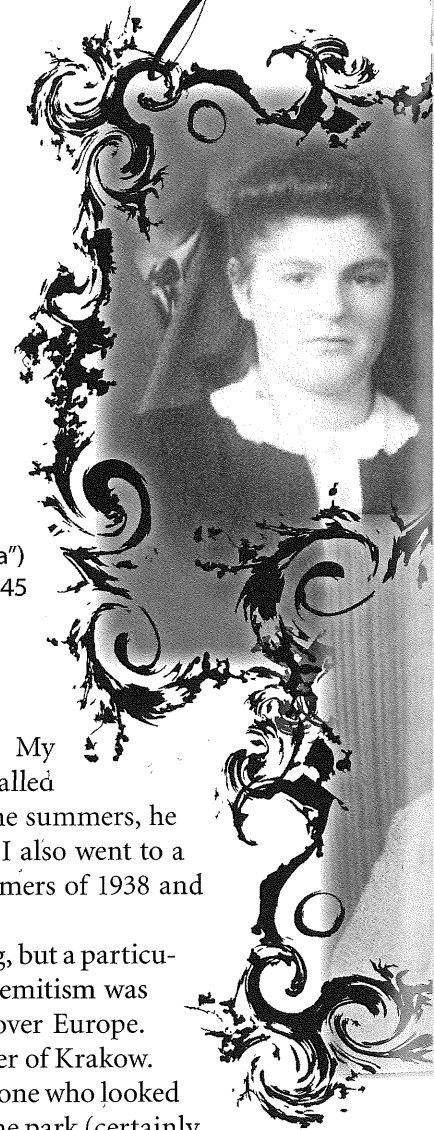


# LOSS AND FEAR AND JOY AND NACHAS

# My Life

by  
MRS. PEREL  
SCHULKIND,  
as told to  
ZEESY SILBERBERG  
written by  
RISHE DEITSCH



Perel ("Pola")  
Stern, 1945

The night before I got married, I smoked meat and hung it from the windows to dry. In fact, I prepared all the food for my wedding, then put on a borrowed wedding gown. I was marrying my uncle, who was 18 years older than me. Hitler had taken both our families, and now, after the war, we found each other still alive and decided to get married. The Klausenberger Rebbe was our *mesader kiddushin*. We were determined to start anew.

## CHILDHOOD - MY FATHER, REB ELIYAHU STERN

I was born in 1923 on the 11<sup>th</sup> of Kislev (November 19) in Krakow, Poland. My parents were Eliyahu and Simcha (Fraida) Stern. Our Rabbonim were "der Krakover Rov," Rabbi Korneitzer, and the Dzialoszyce Rov, from the shtetl of Dzialoszyce, 27 miles from Krakow. There were about 80,000 Jews living in Krakow, of which half were shomer Shabbos and half were entirely assimilated. We lived on the outskirts of the chassidische neighborhood in Krakow called Kazimierz, which consisted of a few blocks.

I was the oldest of four children. Faigel was born in 1924, Shaul in 1926, and Leah in 1930.

Faigel and I attended B'nos (the Shabbos afternoon shiur for girls, started by Sarah Schenirer) for two years

during the mid-1930s. My brother went to a yeshiva called Yesodei Torah and during the summers, he went to a frum boys' camp. I also went to a B'nos camp during the summers of 1938 and 1939.

Jewish life was flourishing, but a particularly virulent form of anti-Semitism was brewing in Poland and all over Europe. There was a park in the center of Krakow. By the time I was a teenager, one who looked Jewish could not walk past the park (certainly not into it) without being loudly cursed for being a Jew.

In 1938, rumors of Kristallnacht reached Krakow, but my parents and their friends and relatives didn't relate it to themselves.

In 1939, Hitler arrived with a vengeance. First the Nazis took over the post office, then the train station, and then they were everywhere. Many Jews fled to other places, seeking safety.

My father, who owned a coal factory, was also a *tzedokoh kleiber*. He would collect and distribute money for those in need. At 6:00 at night he would arrive home from work, but instead of relaxing, he would spend his

free time trying to help Jews in need. He often gave poor people coal for heating, at no charge.

I remember a man named Rabbi Lipshitz. His wife was sick and they had no children. The doctor suggested they go to Israel. My father helped him get the tickets and leave Poland. When Rabbi Lipshitz arrived in Israel, he wrote my father a letter encouraging him to come join him in Israel.

If only my father had listened to Rabbi Lipshitz! But my father was only human — he could not imagine what Hitler had in store for us. He told Rabbi Lipshitz, "I have a job here. Yes, I have enough money for tickets for my family to Israel, but then what? How will I support my family in Israel?" And so we stayed, and watched as the Nazis invaded Poland and took over Krakow.

Once my father heard of a young woman whose husband and parents were not alive, who had just given birth to a new baby. She had not a stitch of clothing to put on her infant. All she had was a single bed.

My father understood the hard life waiting for a woman alone with a baby, with no means of support, and he knew he had to help her.

He went to a large children's clothing store and asked for a donation. He was given some baby clothes, which he brought to the young mother's home. The

Germans were waiting for him when he came out. They arrested him and took him away. My aunt — his sister — went to the police and pleaded with

them to let him go. Finally, they released him.

I will never forget how my father looked when he walked into our house late that night. His full beard was gone, and his face was cut and bruised. Both eyes were blackened. This is how the Nazis treated a man who found nothing more important to do after work than to help a Yiddishe mama and her new baby.

Even in 1940, after the Nazis had taken over Poland, my

parents managed to have mesiras nefesh for their fellow Jews. Our home had a very large living/dining room. It became the makeshift shul where Yidden would come to daven. One hundred men fit in that room! Somebody managed to bring a Sefer Torah and this was put into the breakfront, our makeshift *Aron Kodesh*.

Outside, across the yard, was a large building. My sister Faigel and I were stationed there to watch for Nazis while the men davened in our house. Faigel was 16, I was 17, and this was our job. We never dreamed of saying we were afraid. We just did what we had to do, just as my parents did what they had to do.

On Yom Kippur of 1940, we stood guard across the street from my house. Suddenly, we saw some German soldiers coming down the road. We ran as fast as we could through the back door of my home, and quickly warned the men. Immediately, all the talleisim were shoved under the beds. The men ran up into the attics of our apartment and the other apartments and hid until the Germans passed. As soon as the coast was clear, everyone returned to our house, retrieved their talleisim, and resumed davening. Faigel and I went back to our post and continued looking out for Nazis.

## END OF CHILDHOOD

One day when I was 17, my mother sent me to buy bread from the black market in Krakow. A German soldier stopped me and demanded my papers.

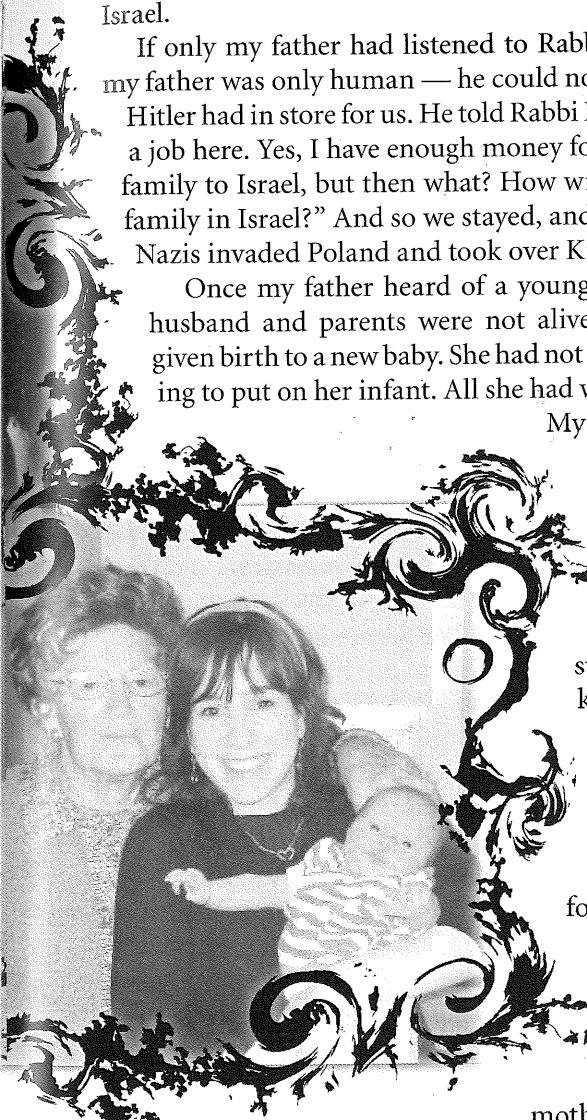
I told him my papers were at home. The soldier demanded roughly, "Where's home?" I was forced to lead him to my home. He told us to pack up because we were leaving in two hours. The Germans came and put us on a train to Mezritch, about 800 kilometers from Krakow. We never moved back into our house again.

We were now compelled to wear yellow armbands with stars to show we were Jews.

The Poles were able to easily and accurately distinguish a Jew from a goy but the Germans could not. The Poles had been living among us until now. The Germans did not know us at all. But I could fool even the Poles. I had blonde hair and blue eyes and could pass as a non-Jew.

I was riding the train once, passing as a goy, not wearing an armband. My friend Aliza was on the train with me. She had jet black hair and was wearing a red kerchief. She was also trying to pass as a non-Jew, but in her case it was much riskier. We didn't dare sit together and chat. We sat far apart. The policeman approached me (my heart began to pound), pointed at Aliza, and asked me, "Is that girl Jewish?" With all the fake confidence I could muster, I said, "I don't know that girl." You had to be quick with the Germans or they'd see through you. At the next stop I jumped off the train and waited for the next one.

Aliza survived the war and married Mr. Widawski. Her



Mrs. Perel Schulkind with her grandchild Zeesy Silberberg and great-grandchild Mirel

brother-in-law was Mr. Schick. Together, they founded Schick's Bakery on 16<sup>th</sup> Avenue in Brooklyn.

When I was about 19, I went on an errand alone to Wisznicz, a shtetl near Bochnia. I was going to attempt to buy my family passes to come there. My father had three sisters there, and thought it would be better for us there than in Mezritch. Once again I traveled disguised as a goy. On the way, the train made an overnight stop in Lublin. The train would not leave until the next morning and I knew it was not safe for me to stay overnight in the train station. I began to walk the now-dark streets of the strange town. I saw a man walking, worked up my courage and asked him as casually as I could, "Where is the Jewish section in this city?"

He gave me a strange look, implying, *how stupid can one be, to ask outright?*, but replied that if I kept walking straight, the street would become very narrow, and then I would find myself in the Jewish section. So I kept walking.

The night was absolutely black.

At last the streets narrowed, but it was so late that the town was fast asleep. I kept walking around, waiting for a *yeshuah* of some sort. I noticed a small light on, inside a store. I peered through the glass door.

Two Jewish men eyed me warily and firmly motioned to me that they were closed.

I mouthed to them through the door, "*Ya yestem zhiduvka!*" (Polish: "I am a Jew!") They opened the door and said that they were closed. I explained to them that I was on the run, that I could have stayed at the station overnight, but would not be safe there.

"My train is leaving at 6 a.m.," I said. "Would you kindly allow me to stay the night?"

They led me to the back of the store where they had a folding bed. I fell into a deep, exhausted sleep until the next morning a little before six, when the two Jews came to wake me with a cup of hot coffee. I didn't know then who they were and I will never know, but this is what they did for me, perhaps in the *zechus* of all the favors my father did for strangers.

## SHOFAR AT HIS BEDSIDE

In the fall of 1942, my family received the passes I sent them and arrived in Wisznicz. We hoped to be safe there, but alas, that was not to be. My father had caught pneumonia many years earlier, during his service in the Polish army. This had weakened his lungs, and he contracted tuberculosis in Mezritch. A few days before Rosh Hashonoh, he became terribly ill.

On Rosh Hashanah, the shofar was blown at his bedside. On the seventh day of Tishrei, he passed away, just 49 years old.

My mother lay in the second bed next to him, completely unaware of his death. She was in a coma, due to typhus.

The Jews of Wisznicz gave my father a Jewish burial. We four children, ages 12 – 19, stood at his graveside, mourning our father, terrified for our mother.

Shortly after his death, we saw the Germans building a highway right on top of my father's *kever* and all of the Jewish *kevorim*, and there was nothing we could do about it.

My brother Shaul was living with my mother. I was staying with my cousins, the Goldstoffs, and my younger sisters were living with our Schachter cousins. One Shabbos afternoon, I went to the Schachters to see that my sisters were all right.

The burden of looking after my three younger siblings, with my mother lying unconscious, and having just buried my father, was unbearable. The dam burst inside of me. That Shabbos afternoon, the tears did not stop.

By the time I finished crying, I had 105-degree fever. I too had contracted typhus. I was taken to a bed to lie down. My cousin Heshkek Goldstoffs held a cool cloth to my forehead and cared for me. Heshkek was a little older than I was, and would later be one of my only surviving relatives. He soon caught typhus from me.

My mother came out of her coma completely unharmed and healthy. My cousin and I recovered as well.

## HITLER'S WORK

It was a terrible time. We lived in a state of constant panic, running, listening, hiding, praying. In Bochnia, we lived in an attic, in one room with sloping walls. We all slept in one bed; Faigel, Leah, Shaul, and I, with my mother in the middle.

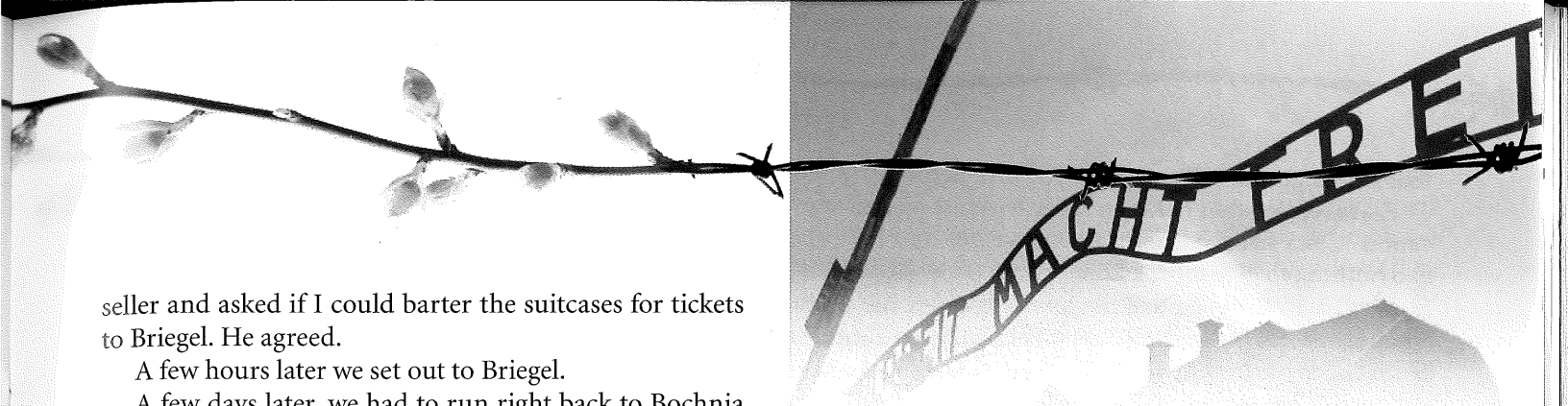
Once, the Germans came looking for my brother.

I don't know why they especially "needed" him that night. They came all the way up to our attic and banged on our door demanding to know where he was. He had ducked under the blanket and was wedged in between me and my sisters. The Germans saw four of us in the bed and couldn't imagine that there could be a fifth person in there too, so they left.

We decided to flee from Bochnia to Briegel. However, by now we were penniless. How would we buy tickets?

We had two leather suitcases, which my father had bought not too long before. At 4 a.m., when there were no Germans at the train station, I came to the station, approached the ticket

They couldn't imagine that there could be a fifth person in there too.



seller and asked if I could barter the suitcases for tickets to Briegel. He agreed.

A few hours later we set out to Briegel.

A few days later, we had to run right back to Bochnia because the Selection had reached Briegel.

## SZEBNIA

All the Jews in Bochnia were taken to Szebnia. My sister Faigel and some cousins and I were there too. We had regular roll calls. We had to form lines, five across. At one point, my sister Faigel and the others I was with were motioned to one side and only I was not included. This did not sit well with me. This new place was frightening enough; the last thing I wanted was to be alone here, without the people I loved. I immediately protested that I wanted to go together with my family no matter where they were going!

The Nazi guard looked me in the eye and said, "They are going to 'work' today, you will have your chance tomorrow." And he took the others into a forest.

The next day they sent my cousin Itche Schachter to collect the clothing which the unlucky group of 700 children was forced to shed before they were shot in the forest. My sister Faigel's clothing and his sister Hadassah's clothing were in the pile. Itche and I understood what had happened. That was the last I ever saw of my sister Faigel, may Hashem avenge her blood.

I was placed on a transport from Szebnia to Auschwitz, a 3-day trip. We made a stop in Katowitz and everybody got out. I saw a barn and ran to it, together with my friend Lola Potak, and we quickly climbed to the top. We considered staying there and then decided against it since the Germans had a habit of setting barns on fire while Jews were trapped in them or on them. Lola Potak told me she was not getting back on the train; she would escape into the town where she knew some goyim who would hide her. She offered to take me along with her. Lola was familiar with the area and knew some people, I did not. I told Lola to go without me: "They like you, not me."

Lola survived the war without going through Auschwitz. I got off the barn and was taken to Auschwitz, where I would be incarcerated for over a year.

In Auschwitz, we had to get up at 5 or 6 a.m. and stand for hours in perfect rows of five. We were counted and then counted again. Rarely a day would go by without a few girls being shot, hanged or selected to be sent to the gas chambers.

## ATTEMPTED REBELLION AT AUSCHWITZ

There were five girls whose job it was to fill the grenades with powder by hand. The girls secretly collected powder and then handed it over to a few daring boys. They were scheming to burn down two crematoria. They planned it carefully down to every detail, the girls who collected the powder and the boys who would set the blast.

Right before the blast was set to take place, word leaked to the Germans.

They made the girls pay in the most horrible scene that I was ever forced to witness and can never forget. We were all made to stand in the center of the camp and watch the hanging of the five girls. A boy who had attempted to dig a hole under the gate of the camp to escape was also publicly hanged.

## DAILY LIFE IN AUSCHWITZ

Our meals consisted of a small piece of bread in the morning after roll call and then a bowl of watery soup in the evening. At roll call every morning, a few people from each row of five were sent to the side, to the crematorium. The next day the lines would fill with new people.

Every day we would come to roll call only to again see people being selected, moved, and replaced like cheap spare parts.

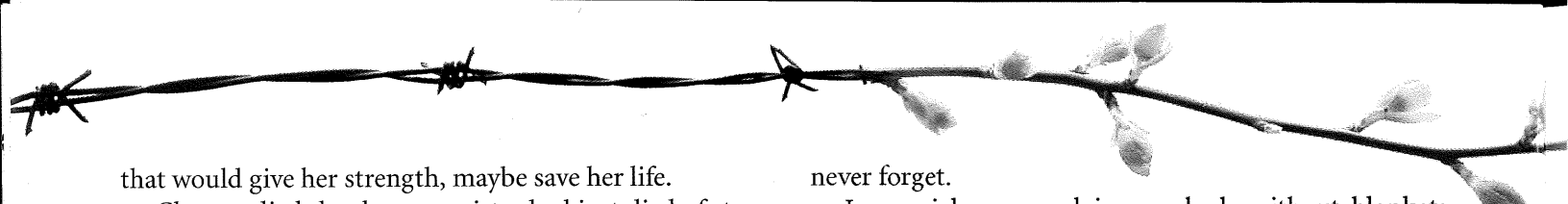
I slept on a board with some bits of straw on it. There were three or four boards attached to the walls, from floor to ceiling. Between 5 and 10 girls slept on each board.

On X-mas, the Nazis did not work, so the morning counting was not held in the center of the camp but rather inside the bunks. That morning, my cousin Eda Goldstoft stood in front of me as we were being counted. Suddenly, she fell backward into my arms. People would just drop like that sometimes. One minute they would be talking to you, and the next second they would keel over.

I caught Eda and held her up until the Nazis left. They didn't realize I was propping her up.

She was obviously close to death. I was desperate to help her. I laid her in her "bed" and ran to a woman I knew in Auschwitz who was a nurse. Clara was an old friend from Bochnia. I asked her if she could get me a bit of jam for my dying cousin. She needed something to eat





that would give her strength, maybe save her life.

Clara replied that her own sister had just died of starvation. Clara had had nothing to give her and now she had nothing to give me for Eda.

I returned to find Eda's *neshomoh* had left her body. Soon my other cousin, Eda's sister Fela, suffered a similar death, in my arms. At night the bodies were picked up and tossed into a wheelbarrow as if they were garbage.

My job every day was to finish the bullets that would fill the guns of the Nazis. We would take the caps and fit them onto the bottom half that was filled with gunpowder. If it didn't fit, we would bring it to the men who would mold it to make it fit.

Once when I came over to the men's work table, I heard somebody softly call my Polish name.

"Pola!"

I turned around quickly and recognized the cousin of a friend from Krakow. I paused in my work to look at his familiar face.

He asked, "Pola, what do you have to eat?"

I told them that most days, not every day, I was given a small piece of bread and a bit of soup. And so my friend's cousin began to bring me food.

He had contact with some Poles outside the camp. They would throw over the fence to him bread and margarine and sometimes a bit of meat. He would share this with me.

I made friends with a girl named Edja Wasserlauf, from a wealthy family in Krakow. Edja was suffering terribly. Her neck was covered in sores that were oozing pus. She went to the hospital and they told her there was nothing they could do; it was caused by the lack of basic vitamins, the lack of food. I shared with Edja my little stash that I received from my friend's cousin, and her neck healed.

## VISIT TO INFIRMARY

With the Russian army fast approaching, the Nazis evacuated the death camp. We were forced to march towards Germany in the infamous Death March. The Nazis shot anyone who couldn't keep up. More than 15,000 Jews died on the march.

We ended up in Neustat-Gleve, near Frankfurt-on-Maine in Germany. I was burning with fever, so the woman in charge of my room, a kind Jewish woman named Dr. Monsey, told me to go to the nearby infirmary, because if I was registered at the infirmary, I would be exempt from work.

I slowly and cautiously made my way over. It took me two hours to walk the short distance; firstly, because my feet were swollen and painful, and secondly, because I did not want the Germans to see any sudden movement and shoot me, as they often did with no provocation.

I arrived at the infirmary and saw a scene that I can

never forget.

I saw sick women lying on beds without blankets, completely undressed, totally dehumanized.

I was weak with fever, my feet hurt terribly and I was afraid of being shot. Still, I did not want to lose my dignity, so I decided to go back and get my nightgown which I had "bought" in Auschwitz in exchange for some bread. I had worn this nightgown during the Death March.

Returning to the bunk took me even longer, because my feet hurt more and I was more exhausted.

When I arrived at the bunk to get my nightgown, Dr. Monsey told me, "Don't return to the hospital. It no longer exists."

The Nazis had just emptied the hospital of all its patients by killing them.

## AFTER THE WAR: HOME BITTER HOME

At 2:41 a.m. on May 7, 1945, General Dwight D. Eisenhower received the unconditional surrender of the German High Command at Rheims, effective May 9. The war in Europe was over, the Nazis defeated. We knew the war was almost over; we heard cannons and guns and there was a strange mixture of dread, panic and excitement in the air. We were kept in our bunks on May 9 and we had no idea what the Nazis would do in their last few hours of power.

A few girls were afraid of being burned alive in the locked bunks and climbed out the windows. As the Nazis were running away from the American liberators, they passed the bunks where we waited for liberation and shot the girls who had jumped out.

When we were finally free, I went with Edja to her big house in Krakow. Edja remembered that her parents, now dead, had stashed jewelry in the wall of the dining room. When we got to her house we saw that it had been turned into an army base, either Russian or Polish. A Polish cleaning lady answered the door and she understood that this had been Edja's house.

Edja said, "I don't want the house; I need to see one room, the dining room."

The cleaning lady allowed us into the dining room. We uncovered the hiding place in the wall and found a pin, a watch and few other valuables. We sold them and bought food and clothes. In this way, we came full circle – in the camps, I was able to share the little I had to keep Edja alive, and after the war, Edja was able to help me.

It was 1945, the war was supposed to be over, but there was a pogrom one Shabbos in Krakow and two Yidden were killed. I knew it was time to leave, to get out of Poland.

I first went to see my home, to see what had become of my childhood memories. I walked into the house and immediately fainted on the floor.

In the  
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help me.

Everything in the house had remained in its place, exactly as we had left it. A Polish family lived there, not too happy to see me. Other than the fact that my family had been murdered, nothing was changed; it was my home with every single piece of furniture, every dish and spoon, intact. The people were dead but the dishes were unbroken. I was revived and given something to drink. I stood up from the floor, left, and have never returned.

There was a long list posted in the Jewish Committee (central office), of all the Jews who had returned to Krakow.

The only names I recognized on the list were my uncle by marriage, Yaakov Kopel Schulkind, and my cousin Itche Schachter. (Years earlier, as a prank, I had snuck up behind him and cut off one of Itche's *lange pyos*. Then, he was furious with me. Now, he was happy to see me! All was forgiven.)

I quickly located my uncle and cousin. Itche told me that my brother Shaul had been taken to the crematorium. I had hoped things would turn out differently because he was tall and blonde...

My mother was taken to the crematorium at the age of 46 together with my baby sister Leah. May Hashem avenge their blood. I knew already that Faigel had been taken into the forest and shot. My uncle and cousin were all the family I had left. (Much later, I also found Heshek Goldstoff, who had nursed me when I had typhus, and a few more cousins.)

We traveled together from Krakow to Prague, Czechoslovakia. There I looked for Dr. Monsey from Neustat-Gleve. She had told me to look her up if I was ever in Prague. I found three Dr. Monseys listed and the first one I called was the correct one. From there we went to a displaced persons (D.P.) camp in Ferenvald, Germany.

## MARRIAGE

The Nazis had taken everything... our precious loved ones, our homes, our money, our food, our health, even our clothing, jewelry, pots and pans. They took our shuls, our schools, our entire way of life. They took our faith in the future, our natural confidence that tomorrow will basically be like today. They took our plans and dreams for the future, our ideas of how our lives would play out.

It was in the D.P. camp in Ferenvald, Germany, that I married my uncle Yaakov Kopel Schulkind, a Radomsker chossid 18 years older than me. He had survived the war by working in Schindler's enamel factory. Yaakov Kopel's wife, my father's sister Chana, had been murdered by

the Nazis, along with their two children, may Hashem avenge their blood. We decided to get married a week before Pesach, in 1946. The Klausenberger Rebbe would be our *mesader kiddushin*.

Many Yiddishe boys knew nothing about Yiddishkeit — they had spent their childhood years in the camps, without parents, without cheder. The Klausenberger Rebbe gathered them, taught them, loved them, and made them into Yidden again.

The night before I got married, I smoked meat and hung it from the windows to dry. I broiled liver and made chopped liver. In fact, I prepared all the food for my wedding, then put on a borrowed wedding gown.

The wedding was bittersweet. Yes, we had survived and were rebuilding. But the void was so great... it could



Yaakov Kopel and Perel Schulkind, 1946.  
Y.K. Schulkind survived the war thanks to Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist credited with saving almost 1,200 Jews during the Holocaust by having them work in his enamelware and munition factories.

not be filled. I was getting married with no parents, no siblings, nobody and nothing familiar. This was not the wedding all little girls dream of.

I still remember the grammen that were sung at my wedding:

*Lommer zingen heint l'chaim*

*Far dem leben far di nayem*

*Hitler ah narisher diplomat*

*Iz er farkrochen kein Stalingrad*

*Dorten hot men geshpilt de katyushas*

*Dort hot er gemacht ah boireh nefushos*

Although there were no musicians, everyone there tried their best to be *mesameach* the couple who was getting married all by themselves.

My husband was close with the Klausenberger Rebbe, and they learned together every day for the four years we were in Ferensvald. The Klausenberger Rebbe requested of my husband to be the mashgiach in the communal kitchen because he knew he could rely on his kashrus and integrity.

In Ferensvald, I gave birth to a son. We named him Eliyahu, after my father. He was born ill, however, and had a pidyon haben before he had a bris. He died in Ferensvald at six months.

## THE UNITED STATES

We finally got visas to go to America and we arrived in New York in 1949.

We settled in Williamsburg for 12 years, and later moved to Boro Park, where my husband founded the Radomsker shtiebel, and where I have lived for the past 48 years.

The Klausenberger Rebbe settled in Union, N.J., and later in Netanya, Israel. A few times, my husband traveled to Union City for the Klausenberg Rebbe's melave malkah.

I earned \$15 a week working in a shoe factory. My husband worked in a jacket factory and earned \$16 a week. We were paid 75 cents per hour. Our rent was \$50 per month.

I scrimped and saved and put away a dollar a week, because I knew Pesach was coming and I needed to buy Pesach dishes and pots. I was very happy when I managed to do it. We even had guests for the sederim. Our first Pesach in the *goldene medinah*, like our wedding, was bittersweet. We were happy to be alive and free, but there was a coldness to our lives, without any family.

## GENERATIONS

The coldness began to thaw when we were blessed with two wonderful daughters; Chaya Sarah, in 1950, and Fraidy, in 1953. They are named after my husband's mother and my mother.

My husband and I, being *greeneh*, were not able to help them with their English homework, but boruch Hashem

they were bright girls and managed very well on their own.

When they were 13 and 10 years old, we wanted them to escape the hot city and go to the country, to overnight camp, so we sent them to Camp Gilah. The following year, when we went to register them again, Camp Gilah informed us that they had installed a new pool and so the price had gone up. We could not afford the new price. In fact we could not even afford half the new price.

We did not know what to do. We did not want our daughters to spend the summer in the steaming hot apartment, but we did not have the money for Camp Gilah and we couldn't leave the city due to work obligations.

Someone suggested, "Call Rabbi J.J. Hecht. He has a camp, Camp Emunah, and will take your girls at whatever price you can afford." So we did. And that is how our daughter Chaya Sarah made friends with Lubavitcher girls and eventually married a Lubavitcher chossid, Rabbi Meilech Silberberg. They are Shluchim in West Bloomfield, Michigan, and their children are Shluchim as well. All because of Rabbi J.J. Hecht a"h and *tbl"ch* Rebbetzin Chave Hecht! Their policy was, "*Ohrem oder reich, du zeinen alleh gleich.*" (Rich or poor, always an open door.)

Our daughter Fraidy married Mr. Shaul Eisen, a Bobover chossid. They had a son, Yaakov Kopel, who passed away at a young age. Fraidy and Shaul find the strength to be very active in HASC and other good causes, and to provide an open, warm second home for extended family and many others.

My husband passed away in 1986. In 1988, I married Moshe Goldstein and we were married for seven years. He passed away in 1995.

## CONCLUSION

When I first came to the Jewish Committee in Krakow, trying to find a parent, sister or brother who may have survived, hoping against hope but finding none, I was given a bowl of hot soup.

I couldn't eat it, because it was too salty from my tears.

But over the ensuing years, I slowly came to appreciate all the good in my life, and to teach my children and grandchildren not to complain about



Chaya Sarah (standing) and Fraidy Schulkind, 1954

what is missing but to appreciate Hashem's many gifts, and to greet people with a smile even when the heart is heavy.

Now, almost seventy years after losing my family, Hashem Yisborach has given me children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren to enjoy. These give meaning to my life. They are what I dwell on, because to have *doros*, to see generations, is to proudly and happily carry on for those who were taken away.



Perel and Yaakov Kopel Schulkind, 1972



Chaya Sarah (L) and Fraidy Schulkind, 1968

(L-R) Fraidy, Mrs. Perel Schulkind, Chaya Sarah, Rabbi Meilech Silberberg, Mr. Yaakov Kopel Schulkind  
(August 31, 1972 - 21 Elul 5732)



Mrs. Perel Schulkind with a great-grandchild, 2004



Proud mother Perel Schulkind





## W

*A Book Review of **BREAD AND FIRE** by Rivkah Slonim*  
Reviewed by Chana Jenny Weisberg

Right inside our front door, we have a wooden cabinet where we hang up our coats and store our boots for rainy days. Underneath the coats, and beside the boots, is a special shelf that is stacked with about 100 books. These books include copies of my first book, *Expecting Miracles*, my second book, *One Baby Step at a Time*, as well as copies of a thick lavender book entitled *Bread and Fire*.

This lavender book's place of honor underneath the Weisberg family coats and beside the Weisberg family boots is no matter of coincidence. *Bread and Fire* is there because it is my favorite book. It is a book I have given to my mother, my sister, and my sister-in-law (none of whom are Orthodox) as well as to my Rebbetzin (who is). It is a book for which I have established its own lending society in my Jerusalem neighborhood. It is a book that I have recommended on my website [www.JewishMom.com](http://www.JewishMom.com) as one of the top resources for Jewish women.

This past fall, a young woman in my community organized a lecture series entitled "Where is G-d in My Laundry Pile?" Where is G-d amongst the potato kugel preparations and the sinkful of dishes slick with chicken grease and the Shabbos mornings spent changing diapers and wiping runny noses while our husbands daven uninterrupted at shul? Where is G-d in our everyday lives, the lives we spend meeting the physical and emotional needs of my family members?

Every woman who has ever asked herself these questions will be forever thankful that Rebbetzin Rivkah Slonim, a mother of nine who, together with her husband, is co-director of the bustling Chabad House of Binghamton University, did too. In her book's introduction, Slonim recalls the first time she questioned the Jewish woman's role as a young girl:

*"I had been grappling with the intersection of women and observance within traditional law...I was mostly at peace with the tradition, but a part of me was agitated...did women somehow end up with the short end of the stick? I still remember the feeling of righteous indignation that filled me and spilled over as I ran into my grandparents' kitchen that Friday morning, determined to discuss these issues with my learned grandfather. I wanted answers and I wanted them right away. Instead, I was arrested by a scene so pure that I can still feel its power today.*

*"In one corner, my grandfather, wrapped in tallis and tefillin, was completing his morning prayers; in the other, my grandmother was concentrating on her prayers as she fulfilled the*

# Bread and Fire

Biblical commandment of challah...I felt like I was a trespasser on holy ground. They were both completely immersed in a conversation with G-d: intimate conversation, loving conversation, in a place where little else mattered. In that moment, my perfectly valid questions concerning equal access for women within Judaism seemed somehow unworthy. If it was truly service of G-d I was after, if what I honestly craved was that connection, then I had found my answer in the devotions that filled the room.

"My questions did not vanish into thin air...But now I ask my questions with less arrogance and a little more honesty."

While writing this book, Slonim presented these questions about the role of the Jewish woman to 57 Jewish women in all stages of life and in a diverse array of life circumstances. Single women, married women, FFB rebbetzins, fledgling BTs, mothers of many, women who have been waiting years for a single child.

"What is it like to be a Jewish woman?" Slonim asked them.

"What have been your greatest challenges?"

"Your profoundest joys?"

The result is an honest-to-goodness page-turner; personal, honest, gripping, heart-rending. Exquisite.

Ruchama King Feuerman, for example, reflects poignantly on her evolving relationship with prayer throughout her life. From her years as an older single, when

"I opened my siddur to pray, [and] lists would assail me; the ingredients I needed to buy for dinner that night, the number of guys I'd gone out with whose names started with 'Y,' phone calls I needed to make, appointments I needed to go to."

Fast forward to recent years as a mother of young children when she came to see prayer as...

"... some kind of spiritual chiropractic...an inner alignment that set me straight and steady for the entire day...I was part of G-d's plan of tikkun olam. He was interested in

me. He loved me. And sometimes, I allowed, He even liked me, and enjoyed my personality quirks."

Sheindal Muller, Shlucha to the small Southern community of Columbia, South Carolina, writes a humorous and haunting (yes, both words apply here!) essay about a role she inherited by default as community Rebbetzin, but which is a very tough fit for her: Mikvah Lady. She writes:

"The glamour is wearing off. It's starting to feel old and inconvenient. All at once, I feel utterly inadequate for a job I never considered, never applied for and shouldn't have gotten. If they place an ad in the Cosmic Classifieds it would read: 'Sheindal need not apply' at the bottom in polite, fine print.

"Too busy, too tired, too shy, too brusque, too clumsy, too secular, too agnostic, too cynical, too self-absorbed..."

"Why, if the mikvah lady has to be so young, shouldn't she at least be happy, reverent, devout, holy, naive, blushing?"

As Sheindal rushes to an appointment at the mikvah, she catches sight of a strange woman flying behind her in her rearview mirror:

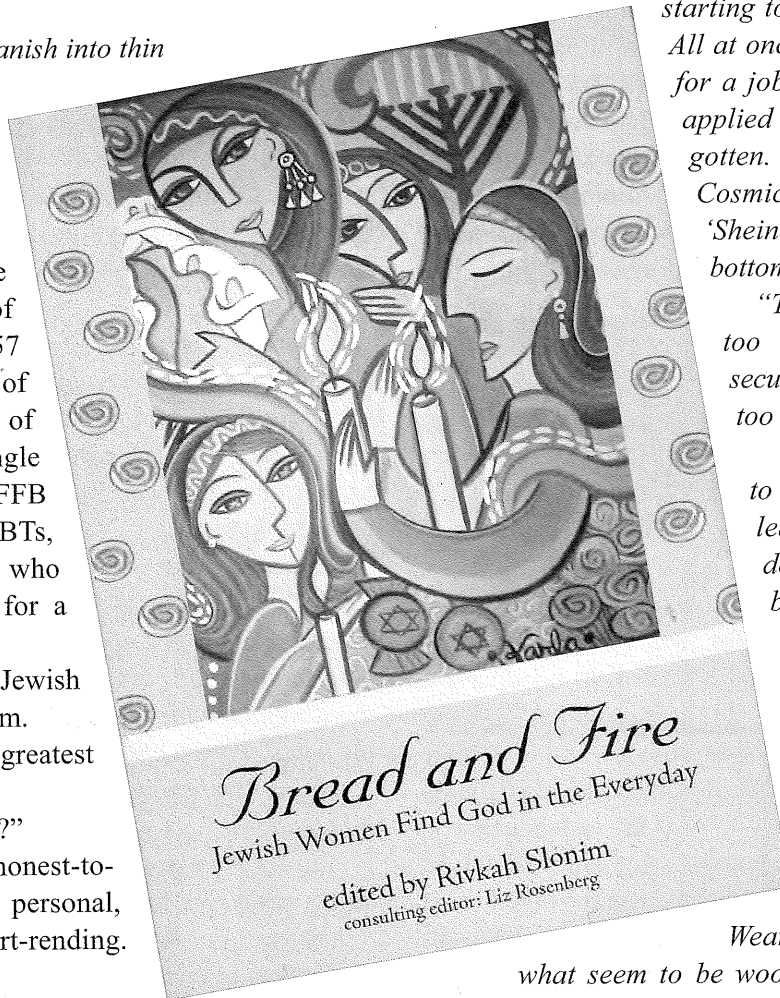
"She is short, squat, and impossibly old.

Wearing layers upon layers of what seem to be woolen sweaters...Then with a fierce jolt I recognize her. She is the mikvah lady of the Warsaw Ghetto..."

That mikvah lady in the rearview mirror is soon joined by a mikvah lady from Communist Russia holding an axe to carve a hole in a frozen Siberian lake, and then by a Spanish mikvah lady in "impossibly elegant clothing" with the Inquisitors' cursed flames already "licking at her hemline." These heroic mikvah ladies of yore assure Sheindal, "We are not only archetypes. We are human too!" Beautiful. Inspiring. True.

Honey Faye Gilbert writes in her essay, "Getting a Get and How Life Goes On," about her divorce and subsequent remarriage.

"The newspaper was spread out in front of me. I actually thought I'd



*read it, but the words, even the headlines, became blurry. I was much better bustling around doing something than sitting down and trying to read, because this was what invariably happened. I would start thinking and that would lead to crying and that would lead to my asking myself and G-d: 'How did this happen?'*

*"I thought I had done everything right and now I was 35 years old, with four children under five, and I was getting divorced. This wasn't supposed to happen to me. My marriage was going to be a success story. I was going to live happily ever after..."*

*"...I knew why my soul and my husband's had been meant for each other—we had to bring these four new souls into the world. Would I exchange them if I knew that I wouldn't have to go through the pain of divorce? I smiled sadly at the thought, and just then my daughter smiled a little crooked, half-asleep smile back at me. No."*



The book also contains a number of previously untold stories about the Rebbe and his teachings on the pivotal role of women in shaping the present and future of the Jewish people.

Karen Kirshenbaum, a highly respected teacher at the Nishmat and Midreshet Lindenbaum seminaries in Jerusalem, discusses the Rebbe's active support of Torah study for women:

*"I remember going to meet the Lubavitcher Rebbe as a young child with my family. My father told the Rebbe about the Talmud shiur that he taught on Shabbat afternoon in our neighborhood in Riverdale. The Rebbe asked what my mother and the other wives of the shiur members did during the shiur. My father explained that the shiur rotated every week to a different home and the women prepared the seudah shelishit meal for the men. Not satisfied with that, the Rebbe suggested that the women should also have their own study group. After we grew up, my*

*mother started a Mishnah study group for women that lasted 25 years.*

*"...Nineteen years ago I started [my own] Mishnah study group that meets every Shabbat afternoon...Just recently we completed all 63 tractates of the Mishnah and made a festive siyum...We have started learning the Mishnah over again from the beginning. For in learning there is no such thing as staying in the same place. You are either actively learning or actively forgetting!"*

Today, Kirshenbaum is one of the leading women teachers of Mishnah in the world. It amazes me to see the fires of Torah that the Rebbe lit that have grown into flaming bonfires lighting up the lives of Jewish women worldwide.

Tzivia Emmer writes as well of "a life-transforming experience she had while listening to an address by the Rebbe when she was newly married and a recent baalas teshuvoh:

*"I'm standing in the main synagogue of 770 Eastern Parkway, Lubavitch headquarters, on one of the occasions when the Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, would give a talk especially for women. The large hall is packed from wall to wall with women and girls sitting or standing, listening intently..."*

*"I pick up some words and sentences in Yiddish that I can understand as a result of my intensive efforts to learn the language of my grandmother. The Rebbe is speaking about the fundamental part women play in making the world a dwelling place for G-d. As the akeres habayis, mainstay of the home, women are the elite vanguard force in what might be called Operation Redemption—the ultimate purpose of all creation..."*

*"Everyone was concentrating very intently, some taking notes, some swaying slightly. I remember thinking that the Rebbe was, in effect, placing Jewish women—us—at the very spiritual center of the universe. G-d had said, 'Make for Me a sanctuary and I will dwell with them.' Within them specifically. In other words, within the sanctuaries in microcosm that are our Jewish homes. The transformative power of women, specifically as the akeres habayis, he was saying, is instrumental in making the world a place where G-d is revealed.*

*"And I remember looking around and wondering whether anyone besides me felt at all overawed or daunted by what the Rebbe was telling us was our mission. An earlier, vaguely feminist version of myself may have objected on the grounds that so singular a role was confining and arbitrary. But now I only wondered if I was up to the task. My home may be a microcosm of the universe and the arena in which mitzvos create a dwelling for G-d in*





*the lower worlds, as Jewish Mysticism teaches, but it is also the place where laundry has to be put away, dishes washed, babies tended, children disciplined, meals cooked, floors vacuumed. Other women, I was sure, had perfect homes, children who always said their blessings, and harmonious Shabbos tables. I felt at times that I could barely get through a day of simple tasks, yet collectively and individually, the Rebbe was telling us, we were bringing the world to that culminating state called Geuloh, with the coming of Moshiach."*

Wow! Cut that one out and put in on your refrigerator!

Elizabeth Cohen writes in her heart wrenching and eye-opening article, "The Fifth Commandment," about her experiences caring for her aging parents:

*"Had you told me at the time my mother was dying that I would someday be happy that I drove each day to see her, slept by her side, spoon-fed her, rationed her medications, held her like an infant, I would have thought you were a lunatic. Had you told me I would someday think back fondly on the time my father lived with me, lost his shoes and glasses every day and cried at night out of frustration because he could not remember where he was, or even his own name, I would have told you that you were nuts.*

*"But now it is two years later, and it is slowly dawning on me that although this experience was terribly hard, it was one of the best of my life. There is no way to sell this to someone on the outside. There is no brochure for parental caretaking that can make it look like a holiday, or infomercial that sells it like a timeshare...But to anyone with a sick parent, or whose parent grows weak or needs them, I can say this: It is time well spent. It will go on your soul's resume. Honor your father and mother and you may like yourself better having done so..."*

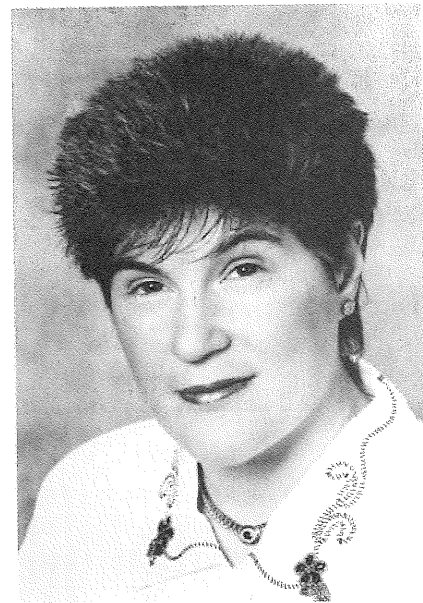
*I know now that each day spent*

*without pain, with a memory of who I am, each day with my daughter, with the sun on my face and a book in my purse, is a giant present from the universe. Every thing I do - peel a carrot, boil a potato, help my daughter put on her socks - seems heaven-sent because it is mine. I own my life in a way I never did before. My parents gave that to me."*

What I love most about *Bread and Fire* is its realness. It is Jewish womanhood uncensored. The tough stuff, the beautiful stuff, the stuff that I underlined and starred that rattled around in my mind until I was talking about it with my husband and friends even when my beloved *Bread and Fire* was parked in its place of honor underneath the Weisberg family coats, beside the Weisberg family boots.

Every article in this book is personal, gripping, and beautifully written. There were many names in this anthology that were familiar to me before I read it: Sarah Shapiro, Sherri Mandel, Rachel Naomi Remen, Tamar Frankiel. There were also many names of contributors that were unfamiliar to me, names that I hope to be reading a lot more of in the future.

*Bread and Fire* by Rebbetzin Rivkah Slonim is a unique book that I highly recommend to every Jewish woman at every stage of life. Frum women will love it for themselves, and also because it is the long-awaited book to pass on to unaffiliated Jewish women who would appreciate an understanding of the true spiritual power of Jewish womanhood. I thank Rebbetzin Rivkah Slonim for asking the same questions that I have been asking myself for years, and for having the courage, the intellectual integrity, and the determination to answer them in this thought-provoking and powerful book. ■



Rivkah Slonim