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"We didn't miss a day" : a history in narratives of schooling efforts for Jewish children and youths in German-occupied Europe

Lisa Anne Plante

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Lisa Anne Plante entitled ""We didn't miss a day" : a history in narratives of schooling efforts for Jewish children and youths in German-occupied Europe." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education, with a major in Education.

Clinton B. Allison, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

J. Amos Hatch, Michael G. Johnson, Gilya G. C. Schmidt

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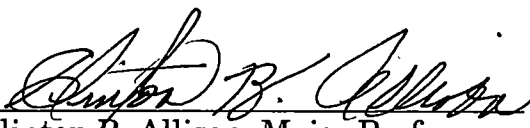
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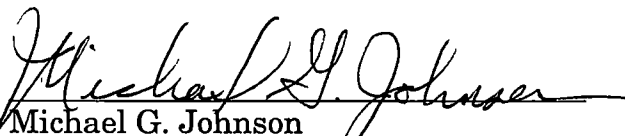
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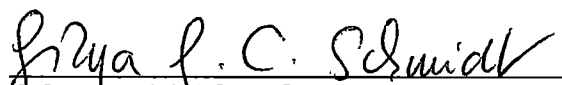
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Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

“We Didn't Miss a Day”:

A History in Narratives
of Schooling Efforts for
Jewish Children and Youths
in German-Occupied Europe.

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Education
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Lisa Anne Plante

May 2000

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter,
Jemina, who whetted my curiosity about who learns
and how, about who teaches and why, about what
people teach and what they learn, and about where
and when it happens ...

... and to the Jewish children and youths who died too
soon, as well as to those who lived against all odds ...
and to all who had the courage and the heart to
teach them.

Acknowledgments

Completion of this study is the result of the efforts of many people. The narrators, whose partial stories appear herein, did not foresee that their work would be used as I have used it and I hope that my use of their narratives would live up to their standards.

Mira Ryczke Kimmelman has been most generous. She has always been willing to share her stories, make suggestions, and encourage me to go on with this work. She has inspired me continually.

My chairperson, Prof. Clint Allison, and committee members, Profs. Amos Hatch, Michael Johnson, and Gilya Schmidt, supported and encouraged me. They each helped and encouraged me in their own unique ways. I credit them with bringing about the completion of this work.

Associate Dean Lynn Cagle provided support, a teaching opportunity, and his sense of humor. I received additional financial support from Profs. Dale Doak and Kathy Greenberg.

Associate Deans Tom George, Carol Kasworm, and (later Dean) Glennon Rowell continually showed a welcome interest in my work.

Dean (emeritus) Richard Wisniewski assisted me in ways too numerous to mention here—suffice to say he inspired me to think in new ways and always believed that I could.

Lisa Pollard first encouraged me to go ahead with this project, Diane Cudahy told everyone about it—I still run into people both at UT and “abroad” who know about my work because they heard it from her. Denise Harvey never forgets me and seems to show up whenever I need her most. Kelly McGarr will never read this—yet, I hope she knows.

My parents, Mary Nichols Miracle Plante and Joseph Jacques Plante, have gone beyond the call of parenthood—I could not have stayed at school without their encouragement. They begged me for several years after high school to attend college—and have been remarkably good in the years since about not begging me to stop. My daughter, Jemina Aleta Mariana Plante, has

probably paid the highest price in time lost with her mother; yet, she has remained enthusiastic about my efforts and encouraged me to continue.

To all of these people and so many more who made this work possible—thank you.

Abstract

This is a study of adult and youth narratives about creating and participating in schooling during what has become known as the Holocaust. Jewish narrators created works that described and analyzed their experiences and educational efforts while in hiding, in ghettos, and in concentration camps. The narratives are in the form of diaries, journals, autobiographies, testimonies, and interviews. The narratives were analyzed in order to discover personal and shared themes and are interpreted and presented in ways meant to retain their particular natures and styles. Short pieces from other sources are included to enhance understanding of the roles of education and schooling in the experiences of Jews trapped in the "Final Solution".

Narrators are introduced through short biographies. Each narrative is offered in segments interlaced with discussion of the contexts and interpretations that enhance understanding of the narrators and their schooling efforts. Following the narratives are discussions of individual and shared themes and of views critical of schooling efforts on behalf of Jewish children. Relationships between social, political, cultural and ideological positions and schooling form a subtext of the analysis of the narratives.

Educational efforts, often under fearsome bans on education for Jewish children, ranged from the autodidactic efforts of isolated children to complex, yet often clandestine, school systems. Schooling was an opportunity for resistance to German plans to destroy Judaism—when intellectual resistance was often the only possibility to fight back. Schooling connected youths and adults to each other and to their pasts, while creating possibilities for a future that many did not live to experience. It sent survivors into that future with a sense of having prepared for a new life. Many emerged from hiding places and sites of imprisonment and torture with little else. Their families and communities destroyed, their material resources stolen, no longer welcome in their own lands—only the intellectual growth and the sense of camaraderie,

fostered in the educational enterprise, accompanied them into an often hostile and strange post-war world.

Preface

No, I decided. I shall live with tomorrow, not with today. And if for every 100 ghetto children 10 can study, I must be among the fortunate ones, I must take advantage of this. Studying has become even more precious to me than before.

Yitskhok Rudashevski (1927–1943)

in the ghetto at Vilna, Lithuania 1942¹

Cattle cars.

One of the most poignant and pervasive images of the Holocaust is that of Jews transported to imprisonment and death in cattle cars. But it is a problematic image as well for in it, all too often, we equate these human passengers with the bovine cargo for whom those freight cars were intended. These human beings thus are seen as being like cattle going passively to their deaths, panicking perhaps but not resisting. Yielding to an awful fate, they wait docilely, uncomprehendingly, for their turn to be herded to the place of departure, onto the trains, into the gates of the camps to be gassed or left to die of depraved neglect—to go quietly or if not quietly at least with cries of fear rather than outrage or protest. Yet, this image is false. Rather than simply awaiting the destruction decreed for them, these people attempted in myriad ways to overcome the horrors surrounding them. They made valiant efforts to maintain or recreate some aspect of decency and dignity in their lives; and they resisted—physically, spiritually, mentally, and intellectually. One aspect of that resistance is revealed in the determination that the children would be educated. Expelled from public schools, and from “Aryan” private schools as well, then barred from conducting their own, Jews nonetheless found ways to continue to teach and learn—a decision that could not be taken lightly as the risks were considerable. Thirteen-year-old Eva Heyman described how risky in

¹Yitskhok Rudashevski, *The Diary of the Vilna Ghetto: June 1941-April 1943*, trans. Perry Matenko (Israel: Beit Lohamei Haghettaot - Ghetto Fighter's House, 1973), 120.

a diary entry in which she reveals her understanding of the dangers inherent in disobeying German prohibitions.

10 May, 1944

Dear Diary, we're here five days, but, word of honour, it seems like five years . . . on every house they've posted a notice which tells exactly what we're not allowed to do, signed by Gendarme Lieutenant-Colonel Péterffy, commander of the Ghetto-camp, himself. Actually, everything is forbidden, but the most awful thing of all is that the punishment for everything is death. There is no difference between things . . . the lightest and the heaviest punishment—death. It doesn't actually say that this punishment applies to children, but I think it does apply to us, too.²

In this dissertation, I examine the phenomenon of learning and teaching—under circumstances so appalling and so dangerous that we cannot truly imagine them—by Jews trapped by the genocidal mania of German anti-Semitism. In looking at the experiences of children and their teachers, we can begin to understand not only their connection to education and its importance to them, but also the extent to which they persevered in the arduous task of creating and participating in education.

²Eva Heyman, *The Diary of Eva Heyman*, trans. Moshe Kohn (New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1988), 89.

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Part I

Introduction

Chapter One: An Overview of Research Concerns and Methodology

In this chapter, I examine material and literature concerning children's experiences of the Holocaust, including child-related iconography and its uses in representing the Holocaust. Topics also include Jewish resistance to German aggression and oppression, the story of my research and its development—including my choice of sources, subjects, and data—and contexts both concrete and abstract. I also discuss definitions of the "Holocaust" and their influence on our understanding of the experiences of European Jews during the 1930s and 1940s. In addition, I discuss methodological issues, including the relationship between narrative and historiography.

Research on Jewish Children and Youth 1933—1945

Children and childhood were initially underrepresented in Holocaust research, although there are some excellent works on this topic. There has been a tendency to write about the Holocaust as if it were a single experience. In truth, "the Holocaust" represents a diverse set of chaotic and unpredictable experiences and for its targets, little other than the intended outcome, extermination, was common. More to the point, "Jewish" victims of German

aggression varied in terms of class, ethnicity, religion, geography, gender, and age.

Some works do deal specifically with child victims of the Holocaust . One valuable resource in understanding children's experiences is Debórah Dwork's *Children with a Star*. Dwork examines many "aspects of the lives of children and youth in the varied circumstances in which they found themselves. She divides her work into categories such as "the recognizable world," "the world without precedent or parallel," and the "unrecognizable world." In doing so, she builds a theme of children and adults existing in ever more unimaginable worlds—worlds of hiding, of ghettos, transit camps, labor camps, and of slavery and death. Drawing on a variety of sources, including the accounts of many of the youngest victims, Dwork has built a compelling description of the lives of the children, the efforts to protect and save them, and their fates.¹ Azriel Eisenberg's *The Lost Generation* is a collection of narratives of adults and children thematically arranged to give a sense of how the Holocaust influenced children's lives.² Eisenberg's work includes examples of documents and publications aimed at fostering hatred of Jews. Martin Gilbert's *The Boy's* examines the lives of a group of young survivors before, during and after the Holocaust, and illustrates a variety of experiences during those periods.³ There are a number of published personal narratives—although many are out of print—in the form of diaries, testimonies, and memoirs of Jewish children or adults who were children during the Holocaust. There are also collections that contain narratives or parts of narratives detailing the horrors visited upon European Jewry as told by children or those who were children at the time. Some of these examine particular manifestations of the Holocaust. Others are eclectic collections of narratives, and some seek to create a general understanding of children's experiences. In addition, many adult narratives and testimonies refer to children, to adult understanding of children's experiences,

¹Debórah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

²Azriel Eisenberg, *The Lost Generation: Children in the Holocaust* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982).

³Martin Gilbert, *The Boys: The Story of 732 Young Concentration Camp Survivors* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996).

and to adult's reactions to the systematic degradation and destruction of Jewish children. Some of these appear in the bibliography.

My interest here, however, is in the more specific realm of schooling and education. While many works mention education, they do not focus on it. When I first began the search, available information seemed thin. However, as I moved beyond histories of the Holocaust and began to examine first person narrative accounts, I found some very insightful and informative sources, and it is from those narratives that this project grew.

Iconography and Representation

Given the general sparseness of specific work on children's lives, in histories of any period, it is hardly surprising that children's experiences of the Holocaust have received less attention than the experiences of adults. Indeed the tendency to focus on certain aspects of the Holocaust, particularly the camp experience and the annihilation of six million Jews, has led to a narrow definition of surviving. Surviving has come, too often, to mean surviving until the end of World War II and often it means surviving the camps. Children for the most part did not survive the Holocaust and specifically not the camps. Thus we do not focus on them as survivors, nor do we focus on their lives before their untimely deaths partly because we tend to subsume children's experiences in adult experiences.

On the other hand, it is curious to think how much of the best known iconography of the Holocaust relates to children: a child's high-topped shoe that is the solitary display in the exit hall at Yad Vashem, the famous photo of the little boy in the big cap being marched away from Warsaw Ghetto—his hands held high and a worried look about him, the hideously abused twins who were subjected to Josef Mengele's monstrous "experiments," and, of course, Anne Frank, whose diary tells us so much of the hopes and fears of an adolescent

driven into hiding. These are among the most vivid and familiar symbols of this horror; yet, not much information about those children's lives is available.

Perhaps the answers lie in how we view those icons. The tiny shoe is a reminder of the innocence of the victims and of their fragility. It poignantly reminds us of the loss to the world, the adult world, of that innocence; the little boy who marches away into oblivion at rifle point reminds us of what bullies the Germans were; the twins represent the horror of something—such as Josef Mengele's medical training—meant for good yet turned to evil purposes; Anne Frank's diary reminds us of all the potential that was lost in that maelstrom.

In each case, we see the loss to adults—we may grieve for those who lost children and for the loss to the world more than for the loss to the children themselves. Perhaps such grief is more manageable. To grieve for the children themselves is too painful. It is hard to think of precocious and impertinent Anne Frank reduced to the pitiful condition that those who were with her during her last weeks of life remember. It is unbearable to think of the raw fear and incredible pain those children knew. Yet, in avoiding such dismal knowledge, we also miss their courage, their humor, their determination, and the creativity with which they strove to create a coherent world in the midst of chaos and depravity.

Story of the Research

My first remembered encounter with the Holocaust came when I was five years old. At that time, I lived in the north of France and one spring my family went on a holiday trip to Belgium. While there, we visited the former concentration camp of Breendonk. It was a grim place, and I learned that the Germans had mistreated, tortured, and killed people there. The camp stayed in my memory as a sinister place and, as I grew older and began to learn details about what we now call the Holocaust, I recognized Breendonk as a scene of those atrocities. Eventually I read Anne Frank's diary and later many other

works concerning the period. As an adult, I continued this study but also began to study education and became particularly interested in education under difficult circumstances and education of oppressed groups. One night while watching Claude Lanzmann's documentary film "Shoah," the story of Simon Srebnik particularly struck me. As a boy, Simon initially survived the death camp of Chelmno due to having been taught, by his captors, to entertain them with his beautiful singing voice.⁴ I became interested in finding out more about things that Jewish children and youths learned or things taught to them that helped them survive.

With that goal in mind I began to read and re-read Holocaust accounts and histories. In reading Holocaust literature, three things became apparent. The first was that there was nothing Jews could learn that would ultimately permit them to survive. For example, Simon's captors eventually shot him in the head and left him for dead. It was luck, not the songs he learned, that resulted in the shot missing vital areas of his brain. For others, certain things may have helped them in the short term or may have helped them at certain times. However, what helped one was fatal to another; we cannot attribute survival to any particular strategy. Debórah Dwork wrote:

There is absolutely no evidence that survival was due to anything more—or anything less—than luck and fortuitous circumstances. The notion that longevity was due to some "survival strategy" or a special "will to live" is not only arrant nonsense but a pernicious construct. The logical conclusion of such an insidious supposition is to blame the victim in a very subtle, but nevertheless absolutely vicious way.⁵

The second consideration in looking at educational experiences of Holocaust victims is that it is impossible to arrive at any real sense of the number or the percentage of children that might have engaged in or even been offered educational opportunities. Of the youths who did have access to schooling or other forms of education, it is difficult to determine to what extent

⁴Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah: An Oral history of the Holocaust* (Hollywood, Ca.: Paramount, 1985).

⁵Dwork, xxxiii-xxxiv.

they participated. A variety of intervening circumstances ensured that such activities were subject to interruption, cancellation, or the precipitous departure of some or all of the students and teachers. It is also difficult to know how effective these activities were as most of the recipients of such schooling were eventually murdered. I do not mean to say we can know nothing of efforts to educate Jewish children or of the youths' efforts to be educated. Some data give us information about certain types of schooling, at particular times, in various locations. Some post-war accounts refer to the educational attainment of particular children. Still this information is fragmentary and, in terms of the goals for this project, not especially germane. My goal is to illuminate some of the particular activities that took place, the difficulties in arranging them, the motives that underpinned them, and the meanings that they had for those engaged in them.

References to schooling in Holocaust histories are rare and frequently quite thin. Often these consist of brief mentions that a particular person, organization, or committee organized clandestine schools; but little information about what that meant exists. In contrast, personal narratives of persons who engaged in those activities, particularly those whose writings were contemporaneous, are often much more specific. They offer insightful discussions of what prompted them to either study or teach in those circumstances, the particulars of the arrangements to do so, and the difficulties and dangers contained therein.

Several things are important in construction of a narrative based account of children in the Holocaust. One is that each person whose story is contained in the work must, I think, remain recognizable as a discreet, unique individual. During their Holocaust experiences, they all suffered loss of identity, loss of recognition as individuals, loss of the familiar idiosyncrasy that grows from membership in social and kinship groups. Those who survived beyond the liberation regained those things in their personal lives, yet, are often seen as indistinct members of the group, "Holocaust survivors." In addition, many of them survived in the peculiar situation of being the only ones, or nearly the

only ones, who remembered their prior lives. Of those whose survival was brief—whom the Germans murdered before they gained their freedom—we have nothing but the stories they left behind. Those narratives are all that remain, but they are rich with the spirit of their narrators. Otto Frank, who felt very close to his daughter Anne, realized only after reading her diary how little he had actually known her in life. Even in death, the Germans denied their Jewish victims their identities; the bones of those who died at the hands of those anti-Semites lie in mass graves or the murderers dumped their ashes into fields and rivers. The ashes of many Jews form sludge that clogs the pond beside crematoria at Auschwitz II/Birkenau.

It is therefore important to allow them to tell their individual stories. It also central to our understanding of their thoughts and experiences that their stories be told, largely as they understood or understand them and as they told them. Therefore, it is essential to preserve their voices, their words, and their sense of story.

Although initially I set out to write a conventional historiographical account, in the process of collecting data, I became intimately acquainted with the persons who had provided—however inadvertently—the material I was studying. In reading the diaries in particular, but indeed all of the various accounts of Holocaust experiences, I came to know the particular individuals in a way that made it seem less appropriate to write a traditional history. I thus decided to present and explicate the particular stories as well. For this reason, I have chosen to study the narratives provided by others and to pull them together without blending them. In that way, the personalities and the humanity of these unique individuals remain.

Significance of the Study

First, and always foremost, this is a story worth hearing and one that all too many of the participants were not allowed to live to tell for themselves.⁶ This study can offer insight into a particular part of Jewish life and into the lives and concerns of some of the Holocaust's younger victims and the adults who cared for them.

In addition to the Holocaust, this study will add to the existing bodies of literature on schooling itself. In the first case, by focusing on a particular aspect of children's lives, we can begin to understand better those lives as well as the concerns of those who worked with children. In the second case, it is an examination of how European Jews created school—created it, not merely sustained it—in the midst of the most vile conditions. Even in more benign contexts, creating schools and educational experiences that foster motivation to learn poses problems. There are things we can learn from the experiences of those who participated in schooling under the most perverse conditions that speak to those difficulties.

This work will also add to a body of literature that examines the ways in which victims of the Holocaust worked to resist the forces of German oppression and to create for themselves lives of dignity. Through schooling people tried to reproduce the traditional intellectual, academic, and cultural structures of their lives prior to the persecutions. They sought to resist the oppressive edicts of the authorities. At the same time, this study examines instances wherein some sought to use schooling to change those traditions. Teachers and students used education as a means to resist not only German efforts to oppress and eradicate them, but also to resist the traditional hegemony that existed within Europe and within European Jewry of the period.

⁶Death rates in general for European Jews were staggering—the Germans murdered nearly two thirds during the period in question. Approximately ninety percent of Polish Jews were murdered. The rate for children was even grimmer—approximately 11% of European Jewish children survived overall—in some areas less. The survival rate for Jewish children in Poland was less than 0.5%. More than 99.5% of Jewish children in Poland were murdered. Dwork, 274-275, note 27.

Resistance and European Jewry

In writing about the two Warsaw uprisings of World War II, Tzvetan Todorov distinguished between the resistance at the heart of those events. In the case of the second uprising, the Warsaw Rising of 1944, in which Poles, including Jews, attempted to fight free of the Germans as the Soviets approached the city, he used the term “heroic virtues.” Confident of the support of the Russians, but also with the intention of proclaiming Polish strength and patriotism, the participants in the rising meant not only to repudiate German control, but also to stave off Soviet domination. The fighters meant the rising and its heroism make a statement to the world that Poland should be free of external control. This event, wrote Todorov, was imbued with symbolic acts and motivations that would lead to immediate freedom or at least to the besmirching of the Soviet image.⁷

The earlier Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943 was a different case, however. That desperate uprising, wrote Todorov, revealed the “ordinary virtues” of an event in which the Jewish participants engaged in a battle with the Germans who were attempting to transport them to the death camps. Lacking arms, training, outside support, or indeed any hope of success, the ghetto inhabitants nonetheless held on for several weeks. Most died—but they died deaths they chose rather than those intended by the Germans. Others escaped to fight on with partisan groups and with a Polish resistance army; still others survived in hiding. The armed resistance mirrored the resistance that existed in everyday ghetto life. There they also fought to retain their dignity as human beings, to act in caring ways toward each other, and to preserve the life of the mind that they held dear. These three components—dignity, caring, and life of the mind—constitute for Todorov the

⁷Tzvetan Todorov, *Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps* (New York: Henry Holt and

roots of ordinary virtue. It is ordinary virtue that perhaps explains the ordinary, yet in retrospect also extraordinary, determination on the part of Jewish youth and adults to continue to make and keep school during their ordeal.⁸

“The Holocaust”

The term “Holocaust,” used as a label for the German persecution and genocide of Jews during World War II, post-dates the actual occurrence of those events. As a way of setting context, it is useful in that it immediately conjures up certain images, but it is also problematic because it conjures those images. In particular, it fosters images of a people rounded up and deported to camps, such as Auschwitz, where the camp officials gassed and cremated them. The reality was no less chilling and no less lethal. However, it is also more complex. Depending upon a variety of factors, ranging from location, to relative wealth and poverty, to time, to age, to gender, the particulars of individual as well as community experiences varied greatly.

For Jews in Germany, the Holocaust was a gradual process that began with the rise to power of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party in 1933. In other countries, German edicts took place upon the occupation of the countries by German forces. However, these countries were neighbors of Germany and shared many of the same political views and machinations. Often anti-Semitism was already marking the lives of Jews before the occupation of the countries

Intensity and breadth of anti-Semitism, as well as the perceived likelihood of local gentile inhabitants seeing their own fate written in the fate of Jews, in some cases influenced decisions as to how to handle the “Jewish Question” in different locales. In addition, local feelings as to the nationality of

Company, 1996), 5-12.

⁸Ibid., 13-24.

Jews played a part. Some countries willingly gave up exiled or displaced Jews who sought safety in their territories but hampered, at least for a time, efforts to deport those who held citizenship in those countries. Even within Germany, Jewish German citizens, especially if they were citizens by birth, initially received somewhat different, and better, treatment. The Germans deported Jewish non-citizens and naturalized citizens to the eastern ghettos early, while those with longer histories in Germany stayed longer. In addition, Jews related to Christians in some instances, especially in Germany, received protection from the worst atrocities for a time. Yet, in many cases local non-Jewish citizens gladly, even gleefully, handed over Jewish neighbors to the cruel conditions imposed by the German authorities.⁹

The Germans forced Jews into ghettos, transit camps, hiding, labor camps, concentration camps, or extermination centers—some experienced all of these. In nearly all cases some aspects were congruent: fear, starvation, lack of sufficient medical care—if any—and threat of death suffused all of these situations. Although Jews were not the only victims of German oppression and aggression, all Jews, particularly all Jews in Europe, were targets of them.¹⁰

In other words, individuals experienced not so much the Holocaust as their particular Holocaust. Some had a sense of others enduring the same treatment. Others were for the most part unaware of what was happening to Jews outside of their own countries or, for that matter, outside of their own communities. While in this age of mass communication this seems nearly

⁹Lucy. Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1975), Debórah Dwork, *Children With a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), Martin Gilbert *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1985), James M. Glass, *"Life Unworthy of Life": Racial Phobia and Mass Murder in Hitler's Germany* (New York: BasicBooks, 1997), Nora Levin, *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-1945* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1968), Leni. Yahil, *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry 1932-1945*, trans. Ina Freidman and Haya Galai. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) and all of those whose narratives appear in this work present material on German conduct toward Jews in their ever intensifying campaign of torture and extermination. In addition, each of these demonstrates the ways in which treatment of Jews revolved around central themes and how it was differentiated in various places, and different times, and against groups whose characteristics and contacts with gentiles varied.

¹⁰Ibid.

inconceivable, in the first half of the twentieth century mass communication was little more than radio and newspapers. The removal of news media left whole communities, especially those surrounded by walls and barbed wire, bereft of news and at the mercy of rumor and propaganda. In addition, those were countries at war or under occupation and the Germans disrupted or strictly controlled reliable sources of information. In this instance, communities starved not only for food but also for information. Whatever understanding existed as to German intentions toward Jews, there was a strong inclination not only to save children and youth if possible, often by extraordinary means, but also to educate them.

Furthermore, the degree of malevolent scrutiny experienced by persons in different situations varied greatly. Hanna Lévy-Hass, for example, reported that conditions in the camp at Belsen were such that the guards rarely ventured inside the camp and especially not into the barracks. This state of affairs afforded the prisoners a dubious freedom provided they set a watcher to warn them of the infrequent inspections.

I remember it was more dangerous in Cetinje, because that was a small prison and we were continuously under guard. But in the concentration camp it was not so bad. The Nazis, the SS "supermen," took good care not to get too close to the prisoners in the huts, because we were not regarded as human beings. They only came close in order to shout at us or beat us or pick people out for the slave gangs at the 'roll calls.' . . . We did it at times when the Germans were unable to come. Sometimes they came unawares and then it was dangerous. But the children were so clever that nobody could see what we were doing.¹¹

Many circumstances arose that exacerbated the difficulty of making or keeping school. Hunger, disease, death, deportation, separation—of children and parents, of students and teacher, of siblings, or of other support groups—could lead to cessation of schooling, albeit not always permanently. Schooling was also dangerous aside from the fact that it was often illegal. The

¹¹Hanna Lévy-Hass, *Inside Belsen*, trans. Ronald Taylor (Totowa, NJ: Barnes & Noble books, 1982), 70-71.

congregation of children into one spot made them easy targets for capture, deportation, and murder. In the "Final Solution" children were prime targets.¹²

The Germans spared some adults to work and when the slaves finished or became too weak to work, they killed them. Children had no place in the work force and so the Germans killed them expeditiously. Their only worth to their captors lay in their value as hostages used to extract cooperation from adults or as sops, who by their continued lives served to placate the fears of adults. Yet, even as the Germans accorded little value to Jewish children, the Jewish communities saw them as beyond value. Children's lives received particular attention, and implementation of a variety of measures aimed at preserving them existed. Before the sealing all borders, some parents sent their children away to safety—many such children never saw their families again. Parents and other adults hid children before deportation to avoid the camps or within camps to prevent their deaths.¹³

Understanding and Writing the Holocaust

To begin to understand the Holocaust, and the experiences of those caught in it, we must understand the Holocaust as being *sui generis*. Thus, we can never completely know what anyone experienced. Explanations that might suffice in other contexts do not always work in this one. Language has different meanings and these meanings may fall short of conveying reality. Raul Hilberg suggests that if we "were not there" we cannot quite comprehend the experiences of those who were.¹⁴ It does not mean that we cannot try, only that we must not be bound by categories as we understand them in other contexts. In addition, we must remember that the readers, in most instances,

¹²Dwork, xliii and Martin Gilbert, *The Boys: The Story of 732 Young Concentration Camp Survivors* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 2.

¹³Dwork., xx.

¹⁴Raul Hilberg, "I Was Not There," in *Writing and the Holocaust*, Berel Lang, ed. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 17-19.

were “not there” so it is incumbent upon those who write about the Holocaust to always keep present the context.

Adorno is sometimes quoted as stating that, “After Auschwitz, to write a poem is barbaric”—yet the quote in question goes on to specify that this is true if to do so means to:

squeeze aesthetic pleasure out of the naked bodily pain of those who have been knocked down by rifle butts. . . .Through aesthetic principles or stylization . . . the unimaginable ordeal still appears . . . as if it had some ulterior purpose. It is transfigured and stripped of some of its horror, and with this, injustice is already done to the victims. ¹⁵

Hilberg cautions that:

How much more removed from . . . actuality are those works whose authors have introduced a theme or theory or just a visible thought to which the evidence has been subordinated . . . these recreators of the Holocaust, be they historians, sculptors, architects, designers, novelists, playwrights or poets are molding something new. ¹⁶

This admonition means, among other things, that when writing about the Holocaust one must situate it squarely within that context. It is not enough to focus on the making of school in the absence of school unless the circumstances that created that absence and the difficulties, dangers, and improbabilities are clear.

It is not sufficient, however, simply to understand the context if we do not also understand those persons who acted within that context. If we go back to Linden’s comments on what it was that people survived, we can see that each person experienced a plethora of types of experiences and combinations thereof. In addition each person’s understanding of the experiences, and the intended outcome, grew not only from those Holocaust experiences we can

¹⁵Theodor Adorno quoted by Irving Howe, *ibid.*, 179.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 22-23

identify, but also from the many other experiences and circumstances of their lives.

Contexts

The time contexts of this study are, for the most part, the late 1930s—in particular from 1939—through mid-1945. The physical contexts are the ghettos, concentration camps, and hiding places of Jewish children in German occupied territories. The Holocaust ended, as it began, earlier for some than for others. Liberation came for some Jews months earlier than for others. The earliest liberated Jews reached “home,” or some safe place outside of Occupied Europe, months before others who at the same time were beginning some of the cruelest parts of their ordeals.¹⁷ Others had in some way escaped to safety months or years before the end of the war.

More specifically, the context includes the physical conditions that prevailed as well as the restrictions placed upon education of Jewish children. In thinking about contexts it is important to remember that the Jews during the Holocaust lived in two different worlds—one was the Holocaust. Another context was the political, social, and cultural world of Europe of that time. For the teachers, students, and parents context includes educational milieu of the period, particularly of Western societies. Realizing that they did not operate free of that context is important to understanding the approaches used in school making. The Germans forced European Jews into an untenable position. The Holocaust was and is *sui generis* and its targets had little but past experience and their own creativity with which to negotiate its perils. Although they did whatever they could to save themselves, they were lost in a strange world. The counter schemes, by which they sought life in the midst of death, were rooted in two unattainable worlds—the past, that was forever lost to

¹⁷At the time of her death, Anne Frank believed that her parents were dead. Her father, however, was not only alive but was making his way back to Amsterdam.

them, and a future, that was knit of the hopes of a people doomed by the evil of mid-century Germany.

It is important to understand the particular stories of individual persons from diverse backgrounds. It should be understood that, while these persons were all considered Jews, and in most cases identified themselves as such, they were also representative of the many European nationalities and cultures. They were from a variety of social and economic classes; they and others understood their Jewishness quite differently. Some were Jewish only in the sense that they came from Jewish families; others were, religiously and culturally speaking, deeply Jewish. Some were thoroughly and proudly assimilated—or thought they were—into modern European society, others were noticeably Jewish, and some were Zionist.

In addition, often regardless of these other differences, the particular circumstances into which German aggression forced them differed substantially. Living in hiding was different from living in ghetto; living in a ghetto differed from living in camp. Even within those categories, experiences differed greatly. Looking at the case of those who hid, we can see that some Jews hid with their families, some alone. Some Jews hid openly—concealing their Jewishness not their existence—and others hid in sewers. Some Jews hid in concealed rooms or apartments, some in storage compartments, and some in religious institutions. Some Jews hid themselves and some were hidden by others. Likewise, various conditions prevailed in ghettos and in camps. All of these things, combined with individual propiologies, served to influence a variety of individual experiences.

Methodology

Aside from the particular problems and needs of Holocaust research is the problem of how to deal with this particular body of data. I have chosen in this work to use a narrative approach to analyze and present findings.

In Chapter Two, I discuss the natures of the various types of materials I used in constructing this account of schooling in the Holocaust. I include brief biographical introductions to those persons whose stories I am using for this project. Chapters Three through Six consist of "Narrative Analyses" in which I have focused on reading the data and constructing from it the several stories of various persons who participated in educational activities.¹⁸ The narrators had thoughtfully constructed their stories. However, in this case it was the stories of education that were made figural with the inclusion of relevant and pertinent details of the circumstances and conditions in which those stories are grounded. In the introductions and footnotes of these chapters, I included pieces from additional sources. These are not less important sources so much as they are less full. Some of them have only short or particular things to say about school in the Holocaust but things that nonetheless add depth or breadth to our understanding.

A perusal of extant sources indicates that many children had access to some form of schooling. Yet it is probably impossible to extrapolate any valid description of a "usual" experience as conditions and combinations of conditions were chaotic and constantly, often abruptly, changing. In a sense, one can look only at the available sources and say, "this is what happened for this person at this time and in this place." In addition, many of these school makers, children and adults, did not live to tell their stories. Indeed, death rates were so high as to suggest that the most "usual" experience of all was death. Yet death rate figures are misleading in that, while the Germans murdered the majority of European Jews, and a large percentage of children in particular, until their murders they lived, as did those who ultimately escaped or achieved liberation. In living, however briefly, they went about the business of daily existence.

In the "Narrative Analyses" I present and discuss the individual experiences and stories of the research subjects. This approach, focuses on Dollard's seven criteria for life history that are, briefly, (1) cultural context(s);

¹⁸Donald E. Polkinghorne, "Narrative configuration in qualitative analysis," *Life History and Narrative*, ed. J. Amos Hatch and Richard Wisniewski (London: The Falmer Press, 1995) 5-6, 16.

(2) bodily dimension and propensities; (3) significant others/relationships; (4) goals/actions/choices, struggles/emotions/values; (5) historical continuity/social events; (6) story—temporal and distinctive; and (7) plausibility/coherence.¹⁹ These criteria are essential for understanding the activities of children and their teachers in the Holocaust. Indeed, in some cases we must—as best we can—know these things in more than one way. For example, it is necessary to know not only that Anne Frank studied and wrote her diary within the confines of the “secret Annex,” that she was hiding for her life with her family and associates during World War II, that she was female, Jewish, and adolescent, but also that prior to this time she lived in a Western European assimilated environment and thought of herself as a modern Western adolescent who happened to be Jewish.

Anne, for example, wrote her diary in Dutch while Moshe Flinker, who was also a Dutch-reared adolescent whose family attempted to hide, wrote in Hebrew. His diary, in contrast to Anne’s, contained much material reflecting both his Orthodox religiosity and his Zionism. One should also understand the differing roles of males and females in the practice of Judaism, especially Orthodox Judaism. Persecution as Jews called for different responses from males and females, depending upon their particular religious and cultural orientation to Judaism.

It is necessary to understand, to the degree possible, what each person meant by being “Jewish” as the differences are profound. It is useful as well to understand the parallel worlds that people inhabited. Even within concentration camps, for example, there were disagreements brought with the prisoners from outside the context of the Holocaust and from outside of Judaism, that pertained to a variety of social, cultural and political decisions. These included such things as progressive versus traditional and secular versus religious schooling, political configurations and support, social class and ethnic loyalties, plus Judaic sects and religious versus secular identity. These differing perspectives appear in the personal writings of Jews at the time. They

¹⁹Ibid., 17-18

become important because, while many different persons endured the “same” experiences, the meanings of those experiences, and the motives for responses to experiences or to the anticipation of experiences, were often quite different.

Chapter Seven is an “Analyses of Narrative.” There I briefly analyze the narratives from Chapters Three through Six to find significant themes among the various sources. I used the particular experiences, as well as the descriptions and explanations of those experiences, to construct accounts of types of experiences organized around those themes—always remembering that these accounts were not formed or recorded with this specific project in mind, are not definitive, and are open to further examination and interpretation.²⁰

Chapter Seven is a construction from the several accounts into an analysis of the meanings and purposes of school for those school makers. There I took an interpretive, hermeneutic approach to telling what they did as well as how and why they did it. That methodology consisted of combining perceptions of the subjects and my own analysis as described by Goodson and LeCompte and Preissle. Goodson distinguished between “life story”—that told by the person who lived or experienced something—and “life history”—that which is constructed through the story of the “giver” and the methodology and interpretation of the “taker” or researcher.²¹ LeCompte and Preissle wrote that “the reality of ... [a] scene is the product of multiple perceptions.... [Interpretive] studies are framed by descriptions of, explanations of, or meanings given to phenomena by both the researcher and the study participants.”²²

Ruth Linden found that accounts of a particular aspect of several people’s experiences when combined “are necessarily more fragmented . . . than many survivors’ accounts of their lived experiences.”²³ She further suggested

²⁰Ibid., 5, 13-14

²¹Ivor F. Goodson, ed. *Studying Teachers’ Lives*. (New York: Teacher’s College Press, 1992), 236-237.

²²Margaret D. LeCompte and Judith Preissle. *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, 2d. ed. (San Diego: Academic Press, Inc., 1993), 31-32.

²³Ruth R Linden, *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (Columbus: Ohio State

that part of that jaggedness relates to our perception of the Holocaust as opposed to the perceptions of those who lived it and, perhaps more importantly, their experience of it. "No one," she wrote, experienced "the Holocaust per se. They [experienced] ghettos, deportations, and concentration camps. They hid. They passed on the Aryan side. They resisted."²⁴

I approached this material from a phenomenological perspective that combines elements of hermeneutic and oral history research.²⁵ Interpretation, organization and design, according to Bogdan and Biklen, must emerge from the data.²⁶ My approach, therefore, was to treat these texts much as I would if they were transcripts of interviews. Some of them are based on interviews, and even those that are not seem to have been written as "testimony"—that is to say as a conscious attempt to leave a record of what transpired and what victims of German persecution experienced. Chapter Seven serves as an opportunity to gather the previous analyses, to discuss implications, and to shape a denouement.

Narrative and Historiography

The Jewish people were caught in a cage; they had no way out. The hopelessness of their situation, the problems they faced, their behavior in the face of death, all these cannot be relegated to our historical research alone. You cannot approach an understanding of the Holocaust without the soul-searing writings of those who were there.²⁷

Yehuda Bauer, in the above quote, writes in reference to historiography of the Holocaust. Perhaps it is true of any historical phenomena that they can

University Press, 1993.), 102.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Shulamit Reinhartz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 128-130.

²⁶Robert C. Bogdan and Sari K. Biklen, *Qualitative Research for Education: An Introduction To Theory and Methods* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1982), 75.

²⁷Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), 49.

be best understood through the words of those who were there. It is especially true of the Holocaust as it is beyond the scope of any experiences we have had. The particular individuals who found ways to share their experiences with us add a dimension of understanding that we can never get from examination of documents, orders, decisions, or third person descriptions. Furthermore, in examining the events of the Holocaust, we are faced with a dearth of certain sorts of documents we might normally find with which to examine phenomena of modern western societies. Finally, the Holocaust is *sui generis*. Our understanding of human endeavors, indeed of the conditions in which humans endeavored, within the Holocaust is never more than ephemeral. The primary means of communicating those horrors is language, and language was developed and is used in a very different context. Still, by examining the accounts, the stories, of those impacted by the Holocaust, we can begin to understand at least some shadow of their experiences. We can thus begin to understand the purposes and meanings by which they ordered their actions and their intellectual existence.

I used a juxtaposition of narrative analysis and analysis of narrative. I read each of the narratives in its entirety to form an understanding of the means, motives, and meanings by which each person lived his or her life. In particular, by seeing how each created, participated in, and perceived school, it is possible to gain some understanding of the role that school had in the person's life and the role the person had in the school experience both for self and for others.

In case of narrative analysis, my method was to study each source, to peruse it for all references to school or education and to then construct from that perusal an abbreviated form of the larger narrative built around those schooling experiences. In some cases it was possible to find additional material that further enriches our understanding of the person's life, perhaps material from the pertinent time as well as during life prior to the Holocaust and, if it existed, subsequent life. Such material can shed light upon the individuals' actions and experiences.

In creating these condensed narratives, I sought to include passages that are not directly related to education but that add texture to the overall story. I have been mindful of the seven criteria proposed by Dollard for creating life history. The will and ability to create and maintain education depended upon a variety of factors including "cultural context(s), bodily dimension and propensities, significant others/relationships, goals/actions/ choices, struggles/emotions/ values, historical continuity/social events, story—temporal and distinctive, and plausibility/coherence." To that end I included material found in near proximity to references to education as well as pertinent material that furthers our understanding of conditions surrounding it.

Following construction of these narratives, I read each to find and articulate themes that are significant to our understanding of these activities and experiences. Where possible I have done so through use of direct quotes from the original creators of the narratives. In other instances I have paraphrased or combined parts of quotes but always with the particular intention of conveying the person's meaning in a way that is coherent and does not distort the original story.

If it is important to know the individual stories, it is also essential to understand the story more broadly. Thus, I have also included an analysis of narratives. Here I took from the narrative analyses the themes of the individual stories and combined them to create a series of broader, common themes that aid in understanding some of the cross-national, cross-ethnic, cross-class, cross-gender, cross-Jewish, cross cultural means, motives, and meanings of education. Through this analysis of narrative, an understanding of the making and keeping of school serves not only to intensify the understanding of school as a social product and activity, but also is important because education, which rarely happens in isolation, did not do so here either. These school makers operated within social contexts. Even those who suffered from isolation nonetheless lived surrounded by other people who may have been unaware of their existence or may have been antipathetic to their educational aims but nonetheless influenced what happened. More importantly

most students and all educators interacted directly with others and often with persons different in myriad ways from themselves. If we cannot know the stories, not even the probable stories, of everyone, then we can look at the commonalty of the stories we do know. Thus, we gain a sense of what occurred among the oppressed and mistreated Jews of the period and of how and why and to what purpose they pushed beyond the limits of wretched existence to create and conduct school.

Chapter Two:

An Exploration of Sources

In this project, I use three basic types of sources. The first is diaries and journals contemporaneous to the period. The second category is autobiographical works produced sometime after the period under study. This category includes written pieces and a third type—interviews of Holocaust survivors, including some done years later. Each of these has certain unique qualities, as well as some similarities, some strengths, and some weaknesses. Although they are not all of the same type, in my use of them I make little difference. This chapter includes discussion of my research sources, including a brief introduction to the persons whose narratives appear in Chapters Three through Six. It also includes discussion of the types of material used and what I know of the circumstances under which the narratives were made. For example, in the case of diaries, it is of some value to understand the difficulties of diary keeping and how the diaries survived and, in some cases, who recovered them and how they did it. It is also important to understand the proximity of memoirs and interviews to the events they describe and the catalysts that led to the sharing of those accounts.

Imbedded in a wall within the Jewish cemetery that once formed part of the border between “Aryan” Warsaw and the Warsaw Ghetto is a mosaic made of rescued pieces of grave stones that were broken and defaced during the German occupation. These pieces do not make a picture; nor do they, in the conventional sense, form a design. Nevertheless, they tell a story of destruction and they serve to remind us of the people they existed to remind us of—albeit in quite a different way than if they still stood sentinel marking their graves. Their inscriptions are incomplete—names without dates, dates without names, parts of names, parts of dates. They remind us of memory lost. For the

most part, these are not the gravestones of victims of the Holocaust in the usual sense but of those who died earlier. Yet, that wall reminds us of the destruction of Polish Jewry. We are reminded of all the things broken—the lives, the memories, as those who would have tended the memories of these dead were themselves annihilated, the human bonds of kinship and friendship, and identity.

In discussing the Frankfurt school's cultural and literary critic Walter Benjamin's dream of producing a work formed entirely of quotations, Ruth Linden described it as a mosaic.¹ I think that if one uses the metaphor of "mosaic" it is necessary to remember the nature of mosaic. Accounts of the Holocaust, especially accounts of the experiences of multiple persons, are like mosaics. Pieces of things destroyed are fitted together to form a story. Such accounts are like unfinished or broken mosaics. Parts are missing; they do not have neat borders; but, patterns and pictures tell stories, and the parts themselves, as well as the whole, speak to the beholder. Of Benjamin's ideas, Linden said:

For Benjamin,¹² claims made in a single, authoritative voice falsified history. Modern narratives told from a seamless point of view betrayed phenomena as they appeared in reality

¹²Benjamin, a German Jew, was reluctant to emigrate from Europe to America along with other members of the Frankfurt School. Thus he remained in Paris until 1940. Following internment in the concentration camp at Nevers, he attempted to reach the Spanish border via an escape route over the Pyrenees. Although Benjamin could not obtain an exit visa in France, colleagues at the Institute of Social Research (the Frankfurt School in exile in New York) obtained an emergency American visa for him. But just before the party arrived in Spain, authorities sealed the border. That night, Benjamin committed suicide. The next day the border was reopened and the rest of the group entered Spain safely. See *The Dialectical Imagination*, 197–98.²

Using a variety of sources such as diaries, journals, memoirs, and interviews, it is possible to create a representation of the experiences of those who lived within the context of the Holocaust. Again, as in the creation of a

¹Ruth R Linden, *Making Stories. Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993), 15.

²*Ibid.*

mosaic, the story and its form are dependent upon available material. In this instance, there are limited quantities of some materials; others are more abundant; some are plain, some more intricate and elaborate. Lucidity varies as does the richness of detail, the texture, the depth of color, and the raw material that forms it. The narratives reflect the differences in the nature of the data. Those stories are not the same in terms of length, depth, scope, or presentation. Each is as unique as the person who narrated it, the circumstances under which it was originally created, and the events surrounding it.

Types of Data Sources

The use of diaries and journals presents certain challenges. The impetus and the sustaining factors for writing were not the same; in the cases presented in this work there is presumably a variety of motives. Anne Frank and Moshe Flinker, for example, seem to have begun to write as a substitute for the peer interaction prohibited them by the need to hide. Both poured out not only their feelings and frustrations but chronicled their other activities. Both used their diaries to voice grievance not only for the events that had driven them into hiding but also for those complaints against families and for friends with whom they were in too close, too constant contact. In Anne's case, it becomes clear that she eventually recognized the possibility of using her diary as a form of witness to these events and of someday publishing it. She even began the task of editing and writing her diary with an eye toward this eventuality. Moshe, on the other hand, used his diary to express his religious grounding and to strengthen and refine his sense of Jewishness.³ In both cases, it is clear that these are not simply the diaries of Holocaust victims but of

³Moshe Flinker, *Young Moshe's Diary: The Spiritual Torment of a Jewish Boy in Nazi Europe* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem), 1976.

adolescents caught up in those events, yet still struggling with the more personal struggles of adolescent development.

Adults' reasons for diary and journal writing were in some cases rather different from those of adolescents. Diarists wrote in order to create records of their personal experiences; journal keepers wrote to chronicle the fate of their people. Some wrote alone and others collaborated with fellow writers. Journalists sometimes wrote simply to record facts, as they occurred or were revealed, with the implication or stated intention that others might later use the data to construct interpretive accounts.⁴ In such cases, there was often a sense that something was occurring that they could not understand but that was momentous.

Regardless of the particulars of the individual diarists, one thing was common to all: the keeping of a diary or journal was in itself an act of resistance. It was true in the sense that these writers recorded inhumane, and indeed inhuman, treatment of the Jewish peoples—and acts of resistance were dangerous acts. For this reason, many exercised some caution in writing. Diaries or journals written during the Holocaust by Jews have at least three potential audiences: the diarist, sympathetic others—e. g. other Jews, other victims of the Germans, or anyone unsympathetic to the Germans, and hostile others—e. g. the Germans, their allies, and their collaborators—including those who otherwise resisted the Germans but collaborated with them in the persecution of Jews. Many diarists concealed their diaries, sometimes on their persons. Others suffered the threat of destruction of their diaries by those close to them. In the Frank family's hideout, there was ongoing uneasiness about her diary and discussion of its destruction as a safety precaution. Bertije Bloch-van Rhijn's family buried her diary and dug it up periodically so that she could write in it. We now know that some writers, like Anne Frank, used pseudonyms and that others, like Emanuel Ringelblum, omitted mention of participation in central events or avoided details that might have led, if the diaries were

⁴Emanuel Ringelblum, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto*, ed. and trans. Jacob Sloan (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1958), xxi.

confiscated, to danger for the authors or others.⁵ It is often difficult, when not impossible, to know who was concealing what. Only if the diarists or other witnesses survived do we know some of what they omitted. Ringelblum, for example, wrote extensively of events in the Warsaw Ghetto. Yet, we can not tell, from his writing, of his involvement in the ghetto Resistance or of his part in the planning and implementation of the Ghetto Uprising. However, we now know that it was considerable. Even when we learn from other sources that a diarist participated in things not mentioned in the diary, we often cannot know whether the lack of inclusion in the diary was related to caution or to the importance that the activity held for the diarist. Likewise it is often not clear, when a diarist ceases to mention an activity, if the activity was discontinued, if the diarist, having described it, has simply moved on to write of other things, or if the diarist has made a decision not to mention it again in order to conceal it.

In contrast, some sources for the study are autobiographical, *ex post facto* pieces. Here the problem is different. Children are the best tellers of children's stories. However, most Holocaust survivors were adults. They may have been children or youth during part of the Holocaust, but they grew up in time to have some opportunity to survive—albeit adulthood may have arrived precipitously. Others survived as children but recorded their accounts of that survival later. Even a few years makes a difference between children and adults. Adults often couch stories in familiar structures. They structure stories to the concerns of adult storytellers and audiences of the stories. Children and youth, on the other hand, were more concerned with school than with other things they could not control or understand. Also, unlike diaries and journals, memoirs and interviews present a story constructed from the perspective of knowing the whole story—unlike diaries written as events unfolded. Details both ordinary and extraordinary fill diaries and journals, but extraordinary or, in the case of the Holocaust, the most catastrophic events, characterize autobiography. Israel Milejowski writing from Warsaw Ghetto in 1942 stated that:

⁵Ibid.

The Ghetto, which struck us so murderously, constitutes the greatest affliction and ruin for both the community and the individual. All our other plagues and tribulations vanish in comparison with the Ghetto.⁶

Dr. Milejowski committed suicide in January 1943 during transport to Treblinka—less than a year after writing the above quoted piece.⁷ Presumably, if he had experienced life in a camp he might have revised his view of the Ghetto as the “greatest affliction”; indeed, his suicide suggests that a change in thinking did occur. It is possible that keeping school may figure largely in contemporaneous accounts, while subsequent accounts, in which the author knows that after the ghetto came Auschwitz or some other incomprehensible experience, may in an effort to convey what was clearly abnormal, give short shrift to prior attempts to sustain normal ways of life.

A somewhat different form of autobiographical material is the interview. While an open-ended interview shares some characteristics of the written autobiography, it is also open to elaboration or explication at the request of the interviewer. Sharing the “whole story” perspective with other forms of ex post facto storying, it nonetheless is open to the influence of questions. These questions could include the research question and clarifying questions whose answers fill the gaps in the researcher’s understanding. On the other hand, this very characteristic lends itself to skewed responses. Thus data may be accurate and, at the same time, responses may reflect the interviewer’s, rather than the interviewee’s, sense of the importance of certain phenomena.

⁶Alan Adelson and Robert Lapidés, comps. and eds., *Lodz Ghetto: Inside a Community Under Siege* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 149.

⁷The piece is dated “Warsaw, 1942.” Milejowski mentioned a visit to Warsaw by Chaim Rumkowski approximately one year earlier when he hired physicians (twelve or thirteen depending on the source). *The Chronicle of the Lodz Ghetto: 1941-1944*. Lucjan Dobroszycki, ed. and Richard Lourie, Joachim Neugroschel, et al., trans. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 55, lists Rumkowski as having returned to Lodz on May 20, 1941 after having hired thirteen physicians. Dawid Sierakowiak, in his diary, put the number at twelve when he wrote on May 21st that Rumkowski had returned the pervious day. Milejowski probably wrote this no later than July 1942, as it does not appear to have been written following the mass deportation of that month. After that deportation the ghetto was greatly changed and in ways that would have led him to understand the real horror of deportation that his suicide indicates he eventually understood.

I have chosen not to privilege one form of narrative over another. Not everyone had an opportunity to keep a diary; not everyone who kept a diary was able to save it; not all saved diaries are found.⁸ Arthur Poznanski, discussing his German orders to clear away the possessions that remained in the former ghetto at Piotrkow in Poland, reported that “every day countless books, diaries, photographs, letters, and mementos of a whole community were thrown on bonfires.”⁹ By the same token, not everyone lived to create autobiographical materials. Not everyone who lived has the will or the talent required for writing accounts of traumatic and grief laden experiences. Not everyone is alive or available to give interviews. In addition it is the variety of sources and the varied strengths of each that lend richness to a project such as this one.

Sources

In thinking through the process of exploring this topic, it quickly became clear that it would be necessary to make some choices about what to include. Historians have directed little specific attention toward the topic of schooling during the Holocaust. There is, however, a significant body of material contained in diaries of the period, as well as in subsequent testimony and autobiography by which we can learn of it.

The mortality rate for children was abysmal—nearly ninety percent did not survive to tell of their experiences. However, there are a number of diaries containing testimony left behind by those who did not live to tell of their lives. Children who reached adolescence, especially mid-adolescence, by the time that they faced selection for slave labor or deportation in the ghettos, or for work or the gas chambers in the camps, were infinitely more likely to survive

⁸Gonda Redlich's diary lay in its hiding place (a woman's purse hidden in an attic at Terezin) until workers discovered it in 1967—23 years after the Germans sent Gonda to Auschwitz.

⁹Martin Gilbert, *The Boys: The Story of 732 Young Concentration Camp Survivors* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 122.

long enough to be liberated. Thus, many of the accounts of youths are those of adolescents and older preadolescents. Most of what we know of the education of young children either we know from the accounts of outsiders to the actual process of schooling or from those who taught them.

Often those who took care of and educated young children shared their fate—either because, like Janusz Korczak, they chose to remain with them until the end or because proximity to young children was often tantamount to a death warrant.¹⁰ Young children, in addition, seem to have longed for school but were less assiduous in seeking or creating it. They went to school if sent, accepted education if offered, but beyond an intense yearning, they were more helpless to enact it. Many older children, already socialized to school, were adamant about continuing to be educated. They sought out school; they enlisted teachers; or they made it for themselves—in groups, where feasible, or as individuals. There are some instances of autodidactic activities, some seemingly ritualized, by which children managed to create school.

In contrast, older teachers, like older adults in general, were less likely to survive than younger ones. For this reason, the preponderance of data comes from older children and younger adults. There were Jews in rural areas, villages, and *shtetls* but there seems to be more material from those who came from cities or towns.¹¹ The Germans apparently considered rural areas, villages, and *shtetls* conducive to on-the-spot murder with few selections for slave labor and few or no survivors. Often the first contact with Germans—those acting for them—resulted in annihilation. Prior to that contact, there may have been no need to make a special effort for schooling as the Germans

¹⁰Janusz Korczak (née Hirsh [Henryk] Goldszmit) was an esteemed pediatrician, educator, and author. He was director of an orphanage in Warsaw Ghetto who accompanied his charges to Treblinka although he had opportunities to escape. UNESCO declared 1978-1979 "The International Year of the Child" in honor of Korczak's centennial. Some works that detail his life and work include: Adir Cohen, *The Gate of Light: Janusz Korczak, the Educator and Writer Who Overcame the Holocaust* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1994); Joseph Hyams, *A Field of Buttercups* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.); and Betty Jean Lifton, *The King of Children: A Biography of Janusz Korczak* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1988); and Janusz Korczak, *Ghetto Diary* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1978).

¹¹*Shtetls* were Jewish communities, especially in Eastern Europe, in the form of small towns or villages.

had not yet forbidden it—or word of the ban or anyone to enforce it had not arrived.¹²

Other problems exist as well. In some cases diarists engaged in detailed descriptions of school for a period of time and then ceased to mention it at all. In most cases it is not possible to know whether this indicates a cessation of school or if, having described it and discussed it, the diarist simply moved on to other subjects. In only a few instances did anyone mention that school had ceased. Many of the accounts I located that mention schooling are from older children and young adults. These tended to be urbanized persons and included both those who wrote diaries and those who survived to tell of their experiences—both small percentages of the total population of European Jewry.

It is possible to define schooling or education narrowly or broadly; in addition, the two terms are not necessarily synonymous. Educational historian Lawrence Cremin provided a broad definition of education as: “the deliberate, systematic, and sustained, effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, and skills, or sensibilities, as well as the outcomes of that effort.”¹³ This definition is congruent with the one I have used in looking at schooling and education experiences of Jewish youth in this work. One definition of school is an institutional experience whose goals include education, but in this case I use both and do not always make a distinction between them. Some children were educated singly or in tiny groups but they or their teachers attempted to be school-like. Groups of children participated in education under circumstances having school-like attributes so that education was extensive but participants bemoaned the lack of school because the material

¹²Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1992), 1-2 and 55-70; Yaffa Eliach, *There Once Was a World: A Nine-Hundred-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok*. (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 581-594; Ernst Klee, Willi Dressen, and Volker Riess, eds., “The Good Old Days”; *The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders*, trans. Deborah Burnstone (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 178-179. Gebietskommissar Gerhard Erren: “. . . neither barbed wire nor guard manpower was available. I . . . began preparations for a large scale action. . . . [which] rid me of [18,000] mouths to feed. . . . The plains were extensively cleansed . . . by the Wehrmacht. Unfortunately [only] in villages with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants.”

¹³Lawrence A. Cremin, *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Basic Books, Inc Publishers, 1977), viii.

components of school were lacking. Life for Jews under German domination was chaotic, ever changing, and disrupted. Indeed, Cremin's use of the word sustained is somewhat problematical as many schooling efforts of Jewish Teachers and students during the Holocaust meet the definition of sustained only by the standards of the Holocaust. Perhaps more importantly they mean to sustain them for as long as possible. What I have looked for is instances where children learned and especially in ways that somehow related to school as they would have understood it in terms of either structure or curriculum—albeit that curriculum might have been outside of what they, personally, might in normal circumstances have been expected to study.

Choosing Narrators

In looking at schooling experiences for Jewish children in the Holocaust, it is not sufficient to think about children alone. The Holocaust requires that one employ different categories. The usual categories of students, teachers, administrators, or parents are inadequate for describing the roles and relationships of individuals in that context. Furthermore, for certain children, much of what we know comes not from the children themselves but from their teachers and caregivers as the children themselves did not survive. There are aspects of teacher roles that influenced children's experiences in ways the children may not have understood fully at the time.

While my intent was to focus on schooling for children, it would be misleading to examine only the experiences and thoughts of children. It is essential to examine the processes of school making and of school keeping and the meanings that these had regardless of the age or positions of the school makers.

One must also recognize that adult and child roles were less fixed than in circumstances that are more normal. Adults and children traded roles or allowed them to overlap. For example, at times, teachers assumed roles of

parents; parents assumed roles that left children to parent themselves; children assumed roles of caretakers, of teachers, of designers of school, and of choosers of curriculum. Children taught adults and provided for them materially; adults allowed, even depended on, children to make important decisions and to take on adult responsibilities. In many cases, the adult/child roles became increasing congruent. For example, Frieda Menco-Brommet, in hiding with her parents, found herself in a dual role of teacher/pupil:

During our two years in hiding my father and I spent our days together teaching each other. His English was much better than mine, so he taught me English. My French was better than his, I taught him French. We read the same books and we discussed them.¹⁴

We might call the various persons who participated in this schooling “school makers” in the sense that they created school physically and in the sense that they created it and recreated it conceptually.¹⁵ In doing so, we ought not to lose sight of ages and maturity levels.

The individuals whose stories I have used include persons who participated in these activities either as students, as teachers, or both. While it is impossible to offer a representative sample of school makers, I have tried to include voices of students and teachers, males and females, inhabitants of ghettos, camps, and hiding places, as well as persons from a variety of geographical locations. There of course is some unevenness in the pool of

¹⁴Debórah Dwork, *Children With a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 76.

¹⁵In normal conditions school is not something we make so much as we carry it on. Adults and children have particular, usually traditional, roles. School takes place in contexts that exist already in terms of buildings, materials, curricula, staff/faculty, and student body. Adults and children show up and “do” school. This is not to suggest that they do not rethink it, reshape it or have any influence on it, school and its roles are certainly contested terrain, nevertheless there are certain day-to-day expectations—for instance that the school that is there on Wednesday will still exist on Thursday or that last week’s teacher will be present (or at least another adult substitute et cetera) and what is acted upon is something that is already there. Even a new school is built and furnished in that context—however innovative it might be or how much it seeks to be different from the old school is still defined precisely as different from the usual. In this case however school was often made from scratch, even when it reflected traditional school models, space, materials, structures, ways to conceal it and participants had to be created and found. Therefore, I think that this notion of school making is important to understanding what happened. These children and adults did not just “go on” having school—they made it.

narrators. The hardships visited upon the Jews were unevenly applied. At each selection, the Germans were more likely to send women and children to death than men. If they spared children, more often they kept boys to work while assigning girls to death. In addition, certain factors, such as distribution of rations, favored males and adults.¹⁶ Girls under the age of sixteen who survived until liberation often did so in hiding.¹⁷ Survival in hiding, of course, depended on not being betrayed. Anne Frank survived for over two years in hiding but, following the betrayal of her hiding place, she survived for less than eight months.¹⁸ Still, while this work may not provide a representative sample in the usual sense, it does speak to the diversity of European Jewry and provides a varied perspective on the topic.

Veracity, Rumor, and True Stories

Holocaust accounts sometimes contain inconsistent or inaccurate details. For example, as mentioned earlier, the Germans often cut off Jews from most sources of news reporting. This blockade created a problem not only with understanding events but also in reporting what any individual or community knew. Thus “news” was often propaganda or misinformation—or it was rumor and highly inaccurate at that.

An example of accuracy would be Mary Berg’s August 1942 report that a few days earlier she had seen Janusz Korczak and the children of his orphanage rounded up and marched away. She then went on to say that:

¹⁶Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933-1945* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), also Martin Gilbert, *The Boys: The Story of 732 Young Concentration Camp Survivors* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 2.

¹⁷*Boys*, 2.

¹⁸Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Otto H. Frank and Miriam Pressler, trans. Susan Massotty (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 338-339.

They went in the direction of Gesia Street, to the cemetery. At the cemetery all the children were shot. We were also told *by our informants* that Dr. Korczak was forced to witness the executions, and then he himself was shot afterwards.¹⁹

This report is not quite true. By all other accounts I have found—and this particular incident was reported by a large number of witnesses—the Germans forced Korczak, members of his staff, and the children to march through the ghetto to the *Umschlagplatz*.²⁰ There after some delay—during which Korczak rejected the opportunity to absent himself—the Germans transported them to Treblinka and asphyxiated them to death.²¹

No doubt Mary and her companions heard of the arrest and probably saw the children marched off toward the cemetery. In addition, the Germans did cruelly murder Korczak, his staff, and all the children. The inaccuracy arises with the informant's report of the place and manner of their deaths. Mary at that time languished in Pawiak Prison. Her incarceration occurred on the eve of the massive deportation that began in July 1942. As Americans, Mary and her family awaited a prisoner exchange. The Germans, having isolated them from the deportation *Aktion*, would likely have restricted their contact with ghetto residents. Thus, the informant was probably also a prisoner at Pawiak and the rumored site of the murder a conjecture based on last seen direction of the group's travel.

In other words, some details of a story may be inaccurate due to incorrect information received at the time although it does not mean that the

¹⁹Mary Berg, *Warsaw Ghetto Diary*, (New York: L.B. Fischer, 1945), 174. [my italics]

²⁰The *Umschlagplatz* was the place in the Ghetto at which Jews selected for deportation (i.e. death) were assembled by trickery, blackmail, or force—amidst the most sickening violence and murder—and then forced into trains. Yitzhak Zuckerman ("Antek"), *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. Barbara Harshav trans. and ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press), 1993, 64 and *ibid.* note 82; Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1985), 389; Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1975), 304; and Leonard Tushnet, *The Pavement of Hell: Three Leaders of the Judenrat* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), 127.

²¹Accounts of Korczak's departure with the children is repeated in many accounts of Warsaw Ghetto including Tushnet, 128; Dawidowicz, 307; and Gilbert, *Holocaust*, 392-393.

report itself was untrue. In the above case, for example, Mary Berg reported both what she saw and what she heard that she believed to be true at the time.

The Narrators

I have constructed skeletal descriptions of the lives, and, where pertinent, the deaths, of those whose narratives are part of this project. In addition, I have included, when known, descriptions of certain ways of sharing those stories. In particular, physical descriptions of diaries and journals, as well as accounts of how they came to be part of Holocaust literature, seem important in terms both of understanding the problems and importance attached to writing and of illustrating the likelihood that such materials as have been preserved and published represent only a small portion of those that were created.

Further information pertaining to the lives and backgrounds of the school makers whose stories form the larger account of education in the Holocaust is included in later chapters.

Yitzhak Zuckerman (1915)

Published interview/testimony

Warsaw and Warsaw Ghetto (1939 to 1945)

His account of schooling efforts in occupied Warsaw is included in a larger account of Resistance efforts by Jews youth, political, and combatant movements.

Republic of Skhid

Magazine (*Vedem*, 1942 to 1944), autobiographical writings, and interviews
Terezin(Theresienstadt), Czechoslovakia

Home One of Barracks L417 housed a collective of boys aged, in most cases, thirteen to fifteen. They adopted the group name "Republic of Skhid" as well as

individual nicknames. Some of them have since been identified by their official names; others have not. They sometimes wrote under collective nicknames—in particular several used the nickname “Academy.” In addition, the collective included a teacher, Valtr Eisinger. Included in this group narrative is the voice of Vera Sommerova, Valtr Eisinger’s wife, who survived him and, in the “Terezin Epilogue,” that of Avi Fischer who also taught in that barrack.²² Of the approximately ninety-two boys who lived in the home only fourteen survived until liberation. They “published”—i. e. wrote one copy that was read aloud at a weekly meeting—a magazine, *Vedem*, which detailed their lives, their schooling, and their relationships. Some of the survivors collaborated on a published collection of this work—which they preserved and protected throughout the period of its publication and in the aftermath—illuminated by subsequent commentary.

Avraham (Golub) Tory (1909)

Diary (22 June 1941 to 9 January 1944 with Epilogue)

Following Avraham’s escape from the ghetto in March 1944, the diary, it was actually a journal of the ghetto of Kovno as well as a diary, lay hidden in crates buried in foundations of a building in the destroyed ghetto. Several persons close to Avraham suffered torture at the hands of the Germans who thought Avraham’s writings contained the minutes of the Ghetto Council meetings. Four months later the author returned to retrieve the crates but was unable to do so initially due to the intense interest of the Soviet authorities in taking possession of his diary. He was eventually able to retrieve three of the five crates and a friend hid them for several months under a child’s bed until Avraham could take them secretly out of the country.

²²“Terzin Epilogue” is in Chapter Six: Schooling in the Concentration Camps.

Sara Spier (c. 1927)

Published interview

Sara Spier went into hiding in 1942 at the age of fifteen. Concealed in the homes of a series of rural gentiles Sara had only herself as a teacher. She emerged an orphan in 1945 when the Allies liberated the Netherlands from German occupation.

Dawid Sierakowiak (25 July 1924 to 8 August 1943)

Diary (28 June 1939 to 15 April 1943)

Five notebooks of his diary survived the destruction of the Lodz Jews and fifty years of efforts to assemble and publish them. A Polish gentile found them shortly after the liberation of Lodz in a pile of notebooks used as stove fuel. In addition to stories, poems and writings, five of the notebooks contained a detailed diary not only of Dawid's experiences in Lodz under German domination, but also of the life of the ghetto. Part of the diary was published fifteen years later while other parts remained unavailable for a number of years. The anti-Semitic Communist regime of Poland blocked publication of the entire surviving diary. It finally was published in 1996.

Yitskhok Rudashevski (10 December 1927 to October 1943)

Diary (June 1941 to 7 April 1943)

Vilna, Lithuania until 6 September 1941

Vilna Ghetto, 6 September 1941 to 5 or 7 October 1943

In October 1943, the Germans marched Yitskhok and his family to the valley of Ponar where they shot them to death. Only his cousin Sore Voloshin-Kalivatsh survived, and it was Sore who found his diary, a small notebook/ledger, after liberation.

Egon "Gonda" Redlich (18 October 1916 to 1944 [deported to Auschwitz on 7 October 1944])

1st Diary (1 January 1942 to 2 August 1944)

2nd Diary [to his infant son] (16 March 1944 to 6 October 1944)

Terezin (Theresienstadt) December 1941 to October 1944. Gonda kept two diaries—the first, written on office calendar pages, he kept from shortly after his arrival at the camp at Terezin until a few weeks before his deportation to Auschwitz. The second, from 16 March 1944 until 6 October 1944, “Diary of Dan,” consisted of longer essays for his infant son. Workers found both diaries in 1967 hidden in a woman’s purse and placed in an attic. They survived their author whom the Germans murdered with his wife and infant child at Auschwitz II/Birkenau.

Zivia Lubetkin (1914)

Autobiography

Warsaw Ghetto 1940 to 1943

A member of Dror before and during the war, Zivia was also a central figure of the ZOB.²³ She was a very active member of both organizations providing leadership during the ghetto period. Zivia was a leader of the January and April 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprisings and continued her leadership in subsequent activities, including the Warsaw Rising of 1944. She immigrated to Israel in 1946.

Hanna Lévy-Hass (c.1914)

Diary (16 August 1944 to April 1945)

Belsen Concentration Camp [Bergen-Belsen] 1944 to 1945

Liberated in April 1945, she was able to conceal and save her diary throughout imprisonment. She escaped from a death march in April 1945. An attachment to the 1979 publication of her diary includes a 1978 interview where she reflected upon her wartime activities.

Tamarah Lazerson (c. 1927)

²³Dror (He-Halutz Ha-Tza’ir or Young Pioneer) was a Socialist Zionist youth movement and ZOB (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa or Jewish Fighting Organization) grew out of such youth organizations, was formed within

Diary

Tamarah was listed as thirteen when the "war" broke out, although as she lived in Lithuania it is unclear if that means the war wherein Kovno came under Soviet control in 1939 or the one where the Germans broke the treaty with the Soviet Union and occupied Kovno in 1941. She avoided deportation and managed to keep her diary, crawling from the rubble when the Soviet army liberated the city in 1944.

Irma Lauscherová-Kohnová (1910)**Autobiography****Terezin**

A teacher in Prague before deportation, she taught also in Terezin. She lived until liberation in 1945 and returned to Prague. Her autobiographical account lends insight into teaching as a form of resistance.

Mira Ryczke Kimmelman (September 17, 1923)**Interview, Autobiography****Danzig until October 1939****Warsaw October 1939 to February 1940****Tomaszow-Mazowiecki February 1940 to May 1943****Blizyn-Majdanek May 1943 to July 1944****Auschwitz (Birkenau)-Hindenburg July 1944 to January 1945****Evacuation march and train January 1945 to February 1945****Bergen-Belsen February 1945 to April 1945.**

Mira was a student and later a teacher in clandestine schools; she relied on education to sustain her in a variety of ways throughout her imprisonment. Liberated on 15 April 1945, she immigrated to the United States.

Chaim Kaplan (1880 to December 1942/January 1943)**Diary (1 September 1939 to 4 August 1942)**

the Warsaw Ghetto, and, in 1943, led the Ghetto Uprisings.

Warsaw 1939 and Warsaw Ghetto 1940 to 1942/3)

Before his murder in Treblinka, Chaim smuggled his diary out of Warsaw Ghetto one notebook at a time. Some were later given or sold to the Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw, and others remained buried in a kerosene can on a Polish farm until 1962, when they were brought to New York and sold to the New York University Library for Judaica and Hebraica. Chaim disappeared in the late 1942 to early 1943 deportations from the Ghetto. It is believed that the Germans murdered him at Treblinka.

Solly Ganor (18 May 1928)

Autobiography

Kaunas (Kovno), Lithuania until 1941

Kaunas (Kovno) Ghetto 1941 to 12 July 1944

Stutthof July 1944 to August 1944

Dachau August 1944 to 25 April 1945

Solly used education as a shield and as a way to try to understand the events consuming the Jews of Europe. Following his years in the Kovno Ghetto, Solly was deported to the camps and was liberated 2 May 1945 while on a death march from Dachau. His experience of the Holocaust began and ended with acquaintances of Japanese descent.

Anne Frank (12 June 1929 to February/ March 1945 [deported 4 August 1944]

Diary (12 June 1942 to 1 August 1944)

Amsterdam 9 July 1942—in hiding

Westerbork, Auschwitz II/Birkenau, Bergen-Belsen.

Upon receiving news of Anne and Margot's deaths in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, Miep Gies, who had rescued Anne's diary after the family's arrest, gave it to Anne's bereaved father.

Moshe Flinker (9 October 1926 to 1944/45 [deported to Auschwitz 7 April 1944])

Diary (24 November 1942; the last dated entry is listed as 6 September 1943 although here are several undated entries that follow.)

Escaped from Netherlands to Brussels, Belgium in summer of 1942. Deported to Auschwitz at Passover 1944 and murdered. Although the Germans murdered Moshe and his parents at Auschwitz, his five sisters and his brother survived until liberation. They returned to Brussels where neighbors had saved some of their belongings—including three of Moshe's notebooks.

Nehama Eckheizer-Fahn

Age unknown but Nehama Eckheizer-Fahn was an adolescent during the Holocaust as evidenced by her enrollment in a *gymnasium* during that time.

Testimony in the archive at Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot.

Nehama seems to have remained in the Warsaw Ghetto at least until the time of the massive deportations of July-September 1942.

Natan Eckron (Eck)

Published testimony

Warsaw and Warsaw Ghetto 1939 to 1942

Age unknown although it is clear Natan Eck was an adult at the time of the Holocaust. He was a founder and the principal of a Hebrew High School in occupied Warsaw.

Lucien Duckstein (c. 1932)

Autobiography

Drancy 1943 to 1944; Bergen-Belsen 1944 to 1945

Lucien's account of his camp experiences first appeared in print in 1993.

Written in French it was translated and published in English in 1996. Lucien recalled his family's experiences in German concentration camps. French

collaborationist police arrested the eleven-year-old and his mother in 1943. They both survived as did his father, a French POW.

Mary Berg (1924)

Diary

Lodz 1939

Warsaw 1939 to 1940

Warsaw Ghetto 1940 to January 1943

Vittel, France 1943 to 1944

The United States of America March 1944.

Mary was able to carry her rather extensive diary out of Warsaw Ghetto as the Germans failed to search them thoroughly in the confusion of their departure. Publication of the diary occurred in 1945 before the defeat of Germany.

Janina Bauman (1926)

Autobiography based on diary.

Warsaw Ghetto 1940 to 1943.

Escaped to "Aryan" Warsaw in January 1943

Janina hid her diary, comprised of several copybooks and a number of loose sheets of paper during the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. After the war, Janina retrieved the diary only to lose it once more during her flight to the west in 1968. Following her mother's death in 1980, Janina discovered copies of some of her diary pages and stories among her mother's belongings.

Part II

The Narratives

The four chapters that make up this part of this dissertation contain the narratives of persons who engaged in making, attending, and keeping schools for Jewish children and youths during the Holocaust. Chapters Three through Six also contain parts of the stories of other children and adults whose experiences and observations add to our understanding of the narratives. Those stories are not less important than the narratives—only more brief. Schooling was not the only concern of the narrators, and I included parts not directly related to education that add dimension to the schooling narratives. For some, schooling seemed to hold a more central place than for others. I have also shortened some passages in order to make the narratives more compact; however, I did so with some regret.

Each of these narratives is part of a larger individual narrative and part of a larger collective narrative. Those are narratives are not only of primary importance in understanding the Holocaust experiences of European Jews but are in some cases substitutes for the epitaphs that do not appear on the narrators non-existent grave stones. For those reasons, as well as because I think a person's voice is important in the revelation of the person's story, I quoted extensively and avoided paraphrasing as much as possible.

The stories are earnest, sometimes funny, and filled with attempts to understand a bewildering and awful chain of events deliberately orchestrated by those who sought to destroy the Jewish peoples. By that, I mean the Germans.

I do not mean to suggest that the Germans did their work unassisted. An assortment of allies and collaborators, including Jewish informers and the Jewish police, assisted in the crimes. Nevertheless, the German regime—which came to power through democratic election—conceived the plans and issued the orders by which it sought to accomplish its purpose—to imprison and then

murder the Jews of Europe. These crimes were not the sole province of either the Nazis or the SS. German gentiles, ranging from in-laws, acquaintances, and neighbors of Jews to government officials and the regular army, participated—not only in Germany but in the lands that country occupied.

It is also true that some Germans did not participate in the atrocities and even sought ways to aid and rescue Jews. Nevertheless, those righteous gentiles were in a minority as the deaths of the six million Jewish victims attest. The Holocaust began in Germany and emanated from Germany as that country's armies and bureaucracy defeated and occupied its neighbors. Therefore, I refer to perpetrators and organizers of the genocide as Germans, although the narrators sometimes referred to them as Nazis, Fascists, or Hitlerites. Remember though that, although Germans planned and implemented the Holocaust and their presence and deeds are present through the manuscript, this study is not about Germans *per se*. It is about those they persecuted and murdered. It is the story of Jewish attempts to move beyond the degradation, danger, and hopelessness of their situations.

Chapter Three contains narratives of three Jewish adolescents from Holland who went into hiding and who employed a variety of strategies for continuing their educations while in hiding. Chapter Four includes the narratives of six Jews in four ghettos who participated in schools. Chapter Five is composed of the narratives of seven Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto and their work to create and carry on education. Finally, Chapter Six includes the testimonies of Jews who experienced schools in the hellish conditions that prevailed in the concentration camps.

Chapter Three:

Schooling of Jewish Youth in Hiding

Many Jews attempted to survive the Holocaust by hiding from those who sought to enslave, deport, and murder them. Hiding meant different things. For some, it meant physical concealment; for others, it meant concealing their identities and their Jewishness. Often it was easier to hide children than adults as places could be found for them in children's institutions and in homes where they could be passed off as relatives orphaned by the war. Children often endured separation from their families and from the social and cultural groups that they had formerly inhabited. They had to pretend to kinship with family friends or with total strangers. Bloeme Evers, a schoolmate of Anne and Margot Frank and as it turned out a fellow inmate of the Westerbork and Auschwitz camps, recalls:

Looking back, I know that period in hiding was only a prelude to something worse, but so long as you don't know anything worse, being in hiding was very traumatic. People haven't paid enough attention to that. But it meant a loss of identity, occupation, your own context, your family, social networks, books, possessions. Everything was gone. In almost all cases you had to subordinate yourself to good—and not so good—people.... All in all it was a great trauma that could last for years.¹

Hiding places ranged from apartments and cathedrals to wardrobes and cramped pits dug in farmyards. While not all hidden children received or created schooling, many did, and I found examples where children in all of the above situations learned and studied.

¹Willy Lindwer, *The Last Seven Months of Anne Frank*, trans. Alison Meersschaert (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991).

Richard Rozen hid with his parents for thirteen months in a cabinet in Loboml, Poland. His father drew letters and numerals in the six-year-old child's palm, and whispered into his ear, so that he could learn the alphabet and to count.² As an eight-year-old, Kim Fendrick lived in a farm-yard cave where she learned multiplication, the capitals of Europe, and reading from a volume of *Quo Vadis* and a book of poetry.³ Yaffa Sonenson Eliach remembered that while hiding in a pit dug under a pigsty:

Zipporah [Yaffa's mother] taught her daughter [Yaffa] to read and write by inscribing the Hebrew letters on the damp clay wall of the pit, and she and Moshe [Yaffa's father] recited to the children all that they could remember of their own school days.⁴

Kristin Keren, née Krystyna Chiger, had lessons in the dank, wet sewers of Lvov. In that dark, slimy, moldy environment, suffering from cold, hunger, and fear, she learned to read, using a borrowed book of his daughter's brought by Leopard Socha, her family's Polish helper.⁵ When their Polish rescuer smuggled from the garbage dump a single page from a Hebrew book, Silvia Richter's mother used it to teach her children the Hebrew alphabet.⁶

In some areas, children found hiding places in educational institutions, including religious schools. There a condition of rescue was often that their

²Jane Marks, *The Hidden Children: The Secret Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1993), 43-44, 61. The cabinet hiding place of the Rozen family was about sixty or seventy centimeters wide (two feet or a little more) and two meters long. It was only high enough that the small child could stand the adults could only crouch and lying down required lying on top of each other. Later, after being expelled from that place when their money ran out, Richard and his physician father joined a partisan unit. One day in 1944 the nine-year-old found a great treasure in the aftermath of a battle—an undamaged leg. He brought it to the field hospital for his father as “there were a few legs missing at his hospital.” Richard attributes his naive belief that the leg could be transplanted to his lack of schooling and failure to have studied biology.

³*Ibid.*, 61.

⁴Yaffa Eliach, *There Once Was a World: A Nine-Hundred-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), 617. Also, University of Tennessee, Knoxville Holocaust Conference 1995. In telling of this experience, Yaffa Eliach remarked upon her tactile relationship with letters resulting from that teaching method.

⁵Marks, 29 and also Robert Marshall, *In the Sewers of Lvov: A Heroic Story of Survival from the Holocaust* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990), 135. In the latter Krystyna is quoted as saying of her lessons with a borrowed book, “I never forgot the first page, *Anna ma kota*—Anna has a cat. There was a little drawing of the girl and her cat.”

⁶Maxine B. Rosenberg, *Hiding to Survive: Stories of Jewish Children Rescued from the Holocaust* (New York: Clarion Books, 1994), 77-78.

parents must agree that their children be baptized and converted to Christianity. Sent into hiding in Catholic boarding schools, Renée Ferstenfeld, Saul Friedländer, Cécile Rojer, and Renée Roth submitted to baptism and learned the Catechism in addition to anti-Semitic ideas. In order to secure hiding places for their daughters, Renée Ferstenfeld's parents signed a letter stating:

We authorize our two children to be instructed in the Christian religion, and to receive baptism

. . . [and] pledge that we will do nothing to make them deviate from observance of said religion in the future."⁷

Saul's father had to write:

I consent and formally authorize you to baptize him. My wife and I promise to continue your work along the lines that you have laid down, as soon as God's will and circumstance's permit us to see to his education ourselves.⁸

Cécile "chose" baptism. Tired of being different from the other girls in the convent she decided that she wanted to be like them. Her impetus for conversion had a more prosaic side as well.

Also I knew that on baptism day I'd get a nice meal that included a hard-boiled egg. I was always starving. And when I became a Catholic, I could join the Girl Scouts too. That meant that once a week I could get away from the convent with a lay leader and go on hikes with the other girls.⁹

Renée Roth recalls that at the time of her baptism:

I was filled with fear. I thought, once you're baptized, that's it. I had guilty visions of

⁷Renée Fersen-Osten, *Don't They Know the World Stopped Breathing?: Reminiscences of a French Child During the Holocaust Years* (New York: Shapolsky Publishers, 1991), 95-96.

⁸Saul Friedländer, *When Memory Comes*, trans. Helen R. Lane (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1979), 80.

⁹Rosenberg, 57.

flying up to heaven without my parents. I was in anguish but I couldn't tell anyone. I had anxiety attacks, and once I was found sleepwalking in the graveyard. . . . I was sure I would die.¹⁰

Other children had more harmonious, although ultimately no less dangerous, hiding places. At the OSE children's home in Izieu, France, Jewish children, both French and refugee, hid until arrested and deported to their deaths by order of Klaus Barbie, the infamous "Butcher of Lyon." While at the home in Izieu, some children communicated with family members by letters. From eight-year-old Georges Halpern we know that the children's schoolwork included: "compositions, arithmetic, science, and geography."¹¹ Eleven-year-old Joseph Goldberg writing to his mother, Gita, described his intent to study hard:

She [the director] told us that we had to study hard, because if we didn't, when you saw us again after the war, we'd be dunces. So I am going to study hard in order to please you, in order to please the director and the teacher, and in order to please myself, too. That way, after the war you'll see that we're both intelligent, and you won't look at us like dummies.¹²

Other children wrote of the school as well; some merely mentioning that there were classes and some, like Georges, adding details of their studies. To her sister, on 1 April 1944, five days before her arrest, ten-year-old Alice-Jacqueline Luzgart wrote:

Fanny, I'm sending you a composition topic from last week. Here it is: "One of your relatives is a prisoner, or one of your friends. You sense from his letters his homesickness for his native land. Write to him about France, about his city or town, pick the details that will interest him, the words that will bring him comfort and joy." I scored a six-and-a-half. The best grade I've had.¹³

¹⁰Marks, 38.

¹¹Serge Klarsfeld, *The Children of Izieu: A Human Tragedy*, trans. Kenneth Jacobson (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1984).

¹²*Ibid.*, 58.

¹³*Ibid.* 71.

For many children, going into hiding was a profoundly isolating experience. Often they were separated from families and friends, and, even when that did not happen, they were isolated from places that were familiar, from communities, and normal childhood experiences as well.

In this chapter, I have included the narratives of three adolescents who wrote of their time in hiding and who found particular meaning in education within that context. They came from somewhat similar backgrounds. They lived in the Netherlands, came from affluent, urban families, and went into hiding at about the same time. In other ways, each youth was quite different from the others. Their circumstances differed as well. For example: two hid with their families and one with strangers; two were from assimilated families and one from an Orthodox family; two were girls and one was a boy; one hid completely; one hid from view at times and hid Jewishness at others; one lived openly in a new community and with non-Jewish papers; two were encouraged and assisted in their studies, and one was actively discouraged; two were arrested and died in the camps, and one lived until liberation. Among the best known Holocaust victims is Anne Frank. The other two are less well known, and their narratives provide additional insight into the experiences of Jewish adolescents forced into hiding. Two went into hiding in the Netherlands and one hid in Belgium. They are Anne Frank, Moshe Flinker, and Sara Spier.

“To take our minds off matters as well as to develop them”

Anne Frank (Anneliese Marie Frank) was thirteen when she began her now famous diary on 12 June 1942. She began writing in a blank book she had received that morning as a birthday gift. Shortly thereafter, on 6 July 1942, she and her family went into hiding in Amsterdam. There the Franks, the assimilated well-to-do family of a business owner, were able to hide in back rooms of the business with Auguste, Hermann, and Peter van Pels—Anne called them “van Daan”—as well as Fritz Pfeffer—called by Anne, “Albert Dussel”). The diary ends on 1 August 1944, three days before the Germans

arrested the entire group. By that time, the diary had grown from the original volume to encompass several account books and various loose papers. In addition, Anne had gotten the idea of having it published after the war and had begun a second, revised edition. After a brief time in an Amsterdam prison, the Germans sent them to the transit camp at Westerbork. From there, on 3 September 1944, they received orders to go on transport on the last train to leave Westerbork for Auschwitz. In late October 1944, the Germans delivered them to Bergen-Belsen where, according to Janny Brandes-Brilleslijper, Anne and Margot worked with younger children

There was a large group of Dutch children there and the Nazis didn't know if they were Jewish or not. They might have been *Mischlingen*. . . . All of us, especially the young women, would go to see the children regularly. . . . Anne and Margot also involved themselves with the children . . . to provide them with a little balance and sometimes a little culture.¹⁴

In the cruelly orchestrated filth and squalor at Bergen-Belsen, the Germans killed thousands of inmates by starvation, inadequate shelter, and disease. In February or March 1945, Margot contracted and died of typhus followed by Ann. When Margot died, Anne fell into despair in the belief that her entire family was dead. The Germans killed everyone who hid with Anne in the Annex except her father who returned to Amsterdam. Upon receiving news of Anne's death Miep Gies, one of the persons who helped the Franks survive in hiding and who had rescued the diary after the family's arrest, gave it to her grieving father, Otto Frank.¹⁵

Early in her diary, Anne provided a list of restrictions imposed upon the Jews of Holland. Included were restrictions on Jewish schooling. In spite of these restrictions, Anne and her circle of friends and relations went on living as normally as possible.

¹⁴Lindwer, 71.

¹⁵Ibid., xii, 27-28 and Miep Gies and Alison Leslie Gold. *Anne Frank Remembered: The Story of the Woman Who*

Saturday, 20 June 1942

Our freedom was severely restricted by a series of anti-Jewish decrees: Jews were required to wear a yellow star; Jews were required to turn in their bicycles; Jews were forbidden to use streetcars; Jews were forbidden to ride in cars, even their own; Jews were required to do their shopping between 3 and 5 p.m.; Jews were required to frequent only Jewish-owned barbershops and beauty parlors; Jews were forbidden to be out on the streets between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m.; Jews were forbidden to attend theaters, movies or any other forms of entertainment; Jews were forbidden to use swimming pools, tennis courts, hockey fields or any other athletic fields; Jews were forbidden to go rowing; Jews were forbidden to take part in any athletic activity in public; Jews were forbidden to sit in their gardens or those of their friends after 8 p.m.; Jews were forbidden to visit Christians in their homes; Jews were required to attend Jewish schools, etc. You couldn't do this and you couldn't do that, but life went on. Jacque always said to me, "I don't dare do anything anymore, 'cause I'm afraid it's not allowed."¹⁶

That passage echoes passages in other diaries that lend us pictures of children and adolescents finding themselves living in circumstances in which everything they once took for granted was forbidden. It is also indicative of Anne's style of record keeping. Throughout her diary are entries that contain lists of habits, of rules, of educational pursuits. They build a remarkably detailed image of her life and the lives of her companions, in hiding.

On Sunday, the day before going into hiding, Anne recorded grades received on her report card, ". . . I got one D, a C- in algebra and all the rest B's except for two B+'s and two B-'s."¹⁷ Anne, although seemingly bright, did not appear to be too concerned about grades. School and education were not the same to Anne and her interest in school extended well beyond academics.

Helped to Hide the Frank Family (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 234-235.

¹⁶Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition*, ed. Otto H. Frank and Miriam Pressler, trans. Susan Massotty (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 8. Two consecutive entries bear the same date. This passage is from the first of those.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 17.

Three days later in describing her precipitous preparations for rushing into hiding, a decision hastened by her sister Margot's receipt of a summons for forced labor, Anne wrote:

Wednesday, 8 July 1942

Dearest Kitty

Margot and I started packing our most important belongings into a schoolbag. The first thing I stuck in was this diary, and then curlers, handkerchiefs, schoolbooks, a comb and some old letters. Preoccupied by the thought of going into hiding, I stuck the craziest things in the bag, but I'm not sorry. Memories mean more to me than dresses.¹⁸

Anne counted schoolbooks among her "important belongings"—along with curlers and handkerchiefs. She even suggested that at least part of their value lay in the memories they invoked.

Apparently during the early weeks in hiding, Anne did not do school work although she was thinking about it. This lack of work is evident in the following passage:

Friday, 21 August 1942

I'm not doing much schoolwork. I've given myself a vacation until September. Father wants to start tutoring me then, but we have to buy all the books first.¹⁹

Anne was apparently content to order her "schooling" in such a way as to approximate ordinary schooling with a summer break. Also she seemingly did not bring enough books and, even at that difficult time, it seemed necessary to buy books for schooling.

A month later Anne's attitude toward school was changed. Not only was she doing schoolwork but also she lamented the things she had forgotten during

¹⁸Ibid., 20. Beginning with the second entry on 20 June 1942, Anne began most of her entries as if they were letters to "Kitty"—as if the diary were a friend. I have omitted these salutations in subsequent quotes. She also signed most entries using the name 'Anne,' 'Anne Frank,' 'Anne Mary Frank,' or "Anne M. Frank." I have omitted these closings from the entries I have used with the exception of the last one.

¹⁹Ibid., 32.

her “vacation.”

21 September 1942

I've begun my schoolwork. I'm working hard at French cramming five irregular verbs into my head every day. But I've forgotten much too much of what I learned in school.²⁰

Anne was not the only one studying in the “Annex.” She reported in the same entry:

Peter has taken up his English with great reluctance. A few schoolbooks have just arrived, and I brought a large supply of notebooks, pencils, erasers and labels from home. Pim (that's our pet name for Father) wants me to help him with his Dutch lessons. I'm perfectly willing to tutor him in exchange for his assistance with French and other subjects. But he makes the most unbelievable mistakes!²¹

Apparently, the “Annex” was well stocked with school supplies. The Annex “family” came into hiding prepared to study and secured additional materials after their arrival in the Annex. It is noteworthy that not only the adolescents were to have lessons, but Otto Frank as well. Anne would serve as teacher.

Already Anne wrote of her reasons to continue her education.

A few nights ago I was the topic of discussion, and we all decided I was an ignoramus. As a result, I threw myself into my schoolwork the next day, since I have little desire to still be a freshman when I'm fourteen or fifteen.²²

Anne did not want to seem an “ignoramus” to her companions in the “Annex.” We must remember that she was then a precocious thirteen year old and by three years the youngest in the group. Education must have seemed a way to try to be more like everyone else.

²⁰Ibid., 37-38.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

By October, the group had come up with an additional educational resource—correspondence courses—a method that offered a variety of opportunities to learn even things beyond the expertise of anyone in the group.

Thursday, 1 October 1942

We have a nice treat in store: Bep's ordered a correspondence course in shorthand for Margot, Peter and me. Just you wait, by this time next year we'll be able to take perfect shorthand. In any case, learning to write a secret code like that is really interesting.²³

Anne looked forward to being able, within a year, to dazzle with her new talent. As we will see, shorthand became a popular course in the "Annex." In addition, Anne, highly imaginative and with a dramatic flair, apparently liked the idea of knowing a "secret code."

In the following passage, we get a sense of the actual work done by Anne as well as some insight into her motivation. Throughout most of their time in hiding, Anne was at odds with her mother and considered her father to be her particular ally. In this instance, we can see her identifying with his academic strengths and weaknesses.

Wednesday, 14 October 1942

I'm terribly busy. Yesterday I began by translating a chapter from *La Belle Nivernaise* and writing down vocabulary words. Then I worked on an awful math problem and translated three pages of French grammar besides. Today, French grammar and history. I simply refuse to do that wretched math every day. Daddy thinks it's awful too. . . . I'm also working away at my shorthand, which I enjoy. Of the three of us, I've made the most progress.²⁴

Anne was careful to point out making more progress than Margot, "a stinker (there's no other word for it), a constant source of irritation, morning, noon and night," or Peter for whom she was at that time also contemptuous.

²³Ibid., 49-50.

²⁴Ibid., 55.

The next month, upon the arrival of the dentist Fritz Pfeffer to hide in the "Annex," Anne wrote out an amusing list of rules and schedules including a section on classes in the "Annex."

Tuesday, 17 November 1942

Classes: A weekly correspondence course in shorthand. Courses in English, French, math and history offered at any hour of the day or night. Payment in the form of tutoring, e.g., Dutch.²⁵

Apparently Anne spent quite a bit of time at her studies or enjoyed them so thoroughly that by late December her mother had thought to use her interest in a new way. As Anne wrote:

Tuesday, 22 December 1942

It's very busy upstairs, and Mother has informed me that I'm not to do any studying or reading until all the household chores have been finished.²⁶

Reading and studying were among the few activities available to the inhabitants of the "Annex." Anne could not chat on the telephone and even the radio could be played only at certain times and had to be shared. For a teenager bereft of a social group this experience of hiding must have quickly lost its appeal. Studying was quiet and Anne's parents and the gentiles who conspired to hide the group endeavored to acquire sufficient study supplies. Her mother however had apparently noticed Anne's predilection for her academic work and had decided to use it as a spur to get her to do mundane household chores.

Saturday, 27 March 1943

We've finished our shorthand course and are now working on improving our speed. Aren't we smart! Let me tell you more about my "time killers" (this is what I call my courses, because all we ever do is try to make the days go by as quickly as

²⁵Ibid., 71.

²⁶Ibid., 81.

possible so we're that much closer to the end of our time here). I adore mythology, especially the Greek and Romans.²⁷

In an interesting juxtaposition, Anne referred to her studies as “time killers,” but at the same time began a discussion of what those were by saying that she “adore[d] mythology.” The implication is that her studies helped fill time but were not mere busy work. Instead, Anne chose things she was interested in to help pass the time. Her previous—and subsequent—comments about maths indicated that she or someone else had chosen some subjects that were deemed necessary rather than enjoyable. Anne would reiterate this idea of studying as a way of making time pass in July, when she wrote: “Our only diversions are reading, studying and listening to the radio.”²⁸

In her second summer in hiding, Anne seemed to have abandoned the earlier idea of giving herself a vacation. Indeed, in the summer of 1943, there is some evidence that Anne may have begun to seek opportunities to study more and to do so in a more private environment. In July of that year, she related a contretemps initiated by her attempts to negotiate with Pfeffer, with whom she shared a room, for more study time. Of course, we cannot know if she really intended to study or merely used that as a way of stating her need for the space. Time at her study table in the tiny bedroom was undoubtedly precious as in such a crowded apartment there would have been little opportunity to be alone. In writing of her need for study space, Anne brought up several points.

Tuesday, 13 July 1943

The Best Little Table

Yesterday afternoon Father gave me permission to ask Mr. [Pfeffer] whether he would please be so good as to allow me (see how polite I am?) to use the table in our room two afternoons a week, from four to five-thirty. I already sit there every day from two-thirty to four while [Pfeffer] takes a nap. . . . The gist of his reply was: “I have to study too, you know. . . . Besides, you aren't serious about your studies. Mythology—what kind of work is that? . . . But after all is said and done, I'll be

²⁷Ibid., 96.

²⁸Ibid., 110 (July 11, 1943).

obliged to let you have your way, since I don't want people saying later on that Anne Frank failed her exams because Mr. [Pfeffer] refused to relinquish his table!"²⁹

It is apparent from the story that having a place to study, and a schedule, were important not only to Anne but to others as well. As we will see, there were a number of study projects going on in the "Annex." Also there was some tendency, especially on the part of Pfeffer, it would seem, to rank the importance of some subjects and to think in terms of important and unimportant areas of learning. In the end, Pfeffer gave in on the grounds of not wanting to be accused of hindering Anne's progress in her later exams. Clearly there was still a strong expectation that there would be a later and that it would resemble the past enough to include exams.

Throughout the time in hiding, members of the group seem to have added to their list of topics to study—some serious, some just interesting. In July, Anne wrote, "Margot is thinking about taking a course in calligraphy," and that Anne, "advised her to go ahead and do it."³⁰

On that occasion Anne went on, in another section of her entry, to say:

Friday, 23 July 1943

Most of all I long to have a home of our own, to be able to move around freely and have someone help me with my homework again, at last. In other words, to go back to school!³¹

Anne longed for school. In more than one instance, it is apparent that when she thought of freedom she equated it with going back to school. As we saw in one of her earliest entries, she did not seem to be terribly grade motivated. What Anne missed most was the social aspect of school: peers, teachers, friends—as well as people about whom one could gossip.

That the youths in the group had responsibility beyond learning is clear in several passages. In August 1943, Anne told not only that Margot was

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid., 115 (Friday, July 23, 1943).

³¹Ibid., 116.

acting as teacher but managed to include a barb aimed at her nemesis, Mr. Pfeffer, when she wrote "Margot tucks a few books under her arm and heads for the class for 'slow learners,' which is what [Pfeffer] seems to be." In that entry, Anne described the schedule surrounding the lunch hour in the "Annex," a time when nearly everyone settled in and had a nap. "What comes next," she wrote, "is the quietest hour of the day; when they're all asleep, there are no disturbances."³²

"Disturbances" is perhaps an understatement. The "Annex" seems to have been rocked by ongoing acrimony among those stuck there. Anne was often in the midst of these, but at other times, she simply was privy to them. That time of the day when everyone settled in and quiet reigned must have been a relief to her, and she learned to value those times when she could be alone, absorbed in study, removed from the midst of turmoil.

Sunday, 17 October 1943

My mind boggles at the profanity this honorable house has had to endure in the past month. . . . I've gone completely round the bend. To tell you the truth, I sometimes forget who we're at odds with and who we're not.

The only way to take my mind off it is to study, and I've been doing a lot of that lately.³³

Anne and Margot had opportunities to choose their curricula, but, if they hesitated too long, Otto Frank was not loath to step in and choose for them. Anne wrote that:

Wednesday, 3 November 1943

To take our minds off matters as well as to develop them, Father ordered a catalogue from a correspondence school. Margot pored through the thick brochure three times without finding anything to her liking and within her budget. Father was easier to satisfy and decided to write and ask for a trial lesson in "Elementary Latin." No sooner said than done. The lesson arrived, Margot set to work

³²Ibid., 124-125 (April 5, 1943).

³³Ibid., 141.

enthusiastically and decided to take the course, despite the expense. It's much too hard for me, though I'd really like to learn Latin.³⁴

In addition, at the time, Anne, a member of an assimilated Jewish family, was to receive education related to Christianity. "To give me a new project as well, Father asked Mr. Kleiman for a children's Bible so I could finally learn something about the New Testament."³⁵ Margot protested that Hanukkah gift so Otto decided that it should be a St. Nicholas Day gift instead. Meanwhile the correspondence courses continued.

Wednesday, 17 November 1943

Margot sends her Latin lessons to a teacher, who corrects and then returns them. She's registered under Bep's name. The teacher's very nice, and witty too. I bet he's glad to have such a smart student.³⁶

Although there would have been some danger in ordering correspondence courses, they must have felt the benefits outweighed the chance of discovery—or perhaps they simply felt safe disguising themselves by using the names of non-Jews. If it occurred to them that a secretary might appear unlikely to study Latin—as opposed to the shorthand course they used earlier, Anne did not mention it.

As the Franks approached the end of their second year in hiding, relations wore thin at times. Anne complained in March that her father "isn't as nice as he used to be." She supported her opinion with an example:

Monday, 20 March, 1944

He's warned me that if I don't do my algebra, I won't get any tutoring after the war. I could simply wait and see what happens, but I'd like to start again, provided I get a new book.³⁷

³⁴Ibid., 142-143.

³⁵Ibid., 143.

³⁶Ibid., 148. Among the papers rescued by Meip Geis, following the family's arrest, were examples of some of the girls' schoolwork. Some of these, including Margot's Latin lessons, are on display in the Anne Frank house in Amsterdam.

³⁷Ibid., 227.

That incident indicated that, Otto Frank had not only gotten tougher in Anne's opinion, but that he did so due to her having slacked off on her studies—at least in algebra. By this time, of course, Otto had endured nearly two years locked in a small space with seven other people, three of them adolescents, one of them being the energetic and opinionated Anne. Anne herself by that time might conceivably have been suffering from adolescent feelings of persecution. She, however, seemed contrite and willing to start again.

Wednesday, 5 April 1944

For a long time now I didn't know why I was bothering to do any schoolwork. The end of the war still seemed so far away, so unreal, like a fairy tale. If the war isn't over by September, I won't go back to school, since I don't want to be two years behind.³⁸

Here again Anne's motive seemed to be to do lessons to keep up with the goal of going back to school. At that time, she was concerned at having missed two years of school and she felt that missing more would put her too far behind to be able to catch up with her class.

Nonetheless, later in this extensive entry she changed her position somewhat stating:

I finally realized that I must do my schoolwork to keep from being ignorant, to get on in life, to become a journalist, because that's what I want! I know I can write. . . . I can't imagine having to live like Mother, Mrs. [van Pels] and all the women who go about their work and are then forgotten. I need to have something besides a husband and children to devote myself to! I don't want to have lived in vain like most people.³⁹

Suddenly the goal of education for Anne was not merely more schooling in the future. She saw education as a prerequisite to enter into a career, one that

³⁸Ibid., 248.

³⁹Ibid., 249.

combined vocation and avocation in this case, and thereby not only to share her talent with others but to fashion for herself a life beyond what she perceived to be the narrow life of women in her social realm.

Three weeks later Anne recorded an example of her "schoolgirl" day.

Thursday, 27 April 1944

The things a schoolgirl has to do in the course of a single day! Take me, for example. First, I translated a passage on Nelson's last battle from Dutch into English. Then, I read more about the Northern War (1700-21) involving Peter the Great, Charles XII, Augustus the Strong, Stanislaus Leczinsky, Mazeppa, von Gorz, Brandenburg, Western Pomerania, Eastern Pomerania and Denmark, plus the usual dates. Next, I wound up in Brazil, where I read about Bahia tobacco, the abundance of coffee, the one and a half million inhabitants of Rio de Janeiro, Pernambuco and Sao Paulo and, last but not least, the Amazon River. Then about Negroes, mulattos, mestizos, whites, the illiteracy rate—over 50 percent—and malaria. Since I had some time left, I glanced through a genealogical chart: John the Old, William Louis, Ernest Casimir 1, Henry Casimir 1, right up to little Margriet Franciska (born in 1943 in Ottawa).

Twelve o'clock: I resumed my studies in the attic, reading about deans, priests, ministers, popes and . . . whew, it was one o'clock! At two the poor child (ho hum) was back at work. Old World and New World monkeys were next. Kitty, tell me quickly, how many toes does a hippopotamus have?

Then came the Bible, Noah's Ark, Shem, Ham and Japheth. After that, Charles V. Then, with Peter, Thackeray's book about the colonel, in English. A French test, and then a comparison between the Mississippi and the Missouri! Enough for today. Adieu!⁴⁰

Anne seemed to have gotten into a mood of recording lists and examples of her studies and those of others with whom she was hiding. Over the following three weeks, she would include at least three of these that I have included. Taken together they extend our view of what education in the "Annex" consisted of and, in some cases, give some idea of for what purposes members of the group thought to use their educations.

⁴⁰Ibid., 273-274.

Meanwhile Anne gave some thought to her own future, including higher education after liberation, as evidenced by an entry in which she said:

Monday 8 May, 1944

I've pinned all my hopes on after the war. I can assure you, I'm not so set on a bourgeois life as Mother and Margot. I'd like to spend a year in Paris and London studying the languages and studying art history.⁴¹

Three days later she expanded upon her description of her studies, telling that:

Thursday, 11 May 1944

I'm terribly busy at the moment, and strange as it may sound, I don't have enough time to get through my pile of work. Shall I tell you briefly what I've got to do?⁴²
 . . . Next I have three pages of foreign words from my various books, all of which have to be written down, memorized and read aloud. . . . Then there're Theseus, Oedipus, Peleus, Orpheus, Jason and Hercules all waiting to be untangled, since their various deeds are running crisscross through my mind like multicolored threads in a dress. Myron and Phidias are also urgently in need of attention, or else I'll forget entirely how they fit into the picture. The same applies, for example, to the Seven Years' War and the Nine Years' War. Now I'm getting everything all mixed up. . . .
 Oh, one more thing. The Bible. How long is it going to take before I come to the story of the bathing Susanna? And what do they mean by Sodom and Gomorrah? Oh, there's still so much to find out and learn. And in the meantime, I've left Charlotte of the Palatine in the lurch.

You can see, can't you, Kitty, that I'm full to bursting?⁴³

Anne sounded, enthusiastic about her rather busy workload and about all the things she was learning. A few days later she would extend this description further still by providing an inventory of what everyone in the "Annex" studied and read.⁴⁴

⁴¹Ibid., 286-287.

⁴²Anne included an extensive reading list made necessary by library due dates. I have deleted it.

⁴³Ibid., 293-294.

⁴⁴This list appears just after the entry for 16 May 1944; the next entry is dated 19 May 1944. It is not perfectly

What Our Annex Family Is Interested In
(A Systematic Survey of Courses and Reading Matter)

Mr. [van Pels]. No courses; looks up many things in Knaur's Encyclopedia and Lexicon; likes to read detective stories, medical books and love stories, exciting or trivial.

Mrs. [van Pels]. A correspondence course in English; likes to read biographical novels and occasionally other kinds of novels.

Mr. Frank. Is learning English (Dickens!) and a bit of Latin; never reads novels, but likes serious, rather dry descriptions of people and places.

Mrs. Frank. A correspondence course in English; reads everything except detective stories.

Mr. [Pfeffer]. Is learning English, Spanish and Dutch with no noticeable results; reads everything; goes along with the opinion of the majority.

Peter [van Pels]. Is learning English, French (correspondence course), shorthand in Dutch, English and German, commercial correspondence in English, woodworking, economics and sometimes math; seldom reads, sometimes geography.

Margot Frank. Correspondence courses in English, French and Latin, shorthand in English, German and Dutch, trigonometry, solid geometry, mechanics, physics, chemistry, algebra, geometry, English literature, French literature, German literature, Dutch literature, bookkeeping. Also modern history, biology, economics; reads everything, preferably on religion and medicine.

Anne Frank. Shorthand in French, English, German and Dutch, geometry, algebra, history, geography, art history, mythology, biology, Bible history, Dutch literature; likes to read biographies, dull or exciting, and history books (sometimes novels and light reading).⁴⁵

The entire "Annex" engaged in learning something and all but Hermann van Pels engaged in course work. Most of the adults studied English. Their interest in that language may have been due to a goal of immigration although there is no mention of such plans. All seem to have been assimilated Jews and to have developed no strong Zionist views. Furthermore, they had managed to

clear if this entry is an addendum to the 16 May entry or something that was written between 16 May and 19 May.
⁴⁵Ibid., 298-299 (Tuesday, 16 May, 1944).

maintain their businesses throughout their time outside of hiding in spite of the German occupation and its accompanying restrictions. Otto Frank and Hermann van Pels had even managed to do so while in hiding. Perhaps they meant to stay on in Holland after liberation and simply chose something that they could do together. On the other hand, for many Jews such intentions faded and the plan to immigrate as soon as possible led to efforts to be prepared to operate in other countries. English was the language of Great Britain and its empire, including Palestine, and of the United States of America. All were common emigration goals in those times.⁴⁶

On the Saturday following the above entry, Anne described a near catastrophe that threatened her study materials. An accident with a vase of carnations had spilled water and soaked her papers.

Saturday, 20 May, 1944

I assessed the damage from across the room. My entire genealogy file, my notebooks, my books, everything was afloat. I nearly cried, and I was so upset . . . I felt like crying because all my work and elaborate notes were lost.

I took a closer look and, luckily, the "incalculable loss" wasn't as bad as I'd expected. . . . "Which books are ruined?" I asked Margot, who was going through them.

"Algebra," Margot said.

But as luck would have it, my algebra book wasn't entirely ruined. I wish it had fallen right in the vase. I've never loathed any book as much as that one.⁴⁷

⁴⁶In the years from 1933, when it became increasingly apparent that the Jews faced many hardships and dangers in Europe, many of them sought to emigrate. However, many of the countries in which they sought refuge declined to offer them sanctuary. For example, the United States admitted only 27,000 German Jews in the six and a half years between January 1933 and 1938 although the quota for Germans at the time was 25,957 *per year*. Meanwhile the British restricted immigration to Palestine and in May 1939 the British issued a Palestine White Paper that, in deference to Arab hatred of Jews, limited immigration to that country to 75,000 in the following five years. Nora Levin, *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-1945* (New York: Thomas T. Crowell Company, 1968), 76 and 135. Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1985), 89; Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 189-191. Of course by the time five years had passed the Germans had murdered several million European Jews—in cities and in ghettos, in ravines and in forests, and in *shtetls* and in camps.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 300.

Obviously, Anne's newfound dedication to schoolwork did not yet extend to algebra.

On 6 June 1944, Anne wrote an euphoric report of the onset of the Allied landing in France. Typically, even at that early point, she couched her ebullience in terms of hope that she would be back in school for the fall term.

Tuesday 6 June 1944

"This is D Day," the BBC announced at twelve. "This is the day." The invasion has begun! . . . Oh, Kitty, the best part about the invasion is that I have the feeling that friends are on the way. . . . Maybe, Margot says, I can even go back to school in October or September.⁴⁸

Six and a half weeks later, in her next to last diary entry, Anne described her optimism about an end to the war. Again, she was nearly agog with anticipation of going back to school. She ended by chastising herself for anticipating events. She wrote:

Friday, 21 July 1944

Were you able to follow that, or have I been skipping from one subject to the other again? I can't help it, the prospect of going back to school in October is making me too happy to be logical! Oh dear, didn't I just get through telling you I didn't want to anticipate events? Forgive me Kitty, they don't call me a bundle of contradictions for nothing!⁴⁹

On Tuesday, 1 August 1944, the last day that she wrote in her diary, Anne analyzed her personality, discussing the "lighthearted" and the "deeper" Annes whom she saw as parts of herself. She asserted that she kept:

trying to find a way to become what I'd like to be and what I could be

Yours, Anne M. Frank⁵⁰

⁴⁸Ibid., 310.

⁴⁹Ibid., 334.

⁵⁰Ibid., 336.

Three days later, on Friday, 4 August 1944, the German police and Dutch collaborators arrested the inhabitants of the "Secret Annex." After a brief stay in an Amsterdam prison, they sent them to Westerbork, a transit camp in Holland, on the last train to leave Westerbork for Auschwitz. Only Otto Frank survived. The Germans sent Margot and Anne to Bergen-Belsen camp in Germany and there murdered them by starvation, exposure, and cruelly engineered disease in late February or early March 1945

On 11 November 1943, Anne, mourning the loss of her favorite fountain pen, lost when accidentally put into the stove with some newspapers, wrote, "I am left with one consolation . . . that my fountain pen was cremated, just as I would like to be someday!"⁵¹ The Germans denied her wish—in Bergen-Belsen they ordered victims' bodies to be dumped into mass graves.

Anne's was an assimilated family. Her friend Hannah Pick-Goals portrayed her as a not very religious girl whose family celebrated Jewish holidays at Hannah's home while at their own home they celebrated such gentile holidays as *Sinterklaas*.⁵² Her hopes for the future seemed to center on being able to resume her life in Amsterdam.

The next narrative is that of Moshe Flinker. In contrast to Anne's, Moshe's family was Orthodox and Moshe was quite religious. His diary reflects his religious devotion not only in terms of what he studied but also in his phrasing of his problems and his frequent prayer offerings. In addition, Moshe developed a strong Zionist outlook. He anticipated making *Aliyah* if an opportunity arose and he tailored his studies to that goal. *Aliyah* was a goal that served as a comfort and consolation for the horrors of his life under German persecution. Moshe gained strength from a study of maps of Palestine, imagining the places and terrain that he hoped would one day be his home.

⁵¹Ibid., 145.

⁵²Anne's diary, recollections of her friends, and the account of the time in hiding by rescuer, Meip Geis bear out the idea that Anne was not very religiously oriented. Anne's mother, Edith, and Anne's sister, Margot, were apparently somewhat more religiously inclined than Otto and Anne.

“Therefore, from today on, everything I do will be directed towards this aim.”

Moshe Flinker's surviving diary, written in Dutch and Hebrew, opens with an entry written on 24 November 1942. The last dated entry is from 6 September 1943, although here are several undated pieces, including poems and essays that accompany it. It is not known if there were originally additional notebooks. Moshe was born 9 October 1926 at The Hague. He seems to have been an excellent student in both his public school and religious studies. In the summer of 1942, as conditions for Jews worsened in Holland, Moshe's well-to-do family escaped to Belgium by bribing their way across the border.⁵³ They "hid" in Brussels, not in a concealed place but by obtaining "Aryan" papers. On 7 April 1944, as the Orthodox Jewish family prepared dinner for Passover eve, an informer brought Gestapo agents to their home. The Germans transported the family to Auschwitz where they murdered Moshe and his parents. His five sisters and his brother returned to Brussels where neighbors had saved some of their belongings, including three of Moshe's notebooks.⁵⁴

Moshe Flinker began his diary with a description of his life under German rule thus far. In that section, he described the string of events relating to schooling for Jewish children and youth in Holland before his family's escape to Belgium. These included an escalating series of bans forbidding Jews to attend "schools staffed by gentile (Aryan) teachers," to own radios, attend movies, and to use public transportation.⁵⁵ These orders increased the difficulty of getting to school but did not prevent Moshe from attending. He wrote:

Kislev 15, 5703

⁵³It was at about this time that Anne Frank's family went into hiding in Amsterdam.

⁵⁴Moshe Flinker, *Young Moshe's Diary: The Spiritual Torment of a Jewish Boy in Nazi Europe*. Shaul Esh and Geoffrey Wigoder, eds. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1976), 6-15.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 19.

November 24, 1942

Several months before the end of the school year we had to turn in our bicycles to the police. From that time on, I rode to school by street car, but a day or two before the vacations started Jews were forbidden to ride on street cars. I then had to walk to school, which took about an hour and a half. However, I continued going to school during those last days because I wanted to get my report card and find out whether I had been promoted to the next class. At that time I still thought that I would be able to return to school after the vacations; but I was wrong. Even so, I must mention that I did get my promotion.⁵⁶

While still living in Holland, Moshe took some pains to get to school. Since then, he included in his experiences a surreptitious escape to Belgium—parts of which he accomplished alone. Still, he seemed quite pleased to report that back in Holland he received a promotion that year.

Having reached Brussels he found himself cut off from his usual activities. Though his family hid their Jewish identity, rather than their physical selves, they nonetheless kept to themselves as much as possible fearing that close association with others might cause their identity to be revealed. Moshe found himself having to work out how to spend his days and reported that,

I am idle all day long, and have nothing to do. . . . I have tried to study the Bible (I brought with me a small Bible, without commentaries) but I am unable to concentrate. . . . It is because I hate being idle that I have started this diary so that I can write in it every day what I do and think; in this manner I shall be able to account for all I have done each day. Now the introduction is over and I shall begin my diary tomorrow.⁵⁷

Soon Moshe began to establish some educational habits with which to use his time. These would include his own studies and, at his mother's request, the role of teacher to his sisters.

⁵⁶Ibid., 19-20.

⁵⁷Ibid., 23.

November 26 1942

My "tomorrow" turns out to be "the day after tomorrow." The truth is that yesterday I hadn't the cheek to report to myself what I had done during the day, because I did nothing. By that I mean that I did nothing to better my soul or to elevate my spirit. Oh yes, I read . . . [a]lso yesterday I began teaching my sisters French. People speak a lot of French here in Brussels (more so, I think, than Flemish). So for that reason, and because I must keep my sisters busy during school hours when they may not go out, my mother told me to try and teach them French. This kept me busy for half a day, and in the other half I quarreled with my sisters and read a little of the Hebrew periodical, "Tekufah."⁵⁸

Moshe's education consisted of secular subjects, religious subjects and, as will become apparent, a set of subjects devoted to his aspiration to immigrate to Palestine. A member of an Orthodox Jewish family, Moshe revealed a strong religious commitment throughout the diary.

Because the family was not literally hiding, Moshe was able to make use of the library. Here he found not only books but advisors as well. He also learned there of the fate of other Jews, including Jewish youth.

Every Sunday I borrow books in order to improve my knowledge of Hebrew and general information. . . . It was at the library a few weeks ago that I met a man who used to teach Hebrew at the Brussels Hebrew School. Because of the situation, there are no longer enough pupils for the school; many have been deported and others, who are fearful of being deported, remain at home. This teacher introduced me to "Tekufah."⁵⁹

Moshe had another reason to want something to which to devote his attention. As he reported on a morning in early December, "My mother and father are now quarreling about business. My mother wants my father to go to work but he does not agree."⁶⁰ For adolescents restricted by the need to hide, and even the open form of hiding in this case was much more restrictive than

⁵⁸Ibid., 24.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 32 (December 3, 1942).

normal life, family disputes were especially irritating if not painful. Thus having something in which to immerse the mind must have been especially alluring to them.

Apparently, Moshe was not the only one thinking about his education or how best to use his time. His diary for the night of December 8, 1942, reads: "shortly after we came to Brussels . . . my mother began to question my father about my future."⁶¹ Moshe and his father could not understand this concern. Moshe "wondered how she could worry about a happy future at a time when we were faced with the problem of life or death."⁶² Worrying that he spent his time idly, at most reading Hebrew that she did not find productive, his mother persisted. Reflecting on her tenacity, he wrote:

During the last few days when my mother raised the question of my future, my reaction was again one of laughter, but when I was alone, I too began to ponder this matter. What indeed is to become of me? It is obvious that the present situation will not last for ever—perhaps another year or two—but what will happen then? One day I will have to earn my own living.⁶³

His mother, having failed to persuade his father to seek employment, had turned her attention to her eldest son. Perhaps it was simply a case of a mother wanting to raise a successful son. Perhaps she was a person who could not bear the sight of idleness. Perhaps by thinking of his future, and by encouraging him to think of it, she felt she was ensuring that he would have one. A future for Jews was no longer a sure thing. Whatever her motivation, Moshe began to think and plan for his future. He said:

At first I wanted to drive such thoughts away but they kept coming back. So I started thinking seriously about the problem. After much deliberation, I've decided to become . . . a statesman. Not any sort of statesman, but a Jewish statesman in the Land of Israel. Even though it would take a miracle to free us now, the rest of

⁶¹Ibid., 35.

⁶²Ibid., 36.

⁶³Ibid.

my idea—living in our land—isn't so far-fetched. Then perhaps, the rest of the world might slightly change its attitude towards us.⁶⁴

It was not only the thought of a free Jewish state that inspired Moshe to look toward such a career. Farther into the passage he presented his second reason and it was quite different—heartbreakingly so.

Another reason for my deciding to become a leader of our people is that other arts require a great deal of study. Rather, everything one knows is useful, and most useful of all is knowing how to use one's head. And, of course, as a "religious" Jew, I hope that the Lord will help me when my own intelligence is inadequate.⁶⁵

Statesmanship was the only career he could envision that might be possible without formal education. Having decided upon a career, Moshe set about planning what to study. What he would lack in formal education, he would work diligently to replace with depth and breadth of learning in those fields he could study on his own initiative and with such assistance as he could garner.

Therefore, from today on, everything I do will be directed towards this aim. Of course, I will continue to study the Bible, because only according to its spirit can Israel survive. In addition, I will learn as much as I can about Judaism and about my people.⁶⁶

Moshe "started thinking about the ideas of the preceding generation or two [but] . . . only the idea of Zionism has any meaning for us today."⁶⁷ Fired with the thought of Zionism and a conviction that in it was the salvation of the Jewish people, Moshe set about learning the things he felt such a person would need to know. In doing so, he became convinced that "it is not important that a man studies—but what he studies."⁶⁸ Moshe began to look upon studying

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid., 37.

⁶⁷Ibid., 38.

⁶⁸Ibid.

differently. Scheduling became less important, if content rather than the act of studying was most important. Soon he wrote: "These past few days I haven't done or learned much. But it's not important, because I know that eventually I'll make up for it and do it all at once."⁶⁹

Several of Moshe's comments from that time alluded to an increasing level of parental discord. Apparently, it bothered him but he tried to distract himself with work. Soon he presented to his diary a surprise.

December 18, Morning

For the past few days I've done nothing concerning Judaism. I haven't read the Bible, or any articles, or anything else. However, a week ago I began learning Arabic. But because I was afraid that I wouldn't persist and continue, I didn't write about it. But now that I can already read Arabic and have mastered the first lesson, I am making a note of the fact. But because I've begun learning Arabic I haven't been able to study anything else. At first it was very difficult; I would read something and understand it—but when I tried to read the piece again, it was as though it were completely new to me. I had to go over it three or four times before I knew, understood and remembered it. But there is a great satisfaction in finally mastering it.⁷⁰

It is intriguing to note that he concealed from his diary attempts at new things until he was sure that they would be at least partially successful. Indeed, he stated that he had begun his study a week before, and, in that time, he had written at least three times each time omitting mention of his fledgling effort to learn Arabic

Meanwhile Moshe still worried about his ability to learn and understand the Bible. However, his determination to become a Jewish leader had inspired him anew and he made a plan to effect that learning. Moshe was not hesitant to include prayer in his plan for study.

⁶⁹Ibid., 44.

⁷⁰Ibid., 46.

I have always thought that I lack something that could only be supplied by the Bible. I feel that if I study the Bible I will not be assailed by so many doubts. But how to begin? I've tried several times and each time I felt that, with the exception of the Book of Deuteronomy and the books of the Latter Prophets, there was nothing in it to interest me. And so I have decided on the following plan: each day I will study a section of the Bible, beginning with the Book of Genesis. In this way I will force myself to read the whole Bible, and I am sure that gradually the interest will come. Each day, as I pray, I will ask the Lord to bring me closer to His Book.⁷¹

For secular studies, however, Moshe used more ordinary means to reach his goal. In addition, he thought through what things he might need to know as a statesman in Israel and kept these reasons in mind as he learned. Of learning Arabic he wrote:

As far as my study of Arabic is concerned, I am not learning it simply because I like it or anything like that. I have begun—and hope I may finish—to study this language because a large part of the inhabitants of the land of Israel and the surrounding countries speak it. And, in view of my plans, I see that I will need this language more than any that I studied in school. It is obvious that we shall have to live in peace with our brothers, the sons of Ishmael, who are also Abraham's descendants. I am sure that the terrible riots in the Land of Israel before the war were incited by Germany and Italy; such terrifying outbreaks must not recur. I think that, had the Jewish leaders learned Arabic and so have been able to speak with the Arab leaders, that violence would not have occurred. And therefore I am trying very hard to learn the language.⁷²

To Moshe it was important to emphasize that his education had purpose and was not simply something he enjoyed or something to keep himself busy. In addition, he attempted to analyze, and planned to remedy, some of the problems that had beset Jews in Israel in recent times. Having identified—correctly or not—that these might be solved by a leadership that could speak, on friendly terms, with Arab leaders in their language, he

⁷¹Ibid., 46-47.

embarked on a study of it. It was a task fraught with difficulty. Study materials were difficult to obtain and presented considerable difficulty in use.

It wasn't at all easy to find an Arabic textbook. I searched in all the book shops, but I couldn't find any. Finally, in a large shop I was able to order such a book, but I had to wait for a month or two, as the book had to come from Germany. After a month I actually got a book, but it wasn't the book I had ordered. It was too small. Even so I took it and immediately put in an order for another book, this time from France. This will take another six weeks, and even though I don't know French too well I will use it by buying a French dictionary and study that way. The first book I got was of course in German, and even though I know German much better than French it is still very hard to use because the book is printed in Gothic letters, with which I am not familiar. But I have not sufficiently mastered German so as to be able to learn another language from it, because I find that there are many words I do not know. And even though I have a Dutch-German dictionary it is still difficult because my dictionary is very small and not every word I need seems to be in it. But I won't give up; I'll try extra hard because I need Arabic for the life that lies before me.⁷³

Here we can see a youth of sixteen, hiding from his persecutors in a foreign country, using a Dutch-German dictionary to decipher a German-Arabic textbook written in an unfamiliar alphabet in order to learn a language that he hoped to use in the service of a nation he has never seen—a nation that as yet existed only in the minds and hearts of those entrapped by the genocidal policies of German anti-Semites. Moshe did not seem discouraged by an educational task that was daunting at the very least. Then he heard the bad news.

December 22, 1942, Morning

Last Friday afternoon, as I was about to finish my Arabic studies, my father came in and told me that he had some bad news. He had heard that many Jews

⁷²Ibid., 47.

⁷³Ibid., 47-48. Conrad R. Stein quoted a teacher from Warsaw Ghetto as saying: "The students went after their studies with zest, wanting to finish in one year a course of two or more years. No more dilly-dallying, no more excuses. They asked the teachers for more work." In Anna Natanblut, "Di shuln in varshever geto," *Yibl* 30

were dying in the East, and that a hundred thousand had already been killed. When I heard this, my heart stood still and I was speechless with pain and shock. I had been fearing this for a long time, but I had hoped against hope that they really had taken the Jews for forced labour. . . . Now my last hopes have been dashed.⁷⁴

Sickened and afraid Moshe entered in his diary the thought that "because of my brothers' torment I, too, wish to die because I can not bear to hear of our terrible afflictions." Nonetheless, he labored on toward his goal of learning Arabic, two days later writing:

December 24, 1942

My studies in Arabic continue daily. The work is becoming more and more difficult, but I am persevering all the same because I need the language very much to fulfill the aim I have set for myself. It is really very difficult to learn everything by myself, without being able to ask questions if only because of the problem of pronunciation.⁷⁵

The lack of a teacher was a problem that had no practical solution; still Moshe did not let it discourage him over much. Having decided to learn Arabic, he set about doing so.

Now, however, he began to have some doubts about his studies. In the following passage, these came to the foreground of his thinking.

The important thing is that I devote every free moment to my studies, otherwise I would go idle. But although I study, I have a strange feeling that this work is merely an expression of idleness. Even so, I continue, if only to fill empty hours.⁷⁶

Moshe was unable to recognize, or at least to admit, that, more than an expression of idleness, his studies were a shield against paralyzing fear. A religious youth of Orthodox upbringing, Moshe also was diligent in his religious

(1947), 173-187, quoted in Dawidowicz, 253.

⁷⁴Ibid., 48-49.

⁷⁵Ibid., 52.

⁷⁶Ibid., 53.

studies but the events that controlled his life and were consuming his people made assiduousness difficult. Even those who were religious had trouble finding meaning in the usual sources. Moshe sought meaning but failed to find it: "My daily Bible study also continues, but as I have already noted a thousand and one times, it makes no impression on me whatsoever."⁷⁷

Throughout that winter, Moshe continued to study Arabic. He also persevered in his religious studies. In both instances, he had moments of success and failure. By March, tortured by a dearth of new thoughts or ideas he resorted to experimenting with schedule changes in an attempt to revive his spirits.

March, 9, 1943

I tried going to bed very late, and went to bed at three, but nothing changed. For two weeks I have reduced my daily meals from three to one, but this, too, has been to no avail.⁷⁸

Many of the passages of Moshe's diary from that time present a picture of a disheartened young person. He seemed to understand much of what was happening to Jews in Eastern Europe, both those who were from there and refugees deported there by the Germans. In his studies, he tried to find hope for a better future but at times failed to do so. Depressed and disheartened, by March he tried to find solace in a study of the geography of Palestine.

Lately I feel so lonely, so barren. . . . I found in the Hebrew library a Palestine school almanac. . . . A few days ago I again took it from the library and read it in a spirit entirely different from the first time. It now seemed like a letter to me, as a sign of life of the rest of my people. I love it so much that I can hardly bring myself to return it to the library. . . . Several times already I have asked myself whether I will ever get the chance to stand on its holy earth, if the Lord will permit me to walk about in

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Ibid., 80-81.

my land. Oh, how my soul yearns for you, my homeland, how my eyes crave for the sight of you, my country, the Land of Israel.⁷⁹

Soon after Moshe's father, perhaps in response to his son's unhappy state, made a new arrangement for him. He sent him to school. Joining a class of peers gave Moshe a sense of normalcy and a sense of alienation from youths leading normal lives. Despite having to conceal his Jewishness to attend, in the following entry he indicated a certain relief of melancholy as he returned to school.

April 7, 1943

Lately I have been going to school, on the suggestion of my father, to learn typing and shorthand. I have been attending this school for about two months. I get there at nine in the morning and sit and pound the typewriter; then some girls who also study there enter and they are full of laughter, joy, and gaiety. And already, this sight—I mean seeing these impudent girls, laughing and gay at a time when the girls of my people are wretched and have not known the happiness these girls enjoy—excites in me jealousy and hatred for them.⁸⁰

Attending a gentile school emphasized for Moshe the disparity between the lives of Jews and gentiles in that time and place. This particular instance, the gaiety of the girls at school, may have been especially poignant to him as the elder brother of five sisters. The school was not an entirely negative experience for Moshe. He seemed to derive some satisfaction from his time there. In addition, it provided him with some badly needed opportunities to make friends and behave in normal ways.

Going to school may have exposed Moshe to scrutiny and inspired a sense of security that would prove to be false. Thus it may not have been the best way to help him survive. However, that is in a sense beside the point. Moshe belonged to a family determined to stay together and to live openly. Having reached Belgium they seemed resigned to staying there, and so in that

⁷⁹Ibid., 81.

⁸⁰Ibid., 83-84.

context a schooling experience for Moshe that would contribute to a healthy mental state and prepare him for a working future would make sense. In an undated essay included with his diary he expounded upon this experience:

An incident: a few months after I came to Brussels, my father said to me: "Moses, how would you like to go to school to learn typing and shorthand? If you go to such a school you will also learn to speak French fluently." I replied that if my father wished it, I would not refuse, and a week later I was enrolled in the school.⁸¹

Sixteen-year-old Moshe enrolled at the school in compliance with his father's wish that he do so. This part of the essay and the previous diary entry where he not only revealed that he was going to school but had been doing so for two months, suggest that he felt some ambivalence about his attendance. It is significant that he had not mentioned it before, although he referred to other learning in those entries—specifically to his progress, or lack thereof in learning Arabic. That ambivalence did not last or at least was not continuous.

Since then I have been to school every day except Sabbath and Sunday. I studied and made progress, but everything remained as it was before and nothing really changed in me. I was still the same Moses that had left Holland. Suddenly everything changed completely when a new fellow registered in the school. His name is Marcel Dutranges and he is twenty-one; he has influenced me so much that I am amazed when I think about it.

During all this time not once have I played truant, saying that I was going to school and then going to the movies.⁸²

Here Moshe congratulated himself on his attendance record in which he seemed to take pride. However, his mentioning it all, and especially in describing what he would have done with his time suggests that he had considered truancy—and may have practiced it in the past—but had rejected it. Moshe's comment lends some credence to the notion that he was going to

⁸¹Ibid., 115.

⁸²Ibid.

school more to please his father than himself—at least until the arrival of Marcel Dutranges. Marcel was presumably the same person to whom Moshe referred in his diary several times, citing shared outings and conversations. This friendship with a schoolmate seems to have also provided some conflict, however, as Moshe never felt that he could reveal his Jewishness. Yet clearly at that time he greatly admired this friend.

Moshe assumed several roles associated with schooling. He acted as teacher for his sisters. He was a student of secular subjects and an ardent student of Judaic learning—both of these autodidactically. He also posed as a gentile boy to attend a commercial program at a Belgian school. The first two were at his mother's instigation and the last at his father's. Only the religious studies seem to have arisen from his initiative.

The other conflict for Moshe at that time grew from his goal of becoming a Jewish statesman. Much of his effort for some time had revolved around that goal, but, as he approached his second summer in hiding and rescue seemed ever more remote, he began to question his aspiration. In May 1943 he wrote an entry entitled, "MY FUTURE."

May 19, 1943

This made me think that my present situation would be inducive to my becoming a statesman because for that profession one need not study night and day, but rather one requires a strong character and a heart of steel. So when, together with these qualities, I would obtain knowledge in various other areas, then everything would be perfect. . . . Everything I did and thought was, as far as possible, related to this aim. But after some time had passed I saw, and what is more important I felt, that it was all worthless. . . . I came to feel that if results of lasting value were to come out of it, that is, if we attain the redemption for which our people has been waiting and hoping for two thousand years, then these cannot occur through diplomacy or other deceit or by the grace of the great powers. In that case, there is no longer any value to the Arabic I am studying and my activities in this direction would appear to be useless. Thus nearly all the positive content to my life is shown to be pointless, and

I am left with almost nothing. . . . So now all day long I do nothing but search for some positive content for my life, so as not to be entirely lost.⁸³

Whatever else he gave up in the way of education, Moshe continued with his course of study at the school until it ended that July.

July 18, 1943

Today I had my final examination in shorthand, and with God's help I passed. The test was in the morning, and we had to return to school in the afternoon to receive our certificates. Before they were distributed a student went to the piano and, after he had played a few songs, all gathered in the hall and rose as one person to honor their national anthem. I rose too. I did not wish to exclude myself from everyone else. While I was thus standing I felt as if a knife had pierced my heart, and I inwardly contracted with pain. . . . Here before me stood a people in whom the spiritual level of achievement and authority is not of the most advanced, and yet, after the playing of some of their national songs, they rose as one to sing their anthem and pay homage to their nation. At that moment I thought of our nation's dignity and how it is daily being systematically degraded in every conceivable fashion by our enemies.⁸⁴

His Belgian peers attracted and, at the same time, repelled Moshe. He also was critical and demanding of himself. Although plagued by doubts and fears, he worked hard toward his goal. He also suffered from forced inaction. Chafing at his inability to get on with his life, he wrote:

July 23, 1943

Setting a goal is done but once, but realizing it is forever before one's eyes. In order to realize a goal, there must be some possibility, however remote, of action; and I have no such possibility. I have written several times of what I might do to attain my aims, but so far nothing has succeeded. Even worse, every day I feel that the decisive moment is coming nearer, and I am still completely unprepared.⁸⁵

⁸³Ibid., 87.

⁸⁴Ibid., 102.

⁸⁵Ibid., 103.

Moshe's surviving diary ended with an entry made on 6 September 1943, there he referred to the notebook as the "first notebook" suggesting that he intended to continue the diary. It was seven months later, on 7 April 1944,

the eve of Passover, when the Germans arrived to arrest the family. Perhaps in the interim he continued his diary. If so, it must have been lost either in the arrest itself, in the time between the arrest and the return of Moshe's siblings, or, maybe, on that night he took it with him and it was lost in the camps. Although he planned to continue, when he arrived at the end of this notebook, Moshe felt the need to make an ending. Reflecting on his gratitude, he listed those for whom he was grateful and added a prayer.

Now that I have reached the end of the first notebook of my diary, feelings of thankfulness come over me: first to our Lord, the Lord of Israel, Who has protected me and my family in such terrible times, and Who has given me the privilege of understanding and knowing His divine guidance and heavenly protection; and secondly, my thoughts turn to my teacher, my master, and my guide—Mr. Grebel—whose memory has not left me from the moment I left The Hague, and about whom I have written little because I did not feel that my soul was pure enough to speak of this most beloved and dear man.

My Lord, so close art Thou to me and yet so far. I search for Thee constantly, my thoughts go out unto Thee, and my acts as well. My Lord, my Lord, do not abandon me. Harken to my pleading voice, and have mercy and compassion on me.⁸⁶

The following Spring saw the arrest and deportation of Moshe, his parents, his five sisters, and his brother. The Germans murdered Moshe and his parents at some time following their arrival at Auschwitz. The date that the Germans killed Moshe and the instrument of his murder are not known.

Included in Moshe's diary were several undated writings including this poem in honor of one of his former, and obviously well loved, teachers:

MR. GREBEL

How have I loved you / how have I adored you / my teacher! my father!
How my soul had yearned for you / how my heart has longed for you / my teacher! My

⁸⁶Ibid., 113.

father!

In all my deeds / in all my meditations / you are my mentor / my teacher! my father!

In all my thoughts / in all my ideas / you guide me/my teacher! my father!

Your memory will always remind me / your image will always reproach me / your

spirit will always lead me / my teacher! my father!

Wherever you are: Shalom, Shalom.

To you and all the house of Israel—shalom, shalom!⁸⁷

Anne and Moshe both went into hiding with their families. Hiding in the circle of parents and siblings not only provided them with some sense of security and an atmosphere of some continuity but also meant they were in the company of people with a particular interest in their educations. Anne's father seems to have served as an administrator, coordinator, and teacher for the three young people in the Annex. Moshe's mother pushed him to plan his future and his father helped and encouraged him to learn even enrolling him in a school for a while.

Some children who went into hiding had very different experiences. Sara Spier was in hiding without her immediate family. Sara's rescuers did not encourage her to continue her education and generally discouraged her from doing so. For her, education became an attempt not to regress in her learning.

“Every day I did again the last mathematics problems I had at school”

Sara Spier was born c.1927. She was living in Arnhem in the Netherlands in 1942 when her parents decided to send her into hiding. By the time she emerged from hiding in 1945, she had moved thirty-two times. Unlike Anne Frank and Moshe Flinker, she was separated from her immediate family

⁸⁷Ibid., 116.

during that time, although at times she shared her hiding place with a cousin. The people who hid her were uneducated, or barely educated, Christian farmers—quite different from her urban, bourgeois, educated, Jewish family. Continuing her education was difficult at best and she often met opposition from her rescuers. Following her 1945 liberation, she discovered that the Germans had killed her parents and brother—only she and her sister remained.⁸⁸

When she went into hiding, Sara, like Anne Frank, took her schoolbooks with her. Still, continuing her education was difficult. In some subjects, particularly mathematics and languages, she felt she could only maintain her education rather than furthering it.

I took my schoolbooks with me and my mathematics. Every day I did again the last mathematics problems I had at school, just not to forget them, because I couldn't go on.⁸⁹

Sara phrased her efforts in terms of retaining what she had already learned, but it is not hard to imagine that the meaning of her efforts may have gone farther. By doing repeatedly the last problems she had at school, she was not only reviewing her contact with prior learning but with her prior life as well. Cut off from everything and every one she knew, a ritual that recalled the past would have been a powerful link to all that she missed. It was not a replacement.

But I missed my school very much because I loved to go to school. I was in a lyceum and you could choose at the end of the second year if you wanted to do *gymnasium*. I had chosen classical languages which I always wanted to learn.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Deborah Dwork. *Children With A Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 35, 76.

⁸⁹Ibid., 75.

⁹⁰Ibid.

Sara missed school and its connection to her hopes for the future—which must have seemed far away. Not only was she in hiding without her family, but she was in hiding in a strange milieu full of different customs, beliefs, and values. Nothing was as it had been. Sara must have felt marooned.

And there was nobody to teach me. So I had my books and, well, I couldn't go on further because nobody could see what I did right or wrong. I just read and read again what was written in the books.⁹¹

Not willing to go back and not able to go forward, this one statement powerfully expressed her feelings of enforced limbo—not only in terms of her education but of her life. All she could do was wait and hope, hide and try at least to maintain her intellectual development at the point where the machinations of German anti-Semitism interrupted it.

Meanwhile she had also to contend with the people who had taken her in. One might be tempted to classify Sara as too spoiled to recognize how good she had it—but remember that all she could compare her circumstances with was her life before. She would not be able to see or comprehend the scope or depth of the Holocaust until afterward. For the time being she was living with kind well-meaning people whose lives she did not quite understand and who probably had no idea of how she had lived before. As long as she remained hidden, Sara's life seems to have been less harsh than the lives of many Jewish children during that period. In an ironic contrast, getting an education was difficult and Sara suffered at having to miss it. Misery and suffering are difficult to compare. In Sara's case—although she did not suffer from starvation, disease, or exposure—she did suffer from loneliness, cultural differences, and separation.

The people who hid me were farm laborers, very simple, very nice, very sweet. But they didn't know anything about culture or languages. Their life was very simple and they were Christian. So I came into a very different milieu where there was no

⁹¹Ibid.

education and a different religion. I felt the difference very forcefully, but of course I didn't say anything. I realized they were people who hid me and I couldn't say I didn't like their way of life.⁹²

Each time she moved to a new hiding place, Sara found a similar situation. In the almost three years she was in hiding, Sara was never to be with people who supported her desire to learn. She did not argue the point with them, but, for her, their lack of support was apparently a circumstance that added to the stress of trying to survive.

For example, they didn't read books. . . They accepted that I had my schoolbooks, but when I would ask for some books to read, they said you can do something more useful.⁹³

Sara recalled only one anomalistic instance in which one of her rescuers deviated from the pattern. For a time, she hid with a miller-turned-farmer and, although he did not apparently approve of reading, he surprised her one day.

We were not allowed to read because to read all those books and novels was sin. The only thing we were allowed to read was the Bible. . . . I read the Bible New and Old Testaments. And I remember after weeks and weeks the miller came once from the village and he just said, 'Here, that's for you.' He took a book from the library, a book about farmer's life.⁹⁴

This incident may be more significant than it seems. Regardless of the choice of material—and it isn't clear if he chose that book to educate Sara as to the nature of farmer's lives, because he felt novels were sinful and such a book would be at least informational, or because he thought it would cause the least

⁹²Ibid., 76.

⁹³Ibid., 76-77. Bertje Bloch-vanRhjin, a Dutch Jewish child who like Anne Frank hid together with her family, recounted a very different experience with her rescuer: "an example: The lady of the house had a whole lot of books—she'd had three children—and she had schoolbooks, big history atlases, a complete set of Dickens, and lots of biographies. . . . The lady of the house was a very well-read woman; she knew a great deal. She had a membership at the library, of course, and she went for us, naturally also for schoolbooks. She had to ask for them in one way or another and so the directress of the library knew."

⁹⁴Ibid., 77.

speculation—the farmer presumably had spent little or no time in the library. So to go and get a book for Sara was quite an undertaking as well a risky venture. She must have firmly impressed upon him the importance of books to her.

One thing that Sara did learn during her time in hiding was Calvinism. Like many other children hidden by gentiles, Sara was exposed to a different religion by proselytizers. Apparently they had little compunction about proselytizing children who were brought into their sphere by tragedy and who were separated through calamity from their parents and their own religious communities.⁹⁵ Forbidden in some of the homes in which she hid from reading anything except the New Testament and Old Testament, and exposed to the deep Christian convictions of her protectors, she soon found a desire to grow closer to a couple who were particularly kind to her. Sara eventually found herself accepting conversion. In addition, surrounded by persons of a different religious belief, she saw conversion as a step toward cultural assimilation. “I think I became Christian” [1943–1952] she said, “because I had the feeling, well, I’d like to be one of them . . . it gave me a bit of feeling of assimilation, I think.”⁹⁶

Sara Spier survived and emerged from hiding in 1945 at age eighteen. Her parents and brother, betrayed and deported in 1943, did not return. Only Sara and her sister still lived. Some of her rescuers helped her find a position as a nurse trainee. Hoping to study medicine, she resumed her studies in night school, completing *gymnasium* at age twenty-eight. By then, she had given up her dream of a university education.⁹⁷ She settled in the Netherlands.⁹⁸

In this chapter, we have seen some of the problems and solutions of youths living in hiding. In the next part of the narratives, those from the ghettos of Poland and Lithuania, we will see how those imprisoned in such places dealt with the problems and found solutions for schooling. The youths in

⁹⁵See the introduction to this chapter about children hidden in religious schools.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 107.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 269.

⁹⁸*Ibid.*, 282

hiding faced certain difficulties but while in hiding many, including Anne, Moshe, and Sara lived lives stalked with fear but not the reality of the ghetto horrors. I do not mean to suggest they had an easier time after all Anne and Moshe went on to Auschwitz and beyond, as opposed to some of the ghetto prisoners who were spared the camps altogether. In the end the Germans murdered them both. It is also certain that making, keeping, and attending school in the ghettos was fraught with difficulties beyond our comprehension.

Chapter Four:

Schooling in Ghettos

“With beating hearts . . .”

This section includes Chapter Four: Tales from Three Ghettos: Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, Lodz, and Vilna and Three Tales from Kovno Ghetto as well as Chapter Five: Seven Stories from Warsaw Ghetto. Each of these contains narratives of schooling in the Jewish ghettos that the Germans ordered into existence in Eastern Europe. Kovno and Vilna are in Lithuania and thus came into existence following the German invasion of that country in July 1941, somewhat later than did Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, Lodz, and Warsaw.

Although the various ghettos began and ended at different times, the course of events in each was remarkably similar. If one ignores absolute chronology, one can construct a calendar of similar development of the various ghettos. One of the main differences is the actual amount of time events consumed in different places. This was due to both an increasing adeptness on the part of the Germans in the establishment and liquidation of ghettos and to their particular uses of the certain ghettos. While it is true that the ultimate purpose was to concentrate Jews in order to dispose of them efficiently when their turns came, in some places the Germans chose to employ Jewish labor and skills to further the war effort thus prolonging the existence of some ghettos. The Germans, aided by the Jewish police—who had little choice as refusal meant immediate deportation and death to themselves and their families—began the liquidation of Warsaw Ghetto, formed officially in November 1940—although forming from the first day of the occupation in September 1939—beginning in July 1942. Following the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the spring of 1943, the Germans razed the Ghetto. By summer, it existed no longer—although the ruins sheltered a handful of survivors.

Tomaszow-Mazowiecki Ghetto was the scene of mass deportation in October 1942. In May 1943, the Germans liquidated the camp that replaced the ghetto. Vilna Ghetto, established in September 1941, effectively ended in September 1943, with a final wave of mass murder at Ponar and subsequent deportation of the small remainder of the Jews to camps. The Germans formed the Lodz Ghetto in the waning days of 1939. That Ghetto's final liquidation did not occur until the summer of 1944—earning it the dubious honor of being the longest-lived of the ghettos. The Germans designated the Slobodka section as the Kovno Ghetto on 10 July 1941, only seventeen days after the Germans entered the city and made it into a labor camp in October 1943. In July 1944 the Germans transferred most of the remaining 8,000 Jews to concentration camps on German soil and set the former Ghetto on fire. They made that cruel transfer just days before the Soviet army arrived to liberate the city.¹

Life in ghettos was harsh. For ghetto children, life was confusing, arbitrary, and frightening. Besides the physical discomforts of cold, hunger, and untreated illness, there was the uncertainty of each day. Lest we forget the conditions that formed the context for both clandestine and German sanctioned schooling, Mira Ryczke Kimmelman's account of what life was like for those school children, their families, and their teachers reminds us.

In the ghetto when you woke up in the morning, you did not know what the day will be like—you *did not know*. You did not know are they going to come into the ghetto today and search houses? Are they going to be on the street catching men for forced labor? Are they going to catch women to become cleaning women for the officers, for the SS? You never knew from day to day. And then living in crowded quarters—hygiene: to wash your body; you didn't have a shower; you didn't have a bath; you had to heat your water; you knew you had to take your turn to be able to wash your clothes. Everything became hardship—getting food for the family. So everything that seems so normal and so easy in life was an ordeal. And then sickness—if, God forbid, somebody became sick—contagious diseases—they had to

¹Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (New York Bantam Books, 1975), 203-208, 290-295, 299-310 and Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, ed. Martin Gilbert, nts. Dina Porat, and trans. Jerzy Michalwicz (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), xii-xiv andxxi-

go to the hospital. The hospital people. There were not enough beds; they were on the floor—not even mattresses—on the floor. Medicine—to obtain medicine—very, very difficult. If somebody had to barter a ring or a watch to get medicine for their dear ones it was [difficult] so we [Mira's family] were lucky. We did not have typhus or typhoid in the ghetto. My mother was getting sick very often because of pneumonia she caught at the beginning. So our dear friend Dr. Giebocki, he came into the ghetto and he gave her what was necessary and helped her but it was very difficult to obtain anything. Everything had a price, and soon you [had] only two sweaters instead of five, one pair of shoes instead of two, no more of the winter coat that you want to wear. So little by little we were parting with everything that belonged to us.²

Not only did teachers and children suffer a number of painful things themselves but also every day they witnessed scenes of abject misery. The way to school was full of experiences ranging from degradation to unspeakable horrors.

Well, what they saw was people begging in the streets. People, men—Jewish men—that wore the traditional black garb and had a beard, covering their beard being afraid that somebody will come and cut it. Women that didn't have coats anymore covered with a blanket because they traded, they bartered the coat they had away. Shoes—children that didn't have shoes anymore. Maybe they were worn out or they outgrew them so with rags they covered their feet. Winter was always a time of horror because it was bitter cold, and we didn't have fuel. Whatever we had we burned to have a kettle of water, to have some hot water, or a little bit of hot soup.

Then the moment we saw the SS uniform or the Gestapo in the street, people were running into the houses hiding. They didn't know what does it mean? Where are they going? What are they going to do? Because many of them just for the fun when they saw a woman with a child took a pistol and shot. Just for the fun of it! So we saw death; we saw misery; we saw hunger; we saw people that were petrified, scared. And that's what the ghetto looked like. This is why education was so important. Why the school was an escape from the reality of ghetto life.³

xxiv.

²Mira Ryczke Kimmelman, interview by author, tape recording, 1997.

³Ibid.

Referring to the film *Schindler's List*, Mira pointed out that "this was on the mild side . . . [in watching the film] you do not smell the smells; you do not hear the screams; you do not feel the horror that cannot be portrayed."⁴ Clearly a barrage of circumstances existed that disrupted or prevented education.⁵

In Chapters Four and Five, I have included differing ways of viewing schools. Chapter Four's "Tales of Three Ghettos" reveals the similarities and differences of schooling experiences and indicates how ghettos organized schools. "Three Tales from Kovno Ghetto," also in Chapter Four, shows education in one ghetto, with emphasis on one ghetto school, as seen through the eyes of three individuals. Chapter Five, "Seven Stories from Warsaw Ghetto," contains narratives describing a variety of schooling efforts within one ghetto and permits examination of the perspectives of an assortment of persons—adults and youths, including administrators, teachers, and students.

Although German authorities often banned schooling in ghettos, particularly for secondary students, in many cases lessons continued clandestinely. Occasional permission to reopen schools was often more illusory than real—as those authorities followed such permission with orders to "temporarily" close for such reasons as epidemics or fuel shortages.

Conditions in the ghettos were not always better or even very different from those in the camps. In the ghettos, too, the Germans starved, abused, and selected Jews who lived under constant threat of deportation and death.⁶ Indeed, their policy involved incrementally converting many ghettos into camps. Nonetheless, schools seem to have flourished. Although it is important

⁴Ibid.

⁵Deborah Dwork, *Children With a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 155-209; Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1985); Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975). Also see the complete narratives from which originate the quotes in this chapter.

⁶Jews were often subjected to the process known as "selection" whereby the Germans would decide who at that particular time would be allowed to live a little longer and who would die immediately. Being chosen for life or death might be based on gender, age, physical condition, or any criteria that the Germans in charge decided upon for each occasion.

to look at ghetto schooling for what it offered to children at the time, it is also useful to remember that, when sent to the camps, ghetto prisoners took their determination and practice in clandestine schooling with them. Not only the adults, but also the children, had practice in making schoolwork under dire conditions—indeed for many children it would have been the only model of schooling they had ever known.

Meanwhile, in ghetto schools, children and teachers met to conduct the age-old processes and purposes of schooling. N. Korn, a teacher from one of Lublin's underground schools, which met secretly in ghetto shops, described the scene:

With beating hearts we conducted lessons, simultaneously on the alert for the barking voices of the SS, who frequently raided Jewish homes. In such a case all incriminating traces immediately disappeared. Gone were books and notebooks. The pupils began to play and the teacher became a customer: in a tailor's house he began to try on clothes and in a shoemaker's house—shoes.⁷

Not always sure what the ghetto portended, but convinced that conditions were getting worse, ghetto internees worked to maintain their lives and the lives of children. Jews imprisoned in ghettos strove to build playgrounds and parks and to provide a variety of cultural programs—including schools. Few truly understood the German plan to annihilate all of European Jewry, yet they understood that life was perilous and subject to sudden, disruptive change. Certain goals, e.g., schooling, must be met with alacrity—if they were to be met at all. As we shall see, teachers strove to squeeze the curricula into too little time, with too few resources, and to conduct lessons under conditions of starvation, disease, cold, and fear. Likewise, despite the grim conditions, the youths they taught worried about whether they were working hard enough, covering enough material, and

⁷Quoted in Milton Meltzer, *Never to Forget: The Jews of the Holocaust* (New York: HarperCollins, 1976), 99.

retaining enough. As a Warsaw Ghetto teacher would later report:

In prewar times we had never witnessed such studiousness as the students demonstrated in these *komplety*. They went after their studies with zest, wanting to finish in one year a course of two or more years. No more dilly-dallying, no more excuses. They asked the teachers for more work.⁸

⁸Anna Natanblut, "Di shuln in varshever geto," *Yibl 30* (1947) : 173-187, quoted in Dawidowicz, 253.

Tales from Three Ghettos:

Tomaszow-Mazowiecki /Lodz/Vilna

This chapter includes narratives of four different Ghetto experiences from the perspectives of six persons. The first section offers narratives of schooling in three ghettos. In Lodz and Vilna, Dawid Sierakowiak and Yitskhok Rudashevski were able to attend school openly. In Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, Mira Ryczke attended and taught clandestinely. These experiences do not constitute an overview of Jewish education in ghettos, but they do contain themes that will emerge in other accounts. There are similarities and differences in the persons who provided these narratives. Two, as we see, did not have to hide their schooling efforts while one hid both her role as a student and as a teacher. Two were male and one was female. Two died and one survived. Two lived in ghettos formed in their home communities and one lived in a ghetto in a new city. Two kept diaries and one later provided an account in a book and interviews. Two looked forward to rescue by the Soviets and to someday living in a just society founded on Marxist principles, while one, a Zionist, looked for deliverance and a future in a Jewish homeland.

Tomaszow-Mazowiecki

"We didn't miss a day."

Mira Ryczke [Kimmelman], the daughter of a prosperous Jewish family, was born on 17 September 1923 in Zoppot, a Danzig suburb. As a young child, she lived in Danzig and its environs amidst the growing tensions of increasingly evident anti-Semitism. By summer of 1939, when Mira was fifteen years old,

she was making ready to immigrate to Palestine. On 1 September 1939, war broke out and her plans dissolved in the confusion. Flagrant anti-Semitism—an export that began to affect Jewish lives even before the arrival of the German armies of occupation—already marred Mira’s education. Her path led from Danzig to Warsaw to Tomaszow-Mazowiecki. Then, in 1943, the Germans imprisoned her at Blizyn near Majdanek. From there, they sent her to Birkenau and Hindenburg, sub-camps in the Auschwitz complex. In January and February of 1945, she endured the deadly evacuation and death march to Bergen-Belsen in Germany. Liberated from that camp on 15 April 1945, Mira was only days from death. Her family had been decimated—mother, brother, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles—all had fallen victim to the German murder machine. Only Mira and her father survived. She eventually made her home in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Her story, as told here, is based on interviews, with some additions from her published autobiography.⁹

“My first traumatic experience with Nazi rules was my expulsion from the German Gymnasium,” wrote Mira of her life during the Holocaust.¹⁰ It was possible for parents to shield children from confronting the hatred directed toward them—even in the face of the ever-increasing anti-Semitic rules and laws. However, when the Germans expelled them from their schools, it was difficult to conceal either the persecution, its source or, the future it portended. When told, in 1935, not to return to her school in the next term, the eleven-year-old’s life changed. For the remainder of the term, her schoolmates and teachers ignored her and the isolation of the Jewish students grew.

Mira’s parents enrolled her in a Polish *Gymnasium* where she had to contend with learning a new language and facing burgeoning anti-Semitism. By 1938, the German export of overt anti-Semitism had altered her new school to the point of forcing Mira and her Jewish schoolmates to sit at desks separated from the gentile students. Meanwhile Mira and her younger brother, Benno,

⁹Kimmelman, interview, and Mira Ryczke Kimmelman, *Echoes from the Holocaust: A Memoir* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997).

¹⁰Kimmelman, interview 1997.

studied Hebrew privately. Then, however, her Hebrew teacher immigrated to France. When her music teacher departed for Manchuria, Mira, too, began to think of leaving; by August of 1939 her parents had agreed that she could continue her education in Palestine, and a school there accepted her. Even as her papers were being processed, the Germans began the invasion of Poland and annexed Danzig as well. In October 1939, they rounded up the Jews of the city and deported them to Warsaw. Mira's family remained in Warsaw until February 1940, when in a daring escape they made their way to the city of Tomaszow-Mazowiecki. Life under German rule was oppressive, dangerous, uncertain, and frightening. The Germans compounded these difficulties by the imposition of starvation rations. Their initial salvo cut Mira even deeper.

The first thing that the Nazis did—they closed all the schools. They prohibited formal education and parents as well as educators understood that if this [schooling] is taken away from the young it's going to cause problems in the long run. We had no idea how long the war would last. We felt when the education, the secret schools, started, and it started right away—November, December 1939, that maybe by spring the war would be over. They felt if the children are going to lose one school year it's going to be hard to catch up. This is when teachers with the help of the Jewish administration and later the *Judenrat* were going to be teaching in secrecy. And by word of mouth—nothing could be put down on paper—by word of mouth, it spread that there are going to be classes and the teachers were the gymnasium professors from before the war that landed in the ghetto and they volunteered.¹¹

Clandestine schooling occurred both in Warsaw and in the city of Tomaszow-Mazowiecki. It is Mira's impression that it occurred throughout the German occupied land. Many of the teachers were refugees and the ghetto prisoners eagerly sought their services.

It started with the Warsaw ghetto but when I came to Tomaszow, the same thing was developing there. It was going from city to city and each city had also teachers that were refugees that ran away from other cities, and people knew there

¹¹Ibid.

is a teacher and they [teachers] volunteered. They were not paid but what we did was pay them in produce—in something so that they could supplement their meager diet. So either bread or some sugar that somebody could get or a few eggs—whatever was available we were giving the teacher to compensate. But it was not in money. Money became worthless because of the tremendous inflation. If you gave him 200 zloty maybe he could buy a loaf of bread and next week, he wouldn't be able to buy a loaf of bread.¹²

Mira's description of the system of paying teachers emphasizes what others have reported concerning the role that teaching played in providing a livelihood for teachers. It also should highlight the value placed on education. The Germans allowed only starvation rations, forcing the Jews to obtain the rest by smuggling and by barter. Even if a family could afford to buy extra foodstuffs, they did so at a risk to their own safety. The conduct of school afforded other risks as well.

So these schools were in private rooms. People allowed for a few students but only very few. We could not carry books; we could not carry notes—nothing—because if caught the Jewish administration would not protect us because this is secret. They would be punished if it would be found out that they knew about this underground schooling system.¹³

Everyone associated with the schools, teachers, students, those who allowed use of space, and the Jewish community administrators, were all likely to be held responsible for breaking the law against education. Still, the students did not lose their enthusiasm. They even had a voice in choosing what to study.

We were taking courses that we felt we [needed] in order to matriculate in time. When war did not end in spring of 1940 the schooling system went on, on a larger scale because we knew now we have to really get into it. I was able to catch up and take that one year that I needed in order to matriculate and went with my father to Warsaw because this is where the tests were given. They had to be

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

authentic. They had to be one standard so that anybody that had a certificate of matriculation issued there could enter a college or university after the war or whenever. Naturally, everything was lost because it was dangerous to even carry them because that proved that there was some schooling system.

History was always something that I adored. You know I learned Latin in school. In the ghetto, there was one teacher that was teaching Latin, poetry Latin, and we remembered it for a long time—today not anymore—but it was important and it was fun.

We actually selected what we really wanted, what we really needed. Because we knew there are certain things we have to learn—[like] Polish literature. So by reciting poetry, by hearing stories, that was important. History, I wanted to learn history. Math was the last on my list but I had to [learn it]. But with chemistry and physics it was more difficult. But languages were taught and literature was taught and math was taught, history was taught, geography was taught. So whatever we could we did. But, it didn't matter what. We were ready for everything. I was and the group I was with—we were there because we wanted to.

You know we had to remember things because it was memory if the teacher taught us something we had to remember. It was the only way. . . . And when you cannot write things down you have to pay much more attention to it.¹⁴

Learning an entire curriculum and taking exams without recourse to note taking was quite an accomplishment. As we will see later they accomplished that feat by creative methodology. The language of instruction was “[in the ghetto] Polish because these were [mostly] Polish professors. The ones [students] that went to the religious part of the school were probably using Yiddish.”¹⁵ Polish was not as obvious a choice as it might seem; even before the ghetto a number of languages were used by different groups of Jews. In addition, as Jews poured into Poland from other places, a number of other languages, including German were used. While the choice of languages may have been in part a rejection of the language of the oppressors, it was also a practical consideration. Before the German take-over, there was a plethora of school choices. In the condensed system of the ghetto, especially a small ghetto

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵In addition to Polish instructors, there were some refugees from Germany who taught languages especially

as existed in Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, it made more sense to choose one language and to opt for one commonly known. The exception as Mira points out was that religious schools used Yiddish, the lingua franca of the Ashkenazim, although there were Sephardim in the ghetto as well. For those inclined to seek religious education, especially those from shtetls and rural areas, Yiddish would have been useful as well as a declaration of Jewishness; for the more assimilated Jews, Yiddish was not necessarily a familiar language as they used Polish or, in the case of non-Polish Jews, the languages of their respective countries. Chedar students often spoke Yiddish, while students who came from other backgrounds, especially from urban and assimilated families, often did not. Religious schools, regardless of the home languages of their students, taught Hebrew.

Mira pointed out that those who taught the older students were professional teachers. The school system may have been cobbled together, but the teachers themselves were not amateurs. Nor seemingly was the curriculum below standard. Although the students made certain choices, the curriculum closely resembled that of secondary schools in normal circumstances. Neither the professional background of the teaching staff nor the ordinary structure and content of the curriculum held true for the younger children. This difference is not surprising as early childhood education has often been entrusted to young women with little qualification other than an interest in small children.

These were all professional teachers. For the very young children not necessarily, but for the older [youths] public school and gymnasium professional teachers. I was not a professional teacher but I volunteered and they allowed me because it was very simple teaching.¹⁶

Latin, French, and German.

¹⁶*ibid.*

Indeed, young children, condemned to the exigencies of the German tyranny, were well served by the interest of such young women. The goals and the needs in primary and secondary schools would have been quite different.

In Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, the school organizers were well-connected, prominent persons. The organizers of schools varied from ghetto to ghetto. In some ghettos, political or religious groups took the lead, in others teachers themselves assumed the role, and in some places the impetus of students led the effort. In Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, a group of parents promulgated the development of the clandestine schools.

There was a group of people that were involved in organizing it [school]. These were people that were prominent citizens in the ghetto, that had children and cared, and knew the Elders, the *Judenrat*, had connections, and could deal with it. But these were the local people. I was not local; I was already in my third place now.¹⁷

As to the types of education available, Mira remembers predominantly secular education. There was also certain amount of religious education—especially of the type to prepare boys for bar mitzvah. Mira pointed out that there were things going on about which she would not have known.

There definitely was [religious education] because my brother not only had to have secular education but he was twelve years old—he was ready for bar mitzvah—so he needed to be prepared. So there were rabbis that in secrecy taught the children [and] prepared them. [These students were] boys only boys. At that time girls were not having any ceremonies, no. So the boys were taught. And I know of many boys that during the war had their bar mitzvah and there were some that never had it because the parents didn't feel at that time it was important or they didn't want to endanger their children. But for [my family] it was important. And

¹⁷Ibid.

then I am sure there were many very religious ones that met and taught also but it was all underground.¹⁸

Although religious education continued to be for boys only, in Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, secular education immediately abandoned gender separation. Indeed, they swept away most of the separations that existed in the effort to provide a good education for the youth of the ghetto.

It was all coeducational. In Poland, even in Danzig we had a few all girls' schools. The gymnasium I went to, the German [one], was an all girls school, but the Polish [gymnasium] was coeducational—all the others were coeducational. In Poland, there were many separated schools. And then there were Jewish schools and there were Polish schools, and there were Jewish schools where they taught Polish and Jewish [Yiddish]. There were Hebrew schools; in the city of Vilna there were Hebrew schools—Hebrew gymnasiums.¹⁹

In the ghetto Mira specified, they “did not separate.” According to Mira, coeducation did not have any disruptive effect on education.

We were there to learn. We were eager to. . . [pause] . . . to *breathe* for an hour or two the air filled with wisdom, with knowledge. We were swallowing the words of the teachers.²⁰

The reason, she said, was that they were able to put aside all extraneous considerations “because we had a goal, those that wanted to matriculate, we had a goal from the beginning.”²¹

They had other goals as well. Besides the opportunity to learn, school provided Mira and her schoolmates with an opportunity to escape, however

¹⁸Ibid. The ceremonies to which Mira alluded here are bat mitzvah ceremonies—she refers to the more modern practice in some Jewish religious communities of including a ceremony for girls that is analogous to the boys' bar mitzvah ceremony.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid.

fleetingly, from the grim realities of the cunningly orchestrated degradation and terror.

It wasn't only a matter of learning. It was also to divert our attention from the horrible everyday life—to forget about the hunger, the living conditions, the constant beatings, the catching of people in the street. And people disappeared. So it was the positive way of gearing the minds of the young people toward something else. And it was in every ghetto. I can only talk about my ghetto but I know about other people who went to school in other ghettos. . . . [And] remember we were strangers in the city so I only had the friends I made and, these friends, I knew exactly what they were doing. Life in the ghetto was so difficult that you could not use your energy to seek a lot of other friends.²²

Young Jews in the ghettos sought various diversionary activities. Mira, like many others, belonged to a Zionist group. Having failed earlier to make *Aliyah*, she nonetheless continued hoping to do so in the future. Zionism and schooling gave her a vision of a future. Her participation in her Zionist group, Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir, was doubly clandestine. She hid it even from her parents.

I was also involved in the clandestine Zionist organization. I've been since I was ten years old in the Zionist movement and we have secret meetings too. This was again another group.

It was absolutely educational. We sang Hebrew songs. We learned the history of Zionism. We were talking about Palestine at that time becoming a homeland for the Jewish people. It was extremely important, and, again, I was a leader for younger groups. We always met on Saturday afternoon and my parents were never aware of it. I told them I am going to my grandparents—I *went* to my grandparents!—but I didn't spend four hours there. I spent two hours there and two hours I was with the Zionist organization. So there were so many activities to keep our minds sane, to think about the future, to avoid despair, to avoid the constant tension of everyday living.²³

²²Ibid.

Concealing her participation in a Zionist organization was complex and filled with the logic typical of adolescence. She concealed it she says, "because I was afraid if they would know they would say 'NO!' and, if they didn't know, if they were asked, they couldn't be punished, they didn't know—they didn't know where I went." It was not an anticipated objection to Zionism per se that kept her from telling them; it was "because they would want to prevent me from being in danger." Her parents saw risking danger to finish school as acceptable as an education as of vital importance. Zionism could wait.

Oh, they were Zionists! Oh yes, yes! Well, they belonged, in Danzig, to Zionist organizations. I belonged. But in the ghetto, because this was so dangerous—you see my education was finished by '41—I already matriculated. I didn't have to endanger myself anymore, but I felt that it was extremely important for me.²⁴

In conjunction with "normal" activities, such as going to school and hiding things from parents, was the life of the ghetto. Lest we forget what that entailed, Mira provided this description:

Life in the ghetto at first seemed normal. *Seemed normal.* There was constantly the need to barter things for food because the rations we were getting were very small. My father was the one who did a lot of bartering. My brother was [also]. I did not barter much because they took over this job; so we set aside a time when we knew we could go to school, and I taught in the afternoon the little ones. I had my lessons in the morning; I taught in the afternoon.²⁵

As she pointed out, the early days in the ghetto seemed fairly normal. The Jewish inhabitants did not yet understand the depths of the depraved German intentions. Indeed, although the Germans held Jewish lives cheaply, and committed themselves to ridding Europe of the presence of Jews, they had not yet agreed upon an efficient means of accomplishing that end. In the ghetto,

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid.

the desperation of the situation was slow to reveal itself to the Jewish prisoners.

Mira finished her *gymnasium* studies in 1941. Even before she finished, she became a teacher for young children. She continued teaching after she finished school, passing on the things she had learned, including the lessons she had learned about school as a shield against the abysmal conditions of the ghetto.

I in turn volunteered to teach the young ones and these were first and second graders—very young children. So without books, without pencils and paper, we were talking—we were talking about flowers and about animals, about forests. These children still remembered everything. You know [the war] happened a year ago—when it started. They still remembered going on vacation with their parents—gathering flowers, catching butterflies—so it was easy to talk to them about these things.

I was at that time seventeen—sixteen, seventeen—but I also always loved teaching, and I always loved children, and I had a younger brother who also was taught in the ghetto. I wanted to give something to the young ones, and there were not more than three, four, mostly five, of them in the room, and we pretended we are playing—in case some Gestapo or SS would enter we were playing—so we always had some toys ready to pretend. We were singing—songs are a wonderful tool for young people—so we were singing songs, and we were talking about what is happening—history, little bit of history. But always giving them hope that it soon it will be all over, and you will be able to return to your own city, to your own school. But for the young people it was a godsend. They needed it even if it wasn't long—two hours a day. You couldn't do more. And then you may meet in the afternoon another hour somewhere else—every day in somebody else's home so that if somebody suspected something we would not be caught.²⁶

Organized into tiny “classes” of less than half a dozen children and a teacher, the classes consisted of neighbor children.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid.

First of all, we tried [to assemble] always children in the building where we lived, in the next building, always close by. The ghetto was small and we were crowded so there were always children in every building."²⁷

Organizing the small schools and teaching in them was quite a task as the teachers had no conventional materials, little or no training, and they had to keep their activities a secret from not only the Germans but from the children as well.

You see for the very young ones I had to devise my own way. The professors had their lesson plans, they knew what they wanted to accomplish because there was a goal. First and second graders did not need to matriculate. They needed to be given something pleasant, something they wanted to go to, something they enjoyed to get them out of the house, of the misery, to bring them together with songs and with stories—everything in stories. Children remember when you tell them stories.

The youngest—there were kindergartens too, secret kindergartens where children were playing. But that age I couldn't deal with. I needed to do a little bit more. But there were kindergarten teachers that had secret kindergartens.

They [young children] were told that "you are going to play." Not "school"—school was never mentioned. "You are going to be with your friends and play." As a matter of fact my husband, Max, had a little daughter in the ghetto, she was at that time seven years old, [and] she was going to a secret school in their ghetto.²⁸

In the introduction to this section on schooling in the ghettos, I included Mira's testimony concerning the hideously grim, dangerous, and frightening everyday experiences Germans subjected Jews to in the ghettos. They designed and orchestrated those experiences both to dehumanize the Jews and to render them too disconcerted to offer any effective resistance to the gruesome mass murders that awaited them. Those attending school faced grave difficulties and disruptions, but, in truth, not all children had the opportunity to attend school. Some simply could not afford the extra bread or

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸Ibid.

other food that served as tuition. Some children engaged in smuggling, upon which the survival of the ghetto depended, and had no time or strength to go to school. There were cultural differences also. Rural children, who had much different educational experiences from the urban children, were confined in the ghetto as well. Having had little education, or at least little secular schooling, these families were less inclined to seek it out now. Urbanites, assuming that those children were less desirous of such schooling, caught up in their own desperate pursuit of life, had little energy to devote to encouraging them. In a world where all energies were devoted to surviving each day there sometimes little attempt to go beyond the stratification that already existed. Mira described the difficult circumstances that kept some children from attending classes:

There was hunger in the ghetto. The children were the only ones that could smuggle some food. Into the ghetto came people from all over, from little towns, from villages, from hamlets, people that were very poor, whose children had very little education before and if they had education it was usually Jewish education only. And then, as I said, with the hunger increasing in the ghetto, the children were the ones, the smugglers, that dared to go out—the ones that didn't have the dark eye and dark hair and were light skinned and didn't look Jewish. They were the daredevils that went out and brought food into the ghetto—potatoes or flour or bread—so that that could be traded. So a lot of children were engaged in feeding the ghetto.²⁹

Mira was aware of little participation in schooling by political or Resistance groups although they did exist in Tomaszow-Mazowiecki . Mira compared Tomaszow-Mazowiecki Ghetto to the more extensive and diverse Warsaw Ghetto:

The Warsaw ghetto was very, very different. In our ghetto [Tomaszow-Mazowiecki], the intellectuals sponsored the schools. Tomaszow was the size of Knoxville.³⁰ The

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰At the time of this interview, Knoxville, Tennessee had a population of slightly over 165,000.

Jewish population when we came was fifteen thousand [ten percent] and by the time the liquidation came there were another eight thousand brought in from all villages and all small towns concentrated there. So you cannot compare with four hundred fifty thousand Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. They [Warsaw] were also better organized than the smaller ones [ghettos]. They had more manpower to do it. On the other hand, too, they had many, many that denounced others. In our ghetto we didn't. And if there was somebody that was denouncing Jews to the Gestapo that person didn't live long.³¹

For school keepers the possibility of discovery was of concern. The Germans were notorious for seizing upon evidence that might indicate flouting orders—and their standard punishment for non-compliance was severe and often fatal.

If they [the Nazis] would see somebody walking with a book, they would stop that person right away. If somebody would denounce that there is a secret school, they would search for it. We hoped that that would not be done. It wasn't. In the [Tomaszow-Mazowiecki] ghetto there was no denouncing. Until the liquidation the education was going on. We were learning poetry; we were reciting poetry—learning by reciting and even children [learned] little poems and they remembered it and it meant a lot to them. And then also holidays, when our holidays came [we would] tell them stories about the holidays, bible stories, everything in stories just to give them a little bit of information in a pleasant positive way.³²

Although they knew of instances where the Germans murdered those who disobeyed orders, those engaged in education continued. In Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, fortunately, the Germans did not catch them.

We were very, very careful. When [we] were in somebody's private room, with three other students and a teacher, we also had something in front of us so, in case somebody came, we were not being taught. So either we had some puzzles or we had something, something innocent, that would not give us away. I think that teachers were much more at risk than we. They had a list of teachers; the ghetto had a list of

³¹Kimmelman, interview.

³²Ibid.

everybody by profession. So it could easily be found out what are the teachers doing.³³

Yet, as Mira points out, the ghetto youth saw danger differently than their elders did. While the adults worried about their children's participation in school or, like Mira's parents, in clubs and organizations frowned on by the Germans, the young people saw the danger as adding a certain élan. Their zeal for schooling went beyond the desire for an education and the need to escape from their harsh circumstances. School represented resistance and a flouting of the hated German edict.

Young people do not perceive danger the way adults do. Danger becomes excitement. "We are doing something clandestine. We are doing something that is forbidden. We are fighting the Nazis by doing it." So we knew it would be dangerous but it didn't matter to us. I think that even persuaded more of us to do it.

Remember that resistance can be very different when you have a resistance by disobeying orders—it doesn't have to be with a gun in your hands. You can resist in different ways. For instance any assembly was forbidden—praying assembly was forbidden. Jews need at least ten adults to pray, to do the most important prayers, to read from the Torah. Every house in the ghetto had a secret room where people prayed. There, if sometimes there was not enough time to warn them and the SS came and found the men praying, they were either severely beaten or taken out and shot. So people realized that there is a danger, but the necessity and the benefit of praying outweighed the danger.³⁴

Eventually, Mira found other opportunities to teach in the ghetto. Not only youth, but also adults found reason to learn new skills; Mira was for a time

³³Ibid.

³⁴Although Mira knew of no schools in Tomaszow-Mazowiecki being discovered by the Germans, she made the point here that, although some Jews were caught praying and were severely punished or murdered for doing so, praying continued. She used that incident to point out the commitment of the Jews of the ghetto to living in accordance with their beliefs and values in spite of German laws to the contrary. In contrast, Meir Sosnowicz recalled that in Warsaw he was in a school when "the Gestapo broke in and removed the teacher. . . . We never heard from him again; neither were there any more attempts at further formal schooling for us." Quoted in Martin Gilbert. *The Boys: The story of 732 Young Concentration Camp Survivors*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996) 72. As we shall see, that episode does not mean that schooling in Warsaw ended at that time—only that it did for Meir and his classmates.

engaged in meeting those needs also. Some of her students were Jews while others were sympathetic gentiles.

I took, before the war, in the gymnasium, English, and had an excellent English teacher who was trained in London . . . and I was very good at it. In the ghetto, after the first liquidation in October of '42, when the ghetto became [less than] one tenth of the ghetto—there were just a few hundred of us left—some rumors somehow were created that Jews, some Jews, will be sent to Palestine in exchange for Germans that live in Palestine. In Haifa, there were a lot of Germans. And some people wanted to learn English at that time. Because in Palestine the English were [in charge]. They [Jewish prospective emigrants] needed English [and] they didn't know [English]. I was tutoring English after the liquidation of the ghetto to those that believed in it. And I remember, like today, his name was Bernstein, he had a wife and two children, and he was a lawyer, and he took English from me. And they asked for volunteers for that exchange, it was December '42, and he volunteered . . . [pause] and they needed more people and others volunteered, and when they didn't have enough they went into the ghetto and took some others, especially those that still had some children. They were all sent to Treblinka. So there were so many times rumors—people were deceived—they were lied to. But they believed and wanted to learn English. It was languages. We had that dear friend, Dr. Stefan Giebocki, who lived next to us [before we were forced into the ghetto]. He was a Pole; he was a Catholic—he did not know German, and he knew as a doctor during the war it would be necessary for him to learn German. I tutored him in German. So it was only languages. Otherwise adults had a hard time; they had to look for ways for the family to survive. And adults were caught to work, caught to camps. Some never returned.³⁵

The schools of Tomaszow-Mazowiecki did not continue indefinitely. First, German work orders absorbed teachers and students into work groups causing schooling to diminish.

[In] 1941 in the ghettos, most of the people were forced to work. So we had to work either in the ghetto or outside. And this is where the schooling started to

³⁵Kimmelman interview, 1997.

diminish because the teachers had to go to forced labor and some of the students had to go.³⁶

Two and a half years into Mira's Tomaszow-Mazowiecki sojourn, schooling was ending both because of the assignment of teachers and students to work groups and because of deportations.

[In] 1942 by about April, things became very bad in the ghetto and we started to feel that there is a tremendous change. But not because we were caught but because their profession was on the list as a teacher—doctors, lawyers, teachers, engineers, somebody who was an officer in the Polish Army. All over Poland in April of '42, the Jewish intelligentsia was eliminated. Some of the teachers, that came to the ghetto from other parts and they already experienced some of the persecutions, were very much aware that if they gave their own profession it may be dangerous and they put down tailor, or cobbler, electrician, or clerk—just not teacher. They have already been expelled from their home; they already knew persecution; they were more cautious. People that lived in the town and stayed in their own environment were not as much.³⁷

On 31 October 1942 a massive *Aktion* decimated the ghetto. The German's sent Mira's "mother, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins" to Treblinka and murdered them. Her father, her brother, and her youngest uncle remained in Tomaszow-Mazowiecki with her. The ghetto, reduced to from 20,000 people to only around 630 people by the deportation, became a labor camp. From there the Germans deported the four remaining Ryczkes in May 1943 to the camp of Blizyn, part of the Majdanek complex, and on 27 July 1944 to Auschwitz, where in Birkenau the SS separated them. Mira became prisoner A-15744—her number tattooed onto her left forearm. Soon she managed to receive a transfer to Hindenburg, an Auschwitz sub-camp. Even in the concentration and slave labor camps, school for Mira did not end as will be

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

apparent in Chapter Six, which deals with schooling in the camps. There, more of Mira's narrative on her education efforts during the Holocaust is located.³⁸

When I first mentioned this project to Mira, she stated emphatically, "We didn't miss a day."³⁹ She said it with such surety that there was no doubt about her spirit and her mental strength. In an interview, when asked about that statement, she replied:

It meant how important it [school] was. And it was something we did because we wanted to—nobody forced us to. If you would let today young people [choose] and [you would] say "you are free to do as you please," how many would go to school? We felt it was so important, that it was important to me, because schooling and education were important. To some young people it was not important. It was more important for them to either go and find some work or go out and smuggle. The family insisted that I finish my secondary schooling—again because we felt in half a year war will be over. I don't miss, we want to be ready. But the parents that insisted on their children's education, these children knew how important it was and, and we did it.⁴⁰

Had they known what was in store for them, would they have done things differently? But they did not know. In the beginning of the German occupation they thought that they had to live through merely a war. It would be a long time before they began to understand the Germans' true intentions.

First of all, in the ghetto we were very isolated. The news we had was mostly from the secret radios that people listened to. Once we knew Denmark and Norway were invaded and a month later Belgium and Holland and they went to France—then we knew we are in for a long, long war.⁴¹

Even after the imposition of the ghetto, and the abuses that occurred there, Mira and her fellow ghetto inmates had little information about the fates of

³⁸See Tomaszow-Mazowiecki Epilogue in Chapter Six.

³⁹Kimmelman interview, 1997.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

other Jews in different places. Even when they received odd bits of information, they were unable to distinguish them from rumors.

We did not [know]. Again, being completely isolated, traveling was prohibited, if somebody came from another ghetto and said "oh they are telling that in Chelmno they are gassing Jews," we said "this is a crazy person." It was in every ghetto like this. We did not know until we came to the first concentration camp, and we met with people that lived close to the death camps and knew what was going on. Not only did we not know, I think we didn't want to know. You don't want to believe the worst. When they tell you "we are sending your relatives and all of them are going to be together. We are sending them east. They will not be separated—they'll be together. . . ." We wanted to believe it.⁴²

As time wore on, and the treatment of the Jews became more horrifying, the Jews still looked for ordinary ways to deal with their imprisonment and oppression. Education seemed to offer hope in the attempt to save themselves mentally. To stay sane and to find a place to exist that transcended the ghettos and the camps, education offered hope for the future.

Yes definitely, definitely. I felt that education can be a tool to save one's life. And it was—it was. So when you are forced to go to school, you say "I wish I could miss a day." But when you want to do something and you do it, then you know how important it is, it's very different. You are not forced to do what you are doing. You are doing it on your own because you want to.

Yes, and [with an education and a sound mind] we will be able to face the world when the war is over.⁴³

Looking back on her efforts to become educated despite German restrictions and abuses, Mira still sees those efforts as essential factors in her survival.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid.

I don't think I would give up schooling no matter what. For me it was a challenge, it was important, it was exciting, and it was—you forgot what was happening outside. And that's what was so very important.⁴⁴

Mira lived until liberated from the camp at Bergen-Belsen on 15 April 1945. Murdered by the Germans, twenty members of her close-knit extended family moldered in graves or lay scattered as ashes—of her immediate family, only Mira and her father survived. She married Max Kimmelman, a survivor whose wife and daughter the Germans had murdered at Treblinka. She lives today in Tennessee.

If to Mira it seemed as if she did not miss a day of school, others chafed at delays and impediments. In Mira's case it may be that, in spite of missing days, they were nearly always in the process of planning or having school—creating and keeping it in opposition to German orders. The clandestine nature of her schools and the structure and methodology meant that the teachers and students did not have to await the whims of the Germans. They could have school anywhere, anytime that they could get together.⁴⁵

Dawid Sierakowiak had a quite different experience. His school languished due to the vagaries of German policies. He experienced waiting for space allocations, teacher firings and hirings, difficulties with tuition, work schedule interruptions, and parental fears. Still, he persisted in attending when possible, while in between he voiced profound frustration over dwindling school opportunities.

Lodz

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵See Irma Lauscherova-Kohnová's account of schooling in Terezin found in Chapter Six of this work.

Lodz (Litzmannstadt) was one of the first ghettos officially organized and sealed by the Germans.⁴⁶ It was also one of the last they liquidated. The chairman of the *Judenrat*, Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, was hated by many, seen as an entrepreneur who collaborated in the enslavement and destruction of the Jews of Lodz. Rumkowski made many unpopular accommodations including the deliverance of the ghetto children for deportation in September 1942. His goal, to save Jewish workers by creating an indispensable work force, was to no avail. In the final deportations of August 1944, the Germans sent the remaining Jews of Lodz, including Rumkowski and his family, to Auschwitz. There they murdered Rumkowski and his family, among many others. Rumkowski had sought to save a certain percentage of Jews in the ghetto through astringent management and cooperation with the German authorities. In the end, he could save no one and the last Jews were deported in late summer 1944. Ironically, the number of Jews who survived deportation and camps following, the liquidation of the ghetto and the Allied victory, is the approximate number Rumkowski meant to save in the ghetto.

In Lodz Ghetto, when the Germans ordered schools closed, supposedly due to epidemics, children met instead in communal kitchens bringing in books and notebooks under their clothing. The irony of life in the Ghetto was such that the inhabitants viewed life as wretched but still possible, still wrought with possibilities—something for which youth must be schooled. The chance always existed for deliverance and, even within the ghetto, life went on. The ghetto poet S. Shayevich wrote:

The Lord has showered us with gentle hand:
 A double gift—
 The death-decree and spring.
 The garden blooms, and the sun shines.
 And the slaughterer slaughters. . . .
 But we crave no recompense or mercy.
 For when you slay a man
 You slay his God as well.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Mira's future husband, Max Kimmelman, was trapped in Piotrkow-Trybunalski which has the grim distinction of having been the first Jewish ghetto that the Germans began to organize in Poland in October 1939. Lodz Ghetto was established in the spring of 1940 and sealed on 1 May of that year.

⁴⁷Milton Meltzer, *Never to Forget: The Jews of the Holocaust* (New York: HarperCollins, 1976), 99.

In Lodz, schools were at times conducted openly. However, the Germans often ordered schools suspended for various reasons. For the students it was disconcerting not to know how long the school term would last or if it would resume. At the height of enrollment, forty-five schools in Lodz enrolled ten thousand students.⁴⁸

“Damn the times when I complained about getting up in the morning and about tests. If only I could have them back!”

Dawid Sierakowiak was fifteen when the Germans began their takeover of Poland. His surviving diary covers the periods of 28 June–31 December 1939, 6 April–23 October 1941, 18 March–31 May 1942, 4 June–6 September 1942, and 11 November 1942–15 April 1943. Dawid endured hunger, disease, slave labor, domestic disintegration, and paternal abuse. He attended school, studied independently, and taught other children and youth. Through his diary we can form a detailed picture of life in the Lodz ghetto during the first four years of German tyranny. Upon Dawid’s death on 8 August 1943, a death certificate was issued stating the cause of death to be tuberculosis. In truth, he died of slow murder at the hands of the Germans. In Lodz, Jews received a daily ration of between seven and nine hundred calories. They forced Jews to engage in slave labor. They did nothing to halt the spread of, or to heal the victims of, tuberculosis. Following the end of the war, the gentile former occupant of the Sierakowiak’s ghetto home, Waclaw Szudlarek, returned to find on the stove top a collection of notebooks—five of them contained portions of Dawid’s diary written in Polish. It was the impression of Szudlarek that someone kept the collection of notebooks for stove fuel—thus, we can presume that the missing portions of the diary were written but later burned. After their discovery, three

⁴⁸Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1975), 254.

of the notebooks disappeared only to resurface in 1967. Anti-Semitic political events in Poland subsequently delayed their release. Only in recent times have all five remaining notebooks of Dawid's diary become available for publication and study.⁴⁹

Two days after the invasion of Poland, in the midst of a description of air raids, fear, uncertainty, and disruption, Dawid Sierakowiak noted that there would be "school on Monday [11 September] at last."⁵⁰ On the eve of his school's reopening, Dawid expressed dismay at a delay in his attendance. He wrote:

Sunday 10. IX. Lodz

My parents say that they are not going to lose me yet. Oh my dear school! . . . Damn the times when I complained about getting up in the morning and about tests. If only I could have them back!⁵¹

Dawid learned from his friends that, "Almost everywhere from the first moment on there were 'normal' lessons . . . but without books or notebooks."⁵² Soon Dawid returned to school but not before the enactment of certain changes. The next week he reported that:

Monday, 18. IX. Lodz.

[Mom] stopped by the girls' *gymnasium*. . . where she found out our three schools have been united into one coeducational *gymnasium*.

I am finally going to school tomorrow. Coeducational classes! There are great girls there, they say. Only let our education be normal. We are supposed to receive certificates of "immunity" so we won't be seized for work.⁵³

Excited by the opportunity finally to return to school, Dawid also was enervated by the prospect of going to school with girls. His concern seemed to

⁴⁹Dawid Sierakowiak, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Lodz Ghetto*. Alan Adleson, ed. and Kamil Turowski, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3-14.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 33.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 37.

⁵²*Ibid.* (11 September 1939).

⁵³*Ibid.*, 40-41.

be only that his education be “normal” although it is not clear whether the concern stemmed from the German occupation or the presence of girls. If the latter seems too trivial, one should remember that in that early stage of the occupation Dawid would have had less understanding of German intentions than he would later. Going to schools with girls on the other hand would have been a thoroughly strange experience—possibly, one he had not had before or at least not since reaching adolescence. Coeducation may have been of great concern to him. He was joyful to report that “meanwhile I am going to school tomorrow. Long live school!” He would return to that topic the next day when he wrote of his first day back, “It’s not known yet whether we will have classes with the girls or separately.”⁵⁴ Apparently, the consolidation could have meant girls and boys in the same class or girls and boys only in the same school.

Dawid reported next day that he walked a “long and boring way, over 5 kilometers, but it is definitely worth the effort to go to school.”⁵⁵ Word also came as to the coeducational quality of the consolidated *gymnasium*. Gender separation was to be maintained. “The girls,” he wrote, “felt bitter when they heard that they were going to be separated from us.”⁵⁶ He did not comment on the boy’s reaction—suggesting that, “great girls” aside, he and his peers were content to have things as they were. The girls on the other hand appear to have welcomed an opportunity, albeit one required by the German regime, to change the tradition of single gender schools.

At about the same time, Dawid wrote of his hopes for a new social order.

Monday, 25. IX. Lodz.

I have borrowed 2 zlotys from Leczycki to buy notebooks. I will give them back to him when I can. The arrangement won’t do him any harm and it’s a help for me. I am more and more attracted to Marx when I consider our present social relations, even those at school. This war will become a real liberator.⁵⁷

⁵⁴Ibid., 41.

⁵⁵Ibid., 42.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., 44. Leczycki would seem to be a friend from a more well off family as Dawid suggested that he could afford to lend money that would be paid back at some indeterminate time.

These students seem to have regarded the occupation and the war with some degree of hope that it would be an opportunity for social change. In addition, some of them expected that transformation would come, at least in part, through school—not so much from the curriculum but through the alteration of the school's social structure. Some hoped to affect a change to coeducational schooling and others began to think in terms of Marxist reorganization of social structures beginning with school. What they did not necessarily think to look for was each other's ideas of freedom. Dawid, for example, did not seem to be empathetic to the girl's hopes for an education shared with boys.

Dawid in the next month would acquire a new role, one that offered opportunities for engagement in the workings of his school. Writing in early October, he described the structure of the school:

Thursday, 5 X, Lodz.

At school, we organized elections for the student council of the combined third grades of the first and second *gymnasiums*. Five boys were elected. . . . I was elected president.⁵⁸

These elections excluded the girls, suggesting that the two boys' schools were remaining entirely separate from the girls' school. The boys' schools on the other hand, while retaining their identities as members of the first and second *gymnasiums*, coalesced into one body for some purposes.

For Dawid, a new crisis loomed even as he prepared to assume the responsibilities of student council president.

Monday, 9. X, Lodz.

Principal Perelman has announced that the students who haven't paid [tuition] will have no reason to come to school tomorrow. He is an exceptionally severe and mean man. I tried to talk to him after classes to explain our dire food

⁵⁸Ibid., 50.

situation, but he pushed me back, saying: "I don't care, there are no exceptions." I cursed him in my soul with all my strength, and vowed to settle accounts with him some day "in another social system." I don't know what's going to happen to me.⁵⁹

Schooling, in other words, was not an altogether altruistic endeavor for all educators. While some simply took on a group of students, others taught either to make money or they expected students and their families to financially support the school. There were surely some of these who, having collected tuition from some students, took on students who were destitute as well, but Perelman demanded payment from all students regardless of their personal situations. That policy seems harsh but probably only reflected his pre-war way of organizing his school. Nevertheless, it created a serious problem for Dawid.

Seeking help, Dawid secured a promise of intervention from a friend's mother but next day reported that "He [Perelman] expelled us anyway!"⁶⁰ That problem was resolved temporarily when:

Monday, 16. X, Lodz.

Mrs. Walfisz and some other women paid the school office the damned money for me, Lipszyc, and Kahan so we will be all right until December 1. . . [a]fter that we will see what we can do. I have a school now, but I don't have bread.⁶¹

Careering from crisis to crisis was typical of ghetto life, and it was part of the plan to immobilize Jewish targets of aggression. Always immersed in solving a set of grindingly difficult circumstances, such as finding food in order to eat and live, or finding work in order to avoid deportation, ghetto residents often had little time to devote to looking at the bigger issues or to forming a plan to circumvent the Final Solution. They were too engrossed in meeting their immediate and basic needs.

⁵⁹Ibid., 51.

⁶⁰Ibid., (11 October 1939).

⁶¹Ibid., 53.

In the fall of 1939, as conditions worsened and winter began, Dawid began to look about for students to tutor. He continued to attend his school and began an independent study of his captors language, using a borrowed textbook. His concerns in school during that period were quite ordinary. On Friday, 3 November, he worried about not having done well on a mathematics test. By the following Monday reported with evident pleasure that, "We received our tests back. In spite of my dismal expectations, I got an A!"⁶²

Throughout November 1939, Dawid expressed growing concern about the school, reporting that "classes are irregular. . . . There are only four [classes] a day now because of curfew," and that "we will not learn English at school, but German,"—a change that was, "fine with me."⁶³ Dawid was more concerned about changes in structure of school, and particularly in the possibility of being deprived of school, than he was about curricular matters. Soon the bad news arrived. The German authorities ordered the school closed.

Thursday, 30. XI, Lodz.

The school has been taken away. The students helped the hired porters. They gave us until tomorrow evening to clear everything out. A deadly feeling: mass looting of the library. Uryson the librarian, distributed several books to everyone who was present. I got a German history of the Jews, a few copies of German poets, and Latin texts, together with two English books.⁶⁴

On short notice, the Germans appropriated the school building and it and the members of the school rushed to clear it. The Jewish staff distributed the contents of the library in an attempt to preserve the books and provide the students some study materials until the school might be relocated. They located another building and the students registered on 7 December. By 11 December, however, Dawid reported that "school is deteriorating," and the next day he added that, there were "fewer and fewer teachers."⁶⁵

⁶²Ibid., 58-59.

⁶³Ibid., 62 (12 November 1939, 64, 20 November 1939, and 65, 23 November 1939).

⁶⁴Ibid., 66.

⁶⁵Ibid., 69.

It was a time of mass arrests and, on 13 December, Dawid wrote: "I was not allowed out to school today."⁶⁶ Throughout that month, Dawid worried about being unable to attend school and by the last of the year the problem remained.

By April of 1941, Dawid was again not in school, or perhaps still not in school. It is difficult to know which as there is a significant gap, from 31 December 1939 to 6 April 1941, a period of fifteen months, suggesting lost notebooks. Dawid, in the surviving notebooks, tended to write daily. At any rate, school was still on his mind as he wrote:

Wednesday, 9. IV, 1941

This week I wrote an article about the plight of school youths for a newspaper organized by the textile workers association (Communists). I handed it in today, but it seems to me that before anything comes of it (there are enormous technical problems), the article will be out of date.⁶⁷

This entry suggests that the school situation was somewhat volatile. Lodz was one of the places where the Germans ostensibly allowed schools to operate. They also made sure that it would be difficult to do so, especially for older youths. Many of Dawid's peers had to find work in the ghetto. The buildings quartering schools were subject to sudden reallocation—as evidenced by the 30 November 1939 reallocation of Dawid's school site. The Germans arrested and deported teachers; and caused parents to fear sending their children out to school. Dawid himself worked long hours during that period. Still he yearned for school.

Later in the month, he had good news to report in his diary:

Friday, 18. IV, Lodz.

School is going to be reopened next week. Only a part of it though, for those boys and girls who live on our side of the bridge. For the time being only the upper

⁶⁶Ibid., 70.

⁶⁷Ibid., 77.

grades will be taught in a small building in Marysin. They say that extra nutrition will be given in the school, but nothing certain is known yet.⁶⁸

One of the problems in school keeping was that the population of students and teachers were in constant flux. The causes were hardships of the ghetto, arrests and deportations, and arbitrary decisions to restrict traffic between ghetto areas. Dawid also mentioned the hope that the reopened school would include a food allotment. Schools, both those allowed to operate openly and those that were clandestine, sometimes served as sites for that sort of social welfare. As we will see in some of Dawid's subsequent entries, for him and his peers, that Lodz *gymnasium* would become a vital element in their physical survival.

Even without school, however, Dawid and his friends continued their studies. Not only did Dawid write of his personal studies at home, but also he mentions certain group activities as when he wrote, "together with a group of friends, Communists, we've started to learn Esperanto."⁶⁹ School itself soon followed as Dawid reported:

Tuesday, 22. IV, Lodz.

I have registered at the school secretariat at Dworska Street. . . . There will be additional nutrition in school, but details won't be known until Friday. So I'll go to school again (of course, only if I don't have some other job to do). There will finally be an end to the anarchy of my daily activities and, I hope, an end to too much philosophizing and depression.⁷⁰

For Dawid, school held the promise not only of education but also of food. Perhaps, as important, he looked to school to organize his time and to lift him from the doldrums in which he felt stuck.

⁶⁸Ibid., 81. The bridge referred to here crossed an "Aryan" street bisecting the ghetto.

⁶⁹Ibid., 81. (April 19, 1941). Esperanto is an invented European based language proffered as an international language. During that period, and in the inter-war period, there was some enthusiasm for learning and adopting it amongst various groups and individuals.

⁷⁰Ibid., 83.

School opened as anticipated. In the following passage, Dawid described it:

Sunday, 27. IV, Lodz.

The first day of school . . . [t]he trip to Marysin is quite long, but the worst thing. . . is the awful mud from the incessant rain. . . . My shoes are in terrible shape [and] I'll soon have to rush to school barefoot.⁷¹

The school is located in a tiny building that can hardly hold our benches. There are no other supplies (not even a blackboard). Nor is there a cloakroom, and we sit in the classroom wearing our coats. We had six classes today. During the last class Rumkowski himself arrived for a visit accompanied by Praskier, Karo, (the "minister" of education), and a number of other ghetto "dignitaries." Rumkowski toured the kitchen, tasted the soup (which was simply delicious, probably for his sake), and addressed the students. He spoke about the difficulties connected with opening the school, and he said he will try to get more for us. He demanded that we work diligently, keep clean, and behave well.⁷²

Whatever that school lacked in physical resemblance to the schools to which Dawid was accustomed, it did have other important non-tangible resemblances: the minds and hearts of the teachers and students and, of course, the ubiquitous delegation of politicians who arrived to open the school and make promises many of which would prove to be empty.

Once school started, it seemed to proceed well. Dawid made frequent reports of the progress of classes and of the running of the school. At that time, he also had a job. Dawid, by then seventeen years old, was again on the lookout for students to tutor. In addition, there were other duties to perform, including work in the school gardens. Noting that the previous day's snow had all melted, Dawid reported that:

Sunday 4. V, Lodz.

⁷¹The distance to school from home for Dawid was 5 kilometers or a little over 3 miles. The round trip then was over 6 miles.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 83-84.

The grounds around our school are supposed to be cultivated by the students. We have to work for our education. . . . I don't mind the work, though, because I'll get to know the soil a little better. Everything may yet prove useful.⁷³

Dawid's earlier problem with tuition was resolved. The school required youths to work for their places in the school. Dawid apparently welcomed that change; not only did it relieve him of finding tuition money, it also provided agricultural training. The latter was, in Zionist thinking, an important element of immigration to Palestine. Life in Palestine often focused on forming self-sufficient *kibbutzim*.⁷⁴ More immediately, the student gardeners were able to help supply their school's kitchen as well as to produce surplus vegetables to help sustain the community. Dawid continued to hold another job as well, working in one of the community workshops where he received scant pay but preserved his status as a necessary worker and received additional food.

School at that time had several meanings for Dawid. He seemed to have valued the school work itself, the familiar scheduling and structure, and the comforting relationships with peers and teachers that harkened back to the days before the German conquest. He also valued school for newfound opportunities to learn about cultivation of the land. School in the ghettos was a venue of social welfare and it was there that the students could anticipate a daily portion of soup. Dawid referred to that benefit frequently, as in the following passage wherein he made short reference to the coarse work but described in detail the soup.

Tuesday, 6. V. Lodz.

At school our studying proceeds at a rapid pace. The soup they cook for us here, though not too rich or thick because of the general lack of potatoes in the ghetto, provides an excellent shot of energy during classes. After all, the long trip to Marysin wears us down terribly.⁷⁵

⁷³Ibid., 86.

⁷⁴For more on the efforts to prepare Jewish youths for life in the *kibbitzum*, see: Ezra BenGershôm, *David: The Testimony of a Holocaust Survivor*, trans. J. A. Underwood (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 94-95.

⁷⁵Sierakowiak, 87.

At about that time Dawid found a client to tutor. It is ironic, given his pique a year and a half earlier at being expelled for lack of tuition, how adamant he was about pay for that service:

Friday, 9. V, Lodz.

The pay his family offers is awful. All they would give me is 1.50 RM for six lessons a week. I want a minimum of 40 pf an hour, and I'm not going to give up even a single pfennig.⁷⁶

It is indicative of the differing situations of ghetto residents that some lived in poverty, for which the usual adjective "abject" is insufficient, while others could afford such luxuries as private tutoring. In that month, Dawid wrote:

Tuesday, 13. V, Lodz.

A student from the same grade as ours died from hunger and exhaustion yesterday. As a result of his terrible appearance, he was allowed to eat as much soup in school as he wanted, but it didn't help him much; he's the third victim in the class.⁷⁷

As conditions worsened, and as ghetto residents suffered from starvation of long duration, tragedies of that sort escalated in frequency. Inspired, Dawid tried to use his influence to better the conditions of the students. Again elected

⁷⁶Ibid., 88. It is difficult to calculate what that amount of money might have been worth. Money was worth one amount in the ghetto and another amount outside. In addition, prices fluctuated, sometimes rather wildly. Finally one must realize that whatever money was "worth" was entirely relative. A mark might be worth very little but if it would buy a loaf of bread, a slice of bread, or a handful of moldy bread crumbs it might be worth a lot if such a purchase would sustain life for one more day. It is also interesting that although the ghetto administration printed ghetto currency and Polish currency was still in use in Poland at that time, Dawid was offered German money for his services. The relative worth of money also revolved around issues of what was available for sale. If no food was available for sale then money could be spent for school simply because it was an available service as opposed to bread or meat that were unobtainable. On 8 August 1941, Dawid reported that he was finally earning "40 RM a month. I have never earned so much. In spite of these strokes of *luck*, however there is nothing to eat at home, and all the time, all the hopeless time, I go hungry."

⁷⁷Ibid., 90.

to represent his fellow students, two days after that student's death, he spoke up to the adult teachers and administrators.

Wednesday, 14. V, Lodz.

This was the first meeting in my life when I had to be the outspoken, stormy oppositionist and scrap with higher authority, namely . . . Prentka . . . Prentka, however, ordered us to reject discussion of these endeavors, and to consider the more important (?) matter of students' responsibilities! I protested and declared that the additional nutrition for students before their deaths seems to be a worthwhile cause to me, and that immediate resolution of the issue is our most urgent problem. It went on like this until the principal adjourned the meeting because of the late hour. I protested once again and declare that I considered the meeting void because its agenda and course had been imposed. Prentka got furious, and other teachers wrangled with me, but tomorrow I hope to push my proposal through.⁷⁸

It was a strong statement of political engagement for an adolescent who had never spoken out in opposition before. The seriousness of the problem obviously spurred him. There is also an underlying sense that, to Dawid, it was clear that it was imperative that the school take responsibility for its students in that way—and that it do so as a first priority. Starving, weakened students, he argued, needed food before being expected to attend to other “responsibilities.” The discussion resumed the next day when Dawid was able to report victory.

Thursday, 15. V, Lodz.

I won! Despite Prentka's fury, the nutrition problem was discussed at the outset. The newly formed seven-member committee, under my leadership, is supposed to deal with the problem immediately. The student board has decided to file an application immediately to the Kitchen Department asking for additional soup portions for us. Furthermore, the board established a student militia, and

⁷⁸Ibid. Maria Prentka was the German teacher for the gymnasium. Deported to Auschwitz in 1944—her fate is unknown.

considered the problem of hygiene and the collection of money for self-help purposes.⁷⁹

It is easier to understand the position of the students of the *gymnasium* than the reluctance, indeed the anger, of the teachers, led by Maria Prentka, to deal with the matter of food. Whatever the reason for the acrimony, clearly it was a bitter debate, but the student view prevailed. These students took into their hands the task of trying to preserve their lives.

They received support in their efforts, and in their victory, by memberships in other, often workshop based, political groups. Dawid mentioned meetings in which his group received political training.⁸⁰ Some of his peers became involved in a resistance group within the ghetto, although Dawid could not quite bring himself to commit to that work. These were adolescents thrust into adult roles, and many of them stepped into those roles with both energy and reluctance. They stepped forward with one foot while struggling to leave the other firmly planted in the world of the *gymnasium*.

Dawid by that time had grown frighteningly emaciated. On 16 May 1941, the day after the above entry, he expressed hope that an examination by "a doctor at school" (who "was terrified at how thin I am") would get him on the list for "a double portion of soup." "In fact," he wrote, "five soups would be even better, but the two will do me some good, too."⁸¹ School, in Dawid's mind, seems to have become inexorably linked with food. It also seems to have been the scene of medical examinations and care for the students as Dawid's diary contains more than one reference to medical examinations at school⁸².

Meanwhile Dawid continued to collect students to tutor. The families of the students paid various sums of money and, at least one of the students was Dawid's cousin, indicating that even within the family there were differences in financial status. The number of his students fluctuated, although at least once

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., 86, 88, 92, 97, 101, 107, 108-109, 126, 174, 190, 244.

⁸¹Ibid., 91. 16 May 1941.

⁸²Ibid., 124.

he mentioned that he had more students than he had time to schedule. "They sent for me to accept the tutoring. . . . I just hope that I will be able to manage my entire schedule."⁸³ Yet, he continued to take on more, never knowing when he might lose some students.

A few weeks later, the school sent Dawid for a chest x-ray. Dawid hoped the school doctor would "prescribe a coupon for additional soup."⁸⁴ By that time soup was so much a part of the school mindset, his fellow students brought it rather than homework to the absentee.

Tuesday, 3. VI, Lodz.

My friends brought me my soup from school. They actually smuggled it out because it is forbidden to take anything out of Marysin. The most important thing is I didn't lose the dinner.⁸⁵

Neither schools themselves, nor their staffs and students, had immunity from political reprisals. They not only had to elude the machinations of the German authorities but of the Jewish sub-authorities as well. Dawid explained

Sunday, 15. VI, Lodz.

The sadist-moron Rumkowski is doing horrible things. He fired two teachers, Communists, from their jobs . . . Majerkowicz, * and Mrs. Laks⁺. The overt reason: they organized resistance among teachers against the installation as commissioner—Superior Principal—of Mrs. Weichselfisz. The probable reason: alleged Communist activities in the school.

*Estera Majerowicz (b. 1905) taught physics in the ghetto *gymnasium*. She remained in the ghetto until the final deportation to Auschwitz in August 1944.

⁺Rykla Laks was deported to Auschwitz in August 1944.⁸⁶

The teachers were not the only ones endangered. Chaim Rumkowski, no doubt in part to appease the Germans, but also to protect his position from

⁸³Ibid., 92. See also 97, 101, 115, 117, 119, 125, 263

⁸⁴Ibid., 98. (3 June 1941).

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., 102.

challenges from within the ghetto, was seen as a threat to any who opposed the status quo. Dawid and the other students had to step carefully. He continued:

We are laying low, and following the leadership's advice, we will not organize any meetings for a week or two. There is danger of purge among the students, and possibly a shutdown of the school.⁸⁷

A month later, the school reinstated the fired teachers. By then, conditions in the ghetto were dragging down the effectiveness of the school. After reporting weakness due to having eaten "nothing . . . but water (soup)," so that, "I thought I would collapse," Dawid went on to say:

Monday, 21, VII. Lodz. Even though everything is in full swing in school, we are making little progress. . . . If it's like last year, August will turn Marysin into one big pool of mud, and school, studies, and, most important, soup will become only a dream again.⁸⁸

Soup was the elixir that served not only to enhance the attractiveness of school but also to make it possible to partake of learning. The Jewish population of the Lodz ghetto for the most part was by that time starving to death. No one knew yet how long the Germans would remain in control. By that time they had been in control for almost two years and the ghetto prisoners had little left in the way of physical reserves. Already the need for soup, pitiful as it often was, superseded other needs. Still they tried and they sometimes succeeded in conducting many activities, including schooling, reminiscent of their lives before.

Wednesday, 23. VII, Lodz.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid., 113.

Today our class had the compulsory bath at Bazarna Street. What a marvelous thing! A wonderful hot and cold shower, What a pleasure! At least for a moment you can remember the good old days.⁸⁹

The school youths of Lodz enjoyed some things associated with school rather normally. A bath, especially in the heat of summer, must have been wonderfully refreshing. The school included it, no doubt, for reasons of hygiene.

As in school activities in every time and place, the students found their own meanings for things as well. One Sunday, in the second summer of the German occupation, Dawid described a school celebration and parade.

Sunday, 27. VII, Lodz.

We had one hell of a delight in school, where we had no classes today because all of the children in Marysin had to parade before Rumkowski. What's more important, we received an additional afternoon snack. . . . We could not be spared a speech naturally. The old man said that he gives us all he can, and in return he demands that we study, study, and study well.⁹⁰

There is a surviving photograph of the event. In it, Rumkowski beams on a phalanx of girls marching past him. They in turn look happy. It is a photograph that seems part of something other than the Holocaust—whose scenes are so often brooding and dark. In the photograph, the children smile as they march in the sunshine. They did not know yet that, no matter what happened, the Germans planned to murder them. Two years into the war, eight years into the Holocaust, although the Germans had decided to kill them, they had not decided how, finally, to best achieve the goal of destroying European Jewry. The conference at Wannsee, where the Germans set forth the means of the “Final Solution,” was still six months in the future.⁹¹

⁸⁹Ibid., 114.

⁹⁰Ibid., 115.

⁹¹Martin Gilbert, *Holocaust Journey: Travelling in Search of the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 42-46.

Meanwhile, the adolescents attending the *gymnasium* with Dawid were using part of their time at school to learn about life in the Lodz ghetto—to study it through lectures and field trips.⁹²

Sunday, 10. VIII, Lodz.

In biology class we had a lecture on tuberculosis. Our biology teacher, who also works as a *Hilfsarzt* [German; assistant doctor], told us that according to ghetto doctors' latest estimations, 99 to 100 percent of the population is infected with tuberculosis. . . . Our ghetto has become a wonderful scientific experiment.⁹³

Dawid described one of the field trips in the following passage:

Wednesday, 20. VIII, Lodz.

Our class went on an "excursion" to the hospital at Lagiewnicka Street to see the x-ray machine and x-ray examinations that are made there. We witnessed an x-ray examination of elementary-school children who are sent there by the anti-tuberculosis dispensary. Almost all of them have signs of tuberculosis.⁹⁴

Conditions in the Lodz ghetto at that time were quite grim. Dawid's preoccupation with school soup was grounded in a profound, and artificial, famine designed and implemented by the Germans. A few months later, at the infamous "Wannsee Conference," German leaders agreed on a technocratic system of more efficient mass execution. Until then, the methods were slower, but the result for many was the same. A few days after the field trip, a neighbor's death became the subject of Dawid's diary entry:

Saturday, 23. VIII, Lodz.

I think his is the first death in the ghetto that has left me so deeply depressed. This man, an absolute athlete before the war, died of hunger here. His iron body did not suffer from any disease; it just grew thinner and thinner every day, and finally he fell

⁹²In Vilna, Yitskhok Rudashevski described similar studies. Vilna, however, was only, in the summer of 1941, being over run by the German attackers. In Lodz, in comparison, the horrors of the German occupation had been visited upon the Jews for nearly two years.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 119.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*, 121.

asleep, not to wake again. . . . All this is a horrible act of destruction . . . and the end of this misery is still not in sight.⁹⁵

What must have been increasing apparent, if he could bear to look, was that such a death could happen to anyone. Dawid, who himself had grown thinner and thinner, must have found his neighbors death indeed depressing, but he did not give up on living and he did not give up on schooling.

In the next month, the *gymnasium* students began their exams. For many of them, including Dawid, these would include graduation exams. Now they began to look ahead to what to do next. Some aspired to higher educational goals; Dawid was one of those who hoped to go on. "I wish we had a university," he wrote, "*Lyceum* soon! I never thought I would attend *lyceum* during the war."⁹⁶

Before long Dawid described exams and noted that the "only thing of value in the school now is soup."⁹⁷ Erev Rosh Hashanah and Rosh Hashanah came in the midst of exams. Although school was out, Dawid noted that, "the main thing is that we'll receive soup and candies in school during the holidays."⁹⁸ Conditions had deteriorated to the point that someone deemed soup at school too essential to be suspended for even a few days. Soon Dawid wrote about the meaning of his graduation:

Friday, 26. IX. Lodz.

The last day of school. My last day of gymnasium, and the end of a particular period in my life. How strange it is to remember that just a moment ago I was a *gymnasium* student and that I will never be one again! "Melancholy" comes over me again! Damn it, the world is going through so much now, and here I am moved by such a trifle. But yes, it moves me because it is about me, and a new epoch in my life begins. Whether the epoch of being a *lyceum* student, I don't know. But that's the way it appears, and I hope it will be so!⁹⁹

⁹⁵Ibid., 127 (6 September 1941).

⁹⁶Ibid. (7 September 1941).

⁹⁷Ibid., 129 (15 September 1941).

⁹⁸Ibid., 130 (21 September 1941).

⁹⁹Ibid., 133.

For all Dawid's enthusiasm, the *Lyceum* did not seem to have come about—at least not for him. He continued his studies however both in the ordinary academic subjects—particularly languages—and in such areas as Marxism and political theory with his group. Writing just after graduation, he noted:

Monday, 29. IX. Lodz.

I study English and French again, read, and arrive slowly at the conclusion that school will not begin again that soon, if it ever will begin again in the ghetto. . . . In Marysin our small buildings will be taken any moment because a new transport of deportees is arriving and an order to empty the school was sent today. The prospects for *lyceum* are becoming fainter.¹⁰⁰

In the meantime, as they waited, hoping that the schools would reopen, the erstwhile students continued to receive soups at the former sites of learning, and rumors spread about the future of schools. Dawid wrote:

Friday, 3. X, Lodz.

I got the picture that we took of ourselves on the last day of school. It's very pretty. I came out excellently in it. A dark rumor has started circulating in the ghetto. They say that all the schools and libraries will be closed. I don't know where the rumor comes from, but it seems to be true.¹⁰¹

Dawid, pleased with the school picture, nonetheless worried over the fate of the schools of Lodz. The arrival of 20,000 additional Jewish refugee into the ghetto seriously disrupted its precarious balance. Disruption was inevitable given the German refusal to provide additional space and resources. On the following day, Dawid reported on a meeting between Rumkowski and the teachers. They moved the winter break to October, hoping to resume in winter,

¹⁰⁰Ibid., 134.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 135-136.

and they learned that teaching of the Talmud henceforth was forbidden.¹⁰² Still hoping for good news, Dawid recognized that it was unlikely to come.

Saturday, 4. X, Lodz.

It seems to be the end of education in the ghetto. I will not be a *lyceum* student, at least not in the ghetto, if I'm ever a student again (I've been lucky enough to snatch the gymnasium graduation). We are supposed to get real printed certificates.¹⁰³

Although Dawid was losing hope of continuing formal schooling in the ghetto, he still saw the ghetto life as temporary and was certain that life afterwards would be different. He looked forward to receiving a "real printed" certificate of graduation that he hoped would help him to secure a job.¹⁰⁴ At the end of the second notebook he wrote: "My student career is suspended at least for a while." He was not without hope. "I'm certain," he added, "that a wonderful, shining life is still waiting for us."¹⁰⁵

Dawid continued his studies, but never again in school. As life in the ghetto wore him down, he often complained of being too weak to study. He also continued, along with other jobs in the ghetto workshops, to tutor students. Life became more difficult; his father, unable to bear the exigencies of ghetto life, stole food and money from his wife and children. Dawid and his sister struggled to survive. For the youth of the ghetto, life became increasingly hazardous. Finally, in September 1942, Dawid reported that the majority of the children were handed over to the Germans by the Jewish ghetto authorities for deportation. Only a few who were hidden remained, although the children of the ghetto officials spared for the time being.

Friday, 4. IX. Lodz.

They said that "the sacrifice of the children and the elderly is necessary," that "nothing could be done to prevent it," and asked us "not to hinder carrying out the

¹⁰²Ibid., 137 (4 October 1941).

¹⁰³Ibid., 133.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 138 (9 October 1941).

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 143.

deportation action.”* It was easy for them to say that because they managed to secure . . . exemption . . . for children of workshop directors, firemen, policemen, doctors, instructors, the Bierat, and the Devil knows who else.

*Sierakowiak’s quotations are basically rephrasings. For the verbatim text of Chaim Rumkowski’s staggering speech, see *Lodz Ghetto*, edited by Adelson and Lapidés, pp 328-31. “They are asking us to give up the best we possess. . . . I never imagined that I would be forced to deliver this sacrifice with my own hands. . . . I must stretch out my hands and beg: Brothers and sisters, hand them over to me! Fathers and mothers, give me your children! . . . I must perform this difficult and bloody operation—I must cut off limbs in order to save the body itself!—I must take the children because, if not, others may be taken as well, God forbid! . . . My duty is to preserve the Jews who remain. . . . The part that can be saved is much larger than the part that must be given away.”¹⁰⁶

The Germans murdered the children. They deported Dawid’s mother, as well. From that time, Dawid must have realized that to be classified as a child was not a desirable thing. At any rate, he was eighteen by that time. He did not lose his identification with being a student or with his school. In the summer of 1942, for example, in discussing the awful death rate in the ghetto and the dismal prospects for survival, he mentioned that, “Many of the teachers from the former gymnasium have died, or are dying, or are incurably sick.”¹⁰⁷

Among his other activities, Dawid continued to teach as well as learn but at times teaching and learning were beyond his strength. In March 1943, he discussed why he refused an offer to teach: “the only compensation would be food and I probably wouldn’t even get that. Anyway I don’t have the strength to teach now.”¹⁰⁸

The fifth surviving notebook of the diary ended in April 1943. A year and a half earlier Dawid had still foreseen a “wonderful, shining life.” In his last entry, dated Thursday, 5 April 1943, he wrote:

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 216. The transcriber of Rumkowski’s speech reported horrible wailing and screaming from the crowd throughout the speech. Rumkowski, who had never had children of his own, claimed to have reduced the German ordered number of deportees from 24,000 to 20,000 by promising to deliver all the children under 10 years of age.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 197.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., 259. (21 March 1943).

Thursday, 15. IV, Lodz. I feel myself beginning to fall into melancholy. There is really no way out of the for us.¹⁰⁹

Dawid Sierakowiak died on 8 August 1943. After almost four years of abuse, he succumbed to a combination of exhaustion, starvation, and tuberculosis delivered by German anti-Semitism. The defeat of Germany was still nearly two years in the future.

Like Dawid, Yitskhok Rudashevski, in Vilna, suffered the frustration of school disruptions. For him, too, school was not only a place of learning, but of comfort, even physical comfort, as well. The physical comfort was more mental than actual, but no less important all the same. He, too, suffered when the Germans commandeered a school building and two schools had to share the space of one. However, Yitskhok's loss of a school building happened late; it was a precursor of events that followed. While school lasted it was a source of stability and perhaps denial. In the weeks that followed its end, Yitskhok reportedly was despondent.¹¹⁰

Vilna

The Germans established the Vilna Ghetto on 10 September 1941, following their invasion of Lithuania in June of that year. Vilna, known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania, was a center of Judaic culture and learning. Throughout the occupation, the Jews of Vilna made an effort to continue those traditions and to preserve the collection of Jewish arts and literature that resided in that city. Much of the renowned YIVO collection, rescued after liberation, now resides in New York. The Germans murdered most of the scholars and archivists, however. A series of *Aktsia* devastated the ghetto. The Germans marched thousands of Jews to Ponar where they shot them and buried them in fuel storage pits left by the Soviets. In September 1943, the

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 268.

¹¹⁰See Sore Valoshin's introduction in Yitskhok Rudashevski, *The Diary of the Vilna Ghetto: June 1941-April*

final liquidation of the ghetto began. When the Soviets liberated Vilna, in July 1944, the rich Jewish life of the city was only a memory.

Meir Dworzecki, a school physician from Vilna (Vilnius), described the birth of Vilna ghetto and how, three days after, the ghetto prisoners drew a plan for education and work began.

They [teachers and pupils] threw themselves into the work like one united family. . . . When the school quarters were ready for occupancy, signs were put up in the ghetto, inviting parents to register their children. . . . At first parents hesitated to register their children because they suspected this was a ruse to compile a children's census. . . . [But] by September 1941 more than 2,700 children, ages six to fourteen, were enrolled.¹¹¹

Dr. Dworzecki also supplied some description of curriculum, originally anti-Zionist and pro-Yiddish, but subsequently tailored to meet a variety of expectations, when he wrote:

They [Zionist coalition] succeeded in fixing an equality between Hebrew and Yiddish and an equitable synthesis of the ideological orientations: Zionist, Socialist, Communist . . . Orthodox parents were allowed to establish special supplementary schools, where their children received an Orthodox Hebrew education . . . arranged as to enable them to attend the public ghetto schools. The experiences and tragedies that befell members of the children's families were reflected in the themes that they chose for their compositions: "How I Saved Myself from Camp Ponar [Vilna death camp]," "They Led My Parents to Their Death," "I Hid in an Underground Bunker," and so on.¹¹²

1943, trans. Perry Matenko. (Israel: Beit Lohamei Haghetaot—Ghetto Fighter's House, 1973).

¹¹¹Azriel Eisenberg, *The Lost Generation: Children in the Holocaust* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1982), 59-60. Fewer showed up when school opened—perhaps 2,000 actually attended.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 60.

“My determination to study has developed into something like defiance.”

Yitskhok Rudashevski's surviving diary covers the period of June 1941—when he was thirteen—to April 7, 1943. In October 1943—two months before his sixteenth birthday—the Germans forced him and his family to march to the valley of Ponar where they massacred them. Only his first cousin, Sore Voloshin, survived and it was she who found Yitskhok's diary, a small notebook, after liberation. The last, poignant, entry is from Wednesday, 7 April 1943. No one knows if that entry was the end of the diary or, if not, what became of any subsequent notebooks. Perhaps a clue lies in his cousin's description of Yitskhok.

What pains the boy had taken with it [the diary]. He carried it every where with him, always hid it. He showed it to no one. So important, so dear was it to him.¹¹³

The simplest explanation is that if there was a subsequent volume he took it with him to Ponar. Sore indicated that in the last months of the ghetto constant raids and murders sent the family into hiding where writing would have been difficult. Yitskhok's parents were Rose and Elihu Rudashevski, a seamstress and a newspaper typesetter respectively. Yitskhok was their only child, and his family paid great attention to his formal and informal education. He came from a close-knit extended family; his maternal grandmother, with whom he had a close relationship, lived with him. Sore reports that at the outbreak of war Yitskhok had completed six years of elementary school and had finished one year at the distinguished Vilna *Realgymnasium*.¹¹⁴

Writing of the days following German invasion and occupation of Lithuania, Yitskhok Rudashevski told of the “sorrow and pain” of that time and

¹¹³Rudashevski, 148.

¹¹⁴Ibid., 8-12.

that it was to their teacher, Mire, that he and his friends turned for solace and advice.

It is Tuesday the 24th of June [1941]

I went in to see my teacher Mire. She was sitting in a depressed mood. We understood each other. She advised us to be sure to hide our neckties.¹⁰ . . . Here too there is a fresh wound. Teacher Mire's parents have been taken away.

10. Red neckties which the Pioneers used to wrap around their necks, as part of their outfits.¹¹⁵

In September of the following year, the Germans sent teachers out in work brigades to collect firewood—thus postponing school. The significance of the postponement was evident in an entry that began:

Monday the 14th [September 1942]

Today we learned that instruction has been postponed again for a week. . . . It is a great pity. I long for the studies which sustain us in the ghetto. Without them we become lazier and more negligent.¹¹⁶

It is not hard to imagine that a boy of fourteen would miss going to school. However, it was not only the social relationships that Yitskhok missed, but also the "studies which sustain."¹¹⁷ Three days later Yitskhok elaborated on the deficiency when he wrote:

Thursday the 17th of September [1942]

You become sad and bored during the long hours that you hang around in one place. We do not go to school on account of an epidemic. It is a terrible time when you cannot settle down to some kind of work and you waste days on nothing.¹¹⁸

It was a longing for purposeful work that was seemingly at the heart of his desire to return to school. The feeling grew as time passed. In the following

¹¹⁵Ibid., 26-27.

¹¹⁶Ibid., 52-53.

¹¹⁷Ibid., 53.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 53.

passage we can see that it was more than the lessons themselves that were missed—it was the order of school as well. For Jewish children, especially in the occupied countries of Eastern Europe, the German occupation meant swift and often total chaos. Stripped of rights, forced from their homes—and often into abysmally crowded new quarters—impoverished, and subject to incomprehensible brutality towards themselves and their families, there were few aspects of their lives that were familiar or predictable. Yearning for the comfort and stability of his old life, Yitskhok wrote:

Saturday the 19th of September [1942]

It is cold and sad. When in the world will we get back to our studies? When I used to go to my lessons I knew how to divide the days, and the days would fly, and now they drag by for me grayly and sadly. Oh, how dreary and sad it is to sit locked up in a ghetto.¹¹⁹

Meanwhile, with school still on hold, Yitskhok received word that one of his teachers, an elderly man who had apparently suffered significantly from the ghetto experience, had died. Yitskhok wrote movingly of his teacher and of his importance to the intellectual lives of the children he taught in several entries, including one where he described his reaction to hearing of his teacher's death:

the 27th [September 1942]

I learned of the great misfortune: our beloved teacher Gershteyn has died. The painful news struck me like a clap of thunder. Teacher Gershteyn is dead. How beloved and precious he was to me . . . now I sensed the tremendous loss: how were we to imagine our dear school, which stood firmly through the years and brought up a new generation, without teacher Gershteyn!¹²⁰

¹¹⁹Ibid., 56.

¹²⁰Ibid., 58-59.

Several of Yitskhok's teachers were quite prominent during the period before and during the war, known both for their teaching and their writing.¹²¹ No doubt their influence helped to shape Yitskhok's desire to continue learning.

Finally, in early October of 1942, the school was reopened—an event about which Yitskhok wrote with joy in a passage describing the first day:

Monday the 5th [October 1942]

Finally I have lived to see the day. Today we go to school. The day passed quite differently. Lessons, subjects. Both VIth classes were combined. There is a happy spirit in school. Finally the club too was opened. My own life is shaping up in quite a different way! We waste less time, the day is divided and flies by very quickly. . . . Yes, that is how it should be in the ghetto, the day should fly by and we should not waste time.¹²²

School helped time pass quickly, leaving less time to worry about events and circumstances of ghetto existence. The mind could be directed to other topics and thus the gloom, uncertainty, and fear that accompanied the German presence in Vilna could be, if not erased, then at least shelved for the duration of the school day and, as we shall see, for the period of time spent in academic clubs as well. That club seems to have been an extension of school where the students had the opportunity to expand their understanding and to act upon the things learned in class.

Wednesday the 7th [October 1942]

Life has become a little more interesting. The club work has begun. We have groups for literature, natural science. After leaving class at 7:30 I go immediately to the club.¹²³

The club continued and enriched the learning the members brought with them from the classroom. It also extended the time spent in intellectual

¹²¹Ibid., endnotes 9, 42, 44, and 46 (pp.162-163 and 168-169).

¹²²Ibid., 65.

¹²³Ibid., 65-66.

pursuits so that it seems that the young members could devote entire days to those activities. Not only did these activities help to pass the time, and to pass it without sinking into self pity, they also helped them to understand themselves and their community. As the following passages indicate, they not only studied the usual subjects but, through projects and guest lectures, they set out to learn about things of immediate significance as well.

Thursday the 22nd [October 1942]

The days pass quickly. Having finished my few lessons, I began to do housework: I read a book, wrote the diary, and off to class. The few lessons run by quickly: Latin, mathematics, history, Yiddish, and back home again. . . . Our youth works and does not perish. Our history group works. We listen to lectures about the great French revolution, about its periods. The second section of the history group, ghetto history, is also busy. We are investigating the history of Courtyard Shavler 4. For this purpose questionnaires have been distributed among the members, with questions that have to be asked of the courtyard residents. . . . The questions are divided into four parts: questions relating to the period of the Polish, Soviet, and German rule (up until the ghetto), and in the ghetto. The residents answer in different ways. Everywhere, however, the same sad ghetto song: property, certificates, hideouts, the abandonment of things, the abandonment of relatives. I got a taste of the historian's task. I sit at the table and ask questions and record the greatest sufferings with cold objectivity. I write, I probe into details, and I do not realize at all that I am probing into wounds, and the one who answers me—indifferent to it: two sons and a husband taken away—the sons Monday, the husband Tuesday. . . . And this horror, this tragedy is formulated by me in three words, coldly and dryly. I become absorbed in thought, and the words stare out of the paper crimson with blood.¹²⁴

The work of the clubs extended to a range of topics. In attempting to understand the workings and life of the ghetto, the students had visits and reports from a variety of persons including ghetto officials. On one occasion, they learned of the scope of educational efforts for the Jews of Vilna.

¹²⁴Ibid., 72-73.

Sunday the 25th [October 1942]

Yashunski, the director of the educational department, in the ghetto, delivered a report about the work. In the ghetto there are functioning right now three elementary schools with two kindergartens, a technical school, a music school, a *Mitlshul*, a nursery, and a dormitory for abandoned children. Each of these institutions has a rich history of martyrdom. Yashunski also spoke about the theater and sports in the ghetto.¹²⁵

The educational efforts and cultural life of the ghetto were important topics in the city known as "The Jerusalem of Lithuania." Once a center of Jewish learning and home of the renowned YIVO, the community now strove to maintain schooling for its youth. "People are writing about culture at the present moment." Yitskhok wrote, "the education of children is still on the same high level."¹²⁶

Education in Vilna Ghetto varied. Yitskhok occasionally included listings of subjects under study, such as the following:

Monday the 2nd of November [1942]

Today we had a very interesting group meeting with the poet A. Sutskever. He talked to us about poetry, art in general and about subdivisions in poetry. In our group two important and interesting things were decided. We create the following sections in our literary group: Yiddish poetry, and what is most important, a section that is to engage in collecting ghetto folklore. This section interested and attracted me very much. We have already discussed certain details. In the ghetto dozens of sayings, ghetto curses and ghetto blessings are created before our eyes; terms like "*vashenen*," "smuggling into the ghetto," even songs, jokes, and stories which already sound like legends. I feel that I shall participate zealously in this little circle, because the ghetto folklore which is amazingly cultivated in blood, and which is scattered over the little streets, must be collected and cherished as a treasure for the future.¹²⁷

¹²⁵Ibid., 74.

¹²⁶Ibid., 79 (Saturday, 31 October 1942).

¹²⁷Ibid., 80-81.

The students in Yitskhok's circle seem to have developed a strong interest in studying the ghetto that was their home and their prison. These youths seemed intent on preserving, through their studies, the culture that had developed within the ghetto; they also sought to anchor that within the larger history of their people.¹²⁸

Tuesday the 10th [November 1942]

The first half of the day drags on and I am glad to go to school. The lessons are quite interesting. In history we learn some very interesting facts about Rome—in Jewish history, about Herod. After school I go to the club. It is cold outside, it is cold at home, so you want to run to the club where you do not feel anything. Our ghetto research circle is actively at work. We hope that through our efforts we shall obtain a valuable historical study about courtyard Shavler 4. Today the meeting for the establishment of the Jewish history circle took place. We resolved to learn, to study Jewish history, and to deal with the problems in Jewish history that interest us and can have current application, especially most recent Jewish history. . . . We collect material for folklore. With such activity you do not feel the cold.¹²⁹

Glad that school had recommenced, Yitskhok described it in tones of relief. Ordering what had become abysmally long and dreary days that lacked order or purpose, school gave his life definition and he threw himself into it with fervor. Still school took up less than all his time and during the remaining time he seemed to count the minutes until he could escape to his classes. In the following passage, he described his longing clearly:

¹²⁸This cultural study is an interesting effort as in some other cases education seemed to focus on traditional forms and content of learning or future applications—either replicating pre-war schooling or furthering the Zionist mission. In Dawid Sierakowiak's narrative, however, we can see that this sort of learning also occurred. These learning structures grew out of schooling efforts of the inter-war era when Progressive methods and influences had established a foothold in Western schooling. Therefore, it is not surprising that Progressivism should be reflected in schools in the ghettos—particularly given that the schools and their participants had such a strong tie to the ghetto. Unlike in present day impoverished inner city communities in Europe and the United States, sometimes referred to as ghettos, there was no question of education being offered as a tool for escaping the ghettos of Eastern Europe. Education was at best seen as something that would be of value when the enemy was vanquished and the ghettos reincorporated into the general communities. But I think we can see that in these instances there was an effort not only to understand the ghettos that were their domiciles (and they had as yet no understanding of how long they would last) but also to record and preserve the culture and history of those places for the future.

¹²⁹*Ibid.*, 91.

Thursday the 12th [November 1942]

The cold casts a pall of gloom over me. I am alone in the house. I cannot bring myself to do anything. I can scarcely hold out like this until I go to class. There it is cold, too, but while studying it somehow becomes warmer.¹³⁰

Mention of the torturous cold is figural in that portion of Yitskhok's story. He had mentioned the cold several times and evidently he equated cold with gloom and felt that his studies could alleviate it. The attention to cold, and school's ability to provide an antidote, is a strong statement as to the importance of school—in the ghetto, cold did not mean just chilly. Winter in that climate could be severe and along with food, the Germans cut off fuel to the ghettos. If education had the power to make a person forget the cold, or to make a place feel warmer, then it must have exerted a powerful influence.

The formal school day was rather short, "from 8:45 to 12," explaining, in part, membership in the club.¹³¹ Remarking upon the school's move into a different building, Yitskhok described the new classrooms as "large [and] beautiful" but added that it "was still very cold."¹³²

In his journal, Yitskhok, described his workload and how the school allotted time. He did not seem distressed at the amount of work time required to finish everything. The following is a fairly happy account provided by a boy who was pleased to be busy and challenged. Yitskhok seemed to spend little time brooding over his circumstances and the future, although he was not unaware of either:

Monday the 23rd [November 1942]

Lately I have a pile of work from school and the club. We spend whole days on historical books. We are preparing various reports and trials. In addition, I am the person responsible for the circle of creative writing in the club, under the direction of the poet Sutskever, and I have to be in constant contact with him. The study period in the morning is quite a pleasant one. However, the rest of the day flies past

¹³⁰Ibid., 92-93.

¹³¹Ibid., 95.

¹³²Ibid.

quickly. I do not even have time to finish my book from the library. I am burdened by piles of reports in Yiddish, in history. And everything comes up at the same time. Every evening I go to the club as usual, visit the history circles, the nature circle, the literary one.¹³³

Along with its role in creating a sense of warmth, order, and stability in Yitskhok's life, school also provided him with an opportunity to look into the broader world and to try make sense of the catastrophe that the Germans had visited on his people. Writing at the beginning of December, he described his thinking on that matter:

Tuesday the 1st of December [1942]

At school today we had a class composition on the theme: "Scenes of Deprivation." I wrote at great length. I found topical parallels to Reyzen's stories. I connected them and concluded that our ghetto is the finale of generations of want. We shall be those who, emerging from the ghetto, shall cast off the affliction which has oppressed the Jewish people for generations.¹³⁴

A few days later, Yitskhok, finding himself having to stay at home, arranged his day to resemble a school day. The following entry is one of the few substantive mentions in his diary of his family—the important sources of comfort and intellectual engagement seem to have been his school and club.

Friday the 4th of December [1942]

Mother is not well. For this reason I could not go to school. . . . During the day I copied the assigned lessons and went to the club. Among friends in the sections at the club you refresh yourself after such a boring day.¹³⁵

Later in that week, after noting that "chemistry and geography have been added to our subjects at school."¹³⁶ Yitskhok described the work that he and his peers were doing to generate a cultural history of the ghetto.

¹³³Ibid., 96.

¹³⁴Ibid., 99-100.

¹³⁵Ibid., 100.

Sunday the 7th [December 1942]

In our circles on ghetto research we decided once and for all to complete the spadework, that is to say visiting homes with the questionnaires. We want to get started on processing the answers, to make history on the basis of the data.

Today my friend and I visited a new apartment. We received very good answers. Making the rounds among ghetto people and talking to them about their lives, we discern the ghetto person with his manner of thinking and speaking. Usually in our questions we are not concerned with the family. There are, however, people who wish to have a record made of their families, they wish to be part of history. Others, on the other hand, are terribly cautious and exceptionally diplomatic. In their answer there is no extraneous word: everything is weighed and measured. If we ask them where they lived before the ghetto, they do not answer. If you ask them in which unit they work, they do not answer. They regard us as people whose job it is to levy taxes. The ghetto person is full of distrust.

On the other hand, for instance, simple Jews today answered in such a friendly and pleasant manner. They were interested in answering us. (Perhaps they may not have understood what this meant.) However, they felt with all their hearts that they ought to answer us. They poured their hearts out to us, explained in full detail all their misfortunes, the complicated tragedies of including additional names to their own. "What do you say, children, this is what [the] Führer made of us. May the same thing happen to him. This will be a history of us. Write, write, children. It is good this way." We finish questioning a family and thank them. "Oh, do not thank us. Promise us that we shall leave the ghetto, and I shall tell you three times as much, wretched folk that we are." We assured the woman ten times that we shall leave the ghetto.¹³⁷

The youths went out with questionnaires to collect certain data, but they ended up collecting instead stories. They took the alteration in stride and even performed acts of consolation and fostered morale among those they questioned.

On his fifteenth birthday, Yitskhok took the opportunity to reflect on his life; not surprisingly school and learning figured prominently.

¹³⁶Ibid. (5 December 1942).

¹³⁷Ibid., 101.

Wednesday the 10th of December [1942]

It dawned on me that today is my birthday. Today I became 15 years old. . . . I decided not to trifle my time away in the ghetto on nothing and I feel somehow happy that I can study, read, develop myself, and see that time does not stand still as long as I progress normally with it.¹³⁸

That birthday was Yitskhok's last. The Germans murdered him before another year passed. As the year 1942 ended, Yitskhok recorded several school activities including a field trip when his class went to view a bas-relief of the city, the staging of a trial of Herod, and visits to a literary circle. Each activity was extraordinary only in that all were conducted under such hazardous circumstances as the ghetto.

It might be easy to think that for Yitskhok it was the going to school itself that was most important—the scheduling, the diversity of topics, the companionship of teachers and students, and the sense of doing something. Yet, as the next passage suggests, it was more than that. Repeatedly we have seen that the studies mattered and the quality of work as well. Yitskhok had previously mentioned a commitment to quality in the study of the ghetto, including the importance of collecting that data. He had found it interesting to study certain subjects with an eye toward gaining greater understanding of the persecutions European Jews were enduring. He was also interested in grades and, in that passage, he discussed them—what his were and how they might have been different:

Sunday the 3rd [January 1943]

At school today they are giving us oral marks for the first third of the school year. I have A's in Yiddish, Jew. history, history and biology. I have B's in mathematics, Hebrew, drawing, and physics; in Latin, German, it's C's.¹²⁴

My grades could perhaps have been better but even those mentioned above

¹³⁸Ibid., 103-104.

are proof that my time is not being frittered away

124. In the original Yiddish text the grades appeared as 5 for A, 4 for B, 3 for c.¹³⁹

If the thought, by a fifteen-year-old, of grades and a longing for better ones seems unremarkable, one must remember that cold, hunger, and illness stalked the ghetto. Most ghetto housing was substandard, and the children of the ghetto regularly heard of and often witnessed acts of sickening brutality. , Yitskhok's interest in education, in attending school, and in doing well remained strong. Indeed, so many of his diary entries revolved around school or the educational clubs that it seems apparent that school was his way of obscuring the other conditions of ghetto life.

It is also apparent that it was important for Yitskhok to have reasonably good grades to affirm to himself, and possibly to others, that he was not simply wasting time while waiting for the end of German occupation. As the next entry illustrates it was important to Yitskhok not to waste his life and to use it in a way commensurate with his previous expectations. Rejecting an opportunity to change his schooling to something that at least seemed to offer more hope for survival, he resolved to continue his academic schooling. He used a rather ambiguous term "easier" to describe the effect of having a trade; clearly, he thought that trade school could give him some advantage. At the same time, he was reluctant to give up his academic studies to enroll in the trade school.

Friday the 8th [January 1943]

New students are being accepted in the technical school in the ghetto. I am now going through a big struggle, whether to learn a trade or to continue to study in the high school as I have done until now. I cannot make up my mind. On the one hand, there is war; it is easier at the moment for the person who has some kind of trade or other. I am growing up and sooner or later I shall have to go to work. On the other hand, I imagine that attendance at the technical school means an interruption of one's studies. For after the four-month vocational course the goal is to go to work,

¹³⁹Ibid., 117.

and once I start working I shall never return to school again. After long hesitation and long reflection I decided to make use of every moment. I need to study; I still have suitable conditions, so I must not interrupt my studies. My determination to study has developed into something like defiance of the present which hates to study, loves to work, to drudge. No, I decided. I shall live with tomorrow, not with today. And if for every 100 ghetto children of my age 10 can study, I must be among the fortunate ones, I must take advantage of this. Studying has become even more precious to me than before.¹⁴⁰

Late in the month, Yitskhok returned to the idea of serious study while writing of a club activity in which students reviewed their purposes and examined the seriousness of what they were doing.

Sunday the 24th [January 1943]

I think that all is not in order in the club. The performances, the dramatic circle has too much influence in the club. The work of the little circles, the club has practically ceased being a place for serious work. This was all dealt with at the meeting.¹⁴¹

On the next day, he returned to the theme of cold and warmth reiterating that study warmed better than the stove.

Monday the 25th [January 1943]

The frost struck hard again. It is cold in class. Everyone stands around the little stove. They put their frozen fingers against the pipes. Yet in spite of it things are gay and lively. While studying we do not feel the cold.¹⁴²

As winter wore on to spring the class continued their studies, taking time to for an occasional field trip such as one to visit the ghetto workshops and receive some workers' exhortations. In the club, they formed a clandestine organization to prepare for leadership in the new world to come. Their hero was Josef Stalin and the leader for the club was Teacher Mire. The bond between

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 119-120.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 125.

¹⁴²Ibid.

students and teachers seems to grow and deepen with the exigencies of ghetto life.¹⁴³

In the month that followed, Yitskhok again reflected on the richness of intellectual life.

March 18th [1943],

I often reflect, this is supposedly the ghetto yet I have such a rich life of intellectual work: I study, I read, I visit club circles. Time runs by so quickly and there is so much work to be done, lectures, social gatherings. I often forget that I am in the ghetto.¹⁴⁴

Later that month an influx of Jews from outlying areas required that the school building be given to house them. Writing of that event, Yitskhok was markedly upset at the disruption of his school.

Thursday the 25th of March [1943]

The school on Shavler 1 has been preempted for the newly arrived Jews. The school on Shavler 1 was moved into the building of our school. They are teaching in two shifts. Today we went to class in the evening. Our studies somehow no longer have any form. We are all depressed. We are in a bad mood.¹⁴⁵

There was worse to come. On April 4, 1943, Yitskhok and his comrades learned that the Germans took five thousand Jews, supposedly deported from Vilna and the surrounding area, to Kovno, only ten kilometers from Ponar. There they murdered them all by shooting them.¹⁴⁶ In the next to last entry in his diary Yitskhok wrote:

Tuesday the 6th. We did not study in school today. The children run away from their homes where it is terrible to stay on account of the mood, on account of the women.

¹⁴³Ibid., 125-27

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 135-136.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶Ponar was a site near Vilna, about ten kilometers away from the city, selected by the Germans as the site of the mass murder by shooting of Vilna's Jews.

The teachers are also despondent. So we sit in a circle. We rally our spirits. We sing a song.”¹⁴⁷

They did not study but still Yitskhok and his peers sought and found comfort in the company of their schoolmates and teachers.

An uncharacteristically short entry, made the next day, April 7, 1943, forms the end of Yitskhok’s diary—at least the portion of it that Sore later found. In that brief passage he wrote:

Wednesday

Our mood is a little better. A happy song can be heard in the club. We are, however, prepared for everything, because Monday proved that we must not trust nor believe anything. We may be fated for the worst.¹⁴⁸

As Yitskhok feared, they were indeed “fated for the worst.” In the first week of October of that year, 1943, after months of hiding to avoid the relentless *aktsia* of the spring and summer, the Germans found the hiding place of Yitskhok and his extended family. They shot them at Ponar.¹⁴⁹

This section included accounts of schooling in three different ghettos. In the next section are narratives from Kovno Ghetto. Two youths and a Ghetto administrator with a strong interest in schools will tell about schooling there. All of these narrators had some connection to a vocational school that was formed in that ghetto. That school received the endorsement of the German occupation authorities. It also operated as a clandestine educational and cultural center.

¹⁴⁷Rudashevski, 139.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., 140.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 12.

Three Tales from Kovno Ghetto

The Germans formed Kovno Ghetto almost immediately following their invasion of Lithuania. Kovno (Kaunas), once the capital of Lithuania, was then home to around 35,000 Jews. The Germans entered the city on 23 June 1941. On 10 July, they ordered the Jews in the ghetto. They located the ghetto in a poor, predominately Jewish suburb called Slobodka. That area, formerly the home of 6,000–8,000 was to be henceforth the home of 35,000. By December of 1942, poor living conditions, starvation and disease had reduced the population. More effective was a series of mass murders at the Ninth Fort outside of Kovno. The Germans shoved thousands of Jews—10,000 on the night of 28 October 1941 alone—into burial pits and machine-gunned them. Then they shoved another group on top of the dead, the wounded, and the terrified—and then another and another. In that month, the Germans also ordered the Ghetto hospital sealed and burned with all staff and patients inside. A year and a half into the Ghetto period, the population stood at 16,601. Ten months later, in October 1943, following the deportation to Auschwitz and gassing of the remaining children and elderly ghetto inmates, the Germans made the Kovno Ghetto into a concentration and slave labor camp. Between 8 and 11 July 1944, the Germans evacuated the camp of nearly all the remaining 8,000 Jews. They sent them to camps in Germany and there killed two thirds of the evacuees. As the Soviet Army approached, the Ghetto's erstwhile tyrants fled leaving it in flames. When the Soviets liberated Kovno on 1 August 1944, they found few Jews still alive.

This section includes the narratives of three survivors of the Kovno Ghetto. Two were students, both at the Ghetto vocational school—as we shall see it was much more than that name implies—and one was on the Ghetto administrative staff. Two were male and one was female. One had access to a plethora of schools located within the ghetto and could take a broad view of educational activities, and two spoke mainly of their own personal experiences.

Before the Germans arrived, one was almost completely assimilated and later found Jewish identity through the Ghetto experience—especially through schooling. All saw school as an important element of resistance. They are Solly Ganor, Tamarah Lazerson, and Avraham (Golub) Tory.

“The ghetto inmates struggled to keep some remnants of civilization alive.”

Solly Ganor was thirteen years old when the Germans forced his family into the ghetto at Kovno in August 1941. Solly came from a well-off family that owned various business enterprises. His autobiographical account of his life during the occupation details his resistance to the fate envisioned by his German persecutors. In it he told of his attempts to survive, the horrifying loss of family and friends, as well as his educational activities in a legal trade school and in a clandestine study circle he and his friends arranged with the assistance of an elderly ghetto resident. Solly's secret activities included the furnishing and use of an illegal library. In July 1944, the Germans deported him to the camp at Stutthof, Germany. He was liberated by an U.S. Army unit while on a death march out of Dachau in May 1945. The first rescuer he saw and spoke to was a Japanese American. That occurrence was particularly ironic as, not long before the Germans invaded Lithuania, Solly had befriended a Japanese diplomat in Kovno. That friend, “Sempo” Sugihara, was the savior of numerous Jews although unfortunately not Solly or his family.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰In late 1939, before the German invasion of Lithuania (but following their occupation of neighboring Poland) the eleven-year-old Solly on impulse invited Chiune (“Sempo”) Sugihara, a customer in Solly's aunt's shop, to participate in the family Chanukah party. Sugihara and his wife, Yukiko, accepted the invitation and at the party met several persons who had encountered German persecution. The following year later Sugihara signed over six-thousand visas for Jews hoping to emigrate and, when leaving Kovno to take up a posting in Berlin, gave his visa stamp to forgers so that they could continue the rescue effort that enabled some Jews to escape the Germans. Solly Ganor, *Light One Candle: A Survivors Tale from Lithuania to Jerusalem* (New York: Kadansha International, 1995).

The arrival of a gentile friend surprised Solly Ganor, on the day after the Germans forced Solly's family into the Kovno Ghetto. The friend brought them food and something perhaps more precious.

We were very much surprised when Petras showed up with his uncle's horse and wagon, bringing Mother's commode full of books, as he had promised. None of us believed we would see those books again. Underneath the commode he smuggled in some food, including five large loaves of home-baked bread.¹⁵¹

With access to that collection of reading material, Solly was able to embark on a self-teaching program. The matter of books would come to form a strong pattern in Solly's account of his ghetto experiences. Books would come to represent triumph and failure, escape and learning, and resistance to occupation authorities as well as to parental authority.

Hunger was the problem the rest of us faced every day. There was only one thing that could temporarily make me forget my hunger, and that was a good book. At least we weren't short of books. . . . In the beginning I preferred books in German and Lithuanian, but soon, because we had so many books in Russian and Yiddish, I began reading more in those two languages.¹⁵²

Soon Solly and his friends made a new friend, Aviva, whose grandfather, Chaim, a former bookshop proprietor, had saved a collection of books. That introduction opened a door to further education for the group, as Chaim was willing to share his knowledge with them

Besides the classics we knew about, he had books by authors we had never heard of. There were books by Stefan Zweig, Jakov Wasserman, Kafka, Thomas Mann, and many others. His name was Chaim, and it was he who taught us how to really appreciate literature.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹Ibid., 104.

¹⁵²Ibid., 131-132.

¹⁵³Ibid., 132.

That relationship lasted for some time and resulted in these four youths' exposure to a new way of understanding literature. It not only seems to have been an opportunity for them to learn but to learn in ways that they might not have done in normal circumstances.

After we'd all read something, he would explain and analyze the characters, the background, the hidden meanings and nuances, and every possible aspect of the book. His lectures were fascinating. It was as if all these years I'd been looking at a two-dimensional picture, and suddenly someone came along and showed me that it was actually three-dimensional.¹⁵⁴

Chaim lived alone in a room filled with books and he probably welcomed the opportunity to interact with the young people who in turn served as his link to the community. Eventually those lessons expanded to include a variety of other topics that went beyond literature.

Later he began giving us lectures on other subjects such as history, geography, political science, and Judaism. He loved to lecture, and in us he found an enthusiastic audience. Whenever the ghetto was shaken by a new trauma, he would patiently give us lessons from history or philosophy, trying to put things into perspective.¹⁵⁵

Thus, as conditions in the ghetto worsened and the young adolescents' hopes darkened, they continued to try to understand events through the classes they arranged. It was a rather personal form of education due to the style and the small size of the student group. They went by to visit their teacher as circumstances allowed, and he was willing and able to address whatever situations had arisen rather than a set curriculum. That pedagogical relationship seems to have filled certain needs in these learners and to have provided hope for young people who had little reason to have any. In the following passage Solly told how, even in the face of seemingly insurmountable

¹⁵⁴Ibid.

¹⁵⁵Ibid.

German military success, Chaim was able to use a lesson in history to demonstrate the inconsistency of seemingly unstoppable military advance:

When endless stories of German victories in Russia threatened to destroy our morale, he gave us an account of Napoleon's Russian campaign. He described the humiliating defeat of the French forces in the vast lands and cruel winters there, and predicted a similar defeat for the Nazis. It was he who gave us hope that one day the loathsome Nazi empire would crumble into dust. When I came home and told my family his predictions, they would all shake their heads.¹⁵⁶

As starvation and fear undermined Jewish life, Solly and his friends returned often to Chaim's room, seeking understanding of their situation and the greater world that they denied them by their German oppressors. That teacher added music appreciation to his teaching and served as their confidant and advisor.

On 4 October 1941, Solly and his father, together with hundreds of other Jews, witnessed an act of unspeakable horror when forced to watch as the Germans and their Lithuanian allies splashed gasoline on the ghetto hospital and lit it. Before Solly's eyes, the Germans shot to death his uncle as he tried to extract his wife from the hospital. They burned alive his aunt with all the other staff and patients within the building, as Solly watched helplessly. Then the Germans ordered the Jews who witnessed the atrocity to assist in clearing the nearby orphanage.

The most heartbreaking job was to move the orphans out of the children's ward. Little children with shaved heads led by older ones, young boys and girls whose parents were murdered by the Nazis, holding on to each other, making strange noises. Many of them, out of fear, wet their pants, as their teachers and caretakers led them on. And why and for what? What had they ever done to deserve such a fate? Even hearts of stone would melt at the pitiful sight of these children, but the hearts of the Germans and the Lithuanians were harder than stone. There were more than two hundred of them, and about ten teachers and caretakers. They were

¹⁵⁶Ibid.

all loaded onto trucks and sent away. Our hearts were breaking and we couldn't hold back our tears as we silently handed them up.¹⁵⁷

By now residents of the ghetto understood that to be taken away meant to die, yet Solly did not report any attempt by the teachers to separate their fate from that of the children. Children in normal circumstances might cling to their teachers; these children in fact had no one else to whom to cling. Nor did he express any surprise that the teachers did not attempt to escape. He seemed to understand that teachers would stay with their charges. Solly went to seek solace and understanding of that terrible event not from his family, from whom he concealed many of the details, but from Chaim.

The tiny study circle grew even smaller when Chaim's granddaughter, Aviva, and Solly's friend Lena were both murdered, having been caught in an *Aktion* in the fall of 1941. Chaim now depended more than ever on the companionship of Solly and his friend, Cooky, which they willingly pledged.

It was not long before the German authorities struck the Jews of Kovno Ghetto with another harsh order.

[February 1942] The Germans ordered all books in the ghetto to be turned over to the authorities. Anyone caught with books after the deadline would be executed. The people of the book, as we had been known throughout the ages, were to be separated from our ancient companions.¹⁵⁸

Solly and his friend, Cooky, discovered an attic full of books and, deciding to contravene orders, hid them away. The boys continued that project by getting work loading books turned in by others. During the process, they were able to secrete some books for their cache. They became aware that others engaged in the same enterprise. Note that just as his family "would shake their heads" over his experiences with Chaim, so they frowned upon his continued use of books.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., 141-146. That atrocity colored the thinking of the Kovno Ghetto Council concerning schools for young children. See the account of Avraham (Golub) Tory.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 207.

Meanwhile Solly gained admission to a vocational program organized by the ghetto council. He wrote:

The Kaunas Council and its Jewish police force managed to hold the community together, opening vocational training schools in carpentry and other basic skills for the youth. The classes provided effective cover for more traditional education and for the operations of Zionist youth organizations. Through these and other clandestine means, the Council and the ghetto inmates struggled to keep some remnants of civilization alive.¹⁵⁹

The confluence of their book saving activities and their attendance at the school fomented a tragedy for the boys. Unwittingly, by giving him a book from the collection, Solly became a pawn in the killing of one of his teachers.

One day I was approached by Mr. Edelstein, our instructor, who taught mathematics before the war and tried to instruct us in math when we weren't pounding nails. He asked me point-blank if I could get hold of any textbooks, especially in mathematics. I first denied that I had any sources, but when he insisted I told him I would inquire. Cooky had in fact cursed me for saving some schoolbooks, especially those in mathematics. He hated math. "Is this what I risked my neck for?" he yelled when he saw them. There was one newer-looking geometry book among these that I smuggled into school for Mr. Edelstein. He was so delighted that he gave me a big hug. "Do you know what a treasure this is? Look! It's in Hebrew and was printed in Tel Aviv only a few years ago. Where on earth did you get it?" . . . When I brought him the book he put it in a bag full of clothing he was carrying.¹⁶⁰

Later in the day, Solly came upon Mr. Edelstein as a fatal encounter with a guard unfolded,

That afternoon when I left school I passed him at the gate, where he had stopped to trade with the guard. Evidently Mr. Edelstein asked for more food than the guard

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 206. Kaunas is also a name for Kovno—Solly used the Kaunas form but both Tamarah and Avraham used Kovno. I have chosen to use this form although today the city appears on maps as Kaunas.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 209-210.

was willing to give him. Suddenly the Lithuanian began shouting "What's this you got hidden there, Jew boy? A book? And in your heathen language too. You know I could shoot you for possessing books. How would you like that for special payment?"¹⁶¹

Extending schooling beyond the limits set by the Germans, in that case by obtaining materials for teaching mathematics, could carry heavy consequences. If Solly had any doubts of the danger, they were that day dispelled as the scene continued to unfold. Soon, an SS contingent arrived.

I was only about ten yards away and turned to see what was happening. A German military car approaching the gate from the other side came to a stop, and an SS officer stepped out demanding to know what was going on. I felt the bottom drop out of my stomach.

Mr. Edelstein stood ashen-faced while the Lithuanian showed the book to the SS officer. The German turned the pages slowly, then demanded to know where Mr. Edelstein had gotten that book. I couldn't hear Mr. Edelstein's answer, but the German slapped him a few times and shouted, "Don't lie to me you filthy Jew! This book was printed in Palestine and is in some kind of code! Who is your contact? Where did you get this book? Tell me or I will kill you!"

I stood frozen in horror as he and the guard began beating my teacher. Any minute I expected Mr. Edelstein to point a finger at me, but instead he made a barely perceptible gesture for me to go.¹⁶²

The teacher, Edelstein, apparently realized the futility of exposing the source of the book, although the temptation to try to save his life must have been great. Instead he took the chance and warned off his student and, by sacrificing his life, saved another.

With that I found my feet and started running. I was turning into a side street when I heard a shot. I looked back to see Mr. Edelstein fall to his knees. The

¹⁶¹Ibid., 210.

¹⁶²Ibid.

German put his pistol to his head and fired again, and Mr. Edelstein fell over and lay still.¹⁶³

Frightened, depressed, and racked with guilt about Edelstein's death, Solly stayed out of school and worked for several days, but eventually returned. "Those ten days," he would later say, "were purgatory, but somehow they helped me expunge my guilt over Edelstein."¹⁶⁴ Solly was not yet fourteen.

Solly returned to school and continued his education for the next two years. By early 1944, Chaim, his well-loved teacher had died in his bed. As late as 27 March 1944, Solly remained enrolled in school although on the edge of dismissal.

I was supposed to go to the trade school as usual, but it was already too late for that. Perhaps Cooky would be able to cover for me. Shimon, our instructor, threatened to throw me out of the course if I missed classes one more time, and then it would be work at the dreaded airport for me.¹⁶⁵

On the day referred to above, the Germans launched a massive round up of children and the elderly. Solly managed to avoid capture by slipping out of his window and hiding in a German officer's tool shed.¹⁶⁶ Other children hid in specially constructed hiding places, including Solly's young cousin, Esterke Schuster. In telling of her escape, Solly told also of his metamorphosis from student to teacher. Like some of the other narrators whose stories I have used, Solly, at an early age, began to give to other children what he had received—education.

I also adored Esterke. She had been born in Palestine, and was only three when everyone was forced into the ghetto. I occasionally sat with her while her parents were out working. By 1944 she was a lovely child of seven. When I read to

¹⁶³Ibid.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 212.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 223.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., 236-237. In that *Aktion*, Solly noted, among the murdered was Rose Gutman who had been giving him lessons in English. Ibid., 351.

her and taught her new words or numbers, her big blue eyes would grow wide with excitement.¹⁶⁷

In June 1944, the ghetto received “the exhilarating news that the Allies had landed in Normandy.”¹⁶⁸ A month later the Germans cleared the ghetto/camp, and Solly began a ten-month odyssey beginning in the camp at Stutthof and finishing with his liberation while on a death march from Dachau.

Unlike Solly, who before ghettoization had lived a life permeated by Jewish practice and tradition, Tamarah Lazerson came into the ghetto with little sense of Jewish identity. For her the ghetto experience, and especially the curriculum at the trade school, generated a sense of belonging as well as helping her to develop a strong Jewish and Zionist identity.

“Now at last I have found an aim in life. I am no longer forlorn—an individual without a homeland and a people.”

Tamarah Lazerson began keeping a diary when the war broke out in Lithuania. She was thirteen. Tamarah’s psychiatrist father encouraged her brother to keep a diary recording the historic events they were enduring and Tamarah resolved to keep one also. She came from a thoroughly assimilated family, and Tamarah leaned toward conversion and baptism into the Catholic faith. Nonetheless, in August of 1941, the Germans forced the family into a ghetto, set in the impoverished suburb of Slobodka. Tamarah developed a profound attachment to her ancestral identity as a Jew. She survived until liberation and subsequently completed her studies. In 1971, she settled in Haifa, Israel.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷Ibid., 250.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 251.

¹⁶⁹Tamarah Lazerson’s diary is quoted in: Eisenberg, 1982, 91-95.

Tamarah Lazerson had many reasons to suffer. Crammed into a small, crowded section of the Kovno suburbs, surrounded by poverty, hunger, disease, and strangers, imprisoned by the German army and by anti-Semitic Lithuanians—whom she had recently thought of as her countrymen—she was in a world where few things resembled her former life. A year after the being forced into the Ghetto, she wrote in her diary of the struggle to get additional food.¹⁷⁰ In Tamara's thinking it was not their skill in smuggling that kept her people alive, although she admired that too, it was their strength of purpose—their will to live.

September 14, 1942. Our people endanger their very lives to obtain food. . . . We are a remarkable people, indestructible. No decree or edicts will break us. I declare this people will never be destroyed, despite their unspeakable suffering; therefore it is an eternal people and it shall overcome its enemies.¹⁷¹

It was not just the sufferings of the ghetto on her mind, a year into the torturous life in the Ghetto. A week after the above entry, Tamarah acknowledged the beginning of a new school year, one closed to her:

September 21, [1942]. My old wound has reopened. The school year has begun. I am deeply pained that another year will go to waste. But what can I do?¹⁷²

Indeed, she could do nothing about the school year in her old school, whose doors the German barred to her. In addition, the previous February, in their effort to strip the Jews of Kovno of every semblance of their former lives, the German authorities had ordered that all books in the Ghetto be surrendered. They confiscated and removed from the Ghetto many books—but

¹⁷⁰On August 25, 1942 the Germans issued a document setting the ration per person/per *week* for the Jews of Kovno at 700 grams [24.69 ounces] bread; 125 grams [4.4 ounces] meat; 112.5 grams [3.96 ounces] flour; 75 grams [2.64 ounces] nourishment, and 50 grams [1.76 ounces] salt. This works out to approximately (depending on the amount of fat in the bread) 400 calories per day. This document is included in: Avraham Tory, *Surviving the Holocaust: The Kovno Ghetto Diary*, ed. Martin Gilbert, nts. Dina Porat, and trans. Jerzy Michalwicz (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1990), 127.

¹⁷¹Lazerson, 92.

¹⁷²*Ibid.*

not all.¹⁷³ Still, books were scarce and Tamarah mourned their loss, "A long time has passed since I have read a book. It's terribly hard to get them now."¹⁷⁴

By the following spring her melancholy seemed to evaporate, along with her former assimilated status. The previous autumn, following the August order banning all forms of schooling in the Ghetto, the Germans approved a plan to open a vocational training school in the Ghetto. Within the walls of that school, the Jewish prisoners formed a second school, shielded from view by the vocational program. Here the academic and ideological education of the students went forward. They studied regular school subjects and in addition received a strong Zionist curriculum as well.¹⁷⁵ Tamarah threw herself with enthusiasm into a life-changing experience.

April 4, 1943. I am now working in a trade school and am very pleased. The lectures are interesting. We take notes diligently and then study them at home. I cannot recognize myself, for I am preparing for life in Eretz Yisrael. Today I handed in quite a long essay for our wall newspaper. I ended it with the slogan: "Eretz Yisrael awaits us!" I am happy.¹⁷⁶

For Tamarah, it was school and Zionism that drew her back from the edge of conversion and gave her hope for the future and a sense of pride in the Jewish people. She saw that she had been lost from her people and she rejoiced in her return. That there was little concrete cause to rejoice, given the general conditions of the Ghetto, made little impact on her. Like others, she found a deep solace in being in the thick of a community who refused to regret their connection with Judaism.

May 20, 1943. I am very pleased with myself. It seems to me that I had strayed and have been wandering about aimlessly. And now at last I have found an aim in life. I am no longer forlorn—an individual without a homeland and a people. No! I have

¹⁷³See the account of the book round up in Solly Ganor's narrative.

¹⁷⁴Lazerson, 92. November 24 [1942]. The problem went beyond the difficulty of obtaining books. Tamara added that: "To add to our troubles the electricity has been cut off. My room is dark and unheated."

¹⁷⁵Tory, 134, 307.

¹⁷⁶Lazerson, 92.

found an aim: to struggle, to study, to devote my strength to advance the well-being of my people and my homeland. I am proud of it. I am no longer blind—God and fate have opened my eyes. I now see that my goals in life were false, and I have atoned.¹⁷⁷

Two years into her Ghetto life, Tamarah was also able to see that her sense of Zionist well being was not universal. Some of the youths of her Ghetto had given themselves over to a very different sort of life. Such a life did not seem worthy to Tamarah who glowed with a keen zeal for a very different experience.

August 15, 1943. I am working in a tailor shop and am continuing my Hebrew studies. I am absorbed in the cultural life of the ghetto. A large number of our youth participate and are avid to learn. They deserve praise. I myself take part in three study circles and am pleased. . . . There are two kinds of young people in the ghetto. Some are permeated with love and longing for Eretz Yisrael and all that the Zionist ideal implies. They are thirsty for knowledge and pursue idealistic, meaningful activities. The others are unbridled and completely given over to satisfying their lusts utterly disgusting and painful for me to observe. They are degenerates.¹⁷⁸

Tamarah continued her education and took on a teaching role. Taking an interest in a group of children sent to Kovno from an outlying town, Tamarah and a friend set out to provide aid and comfort and to share their Zionist ideals.

September 8 [1943]. I am busier than ever and have little time to write. I now belong to four study circles, two of which I lead.¹⁷⁹ I am engaged in important work, Celia and I have become attached to the pitiful children of Zeznier. We help them; they are so dependent on us. We comfort them, teach them Jewish values, and inspire them with goals for living. I am alive and dynamic. I feel that I am needed and useful.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., 92-93.

¹⁷⁹Tamarah belonged to study circles or clubs, also. These related to her studies at school, but were in addition to school. They seem to have been voluntary opportunities to pursue interests aroused in school and often seem to have had advisors who were teachers from the more formal school settings.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., 93.

Tamarah's response to the opportunity to help, encourage, and give a vision of a future to others can help us understand the importance that her education held for her. That experience made her feel alive and *needed*—an important sustaining element in survivor accounts.

Even given her enthusiastic participation in learning and teaching in the Ghetto, her forced absence from her previous school grated on Tamarah. Her sense of separation was especially powerful after the conversion of Kovno from a ghetto to a concentration camp. Hungry for more than food, Tamarah longed to be a part of her old school and to finish her education. Thinking of past gentile friends reminded her of their educational journeys—journeys that she no longer shared. Of a former gentile friend Tamarah wrote:

December 5 [1943]. I am struggling with myself. Kazis is in the sixth grade. Two more years and he graduates. This thought pierces through me like a knife in my heart. And what of me? What will I be? Again the wound in my heart opens. Three years lost. O God, I recall the past. I advanced from class to class, ever higher, and suddenly the ban—a fatal blow to my future.

Three years. It's hard to take. Be it as it may, if I'm still alive I shall yet catch up. I know I can be a person of value to mankind.¹⁸¹

By the time she wrote of her longing for school, the ghetto had been a concentration camp for five weeks. Grim and unimaginably hard as the ghetto had been, the camp was even more hostile to the lives of the Germans' slave laborers. Many of the amenities that formerly barely mitigated, but not ameliorated, the hardships of ghetto life were gone. Endless, grueling labor took over Tamarah's existence. She wrote of that period:

I am weighed down by my enslavement and have no time to write, to think, or even to read. I am mired in a morass, into which I sink as I daily labor from morning to night with the slave gang. Around me is darkness. I thirst for light.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹Ibid.

¹⁸²Ibid.

The approach of Soviet forces spurred the Germans to clear the Kovno Ghetto of Jews so that they would not fall from their hands. From July 8 to 11, 1944 the Germans sent nearly all remaining Jews to camps in Germany where they murdered three quarters of them. Following the deportations, they set fire to the Ghetto. Tamarah Lazerson was one of the few who avoided the deportation and emerged from the ruins of the destroyed Ghetto into the bitter light of liberation.¹⁸³

Left an orphan by the calamity wrought by the German presence in her community, Tamarah set out to rebuild her life. Of her family only her younger brother survived with her.¹⁸⁴ Twenty-seven years later she settled in Israel—as she had so fervently dreamed of doing in the abattoir of Kovno Ghetto.¹⁸⁵

In contrast to the adolescents, Solly and Tamarah, Avraham (Golub) Tory was thirty-two years old and active in Jewish affairs when forced into the hellish world the Germans created in the Kovno suburb of Slobodka. In addition, while the two youths were both members of the trade school, Avraham was not. He was, however, a member of the Jewish Council and an assiduous chronicler of ghetto life. He took an especially deep interest in educational efforts in the ghetto. In his diary, we can find evidence of the efforts to sustain schooling and protect the students and teachers engaged in it. Clearly, many saw school keeping and school attendance as important enterprises in a ghetto coping with cruel and brutal conditions.

¹⁸³Tory, xxiv.

¹⁸⁴Lazerson, 94.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 91.

“We, on the other hand, take a very active interest in everything taking place in the school.”

Avraham (Golub) Tory was born in Lazdijai a village in Lithuania in 1909. He began his education in the village cheder and in 1927 graduated from Lithuania's first Hebrew high school. He continued his education, studying law in Kovno before transferring to the University of Pittsburgh. While in Pittsburgh, he made a living teaching Hebrew at a Jewish school. After a year and a half, upon the death of his father, he returned to Kovno. In 1933, he graduated from law school; however, anti-Semitism prevented him from practicing law. A classmate hired him as a law clerk, and later he worked as an assistant to a law professor. Meanwhile he became involved in Zionist activities and held office in three prominent Zionist organizations. Following the German invasion of Lithuania, Avraham returned to Kovno and took up a position as deputy secretary of the Jewish Council. During the Ghetto period, he recorded his experiences and those of others and he collected and concealed German documents concerning the Ghetto. Avraham took an active interest in various aspects of Jewish life in Kovno—especially the fate of children. In his account of education in Kovno, we are privy to the perspective of an outsider to schooling. He was a ghetto administrator and had some connection to those educational efforts, but Avraham was neither a student, a teacher, nor an administrator of the ghetto schools. In March 1944, Avraham escaped from the concentration camp the Germans created of the Kovno Ghetto. He arrived in Palestine in 1947. Two years later he Hebraized his name to Avraham Tory.¹⁸⁶

Avraham wrote about many aspects of Jewish life in the Kovno Ghetto, including the various education activities in the ghetto. He mentioned, on April 21, 1942, that “elementary schools in the Ghetto have been reopened,” after

¹⁸⁶Tory, x-xxiv.

“they were closed because of a shortage of [fire] wood.”¹⁸⁷ He also recorded that, “a Kindergarten has been set up in the Ghetto.”¹⁸⁸ A short while later, he included the information that “a second elementary school has been opened in the ghetto.”¹⁸⁹ From these entries apparently schooling in the Ghetto was in operation and indeed was gradually expanding.

June 2, 1942

The Jewish religious class for boys and the small Ohel Moshe yeshiva have been incorporated into the Ghetto education system. Their programs of study have been expanded.¹

1. Because of the difficult circumstances, all forms of education, including religious education, were amalgamated in the Council's education department. The Ohel Moshe yeshiva was one of the only two places of prayer remaining in the Ghetto (the other was the Halvayet Hamet synagogue). All other religious study centers had to be used as living quarters because of the shortage of housing, and the other synagogues had been desecrated.¹⁹⁰

At that time, Germans created impediments to schooling. Ostensibly, the Germans allowed Jews to conduct school, yet a pattern continued of German policies that made it difficult to do so. Although the Germans did not yet order schools closed, they forced schools to close in cold weather due to lack of heat caused by stringent rationing of fuel. Religious schools lost their space when German authorities requisitioned it for use as living quarters. There were also restrictions on assembly.¹⁹¹

The outlook for schooling seemed brighter when, on June 26, 1942, Avraham reported that the Germans might be easing up on regulations. “The commandant of the Ghetto guard,” he wrote, “gave his permission—for the first time in the ghetto—for children's festivities to take place in the ghetto school.”¹⁹² Instead in the next month the Germans required a reduction of the

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 78.

¹⁸⁸Ibid., 88 (May 12, 1942). This was a clandestine Hebrew kindergarten.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., 90 (May 25, 1942).

¹⁹⁰Ibid., 91-92.

¹⁹¹The Germans forced 30,000 Jews of Kovno into a poor neighborhood that had formerly housed 7,000. Also in that neighborhood were several yeshivoh.

¹⁹²Ibid., 99.

Jewish Council's staff. That order in turn resulted in the closing of two schools. That reduction was the opening salvo on the Jewish schools of Kovno.

July 6, 1942

In compliance with a Gestapo decree the Council will reduce the staff of the Ghetto institutions by 206 employees; 207 employees will stay on. . . . Two schools, two food distribution stations, and two clinics have been closed down. The lice disinfection center has been closed down temporarily.¹⁹³

Four weeks later the Germans handed down an order that the Ghetto must keep records of school children. The order read: "August 4, 1942. *Department of Education*. At the time of admission to schools, the identification numbers must be marked in the admission registers."¹⁹⁴ Three weeks later the Germans issued an order that henceforth forbade school for the young Jews of Kovno.

August 25, 1942

Existing schools must be closed immediately, and the personnel employed in the schools must be transferred immediately to compulsory labor. Any teaching, as well as any religious training, is forthwith prohibited.¹⁹⁵

That policy was amended somewhat the following month when pursuant to "a meeting of the Council on the subject of schools in the Ghetto . . . the city governor . . . approved the request submitted by the Council to reopen the vocational training school, under the supervision of Hermann."¹⁹⁶ Ghetto officials quickly organized a vocational school and in the following months added a variety of courses. Avraham noted these as they occurred for example: "October 10, 1942. The Vocational Training School opened courses in baking,"¹⁹⁷ and "February 25, 1943. There were announcements . . . about

¹⁹³Ibid. 104.

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 122.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., 128-129.

¹⁹⁶Ibid., September 13, 1942 and 134-135. September 18, 1942.

¹⁹⁷Ibid., 140.

courses for sewing and gardening which were being opened at the vocational school."¹⁹⁸

The vocational school was not the only school in the Kovno Ghetto.¹⁹⁹ Others operated in defiance of German orders to the contrary. In those also, the curriculum went beyond academics. Reporting on one of them, Avraham revealed that even in elementary education there was a strong focus on Zionism and a concerted effort to teach and learn Judaic religious and cultural practices.

March 21, 1943

Today is Purim. . . . Here in the Ghetto we are celebrating Purim in a new style. None other than our little children, our Motels and Shlomeles, give the lie to Hitler's predictions by celebrating Purim with all their innocence and enthusiasm.

The children—pupils of the pioneer of National Hebrew education in the Ghetto, Mrs. Segal—have been preparing the Purim festivities for many weeks. They have been learning the Purim songs, the dances, and the games. . . .

The distinguished educator Mrs. Segal has been involved in these preparations more than anybody else. After all, these are her children, the children she has been looking after since the first day of the Ghetto. She pays no heed to bans and prohibitions. Although the Jewish school has been officially closed on orders from the Germans, this order has yet to reach this courageous and distinguished educator.

Every day, the children gather in her own small room, where she teaches them the Hebrew alphabet, to say "Shalom" in Hebrew, and to sing Hebrew songs. She implants in their hearts a love for the Jewish people and a longing for their homeland—the land of Israel. She does all this by means games, songs, and stories from the past. . . .

The festivities lasted a long time. The audience was becoming hungry, but everyone stayed until the program was over. We recalled the folk adage that all the holy days will disappear with the he passing of time, but that Purim will remain

¹⁹⁸Ibid., 239.

¹⁹⁹Ibid., 239. That vocational school appeared also in the testimony of Solly Ganor, who noted that, in addition to the vocational program, it offered also an academic program. It was at that school that Solly agreed to provide a mathematics text to his teacher, whom the Germans subsequently executed for possession of that book. It was also there that Tamarah Lazerson immersed herself in Zionism and, energized by that goal, was able to throw off depression and look forward to the future.

forever and ever, so that our enemies will not be comforted. Today the wonderful Ghetto children gave this saying another lease on life.²⁰⁰

Purim, a holiday celebrating deliverance from an enemy in the fifth century BCE, provided an occasion with which the Jews of Kovno could readily identify in the spring of 1943. Their teacher, cognizant of the need to create hope among her pupils had used their classes to foment the idea that Jews had survived calamity before and might again.

Schooling in Kovno took many forms. One of these was the vocational school that operated under German auspices but that also directly contravened German decrees by providing, academic, religious, and Zionist education under the guise of vocational training. There were also such schools as Mrs. Segal's. There, the very existence of the school was illegal and the curriculum was in direct conflict with German interests. Other schools existed as well. Earlier, Avraham mentioned the establishment of a clandestine Kindergarten. Yet, the Germans desired that Kindergartens be established and even ordered the council to create them. The purpose of such kindergartens, as revealed in Avraham's diary on 23 March 1943, was ostensibly to permit women to join the work force. The Jews resistance to that plan was rooted in prior experience.

The second woman said she was a housewife and was taking care of her children. . . . "This is rubbish," said Miller. Let them set up kindergartens. Such a young woman must work. . . . I [could not] tell him that we are not very eager to set up kindergartens in the Ghetto. We do not want to deliver our children to destruction. In October 1941, more than 160 Jewish children and babies then in the hospital were executed.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰Ibid., 253-254, 256.

²⁰¹Ibid., 258. See Solly Ganor's account of the burning of the hospital and the subsequent forced deportation and death of the infants and small children.

Thus, the Ghetto continued to develop clandestine versions of the very educational institutions they avoided opening under orders from the German authorities.

Avraham's next entry regarding schooling in the ghetto is somewhat puzzling. Reflecting on the lives of the children and youth in the labor groups, he wrote:

March 28, 1943

Sometimes it is difficult to watch these boys and girls, still children, go out to work. They should be in school. The Ghetto environment is not exactly conducive to their development; there are no schools here or youth movement activities. In compliance with the directive of the authorities they must abide by labor duty with all the unpleasantness it entails.²⁰²

That statement is somewhat enigmatic, as Avraham elsewhere reports on flourishing educational efforts. Still, it is clear that education was not universally available; Solly Ganor, for example, expressed concern over his near expulsion from the vocational school due to repeated absence. That statement by Avraham may be an over generalization, indicating that for the majority of children and youth of the labor brigades there was generally no school.

Meanwhile, Avraham reported continued concern for the youngest children, returning to the subject of the German order to establish children's institutions. The Kovno Ghetto Council feared gathering children in German mandated institutions.

The Germans do not like the children of the Jews. It may be recalled that there was a kindergarten in the Ghetto where 165 children were looked after. On one gloomy day nearly all of them were murdered by the Germans. Only ten survived the carnage.²⁰³

²⁰²Ibid., 261

²⁰³Ibid., 262.

Simultaneously they sought to obstruct orders and to organize children into institutions unseen by the German authorities.

Today we held a meeting at the Council on the subject of establishing a kindergarten. . . . Our office for social work, the health office, and the Ghetto police drew up a detailed plan for the operation of the new institution. The trouble is that an accidental visit by Schtitz in the Ghetto could cost us dear. The Germans would not tolerate the existence of such an institution in the Ghetto, and we, for our part, are not enthusiastic.²⁰⁴

The ghetto council meant kindergartens, in part, to enable women to work. It was a move meant to please the Germans who needed slave laborers and perhaps to give women added protection. Persons whose slave labor was useful might avoid or delay deportations and executions.²⁰⁵ Still the danger of collective children's institutions created concern on the part of the council members.

Meanwhile schooling continued and with it the creation of a strongly Jewish and Zionist cadre within the youth of the ghetto. During Passover 1943, Avraham wrote:

April 26, 1943

Yesterday a third Passover Seder was held in the vocational school.¹ Pupils in the higher grades are organized into small groups which engage in Zionist activities. The

²⁰⁴Ibid., 262-263

²⁰⁵The safety of women and children often depended upon proximity to each other—in fact often survival for one or the other required separation. It was a painful duty at times to separate them so that one group would survive a little longer. As will be detailed later, in some instances children were removed to separate children's units so that better care and supplies could be provided than their mothers (and fathers) might receive. At times, children were separated from their mothers so that the mothers could survive. In camps that had dual functions, i.e. extermination and slave labor, prisoners assigned to assist in clearing transports often encouraged mothers to give their children into the care of doomed women—although they did not tell the mothers the awful reason why they should do so. In that way mothers who were young and otherwise eligible for labor commandos could live. The women themselves rarely realized the danger in time to save themselves, and when they did they were reluctant to abandon their children. Some women died because they chose to assist other women with small children and did not perceive the danger of such altruistic behavior. Likewise, children born in camps, where childbirth was forbidden, were sometimes killed by other inmates who knew that German discovery of the infants would result in the murder of both. Killing the children, which would have been done by the Germans anyway, was seen as a way of saving the mothers. In Kovno Ghetto, as in others, finding ways to make women able to serve a function useful to the Germans was also seen as a way to save mothers from death and deportation and, by preserving the mothers

declared objective of the vocational training school—which was set up after the closing of all educational institutions in the Ghetto—was to train skilled workers for various workplaces. After a short period of education and vocational training, the school is able to graduate carpenters, construction workers, cobblers, tailors, etc

1. In the Diaspora, it was traditional to celebrate only the first two nights of the Passover festival; this third night of celebration was therefore something quite unusual.²⁰⁶

At that time, he also explained some of the circumstance that aided in the operation of the clandestine academic program that existed within the vocational school.

Simultaneously with the issuing of the license for the vocational training school, the director of the German labor office, Hermann, was appointed as its supervisor. He is a relatively lenient man. On account of his numerous duties, he practically never intervenes in the affairs of the school or the activities of its students.²⁰⁷

If the German administrator of that school was somewhat remiss in his attention to the actual running of the school, the Jewish teachers and administrators, as well as at least some of the Ghetto administrators, were considerably more involved.

We, on the other hand, take a very active interest in everything taking place in the school, in the curriculum and its implementation. We make sure that Jewish children will, in addition to the vocational training, receive a Zionist education in the spirit of the Jewish heritage and our national aspirations. Dr. Chaim Nachman Shapiro is a scrupulous and loyal principal in that respect.²⁰⁸

The celebration of Passover that year reached a new level of observance in the Kovno school. Breaking with the abbreviated custom that had grown in

lives, and by keeping them in the ghetto, the Ghetto Council sought to save the children.

²⁰⁶Ibid., 307.

²⁰⁷Ibid.

²⁰⁸Ibid., 307-308.

the years prior to the 1940s, in the 1943 celebration they returned to a series of Passover dinners. In addition, the intensity and dangers of their daily existence imbued the celebration with renewed meaning. Of the celebration at the school Avraham wrote:

Between forty and fifty young boys, aged from twelve to fifteen, were seated around long tables set for the Passover meal. Each boy had his own Passover Haggadah in front of him, from which to read and sing. The girls and boys were dressed in their best clothes, their faces beaming, their eyes shining. . . .

A young man, Itzhak Shapiro, an instructor at the school, conducted the service. . . . The labor office many times has sought to "gobble him up". . . however, we managed to keep him for the educational work with the youngsters. . . .

He also spoke about today's youth, their hopes, their yearnings for redemption and freedom. . . .

I then spoke a few words. I said: "This is a select audience; all those present here came of their own free will. All of them tread the same path; one vision unites them and one goal guides them. It is the idea of 'Next year in the rebuilt Land of Israel.'"

After that Garfunkle and Oleiski delivered short speeches. Oleiski made a confession: "I have sinned. I have been in error. I have sought redemption in the ideal of universal humanity—in distant lands—and I have failed. We must have our own land, our own life. The Land of Israel is the one and only truth." How much Jewish blood has to be spilled, before everyone recognizes this truth?

Then it was the youngsters' turn: one delivered a lecture; another recited poems; a third sang a song while the others sang in chorus. . . .

The atmosphere was so enthusiastic and hearty that we were loath to disperse. . . . Outside—for this was a clandestine event—were lookouts, members of the Kovno Zionist underground, to alert us to danger. Fortunately, we were not interrupted in our joy.²⁰⁹

The celebration at the school seems to have fostered a strong sense of solidarity and of happiness. It is important to realize that teachers and students gathered of their own free will and that, in spite of fear and suffering,

²⁰⁹Ibid., 308-309.

they found in their school satisfaction and joy.

There was a varied life, including educational life, in Kovno. As we have seen there were various categories of schooling and, in the following entry from Avraham's diary, we can see how far the variation extended and that the variety itself was a source of satisfaction. Here he also explained the link between resistance and heightened fidelity to what had once been mundane practices.

June 5, 1943

In the course of time, Ghetto life assumed its present diversity and variety. All these activities provided the Ghetto inmates with some relief.

By law, of course, all these activities are strictly forbidden. It is forbidden to study, to assemble, to give lectures, to pray. . . .

But the forbidden fruit tastes sweeter as opposition grows stronger.²¹⁰

Kovno had previously been a center of Judaic learning and, while the general education of the community's Jewish youth had become infused with a new, vibrant, Judaic, Zionist purpose, there still remained the traditional forums of Judaic study.

As the laws become harsher, so the desire to know and the need for spiritual nourishment grows stronger. Slobodka had been the center of Torah study, of Yeshivoth, and of Jewish culture, for generations. . . . Where are all the yeshiva students from the bygone days, the *matmidim*, the rabbis? For the most part they have been killed. . . . Only a handful have survived. They gather at night, after work . . . to study the Torah and pray. They carry on. They guard the holy fire and refuse to let it die out.

Oshri, a former student at the Slobodka yeshiva . . . goes to great lengths to enable religious young men to abstain from doing forced labor on the Sabbaths and holy days; he gets them jobs . . . inside the Ghetto so they can observe all the commandments. He gives Talmud classes to the young and to adults. . . . If the Germans were aware of this, Oshri would long ago have been a dead man.²¹¹

²¹⁰Ibid., 367.

²¹¹Ibid., 367-368.

Here it is possible to see that perilous efforts were in effect to skew German ordinances in ways that permitted the study and practices of the Yeshiva students. Permitted by subterfuge to carry on these observances they seemingly derived satisfaction from being able to be at the right place in their study.

I asked him, as I always do, "Oshri, tell me, please, how are the yeshiva students doing?" He answers me politely, smiling: "Everything is all right with them. The daily page is still the daily page, the yeshiva students study the Torah and the same goes for the Tifereth Bachurim." . . . Here and there one can still spot yeshiva students dressed in Sabbath attire. For them there is no difference between the Sabbath and the weekday.²¹²

In the preceding two entries it is possible to see that the Ghetto made such effort as was possible to manipulate labor quotas in order to preserve the quality of schooling. The Jews of Kovno kept certain persons from labor brigades in order that they might contribute to schooling. They protected others so that they could partake of school opportunities. Attendance at school offered some protection from labor assignments, and the Ghetto schools made efforts to see that they did not arbitrarily offer such opportunities to those who did not value them.

Avraham saw the organization and conduct of schools as important subjects of his portrayal of ghetto life. Several of his diary entries describe such things in detail. In the next entry, he would share a visit to a clandestine yeshiva when he wrote:

[Oshri] starts climbing the narrow wooden staircase; I follow at his heels we pass through two small rooms crammed with beds and closets, and enter a third room also overflowing with furniture and other objects. A round table, covered with red velvet, a relic of the study house table cover, stands in the middle of the room. Books of Gemara and the Pentateuch are piled on the table.

²¹²Ibid., 368-369.

Rabbi Avraham Grodzenski . . . is teaching Torah. Yeshiva students . . . are gathered around him in this room; others fill the second room. All their eyes are fixed on the place where the old rabbi is seated. They "swallow" each word he speaks. People keep wiping the sweat off their faces and from under their hats. . . .

Rabbi Avraham, surrounded by his students and followers, carries on despite the dangers and ordeals; . . . his students are few in number, but they remain a significant facet of the reality of Ghetto life.²¹³

By the middle of that summer, Avraham's thoughts would turn again to the ominous German uses of school. As he looked toward their plan to intensify labor efforts and their proposal to turn the ghetto into several labor camps, he recorded that once again schooling figured in the plan.

July 30, 1943

In reference to dividing the ghetto into various labor camps the word from the German Schtitz was that every one would go to various camps nearby and that . . . children over twelve will be permitted to join their parents in the work camps. Younger children will stay in the Ghetto and study in the vocational training schools. Kindergartens will be set up for small children so that their mothers will be able to work.²¹⁴

In the early fall, labor plans were still the official German line of argument, and that argument met with increasing alarm on the part of the Jewish Council.

September 28, 1943

Goecke even went on to express concern for the Jewish children: "Kindergartens should be set up for them so that their mothers can go out to work," he said, and ordered the council to submit to him a plan for 1,000 children.²¹⁵

Unable to forget the easy access such institutions provided on a previous occasion, the Council sought ways to delay. Legitimately pessimistic of the success of such tactics, Avraham noted:

²¹³Ibid., 367-371.

²¹⁴Ibid., 447.

²¹⁵Ibid., 483.

Goecke's "concern" for the Jewish children caused the council great anxiety, due to our tragic experience in the past and the heavy price we paid during the liquidation of the small Ghetto two years ago. We are not at all happy about the idea of concentrating 1,000 children in one place. We do not want to expose our children to the Germans. The Germans cast greedy glances in their direction. But Goecke was adamant.²¹⁶

Six months later, the Germans cleared the ghetto of the remaining children, whom they subsequently killed. Having concealed his diary, Avraham escaped from the Ghetto that month. His diary and document collection remained packed into five crates and hidden under a building. After the liberation Avraham retrieved three of the crates and, with some difficulty, was able to conceal them from the Soviets and have them smuggled to Palestine. He arrived in Palestine in 1947 and there he changed his name to Avraham Tory.

In this chapter are three narratives pertaining to schooling in Kovno Ghetto. All of them looked at the vocational school that camouflaged a powerful and enlightening educational and Zionist program. In Chapter Five are seven narratives about education in Warsaw. Some are from teachers, some are from students, and some are from others who took part in providing schooling for the Jewish youth of that ghetto. Only two describe the same school, although the descriptions of some of the schools and educational experiences are similar to each other and similar to others in preceding and following chapters.

²¹⁶Ibid.

Chapter Five:

Seven Stories from Warsaw Ghetto

In 1939, Warsaw, Poland was the home of the world's second largest Jewish community—the largest being New York. At the time of the German invasion of Poland, the Jewish population of the city stood at roughly 350,000. Immediately, decrees and ordinances began to constrict life for the Jews of Warsaw. During the years that followed, Jews from many areas migrated to Warsaw hoping for protection and economic opportunities. The Germans deported others to Warsaw from outlying areas. It was to Warsaw that they sent Mira Ryczke Kimmelman's family after arresting them in Danzig. The Germans stripped many Jewish Germans of their citizenship and deported them east to Warsaw. Although they did not officially establish the ghetto until a year after they seized Poland, from the beginning of the occupation a *de facto* ghetto existed with a German appointed *Judenrat*, headed by the engineer Adam Czerniakow, and a gradual pushing of Jews into particular areas. The task of forcing all of the Jews to move into a small section of the city was problematic given the number of Jews in Warsaw. However, by gradually expelling Jews from their living quarters, by imposing a separate body of laws governing Jewish life, and by violence and trickery, the German authorities inexorably forced the Jews of Warsaw toward ghettoization.¹

In the fall of 1940 a *de jure* ghetto—officially the “Jewish residential district”—confined all Jews, and soon after the Germans sealed it with walls,

¹Yisrael Gutman, *The Jews Of Warsaw, 1939-1943: Ghetto, Underground, Revolt*, trans. Ina Friedman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 3-62; Yisrael Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Companies in Association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994); Nora Levin, *The Holocaust: The Destruction of European Jewry 1933-1945* (New York: Thomas T. Crowell Company, 1968), 204-234; Martin Gilbert, *The Holocaust: A History of the Jews of Europe During the Second World War* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1985), 280-401; Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), 197-223. Also there are a number of descriptive personal narratives

fences, and guarded gates. The population of Warsaw Ghetto fluctuated, rising to near half a million and falling toward the pre-war number. Starvation, disease, fear, and confusion were rampant almost immediately. Children and youth turned to smuggling in a desperate attempt to provide sustenance for the Ghetto inmates. Warsaw, and later the Warsaw Ghetto, became the scene of a plethora of schooling efforts by Jews. These ranged from clandestine to German-sanctioned. They represented, at once, efforts to resist the Germans outright, to change the political, cultural, and religious conduct of their lives, and to replicate traditional approaches to education and familiar social and cultural institutions.²

The children's home and school founded and led by the renowned educator, Janusz Korczak, is an interesting example of a ghetto-based effort to nurture and educate children. Korczak was one of the most revered leaders in childcare and education in early twentieth century Europe. He was an icon of interwar Poland—he was also a Jew. Founded and developed in the decades preceding the German attack on Poland, his orphanage had already established itself as a benchmark of progressive childcare. Forced to abandon the state-of-the-art building that housed it, the orphanage staff re-quartered within the confines of the Ghetto. There, despite hunger and suffering, Korczak continued to organize a self-governing system with children's courts to settle disputes and a child-centered curriculum grounded in the children's needs and interests.

During the Great Deportation in summer 1942, the Germans emptied Korczak's orphanage one morning, marched the children and staff to the *Umschlagplatz*, and sent them in freight cars to Treblinka. There they gassed them to death. Korczak resisted all offers of rescue for himself and accompanied his charges to the death chamber. The children's march to the *Umschlagplatz* took place under the banner of their own flag. The deportation of Korczak's orphans, their vulnerability and deportment, made a profound impression on the terrified Jews of the Ghetto. Many survivors recount those

of the Warsaw Ghetto including the ones that appear in this chapter.

²Ibid.

children's journey to the *Umschlag* as a particularly significant and inspiring moment in the annals of that horrifying period. It also alerted, if any still doubted, the remaining Jews to the breadth of the depraved German plan for the Ghetto.

Before the Germans destroyed it, however, the Korczak's home served as a model of schooling under pressure. Not bowing to Ghetto conditions, Korczak and his staff strove to offer not only care and schooling, but also the best services to children they could eke out. The Ghetto rallied to their aid with donations of money and supplies. Volunteers assisted with programs and in the following narratives are references to the efforts. Alas, for all its good qualities, the home served only a tiny portion of the child population of the city. By the summer of 1942, Korczak was soliciting support for another project. He hoped to establish hospices to shelter the dying children. Unable to prevent their deaths, he hoped to relieve at least their suffering as their lives faded. Korczak's idea of a hospice is perhaps emblematic of all youth programs during those years. It gradually became clear that children might be beyond rescue. Yet, while they could, many youth workers sought to relieve their charges suffering and to sustain and even nurture Jewish children so that they might someday live full lives.

As the Germans worked to render their country and their occupied territories *Judenrein*, "Jewless", they deported more and more Jews to Warsaw. Staggering numbers of people, shocked, penniless, with no material resources and often no family or friends to assist them, poured into the city and then into the ghetto where there was little material assistance available to them. They stretched the limits of the Jewish community's ability to absorb them and they died in droves.

Mary Berg, whose narrative appears first in this chapter, described the suppurating ghetto conditions on June 12, 1941. Horrified at the condition of the poor—especially refugees—and guilt stricken at her own relatively good living conditions, Mary wrote:

The ghetto is becoming more and more crowded; there is a constant stream of new refugees. These are Jews from the provinces who have been robbed of all their possessions. Upon their arrival the scene is always the same, the guard at the gate checks the identity of the refugee, and when he finds out that he is a Jew, gives him a push with the butt of his rifle as a sign that he may enter our Paradise. . . .

These people are ragged, and barefoot, with the tragic eyes of those who are starving. Most of them are women and children. They become charges of the community, which sets them up in so-called homes. There they die sooner or later.

I have visited such a refugee home. It is a desolate building. The former walls of the separate rooms have been broken down to form large halls; there are no conveniences; the plumbing has been destroyed. Near the walls are cots made of boards and covered with rags. Here and there lies a dirty red feather bed. On the floor I saw half-naked, unwashed children lying listlessly. In one corner an exquisite little girl of four or five sat crying. I could not refrain from stroking her disheveled blond hair. The child looked at me with her big blue eyes, and said: "I'm hungry."

I was overcome by a feeling of utter shame. I had eaten that day, but I did not have a piece of bread to give to that child. I did not dare look in her eyes, and went away.

During the day the grownups go out to look for work. The children, the sick, and the aged remain lying on their cots. There are people from Lublin, Radom, Lodz, and Piotrkow—from all the provinces. All of them tell terrible tales of rape and mass executions. It is impossible to understand why the Germans allow all these people to settle in the Warsaw ghetto which already contains four hundred thousand Jews.

Mortality is increasing. Starvation alone kills from forty to fifty persons a day. But there are always hundreds of new refugees to take their places. The community is helpless. All the hotels are packed, and hygienic conditions are of the worst. Soap is unobtainable; what is distributed as soap on our ration cards is a gluey mass that falls to pieces the moment it comes into contact with water. It makes one dirty instead of clean.

One of the plagues of the ghetto is the beggars, who continue to multiply. They are refugees who have no friends or relatives here and for whom there is no place even in the terrible "homes" established by the community. During the first few days after their arrival they look for work. At night they sleep in the doorways, that is to say, in the street. When they become exhausted and their swollen feet refuse to carry them any further they sit down on the edge of the sidewalk or against a wall. They close their eyes and timidly stretch out a begging hand for the first time. After

a few days they ask for charity with their eyes open. When hunger torments them even more fiercely, they begin to cry.³

We know that in the Warsaw ghetto the Germans rounded up people for deportations, they starved, beat, and shot Jews for minor rules infractions. Bodies lay where they died. Orphans roamed the streets or huddled on the sidewalks begging. Yet, despite the horrors surrounding them efforts went forward to provide for as many children as possible. The Warsaw ghetto had classes for kindergartners and for older children as well.⁴ At age seven, Haviva Dembinska attended classes like those Mira described holding for young children in Tomaszow-Mazowiecki.

Going to school was forbidden, but I studied in secret with a class of ten other children. . . . Every house arranged its own hidden "corner" where children came to learn to read and write. Our teacher was a seventeen-year-old girl named Sokowlowska. She talked to us about Palestine and told us stories about the history of our people.⁵

Various social and political groups offered schooling and at times fought to control schooling for the Ghetto's children and youths. They struggled for shares of the pitiful resources the *Judenrat* was able to disperse to those efforts. Even as the end of the ghetto loomed, Warsaw's Jews made plans to establish such diverse educational projects as a school of ballet and a school of pedagogy.⁶ In this chapter, I include narratives from three youths and four adults who engaged in school in the Warsaw Ghetto. Some sought to continue school as it had been, others to create new forms of schooling, and some to use school to create a new order.

³Mary Berg, *Warsaw Ghetto* (New York: L. B. Fischer, 1945), 55.

⁴Levin, 1968.

⁵Eisenberg, 102.

⁶Leonard Tushnet, *Pavement of Hell: 3 Leaders of the Judenrat* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1972), 124-125.

“The old distance between teachers and pupils has vanished, we feel like comrades-in-arms responsible to each other.”

In 1945, as the end of the war neared, Mary Berg, whose mother was an U.S. citizen, was, at age twenty, one of the first to publish a first-person account of her Holocaust experiences. She entered the United States of America in March 1944. She began writing her Holocaust diary on her fifteenth birthday, 10 October 1939. During the preceding six weeks, Germans had commenced war against Poland, and Mary’s family had returned from holiday to Lodz, then fled to Warsaw and back to Lodz. By December, they had returned to Warsaw where the Germans forced them into the ghetto in November 1940. They imprisoned them in the infamous Pawiak prison on the eve of the Great Deportation of July–September 1942 due to the American citizenship of Mary’s mother. Certain Jews with a claim to citizenship in some Allied countries—but not all such Jews or all such countries—went to Pawiak at that time. In January 1943, just before the Germans’ attempt to complete the liquidation of the ghetto, they transported them, from Warsaw to the internment camp at Vittel, France. There the family awaited a prisoner exchange until finally sent to safety.⁷

Mary was able to carry her extensive diary out of Warsaw. These excerpts form one of the longer narratives in this work, as Mary wrote often, at length, and evocatively of school and its relationship to students and the community. Her narrative includes verbatim much of her writing on the subject of schooling for Jews in Warsaw.⁸

Mary Berg was scared. With the German invaders in control of Lodz, she thought going to school was dangerous; she went anyway. One of her earliest

⁷Not all were so lucky. Natan Eck, whose narrative appears later in this chapter, is an example. Instead of to safety, the Germans sent him from Vittel to Auschwitz—only by jumping from the train did he avoid Auschwitz and survive. Yitzhak Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. trans. and ed. Barbara Harshav (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 445.

⁸Berg, 9-15, 162-170, 216-218.

entries, from Lodz, relates the effect of the German occupation on her school and schoolmates:

Lodz, December 18, 1939

The Germans have requisitioned our store and apartment. We are now living with our relatives on Narutowicz Street, near the high school I attend. This school is still functioning, although very few pupils attend the classes, because they are afraid to leave their homes. The cruelty of the Germans is increasing from day to day, and they are beginning to kidnap young boys and girls to use in their nightmarish entertainments.⁹

Mary's concern about the dangers of traveling to school, and indeed of attending school, echo in her later entries from Warsaw. Fear, however, did not stop her in either instance. By late December 1939, she arrived again in Warsaw where, in the summer of 1940, she reported on the particulars of clandestine, illegal schools. It seems clear that already Mary had reached a decision to continue her schooling despite German prohibitions and depredations. She went despite the terrible consequences of discovery. Furthermore, she made it clear that she was not by any means alone in her determination. Less than a year after the German invasion, her description of the dismal and difficult food shortage, and the existence of a local soup kitchen, is rich in details about the burgeoning complex of illegal schools and the impediments that had to be resolved. In addition, she spelled out quite clearly her understanding of the consequences of having school.

Warsaw, July 12, 1940

There are now a great number of illegal schools, and they are multiplying every day. People are studying in attics and cellars, and every subject is included in the curriculum, even Latin, and Greek. Two such schools were discovered by the Germans some time in June; later we heard that the teachers were shot on the spot, and that the pupils had been sent to a concentration camp near Lublin.

⁹Ibid., 23.

Our Lodz gymnasium too has started its classes.¹⁰ The majority of the teachers are in Warsaw, and twice a week the courses are given at our home, which is a relatively safe spot because of my mother's American citizenship.¹¹ We study all the regular subjects, and have even organized a chemical and physics laboratory using glasses and pots from our kitchen instead of test tubes and retorts. Special attention is paid to the study of foreign languages, chiefly English and Hebrew. Our discussions of Polish literature have a peculiarly passionate character. The teachers try to show that the great Polish poets, Mickiewicz, Slowacki and Wyspianski prophesied the present disaster.

The teachers put their whole heart and soul into their teaching, and all the pupils study with exemplary diligence. There are no bad pupils. The illegal character of the teaching, the danger that threatens us every minute, fills us with a strange earnestness. The old distance between teachers and pupils has vanished, we feel like comrades-in-arms responsible to each other.¹²

The members of the school described here took pride in working out how to do a variety of things in spite of lacking the usual means and materials. There is also in that passage a sense of determination to include everything that would have been included in normal times.

Mary also alluded briefly to the particular study of English and Hebrew. These languages were not uncommon choices for study. Many of the teachers began to study these also, as the goal of many students and teachers was to immigrate to safer countries—this generally meant out of Europe. Many Jews intended to go to the United States or to Palestine, hence the particular emphasis on those languages.¹³

Already, after only about ten months of the German occupation, and five months before the imposition of the ghetto, much of the traditional division between teachers and students had dissipated. Education, in Mary's view, had

¹⁰i.e. made up of students and teachers who had come from Lodz to Warsaw.

¹¹Apparently, Mary and her family felt that her mother's claim to American citizenship offered a shield from the worst of the German authorities' cruelties.

¹²Ibid., 32-33.

¹³In her diary, Mary made frequent reference to her mother's American citizenship. It is unclear what that citizenship was based on, as Mary herself did not seem to have that status (although she came to be known as an "American"). Her mother's citizenship ultimately saved the family, who were first removed from the general population during the mass deportations of July-September 1942 and subsequently sent to Vittel, France.

become a cooperative project where adults and youth worked together toward a common goal. It is significant that she described teachers and students as “comrades-in-arms.” Her later testimony suggests that may have been more than a figure of speech.

Mary returned to her discussion of the difficulties of keeping school when she wrote about the scarcity of textbooks, the ways of dealing with that scarcity, and the arrangements for graduation from her clandestine *gymnasium*.

Textbooks are hard to get; their sale has been officially forbidden. We take notes on our professors' lectures and memorize them. Despite these extraordinary difficulties, our gymnasium has actually issued bachelors' diplomas. The examinations and graduation ceremonies took place in the apartment of our principal, Dr. Michael Brandstetter. It was in the afternoon; all the curtains were drawn and a guard of students was posted in front of the house. The pupils were examined separately by the teachers, seated around a table covered with green cloth. Without exception, all of them passed the examination successfully. The diplomas were not issued by the Ministry of Education as in the old days, but by the board of the illegal gymnasium; they were typed on ordinary sheets of paper and bore the signatures of all the teachers. With tears in his eyes the principal made the customary speech to the new bachelors who like all the youth of Poland, particularly the Jewish youth, left the school without any prospect for the future except to become slaves in a Nazi labor camp.¹⁴

Whatever plans depended upon the possession of those diplomas, clearly the students who underwent schooling that year did so with little hope of immediate gratification. The graduates' prospects were grim—even the principal's farewell resonated with emotion as he sent the graduates out into a hazardous world.

The arrangements for the graduation ceremony required some particular effort. The members of the school even thought it necessary to select students to stand guard outside. The committee could have done

¹⁴Ibid., 33.

graduation in a way that would have been less obvious. They could have avoided exams altogether or administered them separately; they could have sent out diplomas to graduates or made them available for collection by individual students. Arranging the ceremony in that way, they conveyed that the students were too important to have their accomplishment go unmarked without as "normal" a ceremony as possible. The posting of lookouts on the other hand indicated that they did not act in ignorance of the consequences. The students finished their programs under particularly arduous circumstances, and the school staff thought them deserving of the best send off possible. That they sent them off into a distinctly horrible future was unavoidable.

Five weeks later Mary described the "house committees" of Jewish Warsaw. Responsible for fundraising, tax enforcement, and implementation of a variety of social services, these committees were at the heart of efforts to protect the Jewish community. We can see that, having passed out of the *gymnasium*, these young people still organized ways of continuing their intellectual development.

16 August 1940

The population of the Jewish quarter has begun to organize its social life. Conditions are miserable and all sorts of ingenious ways have to be found to raise money and organize relief. House committees have been formed; they gather each night in a different apartment to discuss urgent problems and to establish the amount of the contribution of each house to the central relief body of the Jewish community. The house committees also do educational work, stressing the struggle against epidemics. The young people gather together once a week; the first part of the meeting is devoted to the discussion of scientific or literary questions, the second part to entertainment—dancing to phonograph records. The receipts from these affairs are handed over to the relief organizations

The young Jewish people of Lodz [formerly known as the Lodz gymnasium] have founded a club for the purpose of raising relief funds.¹⁵

¹⁵Ibid., 34.

Mary peppered her story with examples of educational efforts of other youths, noting that often students stretched their family or personal resources to the limit.

Olga Szmuskzewicz, whose father is in Palestine, has studied the piano since her childhood. She is still taking lessons with a well-known piano teacher, although her material situation is of the worst.¹⁶

Mary and her friends had embarked on a further resistance in recording that, "it is forbidden to use French or English in public, but we are ignoring these prohibitions." She pointed out, soon after imposition of the ghetto, that, where their elders sought ways to get through the difficulties, the youth of the ghetto protested conditions.

November 20, 1940

The streets are empty. Extraordinary meetings are taking place in every house. The tension is terrific. Some people demand that a protest be organized. This is the voice of the youth; our elders consider this a dangerous idea.¹⁷

A month after the ghetto gates closed, hunger stalked the inhabitants whose official food rations required recourse to the black-market. Or it did if they still possessed financial resources—if not they starved on "a quarter of a pound of bread a day, one egg a month, and two pounds of vegetable jam (sweetened with saccharin) a month." In spite of everything, the community sought to retain standards, including requiring designated educational levels for employment.

December 15, 1940

The community is trying to recruit two thousand able-bodied men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty-five for a Jewish police force. War veterans are given

¹⁶Ibid., 35.

¹⁷Ibid., 38.

preference. A high educational standard is also required: a certificate from a gymnasium is the minimum.¹⁸

By mid-February 1941 plans were underway to open an art, architecture, and industrial drawing school. That school was a rare opportunity for further education permitted by the Germans, and it seemed that many young *gymnasium* graduates sought admission. There were strings attached, nevertheless Mary applied.

February 17, 1941

The Jewish community administration is completing its preparations for a course in machine drawing, architecture, and graphic arts. I have registered for it. I received a typewritten prospectus which explains that the course is being opened by the special permission of the German authorities and is part of the general program for training locksmiths, electrotechnicians, and other artisans from among the young Jewish people who have no trade. We all realize that the Germans' real intention is to train workers for their war industries, workers who will work without wages.

The metallurgical and related courses will be given in the community building at 26 Grzybowska Street; the courses in industrial drawing will be given at 16 Sienna Street, not far from my home. I shall not be exposed to the danger of walking any streets to get to school. The course will last six months, and the tuition fee is twenty-five zlotys a month. There are also a number of scholarships for poor but gifted pupils.

When I went to register, I saw many familiar faces, among them Mark Unger, my accompanist, and Manfred Rubin, the president of the Youth Committee of our block. There are almost six hundred candidates, although the number of vacancies is only a few dozen. Unfortunately "pull" plays a large part in the selection of students. At first I rebelled against this, but when I realized that my chances of being admitted were slight, I finally decided to resort to the same means.¹⁹

That school, sanctioned by the German authorities, seems to have been a desirable place to study. Not only did it protect its students from work orders,

¹⁸Ibid., 41.

¹⁹Ibid., 50.

and perhaps even deportation, but also it was one of the few post-secondary learning opportunities.²⁰ As Mary was obviously aware, it existed only because it served a particular need of the Germans and graduation would mean a cheap well-trained work force for slave labor. Nonetheless, competition for places in the school was fierce. Here again Mary voiced her concerns about safety when she mentioned that the school was quite close to her home. Apparently, the ghetto inhabitants already worried about the dangers posed by public exposure. School seems to have exerted sufficient pull on many of them, however, that they braved the dangers to attend.

In her February 1941, discussion of an interesting new acquaintance, Mary observed that the former entertainer had changed professions, “now the twenty-four-year-old dwarf supports himself by teaching English.”²¹ Mary was aware of, if not involved in, the financial motives that drew teachers to the task. While her family seemed to have been solvent enough that she need not seek work, many others, including students, did teach and tutor to eke out an existence.

February 25, 1941

I have been attending the course in graphic arts for the last three days. The atmosphere is pleasant; I feel as though every day I am visiting another world for a few hours, a world far removed from the ghostly life of the ghetto. The classes last from nine in the morning till two-thirty in the afternoon and comprise both theoretical subjects and practical exercises. The theoretical subjects are the history of art, history of architecture, history of costume design and various branches of drawing beginning with geometrical figures and ending with blueprints, ornamentation, and lettering.²²

“A world far removed” it must indeed have seemed, with hunger, fear and uncertainty stalking the ghetto. That school, focusing on the arts, was an

²⁰Dawidowicz places the number at 40,000 Jewish children, aged seven to fourteen years old, in Warsaw, of whom hundreds formed into *komlety* of around ten students each. Within six-months of the invasion 2,000 pupils attended 180 *hedarim* and Talmud Torahs. Dawidowicz, 252.

²¹Berg, 51 (20 February 1941).

²²*Ibid.*, 51-52.

educational institution rather than a merely technical enterprise. It is unclear if such curricula were within the bounds of the German intention. Mary mentioned later that when the overseers arrived for a visit there was an anxious flurry of getting everything as it should be.²³ The paradox of many educational enterprises, both legal and illegal, was that the teachers came from the upper echelons of their fields.²⁴ Mary found herself studying not with ordinary teachers but with some of the best-known professionals in the city.

The professors of drawing are Hilf, a Viennese artist, and Greifenberg, the well-known Warsaw designer. Geometry and history of architecture are taught by engineer Goldberg who built the most modern government buildings in Warsaw. He is particularly popular with the students.²⁵

Clearly, neither the opportunity for higher education nor for studying with such teachers was the impetus, or the sole impetus, for some of the students.

The young people attending the course are of various ages; the youngest among them is fifteen, the oldest thirty. Some of them worked before the war as designers and some were even well known as painters. There are also a few graduate engineers. The majority are men, and there is good reason for this. Recently Jewish men have been rounded up en masse and sent to labor camps whence no one returns. . . . The students of the community courses are not sent to the labor camps. . . . No wonder most of our students are men. The community is in favor of this, because for the time being girls are not threatened with labor camps.²⁶

²³While that is probably a common reaction in most schools, in the case of Mary's school it meant not only getting rid of anything that did not belong, but also of making sure that each member of the school had their Star of David properly displayed and to make sure every inch of the school was tidy so as not to risk the closing of the school and worse punishments.

²⁴Ibid., 35. 16 August 1940.

²⁵Ibid., 52.

²⁶Ibid. We now know that exemption of women from the labor camps at that time was because the women of Warsaw Ghetto were meant to be starved, abused, and let to die of disease—with the survivors to be gassed at Treblinka. At the time, it must have seemed reasonable to give the majority of the "safe" positions to men to protect them from the obvious dangers of the work orders. In 1941, inhabitants of the ghetto did not yet comprehend the end that the Germans were fashioning for them.

A particular concern for the safety of men, however, was not unusual, nor did it reflect a lesser concern for women or children. No one expected the savage treatment of women and children. Previously there was a supposition, if not always a reality, that women and children were safer.²⁷ Faced with German attacks on Ghetto inmates, Jews initially sought to protect men in particular.

This is not to say that educational enterprises ignored females. Mary not only listed names of female students in her school, although they constituted a minority, but six weeks later she provided a description of a school arranged solely for girls.

April 4, 1941

The number of professional schools and courses in the ghetto is increasing. The ORT organization has opened a special course for girls under the direction of Roma Brandes, the wife of the lawyer and Jewish Socialist leader who escaped abroad. These courses cover the following specialties: ladies tailoring, children's clothes, glove-making, millinery, ladies bags, and artificial flowers. The ORT has obtained two halls for these courses: at 13 Leszno Street and 13 Nalewki Street. My sister Anna has registered for the course in children's clothing; there are two classes, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, and a great number of girls attend them. They produce shoes for orphanages, where almost all the children are barefoot. . . . The girls work willingly, because they know how many freezing little feet are waiting for the fruit of their labors, and no one wants to be paid for this work.²⁸

Here, Mary segued to a discussion of children and the programs that cared for and educated them. A number of organizations existed to aid children, and others added that task to their activities. Commitment to the welfare of others seems to have strongly influenced Mary, and this commitment remained with her throughout her time in captivity.²⁹

²⁷In addition, men were more easily than women identified as Jews due to having been circumcised.

²⁸Ibid., 54.

²⁹That commitment to the welfare of others is central to Judaism. Many of the welfare organizations that formed in the ghettos sprang from that commitment and were rooted in Jewish social welfare organizations that had long existed in Europe.

In general children receive a great deal of attention. In many houses there are special committees that help to provide for poor orphans. In our own house a special kettle of soup is cooked every Friday for the Mattias Berson Children's Hospital on Sienna Street. There are various other organizations for children. Particularly popular is the so-called Spoon Committee, which collects a spoonful of sugar or two spoonfuls of flour and gruel twice a week from each tenant in a given house. Potatoes, carrots, beets, cabbage, and other foodstuffs are also collected.³⁰

Mary and her friends participated in supporting some organizations, both child-welfare institutions and some with educational goals—e. g. Korczak's children's home.

The youth circle of our house at 41 Sienna Street helps Dr. Janusz Korczak's Children's Home. Every day two of our members are appointed to make collections, and everyone, even those who themselves need help, willingly give to Dr. Korczak's little wards. The names of the contributors and their contributions are listed and posted in the doorway.³¹

Indeed, the next section demonstrates that even in that early period of ghettoization, the ghetto made hard decisions regarding the allocation of sparse resources and efforts.

The children's homes now live almost exclusively on such collections, because the various community organizations must devote themselves to the thousands of homeless refugees who arrive daily in the ghetto.³²

³⁰Ibid. Avi Fischer, a teacher at the camp at Terezin and later at the Czech Family Camp in Birkenau described how in Auschwitz II/Birkenau the children devised a way that each child might have an occasional better meal: "Everyday one of them contributed a spoon of soup for another child. This allocation was an orderly arrangement. A different child every day. Their explanation was very convincing and very successful. They said: 'We hardly feel it if there is one spoon of soup less in our meal, but the other child receives a double ration, and he can eat a proper meal once at least.'" Quoted in Nili Keren, "The Family Camp," *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 439.

³¹Berg, 54-55.

³²Ibid.

The flood of refugees had overwhelmed the resources of those groups whose mission was to provide social services and financial assistance to the needy. Institutions such as Korczak's, that had some structure, a building, and recognition in the community, had to rely on their own efforts and those of their friends to survive. Implicit in that differentiation is a distinction between an orphanage school teetering on the brink of disaster even by ghetto standards—and well over the brink in any other context—and the plight of refugees. Refugees, uprooted from their communities and herded pell-mell into Warsaw, often without any possessions or finances, frequently had nowhere to stay, no friends or family with whom to share resources or hardships. They died at a frightening rate from the ravages of purposely orchestrated poverty.³³

In the season of Passover, Mary inscribed a passage that told how harsh were the feelings toward the Germans. It also demonstrated new use of her education as she employed her knowledge of Hebrew.

April 14, 1941

Our show today was a great experience for me, personally. I suggested that as a Passover number we should choose something from the Haggadah, and, as I am the best student of Hebrew in our group, I was given the honor of reciting the "curses." To a strongly rhythmic piano accompaniment I thundered, out the ten plagues that every Jew in the ghetto wishes upon the Nazis. The whole audience repeated the words after me, and together with me silently wished that they should strike the new Egyptians as soon as possible. . . . But meanwhile the wrath of God is heavy upon His own "chosen people."³⁴

³³Mary Berg and, as we will see, Janina Bauman both spoke movingly of the plight of the poor and totally disenfranchised Jews of the ghetto. Both of these youths understood that their own conditions were much better than those of the poor Jews of Warsaw and of the poor refugees. Although neither came from a wealthy family, both apparently came from bourgeois families who were able to retain some of their pre-war resources. Mary's family owned a business, Janina's were physicians. By the time they reached the ghetto however, Mary's family's business had been confiscated and Janina's father was dead. Their families had been able to secret some of their resources, however, and to use them judiciously. Thus, in the economic hierarchy of the Warsaw ghetto, both lived fairly well although abstemiously. They were not starving (although not overfed either) and they could afford schooling that required fees.

³⁴Ibid., 55-56.

Like schools in more normal conditions, Mary's school received visits from various officials. She welcomed some of those visits, especially from the *Judenrat* president, Adam Czerniakow, who visited more than once in the first two months of the school. They seem to have also served as markers by which she paused to assess her progress.

April 20, 1941

I have had occasion to see President during his visits to our school. Whenever Czerniakow visits our school he is accompanied by engineer Jaszunski, the director of the community's network of schools. . . . He [Jaszunski] is a man of wide knowledge and shows great interest in our work.

When they come, they inspect the portraits, drawings, modern lettering patterns, blueprints for buildings, and technical drawings. We hardly realize the great progress we have made within a short time. I myself did not know how to hold a pencil when I entered the school, yet I have learned a great deal during these last two months.³⁵

Her next entry, made a week later, detailed a quite different official visit—different in its reception as well as its source. That type of visit also appears to have happened with some frequency and, from Mary's description, one senses that the members of the school had discussed and rehearsed it.

April 27, 1941

Today the Germans paid another visit to our school. Recently they have been coming more and more often. As soon as their gray automobile enters our street and we see through the window a group of officers in yellow SA uniforms with red arm bands and swastikas getting out, there is a great bustle in our class. The teachers pull the best work of the pupils out of their files. We hurriedly put on our arm bands which must be worn even over dresses and sweaters. Everything is quickly put in order. God forbid that the Germans should find even a scrap of paper on the floor.

They march in insolently with a firm tread. A deathlike silence prevails in the room. Engineer Goldberg, our teacher, who has an excellent knowledge of German, greets the visitors. He answers all their questions and shows them the best

³⁵Ibid., 57-58.

drawings. The Germans are not interested in the illustrations nor in the architectural blueprints; they devote most of their attention to the technical drawings, upon which they dwell at length and which they criticize in detail. Before leaving they inspect our arm bands, and if they find one that is a little bit crumpled, they scold and threaten to close the school. As soon as the gray automobile leaves we breathe with relief and resume our work.³⁶

It is probably significant that they quickly had to replace their armbands. These were white bands with a blue Star of David that the Germans required Warsaw Jews to wear to identify them and to distinguish them from non-Jews. They required them even within the confines of the Ghetto, where there were few persons without uniforms who were not Jews. Apparently, to resist that edict, the students removed them. It was a seemingly trivial act but in fact a significant piece of resistance as the consequences for not wearing one, or for wearing an imperfect one, were serious.³⁷

Later, Mary explained the experiences of a refugee professor, who with his wife, arrived from Germany on sealed rail cars traveling amidst the dead and dying. It was ironic that the intention to eliminate Jewish education in Warsaw were flouted by an upgrading of the teacher corps available to Jewish youth. Many students in ghettos and camps were in the end taught by distinguished professionals and university-level professors.

My mother asked him to give lessons to my younger sister, who studied the violin before the war. He agreed, and now comes twice a week. He gets five zlotys per hour.³⁸

³⁶Ibid., 58-59.

³⁷Ibid., 86. On 31 July 1941, Mary wrote: "Close by, an elderly woman at a little table sells arm bands of various qualities, from fifty *groszy* to two zlotys each. The cheapest are made of paper with a printed Star of David; the most expensive are of linen with a hand embroidered Star of David and rubber bands. These arm bands are very much in demand in the ghetto because the Germans are very 'sensitive' on this score; and when they notice a Jew wearing a crumpled or dirty arm band, they beat him at once."

³⁸Ibid., 72.

Two weeks later, Mary wrote of the ending of the school year and the difficulties the students experienced due to lack of materials

July 4, 1941

Examinations are approaching at the school of graphic arts. The school year has lasted only seven months; the Germans refused to extend it. The professors are satisfied with the progress made by the majority of the students. However, there is a great shortage of supplies; only two stores in the ghetto still sell small quantities of paper and paints at fantastic prices. A sheet of paper that cost twenty groszy before the war now costs four zlotys. India ink, brushes, and pens are not to be found. Nevertheless, we manage somehow to go on with our studies.³⁹

She also noted the forced departure of certain students who had to quit school to go to work and she began a series of sketches of fellow students:

The most popular student is twenty-three-year-old Zdzislaw Szenberg. . . . He has a predilection for designing and makes fun of the painters who, according to him, waste time and material on useless things. But this is only a pose with him; he, too, paints the "misery" figures of the ghetto and landscapes consisting of a rickety chestnut tree against a background of bombed-out houses.⁴⁰

The Germans forbade such artwork yet it was not uncommon. Many Jews of the period sought ways to record the horrors of life under German domination. Many wrote, a few were able to photograph, and some drew or painted. Mary's earlier description of the flurry that ensued upon the arrival of German officials to the school would have included concealment of such items and activities.

Joziek Fogelnest and Kazik Kestenberg are interesting types, too. They are perfect foils for one another, and always, sit together at one desk. They are the despair of the teachers; every time one of them says a word, the whole classroom resounds with laughter. . . . Both are of the same age—nineteen; they are taking the courses only to

³⁹Ibid., 78.

⁴⁰Ibid.

avoid doing compulsory labor for the Germans; they have not the slightest idea of design, and passed the entrance examinations only through "Pull." But they manage to cope with the problems our teachers give us by pretending that they are neo-impressionists, and drawing complicated, incomprehensible, and often quite absurd compositions.

When the teachers point out that their work does not solve the problem given, they accuse the teachers of conservatism and adherence to obsolete ideas, and begin to explain the profound symbolism of their own compositions. The rest of the class almost bursts with laughter, and the teachers give up and often join in the fun.⁴¹

Would such a lack of talent and cavalier attitude have been tolerated during a normal period in such a school? It is hard to know. However, in that instance, Mary's tone suggests not only that everyone was glad of a bit of lightheartedness but that they regarded the school, and membership in it, as a sort of sanctuary. Everyone including the teachers seemed to participate in the subterfuge of retaining the untalented boys in the school. The sense of looking out for one another is explicitly stated in the end of the entry when she wrote, "On the whole, the students get along well together and help one another in every way they can."⁴²

By the end of that month, the school term had ended. Mary took the opportunity to continue her education.

July 31, 1941

Yesterday the last of our examinations took place. I passed everything, and immediately enrolled for the so-called advanced course, which will last another seven months.⁴³

There is no explanation of the rather pejorative sounding adjective "so-called." It was not, as the following entry illustrates, that the school was capable of teaching only rudimentary skills or that the students were incapable of

⁴¹Ibid., 78-79.

⁴²Ibid., 80.

⁴³Ibid., 85.

learning. Two months later, in the midst of the typhus epidemic that ravaged the ghetto—she reported a mortality rate that “recently . . . reached five hundred a day.” Mary described the work of the students and the depth of community appreciation thereof.⁴⁴

September 28, 1941

Today I was on duty at the exhibition of the work of our school. . . . Looking at these designs, I often find it hard to believe that they are the work of our hands under these terrible conditions.

There is much praise for the graphic work of gifted young Manfred Rubin. The teachers predict that a great future is in store for him.⁴⁵

At that time, early in the ghetto life—but slightly less than a year before the “Great Deportation” of the summer 1942—the teachers at Mary’s school still spoke of their students’ futures. In all likelihood, they still believed such was possible if their students did not succumb to the privations and vicissitudes of ghetto life. Equally important, the students, if we accept that Mary Berg is a good example, seem to have believed that they had futures as well. It is also significant that, in the next passage, Mary still referred to what they were experiencing as “the war.” Many people, raised on stories of the hardships of past wars seemed to perceive, at least initially, that the German treatment of Jews was the result of the war itself. “Inka Garfinkel’s works stand out,” she wrote, “I am convinced that if she survives the war she will be one of the best fashion designers in the world.”⁴⁶

Perhaps even more poignant is her description of the work of the architecture group. Their work focused on postwar projects that would not only ease living conditions but would stand in stark contrast to the ghetto conditions in which they lived. They engaged in that work in the understanding that not all

⁴⁴Ibid., 99 (25 September 1941).

⁴⁵Ibid., 100-101. Ten days later Dawid Sierakowiak reported from Lodz that “I have received a letter from Lolek Leczyki in Warsaw. He is recovering from a typhus epidemic that is raging there. Despite the disease, they had a painting exhibition.” Dawid Sierakowiak, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Lodz Ghetto*. Alan Adleson, ed. and Kamil Turowski, trans. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 138.

of them would live to realize the dream. While they did not yet comprehend the totality of the plan to murder them all, they had witnessed enough wanton murder to know that the Germans might murder anyone at any time. Visitors to the exhibition greeted the displays with pride in the accomplishments and vision of these students and hope for the future of Jewish life in a free Poland.

There are plans for modern residential blocks and drawings of postwar one-family houses surrounded by gardens; these houses have many windows. The visitors at the exhibition look with pride at these housing projects for the Jewish population of the free Poland of the future, which will abolish the crowded houses of Krochmalna and Smocza Streets, where the darkest cellars of the ghetto are situated. But when will this come about, and which of us will live to see it?⁴⁷

Mary drew inspiration from the quality of the work that she and her peers had produced despite the conditions under which they lived and worked—despite concerted attempts to eradicate the spirit and the will of the Jewish people. Again, her writings conveyed a message of resistance to her present circumstances and a hope for a better future. Many of her diary entries contained such comments. For Mary, and one gets a sense that she was not alone in her beliefs, education was an opportunity to act out intellectual resistance. She resisted by preparing for the future, by continuing her studies, and by working out how to do so without the usual resources and support.

People seem to leave the exhibition full of impressions, and even on the street continue to discuss the various pictures, and projects for a long time. Everyone simply refuses to believe that such works could be produced within the walls of the ghetto, especially under the present conditions of constant man hunts, hunger, epidemic, and terror. And yet it is a fact! Our youth has given tangible proof of its

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid., 101.

spiritual strength, power of resistance, courage, and faith in a new and gustier world.⁴⁸

Mary built upon these ideas to show her vision of their work as an inspiration to others. That inspirational quality explains in part the community's willingness to support these enterprises. Many ghetto schools, whether allowed by the authorities or clandestine, received support in part from taxes.

Many visitors had radiant faces, shining with pride when they left. Others were serious and absorbed. I also saw a few persons with tears in their eyes.⁴⁹

Beyond the resistance manifested by continuing to teach and learn in the grimmest conditions, the students and teachers engaged in public statements of resistance. These activities inspired fear in observers but also a certain pride in the courage of the students.

Today during my hours of duty, I noticed several dozen people stopping to look at the same poster. The Hebrew letter *lamed* in the text it quotes is drawn in such a way as to suggest hands stretched out in prayer. These spectators must have known Hebrew, and I could read on their faces feelings of mingled satisfaction and fear before the audacity of the young artist.⁵⁰

Although the German authorities allowed the school to operate, they created difficult conditions. Seven weeks later, Mary provided details of the expansion of the school, but also noted that German policies forced them to relocate to lesser quarters.

November 15, 1941

Two new classes for younger students have been opened at our school. Our present quarters are much smaller than our old ones on Sienna Street. Often we are

⁴⁸Ibid., 101-102.

⁴⁹Ibid., 102.

⁵⁰Ibid.

unable to hear our teachers because of the noise from the adjoining rooms, which are separated from ours by the thinnest of partitions.⁵¹

In addition, Mary referred to the shrinking of the student body. Her account here is reticent as to the emotional toll on the remaining students—who had lost three quarters of their peers to poverty and disease. That entry serves as a reminder that often school was possible only for those of the living who could afford it.

Of the former one hundred students in our class only about twenty-five remain. Many are unable to pay the tuition fees and a great number have perished of typhus.⁵²

The school itself, once appearing as a refuge from the harsh conditions of the ghetto, was increasing subject to the same depredations. In Warsaw Ghetto, poverty and typhus stalked the inhabitants. Cold was the bane of everyone's existence.

Here we have no central heating, such as we had on Sienna Street. Our hands freeze and it is impossible to hold a pencil. We sit in our coats and woolen gloves. The little iron stove in the middle of the classroom is insufficient to heat it. The enormous Venetian windows are covered with ice on both sides. The stove is heated with the wood of the benches that once stood in the corridors.⁵³

Nonetheless, Mary's school seemed to go on operating in spite of the apparent unsuitability of the building and the lack of basic amenities. Indeed the role of the school seemed to expand. Previous entries suggested some officially forbidden activities; in the following passage, Mary described that this had coalesced into what was essentially a clandestine school within the officially approved one.

⁵¹Ibid., 113.

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Ibid.

Recently a great number of "educational circles" have been formed at the various schools for the purpose of studying subjects that are officially forbidden. These circles were formed spontaneously out of our deep need.

At the meetings of these circles Polish is chiefly spoken, but in many cases Yiddish or Hebrew is used as a matter of principle. The interest in Hebrew has increased tremendously, because the youth are pinning their hopes to a great extent on Palestine. In some circles, the language used is English or French, usually the former. Many of my friends are taking special courses in English. English literature is read very widely.⁵⁴

Perhaps for Mary, as well as many others, resistance represented the essence of schooling in the ghetto. The study circles formed not only so that the members might go on learning forbidden subjects, but also that they might engage in intellectual resistance.

Mary wrote of languages and their important role in education. She pointed out that not only were there practical considerations related to plans for immigration but principles of resistance as well. To those of us used to thinking of resistance under much less dire conditions, something as seemingly benign as language learning may seem like a small thing. But for these students not only did that learning mean resisting a ban for which they could be severely, even fatally punished, it was, in the case of Hebrew, a way of retrieving their Jewish identity. Indeed, at that time there was no nation in which Hebrew was the official language. The time and energy taken to study anything suggest that it was in some way of particular importance. The importance lay either directly, for example, in learning English or Hebrew to be ready in the event of emigration, or indirectly in learning something to make a statement to oneself or others that one was alive. Learning Hebrew meant not only anticipation of emigration, but of emigration to a yet unrealized Jewish homeland. Fear, poverty, hunger, or diseases were, at least until their final stages, no deterrent to such determination.

⁵⁴Ibid.

In addition, the passage went on to make the strong implication that Mary and her cohort had experienced a more than casual acquaintance with "the Resistance." As mentioned earlier, some topics remained equivocal in Holocaust diaries because to have written them would have exposed the diarist and those within the diarist's circle to grave danger. However, here Mary stated that they were having increasing contact with underground groups. They shared meeting spaces and read clandestine bulletins emanating from the underground. Mary continued to mention the Resistance in subsequent writings.

The conspiratory character of these circles brings them close to the underground political movement. Often our meetings are held in the same rooms and basements where the cells of the political parties meet.

The number of underground bulletins is growing daily. No one in particular circulates them; they simply travel from hand to hand, and who received them first remains a mystery.⁵⁵

By that time, Mary apparently was making a connection between those clandestine involvements. Those involvements suggest that some students moved from clandestine classes to clandestine meetings to clandestine political activity.⁵⁶ At the time of the Ghetto Uprising some five months later, the resistant nature of much ghetto education would become an important consideration. Many of the Jewish fighters in that armed rebellion were Mary's age peers. In addition, some political and Resistance groups sponsored educational activities in the ghetto.

Throughout that autumn, as winter approached, the school remained involved in community aid activities including making posters for the winter relief campaign. In early December, Mary reported that:

December 9, 1941

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Later narratives, particularly those of Resistance leaders and educators Zivia Lubetkin and Yitzhak Zuckerman will explicate that movement.

America's entry into the war has inspired the hundreds of thousands of dejected Jews in the ghetto with a new breath of hope. . . . Most people believe that the war will not last long now and that the Allies' victory is certain.⁵⁷

That entry suggests one reason that Jews even in the darkest times had hope of rescue. They looked forward to rescue by the Allies and believed that a German defeat would be inevitable once the U.S. entered the war. It is possible to find other examples of this sense of impending rescue in other Holocaust narratives. Similar, even more exuberant, passages followed the 6 June 1944 landing of Allied Forces in Normandy.⁵⁸

Academic programs at school were only part of what the students sought. They also had school-based social events such as the one described in the following entry. It is important to realize that these young persons saw school—even clandestine schools—as places to pursue academic interests and as places to be with friends and to have fun—to be young. Understanding school means understanding that it was something they felt a need to help create—whether that meant deciding what and how to study or decorating for a party and providing entertainment.

December 28, 1941

Today we had a party, organized for the young designers. The students decorated the hall magnificently, and there was entertainment. On a small stage built at one end artists appeared. I took part in the program and sang a few songs in English. We danced to the tunes of an orchestra. . . . The teachers danced with their pupils, and the general mood was cheerful.⁵⁹

Early in 1942, and in keeping with her earlier mention of clandestine educational activities within the officially approved school, Mary mentioned a

⁵⁷Note that Mary reported this news on 9 December 1941. The United States did not enter the war with Japan until 8 December and, considering that Poland is six hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time, this suggests that, despite German efforts to block news from the Ghetto, some news was being received as it occurred. In fact, Mary made this announcement two days before the U. S. declared war on Germany. It is unclear if Mary misunderstood the declaration of war against Japan or if she simply assumed that this announcement would follow shortly.

⁵⁸For example, see Anne Frank's 6 June 1944 entries.

⁵⁹Berg, 123.

discussion of poetry—probably not an official part of a technical drawing course. In her description, it is possible to look into the minds of the students as their thinking converged on resistance. Some stated that the poet Tuwim should have remained in Poland others celebrated his escape into exile feeling that “being abroad he might succeed in arousing the world to knowledge of our bitter fate.”⁶⁰

February 22, 1942

Today we had an impassioned debate on poetry at our school. During the intermission, Rachel Perelman, one of students, drew a copy of an underground paper out of her pocket. The paper had reprinted a fragment of Julian Tuwim’s poem, which the great Polish poet had written somewhere in exile. . . . We all expected that this poet, who is a Jew, would send us a message of comfort . . . but there was not a word of the encouragement all of us thirsted for.⁶¹

The students, it seems, not only engaged in assorted forms of resistance—they expected it also of others.

Shortly after this episode, Mary resumed her theme of safety when she provided a description of the perils on the way to her school. This problem had been a concern of hers from the beginning of the occupation and resurfaced in her diary several times before the following entry.

February 27, 1942

Every day, morning and afternoon, when I go to school, I am not sure whether I will return alive. I have to go past two of the most dangerous German sentry posts: at the corner of Zelazna and Chlodna Streets near the bridge, and at the corner of Krochmalna and Grzybowska Streets. At the latter place there is usually a guard who has been nicknamed “Frankenstein,” because of his notorious cruelty. Apparently this soldier cannot go to sleep unless he has a few victims to his credit; he is a real sadist. When I see him from a distance I shudder. He looks like an ape: small and stocky, with a swarthy grimacing face. This morning, on my way to school, as I was approaching the corner of Krochmalna and Grzybowska Streets, I

⁶⁰Ibid., 133.

⁶¹Ibid., 132-133.

saw his familiar figure, torturing some riksha driver whose vehicle had passed an inch closer to the exit than the regulations permitted. The unfortunate man lay on the curb in a puddle of blood. A yellowish liquid dripped from his mouth to the pavement. Soon I realized that he was dead, another victim of the German sadist. The blood was so horribly red the sight of it completely shattered me.⁶²

Gruesome as the experience of getting to school must have been it did not prevent Mary from attending. Apparently, the pull of school was strong enough to draw her even when she could expect to encounter that sort of danger in passing.

Not satisfied with describing her own education Mary returned to the topic of the education of others:

March 30, 1942

Rutka now visits us. . . . She attends a secret private gymnasium, whose chief teacher and organizer is Professor Taubenszlak. Rutka, who is very gifted, likes her studies. She is an inseparable friend of my sister Anna, and they take English lessons together.⁶³

Mary's younger sister Anna had one year earlier attended a program for learning to make children's clothing.⁶⁴ In the above passage, she reportedly took English lessons with her friend Rutka who also attended a secret *gymnasium*. Two and a half years after the occupation had begun, and as conditions grew ever more appalling, there were still students working toward the completion of *gymnasium*. This determination continued despite the ever more apparent danger of engaging in forbidden activities.

In the following passage, Mary reported that, not only were existing schools still operating, new ones opened with some regularity.

⁶²Ibid., 135-136.

⁶³Ibid., 137-138.

⁶⁴See entry for April 4, 1941.

May 6, 1942

Despite the prevailing terrorism, the community opened a number of elementary public schools for children of seven. The teaching is done in Yiddish. The community also supplies textbooks, which are very hard to get. This program includes supervised play after classes. It is pleasant to see a group of children holding hands proudly taking a walk with their teacher.⁶⁵

There was a tone of satisfaction in Mary's description of these schools.

Meanwhile her class still did a variety of things to foster positive experiences for children in the ghetto. In the same entry, Mary tells of going to work on a park ghetto prisoners built in the ruins of a house.

Yesterday Professor Greifenberg took all the students in his class at our school to the little park opposite the community building. This park is on the site of a bombed house, where the Toporol gardeners have planted grass and flowers. Today it is green there. Jewish workmen have constructed swings, benches, etc. The pupils of our school went to paint a fresco of animal cartoons on one of the walls of the ruined house. All this is done to give the ghetto children a feeling of freedom. The park was inaugurated today, and President Czerniakow and other high community officials attended the ceremony. Long tables were set up on the grass, and on them lay little bags of molasses candy manufactured in the ghetto. Every child was given a little present and a bag of candy. Their cries of joy and the gay songs sung by the chorus resounded in the air. The smiling rosy faces of the children were perhaps the best reward of those who had created this little refuge of freedom for the little prisoners of the ghetto.⁶⁶

Mary was explicit that the goal was, in creating what would have been normal environments and experiences for these children in another time, to create "a feeling of freedom" for them. She inferred that it gave something of a feeling of freedom to those who made the playgrounds and the schools as well, a feeling probably difficult to muster under the circumstances.

⁶⁵Ibid., 146.

⁶⁶Ibid., 147.

Conditions worsened as summer approached.⁶⁷ By July, it was apparent that something terrible was about to occur. Mary again wrote about the dangers of getting to school.

July 5, 1942

Fewer and fewer students come to our school; now they are afraid to walk in the streets. The Nazi guard, Frankenstein, is raging in the ghetto, one day he kills ten persons, another day five . . . everyone expects to be his next victim. A few days ago I, too, ceased completely attending school.⁶⁸

Feeling compelled at last to quit attending school, Mary worried about conditions around her. Nevertheless, school as always exerted its pull—nine days later she returned to her studies. On 14 July 1942, she mentioned that, “Today I went to school,”⁶⁹ and again on the following day, “Today while returning from school.”⁷⁰ Although she did not mention why she decided to return, presumably the desire to go to school became stronger than the fear of traveling there.

The entry for 15 July 1942 marks the end of Mary’s record of her education in Poland. By 19 July 1942, her diary entries were from the Pawiak prison in the ghetto area. Due to her mother’s American citizenship, the Germans interned her and her family in the Pawiak prison until January 1943. There they awaited evacuation from Warsaw as part of a prisoner exchange.⁷¹ Three days later, on 18 July 1942, the “Great Deportation” began. Six months later, on 18 January 1943 the eve of what the Germans meant to be the final phase of clearing the ghetto and making Warsaw *Judenfrei*, they were sent on

⁶⁷German policy to make for more peaceful deportation as the worse the ghetto was the more willing people would be to be deported for “resettlement in the East.”

⁶⁸Ibid., 157.

⁶⁹Ibid., 158.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹On 15 July 1942, Mary wrote of the impending move to Pawiak that an acquaintance had said, “Now you’ll see that I was right. We are all doomed. The foreign citizens are being removed because the Germans do not want them to witness what they are preparing for us.” Ibid, 158-159. Mary herself regarded the move as a positive sign; but Chaim Kaplan writing of the same thing worried, “[16 July 1942] All foreign citizens were required, on a few hours notice, to . . . go over to the Pawia. What their fate will be no one knows. Will they be exchanged . . . as is said . . . or imprisoned . . . [in] some concentration camp?” Chaim Kaplan. *The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan, revised*

a transport to the west. Arriving a week later in Vittel, France, they settled into a much more comfortable internment for fourteen months.

Mary's involvement in education was not at an end. In the internment camp at Vittel, the Catholic nuns organized a school for the younger internee children. Mary found comfort in their concern and, as she wrote, became increasingly involved.

July 18, 1943

I like to watch our wonderful Mother Saint Helen. . . . She directs the school, and I take great pleasure in helping her. I make signs, paint toys for the children, and have also illustrated ten copies of the only children's book we were able to get for the whole class.⁷²

Again, Mary found a way to compensate for a shortage of school materials. The next month her role had expanded—she was a teacher.

22 August 1943

The work at school gives me great joy, and provides me with an opportunity to practice my English and French. I now direct the art work in two classes. We use the cardboard from the Red Cross packages as material; for glue we use dissolved powdered milk. The majority of the children are from Poland; many of them arrived in the last two transports, which came after the liquidation of the ghetto. They have learned French and English very quickly, and are a great comfort to us all.⁷³

Using her diary, Mary painted pictures of a variety of school settings—some German approved and others clandestine. Even within the German-sanctioned school, certain activities occurred that violated German intent.

If Mary gave the impression that schools simply sprang up with little strife attached, the next narrator offers quite a different view. In Warsaw, as

edition. Abraham I. Katsh, ed. and trans. (New York: Collier Books, 1973), 376.

⁷²Berg, 237.

⁷³Ibid., 239.

one might expect in a large and diverse community, school was contested terrain where internecine discord revolved around political and economic issues. Such disagreements appear in other accounts as well. Despite the disagreements, the Ghetto supported many schools and, for the duration of the ghetto, children and youth gathered with adults committed to their growth and development. As conditions worsened in the ghetto, Chaim Kaplan indicated that many former points of contention melted away and, faced with disaster, adults and children got on with school. Certainly, following establishment of the closed Ghetto in November 1940, Chaim's references to schooling changed substantially.

*"Everything is forbidden us. The wonder is that we are still alive
and that we do everything."*

Chaim Kaplan was born in 1880 in Horodyszcze, Russia. He immigrated to Warsaw in 1902 and was a pioneer of elementary Hebrew education and principal and owner of a private Jewish school until World War II. He published several textbooks and contributed to several periodicals. Following the outbreak of war in 1939, he resolved to record the fate of the Jews of Warsaw in his diary. He continued to teach and to be concerned with the schooling of Jewish children. Following the Great Deportation of the summer of 1942, Chaim decided to send his diary into hiding, smuggling it piece by piece into the hands of a Pole who hid it. The Germans probably gassed Chaim in the death chambers at Treblinka during December 1942 or January 1943. It is certain that he disappeared during the German *aktia* during that time. Buried in a kerosene can on a Polish farm, the diary resurfaced shortly after the defeat of Poland's enemy, when the Polish gentile who had hidden it gave or sold part of it. He brought other portions to New York and sold them in 1962.⁷⁴

⁷⁴Chaim Kaplan. *The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan, revised edition*. Abraham I. Katsh, ed. and trans. (New York: Collier Books, 1973), 12-15 and Chaim Kaplan. *Scroll of Agony: The Warsaw Diary of Chaim A. Kaplan*,

Chaim Kaplan was worried. It was 1 September 1939 and that morning the Germans had begun their attack on Poland. Writing of that day in his diary, he said:

September 1, 1939

We will starve because there will be no means of livelihood.

How will I support myself? The schools won't be opened for a long, long time, and even if they should open, there would be no students in them. Parents will not let their children go outdoors for fear of air raids. I invested all I could in repairing my school (2,000 zloty), and now it is bright, clean, repaired, and redecorated. But it will stand empty.⁷⁵

Already Chaim worried about schooling for children—although at that point his concern was not for Jewish children alone—and about what a delay in opening school would mean for teachers. Chaim did not yet understand that the German occupation that would follow defeat, rather than the war itself, would ultimately provide the greatest impediment to schooling for Warsaw's Jews. He could not know that parents would have worse things than air raids to fear. However, contemplating the loss of income and of his investment must have been a frightening enough prospect.

In the middle of the next month, Chaim would write of the devastation visited upon the schools of Warsaw, a devastation not limited to Jewish schools. According to Chaim, it was a universal problem in the Polish capital. It is not clear if the Germans deliberately targeted the schools or if those buildings simply fell victim to the destruction of war. What was clear was that it would be a monumental task to restore the school buildings to a useful state.

October 19, 1939

There are no schools, elementary or high, Jewish or Polish. Many school buildings were burned, and a school that has been burned will never rise again, with so many people homeless. Even the schools that remain are in ruins. There isn't a

Abraham I. Katsh, ed. and trans. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965.), 15.

⁷⁵Ibid., 19-20.

building in Warsaw whose windows haven't been broken, particularly on the side facing the street—and when any glass is available, they raise the prices so exorbitantly that glass for a double window costs 200 zloty. There are school buildings in which the cost of glass would run to several thousand zloty.⁷⁶

Chaim still focused on school as a building. As he earlier mentioned, he recently remodeled his school and now that money was spent for naught. In time, he would come to see school differently. In those early days, however, when school was not open due to the ravages of the recent war and before the ban on educating Jewish children, his thoughts focused on the loss of buildings.

The German authorities offered no help. Not only did they not provide schooling; their rules stymied anyone who tried to do so.

October 30, 1939

Soon the Jewish schools will be reopened. They will be reopened because it is too hard to wait any longer and the children remain idle. But in this area the conquerors have done nothing to make their position on the problem clear. We searched for some sort of office of educational affairs to give us specifics to guide our actions, but the Polish educational administration has been thrown out. Only a puppet in the form of a Polish-speaking clerk remains, and he knows nothing.⁷⁷

Fearful of the consequences of opening school without permission as well as of conducting school in violation of German plans, these educators were at a loss how to continue. Egged on by Polish gentiles, they resolved to go about having school.

The Poles are urging us to reopen our schools without permits, on the authority of the charters we have had up to now. It has been decreed that everyone must go back to work. So we have gone back to work! With trembling hearts, and full of doubts, we have decided to do so. The existence of the schools is in danger, and therefore we

⁷⁶Ibid., 54.

⁷⁷Ibid., 61.

have decided to make the effort.⁷⁸

For Chaim, conducting school meant not only educating children but also conducting business. Repeatedly he couched his relationship to education as an economic concern. His labor concerns did not mean he saw school only in terms of livelihood or that he did not recognize other factors of concern to his pupils and their families. If schools reopened, he wondered, "Will students come?"⁷⁹ Those were difficult times and the Jews of Warsaw had many worries.

"Their parents," he wrote, "have been beaten, robbed, and looted. Will impoverished, homeless parents still find the heart to send their children to study Torah?"⁸⁰

Of the children he wrote presentiently: "Jewish youth has no present and no future, and it is fleeing for its very life."⁸¹

Much to Chaim's relief, some schools did soon reopen. It was a short-lived relief.

November 25, 1939

After much work and trouble, the schools were opened. They exist only by a miracle, since the teachers, because of the dearth of students, don't earn enough for a crumb of bread. . . . Teaching is not being done well, because of frustration and insufficient pay. Now even this is coming to an end. Because of the contagious diseases spreading throughout the city, especially typhoid fever, all schools have been ordered closed. From now on we may look forward to lives of hunger and poverty, of ugliness and degradation.⁸²

Not understanding the German plans for Jews, and certainly not anticipating the events to come, including the establishment of the death camp Treblinka only forty miles away, as that galling autumn ground into winter,

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

⁸¹Ibid., 70.

⁸²Ibid., 71.

Chaim still sought to order his life in some semblance of the world as it once was.⁸³ "The teaching profession is treated as a step-child by the conqueror," he wrote, railing against the German disregard for the education of Warsaw's children, particularly if they were Jewish.⁸⁴

Chaim approached the problem of schools as a labor issue throughout a large portion of the diary—an attitude that is breathtakingly narrow except that in truth he did not yet *know*. He was also concerned about the children and, if Treblinka was beyond his ability to conceive, the more immediate intentions of the Germans were not. As the third month of the occupation of Poland began, he was quite clear as to at least some of their motives for restricting Jewish children's education.

December 3, 1939

Permission has been granted to reopen the elementary schools for Polish children, but not for Jewish children. Thousands of them are out in the streets because there are no schools for them. They remain untutored, uneducated, and above all unfed.⁸⁵

The ban was not aimed strictly at education itself but at the fact that education, especially school-based education, cost money. It was decided that Jews could, in fact should, contribute to public treasuries—but Jews were not to receive from those coffers.

The aim of the conquerors is to exclude them from the network of schools being supported by state and municipal funds. Nazi justice does not permit Jews to benefit from public funds. In general, it does not recognize that Jews have any rights and that all the rights which the Jews enjoyed under Polish law have been abrogated and annulled. This exclusion enters even the area of general taxation. Frank's decree states that taxes are collected on the basis of the Polish laws in effect heretofore, but at the same time all Jewish exemptions and dispensations have been canceled. From now on all Jewish institutions of any kind, whether

⁸³Treblinka was the camp where the Germans murdered approximately 90 per cent of the Jews of Warsaw in the summer of 1942.

⁸⁴Kaplan, 81.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*

philanthropic, religious, cultural, or artistic will have to pay taxes. Even the *Judenrat* schools and hospitals are included in this. This decree alone will cause them to perish.⁸⁶

Chaim's understanding of the superficial aims of the Germans deepened. Still he was unable to see that they had even more evil intentions toward the Jews. It was bad enough, he thought, that they intended to deprive Jews of their dignity, of the advantages bestowed by education. Apparently, they also were willing to deprive Jewish teachers and their families of livelihoods.

December 5, 1939

The conqueror is condemning us to ignorance. Jewish education of all kinds has ended in Poland.⁸⁷

After a transitional period, the elementary schools for Polish [gentile] children have been opened and are being supported by the municipality. Only these, no others. The private schools of all kinds, even the Polish ones—remain closed. The Jewish teachers in the city-supported schools for Jewish children have been dismissed, although up to now they had been considered state employees. Their families await hunger, want, and a miserable existence.⁸⁸

As it turned out, neither the Jewish teachers of Warsaw nor their students were willing to accept the German hindrance. Frustrated by their inability to have school according to the rules laid down for them, they nonetheless began to organize schools that ignored or skirted those rules.

December 14, 1939

The unemployed Jewish teachers have found a way to partially save themselves from starvation. They got together and organized small groups of children who come to the teachers home to be taught for two or three hours. Hundreds of teachers support themselves in this fashion. It is possible that the ban against study also applies to such small groups, and if questions were asked they

⁸⁶Ibid., 81-82.

⁸⁷That Jewish education was ended was not true. Not only did Jewish education continue legally in a few places but also it continued clandestinely in many more, including Warsaw.

⁸⁸Kaplan, 82.

would have to be stopped. But no one asks questions. The matter is done quietly, underhandedly.⁸⁹

Not certain, in some cases of the legality of their decisions, but obviously inclined to think that they were contrary to German intentions, the Jews of Warsaw formed new models of schooling. Chaim was no exception, and in the following passage, we can see not only what he did but we can imagine the physical setting.

There is no other solution. I too want to make a living, and I have organized three small groups from among my pupils and meet with them in my apartment. Two women teachers from my school teach them general subjects twenty hours a week, and I teach them Hebrew subjects. For this purpose I have set aside a special room and have placed in it five desks for ten pupils. From this I support myself. I have thus relieved myself of the administration of the school, which has a staff of ten waiting for a salary. This is a temporary, transitory livelihood born of necessity, the child of adaptability.

Contrary to my custom since the outbreak of the war, I have written this personal entry in my diary today.⁹⁰

The above description is unique in that most accounts of clandestine schooling—and all of those I have found from Warsaw—described a much different setting. Most accounts emphasize the lack of accouterments of normal schools. Yet here a teacher not only was able to set aside an entire room for teaching, but also was able to equip it with desks. In addition, the pupils in Chaim's school received instruction from a staff of three teachers. Such arrangements could not last, but for the time being Chaim had a livelihood, his pupils were attending school, and though there was much worse to come they did not yet know it.

As Chaim pointed out some months later, schooling was not a reality for all Jewish children in Warsaw. Many children's formal educations had ended.

⁸⁹Ibid., 86.

⁹⁰Ibid., 86-87.

Writing in the spring following the German invasion, Chaim described the plight of children conscripted for forced labor.

May 15, 1940

Sometimes our work is done by schoolchildren. The children of our poor, with whom the streets of Warsaw are filled at all hours of the day, are not afraid of the despotic conquerors. They remain as ever—lively and mischievous. Their poverty and oppression serve to shield them from robberies and confiscations. No one will harm them. Even the conqueror's eye overlooks them. Let the Jewish weeds pine away in their iniquity. But these weeds watch every act of the conquerors and imitate the Nazis' manner of speech and their cruelty most successfully. For them this is nothing but good material for games and amusements. Childhood does much.⁹¹

It was the children of the poor who went without so much—including schooling. It is perhaps not surprising that a person like Chaim, inured to the presence of poverty and protected from it by his bourgeois status, found indigence poignant and yet ordinary. Indeed in that passage he found positive attributes in those children's circumstances—a view no doubt forged by many years of habituation to a bourgeois life where the children of the poor were not part of his social or professional milieu.

By August of that year, on the cusp of the anniversary of the invasion, Chaim wrote of his motives for keeping a record of life for the Jews of Warsaw.

27 August, 1940

There is no end to our scroll of agony. I am afraid that the impressions of this era will be lost because they have not been adequately recorded. I risk my life with my writing, but my abilities are limited. . . . I dwell among my people and behold their misery and their souls' torments.⁹²

Chaim resolved to record that suffering so that perhaps someday others would know what his people had endured. He saw his diary as an account of the

⁹¹Ibid., 153.

⁹²Ibid., 189.

suffering of the community—earlier he even apologized for making a personal entry.

And again I must point out," he wrote, "that no day passes whose trials are not greater than those of the last. An entire community of 400,000 people is dying and its psychological state is approaching insanity.⁹³

Driven to near insanity by the horrific conditions conceived and orchestrated by the Germans, the Jews of Warsaw nonetheless continued a variety of activities that they saw as necessary to sustain themselves and their sense of humanity, including schooling of children and youth. Soon the Germans threatened that activity again.

The despots learned that the Jewish teachers are supporting themselves by teaching illegal study groups, and it is their intention to investigate and find out if they are teaching illegally. This causes more panic.⁹⁴

Again, the Jewish community sought answers from the conquerors. Again, they were disappointed. When the Germans finally issued another school order, it was vague and unintelligible. Again, the Jews of Warsaw had to wait—this time for the specific regulations for implementing the order.

September 13, 1940

We have finally gotten an order about schools and vocational training centers for Jewish children. Three days ago Jaszunski came back from Cracow with the news in his pocket.

In the fashion of all the conquerors' orders, it is too ambiguous and too general. Until the regulations for carrying it out appear, we can make nothing of it, because it is totally lacking in programmatic educational information. There is no directive about the language of instruction, and nothing about the other pedagogical problems involved.⁹⁵

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

What was clear was that the already overburdened *Judenrat* would be responsible for its implementation and that implementation changed the definition of private schools.

Chaim also read significance into the order's omission of any reference to high school.

All that it said is that the *Judenrat* must support schools for academic and trade education for Jewish children at its own expense, and in addition it must furnish teachers for these schools—meaning that it must establish a teachers' institute. Naturally since these schools are to be supported by the *Judenrat*, they will be known as private schools. This title makes them ineligible to benefit from the municipal or government treasury. And Jewish children are not accepted in other schools.

Further, all that is spoken of is primary schools, that is, six-year elementary schools. High schools will remain closed in the future as well. Here there is no difference between Jews and Poles. The reason is obvious: a pupil over the age of thirteen is a candidate for forced labor. Besides the Jews have no need of an intelligentsia to go around complaining and poisoning the Aryan world with their spirit.⁹⁶

Forced labor and the suppression of resistance were certainly reasons why the Germans did not permit secondary schools to open. There were other even more sinister reasons, but for the time being those two were the most obvious.

First, however, the Jewish community engaged in internecine struggles for control of its schools.

September 15, 1940

The publication of the order about Jewish schools after we had waited expectantly for a whole year has raised a storm among Jewish groups. The troubles that have rained down on us have not weakened our argumentiveness or our

⁹⁵Ibid., 193.

⁹⁶Ibid., 193-194.

partisan stubbornness.⁹⁷

Chaim understood that the conflict occurring within the ghetto had its genesis outside the ghetto. A combination of old, pre-Occupation arguments and the confusing nature of the German edicts resulted not only in struggles among various factions but in a struggle to make sense of what was happening as well.

And it must be admitted that the conquerors' policies aid and abet this. They have segregated us as a separate ethnic group, and this separation has made us into a nation living alone with all its cultural, literary, and artistic attributes, which give us all kinds of satisfactions. Our autonomy has passed into the hands of the *Judenrat*, which has turned into a Jewish government in whose hands everything is concentrated. In normal times we demanded personal autonomy. Nazism has given us autonomy, but not of the personal kind; only a racial one.⁹⁸

Those struggles obscured for Chaim and others the true intentions of the Germans. They still sought to find ways to live within the system imposed upon them, not realizing that the Germans designed that system not to oppress and restrict them but to murder them.⁹⁹ Although the situation was intensely stressful and seemed dangerous, Warsaw Jewry thought, if only they could get through the current difficulties, the situation would ease and they could get on with their lives. Meanwhile Chaim would write of his concerns for meeting regulations for conducting school—a concern that seems to have occupied the minds of many others as well.

⁹⁷Ibid., 195.

⁹⁸Ibid.

⁹⁹"In mid-March of 1942 [well after the onset of the Holocaust] some 75 to 80 percent of all victims of the Holocaust were still alive, while 20 to 25 percent had perished. A mere eleven months later, in mid-February 1943, the percentages were exactly the reverse." Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), xv. Those figures mean that between over one million to one and a half million persons had been killed by early 1942—a number that can only be considered small when seen as a percentage of the whole. The number of persons murdered represents all of German occupied Europe and Jewish access to reports of the murders was hampered by disrupted communications and the fact that the killings were often complete annihilation of communities of Jews—no witnesses in other

The regulations for carrying out the school order have not yet been published, and no one knows its exact meaning because there is only a framework. Since the edict is brief and ambiguous, everyone wants to interpolate his own thought into it. Whatever one person postulates in his own mind he transmits to his neighbor as a positive fact. Hypothesis upon hypothesis is being developed, each contradicting the other. Wonder of wonder, even the absence of newspapers is no obstacle, and the ban on assembly doesn't frighten us. We run from meeting to meeting.¹⁰⁰

In the above passage, we can see how ghetto inhabitants received "news." Lacking sources such as newspapers and radio, they gleaned snippets of information where they could and gathered to discuss and interpret them.

Meanwhile, the *Judenrat* had the task of opening schools. Chaim saw that task as an opportunity for that body to dispense employment to the Jewish teachers.

The education department of the *Judenrat*, which was closed and is now being reopened, will furnish jobs for hundreds of people. In this area too there is great activity. Big shots, middle-sized ones, and small people race up and down the steps of the *Judenrat*. Who knows—to whom will the Lord show his mercies?¹⁰¹

Two weeks before the announcement of orders to move all Jews in Warsaw to the "Jewish quarter," Chaim still worried about the fate of private schooling.

September 18, 1940

This is a time of crises for private schools. Teaching has been my profession for more than thirty years, and I have stuck with it in good times and in bad.

The conquerors do their work calmly. An inspector for Jewish education has already been appointed. And Czerniakow has appeared before him. Czerniakow wanted to press the administration to spell out its orders, but the entire matter has been put off until the first of October.

words. In late 1940, many would not have yet comprehended what was happening.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid., 195-196.

Private education is really tottering on the brink. It has no friends or supporters, and no one wants it to survive except the school owners whose income depends on it.¹⁰²

As the Potemkin problem of establishing official ghetto schools wound on, Chaim came to consider the possibility of giving up his school and going to work for the *Judenrat* schools

September 24, 1940

The president of the *Judenrat* [Adam Czerniakow] tried again to request a clarification of the school order. This time he made a written application, and an appointment was granted for a somewhat earlier date—the twenty-fourth of September. At the time of this writing, no one knows anything yet. But if there are no hitches, and the appointment took place as planned, we will know the details tomorrow.

We ourselves do not know what is the best course. Will we be better off remaining independent and holding on to our individual proprietorship of private schools, which we will find it difficult to run and support—or will we be better off accepting the patronage of the *Judenrat*, which will include our schools in its network and make us into salaried teachers?

In my old age I must change my skin. Instead of being a landlord I will become a hired hand. But here are two sides to the question.¹⁰³

Still the efforts of Jewish educators consumed their thinking. A meeting on school matters in late September excluded private school administrators; that exclusion humiliated and angered them. Not yet giving up hope, however, they worked to secure the rights of private schools.

September 25, 1940

Today private education suffered its first defeat, and the defeat may be charged to my account, because I was the commander and guide of the operation entrusted to me. Some time ago we elected a group of representatives, and five of

¹⁰²Kaplan, 196-197.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 198-199. At that time, Chaim Kaplan was fifty-nine or sixty years old.

those chosen became the executive committee. I was its chairman. We went to work—first of all, to inform the *Judenrat* of our existence and organization.

Suddenly I found out through L. Bornsztejn . . . [that] today a conference would be held at the *Judenrat* in which representatives of the various 'trends' in Jewish education would participate. . . . I went with Bornsztejn to the meeting, and we were almost certain that our request would be granted and I would be allowed to take part in the meeting. But we were wrong. I had to wait in the corridor in disgrace. . . . Insignificant members of some party schools were allowed in, but for the representatives of dozens of schools with thousands of pupils there was no room.

The private schools have no friends or supporters. Everyone wants to build himself up on their ruins. We have suffered our first defeat. But it is only the first battle; we must not despair. Things will change to our advantage.¹⁰⁴

In the end, private schools received little except the ostensible right to exist. This however nurtured hope. Chaim went away with the assurance that private school owners could at least make their best effort to conduct their schools. It was in a sense an empty hope.

September 26, 1940

The most important thing is that it was decided not to interfere with the private schools. They will be allowed to continue on their own in the future, with no support whatever from anybody, but they will require permits from the *Judenrat*, and must submit to its supervision. The *Judenrat's* decision makes sense.¹⁰⁵

On the eve of the ghetto's official formation, Chaim wrote: "October 2, 1940, The eve of the New Year, 5701. . . . Everything is forbidden us. The wonder is that we are still alive and that we do everything."¹⁰⁶ This statement stands as a testament to Jewish determination. Stripped of all rights they still strove to conduct lives of dignity and somehow to do all such things as that required. On the next day, Ludwig Fischer, the German governor of Warsaw,

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 199-200.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 200.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 202.

ordered all Jews living outside the Jewish quarter to relocate within it.¹⁰⁷ Chaim seemed to miss the significance, when he wrote: "The fear of the ghetto has passed."¹⁰⁸ Three days later he returned to the issue of schools offering the opinion that money, or rather its lack, was a formidable impediment.

October 6, 1940

Within the walls of the *Judenrat*, hidden from prying eyes, Jewish education is being established.

The tired and worried *Judenrat* does not want to undertake a new allotment to support the schools. The hospital tax is being collected only with great difficulty and it is impossible to be too harsh in dealing with people who are totally impoverished. And if they despair of collecting taxes that already exist, should they now impose new ones in addition?¹⁰⁹

The president of the *Judenrat*, Adam Czerniakow, was willing to allow schools but offered little financial support. "You want your own schools?" Chaim quoted him as saying, "Fine! I approve wholeheartedly. For my part, I give you all manner of sympathy, except sympathy which involves money."¹¹⁰

Other matters compounded the problem. The teachers were unhappy with the proposed pay. Thinking to force the *Judenrat* to make a better offer, they refused the pay offered. "Even before the schools were set up," Chaim explained, "a dispute broke out between the teachers and the *Judenrat* about salary scale. The teachers' union had set a minimum wage of 300 zloty a month. The *Judenrat* offered "only 130 a month" reported Chaim, "When they heard this the teachers were furious with the president. No teacher will report for work."¹¹¹

Soon Chaim noted the ubiquitous presence of tiny children begging in the streets of Warsaw.¹¹² On 17 November, two days after the sealing of the

¹⁰⁷Gilbert, *Holocaust*, 127. 3 October 1940 announcement of ghetto.

¹⁰⁸Kaplan, 203.

¹⁰⁹*Ibid.*, 204.

¹¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 204-205.

¹¹²*Ibid.*, 220-221.

ghetto gates, he wrote, "What we dreaded most has come; . . . we had a premonition that a ghetto life awaited us but . . . no one believed . . . [it] would come so soon."¹¹³ Until that time Chaim and others, although not everyone, believed the German charade of a Jewish quarter as opposed to a ghetto. He noted: "we went to bed in the Jewish quarter, and the next morning we woke in a closed Jewish ghetto."¹¹⁴ The closing of the Ghetto would mark the beginning of the dissipation of many Jewish hopes. Still school went on. In the beginning of 1941, Chaim wrote:

February 15, 1941

Jewish children learn in secret. In back rooms, on long benches near a table, little schoolchildren sit and learn what it's like to be Marranos.¹¹⁵ Before the ghetto was created, when the Nazis were common in our streets, we trembled at the sound of every driven leaf; our hearts turned to water at the sound of any knock on the door. But with the creation of the ghetto, the situation improved somewhat. The Jewish teachers engage in their teaching with confidence that they and their pupils are in relatively little danger. The Jewish police are assumed to be reliable; even if they uncover "forbidden learning" they will not betray us to the heathens. In addition, we have a semblance of permission. The Self-Aid is authorized to open and support "training points" for Jewish children. We are allowed to feed, direct, and train them; but to educate them is forbidden. But since training is permitted, we educate them as well.¹¹⁶

The children themselves, he explained, had readily adapted to the obfuscation required of such an enterprise.

In time of danger the children learn to hide their books. Jewish children are clever—when they set off to acquire forbidden learning they hide their books and notebooks between their trousers and their stomachs then button their jackets and

¹¹³Ibid., 225.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵"Marranos" were Spanish or Portuguese Jews, forcibly converted to Christianity during the Middle Ages, who nonetheless continued to secretly practice Judaism.

¹¹⁶Kaplan, 242.

coats. This is a tried and true method, a kind of smuggling that is not readily detected.¹¹⁷

Like many other Jews, Chaim initially found a certain comfort in ghettoization. The Germans ostensibly put much of the running of the ghetto into Jewish hands. The Jews did not immediately grasp that the autonomy was only temporary and largely illusory. Thus, the Ghetto prisoners got on with making the best of their situation. This is not to suggest a total naiveté, however. Jews certainly understood that they faced a grim and uncertain future, and Chaim was no exception. For the first fourteen months after the Germans took control of Warsaw, his concern for educational matters seemed to revolve around such things as teaching as a livelihood, teacher rights, and private school rights. In the three months after the sealing of the Ghetto, his thoughts seemed to fix on the idea of providing schooling by every means available.

Eight months later he wrote of the struggle to establish school in the ghetto. The tone was quite different. Recognizing the deceit of the previous year's German pseudo consent to open schools, he reported that:

October 22, 1941

Last year permission was granted to open the schools but this was never put into effect. The reason given then was the typhus epidemic which was still raging through the ghetto. A large concentration of children in one place would be likely to spread the disease. On the face of it, this seemed a justifiable argument. But it was not so much concern for the people's health that motivated the Nazis as their desire to deprive Jewish children of an education.¹¹⁸

Over two years into the occupation, and nine months before most of the Jews of Warsaw fell victim to genocide, the German authorities again granted permission to open some elementary schools for the Jewish children. The previous excuse for closing schools was revealed as a canard.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 273.

Now, a year later, with the number of typhus victims exceeding last year, permission has been granted to the *Judenrat* to open the schools. It is as though last year's considerations had never been. So now we're to have popular education again, the lack of which has so troubled us.¹¹⁹

There remained some echo of bitterness toward the *Judenrat* and toward the lack of support for private education. Such bitterness had by then degenerated into more of a sense of grievance than the cause it had once been.

When ordered to bear the expense of popular schooling [the *Judenrat*] simply turned the entire matter over to the political parties. *Tarbut* was given two schools where they can instill their ideology and *Agudat Israel* was given three; CJSO also received a share. There remained, without political patronage, only schools whose language of instruction had always been Polish. This type of school came under the *Judenrat's* own wing and consequently was the last to receive a handout.¹²⁰

Chaim also noted that education was not free. Listing the fees for attendance, he also pointed out the chasm that existed between moneyed and poor families in making decisions concerning school attendance.

The party-run schools are not free, however. Tuition is 10 zloty a month, and there is a registration fee of 5 zloty. They expected a large enrollment, but they are disappointed. The poor cannot afford the fees, and the well-to-do are afraid to expose their children to the children of the poor, who might be carriers of disease.¹²¹

Chaim's last entry directly concerning Jewish schooling provided a poignant reflection of his first.

Private schooling has not been eliminated, and it continues as before to provide a livelihood for thousands of teachers who provide classes in their homes.¹²²

¹¹⁹Ibid.

¹²⁰Ibid., 273.

¹²¹Ibid.

¹²²Ibid.

In June 1942, just before the Germans removed the vast majority of Jews to Treblinka, Chaim wrote of the establishment of tiny parks within the ghetto. Used by mothers to provide airings for their infants and for children to play, they were also used by nursery schools and older children have their lessons there. In short: an arrow in the Nazis' eyes! The arteries of life do not stop pulsing.¹²³

Chaim Kaplan survived the Great Deportation of summer 1942. Avoiding the *aktia* that swept away the vast majority of the approximately 350,000 ghetto prisoners, he nonetheless recognized the pull of the German inducements.¹²⁴ In the last entry before he sent his diary into hiding, he wrote:

5,000 . . . came to the transfer of their own free will. They had had their fill of the ghetto life, which is a life of hunger and fear of death. They escaped from the trap. Would that I could allow myself to do as they did!

If my life ends—what will become of my diary?¹²⁵

A comrade sent Chaim's diary out of the ghetto. By the following January Chaim had disappeared during an *Aktion*. It is believed that the Germans killed him at Treblinka. Only his diary survived.

If Chaim's diary illustrates the problems faced by adults attempting to create schools in the squalor of Warsaw Ghetto, the following diary, that of the adolescent Janina Bauman, illustrates the experience of some of the youths who partook of the private education available in the Ghetto. Her experiences subtly point out how some aspects of clandestine schools changed the social and cultural practices that existed before the war. Her account of education

¹²³Ibid., 354.

¹²⁴Around 350,000 Jews lived in the ghetto by the summer of 1942. Approximately 287,000 were deported or murdered during the deportation as follows: 10,380 killed during the deportation; 11,580 deported to forced labor camps; 8,000 believed escaped to "Aryan" Warsaw; 55,000 remained in the ghetto as exempt workers or "wildcats" (living unregistered and in hiding); 265,040 sent to the death camp at Treblinka. Many of the escapees and those who remained in the ghetto would subsequently be found and deported as well. Gutman, *Jews*, 212-213.

¹²⁵Kaplan, 400.

also goes beyond the massive deportations of the summer of 1942. She shows that the Jews of Warsaw went on trying to create school even as the Jewish revolt of 1943 brewed.

“The hardest of struggles is to remain human in inhuman conditions.”

Janina Bauman was barely thirteen when the Germans invaded Poland and fifteen when they forced her family into Warsaw Ghetto in 1941. She based her autobiographical account on her diary from the occupation years. Janina's father was a physician and her family seems to have been fairly well off. Apparently able to retain some of their wealth in the ghetto, Janina's family could afford to pay for private teaching. Her narrative shares with us not only her particular experiences, but also her thoughts and the mental anguish associated with them. In January 1943, Janina, her mother, and her sister escaped to the Aryan side of the ghetto wall. They sheltered in a variety of hiding places. Her father who disappeared in 1940 died in the Soviet massacre in the Katyn Forest, but Janina, her mother, and sister survived. The diary was comprised of several copybooks and a number of loose sheets of paper that she hid during the Warsaw uprising of 1944. After the war she retrieved the diary and later lost it once more during her flight to the West in 1968. Following her mother's death in 1980, Janina discovered copies of some of her diary pages and stories among her mother's belongings.¹²⁶

Writing of her life before the German invasion of Poland, Janina Bauman observed that “for some strange reason I was not sent to school until I was eleven. I was taught at home with six or seven other children by private teacher—at my own house or theirs.”¹²⁷

¹²⁶Janina Bauman, *Winter in the Morning: A Young Girl's Life in the Warsaw Ghetto and Beyond 1939-1945* (London: Virago Press, 1986), vii-viii, 1-36, 191-193.

¹²⁷*Ibid.*, 2-3.

The Germans marched into Warsaw two years after Janina began attending a gentile school where she was the only Jewish student in her class. Almost immediately, the occupiers ordered the closing of schools. Cognizant of the danger of contact with the Germans, Janina reported: "We tried not to go out unless it was necessary."¹²⁸

Before long, she found a necessary reason to go out—to attend school:

I do not remember exactly how and when I learnt about the courses organized at my school. From the very beginning of their rule over Poland, the Nazi authorities had set about destroying Polish culture. The universities were closed, academic staff deported to concentration camps, secondary schools banned. In the primary schools which were open, Polish history and geography classes were prohibited. All this had triggered off an instant response in the nation. Teachers, parents, pupils themselves started up a whole system of underground education. The illegal courses began to function soon after the defeat.¹²⁹

Obviously, the opening of illegal schools did not stave off the existent dangers—if anything, it enhanced them. Nonetheless, "ignoring all the dangers of going out, I rushed off to school as soon as I heard it was open."

According to Janina the school was not concealed so much as the curriculum.

Under the guise of sewing and cooking lessons the most important subjects only—Polish, maths, science and history—were taught by just a few teachers to a handful of girls. In my class were no more than ten girls from the previous year, all of them serious, really keen to learn—"the elite." Needless to say, I was the only one wearing the band marked with a blue star.¹³⁰

Although Polish anti-Semitism caused many Jewish students to leave or to be expelled from their schools, at Janina's school it did not. Her Polish classmates rallied to her, giving her their support and protection.

¹²⁸Ibid., 30.

¹²⁹Ibid., 31-32.

¹³⁰Ibid.

After class on my first day we were all about to leave together. In the hall one of the girls to whom I had never been close whispered in my ear, "Slip it off." Taken aback, I obeyed and hid the armband in my pocket. To my great surprise none of the girls said good-bye to me in the street. They all seemed to be heading in the same direction. We talked and laughed as we walked together. It was strange. The year before I had never had any company on my way home, I had always been alone. The following morning two of my new friends were waiting for me at the gate. I slipped off my band again and we went to school together. And so it was ever after: two girls with me in the morning, six or more in the afternoon. I had a warm, reassuring feeling of being among friends.¹³¹

The behavior of Janina's gentile schoolmates certainly was not the experience of all Jews. Anti-Semitism was rife in Poland, even before the invasion of the Germans. However, the combination of a desire to defy their common oppressor and the fact that they had only one Jew, a "good" Jew, in their circle, may have inspired the girls to protect her. Janina rarely saw her other friends "as it was foolhardy to go out unless really necessary."¹³² School served an additional role in providing peer interaction. The friendship of the Catholic girls seems to have been reassuring. As the term progressed, a series of circumstances shrank the school. Janina described the end of classes when she wrote:

The school year was limping to an end earlier than usual. Some teachers had been arrested, some pupils had had to give up school and start working to help their fatherless families. On the last day, Mrs. Kwaskowska, who now was my form tutor, made a little speech. We were just seven, sitting with her intimately in a tiny little classroom. For security's sake she could not give out any written certificates, she said, but our results had been recorded. They would be kept well concealed.¹³³

The next year brought the imposition of the ghetto. Forced to find a new

¹³¹Ibid., 32.

¹³²Ibid.

¹³³Ibid., 38.

apartment, the family moved in with a relative of Janina's uncle. The adults assigned duties and responsibilities to all except Janina and her sister because "the children of the house—Sophie and I—were exempted from major daily tasks. We were expected to continue our studies instead. This we did."¹³⁴

With sufficient assets, private teachers were not hard to find—nor were fellow students. The arrangements, which seem to have been determined by the youths involved, echoed those conditions under which she had attended school until two years previously.

There were many good teachers trapped in the ghetto, and plenty of children wanting to learn. I found a few of my old friends now living close to me, we got in touch with some teachers from a good prewar grammar school for boys called "*Spbinia*" ("Bond"), and within a couple of days we had begun our third year of secondary education. I had only to cross the street or walk for no longer than fifteen minutes to find myself in one of my friends' shabby flats where we gathered daily to study; or they would all come over to my place and, sitting with the teacher around our table, we would translate Horace from Latin or toil over the theorem of Pythagoras.¹³⁵

Again Janina noted the danger travel presented when she discussed the relief she felt at having to go only a few minutes away, sometimes much less, to reach her classes. The short trip to classes was not the case for her younger sister, however. Janina's concern is evident in the following passage.

Sophie, now nearly eleven, also joined a study group of children of her own age. Unfortunately, all her friends lived in "the little ghetto," a district fairly remote from the central part we lived in. Day in and day out she had to walk far through the crowded streets, and cross a busy traffic lane used mainly by German vehicles.¹³⁶

The remoteness of Sophie's school led to frightening consequences before long. Meanwhile the family received a blow with the illness of Janina's uncle who

¹³⁴Ibid., 39.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid., 41.

contracted typhus. That illness required they be quarantined and, when finally released, Janina was eager to return to school. In her diary she recorded:

16 April 1941, evening

Freedom, freedom at last! Everything was fun today, even sitting on this awful settee in Ala's room, squeezed between Zula and Hanka. Even the maths. I've missed quite a lot, by the way, but Hanka says she'll help me make it up in no time. They all seemed extremely pleased when I appeared out of the blue. . . . Lots of news. Lena's five-times-removed relatives—six people including kids—have arrived from Grojec and are staying with her, so we can't meet at her place any more, no room.¹³⁷

Space for classes was always at a premium, as living conditions were overcrowded and tended to become more so with the arrival of more and more persons from outside the city. The difficulty related to space would lead to some changes in how the girls viewed their class formats. Until that time, they studied in separate gender groupings. The Ghetto circumstances caused them to rethink the custom and in the end changed the way they did school. In her diary, Janina wrote that:

16 April 1941, evening

Irena wanted to join our group, but eight is enough, said the girls, and flatly turned her down. So she asked the teachers to let her join the boys. They didn't mind and the boys were delighted, at least she says so. They are nine all together now. Could be nice to meet them—same teachers, same problems.¹³⁸

Going out into the ghetto also provided problems beyond safety. At that point in the ghetto, there were still some people who had reserves of money and valuable goods. They fed themselves, albeit their diets consisted of substandard, nutritionally deficient, unappetizing food. They had housing, uncomfortable or inadequate as it might be. They could pay for things beyond subsistence needs—such as private classes. Others died, quickly or slowly, of a

¹³⁷Ibid.

lack of even the most basic necessities. Writing in her diary in spring 1941, Janina discussed the problem and the chasm that existed between the two groups.

18 April 1941

Two little boys are begging in the street next to our gate. I see them there every time I go out. Or they might be girls, I don't know. Their heads are shaven, clothes in rags, their frightfully emaciated tiny faces bring to mind birds rather than human beings. Their huge black eyes, though, are human; so full of sadness. . . . The younger one may be five or six, the older ten perhaps. They don't move, they don't speak. The little one sits on the pavement, the bigger one just stands there with his claw of a hand stretched out. I must remember now to bring them some food whenever I go out. This morning, on my way to lessons, I gave them my bread and butter meant for lunch. They didn't show any excitement or gratitude, just took it from me and began to eat at once. I saw other people giving them bread or some money, too. This keeps them alive. But, my God, what kind of life is it? . . . I kept accusing myself of being well fed and for that reason entirely indifferent to their plight. . . . The idea of stopping our lessons and giving the money we pay for them each month to the poor won't work either: the teachers who live on it would soon be reduced to poverty. So what can we do? The only conclusion we have managed to come to so far is: we must find a way of being helpful, giving our time, skills (?), physical strength . . . Yes, but how?¹³⁹

How indeed? Having noticed the discrepancy between her circumstances and the suffering and degradation of others, Janina was yet unable to conceive of a solution. Even the thought that school was a luxury she might forgo was of no help. She understood that to use that money for the poor instead would benefit few and might indeed create another group of needy persons. She could envision unemployed teachers begging in the streets if their sources of income disappeared.

Teaching was not only an underground activity but part of the underground economy as well. For some teachers teaching meant extra food

¹³⁸Ibid.

¹³⁹Ibid.

rations supplied by students, their families, or by various organizations who sponsored schools. For others, it meant a source of income in currency. How good of an income is hard to say, even if we knew what that income was, it would be difficult to assess its worth. Nonetheless, for most of those incarcerated in the ghetto any income was of critical importance.

A month later her sister's route to the small ghetto for classes resulted in disaster. Janina's concern for her sister's safety was validated. As she reported in her diary, Sophie "accident" occurred in front of Janusz Korczak's home for children.

15 May 1941, 2 a.m.

This morning Sophie was on her way to her classes, as usual. As she was crossing the traffic lane a heavy German lorry, one of the eight-wheel type, knocked her down and drove away at top speed. . . . [Sophie] lay in the middle of the road, unconscious and spattered with blood. . . . [Witnesses reported that] the German driver did it on purpose, knocked Sophie down because he wanted to.¹⁴⁰

More than ever aware of the dangers posed by going about in the ghetto, Janina continued her education. During the summer break in 1941, she and her friends worked as volunteers for an organization growing food in the ghetto. Thus, they assuaged their concerns about spending money for education while others died of hunger. Aside from the satisfaction of helping others, the girls received "a good training in agriculture."¹⁴¹ Agricultural training was highly regarded by Zionist youth. Agricultural skills augmented the knowledge of those who planned to immigrate to Palestine. Janina later wrote, "the 'school year' was just coming to an end, so we started working almost at once."¹⁴² That statement suggests that, had the schedule fallen differently, they would have deferred the summer work until school ended. These students did not take their

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 45. Sophie recovered from this accident although this required surgery, physical therapy, and a six-month convalescence.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 48.

¹⁴²Ibid.

education lightly. They made every effort to follow the schedules and curricula as nearly as they could.

Summer ended and Janina and her friends returned to their classes. In that winter Janina, who aspired to follow in her father's and grandfather's footsteps and become a physician, learned of an intriguing educational opportunity.

I heard that medical lectures were being given in the big building next to one of the ghetto gates. The building belonged to the "Aryan" side, but the lectures were sponsored by the Jewish Council and were meant for Jews. In fact, it was an almost standard unofficial university course in medicine. We rushed there at once, Hanka and I, and managed to cross the sinister gate alongside bona fide students who were showing their permits to the German guard. Once inside the building, we easily slipped into the lecture hall and immersed ourselves in the world of genetics. The lecture was being given by a prominent scientist of Jewish origin, Professor Ludwik Hirszfeld. It was clear and fascinating. We could follow it without effort, though we were only secondary school pupils without sufficient learning to attend the university. The following week we crossed the gate again and listened to the next lecture on genetics. Later on the checkups at the gate were reinforced and on the third attempt we luckily escaped a beating, just by the skin of our teeth. So we had to give up our medical studies.¹⁴³

One can see that, in spite of their awareness of the danger, the girls found the courage to brave the risks of sneaking out of the ghetto for further education. Only when directly threatened with punishment did they cease that particular activity. Apparently they were not quite ready to risk a beating or worse to attend lectures outside their educational level. They seem to have made a distinction between activities that were "necessary," going to school, and desirable, sneaking into medical lectures.

It was during that time also that Janina reported having assayed her "first steps in English," a subject that eventually took on great meaning.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³Ibid., 54.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., 55.

In mid-June 1942, the end of that school year and the last in Warsaw Ghetto, Janina reported:

In the middle of June we sat the unofficial exams, supervised by our own teachers only. Irena, my friend from before the war who had joined the boys' courses a year earlier, came to me with a message from her group. The boys wanted to meet the girls from my group and suggested a party to celebrate the end of our exams.¹⁴⁵

After two years of parallel schools, one for girls and one for boys and Irena, with a shared set of teachers, the two groups had not met—much less joined forces.

It is worth noting that these students held strongly to a school model based on past experiences while living in a world that bore little resemblance to their past lives. That may have resulted from a variety of influences; certainly one of them was to be a desire to retain some semblance of familiar existence. They were unaware that all of that familiar life, as well as the new lives they had created in the ghetto, were about to end. Four or five weeks later, on 22 July 1943, the Germans initiated mass deportations from the ghetto. By 13 September 1942, the Germans removed 300,000 of the 370,000 persons still locked in the ghetto that June. They forced the majority to go to the *Umschlagplatz* and, from there, transported them by freight car to Treblinka where they asphyxiated them with poison gas.¹⁴⁶

Janina, her mother, and her sister all escaped the deportation. Throughout that fall, they lived a precarious life. The girls were not registered and thus were living "wild."¹⁴⁷ Answering a summons issued to her mother for work, Janina found herself assigned to clean and clear apartments recently vacated by Jews. There she met a former acquaintance, Natan. Forgetting

¹⁴⁵Ibid., 61.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., 65-66. Dawidowicz 310. Gutman notes that German figures for actual freight car statistics totaled 253,741. In addition, they killed 10,380 during the deportation *Aktion*, sent 11,580 to a *Durchgangslager* (Transit Camp), and estimated around 28,000 assumed to have escaped to the "Aryan" side of Warsaw or to have remained in the Ghetto unregistered or "wild." Those figures add up to 303,701. Gutman, *The Jews of Warsaw*, 212-213.

¹⁴⁷A ghetto term that meant not registered but living in the ghetto—possibly working in a clandestine enterprise

their work assignment they “settled on a pile of moldy feathers . . . and began to talk in earnest,” comparing their experiences and their hopes. Natan, like Janina “of course . . . longed to start studying again.”¹⁴⁸ The opportunity soon arrived. Even in these dreadful circumstances, starving, fearful, in danger of discovery at any moment, they resumed their studies. Janina described it saying:

December slipped by. I went to evening classes with another girl and Natan, my friend. The teacher was a middle-aged man, worn and scared. He lived “wild” in a dark little room nearby which he shared with strangers—a family of three. We sat in this room trying to concentrate on logarithms, while the family of three gaped at us vacantly. Despite our initial zeal, it was no good. We were all starving, we expected the *Action* to start again any time. Hair-raising rumours of the imminent end of the Warsaw ghetto grew louder from day to day.¹⁴⁹

On 18 January 1943 the deportations resumed. Janina, her mother, and her sister escaped from the ghetto to begin a period of hiding. Moving from place to place, sometimes separated from each other, there seemed no possibility of continuing her education.

In some of the hiding places, Janina did have books to read but she longed to have lessons as evidenced by the following story.

Once Auntie Maria brought me good news. By chance, she had met Hanka’s mother in the street. . . . Mrs. K. and Hanka had escaped from the ghetto just before the second *Aktion*. . . . They did not need to hide, they both looked like plain peasant women. Mrs. K. found a job and earned some money; Hanka resumed her studies with an underground study group.

I was overwhelmed by the news, happy and envious at the same time, since I could not go out and join a study group myself.¹⁵⁰

or, in some cases, like Janina reporting for work under her mother’s name.

¹⁴⁸Bauman, 88.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., 92.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., 106. Auntie Maria, once the nanny of Janina’s mother, later Janina’s grandparents’ housekeeper, was a good friend of the family. It was with her that they left many of their belongings and valuables when forced into the ghetto. She was able to sell those things gradually and it was that money that sustained them and eventually bought them safe hiding places. Hanka was a good friend of Janina’s and they had belonged to the same study

In the winter of 1944, while still in hiding, Janina's cousin Maryla, who had also escaped, urged Janina to study English again. That time Janina did so with a different goal.

I was now particularly keen to learn. I thought that with a knowledge of English I could be useful to the underground which I had always wanted to join. There were so few people in the country who spoke the language. Imagine a wounded British parachutist having to be hidden and looked after by Poles? It sometimes happened, they said. Would I not be a godsend to him? Thus I daydreamed, earnestly repeating:

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd
A host, of golden daffodils . . .

Only after thirty years did I realize that my wounded hero would not have understood me because of my dreadful pronunciation.¹⁵¹

Janina, her mother, and her sister all survived until liberated at 8 a. m. on Friday, 19 January 1945.

Mary Berg, Chaim Kaplan, and Janina Bauman all represent those who with courage and resourcefulness set about the difficult task of schooling in Warsaw Ghetto. Their focus was on reproducing school that was, as nearly as was possible, like school as it had been, despite German depredations.

The following four narratives place school in a somewhat different light. The first two are those of Zivia Lubetkin and Yitzhak Zuckerman, leaders of the Jewish Resistance organization. For Zivia and Yitzhak, creating school had several purposes—some of them directly related to the Resistance and to the Dror movement.¹⁵² Zivia, Yitzhak, and their cohort would have been among the

group in the ghetto.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 144-145.

¹⁵²Dror was another name for a Zionist socialist youth movement called Frayhayt-He-Halutz Ha-Tza'ir. Yitzhak

group that caused Chaim such anxiety in the first year of the occupation. They were also the group toward whom Mary and Janina looked in their admiration of the Resistance.

“There were still sources of light and creativity within the dismal helplessness of the ghetto.”

Zivia Lubetkin was twenty-five when the Germans invaded Poland. A leader in the Zionist youth movement Dror and later of the ZOB (Zydowska Organizacja Bojowa or Jewish Fighting Organization), she was active in planning and implementing a variety of underground activities. These included the armed resistance to German army units in the first half of 1943, culminating in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.¹⁵³ Whether she taught in the *gymnasium* described in this essay is not clear, but it is clear that she was part of the group that conceived, founded, and supported it—morally and materially. Zivia Lubetkin’s post-liberation account of the founding and implementation of two clandestine schools in the Warsaw Ghetto is less a personal memoir than a report of an organization’s efforts to educate Jewish youth in that ghetto. Thus in a few short pages she concisely described those efforts and their outcomes. Zivia eventually settled in Israel.¹⁵⁴

In the ghetto, Zivia was aware, as many Jews were not, of the wholesale murder of the Jews of Europe—especially of Poland. She had a leading role in the Jewish resistance of Warsaw that gathered intelligence concerning the treatment of Jews and the destinations of deportation transports. Thus, she had no illusions as to why it was important to have school. She knew that, barring a miracle, these young people faced death and that many of them

Zuckerman, *A Surplus of Memory: Chronicle of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. trans. and ed. Barbara Harshav (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 1.

¹⁵³Ibid., 4.

¹⁵⁴Zivia Lubetkin and Yitzhak Zuckerman (a.k.a. Captain Antek) another leader of the Warsaw Ghetto resistance later married.

would have to fight to preserve their lives or at least to choose their deaths. She also realized the importance of nurturing their intellects—educating them to be knowledgeable participants in their lives, building within them a strong spirit, and bonding them into a collective willing to stand up for themselves and each other against a formidable enemy.

Zivia described the initial motivation for forming schools for the Jewish children locked behind the ghetto walls:

The Dror elementary school and gymnasium (high school) were among the most inspiring institutions created in the ghetto. The Germans had ordered all schools closed. (Later, elementary schools were allowed to reopen.)¹⁵⁵ We saw the younger generation living in idleness, growing up ignorant and boorish. This was precisely the Germans' aim. Therefore, we felt it our duty to do something about it particularly among the children of the poor, and so we established our underground schools.¹⁵⁶

From the beginning, the schools were an act of resistance. In this case, they were resisting not so much the German ban on schools, although that as well, but rather their goal of a creating a generation of Jews growing up uneducated and “boorish”—in other words, as German propaganda portrayed them. The Dror movement, and others as well, reached a decision not to let that happen—to resist the destruction not only of Jewish bodies but also of Jewish hearts and minds as well.

Zivia began her report on the Dror schools by describing their intentions and the conditions under which the teachers and students worked.

Our original intention was to establish a high school to teach secular and Jewish subjects to our movement members. With time, we expanded and had more than one hundred and twenty students. The working conditions for the teachers were extremely difficult. We had thirteen teachers on our staff, who had to manage without permanent classrooms, desks, textbooks, or supplementary materials of any

¹⁵⁵These included a Yiddish and a Hebrew elementary schools.

¹⁵⁶Zivia Lubetkin, *In the Days of Destruction and Revolt*, trans. Ishaï Tubbin and Yehiel Yanay (Israel: Beit

kind. Groups of teachers and their students were forced to wander from one apartment to another. In a single narrow room where an entire family was living in cramped conditions, in the dead of winter, in the terrible cold, a group of students (we called them a "complet") would huddle together in a corner to study with their teacher. The teachers sat there, hungry, their legs swollen from the cold, instructing shivering students bloated from hunger. For many months we subsisted on the packages we received from our fellow movement members in Vilna. They sent us such delicacies as sausage and butter that we sold for bread and staples, which went to our students and to our teachers and their families. For months on end we didn't have sufficient funds to pay our teachers' salaries.¹⁵⁷

This is one of the more vivid accounts of the conditions not only under which Jews incarcerated in the Warsaw Ghetto taught and learned, but of the teachers and the students themselves. They were not all children whose families could feed them extra rations or pay teachers to give private classes. Some of the students probably had no families left.

The Dror school was part of a forceful social and political movement. If there was a concealed curriculum, it took second place to one openly designed to convince the students to abandoned bourgeois ideals and join together to create change. The message for the students was that they should learn to think and to question the status quo. The leaders anticipated the defeat of their tormentors, and the students of that school needed preparation to resume life, albeit one different from the past.

We added the history of the labor movement in general and that of the Jewish labor movement in Eretz Israel in particular, to the regular curriculum. The uniqueness of our school, however, did not only depend on the material studied. This was aptly expressed by one of our students at the graduation party: "I have learned many facts here about geography, mathematics, and history, but most important of all I have acquired ideas." Our school was indeed a school of life for these youngsters for whom this new idealism became the very air they breathed.¹⁵⁸

Lohamei Haghetaot-Ghetto Fighter's House, 1981), 68.

¹⁵⁷Ibid.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., 68-69.

That school made full use of the charismatic young members of the movement not only to teach, but also to inspire the students to continue the work of the movement. The goal of Dror seemed to be that these adolescents be educated not to simply improve their lives but to share their knowledge and ideals with others.

The majority of the students passed their knowledge on to others who didn't have the chance to attend our school, but were later to play an important role in the uprising. The living spirit behind the school was Yitzhak Katzenelson. He was our most respected and popular teacher. His specialty was Bible, and he taught his students to love their people and their heritage, and to strive for national independence. His enthusiasm was contagious and at its height he would start singing and his students and the family in whose apartment they were studying would soon join in. It was usually very difficult to find classrooms in apartments, but there was never a problem in securing one for Katzenelson's lessons.¹⁵⁹

The teachers, Zivia indicated, dedicated their lives not only to their students but also to the work of the movement and to a variety of resistance projects. Some fought and some died in the fighting. Some worked to create an archive of documents detailing the treatment of the Jews. Others worked to feed and shelter fellow Jews.

Marek Folman, the mathematics teacher, was also the school's principal. He was more than just a teacher, he was a friend and counselor. After he was sent to other work in Bendzin, he was replaced by Chaim Zelmanowski, a superb biology teacher and a brilliant educator. Prior to the war, he had never been a member of the Movement, but now he gave himself totally to the school. Josef Sack, a member of the Zionist-Socialist faction of the Po'alei Zion Party, contributed much of his time to our school. In addition to his many public and party obligations, he taught world literature and the Polish language. The teaching staff also included Eliahu Gutkowski, one of Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum's closest aides in the compiling of the underground archives, known by the code name, "Oneg Shabbat" (Sabbath Joy), and

¹⁵⁹Ibid., 69.

Perla Levi from Lodz, Leyzer Levin's sister-in-law. Another staff member, Wither, a young mathematics teacher, fell in one of Drop's partisan units at Hrubieszow in August 1942. The rest of the teachers were Braginski Benderska, Weissberg, Zelmanowska, the wife of Chaim Zelmanowski, and Staszewski. They were killed during the Great Deportation in the summer of 1942.¹⁶⁰

Zivia also discussed another type of schooling—that of the children of the rich. She seemed to understand, although not necessarily endorse that teaching; more to the point she evinced a certain satisfaction that while these teachers received good pay for those classes they preferred teaching for the Dror Gymnasium.

High school groups were later formed for the children of the rich; their teachers were paid handsomely, but many of the more idealistic among them still preferred to work for us. They claimed they learned about and felt part of a pioneering spirit which gave them the inner strength to continue their struggle with life. It was a special privilege for teacher and student alike to be among those involved with the underground Dror high school in the Warsaw Ghetto.¹⁶¹

Nor, Zivia reported, did the movement focus only on secondary students, who might be imminent potential members, at the expense of young children. The movement provided clandestine education for young children and organized a clandestine teacher training organization as well.

Everything I have said about the high school applies equally to our elementary school. The Germans did eventually permit the functioning of elementary schools within the ghetto.¹⁶²

Zivia and her colleagues not only felt that academic education was important, but also that cultural exposure and participation was essential as well. In addition, they thought that no child was too young for their concern;

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 69-70.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 70.

¹⁶²Ibid., 70-71.

they provided programs for even the tiniest children and were not content simply to provide untrained caretakers.

The work of the "house committees" is worthy of special mention. We used to leave the house before the curfew and spend the night in a courtyard, where we arranged to have an evening of cultural activity. In the evening, everyone would meet in a student's house to study or discuss the issues of the day, or just to sit and sing. Later the students became part of the Movement. The Warsaw branch of the Movement grew considerably. We had more than 1,000 members and our youth leaders were dedicated, talented, and showed great initiative. They were in charge of all the youth activities in the city. Another cultural activity we ran at that time was the "kinder-winklen" ("children's corners"). Nursery-school and kindergarten teachers, who took special courses organized by the Movement, would care for the younger children while their parents were away. Members of our Movement were also on the staff of the primary school established by the Socialist-Zionist Po'alei Zion Party. One of our girls worked with Janusz Korczak and another joined the staff of Aharon Koninski, the talented educator who ran a large children's house at 13 Mylna Street.¹⁶³

Members of the movement participated in the actual running of the schools, and of related schools as well, including those of Korczak and Koninski.

In the following paragraph, Zivia made an important point about memories of the ghetto. As often happens in certain events in history, those who provide descriptions fasten upon one event or one individual to represent a certain sort of experience, and gradually others retreat into obscurity. She offered a reminder that there were a variety of persons in Warsaw whose goal was to save, protect, and educate children and many of them met similar fates.

Koninski was a member of the Po'alei Zion, Z. S. and a friend of our cause. Just like Janusz Korczak, he voluntarily accompanied his children to the *Umschlagplatz*, and went with them as they were taken to the Treblinka Death Camp during the Aktion (deportation) in the Warsaw Ghetto. The name of Korczak has been remembered by the entire world while that of Aharon Koninski has been

¹⁶³Ibid., 71.

forgotten. We did not stop singing during those difficult times. We organized choirs for children and adults. They were conducted by Professor Israel Faywiszys from Lodz, a friend of Yitzhak Katzenelson. Every appearance of the children's choir was like a holiday among the Jewish community. The performances of the choirs and the dramatic group would attract thousands of Jews seeking temporary relief from the darkness of ghetto life. Such gatherings were in themselves a profoundly significant demonstration. There were still sources of light and creativity within the dismal helplessness of the ghetto.¹⁶⁴

In the above section, Zivia returned to the matter of cultural activities. She noted that not only were these an important part of the education of the Ghetto youth, but they provided relief and inspiration to thousands of others as well. She understood that schools are an important part of every community and that they should both give to and receive from those communities.

In closing her essay, Zivia reiterated that the Movement did not merely sponsor the Dror school—they actively participated in it as well. A variety of members including the party leaders had important roles in the education of Jewish youth.

We included various party leaders in all of our cultural activities such as Leyzer Leaven, Josef Sack, Shalom Grajek, Yohanan Morgenstern, Leib Katz, Avraham Fischelson and Moshe Lichtstein.¹⁶⁵

Zivia Lubetkin survived the Warsaw Ghetto. One of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, in the spring of 1943 she escaped and continued in Resistance work and leadership. In 1944, she was in the Warsaw Rising. She survived that uprising also, and in 1946, she immigrated to Israel.

One of Zivia's colleagues, whom she later married, was Yitzhak Zuckerman. Second in command of the ZOB, the Jewish Fighting Organization that engaged the German army in the heroic, doomed Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

¹⁶⁴Ibid., 71-72.

¹⁶⁵Ibid., 72.

in 1944, Yitzhak Zuckerman nonetheless also involved himself in making and keeping the Dror Gymnasium as well as schools and other educational activities for younger children. His narrative also includes an episode wherein the Dror school became involved in espionage for the Resistance.

“Gentlemen, if you wait for the Germans to allow you, you won’t have a school.”

Yitzhak Zuckerman was born in 1915 in Vilna. Following his graduation from the Hebrew *gymnasium* in 1933, Yitzhak was accepted to university programs in Vilna and in Jerusalem but he eschewed both to join the He-Halutz Zionist Youth Movement. By 1936, Yitzhak belonged to the Central Committee of the Movement in Warsaw. The year he turned twenty-four, war broke out when the Germans invaded Poland. The movement went underground and Yitzhak escaped to safety in the Soviet Union. Later he voluntarily returned to Warsaw to work in the underground movement there. Following the Great Deportation *Aktion* of July to September 1942, Yitzhak was a leading figure in the formation of the ZOB. Before then he worked with the youth of that ghetto and was instrumental in the formation of Dror sponsored schools as well as educational and cultural programs. He became the second-in-command of the ZOB, which spearheaded the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in early 1943.¹⁶⁶

Unlike many European Jews at the time, Yitzhak Zuckerman understood the perniciousness of German intentions.¹⁶⁷ He possessed an early understanding that attempts to work with them would fail. His work focussed

¹⁶⁶Zuckerman, 1, 13, 16, 19, 36-37, 39, 193, and 228.

¹⁶⁷He did not immediately understand the extent of the German intentions, however. Of the early days of the occupation, he later wrote that in 1940: “I really don’t understand the Germans, I said at the time; what do they get out of killing another thousand, ten thousand Jews? What do they want to achieve? It didn’t occur to me then that, if the final goal was really the total destruction of the Jews, they were on the ‘right track.’” Because all that humiliation and contempt, the oppression and weakening of the mind and body—that was the system they stuck to. I didn’t foresee what was in the offing, since I wasn’t a prophet.” *Ibid.*, 65.

on working with Jews and finding ways to resist and compensate for the depredations of the Germans. He also sought ways to work with Polish gentiles to create a resistance coalition. Yitzhak, a leader of the developing Jewish Resistance, later recalled the effort to make schools in the Warsaw Ghetto. The particular schools he described are the same that Zivia Lubetkin reported in her narrative. In the following passage, he referred to the same negotiations as did Chaim Kaplan in the second narrative in this chapter.

At the approach of the school year in 1940, the issue of study came up: the Germans forbade schools! Spring was past and summer was gone and there were no lessons. They closed all the Jewish schools. The Poles were allowed to maintain independent schools. But in the Jewish areas, Polish schools didn't exist. Jews were allowed neither Tarbut schools nor CYSHO⁷⁶ schools nor any other schools. In this period, I started getting involved in cultural enterprises. I participated in the administration of Tarbut, along with the "elders," Lipa Bloch, Menakhem Kirshenbaum,⁷⁷ and a teacher named Rosenblum. There were debates about whether the Germans would allow us to have schools. I couldn't say to them: "Gentlemen if you wait for the Germans to allow you, you won't have a school." Over and over, they reported on negotiations of the *Judenrat* with the Germans. Then came the idea not to wait anymore, but to set up an underground academic Gymnasium; and we did.

76. Central Yiddish School Organization, a network of secular schools in Yiddish.

77. Menachem Kirshenbaum: Born in Lublin. Underground activist. Member of the General Zionists and of the ZOB Coordinating Committee. Moved to the Aryan side of Warsaw after January 1943. Taken to Pawiak Prison, where he was murdered at the age of fifty.¹⁶⁸

Yitzhak already understood that negotiations between the *Judenrat* and the German occupation authorities were useless. If the Jewish youths of Warsaw were to attend school, then that work was in the hands of the Jews themselves. The Dror movement set about establishing its school—from a very small beginning it grew and, while never massive in size, its students, graduating as they did into the movement itself and on into the ZOB (Zydowska

¹⁶⁸Ibid., 61.

Organizacja Bojowa or Jewish Fighting Organization) proved a significant legacy of the Ghetto.

Initially, there were three students and eight teachers in that school. In time, the number of students increased. An almost complete list of names was published in *Dappim*.⁷⁸ The school needed eight teachers, and we needed money because the teachers needed an income. In 1940 and 1941, we got packages of delicacies from Vilna: sausages, cheese, and so forth. But *Dzielna* didn't see any of that, since we sold it all and gave the money to the teachers. That was the subject of bitter debate at *Dzielna* 34. Some argued that the Gymnasium took the food out of the members' mouths and, in fact, that was true.

I can guarantee one thing: not a single one of our leaders in Warsaw had more bread to eat than any other member at *Dzielna* 34. Sometimes party members wanted to take care of Frumka, Zivia, and me and would invite us to meetings in a restaurant at *Dzielna* 36. In such cases, we would eat there and not at *Dzielna*. That happened once a month, or once every two months; I would always "bless" those meetings, not so much because of the topics. They were very simple dishes, but I didn't see such things at *Dzielna*.

78. *Dappim Le-Heker Ha-Shoah*, January-April 1951.¹⁶⁹

Members of the movement acted in ways strongly adhering to egalitarianism and fairness. The movement supported a commune where everyone received equally from Movement resources. This characteristic influenced strong feelings of camaraderie between the adults and youths, who did not necessarily live in the commune, in their schooling efforts.

We had to worry about maintaining the underground movement, the branches and communications, and *Dzielna* 34; and we had to provide shoes and clothing to all the members. . . . We could endure those bitter debates about where the money went because we ourselves lived just like everybody else in the commune, and we ate breakfast, lunch, and dinner there.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 62.

Aside from other problems they faced, they had to contend with criticism of their schooling efforts in particular. Some felt that such pursuits were frivolous but others had a strong motive for continuing those efforts. As Yitzhak reported:

I remember one question we were asked in a meeting of the members: how can you spend money on intellectual things instead of on physical needs? I never regretted that, and I'm proud of the Gymnasium.

The Gymnasium lasted until the beginning of the first *Aktsia* and then expired. The *Aktsia* caught up with it in the summer of 1942, and the Gymnasium wasn't reopened afterward. At the end, there were 120 students and 13 teachers. Except for the 4 or 5 students who remained alive, all others were killed defending the ghetto or in partisan units. Those four are: Havka Folman, Janka Sak (Yonat Sened), Shoshana Gzeda (Kliger),⁷⁹ and Sima Ravitska (Krysinski, the daughter of a Bundist, who now lives in Kfar Saba, Israel; her father sent her to us because there wasn't anywhere else to study).

79. Shoshana Gziedza: Born in Warsaw in 1923. Member of Dror underground; active in youth work and distribution of underground literature. Was imprisoned in Pawiak at the beginning of the Great Aktsia on July 22, 1942. Identified as a Pole, she was sent to Maidanek and various concentration camps in Germany. Survived the war and immigrated to Israel.¹⁷¹

Although Jews in the ghetto formed schools in part to shield students from some aspects of life under German rule, in fact it shielded them from few hardships. It shielded them from ignorance and isolation, but it mitigated only slightly the hunger and disease that stalked them. Whatever protection the Dror school afforded its students, it could not, and did not try, to shield them from reality. It laid bare to them the truth of the German's intentions and tried to prepare them to resist their harsh environment and the plans of their murderers. It encouraged them to act.

The Dror students were active participants in their schooling even organizing some aspects of their studies. Schooling was complex in its structure yet teachers and students were undaunted by the intricacies.

¹⁷¹Ibid.

The students organized study groups of five, in various houses—at Dzielna 34, with Havka's family, and so forth. Being scattered in houses made things very hard because the teacher always had to run, remember the places, and teach according to the curriculum. The principal of the Gymnasium was Haim Zelmanowski. First we thought it would be Sak, but he was always busy with public affairs. The person who actually ran the Gymnasium was Marek Folman.¹⁷²

The curriculum was composed of two elements—the standard *gymnasium* requirements and topics related to the youth movement. Yitzhak explained:

The Gymnasium, called the Dror Gymnasium, held courses and exams in every subject, and maintained all the formalities of a Gymnasium. In addition to the requirements, things were taught there that were never taught in any Hebrew Gymnasium in Poland. We introduced some unique topics, common in the youth movement: mutual May Day celebrations, celebrations of Tel-Hai Day⁸⁰ and Hanukah, as well as social discussions. The Gymnasium, in general, was like a youth movement. The senior students were monitors for the younger children. Everyone gave what he could. Yitzhak Katznelson ran dramatic circles; there was a choir and plays were performed. Everything centered on the Gymnasium and the Movement. And that was our semi-legitimate aspect.

80. Tel-Hai Day: Tel-Hai, a settlement in the north of Israel. Joseph Trumpeldor and seven comrades were killed defending it in 1920. Tel-Hai Day, 11 Adar, became a Zionist holiday.¹⁷³

The Dror Gymnasium was surrounded by horrors on a daily basis and one must realize that there were many dangers associated with conducting school and that some filtered into it directly. Yet the school persisted and even achieved an additional role in the Jewish Resistance within the Ghetto. Yitzhak remembered a particularly important and harrowing role in the following story:

Naturally, there was no lack of foul-ups. Like this one: Marek Folman tried to get

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Ibid., 63.

students who could pay tuition. But we also had to support poor students, lower-class students, who didn't have money and couldn't pay. One day, Marek came on the twelve-year-old son of a rich man, Abraham Gancwajch, and was very happy about it. I was still a stranger in the city and I learned that the man paid a lot of money because he wanted his son to study in this Gymnasium. In time, we found out that that Gancwajch was the leader of the Trzynastka [The Thirteen], a *Judenrat* institution whose official function was to fight profiteers, and such.⁸¹ In fact, however, he was simply a Gestapo agent in the ghetto. He was from Radomsk, worked in Czestochowa, and then in Austria. He had been a member of Po'alei Zion-Z.S. but had been expelled from the party for sins he had supposedly committed. He knew Hebrew. By this time, he was already remote from Po'alei Zion. He was intimate with writers, tried to get friendly with Yitzhak Katznelson, Yitzhak Schipper, and others, and demonstrated concern for artists. Once my "musical ear" picked up the name Gancwajch. I began to get interested, and it turned out that the son of the Gestapo man was one of our students, and thus endangered the entire Gymnasium.

81. Abraham Gancwajch (1904-?): A Gestapo agent in the Warsaw Ghetto; submitted bi-weekly reports to the Gestapo on the underground in the ghetto. He also worked for some time in the Aryan quarter against the Polish underground. All traces of him have vanished. See Czerniakow 1979: 330 & passim; Gutman 1989: 90-94; Ainsztein 1979: 7-14.¹⁷⁴

Suddenly the *gymnasium* was faced with the problem of having a member of the "enemy" in their midst—privy to their secret as it were. They must devise a plan with all expediency to save themselves. As it happened they thought of a plan that did more.

When we told Marek what we learned about the "great windfall" he had brought us, he got scared too. We decided that the boy should continue studying a few more weeks or months, and then Marek would go to Gancwajch and tell him that the Gymnasium was being dismantled for lack of money. A few months later, Marek did go to Gancwajch and tell him the story. Gancwajch offered Marek a job as private tutor for his son; Marek replied that he was very busy but would consider it. When Marek came to discuss it, we told him to take it. So Marek became a tutor in Gancwajch's house. After he became familiar with the place, I asked him to pay attention to the papers and documents there, and he took from the house a kind of

¹⁷⁴Ibid.

report on underground studies in the ghetto and on yeshivas. We were the only ones not mentioned in the report. That is, he denounced everyone except us. At the Bar-Mitzvah of the Gancwajch boy, while Marek was still his tutor, the son showed him a Hebrew book, the Book of the Shomrim of Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir, with a dedication in German, a Bar-Mitzvah present from the Gestapo. I don't remember exactly when Marek got out of there with the excuse that he couldn't continue. And so we parted from Gancwajch. I know he didn't denounce Dzielna 34, where groups and discussions took place, or the Dror Gymnasium; he just denounced others.¹⁷⁵

Such was the power of the Dror Gymnasium, a power emanating from its educational qualities rather than any political or military power, that it not only attracted a father as powerful as Gancwajch but inspired him to protect both the school and the Movement that sponsored it. It is worth noting that he did not protect other schools or movements but denounced them to the Germans. This incident also suggests that the school leaders saw the school as something other than an educational institution; they clearly regarded it as a part of the resistance community that they used to further their other work.

Although this *gymnasium* was a Resistance organization, and despite the hardships and terrors surrounding it, the content and organization of the school in some ways followed that of more ordinary schools.

There were examinations in the Gymnasium. German and Polish were taught along with Hebrew; and there were promotions from grade to grade. One of our students was Hancia (Plotnizka). She had no formal education and we wanted her to study. She studied along with Havka, even though she was much older.¹⁷⁶

However, the teachers worked in other roles and in time so did their students.

Havka's group was an unusual group, which played a key role in the education of the young generation in Warsaw. All its members were killed. The students who later served as couriers played an important role and were killed in various towns. It's not enough to sit "on high" and give orders. They did the work on the ground. I

¹⁷⁵Ibid., 63-64.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., 64.

can't imagine how we would have run the Movement without the graduates of the Gymnasium, or what place our Movement would have had in the uprising if not for the Seminars and the Gymnasium. All the links were intertwined and created the Movement web.¹⁷⁷

The Dror Gymnasium operated until massive deportations during the summer of 1942. During the summer break, the Germans deported and murdered hundreds of thousands of the Jews confined in the Warsaw Ghetto. Led and supported by the teachers and students of the Dror Gymnasium, many of the remaining Jews began to plan a more direct resistance.

The Gymnasium existed until summer 1942. We finished school in June, the Great German Aktsia began on July 22. By that time, I was no longer involved in the Gymnasium. This was after the German operations in Vilna and Chelmno, and other events. I was deep underground at that time, in hiding. This is how the chapter of the Gymnasium ended.¹⁷⁸

Those were busy times for the Movement in the ghetto. Not only did they run schools for children—they ran programs to train teachers as well. In addition, they assisted in the running of orphanages and schools other than their own. Still they could not include all children and youth. Some attended other schools and some attended none at all.

Let me add a superficial review of a few areas of our educational and Movement activity. In the seminars, we had to add another course for the girls, to train them as kindergarten teachers. Our schools didn't include all the children, some stayed in the courtyards and didn't study. On Gesia, there was an orphanage, which was a children's day school. If memory serves me correctly, one of the Plotnitzka sisters was a teacher there, maybe principal of the school. But we also worked in other

¹⁷⁷Ibid.

¹⁷⁸Ibid.

schools and included only a minority of the children in the courtyards of the many houses.¹⁷⁹

Frayhayt-He-Halutz Ha-Tza'ir, even as it evolved into the ZOB, remained committed to the task of aid to the Jewish children. They performed dual tasks in the best progressive tradition combining schools and social work.

We activated every possible member for educational and social work and, of course, in this respect, Gesia 12 was of great help since children there got aid from CENTOS⁸⁶ and welfare committees not directly supervised by the party.

86. Centrala Opieki nad Sierotami (Organization for the Care of Orphans), established in 1936.¹⁸⁰

Some children slipped through the cracks, however. Like others, Yitzhak felt frustration over the plight of refugees, especially the children. Those children seldom benefited from the efforts of ghetto school makers. Both their transitory existence and their swift death rates stymied efforts on their behalf—indeed they appeared and disappeared too quickly for most efforts to come to fruition.

By now, there were a lot of refugees in Warsaw. Jewish Warsaw was swollen by many uprooted people who were simply dying, even before Treblinka. I spent some evenings in the courtyards of the refugees and stayed overnight because you couldn't move. What could you do in the face of that poverty? Families lived by selling their goods in the market on Gesia until they ran out of things. Then they died. I saw families, whole tribes, towns that disappeared. When I came back to them some time later, I didn't find a soul.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹Ibid., 65-66.

¹⁸⁰Ibid.

¹⁸¹Ibid., 66. On page 129 Yitzhak recalled: "We tried somehow to operate under those conditions. At the Eichmann trial, Zivia told of the children begging on the streets in winter: 'A shtikele broyt, a shtikele broyt. (A piece of bread, a piece of bread.)' And, she added: 'We didn't have "a shtikele broyt"; I would get up in the morning and find the child dead. They were like hunted little animals. You can't imagine the grief and suffering of the Jewish child. How they died like flies! And even if an orphanage was opened, and even if you tried to assemble them and give them shelter—how many could you help? Maybe one one thousandth!' Some of the children became smugglers, were beaten, and would hide; there were break-ins of houses."

For those more closely associated with the movement, however, prospects were much better. Although in the end many died at the hands of the Germans, they did not die of the planned extermination by attrition that resulted in so many ghetto deaths. Within the Dror movement:

[T]here was only one single case of death by starvation among us, a tragic case of one of our students in the first seminar, who was scolded for not working properly. One day, I took him for a talk and said: "Listen, they're watching you, you've got a function, you're an educator, and there are complaints." He didn't answer. It turned out he was afraid that if it were discovered he had tuberculosis, we would throw him out of the commune. And expulsion from the commune meant death. Of course that was utter nonsense on his part. After we found out about him, we put him in the sanatorium at Otwock, where he died a while later. I don't remember any cases of death among our members, not on Dzielna, or Grochow, or Czerniakow.¹⁸²

Yitzhak also described the relations between educators and members of the Resistance in the ghetto. While not all belonged to the same parties, and not all worked in the same schools and educational movements, there was a certain amount of sharing and mutual exploration.

[Emanuel] Ringelblum's relations to Ha-Shomer Ha-Tza'ir were very close, even ideologically. But that didn't keep us from inviting Ringelblum to lecture. He was a very boring lecturer. The girls who had known him as a teacher from the Yehudia school also thought so. That was the opposite of Menakhem Linder, who was an interesting lecturer in dull subjects like statistics and economics, whereas Ringelblum would take living chapters of history and "kill" them. . . . More about the members of Oneg Shabbat:¹⁶³ Dr. Natan Eck had less to do with Oneg Shabbat than did Rachel Auerbach.¹⁶⁴ We maintained contact with her at a certain time when I was outside Dzielna. When I came to an assembly, a lunch was arranged for me at a kitchen on our street, where she was director. The meals there were better. I would meet her there in the kitchen. I also met with the teacher Abraham Lewin who was also a member of Oneg Shabbat.¹⁶⁵ I could speak Hebrew with him, and I told him I had read his *Cantonists*.¹⁶⁶ We became friends and he was also one of our

¹⁸²Ibid., 67.

lecturers. Rosenblum, the director of Tarbut, the Hebrew school network, was also very close to us.

163. Oneg Shabbat was the code name of Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum's archive, which was also called the Ghetto Archive, the underground archive staffed by dozens of workers. It was in touch with the Jewish underground organizations and has served as a documentary source for the period of the Holocaust and the history of the destroyed Jewish communities. Aside from Dr. E. Ringelblum himself, Eliahu Gutkowski was also a member of the small directorate of Oneg Shabbat. The workers included Rachel Auerbach, L. Bloch, S. Braslaw, Y. Giterman, S. Sagan, Y. Kaplan, and others.

164. Rachel Auerbach: Graduate of Lwow University in philosophy. Came to Warsaw in 1932; published short stories and essays in various journals. In the ghetto, was active in Oneg Shabbat and directed a soup kitchen. She continued her activity on the Aryan side. Later wrote several works on the Holocaust. Immigrated to Israel, where she organized the Department for Collecting Witness Accounts at Yad Vashem. (See Ringelblum 1986.)

165. Abraham Lewin (1893-1943): Born in Warsaw. From a very religious family, studied in yeshiva, but changed to secular studies and became a teacher of Jewish history and Hebrew at a private Gymnasium for girls. In the ghetto, was active in education and in Oneg Shabbat; worked for YISA. Was apparently killed in the Aktsia of January 1943. (See Lewin 1989:1-57.)

166. In 1934, Lewin published a work, *The Cantonists, on the impressment of Jewish boys in Czar Nikolai's army (1827-1856)*.¹⁸³

Stefa Wilczynska, who worked with Janusz Korczak, used to visit us now and then. . . . We had direct contact with Korczak. . . . Later, we invited him to lecture at our first seminar. . . . Our last meeting with Korczak and Stefa was, if I'm not mistaken, on July 20, 1942, on Saturday. At any rate, it was a Saturday, the last one before the Aktsia. We still keep Korczak's invitation to Zivia and me, which reads: "You are invited to the performance of the children. . . ." And we did indeed go to the performance. It was a special Saturday—the last one before their death.¹⁸⁴

They also counted among their supporters members of the Jewish police and the *Judenrat*.

The Jewish police practically left us alone . . . there were high officials in the *Judenrat*, like Wasserman, who were loyal to us. . . . Some members of the *Judenrat* like Gepner were sympathetic to us and helped us. Sometimes we would get food from the *Judenrat*, for example, when those who managed to be in the school or kindergarten of Shulkult got food, along with their lessons,¹⁸² and they came home, where there was hunger. Those were the children we organized and educated, talked to, sang and danced with.

¹⁸³Ibid., 115-116.

182. Skulkult: Berman describes it as "an educational system connected with Potalei Zion-Z.S.," which "combined Hebrew and Yiddish in its curriculum." (See Berman 1977: 181)¹⁸⁵

The Resistance leaders of Warsaw not only fed and educated the children imprisoned there, they sang and danced with them as well. Yitzhak survived the Warsaw Ghetto. He went on to provide leadership in the Warsaw Rising in 1944. Following liberation, Yitzhak remained in Poland through 1946, assisting survivors and facilitating the smuggling of survivors into Palestine. He immigrated to Palestine in January 1947.

Zivia, Yitzhak, and the members of Dror who sought to provide schooling for the children of the Ghetto looked beyond the immediate, desperate circumstances. They sought to create not only a sense of pride and solidarity among the ghetto youth but to educate them to resist and reconfigure their society if they survived. Zivia's and Yitzhak's accounts will reverberate in the account of Hanna Lévy-Hass whose narrative is located in the collection of camp narratives in Chapter Seven. Others took similar approaches from diverse perspectives.

In the following narrative, Natan Eck tells of an attempt to create a new sort of high school. It was to continue after liberation and would be part of a new Jewish presence in a free Warsaw. It is notable that while several narratives mention schools created to prepare youth for the future, this is the only school I found specifically intended to continue in the future. Resistance in that school took many forms. One was a determination not to be satisfied with stopgap arrangements. This school was to function as if created in ordinary times.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., 117-118.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., 131.

“We wanted an actual high school . . . and were not satisfied with any makeshift arrangement.”

Natan Eck (Eckron) became principal of the Hebrew High School, founded in the Warsaw Ghetto after the sealing of the Ghetto and after the orders forbidding the education of Jewish adolescents. Surviving the liquidation—deportation and murder of most of the Jews—of the ghetto, Natan escaped and fled from city to city. Eventually captured by the Germans, he endured two camps before liberation.

Those were trying times: uncertainty, fear, starvation, disease, and German brutality were the forces the Jews of Warsaw were up against. Yet, they were not willing to give up or to give in. Still there was little to be gained from long range planning, as they never knew what the next day would bring. Afterward, Natan Eck wrote of that time:

As a general rule, all that the Jews did or tried to do in the ghetto was, of necessity, temporary in nature. Every thought and every action was directed toward momentary survival, for it was futile and illogical to attempt to create anything of lasting value in conditions that everyone believed would soon undergo basic and complete change. The purpose of all action in the ghetto was to keep resisting physically, spiritually, culturally—thus counteracting the atrocity of the [German] regime.¹⁸⁶

One exception stood out for him. In dealing with the needs of children, the ghetto made heroic and future-minded attempts to create something of lasting value. Natan was one of those who threw himself into that task.

However there is no rule without exception. I saw an astonishing thing in the Warsaw ghetto, which was completely directed toward the anticipated future—namely the founding of the Hebrew high school in the ghetto.

¹⁸⁶The testimony of Natan Eck (Eckron) is quoted in: Eisenberg, 64-67.

It is well known that under Nazi rule higher education was forbidden to the Jews. However, unemployed high school teachers clandestinely gave private lessons. They organized students in groups of four or five and taught them in private dwellings. Several such "high schools" were in operation. In this way the teachers were able to earn some of their livelihood and a number of pupils were able to continue their studies. This constituted one of the important fulfillments to which the hour gave rise. The founders of this high school, however, did not consider its aim to be either a means of employment for teachers or a possibility for continued studies for students.¹⁸⁷

Efforts to create clandestine schooling in the ghetto took various forms. Natan's circle decided not to be satisfied with a makeshift arrangement. They made plans to have a school organized as a regular school—complete with furnishings and programs such as they had known before the Germans came and disrupted schooling. They were selective in their acceptance of students. Natan notes that various sorts of schooling provided income to teachers and helped some children and adolescents to keep up with their studies. However, he specified that these were, at the Hebrew High School, secondary considerations. The true purpose he writes was to establish Hebrew education and to do so in a school that would endure beyond the present situation and that would attract the high caliber staff and students.

They were concerned with the "Life of the Word."¹⁸⁸ The writer of these lines had accepted the responsibility for directing this institution. The pupils were chosen primarily from the graduates of the *Tarbut* elementary schools in Warsaw, but students from elsewhere were also accepted. The basic principle was not to divide the students into small groups, but rather to maintain unsectioned classes; not to conduct lessons in private homes, but rather in a place specifically designated for that. The aim was to appear as much as possible as an organized school even under the conditions of the Ghetto Underground. Since the Nazis had set up elementary

¹⁸⁷Ibid., 65.

¹⁸⁸Judaism requires that every Jew (at that time every male Jew in particular although also every female to some degree) learn the "word" i. e. the Torah. It is also the responsibility of each generation to pass this knowledge to the next.

schools for Jewish children, we wanted an actual school as well, and were not satisfied with any makeshift arrangement.¹⁸⁹

That school, like some others in the ghetto, belonged with the Ghetto underground organizations. Indeed, Natan Eck was associated with some of the same educators and members of the Resistance as the Dror school mentioned in Zivia Lubetkin's and Yitzhak Zuckerman's accounts and he edited an underground journal.¹⁹⁰

During the first few weeks classes were held at 29 Lashno Street, in a workroom put at our disposal by the *Honoar Ha Tzioni*. Conditions there were most difficult. The room was small and unfurnished and I, the principal, had no corner of my own. I used to run back and forth in the corridor, or sit in an alcove in the next room, where workers were doing their craft. In spite of this, administrative duties were carried on by me with constant diligence. Attendance was taken, lesson plans and résumés were submitted, and several weeks later, when we moved to 68 Novolepky Street, the former quarters of one of the *Tarbut* schools, I instituted a system of bells to ring at the start and finish of each lesson. Now that we had at our disposal, for the hours of the afternoon, classrooms, benches, blackboards, platforms, and a bell, we regarded ourselves as a full-fledged high school.¹⁹¹

From the beginning of the Hebrew High School, the staff strove to ensure that it ran according to traditional plans. Upon moving to an actual school building, it became easy to accomplish that as the furnishings and arrangements lent themselves to it but even before while housed in a workshop they tried hard. For the students whose lives the Germans changed and disrupted so horribly, it must have been a great relief to come to school.

By that time the number of freshmen was about thirty, and it included some

¹⁸⁹Ibid. Actually the Germans did not so much set up these elementary schools as to merely agree to let the *Judenrat* do so. Initially this permission was granted in August 1940 although immediately rescinded ostensibly due to a typhus epidemic. A year later, younger Jewish children were finally allowed to attend school although no support was made available.

¹⁹⁰Zuckerman, 79n and 89.

¹⁹¹Ibid. *Tarbut* was a Zionist Youth Movement.

older students with considerably more background, and we were thus able to form a class of sophomores from this group. We were delighted by this bit of progress. We found reward from our efforts and had no doubt that if we outlived the enemy, the Hebrew high school, which was born in the ghetto, would stand strong and firm in the free capital.¹⁹²

Here also many members of the school were able to imagine a free future and to think of their school, so painstakingly and painfully created, as a part of that future. Many ghetto students saw their schooling arrangements as a way of continuing their education under difficult, even deadly, circumstances. Certainly many of them saw the education they received as something for the future. In contrast, these teachers and students saw the school, the institution itself, as something they were creating for the future.

European Jewry had been subject to certain divisive forces since the nineteenth century. By the first half of the twentieth century, in response to anti-Semitism, the Jews of Europe had separated into Zionist, assimilationist, and Orthodox circles. Yet, even within each category, differences existed. There were, for example, Orthodox Zionists, non-religious Zionists, Reform assimilationists, non-religious assimilationists and Reform Zionists. There were even assimilationists who so rejected Judaism as to convert to Christianity.¹⁹³ In some ways the Holocaust served to heighten these differences and in others to reunite the various factions. The establishment of a Hebrew high school in a large urban center, a high school that was not a *shtetl* yeshiva, or any sort of yeshiva at all, but still was a patently Jewish institution that used the traditional Jewish language, would have been not only a point of pride but of hope for the survival of the Jewish people. Survival not only from the barbarism visited on them by the Germans, in the particular misery of the

¹⁹²Ibid., 65-66.

¹⁹³From the time of the Emancipation (1791 in France, 1871 in Germany) on, there were many ways of being Jewish in Europe. Some Jews remained traditional and were now seen as Orthodox, others decided to "reform" and in fact became the Reform Movement under Abraham Geiger. Others left religion behind and became agnostics, or even converted to Christianity. A very popular movement, which grew out of a socialist notion on the one hand, and a desire for a Jewish state on the other, was Zionism (it began in 1897). See David J. Goldberg and John D. Rayner, *The Jewish People: Their History and Their Religion* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 43-154, 163-168.

ghetto, but of the encroachment of the gentile majority and its inexorable pressure to abandon Jewish identity—if not Judaism itself.

However, the school carried other meanings as well—meanings specific to the times. In telling of a non-Hebrew speaking teacher who gained a place anyway, Natan tells us of that meaning.

Mr. Michael Brandstater . . . a well-known educator and experienced principal, whom I made a member of the staff of the high school, even though he knew no Hebrew, spoke his mind to me on one occasion, “Mr. Eck,” he said, “perhaps you do not realize what you did for me when you found a way to include me in this work—what these hours I spend here represent for me, how before the eyes of these children on school benches. . . .” I don’t remember his exact words, but the context in effect was: It is an escape from the world of ugliness and evil. Here one is blessed with the ability to forget the horror, to be purified, to be inspired. He was expressing the feelings we all had.¹⁹⁴

Those are, of course, the things that many educators hoped for their charges. To make the children feel normal, to help them put aside the horrors of their lives, to inspire them to go on, and to live good lives after liberation—all of these were ways that school was to improve Jewish children’s lives. Both of these educators indicated that school, and the act of keeping school, did that for them as well.

Youths who attended the school understood what they must do for it to succeed. Actually, the school was careful in choosing students. The difficulty of life in the ghetto and of attending school probably meant that those least inclined to attend school found themselves free of having to do so. Still it would seem from this description that these adolescents had learned to take school very seriously indeed.

We had practically no discipline problem. The children behaved like adults. They understood the situation perfectly. Without any explanations they realized that this high school was especially important in the ghetto and that it held high hopes

¹⁹⁴Ibid., 66.

for the future. They maintained constant vigil without any need for warning. Like the adults, they knew all that went on in the streets of the ghetto and within the shabby dwellings, the schemes of the enemy and the fear nibbling at their hearts. The nightmare hovering over all of us hovered over them as well (they were all between the ages of thirteen and fourteen). In spite of that, laughter and joking did not cease from between our walls.¹⁹⁵

Yet, for all the seriousness of doing school, and the seriousness of being found out by the Germans, the staff and students formed in the school a place that seemed safe and where they could even laugh.¹⁹⁶ Actually, according to Natan, secrecy was not such a concern. The ghetto, as we have learned from other sources, provided, or seemed to, a certain protection. Once ensconced, and thus camouflaged, within the setting of a legal school, the Hebrew school focused on other things.

Measures of secrecy were not too severe, especially after we moved to quarters in a school building, where elementary classes were held with permission. However, I felt I dared to take a bold step when I announced that the following Sunday a parents-teachers meeting would be held, at which progress reports on each student's work would be given. The meeting was successful; almost all the parents were present. And it was evident that they were pleased at this chance to meet and to enjoy the illusion of normal living.¹⁹⁷

Bell schedules, large classes, and parent-teacher conferences—the determination to have a normal school was all encompassing. The Germans could starve them, uproot them, enslave them, and kill them—but they could not keep them from having school. They conducted schools in ways they felt would best serve the needs of the students, families, and the community. Soon they were planning school gatherings and even inviting guests.

¹⁹⁵Ibid.

¹⁹⁶The ghettos were enlivened by a pervasive often caustic humor. For more about that experience see Steve Lipman, *Laughter in Hell: The Use of Humor during the Holocaust* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, Inc. 1991).

¹⁹⁷Ibid.

Public assemblies were held during the school year, among which were a Chanukah celebration and Purim festival. The Chanukah celebration was a simple affair, presented while we were still on Lashno Street. However, it attracted many parents and guests. They filled the workroom of the *Noar Ha Tzioni* to capacity, and several public figures . . . were present.

The Purim festival was rather elaborate and centered about the presentation of a Hebrew play. The play was directed with great effort and devotion by Mr. Harman, who was a one time a member of *Habima*. The performance, as well as the entire celebration, surpassed all expectations. The hall was crowded, and the entire audience—teachers, parents, students, and dignitaries—was filled with a sense of joy and pride. They expressed this feeling not only in words but in the special glimmer of light in their eyes, which registered the depth of emotion upon each face.¹⁹⁸

The results were overwhelmingly positive. The students, and the staff joined with the parents in feeling intense pride at their accomplishments. Ghetto dignitaries joined in the festivities and for a little while everyone must have felt far removed from the grim reality of the ghetto. Registration for the following year was heartening as well.

Two months prior to the end of the school year we held registration for the following year, and scores of students re-enrolled. After vacation we were able to reopen with three complete classes—freshmen, sophomores, and juniors. In other words, only one class was lacking to make it a complete high school.¹⁹⁹

The Hebrew school was to be short-lived. Only three weeks before the Great Deportation, something they did not yet anticipate, the students and staff completed a round of end-of-the-year activities. Natan addressed the students with some trepidation as to what the future held.

We completed our studies at the end of June 1942, three weeks before the Jews of the ghetto were massacred! We conducted examinations, held conferences to

¹⁹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹⁹Ibid.

ensure proper grading, and issued report cards. As I took leave of my students, I did not avoid speaking of the dangers facing us. I recall using, several times, expressions like “if we are fortunate enough to meet again,” and “if we live. . . .”²⁰⁰

Yet, for all that had already happened to the Jews of Warsaw, as well as those in other places from whence news had arrived, Natan’s trepidation was not of the horrors that indeed awaited them. It was for the dangers they already knew. Had he known of the planned murder of his staff, students, and community, he might have been unable to say anything at all. As his students left for their school “holiday,” it was enough to fear for their safety within the ghetto. Of that last meeting of the school, Natan wrote:

In spite of the news which was reaching us about Ponar, Chelmno, and Lublin, I did not believe that complete annihilation was in store for us.²⁰¹

Natan Eck escaped death and deportation during the Great Deportation of the summer of 1942. Transferred to Vittel, France, the Germans deported him to Auschwitz. He jumped from the train taking him there, suffered capture and incarceration in him to two camps. He survived until the defeat of the Germans and the liberation of the camps and eventually settled in Israel.²⁰²

The last narrative in this chapter is from a student at a ghetto *gymnasium*. This *gymnasium* was a continuation of a school that existed before the German occupation and it was connected to the Dror school—one of its teachers, Abraham Lewin, was earlier mentioned by Yitzhak Zuckerman as a lecturer at the Dror Gymnasium. Their relationship between students and teachers that was so important to so many participants in ghetto schools—and later in camp schools—is described by Nehama in terms that leave a deep impression on her readers.

²⁰⁰His description of his farewell address echoes those reported by Mary Berg and Nehama Eckheizer-Fahn both of whom reported that teachers and administrators took similar farewells of their students.

²⁰¹Ibid.

²⁰²Ibid., 67 and Zuckerman, 445.

“Even in times such as these we must not abandon human values.”

Nehama Eckheizer-Fahn was a student in the Yehudia school, in Warsaw, during the ghetto period. That school, founded just before World War I and grounded in Zionist beliefs, represented the increasing popularity of educating Jewish girls in traditional Jewish and Zionist values combined with a general curriculum. Following the German defeat of Poland in 1939, the teachers resolved to continue the school despite the ban on education for Jewish youth. Nehama attended the school until the end. Her recollection of the school appeared in the introduction to the diary of Abraham Lewin, one of the Yehudia teachers and a lecturer for Dror.²⁰³ In recalling her experiences as a student at the Yehudia school in the ghetto period, Nehama Eckheizer-Fahn remembered a dedicated group of teachers. Most of the pre-war staff remained and she was able to recall many of them as well as the subjects they taught.

I was destined to be at Yehudia during World War II. Almost the entire staff with Stefania Schweiger at their head continued to teach. [Abraham] Lewin and his wife [Luba Hotner] taught Hebrew and Bible Studies, Rachel Brotmacher taught German, Dr. Cécilia Weinberger and Gustava Zlotowska taught Polish, and Leonora Moronovitch taught physics. Tishak Berman taught at the Laor school and from his salary was able to support two pupils, but after reading the description of the “action” in Hrubieszow he had a stroke.²⁰⁴

The teachers were deeply committed to the students. Not only did they risk their lives to teach but also Nehama described one teacher who worked elsewhere also and used his earnings to support two Yehudia pupils. The clandestine Yehudia school must have been quite a contrast to its earlier

²⁰³Abraham Lewin. *A Cup of Tears: A Diary of the Warsaw Ghetto*, Antony Polonsky ed. and Christopher Hutton trans. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 7-11, 298.

²⁰⁴Lewin, 11. Hrubieszow is a city in Eastern Poland near the Ukrainian border. This “action” probably refers to a deportation from there to one of the death camps.

incarnation; the necessary secrecy drove the school to find ways to conceal its existence. Nehama remembered that:

Lessons were conducted in a different place every day, in the houses of teachers or pupils. They were conducted clandestinely, in small groups, by the light of a single candle, each evening somewhere else.²⁰⁵

Secrecy was not the only hurdle facing them. The physical conditions and the deprivation they endured by German decree were considerable. Even those did not dull the will to teach and learn. They sharpened them. Nehama attested that:

More than once, teachers or staff were ill or weak from hunger, but I don't think there was ever more enthusiastic studying or teaching. It was not an escape from the dreadful reality but an expression of opposition to the iniquity and the desecration of cherished values.²⁰⁶

Nehama's view of the teachers and pupils was that they understood of the realities of the ghetto and that they did not attempt to avoid those realities through schooling. Rather they knew what the ghetto was and schooling was a deliberate, conscious resistance to German depredation of their morale and their intellects. The teachers attempted not only to educate their pupils' minds but their spirits as well. Ghetto life was difficult, frightening, and disruptive. The teachers attempted to counteract those difficulties by example and by constant exhortation to the students to resist the corruption surrounding them. As Nehama explained:

Over and over again the teachers emphasized that even in times such as these we must not abandon human values. They hoped that their pupils would stay alive and tried to maintain their spiritual integrity.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁵Ibid.

²⁰⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁷Ibid.

Nehama also remembered the importance of the close bonds between the youths and adults of the Yehudia school. Not only did the teachers express high hopes for the students, but also a special bond formed between the members of the school.

Relationships between teachers and pupils also changed; continual fear in the cold evenings in darkened rooms created strong ties and great affection between us. We became one family.²⁰⁸

Not all activities of the school aimed toward purely academic subjects. The teachers realized that the youths needed social activities. They worked to create morale building occasions. An assembly with singing and inspirational speeches ended the school year. Of that gathering Nehama would later say:

I remember particularly the last full assembly of the school, which took place in an institute for abandoned children. We sang and we danced, even though the tension in the ghetto had reached its height and we knew that the end was very near.²⁰⁹

If these ghetto youths received inspiration from the dedication of their teachers, the teachers did not lack inspiration resulting from the opportunity to work with the students. Few activities in the ghetto exuded such meaning. Many adults worked outside their fields. Highly educated professionals worked as janitors or in workshops where they produced goods to further the German war effort. Work was survival—or so they hoped—but it was seldom vocation. Teachers, however, had the opportunity to help others, to inspire their students. They did that not only immediately, but also by building a vision of a tomorrow and helping their students acquire the skills and attitudes they would need in that tomorrow. The Yehudia teachers were no exception. Nehama vividly described such an occasion in the next passage. The gathering she described was intensely emotional; unsure what the future held, or if they had a

²⁰⁸Ibid, 11-12.

²⁰⁹Ibid. 12.

future, the school gathered together for the last time. In her recollection of that party Nehama said:

At the end of the party one of the teachers got up and said: "If we stay alive after this war, we shall try to live as human beings worthy of that exalted title; and if it has been decreed that we are to die—we shall die proudly. Whatever our fate is to be, there is no doubt in my heart that the world that emerges after this war will be a better place."²¹⁰

Nehama made it clear that the camaraderie between teachers and their students was profound and lent strength to their combined efforts. Like Mary Berg, she made special note of the disappearance of the boundaries between teachers and students. She also made clear that by the end they all sensed they were to face nearly insurmountable odds in their fight for survival. Yet clearly they went into that abyss bolstered by the idea that they need not be corrupted by it. The belief that, should they emerge they would aspire to a finer world was equally clear.

Nehama lived until the day of liberation. She later immigrated to Israel.

The Germans commenced the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in July 1942. Amid acts of brutal terror and obscene violence they forced the vast majority of Jews to the *Umschlagplatz* where they loaded them into freight cars bound for Treblinka. Those who resisted or who hesitated they murdered on the spot. When the Germans paused in September the Ghetto population stood at a fraction of its June size. In the winter of 1943, the deportations resumed—that time they met with some armed resistance however. They entered the Ghetto at Passover in April of that year and triggered the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The Jewish fighters sustained the fighting, although their numbers were few and their weapons fewer and much more primitive for weeks. The Germans experienced more difficulty clearing the Ghetto than they

²¹⁰Ibid.

had in the invasion of any of the countries they had conquered. In the end they bombed and burned the buildings into rubble. Even then, some survivors remained hidden under the destruction.²¹¹

Chapters Four and Five contain the narratives of Jews incarcerated in ghettos in Eastern Europe. In many ways more horrifying than the narratives of youths in hiding found in Chapter Three, they nonetheless do not complete the story of Jewish youth in the Holocaust. In the next chapter, are the narratives of Jews who participated in schooling in the camps. Many of those narrators earlier survived in hiding or in ghettos. In Chapter Six there is a continuation of Mira Ryczke Kimmelman's narrative wherein she told of her educational efforts in the camps at Majdanek, Auschwitz, and Bergen-Belsen. There are also two other narratives of two people incarcerated at Bergen-Belsen. In addition, there is a group narrative from the camp of Terezin, site of an extraordinary school system. Later in the chapter is another combined narrative of the efforts of a group of Terezin prisoners who sought to replicate their Terezin schooling efforts following their transfer to the infamous camp of Auschwitz II/Birkenau. Finally, there is a narrative of Zvi Spiegel who organized classes for some of the child twins upon whom Josef Mengele conducted pseudo-scientific experiments at Auschwitz II/Birkenau. Camps varied greatly and, as the narratives unfold, the range of educational experiences contained in them will become apparent.

²¹¹Gutman, *Resistance*, 135-140, 177-183, 205-207.

Chapter Six:

Schooling in the Concentration Camps

A paradox. It is hard to conceive of schools conducted within the context of concentration camps. What we know of these places is so horrific that it seems incredible that such a mundane thing as school could be part of those experiences. On the other hand, it would be incredible, given what we know of Jewish life before the camps, if schooling did not exist. Before incarceration in concentration camps, the Jewish prisoners had often already established and practiced an assortment of clandestine institutions. The Germans unintentionally taught their victims to conduct their lives in a sphere of resistant behavior.

Many Jews admitted to the camps—as opposed to those murdered at the time of arrival—were survivors of months or years of German-orchestrated terror and torment. They had developed strategies for dealing with the bans, and the prohibition of schooling certainly was one area that they had already practiced resisting. Still, if life in the ghettos or in hiding had been unendurable, life in the camps was even more cruel. How then could they direct energy toward creating school from nothing? The answers vary and in the following narratives we will see that some schooling was almost instinctive and some the result of careful and heartbreaking planning.

In the camps, some changes occurred in schooling. Where previously attempts had been made to teach and learn certain subjects and generally to include a spectrum of topics, now to teach or learn anything was often deemed enough—or if not enough then at least all that could be done. Teaching and learning was more opportunistic. Celina Karp Biniacz, who was one of the *Schindlerjuden*, recalled that in the labor camp of Plaszow at Krakow, she learned from books. Despite the fear of disobeying orders of Commandant

Amon Goethe, the Jews of the camp conducted lessons for the children. Celina recalled:

I remember reading a great deal. They brought in books for burning, and the crew assigned to bring in the books, under penalty of death, would smuggle them into the barracks. You would read at night and pass it on. At the end of the war, I knew how to read but couldn't write. I hadn't held a pencil in my hand for six years. Women would sing and tell stories. That's where I learned all my Shalom Aleichem.¹

The Germans separated from their families and incarcerated at Buchenwald thousands of male children. Many Jewish boys, but also Gypsy boys and the orphans of executed partisans, suffered imprisonment at that camp. Adult male prisoners, including the camp underground, protected and cared for the boys as well as possible. Between three hundred and four hundred boys lived in Block 66, where the block elder organized a choir school and the choir performed for the SS. Not only is this an example of someone providing traditional instruction to an organized group of children, but it also had the effect of prolonging, if not saving, their lives.²

Jona Oberski entered the camp system as a preschooler. Writing of his time at Westerbork, he said:

In the meantime my father taught me the Hebrew letters. I got them all mixed up, because he'd written them very close together on a little slip of paper. I couldn't see where one letter stopped and another started.³

Jona attended a school in Westerbork as well:

I also learned songs in a little class with other children. The other children

¹Elinor J. Brecher, *Schindler's Legacy: True Stories of the List Survivors* (New York: Plume, 1994), 114.

²Konnilyn G. Feig, *Hitler's Death Camps: The Sanity of Madness* (London: Holmes & Meier, Publishers, 1979), 93-97.

³Jonah Oberski, *Childhood*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983), 31.

knew most of the songs. They had been learning them much longer, the teacher said.

Then she couldn't come any more.⁴

This image of "a class of little children" is elucidated by a journal entry from 24 October 1943 of journalist Philip Mechanicus who was also interned at Westerbork:

Every morning the small children who have not been going to school for a long time because of the infectious diseases go for a walk under the supervision of women teachers. They play all sorts of games and sing songs out in the open field. [One song was]

We're having a lovely walk between the huts
And go with the teacher nicely in a line,
Past the great tall chimney
And the little houses,
Then along the railway and so back home.⁵

As the war ground to an end, on an evacuation train from Bergen-Belsen that wandered for weeks as the Germans attempted to decide where to deposit the Jewish prisoner-witnesses, Jona was told to look out a window and identify a station. "Trude asked if I could read what it was called. I read the word Tröbitz."⁶

Schooling for Jewish children in the camps was even more contingent than in the ghettos on the fortuitous presence of someone able and inclined to teach them. Nonetheless, in some camps prisoners established schools where they sought out teachers and replaced or reassigned them as needed. This was true at the camp at Terezin and, when the Germans sent some transports of Terezin prisoners into the "Family Camp" at Auschwitz II/Birkenau, the Jewish prisoners managed to keep a school going in that camp for awhile despite decimation by mass murder.

It is important to note that the term "camps" is inclusive of a number of

⁴Ibid., 32.

⁵Deborah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), xxxii.

⁶Oberski, 94.

different types of places ranging from transit camps in occupied countries in western Europe to extermination camps in Poland. In between were a number of different sorts of camps, including labor camps, and camps such as Terezin whose internal affairs were ostensibly conducted by inmates.⁷

In transit camps, in order to mollify local inhabitants who had some sympathy for Jews and in order to maintain the illusion that the Jews were to be deported for resettlement elsewhere, the German officials sometimes permitted, or did little to prevent, schooling. They did not, however, provide any materials or effort to encourage schools. A collection of photographs taken at a school in a camp at Ferramonti Tarsia, in Italy, shows well-groomed, smiling children and adults.⁸ At Westerbork, in the Netherlands, some inmates conducted classes "in a little school house."⁹

In labor camps children had no use other than to allay the suspicions of adults; they were, in some cases, admitted but subsequently sent on to extermination sites. In camps such as Auschwitz, the Germans seldom admitted children except for special purposes—e. g. they admitted twin children to be the victims of gruesome experiments and they admitted some Terezin children to use for propaganda purposes. At camps whose sole purpose was the murder of Jews, neither children nor adults were admitted with the exception of a few adults for the *Sondercommando*—who served short terms as handlers of the dead before the camp staff murdered them too. In camps that admitted children, the young prisoners faced the dual challenges of being fragile and especially despised by the Germans under whose debilitating control they lived.

In camps, Jews conducted schooling as best they could. Moving from other circumstances where they had also created clandestine schools or, when permitted to have schools, where they had created schools from very little but their own wills and imaginations, they used those experiences to continue the

⁷Feig, 23-39.

⁸Z. Szajkowski, *An Illustrated Sourcebook on the Holocaust: volume 3* (Garden City New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983), 110.

⁹Josey G. Fisher, ed., *The Persistence of Youth: Oral Testimonies of the Holocaust* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 44.

work of education. Schooling in camps was a spotty enterprise. Some children learned in a full school program while others learned in very limited ways. For some prisoners schooling consisted of exercises they made up for themselves in the darkness of their bunks at night, for others it was based on some particular resource that was available.

Chapter Six includes narratives of some who participated in school in the camps including Lucien Duckstein, an eleven-year-old who attended classes in the transit camp of Drancy, and of Hanna Lévy-Hass who taught in the abattoir of Bergen-Belsen. It also includes narratives of administrators, teachers, and students from Terezin, where the Jewish prisoners conducted a clandestine yet stunningly rich and broad system of schooling. Finally, the chapter contains narratives of some Jewish prisoners at Auschwitz II/Birkenau where, despite the hopelessness of living enveloped by the stench of burning human flesh, they managed to create school.

Drancy and Bergen-Belsen

“From ten o’clock until twelve I forget everything else.”

Lucien Duckstein was eleven years old when the Germans and their French collaborators thrust him into the concentration camp system. His father, serving with the French army, became a prisoner of war in May 1940. Lucien lived with his mother, a milliner, in Paris. By the fall of 1943, the Germans had arrested some of his relatives; others concocted plans they hoped would provide protection. Lucien and his mother, however, felt relatively safe due to their French citizenship—a status not enjoyed by the rest of their Hungarian family residing in Paris—and because of his father’s POW status. The comfort they drew from those circumstances was illusory. French collaborationist police arrested first his mother and then Lucien in Paris on 26

November 1943. He and his mother suffered imprisonment at the transit camp Drancy outside the city. On 3 May 1944, the Germans deported them to Bergen-Belsen in Germany.¹⁰

Even before the Germans sent Lucien into the camp at Drancy, school acted as a buffer between Lucien and the hardships of occupied Paris. Of the evening of his arrest, Lucien recalled:

A few weeks ago a great event took place: I was accepted into the beginning year at the Lycee Buffon. Thanks to the competitive examination I took before the vacation (I hadn't put on my star the day of the examination), I was awarded a scholarship, a small scholarship, about a hundred francs a month. I am a good student. I am happy, and I am excited about learning Latin and English. That's it, my daily round: go to the Lycee every morning, do my homework every evening. The life I am leading seems pretty normal to me; at any rate, it's the only one I know.¹¹

Schooling brought Lucien pleasure and made his life seem normal. In addition, one of his teachers, "a good guy," encouraged him to think of himself as no different from others. He told Lucien "not to wear [the yellow star], saying there's no reason why I should. I don't wear it at school."¹² Indeed, on the night of their arrest, the police came and took only Lucien's mother. The child remained alone in the apartment bewildered.

I am only eleven years old, but I am already habituated to petty meannesses, to prohibitions, to constraints, and to risks you take because not taking them could be even riskier. I have already known humiliation. On that fare you grow up fast.

All alone in this apartment, I am bewildered by what is befalling me. My mind is empty. I do not know how I ought to react to what is happening, how afraid I should be, so out of the ordinary the whole business is. And I have no idea what the next chapter will be, I do not know what to expect.

Should I do something? Not do anything? Is there anything to be done? It

¹⁰Aleksandra Kroh and Lucien Duckstein, *Lucien's Story*. Austryn Wainhouse, trans. (Evanston, Illinois: Marlboro Press/Northwestern, 1996), 1-2.

¹¹Ibid., 4-5.

¹²Ibid., 4.

does not enter my head to put on my clothes, to go up to the neighbors on the floor above and ask them to let me sleep there tonight. Still less does it occur to me to run away, to run off into the darkness outside, into the rain, to seek refuge with my Aunt Alice. . . . I wait for morning to come, I wait for it to be time to go to school. I shall attend class in the usual way, and only afterward shall I go and join Aunt Alice.¹³

Consoling himself with the thought of school, the comforting normality of school, Lucien settled in to wait for morning. Despite the terror of his mother's arrest, or perhaps because with his mother gone the safest, most familiar place he could think of was his school, Lucien resolved to go as usual to school in the morning and only afterwards to find and his aunt and shelter with her. Tragically, before morning came, before he put his plan into action, the police returned to arrest him, too.

Lucien and his mother arrived at Drancy next day. Conditions there did not approach the horrors of camps in Germany and Poland. Still conditions left much to be desired. Living in close proximity to others and denied adequate food and hygiene, prisoners contended with hunger, vermin, and uncertainty. They still managed to conduct some semblance of human life. Of Drancy Lucien said:

Yes, at Drancy we are still altogether human. We continue to try to hold on to certain things, to keep our heads up. There are people who continue to think that it is natural to give children an education. A rabbi has been teaching us to sing in Hebrew, but he leaves very soon. I start learning Yiddish, because Yiddish is what the women speak with one another.¹⁴

Lucien, like other Jews in this study, began to learn lessons about Jewish topics. But those were not long-lived. Soon, however, a new sort of classes began led by a teacher who influenced Lucien's life. Of his teacher Lucien recalled:

And especially, and above all, there's Loève.

¹³Ibid., 6.

¹⁴Ibid., 14-15.

His wife is Catholic, so is he, but he has Jewish forebears and someone reported him; nevertheless, he hopes to be able to get out, for he is a little less than a quarter Jewish. In the meantime—I know not where or how—he has got hold of a blackboard and some chalk, and every morning, from ten until noon, he teaches us algebra. A dozen of us make up his class.

From ten o'clock until twelve I forget about everything else.¹⁵

Schooling then, at least with that teacher, had the power to erase for Lucien, for at least those two hours a day, the discomforts and agonies, the uncertainties and terrors of the camp. If we look back at the night of his arrest, we will see that even then school offered that succor. Schooling, especially with a beloved teacher, seemed a safe place, a place where the vicissitudes of an uncertain life lost the power they otherwise exerted.

M. Loève was no ordinary teacher. Like other Jewish children under German domination, Lucien and his fellow students received the teaching of someone they would not have been exposed to in ordinary times.

Loève is an absolutely remarkable teacher. I have no way of knowing it, but he is a great French mathematician, a familiar name to all those interested in probability. That he is teaching algebra to eleven-year-old kids is something incredible, something unheard of, and for us it is an enormous stroke of luck and a great honor.¹⁶

Rather than simply struggling through algebra, the students were seduced by it and by their teacher. Those lessons shared in the makeshift class at Drancy stayed in Lucien's thoughts well past his time in captivity.

The memory of those lessons will remain with me forever. He explains algebra to us as if he were performing magic. He believes in algebra, and, with him, immediately, we too become believers in it. Before my eyes algebra becomes transparent as crystal. Train A sets out to meet train B coming toward it; reservoirs fill with clear water. He offers us a problem to solve as if it were a gift, and we

¹⁵Ibid., 15.

¹⁶Ibid.

appreciate its value. All my life I shall take refuge in algebra as an antidote to bleak thoughts, I shall calm myself by summoning to mind a problem to solve; all my life mathematics will have for me the power to dispel anxiety and sorrow. Mathematics will occupy an important place in my life. It is here, in Drancy, that I learn to love mathematics, thanks to Professor Loève.¹⁷

Professor Loève's tutelage of the Drancy child prisoners did not last long. Yet his influence was to be far-reaching and of central importance in the life of at least one of his young students.

That goes on for about three months, at the end of which they let him go. Good for him. One day he moves out of the quarter-part-Jew neighborhood, to our great joy, although it is hard on us to lose him. He is set free along with the others who have been able to prove that they aren't all that Jewish.¹⁸

Saddened by his departure but gladdened by his freedom, however tenuous, the students lost the teacher. Nevertheless, if he made a strong impression on them, they made one on him as well. Lucien, who himself became a professor of mathematics, reported that:

Until the end of the war he will keep pretty much out of sight, for with that just under a quarter part of Jewish blood of his, he won't be entirely safe. Afterward he will emigrate to the United States. He will enter Berkeley by the front door. He will only have say "My name is Loève" for them to reply, "Fine, your professor's chair is waiting for you." He will publish books, one of which, *Probability Theory*, will become a classic, a landmark. The book will be written in English, of course, but the dedication will be in French: "To the children of the camp at Drancy."

Learning of that I shall feel very proud, proud to think that he had not forgotten us. "Perhaps," I shall say to myself, "perhaps we brought him something in return." The thought itself will give me enormous pleasure, for both as a man and as a mathematician I shall have been influenced more by Loève than by any other of

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

my many teachers. He shall have marked me for life. I shall always remember certain phrases, certain formulations of his; I could quote them word for word.¹⁹

While it is true that the tenacity of Lucien's memory of Loève's lessons was no doubt influenced by the virtuosity of that professor's teaching, there seems little doubt that it is also connected to Lucien's appreciation of his willingness, to teach children during his imprisonment. Soon after Professor Loève's release from Drancy, Lucien and his mother left as well. Transferred to the camp of Bergen-Belsen in Germany, they remained there until April of 1945. In order to prevent their liberation, the Germans evacuated them from that camp on 11 April 1945 as the Allies approached. The freight train that took them from the camp wandered through Germany for eleven days until their guards abandoned the effort and fled. Soviet soldiers liberated the train full of Jews on 23 April 1945. Lucien and his mother survived and returned to Paris where they reunited with Lucien's father.

Lucien grew up to become a mathematics professor. The teacher/student relationship Lucien and Professor Loève forged in the camp spanned decades.

Thirty years later, when I, too, had become a professor of applied mathematics at an American university, I went to visit Loève in Berkeley. I looked him up in the telephone book, I called him, and he remembered me; he told me to come right out. Oh yes, he recognized me, and for my part I found him no less marvelous than the man I had stood in such awe of at Drancy. To meet again was something of an experience for both of us.²⁰

In contrast to the ex post facto narrative of Lucien Duckstein is the camp diary of Hanna Lévy-Hass. Written in Belsen, her narrative details her efforts to create and keep school for the children of her barrack. Initially she taught the younger children but soon her efforts included adolescents as well.

¹⁹Ibid., 15-16.

²⁰Ibid. 16.

Unlike Lucien, whom the Germans sentenced to the camps at a young age, Hanna lived to adulthood in normal circumstances. She foresaw a future in which, if they lived, her pupils would be instrumental in creating new, democratic political structures and social milieux. She sought not only to impart traditional skills and knowledge but to prepare her children for the tasks that would, if they should survive, one day confront them. Although Lucien spent nearly a year in Bergen-Belsen, he did not mention schooling at that camp in his memoir. It is not clear if there was none or if he merely failed to mention it. He did recall that at Bergen-Belsen: "The women are put to work at once. . . . While waiting for their mothers to return [from work] the children wander about aimlessly, pick up pebbles, wait for roll call to be taken. . . . No intellectual activity at all."²¹ This suggests a much less ordered and much more meaningless existence than Lucien experienced at Drancy, where he attended classes. At that very time, Hanna had formed and was conducting a school in that same camp. Life in camps was in some ways uniform and in others varied greatly depending upon who happened to be in a particular block. It is possible that Lucien and Hanna's students were neighbors yet had different experiences.

Hanna also recounted the problem of adult arguments over educational methodology. Incredibly, some fellow prisoners blamed her and her progressive approach to teaching, rather than the horrors of camp life, for the irregular behavior of her pupils.

"I have taken on the task of looking after the children."

Hanna Lévy-Hass' diary, written during her incarceration in the concentration camp of Bergen-Belsen—also called Belsen—in Germany, details the atrocious conditions in the camp, her reflections on men's and women's responses to the camp, her resistance experiences, and her activities

²¹Ibid., 21 and 32.

at Belsen. Born into an impoverished middle-class family, she trained as a teacher in the 1930s and taught in Yugoslavia at the time of the 1941 German invasion. Hanna joined the resistance where her duties included training first-aid workers for the partisans. In the winter of 1943–44, she surrendered to the Germans. She thought of fleeing to the mountains with her partisan unit, but she feared that would result in reprisals against some elderly Jews. The Germans imprisoned her in Cetinje. Soon after her arrival in Belsen in the June or July of 1944, Hanna took on the task of educating the children of her barrack.²² To that task, the thirty-year-old teacher brought her progressive methods and theories. Hanna lived until liberated in April 1945, during the evacuation of Belsen. She returned to Yugoslavia, and eventually made her home in Israel. An attachment to the 1982 publication of her diary includes a 1978 interview, where she reflected upon her activities as a prisoner. She saved her diary throughout her imprisonment.²³

Hanna Lévy-Hass' account of teaching and learning in Belsen began quite simply. Soon after her arrival her in that camp, she wrote: "I have taken on the task of looking after the children." Here was a young woman with no children of her own thrust into a camp that was a hell by any standard. Belsen was a camp where there were no materials for teaching, where she would receive little support or thanks, at least from other adults, for her efforts, and in which starvation, exposure, filth, and disease would soon kill thousands of prisoners. Still, Hanna accepted the task of caring for and teaching the children in her vicinity. It is worth noting that Hanna first described her teaching as "looking after the children." Throughout Holocaust literature are references to caring for or looking out for children. In some cases no explanation is offered for what that meant. When explicated, teaching often figures prominently. It is

²²Hanna Lévy-Hass. *Inside Belsen*. Ronald Taylor trans. (Sussex; the Harvester Press, 1982). The actual date of her arrival is unclear, but in November 1944 she wrote of being in the "fifth month" in the camp which suggests her arrival was in June or July, depending on whether she was beginning or ending the fifth month. The diary itself began with an entry dated 16 August 1944.

²³*Ibid.*, vi-xv.

immediately clear that for Hanna the nature of that “looking after” included teaching and creating materials for teaching.

Belsen 28. 8. 44.

I have taken on the task of looking after the children. There are 110 children of various ages in our hut, ranging from three to fifteen, boys and girls. It is not easy to work without any kind of book, and I have to write subjects down on dozens and dozens of little pieces of paper, some for the little ones who can scarcely read or write, others for the older ones. They get hold of pencils and paper in whatever way they can, selling their bread ration, or doing some other kind of deal, or simply stealing from each other.²⁴

There were few things in a concentration camp for which people would trade their bread rations. To trade a bread ration meant to starve. It meant to give up all or part of the slice of bread that normally was the only solid food, sometimes the only food at all, that one received that day. Yet, the children were so eager to learn, and apparently so trusting of Hanna, that they traded their precious bread for paper scraps and pencil stubs. Alternatively, they stole—a dangerous thing to do for, if caught, the consequences could be grim indeed. Yet, they entrusted their hard-won booty to Hanna. Wild, undisciplined, and in despair, they came to her with their scraps of paper and their pencil stubs. They knew by then that to learn was to break the law; yet they came and they learned.

In the next passage, Hanna provided a description of the environment in which her school operated.

In the absence of books we sometimes just have oral classes, in which the children have to pay specially close attention. We are often interrupted by roll calls, air-raid warnings or the appearance of various committees which remind us of visits we used to make to the zoo. “Circumstances beyond our control, “as the phrase has it, frequently hinder our work too, like the frightful din that breaks out close to our

²⁴Ibid., 7.

“classroom” when the slave gangs are being hounded by the SS, or when arguments and angry scenes develop when our food is doled out.²⁵

The environment was chaotic; and the children were denizens of that chaos. Not all of them accepted schooling, or if they did they were erratic in their attendance. Still Hanna went on with the task. She wrote about the children:

The children are uninhibited, wild, starving. They feel their lives have taken a strange, unnatural turn, and they react instinctively, brutally. In such an atmosphere of fear and mistrust evil habits quickly spread when difficulties crop up. A small minority of the children show a certain interest in learning but the others remain indifferent. They know that the Germans have forbidden any organised education in the camp and that it is only possible to do any serious learning in secret, so they can stay away with impunity.²⁶

Hanna recognized other difficulties as well. One of these was lack of support from the adults in the hut. They were prone to treating the children quite brutally. It is not clear if the children were the children of these adults or if they were parentless in that camp. Hanna's report on the children said:

But there is no point in remonstrating with them. Indeed it would be ridiculous. Any attempt at moral education is doomed to failure. The adults become irritated by the children's unruliness and sometimes call them layabouts or young criminals; they insist on meting out strict punishment as a deterrent, like beating them or taking away their bread ration—all for the sake of their own peace and quiet. When I protest, they vent their anger on what they call ‘that way of teaching’—as if one could talk about ‘teaching’ in a situation like this, or make the children behave nicely and politely in this savage and inhuman environment, where nerves are on edge, adults fight, steal from each other and curse and swear at each other, and where everything has become defiled and dishonoured.²⁷

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., 7-8.

²⁷Ibid., 8.

“That way of teaching” was rooted in progressive ideology, hardly surprising as Hanna matriculated in the 1930s when progressivism still had a strong presence in teacher preparation. In addition, Hanna espoused other socialist ideologies and there was something of a link between socialist and progressive thinking. It probably is not surprising either that the other adults blamed Hanna’s teaching methods, although her school was in practice for only one, possibly two, months at the time of the above entry. Progressive education formed the basis of many educational debates and disagreements in communities during the preceding years. Hanna next referred to the difficulties she experienced trying to enact progressive reform as a teacher in Yugoslavia before the war began.

People have forgotten that it is more important and more effective to set a good example than to give advice and dole out punishment. Even in so-called normal circumstances the education in our schools back home, in Yugoslavia, was lacking in so many respects. How many ridiculous things went on there that were totally unsuited to the needs of the people and contrary to the spirit of the age! So often our teaching seemed irrelevant and meaningless: It started with the repressive tendency and generally unprogressive nature of the curriculum. It may have been possible with great effort, to change a few things now and again, but in the main everything stayed as it had been. So how absurd it is to dream of some perfect form of education in a concentration camp like this.²⁸

There in Belsen, despite the difficulties of living, much less of teaching, Hanna was able to go on thinking of the future and hoping for opportunities as a teacher to work toward creating a new age. It was toward her success as a teacher that she looked from the darkness of the concentration camp. She understood that it was not the manifestations of evil but the roots of it that must be the target of her efforts.

One must attack the roots of the evil itself. This is why I am looking so impatiently for the advent of the new age that will enable us to attack evil at its source. And I

²⁸Ibid.

eagerly imagine the opportunities I shall have as a teacher. How happy it would make me if my efforts were crowned with success.²⁹

Hanna sorely missed opportunities to continue her own education. She wrote on 29 August 1944, “[a] person is sick if he has no books. It is as though my innermost being has been destroyed.” She went on to describe her imprisonment as a “host of wasted hours” wherein “the mind [is] wasted and stunted,” and she lamented “all the things I failed to learn,” and “all the gaps in my knowledge.”³⁰ It was surely the sense of her lack of opportunity that fed her determination to educate the children. It was also a matter of her deep concern for the unfortunate children themselves whom she described:

Belsen 30.8.44

Then there are the children. They know no joy, only fear, these poor, humiliated little creatures who are made to stand to attention for hours, trembling in fright, waiting blankly for what is to happen next. Covering their heads with some piece of rag, they cling to the adults in search of protection from cold and fear, looking feverishly around with wide-open eyes, like hounded beasts.³¹

Yet, she said two days earlier of those same children:

Belsen 1.9.44

Sometimes the children’s basic goodness asserts itself and surprising things happen . . . so much strength of character do these children have that they can sometimes be made to do things we would never have thought possible.³²

Hanna was particularly aware of the effects of the camp atmosphere on the morality of the inmates, especially of the children, and of the role of the camp as a teaching venue. Of the effects of camp life she wrote bitterly:

²⁹Ibid., 9.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹Ibid., 12.

³²Ibid., 9.

In a word: this is the perfect institution for teaching 'respect'—an institution where men are starved and cramped together like animals, a school for forced labour, for wretched men and women and uncontrollable children, whose spirit has already been crushed.³³

The brutality of the camp, and the way that the Germans forced people into humiliated obsequiousness, gnawed at Hanna. She identified their efforts as an attempt, all too often successful, to reduce the Jewish prisoners to a state of degradation and despair. Writing of the conditions under which they existed, she described the miasma of their physical lives and the sickness it fostered in their spirits. On the last day of August she wrote that "everything is covered in dust; straw lies all over the floor, mixed with garbage and excrement, and the stench is indescribable."³⁴ In the next month she wrote of those wretched conditions noting:

Belsen 4.9.44

A wailing, stinking scene of endless misery, turned into a disgusting public spectacle. It is exactly what the Nazis intended—to humiliate us and reduce us to animals, to drive us out of our minds, to extinguish even the faintest memory we might still have that we were once human beings.³⁵

Determined to foster and sustain the children's sense of themselves as human beings, and by doing so her own, Hanna pressed forward with her school. Unable to improve their physical plight, she nonetheless was able to affect significantly their intellectual and spiritual well being. Her description of their response to her lessons tells a tale of hope, courage, and devotion to the task by the children and their teacher.

Belsen 23.9.44

I devote myself regularly to the children. I feel very dearly that our "school" has become an indispensable part of their existence, the only influence that keeps

³³Ibid., 13.

³⁴Ibid., 14.

³⁵Ibid., 16.

their spiritual lives cheerful and refreshed. The great majority of them are enthusiastic to learn and have the will to make up for the time they have lost. When I call them to come, they respond with shouts of joy and shout 'Hurrah!' Then the ablest among them clear a corner in the hut so that we can start, and they gather round me, their wonderful faces filled with delight but also with attentiveness and concentration.³⁶

The children must have been eager for the opportunity to learn but it is difficult to imagine that level of enthusiasm if the teaching they anticipated had been only a lonely tutorial. There is a strong sense that they appreciated the opportunity to gather together with Hanna and peers to do school. As Hanna next reported, their off days for schooling were rather miserable. School surely gave them a sense of purpose and a sense of Hanna's care. It also kept them busy and distracted from the hideousness of their lives. Hanna wrote:

On the days when they are prevented from having their instruction, their mood changes. They become bored and irritated, because the only thing left for them to do is to feel how hungry they are. It is indeed a tragic state of affairs when children at the age when both body and mind clamour to develop are made to waste their lives in forced mental and physical idleness under humiliating conditions of mass slavery, while their powers become stunted and withered. This is why I try as often as I can to make them learn something. With the youngest this happens almost involuntarily, and they have grown so attached to me that I can hardly free myself from them.³⁷

Hanna's bond with the younger children provided them with an adult to whom to cling for security. The older children also turned to her. They had other teachers who were by then too ill or too wrapped up in other concerns to continue their instruction. Hanna shouldered the additional task and she found it inspiring. The older youths were a group with whom she could explore more sophisticated topics, including themes of literary interpretation and sociological

³⁶Ibid., 36-37.

³⁷Ibid., 37.

analysis. Hanna reported that:

The older children are now coming to me as well, for Professor K. is sick and the other "teachers" are utterly disinterested [sic]. Teaching these older children has a quality of its own. They particularly enjoy discussing with me various questions about life, which enables me to bring them into contact with ideas that I find especially valuable. One day, for instance, I gave them a poem by Verhaeren called '*L'effort*', which I had happened to find and had translated into Serbian, and asked them to comment on it. The simplicity of the description of human work in this poem aroused a keen interest in all of them. Quite spontaneously they began to tell what they knew about the various occupations, and bit by bit I worked them round to describing the values that are created by labour, the role of the workers in society, in the exploitation of the world's natural wealth, in industrial production and so on. From this I led them on to grasp the close link that exists between the evolution of civilisation on the one hand and the working-class movement on the other. Thanks to the fact that a large number of my pupils came from the labouring classes, such as the families of small peasants and tradesmen from southern Jugoslavia (Kosovo and Metohija) I was able to give the discussion a practical slant and help the children to acquire knowledge based on their own experience.³⁸

By mid-November the prisoners were balancing on the brink of extermination. They did not yet quite perceive the abyss into which their murderers inexorably shoved them. Yet the first signs had appeared: huge convoys of prisoners had begun to arrive in Belsen as the Germans worked to clear the eastern camps to avoid their discovery and liberation by Soviet troops who pushed the front westward.

In the third week of November, the camp still went on as before and the longer tenured prisoners remained curious about the new arrivals. That week Hanna wrote:

Belsen 18 November 1944.

My work with the children goes on in spite of everything. The others, the so-called "adults" and "experts", only make things difficult for me instead of helping me.

³⁸Ibid.

Avidly I seize the slightest opportunity to get the children together so as to keep alive both in them and in myself a modicum of mental awareness and of feeling for human dignity.³⁹

Hanna continued the school. It seemed to have become for her and her pupils a symbol of their humanity as well as an institution for developing skills and intellects. She even reported then a decision to extend the work with the children; she noted a decision made and implemented "to use Saturdays in the whole camp for special children's festivals, mostly of a religious character."⁴⁰ Hanna reiterated the spiritual response she felt emanating from her work with the children. She and the children, in spite of all the deprivations and barriers, appear to have achieved an admirable teacher/pupil relationship and to have found in it hope for the future.

This activity comes spontaneously to me, almost instinctively, as the expression of an irresistible urge from the depths of my soul—in those rare moments when I succeed in waking my soul from its slumber. And I feel it is an urge that springs from the souls of the children themselves, for they follow my lead in their excitement, they show their desire to live, to play, a desire stronger than they are themselves. It moves me to the core.⁴¹

The end came swiftly. Three entries, and perhaps as little as two weeks—certainly no more than a month and a half—later Hanna wrote:

Belsen December 1944

I thought the end had come and there was nothing more for me to record. But there is no end. One day follows another—fearful terrifying dark days. If only we could see the end, whatever it is. . . . We are all exhausted, reduced to a shadow. The food they give us gets less day by day. It is three days since we saw a crust of bread. . . . No more school classes, no more cleaning parties—everything is in a state of confusion, a mass of decay and filth.⁴²

³⁹Ibid., 42.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid., 42-43.

⁴²Ibid., 45-47. The entry is dated merely December 1944. The diary contains three entries dated December 1944 of

At Belsen, starvation, exposure, and disease decimated the ranks of prisoners. Hanna was marched out of the camp in an evacuation group in April 1945 as her captors tried once more to take their Jewish prisoners beyond the possibility of liberation. Soviet troops rescued her when she separated from her group. Her diary survived with her. She returned to Yugoslavia in July 1945, and in 1948, she immigrated to Israel.

In a 1978 interview, Hanna discussed the danger associated with her camp activities, including keeping a diary and conducting a school:

I remember it was more dangerous in Cetinje, because that was small prison, and we were continuously under guard.⁴³ But in the concentration camp it [surveillance] was not so bad. The Nazis, the SS “supermen”, took good care not to get too close to the prisoners in the huts, because we were not regarded as human beings. They only came close in order to shout at us or beat us or pick people out for the slave gangs at the “roll calls.”⁴⁴

That observation is interesting as it reveals an instance where Hanna found a “space” to engage in forbidden activities. Ironically, the Germans themselves created that space. Having forbidden teaching, they went on to create such appalling conditions in Belsen that they hesitated to go into the huts to inspect them regularly. Thus, Hanna was able not only to teach, but to keep a record of the very thing the Germans were intent on concealing.

Learning at “school” with the children was more risky [than keeping the diary], because it was [specifically] forbidden. That’s why we did it at times when the Germans were unable to come. Sometimes they came unawares, and then it was

which this is the first.

⁴³Cetinje, in Yugoslavia, was the place where Hanna was imprisoned immediately following her arrest and prior to her deportation to Belsen.

⁴⁴Lévy-Hass, 70.

dangerous. But the children were so clever that no one could see what we were doing. I was well aware that this was dangerous.⁴⁵

Here again Hanna pointed out that they were able to do school by doing it between the not too frequent visits by the Germans. She also relied on the cleverness of the children. These children had spent all or significant portions of their young lives in an environment in which it was essential to hide what they did from the Germans. They were adept at concealing what they were really doing. Still, as Hanna said, "I was well aware that this was dangerous." So, presumably, were the children.

Drancy and Bergen-Belsen were camps easily recognized as such. In Czechoslovakia, near Prague, lay a small fortress town called Terezin. The Germans evacuated the town and used it for a concentration camp for Jews. Initially its Jewish population was Czech and Slovakian Jews, but as time went on, Jews began to arrive from other parts of German-controlled Europe. Included in those groups of Jews were many *Prominente*, Jews who for various reasons the Germans kept on hold in Terezin rather than sending them immediately to the death camps. In the Chapter Eight there are narratives from that camp. Known in German as Theresienstadt, it existed as a unique, albeit no less dangerous, camp in the German system

Terezin

Terezin (Theresienstadt) was a small fortress town in Czechoslovakia. The Germans made it a concentration camp and later used it to try to fool the world about their treatment of Jews. The first Jews arrived there from Prague in November 1941. The Germans portrayed the camp as a ghetto and appointed a Jewish council to oversee the internal workings of the camp and to

⁴⁵Ibid, 71.

carry out German decrees, rules, and objectives. The council labored under the additional burden of overcrowding, lack of sufficient food and fuel, and deliberately induced antihygienic conditions.

The first deportations of Jews to Terezin consisted of predominantly Czechs, Slovaks, or refugees living in Czechoslovakia. Later Jews from Germany, many "prominent" Jews, as well as Danish Jews swelled the ranks of misery.⁴⁶ Terezin also served as a transit camp for Auschwitz. As the Allies advanced into German-occupied territories, and finally into Germany itself, the Germans evacuated Jews from other camps in order to prevent their liberation. As the circle closed, they dumped many in Terezin.

The Germans arranged the camp so that inmates suffered from cold, starvation, and disease. These killed many Terezin inmates and they sent many more to die in the gas chambers of Auschwitz II/Birkenau. However, before they died, many Terezin inmates participated in an astonishing and rich cultural life. The presence of many prominent persons with distinguished scientific, literary, and artistic careers enhanced cultural life in Terezin, where many worked at hard, cruel tasks by day and joined the intellectual efforts in the evenings.

The camp inmates, or at least their leaders, made an early decision to organize children's homes and clandestine schools within the barracks and to divert extra rations to the children of the camp—no easy decision since it required cutting food from others, including most heart-wrenchingly from the elderly. They saw children as the future and much effort went to making their lives as bearable, and indeed as bright and wholesome as possible. Forming a *Jugendfürsorge* [Youth Welfare Department] to coordinate efforts, the Jewish prisoners at Terezin achieved wondrous results in creating and implementing children's programs in a world where it seemed little was possible.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Danish gentiles rallied to hide and the ferry to Sweden nearly all Jews in Denmark on the eve of their arrest and deportation. The Germans seized only four hundred and sent them to Terezin where Danish inquiries as to their health led to a somewhat protected stay at the camp and protection from deportation. Only fifty-one died while imprisoned. Lucy Dawidowicz, *The War Against the Jews 1933-1945*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1975), 373-374.

⁴⁷George E. Berkley, *Hitler's Gift: The Story of Theresienstadt*. (Boston: Brandon Books, 1993), 108-119.

The first narrative in this group is of Egon "Gonda" Redlich, the head of the *Jugendfürsorge*. Gonda had much influence upon the arrangements for housing, feeding, and creating a school system for the imprisoned youths. He also arranged his own studies and took part in various aspects of the educational activities. His work required him to deal with a myriad of philosophical and logistical problems surrounding those efforts.

"Some say we are forcing Jewishness on the children."

Egon "Gonda" Redlich was twenty-three years old when the Germans marched into Czechoslovakia. The fifth child of a lower-middle-class family, he abandoned his legal studies and became a scout leader, coach, teacher, and assistant director of his school until deported to Terezin in December 1941. Upon arrival at the camp the young Zionist accepted the assignment to head the *Jugendfürsorge* (Youth Welfare Department). That organization cared for the fifteen thousand children who passed through the camp. They organized children's homes, persuaded parents to send their children to live in them, and arranged for teachers. The children's program included a variety of cultural activities. Redlich actually kept two diaries during his incarceration. The first, written on office calendar pages, he kept from 1 January 1942, shortly after his arrival, until 2 August 1944; the second, a notebook, he wrote from 16 March 1944. He began the second concurrent manuscript, "Diary of Dan," when his son was born. He continued it until 6 October 1944, when he and his family went "on transport to the East"—in their case Auschwitz II/Birkenau—where the Germans killed all three. Gonda, not raised in an Orthodox family, attempted to create a stronger Jewish identity during his incarceration in Terezin. His efforts included the study of Hebrew and he wrote in that language except entries made on Shabbat (the Sabbath). Someone,

perhaps Gonda, placed both diaries in a woman's purse, and in 1967 workmen found them in a Terezin attic.⁴⁸

The Germans established the camp at Terezin as a transit camp for Jewish prisoners on 24 November 1941. Gonda Redlich arrived in December [possibly on the 4th—see entry 4 April 1942] of that year and immediately became involved in the *Jugendfürsorge*.⁴⁹ Three months later his writing indicated something of his work with a description of in-service training for the teachers when he provided lectures to his staff.

March 17, 1942. My relationship with the counselors is still good. In the evening, a talk with the women counselors. I lectured for almost a full hour, but the counselors were so tired they did not pay attention to the lecture. I wanted to kindle a debate on Jewish education²³ but failed. I hope I will succeed next time.

23. Czech Jews were similar in many ways to their brethren in America. For the most part clustered in urban centers, fairly well-educated, with an intermarriage rate close to 30 percent in Bohemia, because of their orientation toward Reform Judaism, few were familiar with traditional Hebrew books beyond the Siddur or Haggadah.⁵⁰

Apparently, Gonda wanted not only to give the teachers information but also to foment an intellectual atmosphere in which they would discuss and debate issues.

Life in Terezin included many challenges including constant influx of new prisoners. The *Jugendfürsorge* had to deal with large numbers of children many of whom arrived without parents. Gonda noted for example on March 19, 1942. "They say that all the orphans [from Brno] are coming."⁵¹

Jewish leaders also had to deal with the fears of those who worked for them concerning treatment and potential deportation. Throughout Gonda's diaries can be found references to the process, and conflicts, by which prisoners negotiated Jewishness.

⁴⁸Egon Redlich, *The Terezin Diary of Gonda Redlich*. Saul Friedman, ed. and Laurence Kutler, trans. (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1992), xii-xiv.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* Youth Services Department.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 28.

⁵¹*Ibid.*

One assimilated counselor said he heard that I wanted to put him on the transport list to the East. I explained to him that I don't use my position to advantage by exploiting people who have a different viewpoint from mine.⁵²

Early in the life of the camp, work with children had already progressed to the point that on March 21, 1942 Gonda wrote:

We opened a successful exhibition.²⁶ Perhaps S. and B.²⁷ will come and see it

²⁶Of children's arts and crafts.

²⁷These references are to Commandant Seidl and Camp Inspector Karl Bergel. See entry January 10, 1942.⁵³

Art and crafts apparently were within the parameters of allowed activities, as Gonda expressed some expectation of a visit to that exhibition by German camp authorities. Jewish teachers and children used the tacit permission to engage in activities that shielded educational activities that the Germans forbade or failed to approve. Education at that time seems to have existed in an ambiguous position. Later the Germans forbade it although that did nothing to prevent it.

Meanwhile, the task of organizing children's living conditions continued. Initially living arrangements were not consistent. Some children quartered with their parents—boys under twelve and girls with the women and older boys with the men—and others lived separately. In the beginning, the Germans confined Jews to barracks with children allowed to visit parents once a week. The *Jugendfürsorge* apparently decided, not without some initial disagreement, that improving conditions for children required housing and feeding them separately from adults. In addition the committee had to try to find ways to provide even

⁵²*Ibid.*, 28. There was apparently some unease between assimilated and non-assimilated—and especially between Zionist and non-Zionist—Jews in Terezin. Gonda, a Zionist with some position in the camp hierarchy, thus inadvertently instilled fear in this man regarding choices that had to be made regarding who could stay and who could be put on deportation lists. It was, in many instances, one of the cruelties of the German policy that these decisions be made by Jews. This of course created internecine conflict that sometimes helped prevent effective resistance action.

⁵³*Ibid.*

the most basic accommodations for very young children as evidenced in the following entry,

March 24–25, 1942. We want to build beds for the small children. . . . We negotiated with the administration concerning the concentration of youths in one of the army barracks. Maybe this program will succeed. At first, I was against the concentration. But now I see that if we put the children together many good things will occur: large, airy rooms, the possibility of getting rooms for classes, etc.⁵⁴

It is important to understand that the prisoners conducted all of these activities so far during a period in which the Germans confined nearly every Jewish prisoner in Terezin to assigned barracks. Therefore, in essence all teachers had to live in at least the same barracks with students if not actually sharing quarters with them.

In addition, the *Jugendfürsorge* had to contend with convincing others, including each group of newcomers, to agree to their plan. German portrayals of Terezin as a model autonomous Jewish community undoubtedly hindered cooperation. The reality of life in the camp would in some cases have taken a while to settle into newcomers' thinking. Teachers under the *Jugendfürsorge* plan usually lived with their students. Thus, they served as counselors as well as teachers. The irony revealed in the following passage is that the requirement meant ensuring a better standard of living for the teachers than they might otherwise expect. Teachers who were also counselors shared the barracks and the kitchens of their students.

Teachers from Brno will be coming now, and they don't want to work in the same line as counselor and teacher. It's difficult to fulfill their requests. I believe they must work at any job, just like the others.⁵⁵

Gonda, and many of his fellow inmates, became ever more ardently Zionist when faced with the bleak realities of life under German control in

⁵⁴Ibid., 29.

⁵⁵Ibid.

Czechoslovakia and especially in Terezin. More than ever they began to believe in a Jewish homeland, not as one solution to anti-Semitism, but as the only solution. Their teachings reflected their beliefs—if Jewish children were going to survive, much less grow and thrive, they must do so in a Jewish state. However, many assimilationists focused instead on regaining their lives in a free Europe. That conflict seems to have been present throughout the existence of an educational program in Terezin—sometimes reaching the level of open and sometimes bitter discord. Gonda referred to it frequently and seemed to understand both arguments. He maintained sympathy for those whose point of view was quite different from his. In an entry he said:

April 3–5, 1942. The woman counselor doesn't understand the meaning or purpose, the destiny of our people, because she is an assimilated Jewess. . . . I have become a real Zionist here. Nevertheless, I understand the doubts of others and I don't have the will to argue with them. I think that every man must struggle till he finds the meaning and purpose in the work that a Jew is born to.⁵⁶

For some Jews, including Gonda, concentration of Jews into a ghetto and camps served to intensify their Jewish and Zionist identities. His deepening sense of Jewish identity infused Gonda's life with new meaning and influenced his perspective on education of Jewish children.

April 4, 1942. *Shabbat*. Four months of Terezin. On the whole: I have turned into a Jew in the fullest sense of the word. Czech songs and culture have lost all their meaning. I am reaching a goal which I have longed for: to be Jew with all that the word means. I have much work and am working with renewed vigor.⁵⁷

Not content to provide a makeshift education, Gonda reviewed not only the work assigned to students but also the teachers (counselors) who worked with the children. It must have been, for some, an arduous task to bring energy and creativity to teaching. Some teachers may have sought those positions in

⁵⁶Ibid., 32.

⁵⁷Ibid.

order to avoid work that was more strenuous and to benefit from the better kitchens of the children's homes. Yet, there was a strong core of teachers thoroughly committed to creating an exemplary education for their students. Gonda struggled to find ways to combine the two groups with the hope of inspiring those who did not meet the objectives of his plan.

April 7, 1942. The students work on interesting lessons. I myself tried to work at the lessons and saw that they are too hard. I see that most male counselors lack initiative—they do their work mechanically. It's my opinion that a few new counselors would bring an important new force to our work.⁵⁸

Not content with providing classroom lessons, the committee worked to include other aspects of school including recreational activities. In that effort, they met with some successes. Gonda received permission for using the ramparts of the former fortress.

April 11, 1942. Shabbat. Today I was out walking about the walls. We will be getting playgrounds for the children there. The area is wide and has many possibilities.¹¹ I saw the gallows from above. Everything makes a surrealistic impression—the caves in the wall, the quantity of tiered planks, the graves where so many feet have trod, flattening the earth.

11. The thirty-foot-high walls and ramparts of Terezin were covered with vegetation. In some places, the ramparts were broad enough for soccer fields. Redlich received extraordinary permission to have sick children take walks there.⁵⁹

In Terezin, modeled to resemble an "autonomous ghetto," the hierarchy of Jewish "officials" gave rise to suspicions of better living conditions for some. The suspicion worked itself into schools where some children found themselves in uncomfortable peer relationships.

⁵⁸Ibid., 33.

⁵⁹Ibid., 34. The gruesome juxtaposition of the eagerly anticipated playgrounds and the gallows and graveyard obviously created a strong impression in Gonda's mind. The next day, he reiterated: "I toured the walls of the city. They will be giving us large areas full of grass for the children's play area. I also saw the gallows. Its appearance was very eerie. There is great anticipation about the future children's play area."

May 5, 1942. Edelstein "the Little"⁵ won't go to school willingly because his friends ask him if the floor of his apartment truly is covered with carpets, if the food for his family is different from the food of other ghetto people. When he tells the truth, the other children do not believe him

5. Arieh Edelstein lived with his parents in the Magdeburg barrack. He was shot in Birkenau in June 1944. See also entry April 28, 1942.⁶⁰

Apparently, Arieh's schoolmates suspected that his father's position meant better living conditions for the family. That child, apparently suspected by the other children of favored status, indeed lived not in a children's barrack but with his parents and grandmother and thus had to "go to school." This episode illustrates one of the strengths of the arrangements of child life in Terezin; most children lived apart from their parents so it was understood that if their living conditions were better than those of their parents they were equal to those of other children in the homes. Removed from differentiated living situations where uneven conditions could lead to envy and resentment, they could get on with their own affairs.

For many prisoners, children and adults, an important aspect of their camp existence lay in looking to lessons of the past to try to make sense of the present. Both autodidactic experiences and study groups aided in the effort at understanding. Gonda participated in such study opportunities as can be seen in the following passage where he reported on their learning.

May 10, 1942. An interesting Hebrew circle: a lecture on Agnon⁹ and his writings. Contents of his book: *Maalot v'yeridot*. It's like the basic theme in the book of Job. It's the fate of man alternately to suffer and to be happy. Man's lot is like a ladder: he rises to the highest level and then falls to the bottom. There, he has to get back on his feet in order to climb again

9. Shmuel Yosef Agnon (1888–1970) was a master of Hebrew novels and short stories and the first Israeli to win the Nobel Prize (for literature in 1966).⁶¹

⁶⁰Ibid., 40. Arieh was the son of Jacob Edelstein, head of the *Ältestenrat* (Council of Elders).

⁶¹Ibid., 41.

By mid-May other problems threatened to quash efforts on behalf of children. Gonda reported that the Germans were threatening to punish forbidden activities by halting efforts to aid children.

May 15, 1942. Great tension. The Germans designated a final date for handing over contraband. They threatened to stop child welfare programs if Jews continue to smoke and engage in forbidden activities.¹⁴

14. Smoking was deemed one of the worst offenses by the Nazis. The police scandal held serious repercussions for Redlich's program.

May 16, 1942. *Shabbat*. According to rumor, four levels of punishment will be initiated: (a) youth service activities will cease; (b) teaching will be forbidden; (c) workers' aid will be forbidden; (d) food rations will be reduced.⁶²

Adding to the tension was the dissension between assimilationists and Zionists that reached new heights.

Serious arguments about issues in the ghetto. Some say we are forcing Jewishness on the children. We are a minority against the majority here. We are strong, but we do not take advantage of it. We are forbidden to take advantage.

May 17-18, 1942. The conflicts between the Zionists and the assimilationists sadden me. I think it's ridiculous when they complain about us that we are forcing the children to become Zionists. Nevertheless, I am angry because after the war¹⁶ our detractors will surely say that the Zionists were enemies of Czech culture and all progress. In reality, most of the counselors are assimilationists. I have to admit that there aren't enough male and female Zionist counselors. In my eyes, it is better to organize a good non-Zionist education than a poor Zionist one. We lack initiative in work. All my assistants are tired and sometimes irresponsible in educating our youth

16. According to Ruth Bondy, the entry of the United States into the war gave European Jews reason to hope the end of the conflict was at hand. Now, at every major social function, Christian holiday or Jewish, the question discussed was not if people would survive, but what they would do when the war was over.

⁶²Ibid., 43.

See also entry July 25, 1942.⁶³

As Gonda pointed out, Zionists were in a minority even within the ranks of teachers. However, many of Terezin's Jewish leaders, including both heads of the *Ältestenrat* [Council of Elders], Gonda Redlich, and Fredy Hirsch, another major figure in the *Jugendfürsorge*, were Zionists. In the minds of assimilated Jews, that situation gave rise to fears of a powerful Zionist hegemony.⁶⁴

Meanwhile Gonda continued his own studies writing on 18 June, "I continue to study with Rabbi Weiss. He is an expert in Hebrew, and I can learn much from him." His studies did not distract him from his tasks however as he immersed himself in the creation of a school system for the camp's children adding on 24 June: "The kindergartens are expanding. There is more than enough work among the children." The next day Gonda returned to the subject of his own education writing:

June 25–26, 1942. I have already been studying Hebrew for three years. In spite of this, there are always new words whose meaning I don't understand. The Hebrew language is really difficult. I am very diligent but I cannot say that I know the language. What will people do who have only begun to study in Eretz Yisrael? They will never learn the language. Indeed, it is incumbent upon all Jews in Eretz Yisrael to learn Arabic too. What will they do? They don't know Hebrew or Arabic. I am very conscientious.⁶⁵

Clearly, Gonda felt that aspect of education, including his own, to be an essential element of creating a successful homeland in Palestine. Although Gonda had doubts about his ability to use Hebrew, he nonetheless used that language to write his diary. Thus, in a sense, he was using both education and the diary itself to create a new more Jewish persona.

⁶³Ibid., 43-44.

⁶⁴There was in that period also some tension between Gonda and the women counselors. On 24 May 1942, he reported that "In the evening, the women counselors shouted at me." Then on 25 May, he wrote: "It's also not easy to work with the women counselors, with women in general. It's always impossible for me to express an opinion since straightforward opinions don't work." Ibid., 45.

⁶⁵Ibid., 52.

The work of creating the children's home continued. The *Jugendfürsorge* searched for ways to overcome many problems in order to group children and in order to find space to house them. Efforts went forth to put together homes of children according to gender, age, and various affiliations. Some homes were German, others Czech; some were Zionist, Socialist, or religious. They found space to house some groups in the former school building, and by July the committees prepared to begin implementing the plans that had been in the works for several months. Yet, for all the benefits of the plans, there were still difficulties to face, including the separation of families and the continuing prohibition against leaving the buildings as described below:

July 5, 1942. Much work. Next week, we will be shifting quarters of the children and youth from the barracks to the school. The rooms there are nicer. But it is impossible not to see the difficulties with an operation like this. It's still not possible to leave the barracks without permits. The mothers, what will they say? They want to see their children, and in this regard they are correct.⁵

5. Children who were living with mothers were going to central dormitories.⁶⁶

Two days later, after the relocation from Terezin of all Czech gentile civilians, the city became entirely a concentration camp for Jews. The change seemed a relief for the inmates. On 7 July 1942, Gonda reported that they could at last go outside without a police escort and that men and women visited each other. Now the children's homes could operate on a more positive basis as parents and children could visit freely when not at work. It is a measure of the community spirit, that even orphans had regular visitation with adults who "adopted" them.⁶⁷

In addition, the new housing arrangements for children seem to have been successful and we find from Gonda on 9 July, that, "The work of the

⁶⁶Ibid., 55.

⁶⁷George E. Berkley, *Hitler's Gift: The Story of Theresienstadt*. (Boston: Brandon Books, 1993, 109.

counselors in the new school is very nice. The rooms are airy and pleasant. According to the counselors, the children are very happy.”⁶⁸

However, in the camp not all was well, as food rations still were perilously low and medical treatment insufficient. Housing in general was dismal—even in the children's quarters crowding and hygiene were problematical—and the Germans treated Jewish prisoners at best shabbily, and more often with extreme cruelty. Even the “pleasantness” of the children’s quarters and the “happiness” of the children were in contrast to conditions in Terezin—not to their lives before the invasion of their homelands by their neighbors.

Worse was yet to come. On 26 July, Gonda wrote: “They are going to forbid teaching children to read and write.”⁶⁹ Despite the prohibition, school went forward. In Terezin, as in other places under their control, the Germans permitted only certain activities for children. Yet, Gonda’s counselors managed, under the guise of singing and games, to teach a broad range of subjects. Lookouts posted in each school warned of the approach of the Germans or their minions, and the children and teachers would conceal all evidence of teaching. Still that news must have come as a blow to the spirits of everyone concerned.

A month later Gonda reported embarking on a new line of study and the continuation of an old one. Education was not only for children and in Terezin, as in other places, adults studied alone or with teachers. For Gonda, learning was an important element of his current life and part of the process of preparing himself for a new life.

August 30, 1942. I have started learning Arabic. Before I get to Eretz Yisrael I want to master Hebrew. Then I could read the papers, the literature, speak. Then I would have time to study Arabic. It won't hurt if I lay the foundations to study Arabic in the Diaspora.⁷⁰

⁶⁸Ibid., 56.

⁶⁹Ibid., 60.

⁷⁰Ibid., 67-68.

Gonda and his colleagues confronted various problems both practical and philosophical. Among these were problems of ethnicity. Although they saw themselves as members of different cultural groups, the Germans counted them only as Jews and thrust them together. That raised certain dilemmas including the question of segregation.

August 31, 1942. An interesting debate. Is it better to separate children from the Reich or to educate them together with the children from the Protectorate? I considered this problem and it isn't clear.²⁶

26. "Separate kindergartens were established for Czech-speaking children (three hundred students) and Hebrew (seventy to one hundred), and there were some children's homes specifically reserved for Czechs (L417 for boys ages ten to fourteen, L410 for girls ages ten to sixteen) or Germans (L414 for Germans ages ten to fourteen). But others (L318 for sick children ages four to ten, C111 for children ages four to twelve, and the Lehrlingsheim for youths ages fourteen to eighteen) held mixed populations (Adler, 563). Hanka Fishel complained about the poor attitude of German children who were so influenced by Nazi songs and power (Fishel testimony #94, Hebrew University Oral History Project)."⁷¹

In such entries it becomes clear that to be Jewish was a categorization fraught with sometimes problematic diversity. Not only did Jews distinguish between Orthodox and Reform Judaism, and between assimilationist and Zionist, but they also made clear distinctions between Eastern and Western Jews and, as in that case, between Czech and German. They resolved some conflicts more easily. At one time, for example, there was disagreement about German language instruction as many viewed it as the native tongue of the very monsters that had orchestrated the misery the Jews were enduring. Yet that discussion ended with the arrival of children from Germany. The important thing was to offer schooling and such points of contention must not interfere with that goal.⁷²

By September, plans for completion of the children's homes continued. The workload was heavy and Gonda struggled to find time and energy for his studies. He wrote on 1 September, "The Arabic language is very hard. I don't know if I will have enough patience to study such a difficult language in addition

⁷¹Ibid., 68.

⁷²Berkley, 112. See also Irma Lausheřová-Kohnová's discussion of reading methodology debate.

to Hebrew.”⁷³ Yet even as the *Jugendfürsorge* and the Housing Committee toiled to arrange space for all the children in the camp, even more were arriving. Gonda and Fredy Hirsch worked hard to arrange more rooms and new homes. Of their efforts Gonda wrote: “September 18, 1942. Today a transport from Ostrava will arrive. We don’t know where to put the children. There is no room.”⁷⁴ It was a complex problem. Not only must they find quarters, staff the homes, and make educational decisions, but also the children and staff starved, often faced discouragement, and increasingly suffered the affliction of a dismaying array of ailments. Gonda voiced his concerns:

September 25, 1942. Orphans, children in the attics. It’s impossible to find another place for them. The people who are in charge don’t have enough energy. There isn’t enough authority among the others. It goes without saying that there is a connection between the first phenomenon (lack of energy) and the second (lack of authority).⁷⁵

As September wound into October the task became ever more daunting. In October Gonda wrote of the difficulty of carrying on his studies: “October 6, 1942. There are also difficulties. I love studying, but I do not have enough time to study.”⁷⁶ Still, it did not get in the way of providing schooling for his young charges—or for dealing with the disagreements about what form the schooling ought to take. Religious expressions were unlikely to find favor with a number of groups in the camp including socialists, assimilationists, and converts.

October 10, 1942. We are trying to create a curriculum of Jewish education. We want to conduct morning prayers with the small children. And behold—they say that this is reactionary, outdated, and God knows what else. They don’t understand that “Shema Yisrael”⁷⁴ does not have to be an expression of religious faith but can also be an expression of national faith. The debate on this one is at times very severe

⁷³Redlich, 68.

⁷⁴Ibid., 72.

⁷⁵Ibid., 73.

⁷⁶Ibid., 76.

4. The basic expression of Jewish monotheism, literally "Hear O Israel."⁷⁷

.....

October 11, 1942. A great debate on the forms of "Jewishness" in the children's education. Many assimilationist and indifferent counselors are opposed to Hebrew education. We tried, for example, to conduct morning prayers with the small children. Many were opposed to it.⁷⁸

Still, for all the disagreements and varied opinions, schooling went on for the children and their teachers. In Terezin, the adults as well as children had recourse to a rich offering of educational opportunities. Educators had the opportunity to enrich and revitalize their intellectual lives as well as those of their students. Along with a variety of classes and lectures available to the general population of Terezin, special opportunities existed for those who worked with children. On 14 October Gonda wrote: "They are setting up seminars for the counselors. Different scholars will lecture on various subjects."⁷⁹

Plans went forward to expand the schooling available in Terezin. Later that month Gonda's diary included a report of plans for Hebrew kindergarten.⁸⁰ In early November Gonda recorded some of the difficulties that arose in working with young children and providing competent care for them.

November 2, 1942. Caring for small children is not an easy task. Frequently, such and such a mother complains that the counselors do not take proper care of the children. In truth, the children are dirty and the counselors are sometimes negligent.¹

1. Washrooms in Terezin with their limited supply of water were to be treated with lime or chlorine three times daily. Soap, which did not lather, was issued to the children. Individuals might launder three kilograms of laundry every six weeks. With thirty to forty children in a room, many of them sick, it is little wonder that many of the children's rooms were "infested with rats and vermin" (Adler 109).⁸¹

⁷⁷Ibid., 79.

⁷⁸Ibid., 77.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid., 79.

⁸¹Ibid., 82.

Parents were not the only ones suffering from worry, low morale, and the exigencies of camp existence. Although conditions in the children's quarters were generally better than elsewhere in the camp, they were still sadly lacking by any other standard. This affected the morale of the children's staff as suggested in Gonda's diary:

December 8, 1942. The male and female counselors aren't happy with their work [conditions]. The shelters are overflowing, and it is impossible to place orphans or motherless children in them. Many of the aides are sick. Add to this more political opposition, etc.⁸²

Political opposition took many forms—not the least of which was opposition from the children themselves. Following a late December inspection, Gonda described an encounter with that problem and an attempt to deal with it.

December 23, 1942. They have placed many children in the attics. During one inspection of the children's homes, I heard a child revile: "Zionist pigs." I mentioned it to a counselor, and he sent the child to me. I explained to the child that everyone has the right to his opinion, but that great tolerance is needed, especially for us.⁸³

By the first day of the new year, weary and somewhat disheartened, Gonda reported that "I wanted to give up my administrative position. My beloved opposed it. I will not give up, even if I am tired." Having resolved not to quit his post, Gonda went to work to continue the process of improving conditions in the children's homes. He looked for ways to create workable school and recreational activities. Four days into the new year, he had formulated the following plan:

⁸²Ibid., 89.

⁸³Ibid., 91-92.

January 4, 1943. I would like to visit the children's house next week or in the coming weeks and stay in each house a week. Perhaps in this way I will be able to assess the practical situation in education and youth activities.⁸⁴

A wave of transports to Auschwitz kept Gonda from immediately making visits. Meanwhile he received some good news in learning that:

January 5, 1943. We will be given all the floors in an additional children's home. We hope to settle 450 children there. Our situation may improve in this way.⁸⁵

By 18 January, Gonda visited at least some homes in the hope of learning "the existing conditions of the houses and their problems."⁸⁶ Meanwhile he was able narrowly to avert disaster for the schools on 21 January. "In the morning, they placed many counselors into the transport of German youth. We succeeded in extricating almost all of them."⁸⁷ Deportations posed an ongoing problem for the schools—at any given time teachers might be sent on transport. Teacher loss left gaps in children's lives, including their school lives. It is significant that by that time Gonda seemed relieved to have lost only a few.

Despite the weight of work in the *Jugendfürsorge*, in mid-February Gonda took time to inventory his own educational accomplishments. "What have I learned in Hebrew here in the ghetto?" he wrote, "First of all, I have learned Talmudic literature (Mishnah, sections of Gemara, etc.)." It is a mark of his Zionist aspirations that Gonda struggled to maintain a Zionist basis for education not only for children but for himself as well. His faith in future Jewish survival seemed to hinge on establishment of a Jewish State, and he saw an understanding of Hebrew as an important element of that goal. It is remarkable that given the difficulties of the job at hand, Gonda and his

⁸⁴Ibid., 95.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid., 98.

teachers could manage to look beyond the day in order to plan and to prepare themselves and their youthful charges for the future.

By spring, many of the teachers were weary. No doubt, it was in part a physical weariness. Unnourished, often ill, lacking medicines, bereft of privacy, and engaged in a round-the-clock task, the sheer physical strain must have been crippling. Added to that was the extra burden of taking care of and trying to teach children in similar conditions, many of them orphaned. The mental and emotional weariness must have been considerable. It was Gonda's task to shore them up as best he could and to try to keep together the residential program and educational system they had built for the children.⁸⁸

In July, Gonda made another note pursuant to a "children's exhibit" in which we learn that "the children and youth made many wonderful things. Pictures carvings, etc. Children's life in the ghetto is expressed in all their works."⁸⁹ It was the second time Gonda referred to such an exhibit. However, at the time of the second exhibit, he made no mention of anticipated German attendance as he did on 21 March 1942.

Repeatedly in his diary, Gonda returned to concerns about the quality of his teaching staff. In a 24 September 1943 entry he complained that: "Not all the counselors in the children's quarters were selected carefully." He explained his concern that, "some of them call the children 'Polish pigs.'"⁹⁰ It might seem odd that persons with such negative feelings toward children would choose to teach, but, of course, conditions for teachers were commensurate with those for children. While they received no extra provisions, the Jewish committees charged with distributing resources, with the apparent acceptance of many other prisoners, decided to grant children better quarters and rations

⁸⁸Ruth Bondy's [editor of the Israeli edition of Redlich's diary] estimate of the number of children served by Redlich and the staff of the *Jugendfürsorge* included one thousand children under the age of seventeen. Divided by gender and age into groups of twenty or thirty per room (called a *Heim* or home) in barracks L417, U14 and L410.

⁸⁹Some of these works still exist—in most cases having outlived their young creators. One collection is the magazine *Vedem* some of which appears else where in this work. There is also a collection of children's writings and artwork housed in the Jewish Museum in Prague (with loans to various institutions such as the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.). These works are also the subject of publications.

⁹⁰Redlich, 131.

than they could otherwise expect. Teaching was also less physically arduous than some of the slave labor expected of others. Although teachers were not exempt from physical labor, they received some protection from the worst of it so that they could perform their pedagogical tasks. Apparently a number of persons gravitated to the teaching ranks for reasons that had little to do with the welfare of children.

I do not mean to suggest that relations between teachers and student were all bad. As we see in the narratives of others, many teachers earned great affection from the children. In an early December entry, Gonda told a story that illustrates not only an apparent regard for their teacher by a group of children, but also is an example of how children took responsibility for adults.

December 2, 1943

A counselor's boots were stolen. What did he do? He sent the children from his quarters to look for the boots. Really, the children found them with a person in the street. An occurrence like "Emil and the Detectives."⁹¹

Gonda recognized the goodness, in spite of weaknesses occasioned by unimaginable want, of some of his teachers when he wrote that:

December 5, 1943. Sometimes, a man's pride takes precedence over his hunger. If I tell the counselors they are to be punished by canceling their rights to get food from the children's kitchen (you are good counselors, but I have to treat everybody equally) they will leave me and take their punishment gladly. They are the good ones.⁹²

Gonda made little reference directly to education after that time. The exception is June 1944 when he referred to the embellishment of the ghetto before an International Red Cross inspection visit. Massive deportations preceded that event to relieve overcrowding; the Germans ordered the prisoners to clean and paint some building, and to rehearse various interactions and vignettes to be sure the inspectors received a good impression.

⁹¹Ibid., 137.

⁹²Ibid.

Gonda made several sarcastic comments about the fabrication of a “school” reporting on 18 June that: “They permitted the reconstruction of the school,”⁹³ and on 22 June commenting: “A sign: school for boys and girls. Now, in vacation time! Such is the teaching permit.”⁹⁴ Writing to his infant son after the commission’s visit, Gonda recalled the event and emphasized the sham saying:

June 23, 1944. They built a Potemkin Village. The Red Cross Committee inspected it. They visited us and saw the wonderful children, houses, post office, hospitals, and nice schools. The ban on teaching has not been lifted, but we have schools. . . . It’s enough if there is a sign “school” and magically, overnight, one appears. Jews are laughing, content with their fate. . . . Thus the committee has looked around and then they left. . . . The only question is: did they really believe what they were shown?¹⁷

17. Subsequently Dr. Frants Hvass of Denmark would concede that he exaggerated his praise of Terezin so the Nazis would permit the continued flow of food and supplies into the ghetto [sic].⁹⁵

The Germans sent Egon “Gonda” Redlich, his wife, Gerta Beck Redlich, and their six-month-old son, Dan, on a freight train to Auschwitz II/Birkenau on 7 October 1944. Whatever he might have thought their fate would be, he seems not to have envisioned the gas chambers or crematoria of Auschwitz—their actual destination. In a last entry in the diary he kept for his son, Gonda noted:

October 6, 1944. Tomorrow we go, too, my son. Hopefully the time of our redemption is near.⁹⁶

The Germans murdered all three at Auschwitz II/Birkenau.

⁹³This entry does not refer to the rebuilding of an actual school but of a sham school meant to mislead the members of an International Red Cross Commission scheduled to visit Terezin on June 23, 1944. A ‘school’ was fashioned—a building only with a sign stating that the school was closed for vacation.

⁹⁴Ibid., 149.

⁹⁵Ibid., 158.

⁹⁶Ibid., 161.

Gonda Redlich, as an administrator, saw school in one way; as a Zionist and a student of subjects pertinent to immigration to a Jewish homeland, he saw school in another way. In Terezin some yearned to return to life as it used to be and devoted their efforts to teaching children so that they too could return.

Irma Lauscherová-Kohnová's narrative of teaching in Terezin is in some ways very different from Gonda's. From her narrative, we can see the more mundane problems of teaching. We can envision how, from a perspective rooted in pragmatism and a determination to resist, she and her teaching cohort set about solving those problems. In addition, in her narrative she recorded how they dealt with differences of opinion and conflicting teaching methodologies. Even under the despotism of the German authorities, they found the freedom to teach. Outside the camps and ghettos, many gentile teachers, who had permission to teach, did not find that freedom. For several teachers in this study, including Irma, finding the courage to defy orders against teaching meant finding the freedom to teach as they wished. They were already under sentence of death—what more could be done to them for teaching in opposition to the approved curricula?

"We took the risk. We were not allowed to teach, but we did."

Irma Lauscherová-Kohnová was in her early thirties when deported to Terezin near Prague, Czechoslovakia. Upon her arrival in Terezin she became involved in the clandestine education of the children of that camp. Liberated in 1945, she returned to Prague. Her autobiographical account of teaching in Terezin was published in 1965.⁹⁷

Irma began her narrative of teaching in Terezin with a story set in June 1945. When she took two children to "a selective school" in Prague for entrance

⁹⁷Irma Lauscherová-Kohnová, "The Children," *Terezin*. (Prague: The Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands, 1965), 322.

exams, the headmistress questioned her. How, Irma was asked, could eight-year-old Eva and ten-year-old Frank, have performed so well—better even than those children who attended school in Prague? The headmistress expressed amazement that they drew Bohemia as it was before the occupation of Czechoslovakia, re-drew the borders, and altered the school curricula to reflect the changes. Irma answered:

An important role was probably played here by the consciousness of illegal activity and the feeling of adventure roused by it. Usually teaching was carried out according to the syllabus of the elementary schools in the First Republic (i. E. 1918–1939), so that pupils staying at Terezin for any length of time could be placed in the class corresponding to their age on returning home. In some subjects (Czech, literature, history) their knowledge was not limited by Protectorate teaching. . . .

The other children attended school in the Protectorate. A school with an officially imposed curriculum. We took the risk. We were not allowed to teach, but we did. We drew up the syllabus ourselves as we knew and thought best in accordance with the oath sworn when we took our degree. And the mountain Rip? We could see that from the window of the attic where we lived. It was a symbol for us.⁹⁸

The Germans banned education for Jewish children in many places including Terezin. Jews who educated others and those who set out to learn during the Holocaust were committing profound acts of resistance—the penalty was death. Irma's account suggests that, having accepted the risk of teaching, the teachers found it easy to construct a curriculum different or even opposed to the official curriculum. The German-approved curriculum carried with it permission to teach and the gentile teachers accepted it as the price of teaching.

Terezin's teachers based their curriculum on what they felt was the best educational choice and on symbolism. Irma described how they used symbols of their country predating the occupation as a way of giving the students and themselves a vision of a world free of German oppression.

⁹⁸Ibid., 79 and 90.

To teach or to learn were not easy. Along with schoolwork, Irma reported:

The older children had to work according to the order of the day, from the age of sixteen, in fact from fourteen years and, after the depopulation of Terezin due to the autumn transports in 1944, even twelve-year-olds were put to work. They were included in the regular working process.⁹⁹

In addition to the work requirements for older children and adolescents, children of every age suffered from starvation—in some cases additionally tormented by the work they did—in this case work with food they were not permitted to eat.

They mostly worked in agriculture and gardens. The latter were not called *Jugendgarten* because vegetables for children were grown there, but because the young ones slaved in them.¹⁰⁰

Nonetheless the teachers worked to create curricula and materials and to make school. That teaching was illegal was only the first hurdle. Irma recalled:

Here, too, any kind of teaching was banned. But we kept on learning and teaching. How was it done without any teaching aids? We wrote the textbooks for the first grade from memory and we still had enough energy left for lively discussions about methods of elementary teaching, the whole-word versus phonetic. In the end everyone taught as he had been used to, or as he knew best. I shall never forget two whole-word readers for the first form which later got lost in the disinfection. Ruda Ohrenstein had written and illustrated them for me.¹⁰¹

It is curious to think that teachers, bound by walls, tortured by fear, hunger, and disease, and bereft of the familiar tools, would not only painstakingly

⁹⁹Ibid., 94.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

create and recreate materials, but would also take the time and energy to engage in contemporary arguments about teaching methodology. It is heartening to know that they still cared how they did their work.

Some of the materials, Irma went on to say, carried a chilling irony. The content of reading texts had very different meanings in Terezin than they had in ordinary settings. Irma illustrated the difference when she wrote of the horrible fate of one of Terezin's teachers:

In Prague as well as in Terezin the children read: "This is a dog. This is a cat. The dog is running. The cat is running."

A dog. The children of Terezin saw only one dog there, a large Alsatian that always bared its teeth. It always accompanied its master riding on horseback through Terezin. The camp commander was a great "sportsman and hunter." For example, he chased to death Titelmann, the teacher walking on the ramparts with the children and explaining the four cardinal points to them. "Saujud, lauf!" He roared flipping his hunting crop until Titelmann sank to the ground exhausted. The dog held the fallen man down with its paws. "To the cell with him!" He was sent East with the next transport.¹⁰²

Outside of camps and ghettos, such books often carry entertaining stories and instructive ones; so too did they in Terezin although the lessons there took on a more somber meaning. More somber, too, were the categories of children for whom the teachers prepared their lessons and materials. "Once again," she wrote, "we started a reader for the first class. This time it was for tuberculosis children from Vienna." The departure of its creator slowed completion of the book.

We could not finish it together. I had to cut out pictures by Ales from an old primer that I found and try to write it myself step by step. My fellow-worker had left. And so I can only gratefully remember all those starving, weakened, much suffering

¹⁰²Ibid.

people who, exhausted after ten hours of daily slavery, understood the needs of the children and helped to create a more human atmosphere for them.¹⁰³

There must have been days when it seemed impossible to go on; yet they did. Irma described the breadth of teaching, and the other avocations of some teachers in the following passage.

We taught. The older children assembled after work, solving equations, studying literature. In one home a former engineer, a dustman in Terezin, explained physics in a very interesting way, in another home they were drawing, or modeling or discussing problems of esthetics. In still another home F 94 Zelenka, a well-known Prague designer, talked about stagecraft. Block number 2 was crowded, every seat taken not only on the benches and bunks, but people were also sitting on the floor. A young graduate from Prague University was lecturing on sociology and made the young people understand for the first time what had brought them to Terezin.¹⁰⁴

Understanding, or trying to understand, how they came to be in Terezin could not help them materially, yet, here is an example of how Jewish children at the time were interested in knowing anyway. For whatever reason, such classes captured their attention.

Other subjects engaged them as well. Teachers welcomed the talents of many in giving their students a way to begin to understand a variety of topics. Teachers often invited other, talented prisoners to perform for the students as in the example below:

A slim well-built, curly-headed boy used to come among the children. That was Gustav Schorsch. He used to recite poems by Nezval, Wolker, Neruda, Halas. He knew how to play upon the sensitive minds of the young, to encourage their faith in the future, arouse a natural optimism. It was easy for us then to lecture on the classics.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 94-95.

¹⁰⁵Ibid., 95.

Classes for young children consisted of the usual skills and creative activities of early childhood education. Irma recalled:

The smaller children were only kept busy. But this . . . was nothing else than the system of the one-class village school, where reading, writing, drawing, etc., took their turn and where deepest silence reigned when the teachers spoke about the history of their country. The climax would be the legend of the "Knights of Blanik." They used to clamour for it. "When the country is in the greatest need the mountain Blanik will open and the knights will come to the rescue."¹⁰⁶

How the children must have longed for the "Knights of Blanik" to rescue them. Meanwhile they had additional skills to learn. Even the youngest students had to learn the skills required for secrecy: instant unquestioning response to instructions, quick action, prevarication, and drama.

Quiet employment of one group alternated with explanations given to the second, while the third was reviewing lessons. Silence and concentration reigned in the room. Watch was kept in front of the house and in the corridor and a prearranged low warning was given at the approach of a German uniform. Even Honza Freiburger, an especially wild eight-year-old boy knew very well what it was all about and was disciplined in this case. At the prearranged signal all teaching aids disappeared, only physical exercise or singing continued.¹⁰⁷

Teaching in Terezin presented other challenges as well. Irma described the problems of teaching morality in an environment where "pinching" was not an immoral act but rather the difference between starving and only being hungry, between death and life. She discussed the problem saying:

When talking about Terezin children we must not forget the difficulties of environment. The children were prisoners in the Ghetto as we were and quite a few things undermined their morality. For example "Schleuse" (pinching)—in other

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷Ibid.

camps it was called organizing—was not stealing, it was only the answer to want and privation.¹⁰⁸

There was the added difficulty of teaching children for a future that with luck would be altogether different from the awful present in which they lived. It was not a task from which the teachers shrank. At the end of her essay, Irma wrote:

There was no freedom behind the barriers of Terezin. The children saw disruption, chaos and death with their own eyes. They got to know what it meant to live in an atmosphere of orders and prohibitions and in constant fear of tomorrow. And in this atmosphere sensitive young people grew up, in spite of everything.¹⁰⁹

Irma Lauscherová-Kohnová's survived until liberation and returned to live in Prague.

The following is a complex group narrative. It is formed from Terezin writings of boys from Home One in L417, as well as from contemporary writings and interviews of survivors of that home. Unlike some of the *Jugendfürsorge* and *Ältestenrat* leaders, this particular group was not ardently Zionist, and, after liberation, some of its survivors remained in Czechoslovakia, while others escaped the Communist era and emigrated to other Western countries.

In Terezin, as in other camps, some of the inmates were not Jewish in their own minds until so identified by German race laws. Some of the children, including some in Home One, were *mischlinge*, the children of mixed marriages. Their Jewish parents were protected by marriage to gentiles, but the Germans afforded the children no such protection and deported them, often alone, to Terezin. Thus, the children's homes had special importance to them as they had no family members available to protect or comfort them.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

“The system was created not just by the teaching, but by the daily living together—the boys, the teachers and supervisors.”

Home One of Barracks L417 housed a collective of boys mostly aged thirteen to fifteen. They adopted the name “Republic Of Skhid” as well as individual nicknames. Some of their writings have since been attributed to their real names; others have not. They sometimes wrote under collective nicknames—in particular several used the *nom de plume*, “Academy.” In addition the collective included a much-admired teacher, Valtr Eisinger (a.k.a. “Tiny”), who shared their living quarters and their lives. Of the approximately ninety-two boys who lived in the home, at one time or another, only fifteen survived until liberation. Besides forming a school, they published—i. e. wrote one copy that was read aloud at weekly meetings—a magazine that detailed their lives, their schooling, and their relationships.¹¹⁰

Some of the survivors have since collaborated on a published collection of their work—the magazine *Vedem* was fortunately preserved and protected throughout the period of its original publication. Thus, it is possible to study both the Terezin writings of the boys and subsequent material wherein they highlight and interpret their youthful lives and work. The magazine itself survived the war, outliving most of its contributors. Following the massive deportations in 1943 and 1944, “The Republic of Shkid” as well as most of the other homes ceased to exist. Zdenek Taussig, the only member of Home One who remained in Terezin until the end, hid the magazine until liberation. This collective narrative also contains material from interviews with Valtr Eisinger’s wife, Vera.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰*We Are Children Just the Same: Vedem, the Secret Magazine by the Boys of Terezin.* ed. Marie Ruth Krížková, Kurt Jiri Kotouc, and Zdenek Ornest, trans. R. Elizabeth Novak. ed. Paul R. Wilson (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 5755/1995), 15, 35-36, 49, 192-193.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, 16-18, 195.

We walked through the silent corridors, the three of us, Zdenek, Kurt, and Marie. It was a Sunday and the porter kindly showed us through the rooms that had become classrooms again, where our children are getting an education now—not for death but for life.

“In this building there were ten so called ‘Heime.’ Every ‘home’ had its own room, its name and number, its tutors, who were called ‘*madrachim*,’ explain the former members of ‘Number One.’

“Home Number One” is now a classroom for Grade One. There are flowers on a little table, pictures illustrating the alphabet hang on the walls, a huge abacus sits next to the blackboard. There are no traces of the past. Or almost none. The doors are still the same, marked by the children’s penknives, the wooden floorboards, which always had to be scrubbed on Saturdays, are worn in places, the high coal stove . . . and the memories. (Terezin, 1971)¹¹²

The Children came to Terezin in 1941 with the very first transports from Brno and Prague. Gonda Redlich and Fredy Hirsch, true to the tradition of the youth movement from which they came, immediately took charge of these children and managed to arrange slightly better treatment for them.¹¹³

Life in Terezin, perhaps less horrible than some other camps, was nonetheless gruesome and hard. Writing of the conditions under which they lived Petr Fischl explained:

We got used to standing in line at 7 o’clock in the morning. We stood in a long queue with a plate in our hands into which they ladled a little warmed up water with a salty or coffee flavor. Or else they gave us a few potatoes. We got used to sleeping without beds, to saluting every uniform, not to walk on the sidewalks and then again to walk on the sidewalks. We got used to undeserved slaps, blows and executions. We got used to seeing people die in the own excrement, to seeing piled up coffins full of corpses, to seeing the sick amongst the dirt and filth and to seeing the helpless doctors. We got used to it that from time to time, one thousand unhappy souls would come here and that, from time to time, another thousand unhappy souls would go away.¹¹⁴

¹¹²Ibid., 34.

¹¹³Ibid., 30. From the Deposition of Zeev Shek before the Commission for the Concentration Camp of Terezin, 29 June 1946.

¹¹⁴Hana Volavková, ed. . . . *I Never Saw Another Butterfly. . . : Children’s drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp 1942-1944*, expanded 2d edition by United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. (New York: Schocken Books, 1993), 6.

In telling of their educational experiences in Terezin, the former child inmates of the camp referred often to their teacher Valtr Eisinger who, due to his short stature, they nicknamed "Tiny." They saw education as a very personal experience. The organization of the children into "homes" and the particular relationship with their teacher seemed to give them a very close sense of camaraderie. From the beginning of the life of "Home Number One," they were drawn to Eisinger and were enthralled with his stories. Explaining how they came to choose the name "Republic of Shkid," one of them said:

Zdenek: He [Valtr Eisinger] used to tell us about a book called 'The Republic of Shkid.' He was very fond of it. . . . I only read it myself after the war. He merely told us about it and it made such an impression on us that we all wanted to be Shkidovites. Shkid is really an acronym. It's from *shkola imeni dostoyevskovo*—that was the name of the school for homeless orphans in post-revolutionary Saint Petersburg.¹¹⁵

It is probably significant that the boys chose a name associated with an orphan experience. All of them were living in Terezin separate from their families, and many of them had left their families behind, or had been deported to separate destinations.¹¹⁶ All of them had experienced some sense of having been stripped of family life. Some of them were orphans although they had not all discovered it yet. Several layers of responsibility characterized the schooling and living arrangements. For example:

Kurt: Leo Demner was the superintendent of L417. Dr. Jachnin worked with him; he was in charge of the furnishings and of hygiene. . . . Ota Klein—we call him Otik . . . was the head of the entire L417 house. We were in frequent contact with him. The most important representatives of the Youth care unit (*Jugendfürsorge*) in

¹¹⁵*We Are Children*, 35. The *Shkidovites'* post-Holocaust testimony about their Terezin experiences is from conversations with their co-editor, Marie Rut Krizkova, and were included in the published collection of their *Vedem* work.

¹¹⁶Petr Ginz, as an example, was the child of a so-called "mixed marriage"; the Germans deported him to Terezin as a *mischlinge*, over the age of fourteen. His father received some protection as the husband of a Christian woman and his younger sister avoided deportation until she too turned fourteen.

Terezin were Egon [Gonda] Redlich and Fredy Hirsch. There were others who looked after us but to all intents and purposes remained anonymous. . . . One "friend" was the young Prague philosopher Hans Adler . . . also . . . Luise Fischerova who once worked for the Czechoslovak Red Cross . . . looked after the sick. It was she who woke me up in the middle of the night to tell me that my call up papers for an "eastbound" transport had come. She broke the news compassionately, and then stayed with me and helped me with everything. . . . Mrs. Laubova was a helper in "Number One." Her son Rudolf was one of the Shkid members and one of the contributors to *Vedem*.¹¹⁷

A number of adults concerned themselves with the children's welfare and they took on a variety of tasks and responsibilities. The boys received support from a variety of sources and had a number of people, albeit not in most cases their families, on whom they could depend.

One aspect of the home was that it had a self-government. The boys not only made organizational decisions but also were responsible for many aspects of the running of the home. One of those decisions was to publish a weekly "magazine" of their work.

Kurt: And each one of us was responsible for something depending on our interests and abilities. We set up our own government during a Friday evening celebration on December 18, 1942 to be exact. . . . It may seem incredible, but the magazine was our own idea.¹¹⁸

Esprit de corps was an important element in their commitment to their home and their education. They named the magazine *Vedem*, meaning "In The Lead" because it reflected their feelings about their group.

Zdenek: Home Number One was always the first, home number one will always be

¹¹⁷We Are Children, 49 and 56.

¹¹⁸Ibid., 35-36.

so! . . . The magazine was never actually published in the true sense of the word. We simply read it aloud every Friday night.¹¹⁹

Due to paper shortages, lack of reproduction equipment, and the danger of multiple copies circulating into the wrong hands, the magazine was not published in the sense of handing out individual copies. Instead, the reading of the single copy was an event that served to draw the group together. That activity was dangerous as was the education itself. The boys were apparently only partially aware of the extent of the danger; the teachers, however, must have had a much better sense of the risks.

Zdenek: At the time we didn't fully appreciate what the consequences might have been. It was an adventure and it gave us at least the illusion of freedom. But it was certainly very, very dangerous for Eisinger.¹²⁰

Nevertheless they continued the school and the magazine. Eisinger apparently made a point not to be, at least in front of the boys, too overawed by the German overseers. Whether it was bravado or simply an attempt to preserve their dignity is not clear. What is clear is that they admired him for it.

Zdenek: Eisinger could really behave like a naughty boy, like "one of us." I remember one time shortly after my arrival at Number One (at first I was in Number Ten, but when I saw what it was like in Number One I did my damndest to get transferred) . . . there was a surprise inspection by the SS. We all had to stand at attention while Eisinger reported. The way he did it, we could hardly keep a straight face; with pure comic panache he made fun of those SS-men in front of us—we knew what he was doing, and were delighted that they weren't even aware of it. Eisinger won us over forever.¹²¹

¹¹⁹Ibid., 38.

¹²⁰Ibid., 37.

¹²¹Ibid., 40. After they were deported to Auschwitz, Zdenek reported seeing Valtr there: "In Auschwitz I caught sight of Professor Eisinger marching by in a column and he was in such a terrible state that it took my breath away." Whether being imprisoned with his students would have made a difference in Valtr's camp life is impossible to know—although many survivors later reported that having someone to take care of and to watch over was an essential part of their own ability to survive. His sighting of the indomitable "Tiny," reduced to a "terrible state," must have engendered strong feelings in Zdenek.

Living conditions in the camp at Terezin were not only dangerously inadequate—with lack of food, medicine, and sanitation—but severe overcrowding intensified the other problems. The presence of a wide array of political, national, social, cultural, and religious ideologies among the inmates of the camp exacerbated the difficulties. Many educators apparently realized that their task went far beyond merely keeping the children “caught up,” and it certainly went beyond rote learning. Both children and adults faced the task of redefining and refining their own personal sense of self as human beings and more particularly as Jews. Perhaps it was the shared sense of metamorphosis that drew the boys closer to their teachers and heightened the effectiveness of the learning experience. The boys of *Skhid* recalled that the intellectual teacher of their “home” influenced them to be intellectuals and to question beliefs and attitudes, while the teachers of the Dror home emphasized Zionism and physical fitness.

Kurt: Eisinger’s most impressive quality was his tolerance. He firmly believed in a new, socially just world order, but he did not expect us to mechanically accept his belief. On the contrary, he insisted that if we wanted to form an independent opinion at our age, we would first have to know a lot. And he practiced what he preached. For instance, he arranged for people with very different points of view to come to the Home and talk to us.¹²²

The leaders of the various homes brought with them their ideas not about only education but also about the world they might live in after liberation. More specifically, they addressed the roles and responsibilities of Jews in future. Some foresaw the value of intellectualism. Others opted to imbue their charges with pride in being Jews and commitment to Zionism. They sought to build them into physically strong, well-bonded cadres of young Zionist pioneers.

¹²²Ibid., 38.

Kurt: The leader of Number Five [the Home that used the name Dror], Sloppy [Arnost] Klauber, together with Avi Fischer, led his home with the foundation of the future State of Israel in mind, toward awareness of a Jewish nation. I should also say that in Shkid we had a more intellectual education, whereas in Number Five the stress was on esprit de corps and sport.¹²³

The degree to which teachers, through their interests and talents, influenced the development of the homes they led as well as the boys in their care is suggested by the following recollection.

Zdenek: Sloppy [the leader of the Dror home or Home Five] was an outstanding athlete. I don't mean to say that Eisinger didn't appreciate sport, not at all, Eisinger regularly played football in Terezin, with great encouragement and support from everyone in Shkid. But the boys in Dror trained harder than we did and beat us easily many times.¹²⁴

Led by "Tiny," an academic type who enjoyed sports, the boys of Shkid saw themselves as intellectuals who enjoyed sports. In contrast, in the Dror home, led by "Sloppy" who was a Zionist and an "outstanding athlete," the boys became Zionist, outstanding athletes, and they formed a football team dedicated to winning.

What ultimately happened in Home One, the development of a tight academic tribe of adolescent boys, was not initially the goal of Eisinger or the other teachers. It was something that grew, not only from the intention of the teacher, but from the experiences and the determination of the boys themselves. "Shkidovites" were formed of a variety of forces. That the teachers greatly influenced their charges is clear. That the boys influenced their teachers is also apparent.

¹²³Ibid., 51. Testimony from Avi Fischer is included in "Terezin Epilogue".

¹²⁴Ibid., 51.

Kurt: I think . . . that in the end Eisinger himself was surprised at the way our home developed. In the beginning, I don't think he'd set his sights so high. He just wanted to whip us boys into shape.¹²⁵

The boys Eisinger worked with were not a handpicked crew. They apparently landed in that particular home more or less by chance. There may have been some attention, to which they were not privy, to dividing them up according to academic characteristics and political propensities. However, conditions of the camp precluded fine-tuning the groups. There was some trading around by the boys themselves. Zdenek, for example, began in Home Ten, but after observing Home One he did his "damnedest to get transferred." Neither boys nor teachers were passive vessels. Still it is the impression of some of the survivors that for the most part they landed in Home One by chance.

Zdenek: We'd be overestimating ourselves if we thought [Eisinger] had [chosen the boys in his Home himself]. It was chance and age. The older boys were put into Numbers One and Five, he probably would have achieved the same results there. His effectiveness came from a special inner strength. He was able to evoke things in others. He gained our complete trust. We were inspired by his tremendous altruism. He was never self-absorbed, he never lost his temper. We never had to wonder what came over him.¹²⁶

These were not just ordinary boys though, if only because of the things they had experienced or had been forced to undergo such as the degradations suffered by Jews under the German occupation. I do not mean to suggest that this particular group was inherently different from other European Jewish children of the period—they were probably quite typical of children of their backgrounds.

¹²⁵Ibid., 38.

¹²⁶Ibid.

George Brady: I was one of those children. And by pure luck I found self among the boys who were led by Valtr Eisinger. In a small room overcrowded with three-tiered bunks, he created a new, fascinating world for us behind ghetto walls. The boys developed talents they never dreamed they had, and it was there too that the illegal children's magazine . . . was founded.¹²⁷

.....

Kurt: Those several scores of boys, all about thirteen years old, who later met in Home Number One of L417, were a specific group, different from the other groups in the former Terezin school . . . who had reached a critical age in our development. When the German occupation began in 1938, we were already far too mature to escape into a child's micro-world, to have our consciousness clouded by a childish fear of ill-treatment. . . . We had witnessed the destruction of our homes the helplessness of our parents. Marked by stars and numbers, in quarantine and in the *Schluesen*, we saw the conventions destroyed, and witnessed the ardor and fragility of human relationships, we saw altruism and naked selfishness, we listened to the death rattle of the dying and the heavy breathing of couples having sex.

And this is how Valtr Eisinger found us.¹²⁸

These boys possessed little of the usual naiveté of early adolescence. They had in effect seen it all. Many had witnessed the deaths—often horrific deaths—of family and friends. The Germans had snatched them from all that was familiar. They knew that there was little chance to escape from the anti-Semitic strategies—they were the hunted.¹²⁹ In Terezin they had found a group of adults, many of them quite young themselves, whom they idolized, who committed themselves wholly to the welfare of the children, and who worked diligently to create and maintain highest possible standards for their care and nurturing.

¹²⁷Ibid., 101.

¹²⁸Ibid.

¹²⁹Perusal of the youth's narrative suggests that it was not unusual for Jewish children, especially adolescents, to feel a certain relief at ending up in certain camps. Seeing this as the end of the line, so to speak, they felt that they had finally ended up in the place they had been avoiding and dreading so they no longer had to worry about it. Also they often found themselves attached to groups of peers and relatively free of parental interference. This is not to suggest that they were not frightened by their experiences, or that they didn't suffer in myriad ways, only that they felt they had gone as far as they could and could figure out how to live with it. Also they often had a strong and positive reaction to finally being among their own and not any longer subject to the abuses of those gentiles whom they had always regarded as their fellows who had now turned outwardly hostile.

The schedule was dense with a variety of activities. The children from all ten Homes in L417 went to school:

Kurt: Morning wake-up call was at six or seven o'clock. Then we washed under a dribble of cold tap water, and made our beds. After that the day's duties were assigned—for cleaning the rooms and corridors, the lavatories and the courtyard. Then came breakfast and roll call. All Homes fell in line in the corridor and the head of L417, Otik Klein, read out the "daily orders." It was only then that the classes started. Because of the shortage of space, classes were sometimes held right in the homes, but mainly they were held in the attics, where there was less danger that the SS would suddenly burst in on us. Whenever classes were held, some of the boys would be put on lookout duty. In case of an inspection by the SS, each form had to pretend to be doing something else, like cleaning the room.¹³⁰

The children guarded the classes that were conducted only after they completed other duties. Here is another example of sharing responsibilities in the homes, and it undoubtedly added to the cachet of having school—especially for that particular age group. From these activities they gained a sense of themselves as resisters—in a scenario in which most forms of resistance were not available to them.

The teachers were chosen for, and perhaps applied for, the posts based on criteria other than previous experience as teachers. In L417 the teaching staff included persons with coaching experience or experience leading Zionist groups. Teaching at Terezin apparently owed much to a progressive model and, to varying degrees, the curriculum—discussed in pedagogical councils but left to the discretion of the individual teachers—consisted of amalgamations of standard subjects, taught in innovative ways, non-standard subjects, and political exploration.

Kurt: Of the eight or ten teachers, only two or three were professionally trained. There were no teaching aids and the classes often contained children of different ages and very different previous schooling. Still the teachers tried to maintain a

¹³⁰*We Are Children*, 39.

certain system, and they consulted each other in what they called pedagogical councils. There were three or four hours of teaching a day. I can still remember my math, history, and geography lessons. Hebrew was optional. Like children everywhere we were sometimes very naughty, but in spite of everything we completely accepted our teachers' maxim that we must keep up with the children in the schools outside . . . the system was created not just by the teaching, but by the daily living together—the boys, the teachers and supervisors. I only realized how effective it had been when I came back from the concentration camp and attended a normal school again. I had not really fallen behind the others in any subject.¹³¹

As the teachers gained experience, as the boys grew confident in their interests, as the plans settled into the efficiency that comes with practice, they found time for more activities. They dropped things that did not seem effective to make room for those with more promise and richness.

The New Cultural Program of Our Home

At the beginnings this week, a great change took place in the cultural program of our Home. This is due to the extension of the regular school program, which is now taking up the time formerly devoted to learning circles. Professor Glutty has therefore decided as follows: all existing circles are to be canceled and replaced every evening by a lecture (on literature, natural science, etc.). Furthermore there will be amusing evening programs given by our comedian, H. Beck. Two evenings will be given over to deathly silence when everyone will read or study. After these evenings we shall read to each other in bed for various entertaining or instructive books. The evening lectures will not be held, as before, only for interested parties, but for the entire Home. And finally: tomorrow, Saturday, Marenka and Vasicek from the Bartered Bride will visit us. I think that everyone will have a good time.

This is all I wish to say for now. Much success to our new program.

(Kurt Kotouc)¹³²

That "Cultural Corespondent," Kurt Kotouc felt comfortable writing of the new schedule with an easy and affectionate mocking speaks volumes for the ambiance the adults had worked to create. The boys must have felt well at

¹³¹Ibid.

¹³²Ibid., 150.

ease in their school, protected not only from outside forces—which in truth they were not—but also unthreatened by the authority figures who led them.

The interests of the students and the fields of expertise of teachers and a host of outside lecturers appear to have led to a diverse and increasingly sophisticated set of learning experiences.

Cultural Report

Last week a splendid lecture program began. So far the following lectures have been delivered: Leibstein on television, Ginz on Buddhism, Beno Kaufmann on Hinduism. We must say these lectures are an excellent supplement to our magazine. . . . The value of the lectures is confirmed not only by the interest shown by the listeners, but also by the increasing number of lecturers, who are preparing some excellent talks for us: Muhlstein on Mozart, Kahn on old Czech, Weil on the history of chess, Roth on Cervantes, Kotouc on criminality. But there is one thing we miss—lectures by adults. For not one of us has sufficient knowledge to talk about political trends and ideologies. I hope that this gap will soon be filled.

—nz (Petr Ginz)¹³³

The above excerpt from *Vedem* is a listing of lectures given by students in the Shkid group. Adults from within L417 and from the camp at large also offered programs and lectures. Kurt reported on those in the following excerpt:

Cultural Report

The cultural program for the last fortnight has finally reached the level we have all been longing for. It was as follows:

A Wolker evening was held on Sunday, January 3, in commemoration of the poet's early death. We read and discussed some selected lyrics that were new to us and then Profa dramatically recited a one-act play called the Hospital.

Monday Mesa Stein delivered the first part of his successful lecture on the textile industry.

On Tuesday Dr. Zwicker in his lecture explained some basic economic terms to us.

¹³³Ibid.

On Wednesday "lights out" was moved forward to eight-fifteen in deference to Laub, who was seriously ill. This is why the second part of Mesa's lecture was put off till Thursday.

On Friday Mrs. Klinkeova came to see us and sing some Hebrew songs and one aria from *The Bartered Bride*.

Fricke Pick came on Saturday and spoke fascinatingly about sport and about his own experiences in sport.

On Monday Smuel Klauber lectured most interestingly about modern psychology.

Tuesday night we all read.

On Wednesday Sisi Eisinger gave his lecture. An important event in our cultural life is the re-establishment of two cultural circles (Latin and Russian).

—Cultural Corespondent (Kurt Kotouc)¹³⁴

Additional inspiration for the students came from the need to "keep up." It was never far from the minds of the clandestinely educated, starving, abused children that someday they would return to the other world and the expectation that they would need to be competitive with their peers. It is also noteworthy that they did not quite understand, at the time, the extraordinary nature of what they did or what others did for them. The need to "keep up" had another meaning as well. Some children, whose families were not in Terezin, were able to write occasional letters home. School became a way for them to placate their parents' fears and to reassure their parents that they did not fall behind. An example is one of Petr Ginz's letters to his parents and sister.

My dear Daddy, Mummy, and Eva,

I am still all right, although not quite as well as before. But you needn't worry about me. . . . The magazine I'm editing is still being published. I write some serious stories for it, and sometimes even try my hand at philosophizing. Otherwise I attend the fifth form* and my lessons are going well. Next week we're having exams.

Love and kisses from your

Petr

P.S. Send me a book on sociology

¹³⁴Ibid., 148.

* He's referring to the improvised lessons in L 417. "Fifth form" is an exaggeration to please his parents.¹³⁵

The children's programs in Terezin were fairly comprehensive and were scheduled to use up the better part of a day. Not only were there personal and collective chores followed by lessons, in the afternoons there was time for reviews and physical education. The evenings revolved around study and additional lessons and lectures from both the boys and from invited speakers and experts. Only the hour before supper carried the sobriquet "free time"—children whose families were also in Terezin generally used that time for family visits.

Kurt: After taking our mess tins to get lunch, which we had to line up for outside the kitchen in the Hamburg barracks, we reviewed what we had learned that day, without the teachers present. There could be other activities as well. The favourite was physical training, such as a football match in the yard. . . . After supper the homes became worlds unto themselves, where the children depending upon their age and their supervisors' abilities, amused themselves until bedtime.¹³⁶

To gain an idea of the sorts of things the boys studied, as well as the ways in which they used their evening study times, we can look at such items as the "Time Sheet" of *Vedem's* editor, Petr Ginz, who along with writing for and editing the magazine, engaged in the following activities:

Petr Ginz's "Time Sheets"

June (1944)

I work in lithography. I have made a physical map of Asia and have started a map of the world.

I have read: Otahalova-Poelova: *Seneca's Letters*; Arbes: *A Mad Job, My Friend the Murder, Satan*; London: *The Lost Face*; Musil: *Desert and Oasis*; H. G. Wells: *Christina Albert's Father*; part of Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*.

¹³⁵Ibid., 69-70.

¹³⁶Ibid., 39.

I have learned: Ancient History (Egyptians, Babylonians, Indians, Phoenicians, Israelites, Greeks Persians, etc.), the geography of Arabia, the Netherlands, and of the moon.

I have drawn: behind the sheepfold and Vrchlabi. I made a survey of zoology, both mentally and on paper. I go to evening lectures on Rembrandt, the Alchemists, etc.¹³⁷

For the boys in *Shkid*, an important difference in their Terezin experience was that Eisinger, who had another option, chose to make his home with them.

Kurt: I should explain that it wasn't usual for the pedagogues to live in the homes with the boys. They had their own quarters in L417. The fact that Eisinger decided to live with us and sleep in one of the three-tier bunks—just like one of us—says more about him than words can tell.¹³⁸

Indeed, "Tiny" did not make many boundaries between his life as leader of Shkid and his private life. Vera Sommerova, whom he married in Terezin, recalled that:

We both worked in Youth Care. Valtr was the leader of the Youth Home for boys, and he often spoke of them to me. He tried to be not just a pedagogue, but a friend, a counselor, and a confidential advisor. . . . Whenever we appeared with Valtr in the streets of Terezin our children would come flocking to us. We used to joke about how our work never seemed to end. We had long discussions about the individual children and how best to handle them. The children all had strong personalities, both the little ones, from four to six, and Valtr's thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds.¹³⁹

The Shkidovites were not unaware of Valtr's devotion. They flocked to him in the street and shared their most private fears and hopes with him in Home One. When the opportunity presented itself they went out of their way

¹³⁷Ibid., 67.

¹³⁸Ibid., 39.

¹³⁹Ibid., 163.

to reward his generosity. In an account of their 11 June 1944 wedding, Vera recalled that the boys arranged an especially poignant sacrifice to commemorate the occasion.

Vera: In front of the town hall Valtr's boys silently formed a double line behind us and walked us back to the Home, where they had prepared a fantastic present—a huge cake made from buns they had saved from their weekly rations. Poor boys, all of us looked forward every week to this one brick hard delicacy, and they had given up this pleasure for us. . . . I wanted the cake to be divided up at once among everyone in the Home and eaten on the spot, but the boys wouldn't hear of it. It was their contribution, they said, to our wedding feast.¹⁴⁰

Beginning in September 1943, the Germans sent several large transports to take Terezin prisoners to the "Family Camp" at Auschwitz II/Birkenau. The Germans gassed to death the first contingents to arrive in that special camp by the time of Valtr and Vera's wedding. Twenty days later the camp authorities dispersed the remainder of the Family Camp. They packed most of them, including the children, into the gas chambers and delivered a hideous death by means of Zyklon B, a poisonous gas. A half-hour later the Terezin Jews were dead. The remainder of the boys still in Terezin and their teacher soon followed their companions to the deportation trains.¹⁴¹ Only one of the Home Number One boys would remain in Terezin. The Germans sent Valtr Eisinger from Auschwitz to Buchenwald and reportedly shot him on 15 January 1945 during a death march. They murdered seventy-seven of the self-styled *Shkidovites* in the camps. Only fifteen survived.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 164-165.

¹⁴¹At the time that Eisinger was put on transport his wife, frantic to stay with him, managed to get herself placed on transport also. Too late, after arrival at Auschwitz, she realized her mistake. She survived.

Juda Bacon	survived	Herbert Maier	perished
Jiri Bauer	perished	Leos Marody	perished
Hanus Beamt	perished	Jiri Metzl	perished
Hanus Beck	perished	Emanuel Morgenstern	perished
(?) Benjamin	perished	Emanuel Muhlstein	perished
Zdenek Bienenfeld	perished	Miroslav Neumann	survived
Bedrich Blum	perished	Zdenek Ohrenstein(Ornest)	survived
Jan Boskovic	survived	Ota Pacovsky	perished
Jiri Brady	survived	Norbert Picela	perished
Toman Brod	survived	Harry Pick	perished
Jiri Bruml	perished	Jiri Pick	perished
Adolf Brunzel	survived	Renee Pick,	perished
Frantisek Feuerstein	perished	Erick Pollack	survived
Kurt Fischer	perished	Hanus Pollak	perished
Peter Fischl	perished	Zdenek Pollak	perished
Zdenek Freund	perished	Ralph Popper	perished
Jiri Frisch	perished	(?) Rosenberger	perished
Robert Gelb	perished	Walter Roth	perished
Petr Gelber	perished	Otto Sedlacek	perished
Petr Ginz	perished	Kurt Segal	perished
Kurt Glasner	perished	Otto Sindler	perished
Pavel Goldstein	perished	Harry Stern	perished
Rudolf Gottlieb	perished	Karel Stern	perished
Jiri Grunbaum,	perished	Hanus Sternschus	perished
(?) Grunwald	perished	Wiki Tauber	perished
Rudolf Haas	perished	Jiri Taussig	perished
Hanus Hachenburg	perished	Zdenek Taussig	survived
Hanus Heller	perished	Herman Teichner	perished
Jiri Herrman	perished	Egon Tenzer	perished
Bedrich Hoffman	perished	Bedrich Vielgut,	perished
Adolf Immergut	perished	Jiri Vohrysek	perished
Hanus Kahn	perished	Zdenek Vohrysek	perished
Hanus Kalich	perished	Jan (Jiri) Volk	perished
Hanus Kauders	perished	Hanus Weil	perished
Beno Kaufman	perished	Zdenek Weinberger	perished
Arnost Kohn	perished	Zdenek Weiner	perished
Hanus Kominik	perished	(?) Weisskopf	perished
Mendel Kopelovic	survived	Laci Willheim	perished
Jiri Kosta	perished	Jiri Zappner	perished
Kurt Kotouc	survived	Jaroslav Zatecka	survived
Hanus Kraus	perished	Erich Zinn	perished.
Pavel Kummerman	survived		142
Felix Kurschner	survived		
Rudolf Laub	perished		
Petr Lax	perished		
Jiri Lebenhart	perished		
(?) Lichtenstein	perished		
Karel Liebenstein	perished		
Leopold Lowy	survived		
Wiki Lowy	perished		

¹⁴²Ibid., 192-193. Entitled: "A list of the boys from Home Number One in L417, drawn up in 1947 by Kurt Kotouc and Jiri Brady."

The Germans set out to fool many people with the camp at Terezin, but they fooled Jews only until they arrived and learned the awful truth. They more

successfully hoodwinked the Red Cross representatives who inspected the camp. In truth, it was a deadly place where Jews struggled to survive in untenable circumstances. They managed to make a rich cultural life and also to create an incredible educational program for the children. Conditions in other camps were even worse. Yet, even in Auschwitz, Jews, including the Terezin Jews, were able by dint of incredible effort to create schools. In the final part of this chapter of narratives are accounts of schooling in that camp.

Auschwitz

Very few Jewish children gained admittance to the camp of Auschwitz. The Germans crowded most into the gas chambers on arrival, or on busy days perhaps to the birch forest near the gas chambers to await their turns. Some children gained admission, however. The doctor Josef Mengele selected twins, many of them children, and let them live long enough to use them in his macabre medical experiments. Also children from several Terezin transports entered Auschwitz II/Birkenau, and the Germans quartered them for a short time in a section temporarily set aside for Terezin inmates. At times other children gained places in the camp. Prisoners smuggled in and hid some. Others arrived late, after a halt in the gassings in the waning weeks of 1944.

In the case of the boy twins, late in the camp history, and of the Czech [Terezin] Family Camp, adults deemed schools important for the children's welfare. Other motives existed for schooling in Auschwitz, but in both of these cases, strong reasons were to protect the children as well as to educate them. The adults who led both schools had little reason to think the Germans planned to allow the children to live. However—in case they lived—their teachers felt they should teach them and that until the end came, they must try to protect them from the horrors of Birkenau. In Birkenau, the importance of keeping children close was immediately obvious.

Other forms of schooling existed as well. Mira Ryczke Kimmelman, transported from Tomaszow-Mazowiecki to Majdanek, then to Auschwitz II/Birkenau and Auschwitz/Hindenburg, only to end up, like Anne Frank, Lucien Duckstein, and Hanna Lévy-Hass, at Bergen-Belsen, organized with her friends to review and solve past lessons and intellectual problems.

Terezin Epilogue: "The secret was out and every child knew it."

Jindric Kolben and Avi Fischer were both members of the boy's home L417 in Terezin. Jindric was one of the boys; Avi was a teacher and counselor in Home Five, Dror.¹⁴³ Both arrived in the Czech Family Camp in Birkenau where they became involved in the children's school. Both survived until liberation.

Schooling that occurred in Terezin can be tracked from that camp to the camp at Auschwitz II/Birkenau. The Terezin school effort is one of the few instances where it is possible to document such a transfer. In September 1943, the Germans transported a large group of Terezin inmates to Auschwitz, specifically to Birkenau. Without subjecting them to selection, they installed them all—men, women, and children—in section BIIb, the *Familienlager*. Unbeknownst to the Jews, their captors intended to use them to allay concerns about the fate of Jews in the event of a Red Cross inspection. Thereafter they intended to gas them to death, which they did six months later. A similar transport arrived in December 1943, and others swelled the population of the Family Camp. The Germans later liquidated each transport in turn.

The Jews sent from Terezin lived together in a separate set of barracks, so it was more or less possible to transfer what they had been doing in Terezin to the new incarceration site at Birkenau. Led by Fredy Hirsch, who with

¹⁴³Zivia Lubetkin and Yitzhak Zuckerman were leaders of Dror in the Warsaw ghetto. See their narratives in Chapter Five.

Gonda Redlich led the children's programs at Terezin, they set up a children's block and instituted a program of schooling. There the children received, as they had in Terezin, marginally better rations and physical conditions as well as educational activities. Unlike at Terezin most of them slept in barracks with their families—girls and young boys with women and older boys with men.

They arranged the block, in fact an ordinary barrack, in such a way as to provide some separation of classes. In time, an adolescent inmate painted the walls—with permission and paint obtained from the infamous Josef Mengele. She created scenes of nature and of fairy tales. Young people, too old for assignment to the children's block, sometimes found positions as helpers thus allowing them to stay as well. In the following passage, one of them later recalled the children's block.

Jindric Kolben: . . . For children up to the age of sixteen, it was Fredy Hirsch who looked after them with great devotion. He was exceptionally able and dedicated. When I got to the camp [Auschwitz II/Birkenau], he had already been working there three months. During that time he had managed to establish a center where children up to sixteen could spend the whole day, from the time they came from their blocks in the morning, till evening. He introduced some sort of school regimen, which was strictly forbidden. He managed to get them slightly better rations, and it could be said that his center was the only place in camp BIIb (the *familienlager*) where a little humanity was preserved. . . . The children's center was the only building where there was some sort of heating. . . . For those of us a little older, it was an oasis and everyone tried to get there one way or another.¹⁴⁴

Avi Fischer, one of the Terezin teachers in L417 who was attached to Home Five or Dror,¹⁴⁵ testified afterwards about the school formed there. According to Avi, one purpose of the school in the "Family Camp" at Auschwitz II/Birkenau was to distract the children from the functions of the camp: that

¹⁴⁴*We Are Children*, 52-53. In *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*. Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 431, Nili Karen places the age cut off, imposed by the Germans, at age fourteen. At any rate, the age was somewhere in mid-adolescence and teenagers in Auschwitz sometimes gave whatever age was advantageous if they had the foresight or forewarning to do so. Anne Frank and Elie Weisel, for example, both apparently gained entry to Auschwitz by passing as older than they actually were.

effort was not successful. Telling of a play written by Stiepan, an eleven-year-old boy, and performed in the children's block, he described a scene that revealed their failure to keep that knowledge from the children.

The ambulance (represented by a simple wheelbarrow) pulled in and when the boy, i.e. the actor who acted the adult character, who also happened to be the author of the skit, was being loaded on it, he refused, and resisted, screaming: "I want to go by foot, don't get me in the car! I don't want to go to the gas!" The children responded with laughter. For the first time I knew full well that this secret, which we tried so much to suppress and had thought we succeeded, the secret was out and every child knew it.¹⁴⁶

If, in Terezin, school children lacked full awareness of their fate, in Birkenau the schooling meant to create a screen against the horrors failed the task. It is possible to see, however, that, having conducted a successful clandestine school program in Terezin, the teachers found ways to implement a similar program in Auschwitz II/Birkenau.¹⁴⁷

On 7 March 1944, the Germans gassed all those whom they brought from Terezin in the September 1943 transport. On 1 July nearly all of the remainder, including the entire children's block, fell victim to the genocidal mania, and were massacred as well. The "Family Camp" ceased to exist.¹⁴⁸

The school within the *Familienlager* serves as an example of school makers transferring their efforts from one situation to another. In the Auschwitz camp complex, there were other educational efforts as well.

¹⁴⁵See *Terezin*, specifically the section from *Vedem*.

¹⁴⁶*Anatomy*, 438.

¹⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 439. Avi and some of the other educators considered whether they should go on with the program or knowing their fate if they should do something else. Apparently, there was some plan for active resistance among the children. Some of the adults felt that this gave the children a sense of purpose.

¹⁴⁸*Anatomy*, 439-440.

Tomaszow-Mazowiecki Epilogue: "It just came naturally."

Mira Ryczke Kimmelman's narrative describes the lessons that she and her companions organized spontaneously within the dank, verminous confines of their barracks. Haunted by fear and hunger, tormented by thirst, disease, slavery, and lice, they nonetheless found the strength to continue. Following her deportation from Tomaszow-Mazowiecki, Mira survived the hell of Blizyn-Majdanek, as well as of Birkenau and Hindenburg in the Auschwitz complex, and finally Bergen-Belsen. In the camps, Mira and her companions huddled in their bunks at night. Their only weapons against the campaign to destroy them were their minds. In the dark confines of the prison barracks, they used those weapons to fight that destruction.

What we did is, in the camps, we were reciting poetry; we were thinking about how to solve some math problems; we were recalling dates in history, to keep our minds going—it was just to keep our [minds going]—if we did not we would not have survived. The mind had to be occupied with something—stories from childhood, stories about holidays, stories about school—but a lot of poetry, remembering poetry. When your memory is working, it's very important—math problems, dates, dates in history, that kept us going. It was not so much educational as it was necessary to retain our sanity.

It just came naturally. We felt the need to do something, so every evening on our bunks, very quietly, we decided on what are we going to do today. We were even telling jokes in the terribly desperate and hopeless situation. We were trying to look at the lighter side. We were looking at our clothes; we were talking about how terribly we smelled, and—you see?—how many lice do you think are crawling all over us. But we had to do it in a light way.¹⁴⁹

Schooling in the concentration camps took on an additional meaning. Before the camps, Jews intended school to preserve ways of life—religious life and cultural life. Through schooling, they resisted German efforts to degrade life

¹⁴⁹Mira Ryczke Kimmelman, interview, 1997.

and to deny education to Jewish children. In the camps, they used education to push back the encroaching horrors—to preserve their existence.

Jewish prisoners also used school to protect children physically. In Birkenau, there was for a time another school. Unlike the school of Mira and her companions, it was a more recognizable school with an adult teacher and child students. Unlike the school formed in the *Familienlager*, an adult who had no previous experience as a teacher or children's leader created it. Zvi Spiegel made school for his charges under the most despicable circumstances.

"I taught them whatever I could remember."

Zvi Spiegel, called by the boys for whom he created school, *Zwilingefater* ('Twins' Father), was born in 1915 in Budapest, Hungary and became an officer in the Czech army. In 1944, the Germans deported the twenty-nine year old Army officer and his twin sister, Magda, to Auschwitz II/Birkenau. Zvi answered a call at the initial selection for twins, thus saving his life and that of his twin. Zvi received charge of the boy twins whom Josef Mengele collected for hideous pseudo-medical experiments. Zvi organized classes for the boys. Following the Soviet liberation of the camp on 27 January 1945, Zvi was instrumental in returning the children to their places of origin if not their families. He immigrated to Israel where he continued to have contact with many of the twins with whom he had once created school in Auschwitz II/Birkenau.¹⁵⁰

Zvi decided that caring for the children meant among other things, educating them and, perhaps more importantly, encircling them within a school-like social structure. Telling of his efforts and motives later, Zvi said:

I felt very sorry for the young twins. I was always trying to make their lives a little more bearable.

¹⁵⁰Lucette Matalon Lagnado, *Children of the Flames: Dr. Josef Mengele and the Untold Story of the Twins of*

I was twenty-nine years old when I was deported. I felt at least that I had tasted life—whereas most of the twins hadn't even begun to live.¹⁵¹

Zvi, like others who made school for the children in their circles, wanted to normalize their lives to some degree. He tried to offer them an opportunity to know the world that existed outside the barbed wire that confined them. He would also say of his efforts, "I saw my most important task as maintaining the children's morale."¹⁵² Bereft of the usual necessities of life such as food, shelter, and safety the children had little chance of survival. That particular group of children also faced the gruesome hurdle of Mengele's hideously cruel "medical" experiments. Only by maintaining their morale, the only thing he could have an affect on, he hoped to give them some slim hope of survival. In that effort, Zvi organized games and classes for the boys. Unlike others, who had particular curricula in mind when they created schools, Zvi improvised. His only tool was his memory of his own school days. In describing his teaching, he later recalled:

I organized classes. I would teach them math, history, geography. We had no books, of course. But still I gave them simple exercises to do. I taught them whatever I could remember from my own school days.¹⁵³

Note that Zvi did not say he taught them everything he knew or everything he thought they needed to know but rather "whatever I could remember from my own school days." In other words, he did not attempt to reinvent school so much as he tried to reproduce his own experience. As we will later see, his efforts, comforting and probably familiar, had a positive, lasting affect for the boys. Zvi's schooling efforts had another aim as well. One purpose of his classes was to keep the children out of trouble—not trouble of their own making but that of their captors. Recalling his concerns, Zvi said:

Auschwitz (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991), 19.

¹⁵¹Ibid., 68.

¹⁵²Ibid.

¹⁵³Ibid.

I was very anxious about keeping the children together, and as close to me physically as possible. Children are children wherever they are. The twins wanted to walk around the camp—and of course that was very dangerous.

An SS guard might not know they were Mengele's twins [and] could kill them on the spot. That was why I thought up games and classes. This way, I knew where they were at all times.

I also distrusted Mengele. I felt he could change his mind about the twins at any time and have us all killed. And so my strategy was to have the twins maintain as low a profile as possible—and keep out of Mengele's way.¹⁵⁴

Clearly, while Zvi saw himself as something of an amateur teacher, he also saw himself as the twins' protector. He understood that it was important to teach them something that would engage them and keep them together rather than to teach them any particular thing. Keeping out of Mengele's way was of course not really possible; in fact he continued to experiment on the twins and thus cruelly killed many of them. When one twin died Mengele murdered the second as well and then performed comparative autopsies. At least through school, Zvi could keep the twin boys out of other harmful situations.

When the Soviet Army liberated the Auschwitz complex on 27 January 1945, Zvi Spiegel and 157 twin children still lived in Birkenau. Zvi was instrumental in returning the children to their hometowns where many found that they were the only survivors of their families.¹⁵⁵ Zvi married on the first anniversary of his liberation, and within a few years, convinced that there was no safe place for Jews in Europe, he immigrated to Israel.¹⁵⁶

At a 1985 reunion of the surviving twins, the male twins easily recalled comrades, recognized faces, and remembered names of their former barrack mates. The female twins had trouble remembering each other and recalled little sense of camaraderie. While imprisoned in Birkenau the girls, unlike the

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 95

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 123-125.

boys, had no adult caregiver, and thus no one to mediate their experiences, soothe their fears, or organize them for the future. While the boys underwent a somewhat organized, unifying experience despite the context of fear, cold, hunger, pain, and grief, the girls underwent a disorganized, isolating experience exacerbated by the hideous conditions of the camp.

Zvi insisted that the boys learn not only the things he could teach them but also the names and hometowns of their companions. He apparently understood that in the end it was more important to teach them something, to engage in school, than to teach them any particular subject. For those boy twins, trapped in the dark world of Birkenau, the experience of school and the relationship with a caring teacher kindled a sustaining light.¹⁵⁷

The Holocaust came to different places at different times and it ended at different times as well. In some cases, the Germans murdered their Jewish victims even after the homes of those Jews were free again. Anne Frank, Sara Spier, and Moshe Flinker went into hiding in July 1942, the month that saw massive deportations from Warsaw Ghetto and nearly three years after the Jews of that city had begun their ordeal. Two years later, at the time of their arrests, Warsaw Ghetto and its doomed Uprising were only a memory, the entire district reduced to rubble a year before. At the time of Moshe's arrest, Hanna Lévy-Hass still experienced a tenuous freedom as a partisan and did not yet know the horrors she would witness. By the time of Anne's arrest in August 1944, Hanna had been transferred to Belsen. That summer the Soviet Army liberated Kovno. Tamarah Lazerson, who had managed to avoid evacuation as they approached the city, was free. Solly Ganor who was marched out and sent to camps in the heart of Germany, endured ten months in those camps before his liberation nearly a year later.

Anne's death marked the last of the narrators' Holocaust deaths known to me. By the time of her death, Dawid Sierakowiak had been dead for a year and a half, Yitskhok Rudashevski for nearly that long; their bones lay in

¹⁵⁷ Nancy L. Segal, "Holocaust Twins: Their Special Bond," *Psychology Today* 19 (August 1985): 56-57.

makeshift graves. Most of the boys of Shkid were also dead for nine months or a year and Chaim Kaplan for over two years. Warsaw, Kovno, and Vilna were liberated. Their ghettos no longer existed. Auschwitz/ Birkenau, where she had been imprisoned was liberated. The camps of Bergen-Belsen and Terezin ground on inexorably. Their liberation was still a month and a half away. In New York, Mary Berg, safe for a year in New York City, published her diary at about the time of Anne's murder.

This chapter ends the narratives. Each narrator brought a different perspective to the subject of schooling in the Holocaust. They had personal reasons and found individual meanings for their participation, but many common themes emerged as well. In addition, there were many children who did not have schooling during those events. Chapter Seven explores some of the similarities and differences in motives and meanings of school and includes some criticism of the schooling efforts.

Part III

Analysis

Chapter Seven:

In the Shadow of Death

The Jews caught up in the Holocaust tried in myriad ways to save themselves. Many strove to save their people as well. They understood that physical survival was not enough—emotional and intellectual survival were important, too. For nearly all, it was essential to survive as Jews although some had begun the odyssey barely conscious of their Jewishness. For many, making and keeping school, against the odds and despite German orders or obstacles, was a vital part of their survival. Their efforts reveal three worlds: one remembered but forever lost; one actual but cruelly destructive; and one anticipated, conjured from an audacious alchemy of hope and imagination.

They used models from their former lives to counteract the desperation of their lives under the murderous German tyranny and they created a framework for new lives in a future free of that tyranny. If schooling seems an unlikely vehicle for surviving the “Final Solution,” then one must remember that, until the last, most of them thought they needed only to “weather the storm” of German persecution.¹ In the end, all that they possessed was what

¹Knowing what we know now, it is easy to look back at events and understand that the Germans meant to kill all of the Jews. However, at the time, for various reasons it was not so simple. First of all it was not something that had happened before, second communications were not then what they are now and the Germans took care to control the media and to confiscate all of the Jewish radios. In addition, even when the first reports began to filter in about the mass murders, many people could not bear to believe those stories—so they assumed that the bearers were misinformed or simply crazy. Finally even when they began to understand what was in store for them, it was nearly impossible to escape, and, for those with children or elderly relatives, there was little choice but to remain with them. In addition even if Jews could get out of their countries, they found little welcome in other countries

was in their heads and hearts. Everything else—possessions, professions, shelter, and sustenance—the Germans stripped away from them. The life of the mind and the courage to go on and to bond were all that finally remained.

Why did persons condemned to vile degradation and merciless death choose to participate in something as prosaic as school? The answers appear in their narratives of schooling and are as idiosyncratic and individual as the narrators.

Interpreting Jewish responses to the Holocaust is a precarious business. Using standard psychological, sociological, or cultural explanatory models does not really work—not because the Jews were unique but because the circumstances, the horrors, and the models designed and implemented by their tormentors and murderers were unique. Most theoretical models are not based on experiences of communities or individuals condemned to total annihilation. They are not predicated on behavior of those condemned to deliberate torture and abuse with little prospect of relief. Yet, for the years in which the Germans perpetrated the Holocaust upon the Jews of Europe, their victims faced exactly such anguish, such barriers to life. Nonetheless, we should look briefly at some of the explanatory ideas that one might apply. It is not that these theories are invalid but that they lose a great deal of their explanatory power when applied to a *sui generis* phenomenon such as the Holocaust. It is also difficult to say just what in particular inspired Jews to create schools and to strive to teach and learn. The answers are as diverse as the Jews themselves—and even individuals acted from a variety of motives and meanings attached to schooling and to learning. European Jews did not, after all, form a homogenous group.

Jews in Europe during the Holocaust years certainly tried to construct everyday realities. Schooling was a manifestation of those attempts to define and construct reality; it was not the only one however. Many Holocaust

who for the most part were unwilling to take in refugees from German aggression. On the other hand, Jews and their families had suffered through a variety of hardships and discrimination for many centuries and they simply thought that their current problems were similar to those and that with patients, resources, and tenacity, they too could outlast the German mistreatment.

narratives describe theatrical, musical, artistic, recreational, and sports activities to name a few, by which Jewish communities sought to normalize their lives. One of the strongest reasons for keeping school, one that is reiterated in narrative after narrative, is simply the desire to create a life as normal as possible in the most abnormal contexts imaginable. Adults saw maintaining normality for children as central to the children's well being. Children saw normality, fragile as it was, as an assurance that things would be all right in the end. In addition, for Jews, the struggle to create a semblance of normality, however thin, was a form, often the only form still possible, of resistance to the effort to destroy them. Although many Jews did not see until too late the larger plan to murder them all, they did see the more immediate effort on the part of the Germans to annihilate them culturally and intellectually, and they strove to resist that effort.

The Holocaust was designed to flout normality and to leave the Jewish peoples disoriented and off balance. Changes occurred suddenly, in opposition to all clues the victims could gather in advance, and with a brutal and disorienting cruelty. Therefore, efforts to create an understandable, navigable reality were in vain. Jews tried to find ways to create a reality in which they could make some prediction about the behavior and intentions of their tormentors and about their own futures. In truth, Jews seldom had the power or opportunity to form a useful understanding of reality as they had little power to protect their constructions in the face of the juggernaut of destruction designed to destroy whatever they built. The "Final Solution" was designed to obscure itself and to effect swift and unpredictable changes

Paulo Friere wrote of the liberatory power of education and of the ways that oppressors distort education in order to further the oppression of those they seek to shackle.² While the former was certainly a factor in the education of Jewish children in the Holocaust period, the latter is much more problematic. Not only did the Germans prohibit or hinder education rather than

²Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1992), 75-81.

impose any particular content, methodology, or philosophy; they did not oppress the Jews who fell under their rule—they murdered them brutally and systematically or tried to. Oppression carries the suggestion of a long-term relationship. People oppress slaves, they oppress minority groups, and they oppress lower social classes and castes. The Germans meant not to keep the Jews alive long enough to form such a relationship as that of oppressors and the oppressed. Their aim was to murder every Jew and to persecute and torture them in the time until they accomplished that nefarious end. To the degree, that education was liberatory, it was a means of preserving the only freedom possible to Jews—the freedom of the mind. In some cases, this had a more practical effect—in some schools students learned ideas leading to active resistance. Thus, many students of the Dror Gymnasium in Warsaw matriculated to the Resistance forming in that ghetto and into the ZOB (Jewish Fighting Organization) particularly. There they found a sort of freedom in the practice of resistance and in choosing their deaths. However, Friere's idea of education of oppressed peoples is somewhat different. He looks at models of how powerful groups in a society use education to validate and to fuel oppression. He looks at how oppressors manipulate education to keep certain groups in control and others in bondage and how they use education to enhance the power of their own heirs. He also looks at models of teaching and learning that allow the oppressed to view those power relations and to raise their consciousness of their oppression.³

While the education of some European Jewish children was structured to bring them these same sorts of awareness, others had educations that were liberatory only in the sense that their intellects grew and their self-images as resistors strengthened even on the threshold of their tragic deaths. Even those who had the most enlightened educations, who came to understand most perfectly the power relations that had led to their persecution, could not fend off the "Final Solution." They too died, and if they died in ways they chose, they nonetheless chose from a narrow set of options. They did not choose between

³Ibid., 28-33.

slavery and freedom, or between life and death. They chose little more than the manner of their deaths. They chose between being shot while standing at the edge of their graves, being burned out of their bunkers and shot, suffocating in smoke filled bunkers, or taking cyanide rather than surrendering. They chose between asphyxiation in gas chambers or death while fighting back.

We can also look at the work of Madeleine Grumet who wrote most movingly of the different relations inherent in teaching our own children and teaching the children of others.⁴ Yet, in these Holocaust narratives we can see that these lines blurred and dissipated—sometimes immediately and other times in a few, jolting increments. Nehama Eckheizer-Fahn, Mary Berg, Mira Kimmelman, and Yitskhok Rudashevski all alluded to the special relationships that formed between teachers and students. The accounts of Yitzhak Zuckerman, Zivia Lubetkin, and Hanna Lévy-Hass also suggest some connection different from the usual teacher and student relations. Clearly Valtr Eisinger, Natan Eck, and even Chaim Kaplan experienced relationships with their students, and Dawid Sierakowiak, Solly Ganor, Tamarah Lazerson, and Janina Bauman with their teachers, that were closer and more personal even than the closest relations between educators and students that normally exist. As the Germans decimated Jewish communities, the children became the children of all the adults who were active in their lives. Those adults found themselves bound to children in intimate and nurturing ways. The vicissitudes of their lives dissolved the boundaries and created new and often unexpected bonds. Most of the teachers in this work exhibited little awareness of teaching other people's children—they taught children they thought of as their "own."

Also, in Grumet's work we can find reference to teaching enterprises fueled by

the desire to establish a world for children that is richer, larger, more colorful, and more accessible than the one we have known . . . the creative refusal of human

⁴Madeleine R. Grumet, *Bitter Milk: Women and Teaching* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 164-182.

consciousness that says, "not this, but that," . . . [and] pulling back the curtain, opening the window, letting in more light."⁵

If this is true in ordinary times, it was even more so in those teacher and learner relationships in the camps, ghettos, and hiding places of the narrators of these stories. Youths and adults sought a world better not only than the Holocaust world, but better than the one in which that abomination could happen. They refused to accept the existence, or even the death, decreed for them. They longed for light and air, and hungrily sought windows through which their minds and spirits could fly free even as their bodies suffered vile imprisonment.

Many of those who strove to create and maintain schooling did so from an intricate mix of motivations. On the surface, those needs, at least initially, appear congruent with Abraham Maslow's hierarchical arrangement of needs.⁶ In schools, Jewish youth and adults sought and gave food and drink, shelter and medical attention, camaraderie and reassurance, identity and affection, as well as recognition and achievement. They sought higher needs as well. They sought knowledge and understanding, order and symmetry, justice and beauty.

Yet, the hierarchical structure Maslow assigned to human needs suffered disruption, even reversal. When basic needs were not met, students and teachers, children and adults, moved on, seeking to achieve satisfaction of higher order needs to compensate for the lack of fulfillment of more basic ones. In other instances, they symbolically allowed school to meet physical needs while they occupied themselves with other concerns. Starving, ill, inadequately sheltered, and fearing gratuitous torture and death—in other words with none of their basic needs met—those children and adults sought solace in schooling. The warmth of camaraderie stood in for physical warmth; the knowledge with which they fed their minds sufficed for their empty bellies; and the caring of their teachers stood as their shelter from the depravity of their ever-shrinking

⁵Ibid., xii-xiii.

⁶Abraham H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, 2d ed (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers 1970), 35-51.

world. However, schooling was not merely solace; it was a way of actively working to preserve, create, and recreate themselves and their lives. This bears some resemblance to the results of successful positive disintegration as explained by K. Dabrowski and Michael Piechowski.⁷ Unable to satisfy those physical and safety needs, they moved onto a new hierarchy where intellectual growth and self-actualization were not dependent upon satisfaction of what they previously viewed as basic needs. Only in the final stages of physical disintegration did learning or teaching end. The yearning for them ended only at the very threshold of death.

Within the schooling experience, youths and adults strove to recreate some vestige of their past lives and to give birth to new lives as well. Clinging to the past with varying degrees of tenacity, they pulled themselves toward the future. For example, some studied or taught geography as it was before the *Blitzkrieg*—others the geography of Palestine. Some studied and taught their native languages—others Hebrew and Arabic. Some did both.

Children and adults saw schooling as a means of receiving and providing food, shelter, safety, and in the case of educators, livelihood. In most cases, they earned not money but consumable or barterable goods that they hoped to use to provide themselves and their families with safety, food, and shelter. That these amenities were barely recognizable as such, indeed were sometimes imaginary, seems to have made little difference. Yitskhok Rudashevski repeatedly mentioned the warmth that emanated from his classes—not actual warmth, as there was generally little or no fuel for the stove—but warmth kindled in the camaraderie of the classroom and the academic clubs. Others mentioned the students “swallowing” the words of their teachers, as if their teachers’ words filled their empty bellies and obviated their torturous hunger.

Youths left their homes and braved the dangers of exposure to sadistic guards to reach their schools, where they then felt a sense of safety. That feeling of safety related not only to the specific physical and intellectual

⁷K. Dabrowski and Michael M. Piechowski, *Theory of Levels of Emotional Development, Volume 1: Multilevelness and Positive Disintegration* (Oceanside, N.Y.: Dabor Science Publications, 1977), 13-15.

environment of the school, but also to the company of peers and teachers. Many youths felt keenly the loss or impotence of their parents who could no longer provide them with the necessities or the protection the youngsters craved. In most cases their teachers could not provide them either; but, to their students, they seemed more able to do so. Israel Gutman writing of the youth movements and their relationship to the lives of children and youths in the ghettos said:

During the Nazi occupation and the existence of the ghetto, the world of the Jewish youngster obviously became constricted. School, family, home, and the company of adults disappeared or lost their authority. The trust and logic of the adult world was undermined. Fears, frustration, and helplessness affected adults more profoundly than it did the adolescents and placed the head of the family in a humiliating and vulnerable situation. Fathers could not protect their children. Mothers could not feed their young. Hence, the youth movement with its friendly alliances frequently provided important moral and material support. Of necessity and by choice, young people turned to each other.⁸

Some, although not all, of the persons who adopted the task of teachers had some prior experience working with Jewish youth. Some had been teachers in their free lives; others were youth movement leaders who had worked to further certain causes, including Zionism, Anti-Zionism, Socialism, and Communism, not merely by speeches or political action but through educational means. These activities included lectures, educational meetings, camps, and clubs. In the interwar years, the Jewish youth movements sought a variety of solutions to, and relief from, the resurgence of anti-Semitism. In tracing the history of her *shtetl* of Eishyshok, Yaffa Eliach provided a telling chronicle of the efforts of these groups to gain and retain leadership of community institutions such as the *shtetl's* school and library in the early twentieth century.⁹ Yitzhak Zuckerman's account of his experiences during the

⁸Israel Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Companies in Association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1994), 124.

⁹Yaffa Eliach, *There Once Was a World: A Nine-Hundred-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok* (Boston:

Holocaust and immediately prior to it, includes instances of how his youth movement work transformed into resistance work, including clandestine education in Warsaw ghetto, and formation of the Jewish Fighting Organization that planned and led the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943. Some of the Youth Movement leaders, many of them young themselves, including Yitzhak Zuckerman and Zivia Lubetkin were among twenty or so Youth Movement leaders who, following the German invasion of Poland in 1939, returned to German occupied zones in order to provide leadership for Jewish youth. They sacrificed their own safety for that purpose and many of them were to go on to lead resistance organizations—but in the meantime, they lead schools and educational organizations. It should come as no surprise that many of them were instrumental in forming and conducting a variety of schools and educational opportunities for the youths of the ghettos and camps in which the Germans confined them.

Some teachers in the Holocaust context, but by no means all, had already pursued pedagogy as a profession. Teaching was for them a familiar endeavor and their relationships with children, including the ability to touch their lives and to shelter them, however thin the shield they could offer, gave them a sense of normality and a sense of being able to do something positive. Students too felt comfortable in their roles and, while many of them had taken new roles in their families and communities, in school they could again be children. Still their living conditions affected them. They became more active seekers of schooling and more vocal and exacting as well. They learned to find educational opportunities, to enlist teachers, and to insist upon changes that better met their needs.

In a sense, schools offered not safety, food, or shelter at the time but the hope of them in the future. Students and teachers looked to a future wherein they would take active roles in creating a world where the current injustices would find no quarter. They looked forward to founding and maintaining a

Jewish homeland, and they anticipated new political models of freedom and dignity.

If the Jewish children and youths found comfort in the milieu and the life sustaining services of schools, they were not alone. The Jewish teachers themselves found comfort and sustenance in caring for the children—the simple dignity in caring for another human being bolstered the sense of humanity that the Germans so thoroughly sought to eradicate.

Adults and youths recognized the importance of staying busy, keeping up, growing intellectually, living as normally as possible, pleasing and reassuring families, bonding with each other, and remaining connected to the world before, the world outside, and the world to come. In Terezin, where an astonishingly complex and rich school life existed in secrecy, the classes for young children were nonetheless called *Beschaefigung* or “keeping-busy” classes.¹⁰ This is a puzzling sobriquet unless one recalls that young children needed protection from the knowledge that they engaged in forbidden activities. It is less puzzling still if one considers the importance of keeping busy. The alternative was to slide into a passive and declining state.

While many of the narrators mentioned the need to keep busy, others seemed to have a particular need to be doing what peers from their former lives were doing. Some looked forward to rejoining their schools and peer groups and sought to keep up with what their erstwhile peers were achieving. Their teachers helped and encouraged them in that effort. Those teachers were determined that, should their students survive, they not do so in ignorance.

Children also saw school as a way to meet family expectations. Children sometimes sought to reassure their parents by referring to their schooling. Letters from children, separated from their parents, included assurances that the children were having school. Joseph Goldberg, writing from the children’s home in Izieu, France, reassured his mother that she would not find him to be a “dummy” when they were reunited as he was studiously attending to his

¹⁰Inge Auerbacher, *I Am a Star: Child of the Holocaust* (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1986), 56.

lessons. Petr Ginz, writing from Terezin, prevaricated somewhat when he reported to his parents that he was attending the fifth form but went on to reassure them that he was doing well in his studies—a truth attested to by survivors. Both boys ascertained what, under normal circumstances, would have been a particular concern of their parents. Others, including Anne Frank and Moshe Flinker, mentioned parental concerns about their educations or about their futures and their own commitment to meeting their parents' expectations. Some certainly had different experiences. Both Solly Ganor and Dawid Sierakowiak reported parental ambivalence about schooling. In both cases, the parents focused on safety concerns rather than engaging in negative attitudes toward schooling itself.

Jewish youths found themselves contemplating adult needs. Janina Bauman for example was conscious of the connection between her school fees and her teachers' welfare. Other children were similarly concerned about adults in ways that had little bearing on adult's ability to meet children's needs but simply demonstrated a strong concern for the well being of others.

School also seemed to provide relationships between Jewish youths and adults unprecedented in their previous lives. Several narratives allude to the special relationship that developed between teachers and students in which adults and children formed bonds of friendship, dependence, solidarity, and affection. In addition, there are several instances where teachers and students formed such strong bonds that teachers willingly accompanied their charges into frightening, patently dangerous, and in fact fatal, situations.

If students suffered from abuses, so too did their teachers. Those who taught the Jewish children did not in the afternoons leave school and return to places that were more genial. They did not leave the ghetto for suburban homes. They did not eat better lunches than did their students. They did not have separate lives imbued with a safety and wealth unknown to their students. They lived in the same wretched places, ate the same inadequate food, and suffered the same dangers. The youths understood that and it worked to forge a bond between youths and adults.

German genocidal policies were in conflict with a strongly rooted Jewish habit of self help and, whereas those Jewish efforts must in the end fail in the face of the concerted effort to effect a "Final Solution," in the interim Jews intent on preserving themselves and providing for their children could in some cases establish normal activities such as schooling. More to the point, the previous efforts to provide for themselves seem to have instilled in them an attitude that they could do these things even without outside resources and indeed in the face of strong prohibitions. In addition, these organizations provided funds that helped to sustain schooling and provided other resources such as space and concealment for schools that in several instances met in community soup kitchens.¹¹

It was also seen as important to remain connected. Sara Spier, unable to go forward with her schooling, repeated her last assigned lessons again and yet again. Others used education to connect themselves to Judaism, Jewish culture, and the Diaspora. For many, Judaic learning filled a particular need. Tamarah Lazerson acquired a sense of Jewish identity she had not previously possessed. Others sought to connect themselves to the experiences of ancient generations of Jewish ancestors. Many saw Zionism as a means of realizing such a connection and eagerly accepted Zionist teachings. Others seemed to be more focused on Zionism as a means of connection to their Jewish contemporaries.

Several adults and youths told of learning and camaraderie that increased their feelings of Jewishness, enhanced their understanding of Judaism, and fostered strong Zionist hopes. One youth wrote of Terezin:

¹¹From 1933 to 1945, as well as in the preceding decades, Jewish communities were served by a number of social welfare organizations that sprang not from the greater societies of which those communities were part, but from the Jews themselves. Jewish Mutual Aid Societies provided relief in various ways for an array of social problems and they provided education, libraries, and recreation. Funds for these groups came from the communities and from off shoots of those communities such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Central British Fund and from smaller more particular aid societies formed at emigration points by Jews who wished to aid their former home communities. Such philanthropic organizations, whose members were Jewish emigrants and descendants of Jewish emigrants, provided funds and goods to Jewish communities in Europe prior to the war and continued to find ways to forward money to them even as the war progressed. Nevertheless, community members did the work of those societies and in the hard years leading up to the abuses suffered during the Holocaust Jews had funded and labored to provide for themselves and their fellow Jews.

So richly, brightly, dazzlingly yellow.
 Perhaps if the sun's tears would sing
 against a white stone . . .

Such, such a yellow
 Is carried lightly way up high.
 It went away I'm sure because it wished to
 kiss the world goodbye.

For seven weeks I've lived here,
 Penned up inside this ghetto.
 But I have found my people here.
 The dandelions call to me
 And the white chestnut candles in the court.
 Only I never saw another butterfly.

That butterfly was the last one.
 Butterflies don't live in here,
 In the ghetto.

4. 6. 1942 Pavel Friedmann¹²

Like Pavel, many young Jews found comfort and a sense of purpose in discovering "their people." Concentrated in ghettos and camps, immersed in their studies, they were able to draw comfort from proximity to fellow sufferers and from their deepening beliefs. Freda Menco, a contemporary of Anne Frank's, cast into Westerbork in the summer of 1944, said of her reaction to the camp: "For me it has been the best time of the war. No hunger, nice boys. When we worked during the day time [it] wasn't bad and we got good food and . . . we were standing around making jokes with each other."¹³ Going into ghettos and even camps often left youths with a temporary sense of relief—they had arrived at the place they had been avoiding; they were still alive; they were done with hiding or evading capture; they were with others of their own ages who were in similar circumstances. For a time at least they could feel they had dodged disaster. Such feelings were often short-lived.

¹²Hana Volavková, *I Never Saw Another Butterfly: Children's Drawings and Poems from Terezin Concentration Camp*, trans. Jeanne Nemcová. (Prague: Artia, 1978), 33. Terezin was portrayed by the Germans as something other than a camp. Many of the inmates referred to it as a ghetto especially those for whom it was the first camp they had experienced. In addition, horrible and dangerous as it was, it was in many ways less immediately terrible than camps such as Auschwitz, Treblinka, Chelmo, Sobibor, and others where the Germans committed mass murders of unfathomable dimensions.

¹³*Anne Frank Remembered* (Culver City, CA: Columbia TriStar Home Video, 1995).

Of course, the impulse to create and conduct schools did not spring from nothing. Jewish culture places great emphasis on children and, even before the attempt to murder them entirely, the Jews of Europe had a history of close attention to the welfare of children.

Jewish tradition, especially perhaps in the Diaspora, has always made the care and protection of children a prime priority. During the 19th century, for example, Europe's Jewish population grew twice as fast as its non-Jewish population. This occurred not because of a higher birth rate but because of a substantially lower infant death rate. While many factors figured into such a development, including lower Jewish rates of illegitimacy and alcoholism, one underlying cause was the Jewish community's greater concern for child welfare.¹⁴

Passing of knowledge from one generation to the next is an important part of Jewish tradition and belief. Schooling therefore is an essential part of Jewish identity. The Talmud charges parents with the task of providing their children with education and charges the community with absorbing that responsibility if the parents cannot meet it.¹⁵ Both religious and non-religious learning are important, because, in order to study Judaic literature, the student must possess the general skills for learning. Many of the creators of the narratives used in this work were not Orthodox or even observant Jews. They were highly assimilated and felt, at least initially, little connection to Judaism. Nevertheless, such traditions are slow to die. When the religious impulse was lost or neglected, families rooted in an understanding that to be a Jew one must be learned, retained the idea that it was important to be educated, especially where secular learning had become the cornerstone of identity and vocation.

Indeed, in Poland, Jews constituted approximately ten percent of the population but, in the two decades before the war,

¹⁴George E. Berkley, *Hitler's Gift: The Story of Theresienstadt* (Boston: Brandon Books, 1993), 108.

¹⁵Ben Zion Bokser and Baruch M. Bokser eds., *The Talmud: Selected Writings*, trans. Ben Zion Bokser (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 34, 36-38, 49, 196.

Jews composed a substantial percentage of the graduates of all high schools and universities, including many women. Jewish graduates applied to the universities to continue their studies in medicine, pharmacy, law, the humanities, chemistry, the Polish language and literature. The percentage of Jews in higher education began a steady decline in the period between the wars. In the years 1921-1922, Jews composed 24.6 percent of all students; in 1923-26, 20.7 percent; in 1934-35, 14.9 percent; and in 1937-38, 9.9 percent.¹⁶

The decline emanated from an increase in anti-Semitic attitudes and rules. Jews continued to fill the quotas set for them in schools, and many sought higher education elsewhere. Jews constituted a literate segment of society in Germany and the countries it defeated and occupied.¹⁷

In order to understand why adults and children worked so diligently at conducting school, it is necessary to examine also what they included as topics of learning. Some simply continued a course of study as similar as possible to that the Germans forced them to abandon in their previous schools. Two of the most notable examples are Anne Frank and Sara Spier. Their studies seem not to have gone in new directions. Sara, as we have seen, ritualized her studies, especially foreign language and mathematics, and she kept repeating the last lessons assigned to her. Anne went forward with her studies, yet her subjects seem to be well within the scope of a traditional secondary school curriculum. These were two of the most isolated youths whose narratives appear in this study and that circumstance is, I think, significant. Anne's coterie was not only

¹⁶Gutman, *Resistance*, 14, 28.

¹⁷This was not entirely a European phenomenon—it occurred in the United States as well. "By the early 1920s, Jewish representation at leading American universities had grown greatly. In 1922 . . . Jews made up 22 percent of the incoming class at Harvard, more than triple the 6 percent of 1909. Harvard's president, A. Lawrence Lowell, feared that the Jewish percentage would rise still higher; as a result, he pushed for the institution of quotas to limit the Jewish enrollment. . . . Jews lost the fight over quotas, which were instituted at Harvard and other Ivy League colleges (in some places formally, in others as a tacit policy). It is estimated that some seven hundred other liberal arts colleges soon followed Harvard's lead. . . . In 1923, before quotas, Jewish enrollment at Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons exceeded 50 percent; by 1928, it was under 20 percent; by 1940, 6.4 percent. . . . During the same period, Cornell's Medical School instituted a rigid quota which reduced Jewish students from some 40 percent in 1920 to 5 percent in 1940. Universities disinclined to admit Jews as students similarly were averse to hiring them as faculty . . . throughout the 1920s, fewer than one hundred Jewish professors could be found in American faculties of arts and sciences." Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Wisdom: Ethical, Spiritual, and Historical Lessons from the Great Works and Thinkers* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994), 484-485.

very restricted, but the adult whom she identified most often as involved in her education was her father. He provided her materials in the hiding place, and he taught or supervised many of her lessons. Sara lacked even that narrow circle of concealed companions. The adults who sheltered her were not interested in, and were sometimes even opposed to, her desire to learn.

Moshe Flinker, who hid in the open, had a much larger circle of people to influence him. Those who attended ghetto schools, clandestine or permitted by the Germans, had apparently wide circles of fellow students and teachers with a range of interests and ideologies. In most cases, it seemed that the more school was removed from parental spheres of influence the farther curricula were from the ordinary. Mary Berg and Janina Bauman, who attended private classes arranged by their families, received fairly ordinary educations, albeit clandestinely and with attendant modifications such as chemistry labs constructed from kitchen equipment. Janina even sought briefly to continue her education with medical lectures at university level—following in the footsteps of her father and grandfather.

Those who attended less exclusive classes and schools often gained exposure to curricula further from the standard school topics. Mira, Yitskhok, Dawid, Solly, and Tamarah mentioned exposure to either Zionist or Marxist ideas. Zivia, Hanna, Natan, Yitzhak, Gonda, and Avraham recounted sharing Zionist or Marxist ideology with youths. In Terezin, the boys of L417 seemed to be in various groupings that reflected the ideologies and goals of their teachers. The boys reportedly shared those beliefs, although most assignments into homes depended on other characteristics such as age. They shared ideologies perhaps through bonding with teachers and fellow students. It is not too surprising that teachers had a distinct influence on their students' political, cultural, and religious thinking and that this influence pulled those youths away from family beliefs.

In addition, there is in the narratives of both teachers and students little evidence of parental interference in curricula. Even in the case of Hanna Lévy-Hass, her fellow inmates opposed her specific teaching style, although neither

her right to teach nor the content of her lessons attracted censure. Hanna's curriculum reflected Marxist ideology and, while her progressive style received insults, she did not report any protest of her subject matter.

Many of the teachers were members of Resistance organizations or organizations that were resistant. Youths, trapped in the pinchers of oppression, sought such exemplars. Mary Berg and Janina Bauman, for instance, both expressed interest in becoming involved with resistance activities—although it is not clear that their private *gymnasium* teachers engaged in Resistance activity). Other students however had different experiences. The Dror students described by Zivia Lubetkin and Yitzhak Zuckerman found welcome in an organization that was to play a central role in an eventual Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

Some educators belonged to groups that did not endorse armed resistance but nonetheless engaged in resistance that sought to ameliorate the effects of ill treatment of Jews. Resistance sometimes meant striving to reproduce the religious, cultural, and intellectual characteristics of their parents and forebears. Young Jews, who emerged from the sepulchre of German-controlled Europe, often did so with identities that echoed those of their distant ancestors more than they did those of their parents. Retaining behaviors seen as civilized and retaining a sense of Jewish identity, however various people defined that, Jews sought to resist German persecution by reproducing themselves socially and culturally as Europeans, as Jews, or both. If that resistance was not deadly to the Germans, it was spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually sustaining to their victims.

The well-known leader of the religious Zionists, Rabbi Yitzhak Nissenbaum, tried to provide a religious understanding of life and duty within the ghetto. He introduced the concept of *Kiddush hahayim*, "the sanctity of life," in place of the more common *Kiddush hashem*, the sanctification of God's name, the traditional term for martyrdom used by the Jewish community. Nissenbaum's justification: During the Middle Ages, the enemies of the Jews wanted to destroy their spiritual world, intending in the main to convert them to Christianity. The Nazis were trying to annihilate the Jewish people. Therefore, if in the past it was the Jews' primary duty

to sacrifice their lives rather than renounce their beliefs, in the ghetto it was now their sacred obligation to struggle for their physical survival. Survival itself became a sanctified response to the Nazis. Jews within the ghetto were less philosophical, less religious. Nevertheless, they intuitively understood Nissenbaum's point. Survival was the common mission. Residents spoke of *überleben*, which could be translated as "to overcome and stay alive" and to arrive eventual release from sorrows.¹⁸

Many Jews felt that spiritual, cultural, and intellectual survival was nearly as important as any other kind. Thus, they continued to observe religious life, they continued to sponsor and attend cultural activities, and they continued to teach and learn.

Some educators and students affiliated themselves with groups that resisted German aggression and had previously also resisted the hegemonies that had theretofore existed within European society, including European Jewish hegemonies. They offered visions of new worlds organized according to principles outside the traditional realm of European Jewry—e. g. Zionist, Socialist, or Communist—worlds where the injustices then heaped upon Europe's Jewish children would find no footholds. In doing so, however, they often went against the beliefs of the cultural circles the youths had formerly inhabited and frequently directly contradicted family beliefs.

Before the onset of the destruction of European Jewry, Zionism was not a universally accepted idea. Both assimilated and Orthodox Jews sought to maintain their places within Europe and some began to look to Palestine only when their situations became grave. Others never dreamed of Eretz Israel, but in the extremity of the Holocaust, looked to leave their countries to escape German depredations—not from any innate desire to leave Europe or to found a new nation. Others had long-standing dreams of emigrating for economic reasons. For these families, the Marxist, Zionist, and pro-Judaic teachings their children received were not always welcome. As an example, Gonda Redlich mentioned the dismay of a segment of Terezin's population of assimilated Jews that the schools were "forcing" Judaism and Zionism on the students.

¹⁸Gutman, *Resistance*, 84-85.

Jewish teachers and administrators took advantage of a certain unexpected academic freedom that emerged in the midst of tyranny. Sometimes that advantage included attempts to sway youthful opinions to competing political parties—at least in the early period of the occupation. Chaim Kaplan reported a certain amount of conflict and of jockeying for favored status among groups vying for the endorsement and funding of the Warsaw *Judenrat*. However, following the sealing of the Ghetto in late 1940, he made little mention of that conflict. His descriptions of schooling suggest that in the end everyone just got on with the job of creating and keeping schools for the Ghetto children and youth. I do not mean to suggest that schooling became de-politicized, however. The narratives of Zivia Lubetkin, Yitzhak Zuckerman, and Hanna Lévy-Hass suggest otherwise. They described strongly political schools that meant to raise the consciousness of students so that in the future they would be resistant to tyranny. The Dror *Gymnasium* also sought to inculcate children with a strong bias toward Zionism. The Dror school and Hanna's Belsen school appear as well-intentioned approaches to teaching youngsters, who already lived under the harshest tyranny. The narratives of Natan Eck, Gonda Redlich, Chaim Kaplan, and Avraham Tory also suggest albeit to a milder degree that educators intentionally designed schools to inculcate Jewish children and youth with a host of ideas with political overtones.

In the first chapter, I alluded to the problems faced by teachers concerning motivation of learners. Teachers are always concerned with motivating students to learn even under the best conditions and with the latest equipment and materials at their disposal. Even in the most auspicious circumstances, fostering motivation to learn in school can be difficult. Yet, during the Holocaust, under the most difficult circumstances imaginable, children and youths were often enthusiastic about learning. How can we explain this?

In addition to the factors already discussed is that of methodology and the curriculum creation. One important aspect of the schooling experienced by

Jewish children in this context was the nature of the methodology and the content of what they learned. For various reasons, much of the educational work was progressive in nature. Progressivism was an ongoing idea in schooling circles during the early part of the twentieth century, as it was within Western society in general. As we have seen, many of the educators who appear in this study were teachers of one kind or another before the occupation and, thus, they had already been exposed to the ideas and methodologies of progressive education. In addition, some of them had political affiliations or engaged in political activities that were congenial with progressive thought. Still, not all would have been inclined to progressive education before the dissolution of their ordinary lives. Yet, when pushed to the extreme, many of them, for philosophical or practical reasons, adopted progressive models of teaching.

With little or no access to traditional teaching materials, students and teachers found or created them from resources available, including creating chemistry labs from kitchen equipment and “organizing” pencils and scraps of paper with which to create books. Since their students were in such desperate need of shelter, sustenance, and medical care, schools incorporated available community resources into the services offered. Because students yearned to understand their strange new environments, teachers helped design research projects, or encouraged students to design them, which helped youths understand their ghetto and camp communities. When possible adults and youths searched out the works of historians and sociologists to assist them or invited the experts themselves to participate in their lessons. Reflecting the best of progressive traditions, schools attended by Jewish children caught up in the Holocaust were, according to the narrators of this work, culturally relevant. The curricula and the methods of teaching and learning focused on the cultural milieu in which the participants found themselves while acknowledging their shattered pasts and always cognizant of their hope of a future.

Yet, schooling and educational efforts did not focus too nostalgically on their past lives, which most of them understood were gone or at least forever

altered. Nor did Jewish schools prepare them for the future at the expense of the present. Efforts that had future goals, e.g. building of a Jewish homeland, were firmly rooted in present concerns. If they sought to learn skills for a distant life, they usually focused on using those skills more immediately. For example, some teachers and students took up the study of Hebrew, Judaism, and Judaic culture not only to prepare for life in Palestine, which might prove impossible, but in order to live meaningful lives as Jews, within the confines of the ghettos, camps, and hiding places in which they awaited deliverance. Meanwhile they worked to know and to enhance their communities. Narrators reported field trips and fieldwork sponsored by schools and educational clubs or circles. Several youths and adults mentioned culture studies within the ghettos and camps, while others mentioned older youths planning and staging various activities and facilities for younger children.

Learning became not something handed to youths but something they worked with adults to make possible and meaningful. In truth, the narratives of both adults and students are replete with examples of curricula springing from the needs and interests of the students. Many narrators commented on the special, close, and personal relationships that formed between teachers and students. The unusual closeness was the result not only of the tribulations they shared, but also of the nature of their shared endeavors. They shared not only space and circumstance, but also work. Lines separating teachers from students blurred as they strove together to create schooling under the most horrendous conditions imaginable. They moved from being good teachers and students to being communities of active learners.

Neither teachers nor students shrank from working to understand the disaster engulfing them. Although many narratives mention the power of education temporarily to remove its participants from the reality of their impending destruction, it is clear that awareness of their circumstances was nonetheless present. If some schooling efforts were intended to shield children from horrors, when that subterfuge failed, efforts were redirected towards understanding and counteracting what was happening to children.

Most of the narratives speak warmly of schooling endeavors, in part because of the camaraderie formed in the effort to create and sustain schools, but also because superfluous, rote lessons gave way to lively, enriching, and deeply interesting learning experiences. Only Sara Spier, who alone studied in isolation, and whose sole educational resource was a set of textbooks from her former school, expressed dissatisfaction with her learning experience. Those critics of schooling efforts, whose comments appear in this chapter, did not criticize the quality of learning but rather the substitution of schooling for more forceful action to resist genocide.

While many adults and youths enthusiastically offered, sought, and received schooling, I do not mean to suggest universal acceptance of school much less to imply that it was a universal opportunity. Some children simply had no opportunity to attend. They were too needy and too involved in such work as smuggling and slave labor to attend school. As Mira Ryczke Kimmelman pointed out, some children had no past exposure to or expectation of more than rudimentary schooling, and they did not develop, and were not encouraged to develop, further interest given the circumstances. Some children and youth were too busy with the task of staying alive or had no opportunity to attend school. This was a bitter loss for some—writing of her Holocaust ordeal, Kitty Hart began by saying:

Looking back, I think what makes me most bitter against the Nazis, even after all this time, is the education of which they robbed me. I've tried to make up for lost ground, but those lost years were never fully compensated for.¹⁹

Schooling was not a happy experience for all of the children who had access to it either. In a documentary film of her Holocaust ordeal, one survivor told of lessons while in hiding and of physical abuse by her gentile rescuer if her work was incorrect.²⁰ Others chose to forgo school. Thirteen at the time of the

¹⁹Kitty Hart, *Return to Auschwitz: The Remarkable Story of a Girl Who Survived the Holocaust* (New York: Atheneum, 1983), 11.

²⁰*Diamonds in the Snow* (New York: Cinema Guild, 1994).

German entry into his city, Jack Eisner became a Warsaw ghetto smuggler and took to that work with enthusiasm. He voiced dismay that his father buried himself in study and "as a father, husband, and family leader ceased to exist."²¹

Others participated in school at the time but later expressed criticism. Abrasha, a favorite of Janusz Korczak, would in the end complain that: "[We] should have been taught to use guns and to fight back," rather than participating in the activities, democratic, egalitarian, and progressive as they were, of Korczak's orphanage. Hela Blumengraber wrote:

To the Teachers

You taught us to strive for a life of ideals,
You exhorted through verses and poem
To soar on the wings of enthusiasm
You taught us to unravel life's innermost secrets.

You taught us to love the magic of words,
To go into raptures, weeping with awe,
To press ever onward and search unrelentingly
For the truth and the cosmos unrevealed.

You enchanted our spirits with humanist phrases,
You taught us to worship the glory of genius.
For this I am now bowed with suffering,
I face the cruel world all helpless and lost.

We should have been taught to spring from a crouch.
To seize hold of a neck with an iron-strong grip,
To strike at a forehead with merciless fist
Until lifeless he crumples and falls.

You should have taught us to shriek till we're heard,
How to crash through a gate that is cracked,
How to kill to avoid getting killed
And get used to the glitter of blood.

O, erudite teachers, men of vast knowledge!
Did you really not know
That the earth is no place for a humanist?
Why did you plant yearning in our hearts? ²²

Some adults protested against the need for school on behalf of children. Kim Fendrick, who hid with her family in an underground bunker, recalled that,

²¹Eisner, Jack, *The Survivor*. (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1980), 131.

²²Azriel Eisenberg, *Witness to the Holocaust* (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981), 334.

even as her mother taught her, her grandmother opposed the effort. "Why are you torturing this child," she queried; "We're all going to die. Why does she need to sit here and do this?"²³ Teacher Annaliese Ora Borinska later wrote:

Today I know how wrong this policy of pretending "as if" was. However, one must understand that we had to try to impart some sense of security to the children in a world which was collapsing around them.²⁴

Such critics, as in the example immediately above, often temper their criticism with the observation that, while in retrospect schooling may have been less than an ideal choice, it was at the time a valid and crucial choice given what they knew and what they were able and unable to do otherwise. Realization came late to the teachers and the students of the German's intent to kill them all. Only in retrospect did they come to question their efforts. Yet, even possessed of the knowledge of the plan for the "Final Solution," once trapped in ghettos and camps there were few options for preserving and protecting the children.

Others came to see educational efforts differently as time and circumstances rushed toward the hideous end. Once news of the horrific massacre of the Jewish children, women, and men of Vilna reached Warsaw, Yitzhak Zuckerman saw that:

All the education work, which aspired to preserve the humanity of the younger generation and arouse in it the spirit of battle, would have been meaningless . . . unless together with it, and by virtue of its power, an armed Jewish self-defense force would come into being.²⁵

In the early days of the Holocaust, Jews saw the persecutions as temporary. There seemed to be little if any doubt of the eventual defeat of the

²³Marks, 57. Kim's mothers reply was "If we live she will know how to read and write. If we die, she'll have been kept busy."

²⁴Eisenberg, 333.

²⁵Mordecai Tenenbaum-Tamarof, *Pages from the Conflagration* (Jerusalem: Beit Lohamei ha-Getta'ot, 1948), 8.

murderers and that such a defeat would spell a reversal of the plight of their victims. Of course no one knew how long that day would be in coming or that the majority of them, indeed nearly all the children, would be dead by then. So they waited for deliverance and worked for it too. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, resulting in the entry of the United States into the war, was an immediate cause of jubilation. Mary Berg, for example, wrote of it joyfully as soon as it occurred. Likewise, two and a half years later, hope spread through the remnants of the Jewish people as word spread of the Normandy invasion. On a Tuesday, two months before her capture and nine months before her piteous death in the German camp of Bergen-Belsen, Anne Frank wrote: "6 June 1944. The invasion has begun! . . . The best part about the invasion is that I have the feeling that friends are on the way." Battered, decimated, starving, widowed, orphaned, and oppressed, the Jewish citizens of Europe always harbored the knowledge that an army—no, a vast *army of armies*—marched against their tormentors. And no one doubted its commitment to freeing Europe of the German scourge.

Certainly, many children and youths either by choice or by lack of opportunity did not attend school of any sort. However, figures on school enrollment in different locations at various times suggest that many were able to attend schools. Holocaust historian Lucy Dawidowicz offered the following figures: in Warsaw, two hundred boys learned in at least eleven *yeshivot*; two thousand youths studied in one hundred eighty clandestine *hedarim* and Talmud Torahs; hundreds of *komplety* in that city served an average of ten children each and met in public kitchens and private homes. By the time of the Great Deportation in July 1942, a school term had just ended with seven thousand students enrolled in nineteen schools. In 1940–1941, four thousand youths enrolled in vocational schools. Lublin boasted *komplety* led by one hundred teachers. At its peak, the Lodz school system served ten thousand children in forty-five schools; and, in Vilna, one secondary and several

elementary schools served some two thousand children—religious schools were also available.²⁶

For the youngest victims of German anti-Semitism, school provided for essential but scarce physical needs and served as a wall against the depravity that was overtaking their lives. School also provided them with companionship and cultural life while it offered opportunities to grow, learn, and create. Children and youth often sought out teachers and those teachers in turn gained from their experiences. In making and keeping schools, even in the shadow of death, they were able not only to give knowledge and guidance, security and acceptance to their students, but also to join with them in building hope and meaning for the future.

The hardships adults and children faced together, and the dangers they skirted daily, drew them into a relationship that went beyond the closeness of prior bonds between good teachers and enthusiastic students. They had a sense of companionship born of the conspiratory yet righteous endeavor they shared and nurtured by the closeness of the tight structure of their classes. Teachers, free of the devastating fear for the children's safety that could immobilize some parents, and imbued by the youths with heroic attributes, were natural subjects with whom children and youths bonded. For those youths who had lost all or parts of their immediate families, teachers and fellow students became natural substitutes for family.

There was an element as strong, if not stronger, than the closeness of the individual bonds of schooling. There was the bond of community as well. The sense of community permeated nearly every schooling endeavor. Sara Spier's education alone, of the examples offered here, stands in testimony to what a lack of community meant. For the others, it meant all. Some of the students and teachers used school to retain a sense of commitment to former communities. Anne Frank, Mary Berg, Janina Bauman, and most of the *Skhidovites* attached themselves to that vision as did Zvi Spiegel, Chaim

²⁶Dawidowicz, 252-255. She estimated 40,000 children and youth of school age in Warsaw during the Ghetto period.

Kaplan, Valtr Eisinger, and Irma Lauscherová-Kohnová. Others thought ahead to a new order wherein wrongs would be righted and a new era of egalitarianism would emerge. Dawid Sierakowiak and Yitskhok Rudashevski sought schooling to that end, and Hanna Lévy-Hass taught those ideas to her students. Natan Eck sought to establish a school community that would survive the Germans and revitalize Polish Jewry. Others looked beyond the known communities and beyond the borders of Europe and used schooling to begin the creation of a new Zionist Jewish community on a large scale in Eretz Israel. Moshe Flinker, Mira Ryczke Kimmelman, Solly Ganor, Tamarah Lazerson, Avi Fischer, Avraham Tory, Yitzhak Zuckerman, Zivia Lubetkin, and Gonda Redlich all sought to build that community; all drew strength from that idea; and all looked to school as an important element of becoming more consciously Jewish and of realizing Zionist dreams.

Not only did the sense of community matter within the schools, but also schools mattered greatly within their larger communities. Mary Berg, Yitskhok Rudashevski, Dawid Sierakowiak, Natan Eck, Zivia Lubetkin, Hanna Lévy-Hass, Avraham Tory, and Gonda Redlich all gave particular mention of the school programs or projects that affected their communities. Yitzhak Zuckerman told of how, even as he served as a leader of the Warsaw Ghetto resistance and occupied the post of second-in-command of the Jewish Fighting Organization, he found time to be involved in schooling efforts in the ghetto. More particularly, he recalled going to the lower school and kindergarten to talk to and to sing and dance with the young children there. Contact with schools and the children attending them gave community members a sense of purpose and an energizing respite from the horrors of the ghetto.

We must remember, however, that while many of the narrators of the stories in this work lived through the Holocaust, a proportion of those who participated in schooling during those murderous events suffered and died at the hands of the Germans. Remember in the early part of this work are figures indicating that only around eleven per cent of European Jewish children survived and, in some areas, even fewer escaped death. In Poland only one half

of one percent of children fourteen or under survived.²⁷ Of those who survived long enough to experience freedom from their tormentors, not all experienced significant amounts of schooling.

It is important also to understand schooling as it was. It is tempting to see in those efforts a glorious heroism. Yet, German cruelty did not lift the educators and learners found in these Holocaust narratives to greater heights of bravery, self-sacrifice, or heroic virtue. The pain, suffering, humiliation, and debasement of the brutal, violent, murderous, and inhuman treatment meted out by those Germans did not create heroes. Such torture does not raise humans to exemplary heights of courage or virtue. It batters them, humiliates them, and destroys them. This is a story of people who managed despite those torments to carry on as human beings. These efforts are clear examples of what Tzvetan Todorov, quoted in Chapter One, called the ordinary virtues of dignity, caring, and life of the mind. They seem extraordinary only in contrast to the stage on which they were acted out.

Refusing to die, or to give up, teachers and students went on with the very ordinary efforts of schooling. Only in contrast to what we know now of the Germans intentions do their efforts come to seem extraordinary. Had they known that the Germans intended to murder every Jew in Europe, some might have adopted other strategies. In some cases, they knew what fate their enemies had decided for them and they created and conducted schools anyway because they saw nothing else to do. Escape was not an option. Often they could fight back only in the sense of mental resistance. The only goal left was to survive—and do so as civilised human beings. In that endeavor, schooling served a vital role. To look upon their efforts in that way is to see schooling as part of a grueling attempt to survive rather than of a campaign of heroics. Schooling, in the context of the Holocaust, says more of perseverance than of posturing. Yet, there is in the narratives of many of these Jewish school makers, especially the older youths and the younger adults, a bit of bravado.

²⁷Deborah Dwork, *Children with a Star: Jewish Youth in Nazi Europe*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 274-275, note 27.

Their narratives, especially the diaries, speak of schooling very much in terms of something they continued doing in spite of the difficulties. There is also a certain satisfaction, perhaps bravado, which echoes in their descriptions of how they overcame obstacles. The Germans closed the schools—so what? We meet in secret. We have no classroom facilities—fine. We made a chemistry lab in the kitchen. We lack books—who cares. We invite guest speakers to lecture. We are starving—we consume knowledge. We are cold—we warm ourselves with ideas. The Germans persecute us for our Jewishness—we study Judaism, we learn Hebrew, we become more Jewish.

For all of the narrators, all of the school makers, in this study, schooling was a complex and vitally important part of their existence. As they negotiated the exigencies of life and death under the cruel and debilitating attempt to erase the rich and diverse reality of European Jewry, they strove to learn and teach. For all the differences of organization and immediate goals, in every instance certain fundamental similarities existed. Schooling was a means whereby European Jews, against all odds, sought to connect their cultural heritage to an uncertain future. Out of the remnants of normal life, schooling stood as something they felt they should do, and because teaching and learning are enhanced by such niceties as school buildings and educational materials, but not bound to them, it was something they could do. They could do it for such exalted reasons as a desire to create a new post-war world and for reasons as prosaic as creating a sense of normalcy in a world gone mad or to keep children occupied as their lives sped towards doom.

It is clear that the schooling efforts and educational success of European Jews in those grim years were neither accidental nor inevitable. Other groups, in other times, under different stresses might fail at the task or might never take it up. Persons less concerned about the welfare of their children, less imbued with a commitment to learning and teaching, and less practiced in the art of self-help would be less likely to embark upon the efforts put forth by those mid-century Jews to educate and be educated. In the accounts of many of the teachers, we find descriptions of their own efforts to

learn as well as teach; in others, we find lamentations over their lack of opportunities or resources for learning. In the narratives of the youths, we see that they regarded schooling as a precious opportunity and that they saw learning with or without school as a treasure. It was the combination of these initiatives for teaching and learning that created the will and, in spite of everything that might have stopped it, the ability to teach and learn in an environment that contained every circumstance that in normal times we lament as impediments to learning.

At Terezin, in 1942, Dr. Karel Fleishmann wrote:

One of us
will teach these children how to
sing again,
to write on paper with a pencil,
to do sums and multiply.
One of us is sure to survive.²⁸

All across Europe, Jewish adults and children did not wait to see if they would survive until liberation. They created lively schools and pinned on them their hopes and their dreams of the future.

²⁸*Terezin* (Prague: The Council of Jewish Communities in the Czech Lands, 1965), 77.

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Vita

Lisa Anne Plante was born at Lockbourne, AFB. Following a stint in New Mexico, she began her education at a teacher's college in Evreux, France—one of only a few American girls at the co-educational school (American boys were not admitted). Her early educational career spanned thirteen schools and twelve thousand miles schools in a variety of places, including New Jersey, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Guam. Many of those schools had diverse student bodies and she was not always a member of the majority. Beginning as a child, she developed an abiding interest in issues of culture and ethnicity as well as social justice and equality.

She entered college at age twenty-one as a theatre and dance major. She later changed to Teacher Education earning a Bachelor of Science degree and teaching certificate in 1983 and a Master of Science degree in 1987. As a member of the University of Tennessee's Cultural Studies Unit, she received her doctorate in May 2000.

She has taught in public schools since 1983 and has had assistantships in the College of Education at University of Tennessee, Knoxville. There she engaged in a variety of research projects and taught in the Inner City/Apple Corps program, a program designed to introduce prospective teachers to classrooms, to inner city schools and children, and to a variety of issues surrounding the teaching profession. In addition, she taught "Teaching, Schools, and Society," a Social Foundations requirement for completion of the Teacher Education program at UT, and served as a co-facilitator for the Trans-College Seminar, a required course for Ph.D. students in the College of Education.

She spent three years as the first graduate student member of the New College of Education's Coalition Core, a committee of college leaders who served in an advisory capacity to the Dean of Education and as a think tank for the college. She also served on planning committees for two Holocaust conferences at UT. Her dissertation grew from a combination of her interest in and knowledge of schooling and the Holocaust.