

Fanning the Embers

The political climate in 1932 was incredibly tense. There were six million unemployed in Germany. Our region was hit very hard. The Communists were strong in our area, and the Socialists also had large segments of the population supporting them. The Nazis were gaining in strength and were even more militant than the Communists — they were fighting in the open, strutting about and beating people in the streets.

We weren't alarmed by the Nazis, because they weren't in power. They seemed to us more like rowdies and ruffians than a menace to the state. At least this was the picture I got from my parents and other adults around me whenever I heard them discuss politics. I used to listen to the radio and heard Hitler's shrill harangues. Little by little, I picked up what the political parties were all about.

There was tremendous social agitation and huge political rallies. Everyone anticipated a major event, because the economic situation was so desperate. My parents talked about politics endlessly — it seemed they never talked about anything else.

Before the elections that gained the Nazi Party the largest number of seats, we thought that Hitler would never win. We believed there would be too much opposition to him, that the other parties would block his moves.

In fact, just the opposite happened. The right-wing and centre-leaning nationalist parties regarded the Communist Party as their main opposition. Many people, at least in our area, expected the Communists to win. So, following the elections in July and November of 1932, when both the Nazi Party and the Communist Party attracted strong support, Hitler skillfully used fear of communism to swing the moderate parties behind him. By manipulating the Red Scare, Hitler managed to attain power with support from the moderates.

I remember my father's prognostications: "If Hitler gains power, he won't last more than six months. Hitler doesn't know economics. He can't run Germany without knowing economics. He can't run a complex government in a modern society."

The election returns were close. In our region the Nazi Party wasn't strong, but that didn't make any difference. After a series of weak short-lived governments, Hitler was asked to become chancellor at the end of January 1933. My parents were stunned; they couldn't imagine what the next step would be. They knew Hitler's political and social philosophy but didn't take him seriously: my father described him as an adventurer who couldn't hold things together. He thought the economy would collapse under Hitler.

My father misjudged Hitler completely, as did many others inside and outside Germany. People deluded themselves: they thought Hitler could be controlled, or they brushed him off as a temporary aberration that would soon disappear. And they were so mournfully wrong. Hitler dominated everyone around him. Using surprise, propaganda and violently repressive tactics, he lasted much longer and did indescribably more harm than was ever predicted.

Within a year of taking office, Hitler had eliminated all the other political parties. Germany became a one-party state. Hitler forced everyone to fall in line or risk severe penalties or death.

Shortly after the Nazi Party assumed power, my uncle Josef was savagely beaten. The skin across much of his body turned blue with terrible bruising. The assailants warned him to clear out of Bochum.

A foreign newspaper printed a picture of him to illustrate Nazi brutality. My uncle was a bellwether in 1933, a sign of what was to come. He owned a fashionable shoe store in nearby Bochum that was favourably located and always crowded with customers whenever I was there. It was a gold mine, according to my father.

He was hospitalized for two weeks. When he was discharged, he came to our house to hide. Since his picture had been published abroad, he was afraid of being beaten again or killed. For six weeks he hid in a small room in our attic, terrified of being found and too scared to return to Bochum.

We never knew why he was attacked. My parents immediately assumed that it was a personal attack and not an assault against Jews — such was their faith in German civilization. I now think that his business success had aroused poisonous envy and made him an early victim. He was certainly not a communist; on the contrary, he was an outright capitalist.

Around that same time, the principal of the *Freie Schule* in Waten-scheid, an admirable man called Rector Mank, who was a true democrat and a pacifist, was summarily exiled by the Nazis to a one-room school in a remote part of Germany. Rumours of other attacks and demotions circulated, and many reports of these appeared in the newspapers abroad. But Uncle Josef was the only Jew we knew to whom this sort of thing had happened. My parents shrugged it off. “This isn’t the end of the world,” they said. “Maybe he did some harm to someone, and that person took revenge.”

But after that, Uncle Josef was afraid to stay in Germany. He sold his business and moved to Palestine. There were no currency restrictions yet, so he took all the money he had with him. He left Germany with his family in 1933.

Unemployment went down swiftly after Hitler rose to power. He built armaments and prepared for war. The economy recovered in a phenomenal way. Our stores were crowded from morning till evening; we could barely handle the volume.

The next disturbing incidents took place at my *Gymnasium*. Students began joining the Hitler Youth. Soon they were wearing the uniform — brown shirt, black pants and big belt — to school. Teachers also joined the Nazi Party. The Nazi Party anthem, *Horst-Wessel-Lied*, and other songs associated with the Nazis were sung at class meetings. I was also the only Jewish boy in my class and eventually I was the only one in the class who didn't belong to the Hitler Youth.

The odd thing is that, even though they belonged to the Hitler Youth, many classmates were still my friends. Most of them didn't stop talking to me. It was like the Boy Scouts at first — simply a club they joined that I didn't. All of them knew I was Jewish, yet they didn't ostracize me. In the early years, I felt only slight discomfort. But the strain increased inexorably as time went on.



Before 1933, there was little cohesion among Jews in Wattenscheid. My father, for one, had a low opinion of the services at the local synagogue. Every year on the High Holidays, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, our family used to walk to and from the synagogue in Gelsenkirchen, four kilometres each way.

After 1933, though, the Jewish community in Wattenscheid began to come together. Since Jews were excluded from clubs and activities, we created our own groups and social events. A varied and active community life developed for those few remaining years. Every Friday night and Saturday, for Shabbat, all the young people flocked to the synagogue. When my brothers and I got involved, our parents were drawn in too. My father joined us regularly, even though he had seldom gone to synagogue before. He wasn't a religious man, but he came with us because he felt he should.

It was remarkable to see all the Jews in synagogue. We never lacked a minyan or quorum; until then, such participation had been impossible. People drew together as the larger community pushed them out. Now synagogue became the centre of our lives.

Wattenscheid was too small to have a rabbi of its own. Instead, we had a cantor who also acted as rabbi and gave sermons, but whose main occupation was as a teacher in the *Freie Schule*. Cantor Oppenheim had been my class teacher in 1932, my final year there, and his brilliant daughter, a professor of linguistics who had a doctorate in pedagogy and had specialized in English, had been our first English tutor.

Long established though small, the synagogue was furnished with simple benches. Women sat in the balcony, and men on the main floor. A short distance away was the *Gemeindehaus*, the community centre, where Cantor Oppenheim lived in the rooms upstairs. Downstairs, there were meeting rooms and games rooms, with Ping-Pong tables and chess, checkers and card tables. We organized frequent events and many Zionist activities. Every Saturday afternoon, we held an Oneg Shabbat, a sabbath celebration, where Cantor Oppenheim told rabbinic stories and we sang Hebrew songs.

The cantor trained all the young men to daven, to pray. He taught us to read the Torah with *neginot*, the proper liturgical chant and traditional melodies. He instructed us in how to perform as the *chazzan*, cantor, ourselves and how to lead prayers. He gave us repeated opportunities to practise. On Friday evenings and Saturday mornings and even on holidays, the young boys had the honour of assisting him, taking over parts of the service.

Cantor Oppenheim was a typical German schoolmaster. He had high standards and paid great attention to detail: every phrase had to be exactly right. He wouldn't accept half-hearted attempts. I never forgot what he taught me and will always be grateful to him.

I continued bravely on at the *Gymnasium* in Wattenscheid, while my brothers were pupils at a Jewish school in Gelsenkirchen, which they went to by streetcar every day. My brothers and I were quite different. I was a bony child, and with my thatch of platinum-blond hair I was nicknamed *der Alte*, the old one, by my classmates. My serious demeanour and my years with Baba Shoshi had made it easy

for me to sit for hours with adults. Benno was becoming a tall, athletic fellow with red hair, fair skin and large brown eyes. People often admired Benno's deep, dark eyes and Eddi's thick, wavy, black hair. When Benno was little, Eddi and I used to tease him because he was the youngest. As he grew older and more wiry, we backed off. He was excellent at sports and gymnastics. He became a better soccer player than Eddi, who was good at every sport.

Though I was keen about most athletics, my physical skills didn't match my enthusiasm, so my participation was limited. Besides, when I was twelve I began to wear glasses due to my near-sightedness. At first, I was ashamed of them and used to put them on only in class to see the board, but after a while I had to wear them even to play soccer, even though they risked falling off and breaking. So as time went on, I was usually found in the cheering section at soccer games.

My brothers and I, especially Benno and I, were soccer fanatics. Our favourite team was Schalke 04, which won the German championship several times during the 1930s. Another team we followed was SV Höntrop, whose stadium was within walking distance of our home. Benno and I spent many a Sunday afternoon at the games, often to the consternation of our parents. I knew the players' scores better than Benno did, but Benno knew them better than Eddi did. Eddi liked to do things rather than talk about them, whereas Benno compared records, discussed moves and also played well himself.

We all did well in school, but I felt increasingly uneasy at the local *Gymnasium*. The usual salutation between teachers and students had become "Heil Hitler," and even more Nazi songs were sung fervently at school assemblies. I knew it was only a matter of time before I'd be expelled or something worse would happen. So in 1935 I told my father I wanted to join my brothers at the Jewish school. My father tried to dissuade me, because the Jewish school was mostly a primary school with a few classes for the higher grades, not like a *Gymnasium*. Finally, he gave his consent.

However, my father was right, and soon after changing schools I told him that I would prefer a *Gymnasium* after all. After a few months, I quit the Jewish school and enrolled at the *Gymnasium* in Gelsenkirchen. Other Jewish boys from the area were there, and this lessened the pressure from Nazi sentiments and ideology.

In 1935, Germany was now openly re-arming, and many armaments were being produced in our region. Hitler began to urge the nation to protect itself in case of war by building bomb shelters, which the government would subsidize. Accordingly, my father applied for a subsidy and installed a shelter in our cellar. It was completely furnished and stocked with dried foods and other necessities. Living under extreme conditions was becoming imaginable, even palpable.

Some time that year a letter arrived from Australia, like a voice from another world. It was from a man named Rosen, who had emigrated. He offered to reciprocate my father's generosity: Rosen had toiled in the coal mines near us until my father had given him a start in business. He was now successful in Australia and was confident that my father would do well there too. He urged my father to let him help us secure immigration papers. The man's gratitude and the offer astonished my father; in fact, when I think about it now, it seems to me it truly alarmed him. Rosen Textile Mills, Sydney, Australia, was the return address on the envelopes I would handle wonderingly. My father's response was consistently negative; he claimed he knew very little about Australia. "Where's Australia? What's in Australia?" he would mutter.

Then my father ordered us to stop discussing the subject. He refused to move and never considered the opportunity properly. I can hardly bear to think how he must have begun to regret this decision very soon afterwards.

Other people were leaving. In 1936, my bachelor uncle, Mischel, who lived in our house and managed our furniture store, decided to pack up and get out of Germany. He went to live in Palestine, where

he died in the 1960s (it had by then become Israel). I never saw him again after he left Germany.

Later that year a fire broke out in our clothing store, and a section of it burned. My father was arrested and accused of setting the fire — highly improbable since sales were booming!

Erwin Schrock, a master tailor working for my parents, was also living over our store. He and his wife, Hedwig, occupied the apartment next to ours. Hedwig had been a nursemaid in our home at the age of sixteen, in 1923, before Eddi was born.

Hedwig and Erwin had virtually become a part of our family. They lived in the annex of our home because my parents wanted them nearby. Both my parents were deeply attached to the Schrocks, and the Schrocks were devoted to them. Baba Shoshi and Uncle Mischel had both been very fond of golden-haired Hedwig, whose Slavic face regularly burst into radiant smiles; my mother, an only child, treated Hedwig like a beloved younger sister. Similarly, my father and Erwin were like brothers.

Erwin came from Stettin in the province of Pomerania, a part of Germany (now known as Szczecin, Poland). In 1921, when he was twenty-two, he began to work for my father and stayed with him from then on. Erwin was capable, good-looking and elegant. He was also an intelligent, independent-minded man. My father trusted him completely and relied on him increasingly in business matters.

After our store burned and my father was arrested, Erwin checked around the building. He found matches that had evidently been left by whoever had set the fire. He showed these to the police; they then arrested him, too, and charged him with being involved!

My father was kept in the prison near Wattenscheid for four weeks; Erwin was held for two weeks. He testified unsuccessfully as a witness in my father's defence.

Because German newspapers were severely censored by the authorities, we began buying Swiss German-language papers from Bern and Zurich. In those newspapers, we read articles about Dachau. The

camp, opened in 1933 in a suburb of Munich, was the first concentration camp created by Hitler. Jews and non-Jews, communists, socialists and others who opposed Hitler's policies were being thrown into Dachau. People were suffering and dying there because of mistreatment, malnutrition and slave labour. This was all well known at the time; my parents talked about it at home.

Knowing this, we were relieved my father wasn't sent to a concentration camp. He was kept in an ordinary jail and underwent the usual prison treatment. Then he and Erwin were released, and the whole matter seemed to be put to rest. None of us talked about it afterwards.

After this episode, the day's receipts from the stores were kept by Erwin. My father had begun to realize that we were losing our rights, yet he was determined not to be intimidated into leaving Germany. My parents often discussed the possibility of leaving. My father, however, felt there was no reason for him to have to leave; he would go on his own terms or not at all. Losing his property, let alone his life, was not in his plans.

By 1935–36, it was becoming clearer to him that all might not turn out well. But we were prosperous, and when people are living affluently in the country of their choice or birth, they don't readily detach themselves from it.

More significantly, my father was forty-two years old in 1936. For a man of that age with numerous attachments and dependents, emigration is a serious decision. Exile isn't an option that a responsible person chooses lightly.

From late 1935 on, my parents' plan was to send their children away, starting with me. After that they would see what happened. They thought they had some time, not expecting events to occur as quickly as they did.

I continued at the *Gymnasium* in Gelsenkirchen until the spring of 1937. I had just completed the German school system's *Obersekunda-Reife*, which was similar to a junior matriculation or intermediate high school diploma. In another two years I could have sat for the

Abitur or senior matriculation, but I couldn't continue there any longer. It was almost impossible by that point for a Jewish youth to attend a German *Gymnasium*; the pressures were becoming overwhelming. The Hitler Youth had by then been indoctrinated for several years. To hate Jews was their supreme mitzvah, their first commandment. One of their major tenets held that Jews were the cause of their *Unglück*, their misfortune.

Many young Nazis had a mystical feeling about Germany and about having a mission to fulfill. A main aim of this mission was to wipe out all the Jews in Germany. Jews were classified as rats, sewer rats, vermin. Hitler and his propagandists inveighed against Jews constantly. The evidence of this mountain of propaganda is still there for all to see in the press and posters of the time; the world had never seen its like, a truly modern weapon in ideological warfare.

Schoolmates were baiting me and sneering, "There's no place for you here. Why don't you go to the Holy Land? Why don't you get out of here? We have no use for you. You're responsible for all our troubles." They would become frenzied. It wasn't possible for me to study among them or to be among them.

Hamburg and Cologne — which was closest to us — each had a Jewish *Gymnasium* that covered only the intermediate level. In Frankfurt and Berlin, Jewish *Gymnasias* offered the higher grades.

I told my father that I could no longer attend a public *Gymnasium*, that I couldn't stand it. Eddi had gone to Berlin the year before, after he graduated from the Jewish school in Gelsenkirchen. In Berlin, he was attending an ORT school, a trade school for Jewish boys run by the Organization for Rehabilitation through Training. My father suggested that I join Eddi in Berlin. As a result, I applied and was accepted at the Adath Israel *Gymnasium* in Berlin. I was fifteen years old. It was time for a change.

Departures

My father accompanied me to Berlin to help me settle in. Eddi moved out from the family he'd been boarding with, and together we moved into a kosher hotel on the Kurfürstendamm. By then Eddi knew his way around the city, so I was quickly oriented as well. Berlin was overwhelming, but at the same time the anonymity of the big city was a relief in its own way.

I began studying at the Adath Israel *Gymnasium* in April 1937. I found the standards very high, and it took me weeks of strenuous effort before I caught up to the other students — they were better trained than I was in the basics. At the school in Gelsenkirchen I had been easily the best student; the school in Berlin, however, admitted only top students from all over Germany. Many of the teachers, moreover, had taught in German universities but had recently been forced out; they were far more scholarly than the high school teachers in Gelsenkirchen.

The school comprised a few hundred boys, with thirty-five or forty to a classroom. I was in the *Unterprima*, the next-to-final class. It was a stimulating environment and an exacting one.

Some boys in my class were preparing to write the Cambridge English exam, which could be written in Germany even then. If they achieved high scores, they had a chance to gain admission to Cambridge or Oxford. I knew several students from the *Gymnasium* who

accomplished this. In due course my father suggested to me, "Why don't you take the exam? Maybe you could study in England." My parents were always proud of my scholastic ability and had lofty aspirations for me. I began, with direction from my teachers, to drill myself to write the Cambridge exam.

For social life in Berlin, Eddi and I joined a Zionist group, a youth branch of the Mizrachi organization called Brith Hanoar, to which we had already belonged at home. An active unit flourished in Gelsenkirchen, and I had been the secretary and had met touring national leaders there. Since the leaders we had met there were mainly from Berlin, Eddi and I resumed acquaintance with them now.

Some of these youthful Zionists became prominent in Israel later on. Many founded kibbutzim and some served in the government. I remember Yosef Burg of Leipzig, who became a long-time cabinet minister in Israel and was a vigorous Zionist organizer when I was in Berlin.

Another person I remember who attended Adath Israel *Gymnasium* concurrently with me was Walter Wurzburger, who hailed from Munich. He went on to become one of the most distinguished Orthodox rabbis in North America.

Among students at the *Gymnasium*, the major issue concerning us was passing our exams. I'd been more concerned with the state of Germany while in Gelsenkirchen and Wattenscheid than I was in Berlin. The population was diverse and cosmopolitan and there were many Jews. Eddi and I felt safer than we had in a small town where we could be pointed out as one of the only Jews. In Berlin, I concentrated on passing the next exam and paid little attention to politics.

It was an insular life. My parents weren't around me constantly talking about politics with friends and anyone else who dropped by. My brother and I were living among transient strangers and we spoke about politics with no one. We scarcely read newspapers or listened to the radio because there seemed to be no point, as both newspapers and radio were under complete government control. We became less

involved in political events even though we were closer to so many of them.

While we were in Berlin in 1938, our uncle Beryl, his wife and youngest son, whose home was in Oberhausen not far from Bochum, were expelled to Poland. From there, by a circuitous route they made their way to Palestine, where the two older sons had gone a few years earlier. Now our immediate family was the only one left in Germany. All our close relatives had gone. My father's mother was still in Poland, and his sister, Gusta Schmidt, was in the Netherlands with her family. Everyone else had left Europe.



On November 7, 1938, a junior official in the German embassy in Paris whose name was Ernst vom Rath was shot. His assailant was a teenage Jewish boy. In retaliation for this assassination, the Nazis proceeded to destroy Jewish property and levy taxes on German Jews.

Kristallnacht, the Night of Broken Glass, started on the ninth day of November. That night and into the following night, squads of Nazis invaded Jewish neighbourhoods. They smashed windows. They looted and set fire to Jewish homes, factories, stores and synagogues.

These depredations struck many small towns, as well as Berlin. In small towns all the Jewish real estate was targeted and blighted. But Berlin was a huge metropolis, and so it was possible to not see Nazis' violence and destruction. Eddi and I still lived on Kurfürstendamm, which was and still is one of the main avenues. It was a mixed area, not especially Jewish. Our district was undisturbed, so my brother and I were unaware of what was happening around Germany.

We got up to go to school on the morning of November 10, 1938, as we did any other day. Suddenly the telephone rang with a call from our mother. The time was seven o'clock. She blurted out that my father had just been arrested again. She was alone and didn't know what to do. I was so shocked at the news of my father that I don't even remember if she mentioned what had happened to the store. She told

us to come home immediately, even though Eddi and I might have been safer in Berlin.

After her call, we hurried home by express train. We arrived in Wattenscheid, reached our gutted store, greeted our haggard mother and sat down to drink tea in the kitchen. The police turned up soon after and arrested Eddi and me right there.

We were flung into the jail in Wattenscheid. That night we were transferred to Herne, about twenty kilometres away. Our Aunt Rosa, my father's sister, had lived in Herne with her husband and children until they left Germany in the early 1930s.

We were detained in the jail in Herne along with other Jewish boys. One was Walter Nussbaum, whose home, like ours, was in a nearby town. We got to know him quickly in those unusual circumstances. Many years later my brother would find him again in Israel. And he still maintained his sense of humour: once he said to my grandson, who was on a visit to Israel, "You know where I met your grandfather? In jail!"

Locked up in Herne, I kept wondering where my father was. Then a talkative police officer revealed that we were supposed to be shipped to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, but the camp was full. He said, "You're lucky, you guys. You're sitting here in Herne, not in Sachsenhausen like the others, the ones ahead of you." My father had been seized ahead of us, so I surmised he was in that concentration camp, located near Berlin. The Nazis were still somewhat deterred by the effects of overcrowding; years later, overcrowding in the camp wouldn't have entered into their considerations.

After two weeks, my brother was released because he was only fifteen. I was held for four weeks, because I was already sixteen and regarded as grown up. I suppose they were hoping to find room for me in a camp with adults.

My mother had been unrelenting in finding a way to free me. She had even managed to obtain an exit visa for me to leave the country on a Kindertransport. Several countries, such as the Netherlands,

England and Denmark, agreed to accept a fixed number of Jewish children from Germany. Thanks to my mother's efforts, I was scheduled to be part of one of those transports. Unluckily, I was slated for the Netherlands instead of England, which would have been much safer.

The last day I was in Wattenscheid, my father returned home. I learned then that he had indeed been in Sachsenhausen, one of the worst concentration camps in that period. He looked weak; he had been ill and hadn't yet recovered.

He called me aside and said to me, "You're leaving today, and I may never see you again. I want to tell you something," pausing, "I'm not supposed to tell you this," he confided. "I had to swear I wouldn't mention it to anyone. If it's discovered that I have spoken about this, I may be arrested again. But I'll tell you anyway."

He went on. "When I got to Sachsenhausen, the first thing I had to do was stand in line with other men for twenty-four hours. We weren't allowed to go to the toilet. If any of us became unsteady or fell, no one helped him. Anyone who fainted was shot on the spot and carted away."

My father had been in the army; he had endured severe conditions in the war. He continued, "There weren't many of us who stood still for that long. Those who did were assigned to barracks and put to work. We had to move heavy rocks all day. We loaded them onto wheelbarrows, pushed them from one place to another and dumped them out. Then we had to reload the wheelbarrows and move the rocks back! Meaningless work! All day long, every day. The guards hit us, beat us and gave us very little to eat. It was inhuman. Many people died."

My father was a strong, robust man, but he fell sick in Sachsenhausen and was put in the camp hospital. After four weeks in the camp, he and others arrested on Kristallnacht were released. Maybe the Nazis freed some individuals to warn Jews to leave Germany, to drive Jews away so there would be no need to deal with us further.

My father was lucky to be free, but he reasoned that they wouldn't let him go the next time.

He had opened my eyes to the terror of Sachsenhausen. "Remember," he drummed into my ears, "whatever you do, never enter a concentration camp. Never put your foot in a concentration camp."

He gave me this extraordinary message, the most important instruction I ever received. He directed me to do everything I could to stay out of a concentration camp. "Because once you're there," he warned, "you'll never get out. It's torture."

He made clear to me what the Nazis were doing in the camps. They debased and weakened people; abuse, starvation and excessive labour were just some of the ways the Nazis were murdering the Jewish people.

With that message, my father told me all I needed to know about the concentration camps. Until then I hadn't realized what these places were really like. We had heard about Dachau: we knew that some Jews and Roma and nonconformists were imprisoned there. But arrests had been on a relatively small scale.

Suddenly, we were all candidates for the camps. The Nazis' camps took on a whole new meaning.

My father galvanized me with his warning in December 1938. It was the last time I saw my father and the last day I saw my mother and my youngest brother, Benno. I never forgot my father's message. I never allowed myself to be deluded. His words were always uppermost in my mind throughout the horror of the coming years.

My father was too spent to see me off, but my mother and brothers escorted me to the station in Gelsenkirchen. There I boarded the train that took me across the frontier into the Netherlands.



All I had was the small suitcase we were allowed to bring, along with ten Reichsmarks, which was all the currency we were allowed to take out of Germany. My mother had supplemented this with a piece of

jewellery, a fine gold chain set with a jewel, which I hid deep in my jacket. That was all I took with me: some clothing, ten Reichsmarks and a bracelet.

The train was the ordinary one that ran between Gelsenkirchen and the Dutch border. Jewish children occupied several railway cars. The Gestapo officers who climbed aboard to check our papers, even though each of us had a special visa, were rough and insulting to us.

My train went only as far as the Netherlands. Other trains carried children to England and elsewhere. It was just by chance that some children went here, others there; little forethought determined the destinations. Faced with the choice of letting me rot in jail or bailing me out with a guarantee that I would leave Germany, my mother had snatched at the first refuge offered, and that was to send me to the Netherlands.

In the evening I crossed into the Netherlands at Winterswijk, but at the border I was interned immediately as an enemy alien! I had been a prisoner in Germany and no sooner did I touch ground in the Netherlands than I was imprisoned again. It wasn't as bad as the German jail, but it wasn't the warm welcome I had hoped for, either.

The institutions involved with refugee children were the Dutch government, local churches and Jewish organizations. The first thing the Dutch authorities did was load us on a bus. We were driven to a village called De Steeg, near Arnhem and not far from the German border. There we were taken to a building that housed children in the summer, which was empty in the winter. The location was pastoral and pleasant, overlooking the IJssel River, a tributary of the Rhine. However, the beds in the dormitory were small; they were designed for young children, but we were adolescents. The Dutch had expected a transport of little children. They weren't prepared for us and had to make use of whatever quarters they had. They were now undecided about what to do with us.

I was in De Steeg for a couple of weeks before being shifted to naval quarantine barracks in Rotterdam. I was interned there like a criminal.

I was feeling lonely and unwanted, so I wrote to my aunt Gusta, my father's sister who lived in Maastricht, and she came by train to visit me. It took her the entire day to get to Rotterdam and then to the barracks where I was being kept. She brought a large basket of fruit and chocolates and talked with me for a while. She described the red tape she'd encountered at the gate of the naval installation before she was allowed to see me. But I was so glad she'd persisted — that little bit of family warmth meant a lot.

From Rotterdam I was transferred again, this time to a youth hostel near the city of Deventer. It was still winter, and the hostel, a recently constructed building, was only occupied in summer. Its facilities were just right for us, but we couldn't stay there long. With summer approaching, youth hostellers were expected, and we would have to move again.

We were given no regular schooling and had to find ways to pass the time. I had lost the opportunity to write the Cambridge exam, but I tried to continue learning something, anything. I studied Italian and a few other things on my own. Classes started, but they weren't well organized. We lacked essential texts and were never in one place long enough to make any headway. I now needed to always wear my eyeglasses, maybe because of the stress I was under, though I hardly let myself acknowledge these feelings.

Occasionally, we had visits from Jews who lived in Deventer. One was a man who travelled on business to Maastricht, which was about two hundred kilometres away. He offered to take me with him so I could visit my aunt. I was given permission to go with him twice. The route we followed paralleled the Dutch-German border, and Dutch police, who appeared to be on high alert, stopped us several times to check our papers. In Maastricht, the man left me with my relatives for a few hours while he attended to business. We would return to Deventer that same night. These excursions were a blessed change from the monotony of internment.

I tried to learn to garden in the spring in Deventer — I was burst-

ing to learn something or do something. There was a trade school in the town, and after repeated attempts I succeeded in getting my name on the list to learn plumbing, which seemed to be a useful skill. Before I could start apprenticing, I was moved again.

We were taken to an abandoned orphanage in Gouda, the city famous for its cheese. The orphanage was an antiquated building in the centre of the city. Dilapidated and dirty, it was a thoroughly unsanitary place. In the dormitories, the beds were set close together, and outdoors we were packed into a small courtyard. Once again, we had nothing to fill our time.

Diphtheria flared among us. Some became very sick, and all of us were infected. I never developed the disease, but I became a carrier. We were tested for diphtheria regularly, and anyone who tested positive was confined to hospital. I was eventually placed in quarantine in the hospital in Gouda.

I wanted to conceal the worry about this disease from my parents, so in my letters to them I pretended none of this was happening. In that period, however, each letter from a contagious-disease ward was fumigated and the edges of the envelopes were cut off. I wondered if my parents realized the situation I was in.

In 1939, my parents struggled to find a way to leave Germany through official channels. By then Jews were forbidden to withdraw money from the country, so my father shipped a room-sized container full of valuable precision tools and small machinery addressed to relatives in Palestine, thinking he and my mother and my brother Benno might follow. The shipment reached Italy and went no further; there it went astray. The British aggravated the critical situation by blocking entry into Palestine. But no other country would accept Jews, so of course people thought more and more about getting to Palestine.

My aunt Gusta tried to pluck my family out of Germany in 1939 by sending a car with a Dutch driver to pick them up. But my father insisted on having authorization to leave. Stubbornly, he cited his

German citizenship and military service; he refused to sneak away from Germany.

Maybe he could no longer see things for the way they really were after the experience in the concentration camp. Maybe his mind could no longer take in what was happening. Or maybe he simply gave up, lost his gusto. I phoned them sometimes, and they could phone me; the short distance between us made this possible. I still had some hope, though it was slowly diminishing. There was no way they could legally leave Germany now.

In May 1939, my brother Eddi went to England on a Kindertransport, and Benno could have gone with him, but my mother wouldn't let Benno go. "I'll be alone," she wrote. "There'll be no one at home. I can't let all three of you go." She seemed so bereft that Benno told her he didn't want to go. My poor mother.

In September 1939, the war broke out when Germany invaded Poland. I was still in quarantine in the hospital in Gouda. A nurse who showed compassion for us said to me one morning, "War broke out today," and then brought me a newspaper.

Shortly after that I received a letter from my parents. They told me they had moved from Wattenscheid to Dortmund. I learned that the Jews in Wattenscheid had first been forced to move into the town's *Gemeindehaus*, where they had stayed until they were taken to Dortmund.

The move disturbed me and filled me with dread. I told the nurse, "This is the last time I'll ever hear from them. This is the end." She tried, nonetheless, to console me. "Don't say that. You never know," she said. But I was very close to correct.

Much later on I learned that after Eddi and I had left home Nazis would loiter outside our stores. They badgered the Schrocks with remarks like, "Did the Jews rake in money today?" They threatened to blow up the stores. They harassed Hedwig and called her "Jew wife" because of her friendship with Jews.

Then one day trucks drove up, and Nazis removed all the goods from our stores. My parents and Benno were ordered to live in a small room behind the Schrocks' apartment. They were forbidden to work from then on. Someone was appointed by the Nazis to administer our property. So much of the whole Nazi fabrication came down to property — it always did.

Later that year, because I was only a carrier of diphtheria and wasn't sick, the Dutch officials decided it was too expensive to keep me in hospital. I was transferred to the harbour area of Amsterdam to a quarantine station normally used by seamen. The barracks and huts were very old. I stayed there in isolation for a couple months with nothing to do.

Having been a member of Brith Hanoar, I established contact with the group in Amsterdam. Members of the organization came to all the detention centres looking for volunteers to prepare to go to Palestine. The group operated two kibbutzim in the Netherlands, one near Amsterdam and one in the northern province of Friesland. I volunteered to join one of these, to go on *hachshara*, the preparation and training for collective farm life. I was accepted into the *hachshara* in Franeker, a tiny city to the north.

But first I had to be cleared of diphtheria germs. There was no penicillin or other antibiotics at that time; my own body had to destroy the infection. I was kept with other infected people, so even if I overcame the disease I could be re-infected. My body eventually developed some immunity.

I had to sign a plethora of documents, but I was finally granted temporary residence and a work permit. This meant I was being released from custody, and in December 1939 I was suddenly a free person, exactly a year after I had left Germany. I had spent a whole year in the Netherlands doing absolutely nothing, except contracting a contagion due to poor conditions — the overcrowding, inadequate food and substandard housing. I still had a German passport with a

swastika on the cover and a large “J” for *Jude*, Jew, stamped inside. But I now had Dutch resident status. I was accepted; I was legal. I could walk in the open air. I could breathe. I had nothing but my papers, yet I felt wonderful.



I had now joined the hachshara in Franeker, about twenty kilometres west of Leeuwarden, the capital city of Friesland, and a short way from Harlingen. This was an isolated region of the Netherlands, with its own marked dialect and its own distinctive character. The land is very flat and close to the sea, a windy, lonely landscape.

Friesland is rich farming country with excellent farmers. These hard-working farmers were grim and taciturn, barely speaking under any circumstances. One of the few remarks they made to me regularly was a proverb on the weather. It went:

*Morgenrood
Brenge water in de sloot.*

The proverb says that if the sky is red in the morning, it's going to rain (there will be water in the ditch).

Conditions were difficult for the Friesian farmers. They rose at four in the morning and worked steadily until six in the evening, labouring almost without pause. It was quite the preparation for a city boy like me.

We were a group of about twenty-five young people, fifteen boys and ten girls. Most of the girls worked in the houses, though a few were apprentice gardeners learning from a horticulturist. The boys worked on farms. The leaders of our organization demanded that we train hard, grow tough and learn to be skilled farmers from the Friesians.

We all lived together in a former train station in Franeker. The tracks had been removed, and so the place had been vacant until our arrival. Our organization adapted the building for our use: the ticket office became the kitchen, and the waiting room a boys' dormitory,

while the girls slept in a room upstairs. We each had our essential bicycle, which we stored in a shed beside the house.

At 3:30 in the morning each day, we sallied forth on our bicycles. We were required to be on the farms by four o'clock, when the farmers began milking. There was a main road with bicycle paths, as there are all over the Netherlands to this day, where I could pedal safely. However, to get to my destination I had to turn off this path and struggle for five to ten kilometres along narrow, rutted back roads flanked by wide ditches. In that part of Europe, farm buildings are placed far out in the fields. It often snowed, and back roads in particular weren't cleared of snow early in the morning. I couldn't tell where the road was under the snow and where the ditch started — I landed in an icy ditch almost every day.

Country life was completely new to me; the closest I had ever come was my idyllic childhood summer in Galicia, in Poland. It was especially difficult because I had just emerged from quarantine, having done nothing for a whole year, and I had never before had to work physically hard. In Germany, I had just been a student, chiefly of language and classics, growing up in one of the most technically advanced regions of Europe and in the cosmopolitan city of Berlin. Suddenly, I had been thrown into a grind of hard physical labour with people who seldom talked to me. When they did speak, I couldn't understand what they were saying, since they spoke Friesian and I only knew some Dutch. Over the previous year as I was interned, I had learned a little of the language, since it was the one thing I could learn there. But these Friesians spoke their own dialect, which was very different from standard Dutch. They had no respect for me and always called me *Jood*, Jew, never using my name. They were very narrow-minded people who weren't at all accustomed to strangers.

They even disliked other Dutch people. And we were Jews, urban Jews. They didn't know what to make of us: they seemed to think we were demons or some other weird creatures. They accepted our presence because we worked for them for a pittance. They had dirt-cheap labour, and we had our training.

It was difficult to gain the Friesians' confidence, but once we did, they became somewhat friendlier toward us. They were not really willing to teach us much, though this varied with each farmer: some were more patient than others. The one I worked with first was a youngish man. I wasn't the strongest fellow around, and he continually discouraged me. "You'll never learn how to milk," he droned. "You'll never become a farmer. You'll never learn it. You're wasting your time." I was unhappy and asked myself, "What am I doing here? I'll never be a farmer! I'm working my heart out for nothing."

I hated my difficult early morning travels, tumbling into a ditch every time. The whole endeavour was ridiculous, and I was sorry I had undertaken the training. But I had no alternative, since if I had quit, I would have been interned again. I was only set free to work on the hachshara.

We were expected to spend about a year on one farm before being allowed to rotate to a new farm; we had to establish our tenacity. Many Jews at that time believed that persistence alone proved a person's value. An ideological glorification of labour had affected us. Zionist groups exalted manual labour, reversing the centuries-old trend of Jews as merchants and scholars.

I was lucky to have a few warm-hearted friends. One of them was a rabbi, Yehoshua Wolf. He had been a rabbi in Berlin, and I remembered hearing of him there. I was eighteen years old, the youngest on the kibbutz, and Rabbi Wolf must have been about thirty. He gave *shurim*, or lessons, and I was a very good student; he liked me because I was the most intellectual in the group.

Yehoshua Wolf was a man with two left hands. He couldn't do any of the manual work even passably well, so he spent his time studying. As a result, he was ridiculed by some of our members, but I respected him. To me he was a learned man with a great reservoir of knowledge.

Another close friend on the kibbutz was Aaron Rath, who was also from Berlin. He'd attended the university there, but he was also skilled at manual work. He told me often to just keep at it, stick to it,

and I'd be a farmer as well as a scholar. Every day Rath said, "I'm going to measure your shoulders now." Then he'd take out his measuring tape and stretch it across my back.

"You see?" he'd exult. "Your shoulders are already broader than they were yesterday! You get stronger when you work." What he said was true. "Every day you get stronger. I saw it myself," he'd say as he displayed his muscles. He always made me feel better. "Work! Work! Don't take any notice of what the farmer says." He'd clown and play little tricks to encourage me and cheer me up.

A shortage of nutritious food was a serious problem on the kibbutz. We ate only kosher meat and received provisions from Amsterdam every week. However, we never had enough to satisfy the appetites of young people employed in heavy labour, and I was hungry much of the time. But no doubt about it, I was getting tougher. Things were actually starting to look up a bit.

The hachshara had existed for several years before we joined it and included both refugees and Dutch citizens when I was there. Since half the members were Dutch, it wasn't like a refugee camp. A number of individuals had already gone to Palestine from the hachshara, and some members had already been training for a year or more by the time I joined. The Dutch Jews were much more at ease than the rest of us. They understood the language and could pick up the dialect well. They felt at home. They often helped us out, speaking to the farmers on our behalf.

I encountered my distant cousin Moishe Heller in Franeker. Like Rabbi Wolf, he was ten or twelve years my senior. The Hellers had lived in Hanover in Germany; I knew of them from my parents, but I had never met any of them. When I discovered that Moishe Heller was related to my mother, he took some interest in me. He too encouraged me and helped me to persevere. "You know, it's tough for all of us," he said. He had been in Franeker for some time and was considerably fitter than I was. He had already switched to his second farmer, one more likable than mine.

They were mainly dairy farmers in Friesland. On the first farm where I worked, my principal job was milking cows. Milking may look easy but it's not, believe me. I had to learn the proper technique and develop the right muscles, but I finally got it despite my complaints.

The prospect of simply reaching the farm each day was discouraging, nevertheless. The farm was so far from where we lived, and pedalling there in the winter conditions continued to be a battle against wind and snow. After milking the cows at four in the morning, I would feed the animals and clean the stable. I then prepared more fodder and attended to other chores. In the early afternoon, I repeated the same routine of milking, feeding and cleaning. In warmer weather, in between the stable chores I worked in the fields haying or spreading manure. I was busy until six in the evening, with only one or two hours of rest during the day.

I was relegated to the stable and never entered the farmer's house. A typical Friesian farmhouse was very large: the small front part, which had a tiled roof, was the farmer's home. The large back section had a thatched roof and contained a barn and a high hayloft. I was strictly a farmhand and never even saw the kitchen or the inside of the house. Even the other farmhands were contemptuous of me at first because they couldn't figure out who or what I was, though after a while some of us became friendly with each other. The farmers, however, never invited me into their homes. I never got anything from them, not even a kind word. Each day I brought my own bread and my own Thermos. I was paid four guilders (about two dollars) a week. It was a rough life — but at least it was a peaceful one.

Invasion

Every Friday afternoon our group stopped work early to go to the municipal baths. There we bathed, showered and donned our best clothes. Then we hurried to our house where we held our Friday evening service. We sang *zemirot*, songs, and I learned many new melodies. Some of these songs sounded strange to me, because they came from Sephardic Dutch Jews, but they were very beautiful.

Our Shabbat services on Friday evenings and Saturdays were very pleasant and informal. We were often joined by a Jewish psychiatrist from the psychiatric hospital in Franeker. When he was obligated to say Kaddish, the mourner's prayer for the dead, we congregated at his home on the Voorstraat in the centre of Franeker. Usually, though, we set up a chapel in the dining room of our house. The rabbi officiated and delivered a sermon: he gave lessons on the *sidra*, the Torah reading of the week.

On Sundays we resumed our work at four in the morning; we milked the cows early and again in the afternoon, but we were free in between. The people of Franeker and the surrounding area went to church, and so we did a half day's work on Sundays.

This routine continued smoothly throughout the winter of 1940 and into the spring. I grew stronger and coped with the work more easily as time went on.

We listened to the radio and heard rumours daily that Germany was planning to invade. No one believed it. The Netherlands had been neutral for a long time: the Dutch had stayed out of World War I and had often avoided the major European wars. There was no credible indication that the Germans would invade.

Then on May 10, 1940, it suddenly happened. I was at work on a farm when I heard the report. The farmer repeated an announcement he'd heard on the radio: the Germans were crossing the border. Troops were invading the Netherlands from multiple directions.

Without hesitation, I told the farmer, "I have to go back and talk to my colleagues." I felt we had to do something. I was not the only one in our group who had fled the Nazis, and now here they were, coming after us again. We knew they would repeat their past atrocities here.

I almost flew on my bicycle to the hachshara, arriving around ten o'clock in the morning. A few others had already returned, including my cousin Moishe Heller, whom I looked up to for advice and support. I spoke to him and the others, "Look, we have to get out of here fast, take our bikes and try to reach the other side of the Netherlands. Maybe we can board a boat to England. We have to clear out, otherwise we'll be trapped. We may never get away."

Moishe was opposed to the idea. He was a cautious man who tried to plan every move carefully. "Let's use our heads. Let's reason things out," he said. He thought I was panicking.

I said to him, "Don't pretend the Nazis use reason. They're not reasonable people." I knew their mentality. I had gone to school with the Hitler Youth. Their devotion to the Führer had reached such proportions that I believed they would go to extremes for him. My father's warning also echoed in my mind.

Most of the others in our group, especially the Dutch, were cool to my proposal. They didn't know what the Nazis were like.

A fellow from Bavaria, Benno Jacobs, was part of our group. Even through the thickness of his Dutch, I could detect his Bavarian ac-

cent. Benno and I wanted to escape from the German onrush. We decided to get on our bikes and pedal as far as we could in the direction of Amsterdam or Rotterdam. We would try to ship out from one of the harbours on the coast or from the Rotterdam area. We were the only ones who left. We took nothing with us — no food or change of clothing.

At about eleven o'clock that morning we hurried away, pedalling furiously. We intended to get out of Friesland, the northeast region of the country, and head down the western side. The entire country was gripped by confusion, and we had no information about what was happening.

From Harlingen we pedalled down the coast. About twenty kilometres from where we'd started, we came to a very long causeway that crossed the Zuiderzee, a body of water now called IJsselmeer, or Lake IJssel. We saw troops beside the causeway but paid no attention to them as we barrelled ahead.

The soldiers stopped us at the causeway and asked who we were, demanding to see our identification papers. We had no papers, since we had left them in Franeker.

The soldiers were stopping everyone, attempting to identify German invaders, including those who had parachuted in wearing disguises to blend in, with machine guns under their clothes. We found out later that paratroopers, masquerading in that fashion, had been part of the forces that would occupy Rotterdam.

We were arrested by the soldiers at the causeway, and our bicycles were confiscated. We were seated in a corner near the water with several soldiers standing guard over us.

We sat there for a few hours wondering what would be done with us. We tried to explain who we were, that we weren't German soldiers or spies; we were German refugees, Jewish refugees. We protested to our guards that we would never help the Germans conquer the Netherlands. But the Dutch soldiers were excited and on edge and ignored our explanations. They kept insisting that we were German spies.

There was mass shock and bewilderment that day, so we could hardly blame them for not believing us. The entire country was in turmoil. The Dutch hadn't fought a war in so long that they were completely unprepared, and the German attack had taken them by surprise.

After a few hours, we were ordered onto a bus that had arrived. The bus was then driven around in a zigzag course to numerous villages, picking people up. At first Benno and I were the only civilians on the bus, then other people were collared. We didn't know who was being picked up or why.

Suddenly, we heard German planes overhead: they started bombarding the road we were driving on. Machine-gun fire from the planes almost hit the bus. With a Dutch security vehicle tailing us and other soldiers guarding the bus and standing upright in the doorway, our bus surely looked like a military vehicle, too.

The planes flew on and gradually the bus filled up. We crossed the long causeway from Friesland into northwest Holland. We were again strafed on all sides. We drove on. Finally, we came to a city called Hoorn, north of Amsterdam — an old prison fortress surrounded by water. We stopped.

We were hustled off the bus and into a cellar deep inside the fortress, where we were locked in small, dark cells. We remained there for days with little food and saw nobody.

Benno and I were sharing a cell with several other men, but we never spoke to them. We couldn't see anyone clearly in the dark. We were wary of everyone, so we scarcely talked and barely slept. There were loud explosions nearby. We heard artillery fire and bombardments. At least we were safe from bombs deep in the fortress.

Then one morning we were all led upstairs. And who was there? German army officers! They shook hands with each one of us and congratulated us on having survived the bombing. Then they subjected us to speeches about the war and the German empire that had now been expanded. The Netherlands had now become part of the German empire, they said, and they were looking forward to our col-

laborating with them in assimilating the country and incorporating it into the thousand-year empire.

They spoke on and on as we were served hot coffee and food! We were ravaged with hunger.

We found out who our companions were: they were all Dutch Nazis and German infiltrators. We had been thrown in with them! The paradox of paradoxes was that, on the fifteenth of May, we were free men in the Netherlands and freed by the German army! The officers even offered us a lift to Amsterdam in a German army truck. We climbed on the truck, and a German army driver took us to Amsterdam. Two German Jews liberated in the Netherlands by the German army — it was rich, though we still didn't feel like laughing. Our identity was never even questioned by the Germans. They were on top of the world, and all was going according to their plan.

We arrived in Amsterdam to find it completely deserted, as everyone had gone into hiding or run away to the countryside. Benno and I roamed the streets looking for people who might help us, but we couldn't find anyone.

We went to the head office of our organization, which was also empty. When people eventually showed up there, they were mystified by our presence. When we told them what had happened, they gaped and shrugged their shoulders as though we had concocted the story. They just couldn't believe it.

We decided to return to Franeker, since there seemed to be nothing else to do. All transportation in the country had stopped, so we stayed in Amsterdam for six days until trains were moving again.

The Germans were now engrossed in military operations in Belgium and France; they weren't much interested, it seemed, in the civic setup in the Netherlands. Benno and I managed to get back to Franeker without incident and found all our colleagues still there. Nothing had happened to them.



I resumed my work on the farm as if nothing had happened. The summer was lovely that year. There was scarcely a sign of the military occupation — we seldom saw any Germans in our corner of Friesland. Once in a while, a patrol passed along the highway, which we could see from our house on the Harlingerweg, the road to Harlingen. Motorcycles with sidecars would clatter down the road infrequently, and the Germans neither stopped nor talked to us. The summer was a quiet one.

I transferred to another farm at the end of the season. Moishe Heller had worked there and recommended the place to me, since it was easier work than what I had been doing and more diversified. The new farm was north of Harlingen at Sexbierum, close to the sea, which was much farther away from where we lived. This was the only drawback, as it took me more than an hour to get there. Fall and winter wore on, and I often had to cycle straight into stiff sea winds.

Still, I liked working there because I learned more than just how to milk cows. Plowing and field work with horses and growing potatoes were all part of the job. The farmer was a specialist in growing potatoes. The production of seed potatoes was a major industry in Friesland. Friesians grew some of the best potatoes anywhere, many for export. There wasn't much trade at the time because of the war, but normally their potatoes were shipped all over the world.

I was very impressed with the way the potato industry was organized. Every few weeks an inspector would come into the field. He scrutinized every plot and assigned them each a grade: A, B or C. If the plants were tall and dark green with no sign of disease, the potato plot was given a high grade. The better the grade, the higher the selling price, so farmers worked hard for the top grades and good returns.

The Dutch also established courses in milking, and milkers had to pass examinations. The farmers paid workers according to the grades they achieved on these tests. The farming industry in the Netherlands was extremely well operated.

Besides working and learning how to farm, I took all the courses in religion offered by Rabbi Wolf in the evenings. We studied Mishnah, the oral common law, and Gemara, debates on the common law, as well as Jewish history. Every Shabbat we discussed the Torah portion of the week. Rabbi Wolf was a gifted teacher, and because of his association with us, I had a rare opportunity to learn.

There was a furniture factory where many carpenters worked next to the old train station where we lived. I was now well into my grueling second year as a farm labourer and I really wanted to acquire a trade or profession other than farming, so I talked to some of the factory staff, who were ready to take me on as an apprentice. I proposed this to our group, arguing that in the Land of Israel carpenters would be needed as well as farmers, since all kinds of skills are required to build a country. Our leaders brought my request to the highest council in Amsterdam, who decided to reject my request. I was told that the reason for the decision was that the organization wanted all of us to know how to farm.

Our group did, however, notice my talent in discussing religion, and they eventually decided that the group might benefit from sending me to rabbinical seminary in Amsterdam to study for a year — not to undertake a full degree, but to learn enough so the group would have a second person who could direct religious studies. Rabbi Wolf sponsored me strongly for this. He contended that we needed young people trained to lead discussions, interpret the Torah and teach others. The leaders in Amsterdam voted in favour of my coming to Amsterdam for a year to study at the seminary.

In September of 1941, for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the High Holidays, I visited my aunt Gusta and her family. I had stayed in contact with her since she had visited me in Rotterdam when I had first arrived in the Netherlands and had since spent many holidays with her family. Aunt Gusta was devoted to me because she had lived with my father when she first emigrated from Poland. She had kept house for him when he was struggling to build up his business and

felt very close to him. She tried to do whatever she could to make me feel comfortable in her home. Now and then, she also sent me money by mail. She always said my father had sent it for me by courier, but by that time I rarely got any notes or letters from home, so I don't know if this was true. She may have been giving me money of her own.

Aunt Gusta was strikingly good-looking, with black hair, dark brown eyes and clear skin. Her features were small and neat, characteristic of our family. She was slender and graceful, with a riveting presence that drew people to her. She was also unusually kind and generous, genuinely good, radiating the same benevolence as my father. He was an open-handed man who would empty his pockets for someone in need without expecting thanks, and Aunt Gusta was exactly the same. She had tremendous warmth and humanity. Whenever I visited her in Maastricht, she treated me like a prince. I never had such treatment from anyone else.

Aunt Gusta and Uncle Shalom had five children, three boys and two girls. One had the unusual name of Schneewittchen, which is German for Snow White. The boys were my age and a year or two younger; we always had fun together. The family had been in the Netherlands since 1933 or 1934. When they had lived in Germany, they had barely scraped by, but in Maastricht they had done well. Uncle Shalom, a devout and humourless man, owned a furniture store and seemed more than adequately successful.

Visiting Aunt Gusta's home was my holiday from hard labour. To get from Franeker, close to the most northern point of the Netherlands, to Maastricht, near the most southern point, I had to cut right across the country, a trip that took a full day by train. There were German soldiers guarding the stations, but they were not interfering with the daily life of civilians, as far as I could see. And so I made my way to my aunt's house without incident.

The food was traditional and always plentiful: baked carp, chicken noodle soup, roast chicken or boiled beef, potato pancakes, red cabbage and sponge cake. Her meals were much more satisfying than

those on the hachshara, where we lived on bread, milk and boiled vegetables, mainly potatoes, peas or beans. Doing farm labour and eating little meat is a debilitating combination, and it was a struggle to constantly work hard when our diet lacked sufficient protein. Under the German occupation, it was particularly difficult to get kosher meat to the tiny community of Franeker; in Maastricht, kosher meat was still readily available.

During that holiday visit, my aunt and uncle were concerned about the German occupation. I met several other Jews from Maastricht at their home. No visible action had been taken against anyone, but the ominous mood was overwhelming.

Back on the hachshara after the holidays, in October 1941, our group was called to meet with the Gestapo in Leeuwarden and to bring our visas and passports. The Gestapo examined our papers and asked us questions before letting us go. Prior to this, we had had to report a few times to the small police station in Franeker.

On the hachshara we foolishly believed that we would be able to leave the Netherlands, that somehow the Nazis would let us go. In Germany they had permitted emigration until late in 1939. But then the British blocked immigration to Palestine, and with a war going on there was now no longer any way to even travel to Palestine — no passenger ships, no civilian traffic. It had become almost impossible to get there.

As the war escalated, the chances of fleeing from the Netherlands were approaching zero. No other country would provide asylum. The Germans closed the borders, stopping all exodus.

The Nazis had established the Joodse Raad, Dutch for Jewish Council, in the Netherlands, but nobody knew its intended purpose. Rumours began to circulate that the Jewish Council was “recruiting.” At first it was young people between the ages of twenty and thirty who signed on for work camps, and the rumour was that they would work for the Germans in war industries. Way up in Franeker, we were never part of that recruitment.

I was no longer able to phone my parents. I think long distance calls were being restricted to military business. I wrote letters to them, and they wrote to me; sometimes the letters got through. My parents' letters were always short, since they were under surveillance and letters were censored. But I read between the few lines and understood that they weren't doing well. I worried about how they were living from day to day, how well they were eating, how their health and their spirits were holding up, what treatment they were being subjected to.

All the Jews in the Ruhr Valley, including my parents, had by now been rounded up and herded into segregated Jewish houses in Dortmund, where they were confined. In the Jewish house, my parents and Benno had two rooms, a bedroom and sitting room, in a house with many other Jews. Jewish-owned businesses were all closed. My parents were not allowed to work; they couldn't earn any money. They were living in Dortmund on the same street as some distant relatives. My youngest brother, Benno, was there supporting them, learning to be a carpenter by working in heavy construction for some entrepreneur — at least, that was what they told me. In 1941, Benno was just sixteen years old.

In the fall of 1941, I received a letter from Eddi through the International Red Cross. I was astonished to see it came from Canada! Until then I had thought Eddi was in England, because I had not heard from him since he had gone there in 1939. He wrote, however, that he had been interned in England because he was a German citizen and had then been shipped from England to Canada along with other German Jews and German prisoners of war. Now he was in an internment camp near a place called Fredericton in New Brunswick, working in the forest felling trees. He'd had to use a Red Cross form letter, without much space to write, but receiving even that thin lifeline to my brother was a wonderful event. I could only think how glad I was that he was well — and well away from Europe.

I was still on the hachshara. I had recently begun working on a

farm very close to where we lived, which meant I was even able to go home for breakfast. This farm was one of our group's preferred placements because, being on the Harlingerweg just beyond the psychiatric hospital, it was about three minutes from our old train station by bicycle. No more worrying about falling into ditches in the early morning! It was also a clean place to work, and the owner was fair-minded. I inherited the job from a colleague because I'd become an excellent milker. The farmer Van der Berg had a large herd of cows, so the job required an experienced hand.

I was working out in the fields one cloudy day in late 1941, in the cool, rainy weather we often had in Friesland. By then the solid manure that had been collected all year had grown into a bulky pile. Liquid manure had also accumulated in the ground in large containers that were cemented and covered, so that later it could be sprayed on the land with hoses attached to special carts. That autumn morning, we were trucking solid manure out to the fields. A crew was loading the manure onto two or three carts, which operated in tandem; when the first cart was full, a farmhand drove it to the field, unloaded the manure and came back for the second load. I was driving a cart pulled by two horses. Suddenly, when I was out in the field with a load, the horses shied, then went wild. The cart, manure, horses and I flew into a ditch. I could have been killed if the cart or horses had fallen on me. Miraculously, I landed on top and slowly sank into freezing water.

When I failed to return for a while, the farmer grew suspicious. He came after me and found me near the ditch. I had scrambled out, and the horses had also got out; the wagon was partly smashed. The farmer tried to retrieve whatever he could, before telling me to go home, change my clothes, get a hot drink and keep warm. He saw that I was shivering and feeling a bit sick.

So I went home and changed my clothes. I drank hot tea and got into bed to warm up. It was about eleven in the morning. I fell asleep.

At about two o'clock, I woke up. I heard boots, German boots, marching onto the former station platform in front of our house. A

small army was assembling there. I thought, *This is it. They've come to pick us up.* We'd been wondering why they had never bothered us.

I pulled the blankets over my head and played dead. The room was large, the main waiting room for the train station, with twelve or more beds in it, some of them bunk beds. When they spotted me, one of the officers, in typical Nazi fashion, raised his foot and shoved me with his boot. Then he kicked me. Finally, he ordered me in German to get up immediately.

The others stalked the room and tore it apart, combing through everything. They opened cupboards and knocked things out. We had little in them, but anything we did have was thrown to the floor. Beds were overturned.

Then the officer said to me, "You line up with the others." Some of the soldiers went upstairs to the room where we stored a few bags of food and cans of vegetables. Soon these soldiers came out screeching, "See what these Jews are hoarding? They're hoarding food!" We had barely enough to eat for the next day; there was absolutely nothing to hoard. We had a few bags of beans and potatoes. "Hoarding and hoarding and hoarding!"

They lined us up on the platform. We stood there for a couple of hours. They were waiting for everyone to return from work. They were rounding us up to take us away.

The Dutch police were there too and were helping the Germans by describing the region to them and informing them where all our members worked. They went as far as to fetch some back themselves, rounding up quite a few of our members. I was struck then by the close cooperation between the Dutch police in Franeker and the Germans.

I was standing in line, still jittery from my tumble into the ditch that morning. German soldiers were posted all around. In desperation, I spoke in German to a soldier and said, "Look, I have almost nothing on. Can I go inside and get my jacket? Can I go and get my jacket?"

He answered, "No. No. What do you need a jacket for? You won't need a jacket where you're going."

I asked him again. In spite of what he'd said, he seemed to have a little sympathy, especially when he heard me speak in German. And sure enough, this time he grumbled, "All right, go ahead. And come back fast." The Nazis were always ordering everyone to do everything *schnell*, fast. So I did.

I scurried into the station house. The place was a wreck. Instead of looking for my jacket, I raced to the back door. The back door of the station house was blocked by a heavy case, but I thought if I could move it aside and open the door, I might get away.

Even weak people can sometimes summon unusual strength when it's really needed. My hair was short, unlike Samson in the Bible, but I had more of it then than I have today. And like sightless, enfeebled Samson, I exerted enough force to move that case.

I immediately opened the door and without even looking left or right simply threw myself out. With one jump, I landed in the ditch behind the station house.

The guards had noticed nothing. A guard stood at each end of the back of the building, but they were facing the front, not expecting anything to happen at the back. I listened for a moment, waiting for reactions, and then I crept along the ditch. The ditch was filled with tall grasses and water, slowing my movement. I knew that in two hundred metres or so I would reach an open field. If I kept my head down and moved quickly and carefully, I might get away.

I reached the field, then a row of houses nearby. A farm worker acquaintance lived there. I knew the Germans would be looking for me as soon as the soldier who had let me go noticed my absence. I saw an empty kennel with no dog in sight and quickly decided to hide in it. I crept inside and crouched low. It was roomy, for a kennel!

I stayed there until dark, then decided to move. I thought I might find one or two of my friends and try to save them; I hoped they weren't all rounded up. One fellow, Bram, always returned late in

the evening because he worked on a distant farm. I headed in that direction.

Under cover of darkness, I ventured down the road and was lucky enough to intercept him. Bram was a Dutch Jew, a big, brawny fellow, who had had less difficulty with the local people than I had. On the farm where he worked, he'd become close friends with a Friesian who owned a little farm of his own. We decided to go to this farmhand and try to hide in his barn for a while.

We went to Bram's friend and explained why we had come. We persuaded him to go to Franeker that night to find out what was going on. He knew everyone in town, and he dropped in at a local bar and talked to people gathered there. The day's event was the most exciting thing to hit Franeker in years, and the town was buzzing because of it. Townsfolk said all the Jews had been rounded up except two: one had escaped and the other couldn't be found. The Germans were looking for both of them. The other Jews were now in prison in Leeuwarden. The Germans had ransacked the old station house.

Bram and I hid out on his friend's farm for two days. We knew the Germans were hunting for us.

However, we also knew we had to abandon the area. Although the Friesian farmhand backed us a hundred per cent and would have concealed us indefinitely, there was no reason for us to stay there with everything we were linked to destroyed. More importantly, since Dutch police were collaborating with the Gestapo, we had very little chance in such a small community of not being caught eventually. By hiding us, the farmhand was also running a great risk, since at some point someone would have betrayed him.

We decided that on the third day at five or six in the morning we would try to take the first bus out of the neighbourhood. From a station further south, we would take a train to Amsterdam.

Our plan succeeded. We got away from the farm and left the area on a bus from a village near Franeker. We first went to a small city called Sneek. We saw German guards at the train station there but

passed them without being questioned. Our pictures weren't in circulation, so they couldn't easily identify us. Contrary to common Nazi belief, the Germans couldn't actually easily identify someone as Jewish. We boarded a train to Amsterdam that afternoon.

When we arrived in Amsterdam, we felt obligated to report to our headquarters. The officials sent us to the Joodse Raad, which occupied the same building. Our organization respected the purpose of the council.

We presented ourselves at the council office, and the functionary in charge exclaimed, "Oh! You two are here! We've been waiting for you. We've been looking for you."

I said, "What do you mean, looking for us?"

"I just had a telephone call," he answered, "from the chief rabbi of Leeuwarden. The Gestapo have been in contact with him. They told him that unless you two report voluntarily and give yourselves up, all the others will be shipped to Westerbork." An internment camp established by the Dutch in the late 1930s, Westerbork had become a German camp.

I hissed at him, "I'll tell you something. They have twenty-five of us now. If we give ourselves up, they'll have twenty-seven. All that you will achieve is sending two more Jews to Westerbork."

"Shame! Shame!" he cried. "It's your duty to stand with your colleagues, to stand side by side with your comrades! Don't you have any feeling of responsibility?"

I shouted back at him, "My responsibility is to save myself! Bram's responsibility is to save himself! Along with anyone else we can help. But we can't save the others! I know the Gestapo. It's certainly not my responsibility to cooperate with them! By giving ourselves up, we'll achieve nothing, nothing! We would just be helping the Nazis in their filthy work!" I knew this immediately, though I couldn't convince this pompous creature, who was either deliberately harmful or a dupe and a fool.

I'm glad to be able to record that our organization supported us

completely after this interaction. Bram and I split up, and our officials arranged for me to spend a few days with a Sephardic family by the name of Rodrigues. Distinguished people who were deeply religious members of the renowned Portuguese Synagogue of Amsterdam, they were very kind and concerned. Since I couldn't stay with them long, they found another place for me.

I moved to the Koster house. The Kosters were Jews who lived in the Zuid, south, a wealthy enclave of Amsterdam. Their mansion commanded a sheltered street of imposing homes off a wide boulevard called Apollolaan.

Koster was the most eminent professor of accountancy in the Netherlands, and also directed a private firm. Many top students of accountancy in the entire country came to study with him.

The Kosters had four children, one of whom had a cognitive disability. The family had had severe problems with that child and employed a specially trained nurse solely to care for him. My arrival on the premises was the result of their need for a maid. Their house soared several storeys high and contained many spacious rooms and bathrooms, and so I became a domestic in the Koster house, as they needed somebody to do the heavy work of scrubbing floors, cleaning carpets and washing windows. By then Jews were no longer allowed to hire any non-Jewish help. Semicloistered, I couldn't ramble outdoors at will; my rights had disappeared, and my name was on the Gestapo's wanted list.