or forty chaperons, some of them survivors, but most were either French or American volunteers. The volunteers taking care of us were part of Agudath Yisrael, a very religious Zionist organization. Their goal was to take us to Palestine. I believe they had permission to take out five hundred children but they could only find about three hundred to take on the train with us.

The conversation with my parents before putting us on the train was mostly that it was important to save ourselves. Dad insisted that we stay Jewish always: "Remember who you are. Remember who your family is." It was important that we remember who we are because Mom and Dad probably thought they would never see us again. They feared that either they would never be able to get out of Poland or that in crossing the border they would be shot. The train ride was a long, slow trip. I don't know if there were other children there like my brother, sister, and me who weren't really orphans — that was a deep kept secret.

We were always afraid that was part of the reason why it took us so long to get out of Poland. At every border the passport control came and checked everybody's papers. We had travel a document, a *pszepustka*, that was just a sheet of paper with our pictures and our names on it, but

most of the children did not have any official papers. Allowing us out was basically a special concession by the Polish communist government. I guess it was on the behest of the United States or whatever powers to be to allow these children to be saved. Maybe the Polish people just didn't want that many Jews, so they sent them away.

After several days on the train we arrived in Czechoslovakia. We spent two or three weeks there, housed in a make-shift orphanage in Diablice, a suburb of Prague. It may have been an old army camp; it was mostly barracks. At this orphanage my sister took care of us because she was the oldest. But, really, I took care of myself. The only word I learned in Czech was the word for ice cream: zmrizlina.

After a couple of weeks, all the children were moved from Diablitze to Ajx'!es-Bains, a little town in the French Alps. They took over a hotel, the Chateau Deville, to be used as an orphanage. In this orphanage we had dorms, a synagogue, and eating quarters. We studied and we put on plays. We were there for about seven or eight months. It was probably, within parameters, the first normal life that I had ever led. I didn't have to sell anything. I got three meals a day. I got an education. I had a lot of friends, tons of friends. Unfortunately, I have lost contact with all of them.

When we were in the orphanage our pictures and our names went out all over the world. My brother and I were quote,

unquote, adopted by a family in Philadelphia: Benjamin and Adele Siegel. The Siegels had two children of their own. They picked two brothers to adopt. I don't know why they didn't pick my sister, too. Possibly because she was in the girls' section and they only saw the boys' pictures. They started sending us care packages. The only problem was that what they thought kids would like, we didn't know about. They sent us chewing gum and we didn't know what to do with chewing gum. They sent us a football. "What happened to the ball? How come it's not round?" we wondered. Mrs. Siegel wrote us letters in English that we had to have interpreted — it really warmed our hearts. We were afraid at that time that the Siegels would find out that we were not really orphans.

By that time I had learned how to write and kept up a correspondence with my parents. Of course my sister, Sarah, was the main correspondent. On each letter she wrote my brother and I would add a few words. We did not know where our parents were, so we sent the letters to Lodz. We learned later that they did not get anything from us. We did not receive letters from our parents but we sometimes received word from them through Dad's cousin, Yitzhak Bialebroda, who by then was living in Paris.

My brother, sister, and I were supposed to be on the ship, Exodus, to Palestine. But, fortunately for us we found out through Yitzhak Bialebroda that our parents were able to get to Strasburg, Germany, and that in a week or two they would

be in France. So, instead of going on the Exodus we stayed in the orphanage and were eventually reunited with our parents in Paris. The orphanage arranged for us to take the train to meet our parents in Paris. The joy of being reunited with Mom, Dad, and Bernie outweighed the sadness of parting will all the new friends we had made.

In Paris we were taken care of by the Displaced Persons' Committee of the United States. We lived in a hostel paid for by the JOINT and HIAS (The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.) We applied for a visa to the United States. While we were waiting for the visa, we had nothing to do. As the weeks and months went by and nothing was happening, Dad sent me to Gastain, a chateau or farm, about fifty miles outside Paris to a yeshiva established by some rabbis so I would get a religious education. Because the one room my family lived in was very crowded, with the help of volunteers, my parents found a French family farm where they could send my baby brother, Bernie. He was then about two years old. On the farm he learned his first language: French. (I learned French in the streets of Gastain and Paris.)

Then, at the end of 1947, came the blockade of Berlin. Everybody thought that World War Three was around the corner. Everybody panicked. We just wanted to get out of Europe! My dad went down to the Displaced Persons' Bureau and said,"l want to get out." They said, "We can get you a visa to Costa Rica." Dad didn't know where Costa Rica was, what Costa Rica was, but he said, "Where is it?" And they told him it was in America. So he said, "We'll go."

ARRIVING IN COSTA RICA

We took a train from Paris to Cannes where we boarded the ship, Jagelo, in April 1948. It was a Polish boat operated by an Italian crew. All the food contained cooked tomatoes, a food we never before tired and which disagreed with us. The first few days were miserable — we spent most of the time below deck being sick. After a few days we felt better and I had a nice time with the other kids on board. Dad got on the ship carrying a Yiddish/English book. He had been studying English in France in preparation for life in America. A refugee on board (there were mostly refugees on the ship) who was on his way to Uruguay knew they spoke Spanish in Costa Rica like they did in Uruguay and told my father he needed to learn Spanish, not English!

We traveled on that boat as far as Panama. Costa Rica was going through a revolution so we had to wait in a camp in Panama for about a week or two. The local Jewish community was very nice to us. We went to movies and drank Coca Cola. When the revolution quieted down we took a small plane from Panama to Costa Rica. As it turned out, we were, for quite a while, the last Jewish people to be admitted to Costa Rica because the new government wanted to restrict immigration except for farmers. So we came to Costa Rica: my dad, my mom, and four children, with $904 and a bunch of clothes that weren't worth anything. We moved into an apartment that was like a basement. All we had was a kitchen, a very small living room and two bedrooms. Mom and Dad

had a bedroom. Alan, Bernie, and I had a bedroom and my sister slept on the couch. My mom never complained.

My Uncle Moses and his two sons, Berl and Hershel, independently of us and without our knowledge, wound up in Costa Rica, also. They had gotten there maybe six or seven months before we did. By the time we arrived in Costa Rica Uncle Moses had left for New York but my cousins stayed and had a store there. My cousins took the Spanish names Bernardo and Enrique. There were Jews from Zelechow in Costa Rica — strangers, not family — who helped us out more than my cousins did.

There was a sizable Jewish community in Costa Rica. Some of the people knew Dad or knew of him. They gave him credit on merchandise, and and he became a peddler, a *klapper*. He would get some pants, some shirts, whatever he could, and walk to the farms and sell to the farmers. He would buy for twenty and sell for thirty. The catch was he only got paid once a week so each week he had to go collect the pesos. But that's the way most Jews got started. His legs started giving him problems again. Since I was the oldest boy, some days I went out to do the collection for him. He was miserable.

After a while we were living in a little better apartment, but it was s till a lousy apartment. Dad was away constantly. Mom took care of the kids plus she went to the stores, bargained with the merchants, and bought the merchandise. After about two years we bought a little store in the marketplace. Dad

was still peddling then and Mom was running the store. Farmers would walk into the store and didn't want to buy anything but Mom would sell them a whole bunch of stuff! She knew what she was doing. She knew that things had to be done and how to do them. She suffered with varicose veins and could hardly walk, but she still worked hard and never complained. Even at this time in their lives, my parents sent money and packages to help relatives in Israel.

When we came to Costa Rica they didn't know what classes to put us in. The only school I had even been to was third grade in Lodz. My brother, who had never been to school, was assigned to the third grade because there was one Jewish boy in the third grade — one Jewish friend for him. Me, they put in the sixth grade because there were three Jewish boys in the sixth grade. The purpose was for them to help me, but they didn't speak any Yiddish so it was no help at all. The boys were separate from girls. My sister, who was older than me, was placed in fourth grade because there were some Jewish girls in the fourth grade. There was no Jewish school. In the third grade in Lodz I had learned how to multiply and divide. Then in sixth grade in Costa Rica I had a problem because they were beginning algebra. Discipline and nice hand-writng were the most important things in our school, Escuela Republica de Argentina. We had to wear uniforms: white shirts and black or dark blue shorts. One day the boys went to school in the morning and the girls went in the afternoon and the next day

the girls went in the morning and the boys went in the afternoon.

On Friday afternoons the Lebanese guy and I would go to the plaza, which was about two blocks from school, and we used to fight. It was always a fair fight. I would get all sweated up and dirty, but I never had a wound. One Friday, though, this kid began really fighting. He had an older brother who came over on a bike and went to help him. When the other kids saw that wasn't fair, they jumped in to pull him off me. So I grabbed the bike and went away. Then he had to look all over town for his bike because l just left it. After that we never had another fight.

The first time I had a relationship with my cousins Bernardo and Enrique (Berl and Hershel) was when we were all in Costa Rica. (I don't remember having much of a relationship with them before the war or in the cellar.). In Costa Rica they would sometimes take Alan and me along to a swimming place called Ojo de Agua. They would also take us to the movies. It was a custom in Costa Rica to go to the movies on Sunday night and after the movies to go to
the park, Central Park, which was right in front of the movie. The girls would walk in circles, vueltas, one way, and the boys would walk the other way. That's where a lot of friendships were made. After the park we would go and have coffee or a coke or an ice cream soda. They would be good to Alan and me and invite us because they had money and we didn't.

As young men there wasn't really much we could do socially in Costa Rica. If you went out with a non-Jewish girl everybody talked about you. lf you went out with a Jewish girl then you

were getting married — or everybody said so. The Jewish community considered itself orthodox, but most of the people really were not orthodox. So it was a very, very trying time.

Alan and I had a tremendous relationship which began in Lodz or France. We would be together a lot walking and talking. In Costa Rica the other boys would call us *maricon* which meant gay because we would walk and hold hands. We would be telling each other stories we made up about ourselves. In our stories we were heroes: Superman, Captain Marvel. If I was a hero, Alan was a hero, too. Throughout our lives it has always been that way.

GOING TO THE YESHIVA IN DETROIT

Dad was very upset about there not being a Jewish school in Costa Rica. As luck would have it, Rabbi Hirshberg who was involved with the yeshiva I was attending in Gastain, France, came to Costa Rica to raise money for a yeshiva he was establishing along with Rabbi Rothenberg, in Detroit, Michigan. Soon after he left, we got a letter from him saying that both Alan and I should come to the yeshiva in Detroit. All food, lodging, and school fees would be taken care of. All Dad had to do was raise the money to buy us plane tickets to Miami where he would meet us and take us to Chicago to stay with him — so we didn't have to worry about that. Dad didn't have the money at the time, but he somehow raised it. In April, 1949 Alan and I left Costa Rica on our way to the yeshiva in Detroit.

I was thirteen years old. I had literally never been a kid. I was either hidden from the Nazis, working to earn money for the family, or in an orphanage. At the yeshiva I didn't know what the other children knew. If the kids wanted to play ball and there weren't enough players, they would drag me along. l didn't know how to play baseball; I didn't know how to hold a mitt. One day they said, "You go out there and you stay at the plate and the pitcher is going to pitch you four balls and you'll walk." I knew how to walk. So he pitched me four balls and he hit me with one of them. That was my experience with baseball.

The yeshiva was orthodox. Their intent was for me to become a rabbi. They put me in the eighth grade. I was a very good student, but somewhere along the line I got sidetracked. It started when the rabbi caught me without a yarmulke. I argued that the Talmud does not say that you have to wear a yarmulke. He argued that you have to have faith. I just couldn't reconcile logic with faith, so from that time on I developed my own theory that I still feel comfortable with.

In August of1951 my parents were doing better financially. They opened a dry-goods store called La Perla. So they sent me a ticket to come to Costa Rica for a visit. I didn't know at the time that the Walter McCanan Immigration Act had just been enacted. So, once I left the United States l would have to apply for a new visa. I got to Costa Rica in August 1951 and it took me until December 1952 to get a student visa to go back to the United States. I went back and finished high school at the Yeshiva Chachmey Lublin in December 1953.

Alan and I knew that when we finished school in Detroit we would be returning to Costa Rica, so we decided to take a bus trip before we went back. We had a three-month vacation. First we spent six weeks working illegally. I worked as a lifeguard at the JCC pool. I sold ice cream on a bike. I helped a guy in a saloon. Alan and I made chicken coops. After we made enough money we began our bus trip. The first Greyhound stop after we left Detroit was Toledo, Ohio, where we had a break for an hour or two. We went into a restaurant and I ordered cream of tomato soup and a hamburger. That was the first non-kosher food I ever had. Alan was not judgmental about me eating the hamburger. I think he probably looked to me to do it so he could do it himself. We never felt we did anything wrong. As time went on, Dad would be a little troubled, but he never said anything.

Because December is their busiest selling month, Mom and Dad wanted us there to help. Alan and I went back to Costa Rica on December 15 and started to work in the store. We ended up working there for five years. In our store there were sometimes hours when nobody would walk in. To fill the time I began to sew. We had a sewing machine plus several sewing machines for sale. I used to make shirts and aprons. Aprons were my specialty. We sold them in the store.

I set up the financial books for Dad. I remember the accountant would come in at the end of the year and ask, "How much in taxes do you want to pay?" Then we would work backward from the books I set up. I was a natural accountant. That is when I decided I was going to be a CPA.

LIVING IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

On January 2, 1954, Alan and I went to the American Embassy and applied for resident visas. While we waited for our visas we were in business in Costa Rica. I started going to night school and later on I went to the University of Costa Rica. We opened up a second store in San Jose called the *Bazaar Detroit* and after that a third store in Alajuela. We were getting back on our feet. In October or November of 1958, when our visas came, we started liquidating. Alan and I landed in Miami on March 2,1959. My parents stayed in Costa Rica. My sister married and stayed in Costa Rica until 1962 when she and her husband moved to the United States.

I had alway wanted to be an accountant. We had an acquaintance in Miami who recommended me to his accountant so I went and interviewed. He said,"Forget it. You should leave Miami, there are no jobs here." I was despondent. The next day I went out and got a job at Jackson Byron's, a department store on Miami Beach. Alan found a job in a savings and loan about two days later. I worked for Jackson Byron's for about six weeks and then I found a job at a savings and loan company. I worked there for a year and a half. I went from teller trainee to head teller. There was a CPA who worked in Miami but had a few clients in Miami Beach who always came in to cash his check. On Miami Beach you could only cash a check if you had an account at a bank or if an officer authorized it. So, he came to me as the head teller to okay the check. After this happened a few times, he recommended me to his boss. And so, in November 1960 I went to work for a CPA firm while Alan was attending night school at the University of Miami.

Alan and I were both studying accounting. After the second year someone advised us to take an aptitude test. It came back that Alan should be an engineer and I should be a mathematician or physicist. For one business class assignment I had to prepare a resume. Unbeknown to me, my resume was given to the placement service at the university. The IRS offered me a job but then refused me because I was not a citizen. Alan went on to become an industrial engineer and I became an accountant.

l worked for the first CPA while I was attending night school. My brother and I had rented a house in the Southwest section of Miami that had room for four people so we found two roommates. One of them was Clifford Gordon who was going to the University of Miami. One night he brought over a girl he was dating named Sandy. I thought she was cute. About six, seven weeks later when he had dated other girls, I asked him if he minded if I took Sandy out. So I did. This was in 1961. Sandy was attending Teachers College, Columbia University, to get her masters and I was in Miami, so we had a lot of dating by telephone and by mail. I proposed to her on Thanksgiving 1964.

I graduated in 1963 but I could not take the CPA exam because in those days you had to be a citizen and I did not become a citizen until 1964. In February 1965 I got notice that I had passed the CPA exam. My brother was in Washington working for the United States naval propellant plant. Sandy was in New York in class. I couldn't reach my parents in Costa Rica. I was so excited, but I couldn't tell anybody!

I left the accountant I was working for and joined two other fellows and began our own firm. It was a big chance but we became very successful. Sandy and I got married in June 1965. Our son, Andrew was born in October 1969, and our daughter, Robyn followed in November 1970. In 1974 my parents left Costa Rica and moved to Miami Beach. Our family was all together once again.

VISITING POLAND

In 1973 Sandy and I decided to visit Poland. We had been married for eight years and I had still not told her anything about the war. She knew I was a survivor, but I had never told her any of the stories. The reason I hadn't until then was because it hurt to think about it and I didn't think people would believe me. On our eight hour flight I started telling Sandy the story of my survival. This was the first time that I told anybody about how I survived.

When Sandy and I got to Poland I was afraid to do anything that would attract attention. I was really afraid. When we got to Warsaw we hired a car and a driver and we went to Wilcziska to see the Sokols. Mrs. Sokol must have been about 80. The house, except for a radio on the hood of the wood-burning stove, was exactly the way I remembered it and explained it to Sandy. They still didn't have electricity. They still had an outhouse. The door between the living room, kitchen, and bedroom was still a hanging burlap bag. We saw the two daughters. Unfortunately, the son had died in an accident. As we sat on their patio eating the lunch they prepared for us, we learned that their house needed a new roof. I gave them travelers checks that were enough for them to get a new roof. My sister still maintains correspondence with the Sokol family.

Sandy with Mrs. Sokol and her granddaughters at lunch on Sokol's patio.

Sandy and I with the Sokol family in their yard in 1973.

WHAT BECAME OF EVERYONE

Devorah Popowska was the only member of the Popowska family to survive. She emigrated to Australia and later to Israel.

Uncle Moses Boruchowcz went from Poland to Costa Rica and then New York. He died in Jerusalem in 1986.

Uncle Simon and Perla Wainberg emigrated to Costa Rica and raised three children: Gita, Eva, and Betty. At Uncle Simon's funeral I learned that his children did not know that their father survived the Holocaust in hiding or that their mother had been in Auschwitz.

My father, Chaim Wainberg, died in Miami in March 1992. My mother, Perla Wainberg, died in Miami in February 2000. They had nine grandchildren and fifteen great-grandchildren.

My sister, Sarah, married a Holocaust survivor. They live half the year in Jerusalem and half the year in Miami Beach. Their daughter lives in Jerusalem. Their son lives in Miami.

My brother, Alan Wainberg, has three children. He lives in Hallandale, Florida.

My brother, Bernie Wainberg, and his wife, Ilana, live in Miami. They have a daughter, Rena, and a son, Mitch.

MY LEGACY FROM MY PARENTS

The most important thing I learned from my parents was determination — not to get way-laid because of obstacles. I learned I could find the strength to accomplish anything I set out to do even if it is sometimes difficult and painful. From my father I learned to never betray a confidence. This came into play both personally and professionally. From my grandfather, who on his deathbed in 1938, said to my father, "Do not be seen," came the legacy to do good deeds and give charity anonymously. During my working days I volunteered for many Jewish and Israeli causes and professional organizations. Since my retirement I have done volunteer work for my synagogue, the Florida Holocaust Museum, and at a hospital clinic where I interpret for patients who do not speak English.

MY MY PHILOSOPHY TODAY

When Alan and I moved to Miami for school we did not belong to any synagogue. For about twenty-five years I went to synagogue maybe three times a year. Sandy and I did not keep a kosher home. Things changed when Dad died. While sitting shiva at Dad's apartment, the rabbi asked me to lead the service. So I led the orthodox service as if I had never stopped. Now I attend synagogue regularly. If they don't have anybody prepared to read the Torah, they call on me. I am familiar with the reading having learned in the yeshiva.

Ever since the rabbi in Detroit told me I have to do and believe something even if it is not logical, I developed a philosophy I feel very comfortable with. I am blessed because I believe that the way the Jewish laws are observed changes over time. I don't feel guilty if I don't keep all the laws that I think are illogical or unnecessary. I am comfortable with my Jewish way of life now.

My family today. Left to right: Lanie, Noah, Marlin, Sandy, Sadie sitting on Sandy's lap. I am next to Sandy and Andy next to me. Standing behind us is Noah and Robyn.

SPEAKING ABOUT THE WAR

Many of the people in my family find it difficult or painful to speak about their experiences during the war. Most of them never speak about it at all. My sister does not understand how I can talk. She does not even want me to mention her name. The reason is very simple: she is still afraid. When Sandy and I moved to Tampa, I became a docent and then a speaker at the Holocaust museum there. Sandy became a docent. Once, while I was speaking at my younger brother's wife's school, my sister's son, his wife (who is also a child of survivors,) and their six children came to hear me talk. The children had never heard a thing from their parents or grandparents! My sister has never spoken a word to her children about her experience.

One thing survivors fear — this used to happen a lot in the very beginning — is that people don't really want to listen. It's not just that many survivors are afraid, many are ashamed: why didn't we do anything to fight back?

Over the years I have spoken at almost every school and university in the surrounding counties. To one school group of teenage girls I told them that I was just beginning to tell my story for the first time. I told them I hadn't told it before because I didn't think anyone would believe me. One student came up to me, took my hand, and said, "I believe you."

MY LIFE TODAY

My life today is my wife, Sandy, our daughter, Robyn, our son, Andrew, our son-in-law, Noah, and our three granddaughters, Marlin, Alaine, and Sadie. After I retired, Sandy and I moved to Tampa to be near our children. One of my greatest pleasures is having Shabbas dinner in my home surrounded by my wife, my children, and my grandchildren. Family is everything to me. My children know my feelings about being Jewish. They know the story of my survival. They know their heritage. I try to teach them that the real value in life is not in material things, but rather in having something to believe in. I believe that the hereafter comes in the legacy that you leave, that somebody remembers.

I just want people to understand, to remember, and to never let it happen again.

ABOUT THE WRITER

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Bobbi Kaufman

"What sustained us was that we didn't know how long it was going to last."

— Salomon Wainberg

Escaping from the Zelechow Ghetto in 1942, Salomon's family would spend the next two years hiding in a farmhouse cellar. Twenty-four people would live in the dark, damp, eleven by eighteen foot cellar for two years until one day the trap door opened and Polish bandits began shooting. Salomon's sister was shot. When Salomon's father begged the Poles to allow him to bury his daughter, the family escaped and hid in the fields for six weeks until liberation by the Russians. Solomon was eight years old.

In 1947 the family emigrated to Costa Rica. Salomon completed his education at the University of Miami where he met his wife. Together they raised their son and daughter.

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

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