emerges beside the water. The channel of the river along this strip is not very wide but the water is deep and swift. On one side is France; on the other, Switzerland.

We came to the top of a mountain on the French side. Perched above the river was an ancient village called Fournet Blancherouche. In the church we found an old priest.

We told the priest that we were *Juifs* (Jews). He cried out, "*Vous êtes des anges, des anges.*" (You are angels, angels). He reacted as though he had never seen Jews before, as though we had stepped right out of the Bible.

He brought out a large bar of chocolate that he had been saving for a long time; I had never seen chocolate like it. He gave it to us and we sat down to a wonderful treat.

Then, demonstrating some worldly sense, he pointed out a house in the village and warned us that Germans were staying there. He described the route we should follow.

Somehow we lost our way. Perhaps his directions were wrong—sometimes our amateur guides didn't know the way well themselves—or maybe in our excitement we missed a turn. Whatever the reason, the path we took was full of patrols with police dogs.

CHAPTER XII
ENTERING SWITZERLAND

It took us about half a day to work our way agonizingly down the mountainside, through the trees and underbrush, to the Doubs River. As much as possible, we tried not to slide down so as not to tear our pants or ruin our clothes.

We reached the riverside. No patrols were about. We could cross, but the river was quite wild and I couldn't swim. Piefke jumped in and swam across. I thought maybe I would be able to swim, maybe fear would force me to swim.

I jumped in the water but I still couldn't swim; I almost drowned. Clutching at some reeds, I managed to keep myself afloat and pull myself out of the water.

I was still on the French side. Piefke was already on the other side and called out to me. I thought, "Holy God, I'm going to be caught here." The patrols would be coming by soon; I could hear the police dogs barking.

I scurried around and saw a boat chained to a metal stake on the bank. Could I tear the chain free or pull the stake out of the ground? Could I tear the boat loose? I had no tools, no equipment. I tore at the chain and pulled and tugged. I kept on pulling, tearing, straining. Almost anything is possible in extremity. I tore the stake out of the ground.

The boat was loose but there were no oars in it. I jumped in and paddled with my hands. It was very awkward; I could scarcely control the boat.

By sheer luck—good luck in bad luck—I maneuvered the boat into the middle of the river. At that point I stood up and heaved myself out. In one leap I almost reached the other side. I scrambled to my feet and waded the rest of the way.

I was on the Swiss side and began to climb the slope. I didn't see Piefke; I had completely lost sight of him. It was growing dark and there were dense woods by the riverside.

I had barely made it to the Swiss side before I heard

German voices on the other. They were shouting that the boat was gone, their patrol boat was gone. They hollered, "*Wo ist das Boot? Das Ruderboot ist verschwunden. Etwas stimmt nicht.*" (Where's the boat? The rowboat is loose. Something's wrong).

The dogs were barking fiercely—I thought they were going to cross the river. It was rumoured that German patrols sometimes crossed to the Swiss side to pick up whoever they were after: the Swiss weren't guarding the border diligently. I didn't see any Swiss guards at all. The Germans didn't come across.

In the morning I met Piefke high up on the hill. When we reached the top together, we lay down in the sun to dry our clothes; we were soaked through.

We hugged and congratulated each other on our accomplishment. "We've done it. We're free. We're in a free country. We've put those miseries behind us."

We had succeeded beyond our wildest dreams. Together we had managed to enter Switzerland in 1942 without any money and without a guide. We had crossed three borders in about six weeks, a remarkable feat considering we had done everything more or less on our own.

Our next objective was La Chaux-de-Fonds. There we would search out the rabbi or some Jewish people and ask them to help us.

We resumed our journey. The region was full of trees and tangled undergrowth; our pants became torn and ragged from tramping through the bush.

We reached an isolated farm. The farmer was working in the field. We spoke to him in French: we asked him the way to La Chaux-de-Fonds and how far it was. He pointed to a road winding down the mountains and a town far ahead in the valley. Then he said to us, "They're very strict with people who come across the border. They're arresting everyone. They don't want any refugees. I want nothing to do with you guys. I can't help you. You'd better get out of here. Go on. Go. And don't tell anyone you saw me."

We told him that we didn't want his help, we didn't want anything from him. We were surprised by what he had said. We thought the isolation had affected his brain or detached him

from reality. We were sure he was exaggerating. The Swiss in general would welcome us with open arms. Even if we were arrested, so what? We didn't mind being arrested by the Swiss; they wouldn't do us any serious harm.

From our crossing point at the Doubs River it took us three days to reach La Chaux-de-Fonds. By that time we were tattered, rumpled, and dirty. We looked like bums.

We arrived in La Chaux-de-Fonds in the afternoon. It was a small attractive city. Not knowing if any Jews were living there, the first thing I planned to do was find a telephone booth and look up Jewish names like Cohen and Levy. We walked down the main avenue. Suddenly a man in civilian clothes approached us and said, "*Police secrète suisse. Carte d'identité.*" (Swiss Secret Police. Your identity card).

It was three o'clock in the afternoon. The policeman arrested us and took us to the cantonal jail. It seemed like paradise to us; it was new and clean and warm. We had been outdoors for weeks sleeping in forests and fields.

We were put in a cell with two cots. Everything was neat and scrubbed. We felt very comfortable there after so many weeks on the road.

At six o'clock we were brought some food—hot black coffee and bread; it tasted delicious. We hadn't eaten properly for a long time: we'd been stealing apples from trees. This simple food was excellent.

In the evening, at about eight o'clock, a policeman brought us to an office where there were other police. They began to interrogate us. The questioning went on for a couple of hours.

We weren't searched or told to empty our pockets. Although carrying Belgian identity cards, we didn't use them. We told the Swiss police that we were Jews from Holland: Piefke and I had decided that it would be to our disadvantage if we said we were German Jews. We thought we'd have a better chance of being accepted into Switzerland as Dutch Jews.

We told them we had come all the way from Holland, mostly on foot. We had crossed several borders, including the one into Switzerland.

They wrote down everything we said. Then they went to the phone a few times, calling Bern to ask for instructions.

Eventually, at about ten o'clock, they told us, "There are too many Jews in Switzerland; we can't take any more. If we take any more, Switzerland will be overrun by Jews." This was August 1942. They said, "If we let you stay, there'll soon be more Jews here than Swiss. It can't go on like this. We're very sorry but you can't stay in Switzerland. You have to go back."

They had decided to expel us. This was the directive from Bern.

It was a terrible shock to us. After all our efforts to get there and the safety it meant to us, the decision was catastrophic.

The greatest insult of all was that we had to sign a statement declaring that we understood that, if we ever set foot on Swiss soil again, we would be handed over to the Gestapo at the border. "This time," the Swiss police said, "we'll do you a favor. We'll bring you to the border at an unguarded point. We'll set you free. We'll let you run across to try your luck somewhere else."

There were tears in Piefke's eyes; he was crying. I didn't cry. At that juncture, I became very angry. I accused the police, "*Vous êtes des assassins*. You're murderers. You've condemned us to death and you pretend it isn't so. We can't go back again; we had so much trouble getting here. You can't send us back."

They didn't stir. It didn't upset them a bit to be called murderers. Their decision didn't change.

Then three or four brawny policeman walked in. They told us to stand up. They led us outside and pushed us into a car. Three of them climbed in with us.

It was after ten o'clock on a moonlit night. We drove to a clearing near a place called Le Locle. The car stopped and we were hustled out.

A policeman carrying two loaves of bread gave one to Piefke and one to me. Then he said to us, "This is the border. Go. That's the way, in that direction. Keep on going, keep going. And never come back again."

CHAPTER XIII
BACK TO FRANCE

The border point was riddled with snares and traps. There was a Swiss zone, a neutral zone, then a German zone.

We edged forward through different zones. Suddenly the Germans were shooting at us. We dodged and tried to run for cover. We were separated. I lost Piefke. I don't know what happened to him. We were never together again.

Next morning a farmer driving down the road on his wagon gave me a lift to a town called Morteau. From there I took a train back to Besançon.

I walked from the station down to the Doubs River which winds through this part of France and the city of Besançon. Then I called on the Archbishop again.

He recognized me at once. He said, "I know where you can smuggle yourself into *France Libre*" (Free France). The border between the two parts of France was close to Besançon. "If you can penetrate into *France Libre*, you could go on to Lyon. In Lyon, who knows what may happen?"

Near Besançon there is a town named Arbois where a railroad track constituted the border between the two regions. Many people crossed there, according to the Archbishop, because the Germans weren't guarding as closely at that point.

On a sunny afternoon just after the middle of August I left Besançon by bus on my way to Arbois. Driving through rolling, hilly countryside covered with forests and fields, we passed through villages on the Doubs River; at least once we crossed the river itself. As we were descending the mountainsides into the valleys, a church steeple was conspicuous in the distance.

About two hours later the bus arrived at the outskirts of Arbois. Grapevines covered the hillsides. As we entered the town, a church tower came into view.

Then, startled, I noticed that the town was crowded with Germans. Arbois was virtually an encampment of the German Army! Apparently the Germans had begun to plug the hole in the dam on precisely that day or that week in order to stop the exodus of French people from *France Occupée* (Occupied France). The Archbishop hadn't known about this development.

The bus stopped at the terminus. German soldiers were standing watching everyone who dismounted.

I decided, "I can't walk out the front door." Instead I opened a window and jumped out. Then I hurried away from the bus and disappeared from the depot as fast as I could.

I was in a dangerous position. The whole place was full of Germans; they were patrolling the streets and squares and standing at every corner. It was impossible to avoid them.

I managed to slip into a church near the city hall in the centre of Arbois. I talked to the priest. I said to him, "Can you help me? I have to cross over to the other side."

"Oh," he lamented, "*Vous êtes un malheureux, vous êtes un malheureux.*" (You're an unlucky one, you're an unlucky one). He continued, "You have come to the worst spot in France You won't find a crack in that line now. The Germans have sealed it tight. There's no way to get across."

He gave me no hope and no help. He took me up to his rooms under the roof of a tall building behind the church and, pointing down, he said, "You see, that's the jail. It's full of refugees. They were all caught here. " I looked down at a courtyard enclosed by high walls.

I had to flee from this vicinity: I thought I'd be arrested right there or that he'd turn me in. He was absolutely terrified. Even to talk to me or to harbour me in his rooms frightened him.

I said to him, "Show me the direction. Which way do I go?" He answered, "You see the railroad track there?" He pointed toward *la gare* (the railway station) a few streets away: the track ran behind, at the edge of open fields. There were hills beyond, in the near and far distance. He declared, "You have to cross that track to be in France Libre. That's the border."

I thought, "It's not very far, just a few hundred metres away." German soldiers were patrolling the track. I would try to cross early in the morning; I figured there wouldn't be many guards on duty then.

I skittered through the town toward the railway station and stole into a garden near by. Sunflowers and other tall big-leaved plants were growing in the garden; I crouched among them and lay down to sleep.

During the night a violent storm blew up. The rain beat down. I tried to shield myself with flowers but they didn't cover me: they grew heavy with rain, drooped and dripped on me. Soon I was completely drenched.

I waited until daylight, then forced myself up. Hurrying from the garden, I made for the railroad track. Suddenly four uniformed Germans were blocking my way with police dogs.

They arrested me. I acknowledged that I intended to go to *France Libre*; I saw no point in denying it.

I did not really want to go to *France Libre*, because I sensed that it would not go well for me there, either. Maybe this feeling had come over me because the Swiss had driven me out; I had never expected that; it had thrown me off balance. Then Piefke had vanished. After that the Archbishop and the priest had let me down. Worse still, I had made the same mistake in Arbois that I'd made in Switzerland: Piefke and I had attracted attention in Switzerland by walking into La Chaux-de-Fonds in daytime. I should have tried to leave Arbois during the storm at night. I don't know why I didn't. Waiting until morning was a serious mistake; that was how I got caught. After such blunders, shocking turns and misguidance, I could have lost the strength to survive.

CHAPTER XIV
JAIL IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM

I was put in the jail in Arbois. It was a small, old, dilapidated place. As the priest had said, there were lots of others.

The German *Geheime Feldpolizei*, which was a military branch of the Gestapo, came and questioned me. That's when I invented my story.

I said I was Belgian and the situation in Belgium was tough; there was no way I could get by in Belgium. My parents were dead; but I had a brother. My brother was living in Lyon. He had a milk business; he was selling milk in Lyon and needed somebody to deliver it. So I was on my way to Lyon to be with my brother and help him deliver milk.

That's what I told the German police. They sentenced me to three months in jail for attempting to cross the border. Three months in jail in Arbois. After that I would be sent back to Belgium to verify my identity card and confirm that I was who I said I was.

I stayed in jail in Arbois for three months. Lice were the biggest problem there—the jail was swarming with them. I had never had lice before but I became infested: the mattresses were full of them so they spread everywhere.

I had lice in my hair; I could feel them crawling. Whenever I touched my hair, I would pull out lice and crack them between my fingers. They pop as their body breaks.

They were all over me, even in my armpits and pubic hair: wherever there was hair on my body, lice were in it. I washed myself scrupulously, but the jail was so full of lice that I couldn't get rid of them.

My circumcision made me apprehensive; I was afraid it might be noticed in jail. It was a detail I had to keep in mind. Though other men were circumcised, too, not only Jews, I wanted to avoid suspicion or questions about it.

Some of the prisoners in the Arbois jail were criminals, but everyone there had been arrested for trying to cross into Free France. When my three-month sentence was over, I was started on my way back to Belgium.

The transfer was done in stages. First I was sent to Besançon. In Besançon there's a vast and formidable *Maison d'Arrêt*, a prison situated on a butte above the old city. It's a classic prison with cell blocks radiating from a central tower and high walls surrounding the complex. Some wings were used by the French; others were partitioned for use by the Germans. Prisoner transports were assembled there.

I spent three weeks in solitary confinement in Besançon: I don't know why suddenly I was put into solitary. The food was vile: it was minimal in all Gestapo jails. I was handed a hunk of dry bread in the morning and watery soup three times a day: their bread was baked with sawdust to give it weight and the soup was a thin broth with a few vegetables floating in it.

I was starving all the time. But I treasured my hunk of bread for many hours: I would look at it and touch it all day long; then I ate it slowly at night. This was the only way I could sleep through the night. Otherwise hunger would keep me awake.

I lost a near fatal amount of weight at this time. I was weighed in Besançon: I weighed 92 pounds (41 kilograms). Before that, I had weighed about 135 pounds (60 kilograms). For my height of five feet eight inches (174 centimetres), I had become extremely thin.

From Besançon I was transferred to Dijon. As I walked into the jail an SS man rushed at me, screaming, "*Sind Sie Jude? Sind Sie Jude?*" (Are you a Jew? Are you a Jew?) I looked him in the eye and said, "*Nein.*" (No). I answered him so coolly that he didn't question or examine me further.

The Dijon jail must have been the worst jail in France. It was a gloomy, medieval place. Inmates were treated very harshly. We weren't treated like Jews—which would have been worse; supposedly we were Belgians, so we were treated as Belgians. Yet the guards beat us prisoners constantly.

After a week, a transport was assembled for Belgium. We were put on an ordinary train in special cars guarded by German soldiers and German police.

There was one guard for every two prisoners. Prisoners weren't handcuffed but, wherever we went, even to the toilet, a German guard went with us.

It was a slow train and quite a long trip. A number of times I thought of leaping from a toilet window or opening a compartment door and jumping out. But the Germans were watching so closely that there wasn't much chance of doing it.

I was thinking continually about escaping and tried to develop a plan. Several times I thought, "I should do something now; I should make a run for it." But I didn't take the step.

We arrived in Lille in the evening where we had to change trains for Brussels. We were herded off the train, then led from one platform to another when, suddenly, a guy who I suspected was Jewish disappeared. I saw him going. The station was so crowded with people that he vanished into the throng; the Germans couldn't follow and lost him. He slipped away in Lille.

I told myself, "That guy did the right thing. I should do that, too." I tried to figure out how to do it, how to do it. I looked for an opportunity, but opportunities were limited.

Then we boarded the train for Brussels. Still I kept thinking, "Should I jump?" If I went through to Brussels with a false identity card, I was a doomed man. I thought, "The only chance I have is to break free."

For one reason or another, I didn't jump; I didn't run. There were few chances to do so, but sometimes we have to make our own chances. Even so I didn't do anything.

We pulled into Brussels and were lugged away to St. Gilles jail. It was the worst jail I had been in yet: about three thousand political prisoners were incarcerated there; I could hear continuous barking and screaming. It was a hellish place.

I was locked in a cell and kept there for about a week. Then I was summoned for interrogation with some other prisoners.

We were led to a large room partitioned into separate cubicles. In each one an SS man presided at a table.

I realized I had to make a good impression, to give the appearance that I was telling the truth. A booth became empty; my turn was next. The interrogator in that booth was an older man who looked experienced. I was sure he would see through me fast so I held back to try to avoid him.

In a moment another booth was free. The interrogator there was a youth of eighteen or nineteen. I thrust myself in with him.

I told him my story. As usual I had to play a strange game: I purported to be a Belgian but my name wasn't Wallon, French Belgian, it was Flemish; and I couldn't speak Flemish. I could speak Dutch but not Flemish which is Belgian Dutch and somewhat different from the language spoken in Holland. So I always spoke to the Germans in broken German to forestall their calling an interpreter who would have realized immediately that I wasn't who I said I was.

I talked to this young SS man in broken German. I told him about my brother and the milk business in Lyon. Then I watched as he wrote, '*Der Angeklagte macht einen glaubenswürtigen Eindruck*' (the accused gives the impression that he is telling the truth). After that, I was hurried back to my cell.

We always had to move rapidly. We were wakened at St. Gilles at five o'clock in the morning and then did absolutely nothing. We were given almost nothing to eat. I was dangerously thin: it surprised me that I didn't catch tuberculosis or some other wasting disease.

Again I sat in jail in filthy conditions. St. Gilles was full of lice like the French jails. I thought, "I'll never get out of this hole."

I had almost given up hope. Prisoners were shot every night in the courtyard; I could hear the shots and screams.

If the Gestapo discovered that someone was a Jew, they shot the person immediately. I thought, "They'll come at any moment; they'll discover I'm a Jew because my identity card is false. How can Wavre confirm that I'm Jan Van Capelle, that I used to live there? The address probably doesn't exist. The name with my personal statistics certainly doesn't exist."

One day, about two weeks after I arrived there, the *Feldwebel* (sergeant) appeared and shouted, "Van Capelle!" I said to myself, "This is it, the day of reckoning."

I sat, hesitating. The sergeant snapped, "Come out! Fast!" Everything had to be done in quick time.

He ordered, "Take your stuff!"

I said to myself, "Oh, no. It's over."

He shrilled, "Why don't you come faster? You're free!"

I said, "What?" I couldn't believe it. Free! How could I be free? Free!

I didn't believe him. Free! Impossible. But I couldn't reveal what I thought.

Then the process of freeing me started. It took six hours until I'd gone round to all the different offices and officials and been checked and signed out and released through all those doors, doors, doors.

And there I was one evening at the end of December, 1942, a free man in Brussels. A German Jew. Via Holland. Via Switzerland. Via France. I was free in Brussels!

I didn't know anyone. I had never lived in Belgium. A war was on. What was I supposed to do now?

CHAPTER XV
BRUSSELS 1943

When the Germans set me free from St. Gilles, they gave me a warning and a letter of instruction: I was to report to the police chief in Wavre within twenty-four hours. If I failed to report in Wavre, I would be arrested again.

But I couldn't report to Wavre. It was just a dot on the map to me. I had never been there. I knew that, even without civil records and official inquiries, the police chief would easily discover that my identity was false. I decided I'd better get out of Brussels or disappear underground.

Another prisoner had been released from St. Gilles at the same time as I was. He was going to the Gare du Nord, a train station in Brussels, to take a train home. So I tagged along with him.

On the way I noticed a Salvation Army hostel near the *Gare du Nord*. When we reached the station, I said good-bye to the other fellow.

It had grown quite dark by this time. Retracing my steps, I went to the Salvation Army hostel. The officers received me: they took me in. They gave me a bowl of soup and told me I could sleep there for one night.

The following day I walked around Brussels wondering what to do next. All kinds of schemes entered my head.

I thought of finding some Jews. I saw a man on the street who I thought was a Jew; I followed him. He tried to avoid me but I collared him. Shoving him into a corner, I grabbed him by the throat and said, "I know that you're a Jew; don't deny it. I'm a Jew, too. I want you to help me. You have to give me shelter or tell me where to find other Jews. I'm here alone. I don't know anybody."

He was scared. He tried to shake me off. Finally he gave me an address and told me how to get there.

I arrived at the address and discovered the offices of the Jewish Council. I went in. The people there told me the situation in Brussels was desperate for Jews and the only thing to do was give myself up. Again that was the advice I received-surrender to the Germans!

I realized that I was in a trap. I escaped from the spot as fast as I could. Luckily I got away; the Germans could have been watching the place.

I decided then that I would never again have anything to do with the Jewish Councils. I would never go near them again. I would never appeal to them for help. I wanted nothing to do with them. I wanted nothing from them.

Then I remembered the Austrian couple I had met through Piefke's uncle. Piefke and I had been to the flat where the couple lived. So, racking my memory, I traced my way to the statue of *Manneken Pis* and, and from there I managed to find the flat, which was close by.

The woman remembered me; she was very friendly and kind. Her husband had been arrested by the Gestapo but she was in a fairly safe position: she had a German passport because Hitler had annexed Austria in 1938. As a German and a gentile, she wasn't under suspicion.

In reality this woman was active in the Belgian underground. That night she took me to stay at another flat. Then she spread the word about me to others in the resistance. I was shuffled from one flat to another for several nights.

A few days later I decided to venture outside Brussels to the suburb where Piefke's uncle lived. I wanted to try to locate him and maybe Piefke.

The uncle wasn't there any more and the neighbors had no news of him or Piefke. They recognized me and were pleased to see me. They invited me into their house.

I had left my phylacteries with them. The woman said to me, "Are you back again?" Right away she went to a cupboard and returned soon saying, "Here. Here are your holy objects." She didn't know what to call them. "Here they are," she said. "Do you want to take them with you?"

I said, "No; thanks very much. I can't take them with me. I don't know where I'm going."

The people I was staying with in Brussels were all in the Belgian resistance movement called the *Armée Blanche*. At first they were suspicious of me; they thought I might be a spy. I told them that I wasn't really Jan Van Capelle, though I used that name. I said my real name was Eli Hart and that I was Dutch.

The Austrian woman accepted me for what I said I was since she'd met me under that name when I had first come from Holland. Then, quizzing me themselves, the others became very interested in me after I told them about my Swiss and other jail experiences. They wanted people like me to join the underground army to do illegal work and sabotage.

They talked to me and induced me to join them. "After a while," they emphasized, "all of us will go to England to be trained as commandos for the eventual invasion of Europe." This prospect appealed to me: I was longing to become a fighter of some sort. Connected with them, I could look forward to serving in the regular British army, the commandos or some other force, and fighting the Nazis in the open.

Therefore I attached myself to the *Armée Blanche*; it seemed the only way to sustain myself. There were few means of surviving unless one was part of an organization.

In Brussels our group always met on the Rue Verte near the Gare du Nord. A slummy, red light district with a floating sea of unsavory types and questionable enterprises. It was the least conspicuous place for the underground to meet.

Our group organized and carried out raids and attacks, particularly to obtain ration tickets. Everybody had to have ration tickets and most underground people didn't have them. One couldn't buy basic foods without stamps.

We stole the stamps from the administrative offices that issued them. We would rush in waving pistols and demand all the tickets. We had to rush in suddenly, move quickly, and get away fast. We did it in the daytime when the offices were open.

We were armed with pistols to show force but we didn't use force unless we had to. The people we confronted usually knew they couldn't resist us successfully so they handed over the tickets without commotion. Some officials actually co-operated with us; they were probably in sympathy with our cause. Others tried to resist.

Sometimes there were German guards on duty at the locations. We tried to avoid meeting them: either we struck when they weren't around or sneaked in and out through a back or side door so they wouldn't detect us.

We also set explosives at bridges, tunnels, and railroad overpasses: the purpose was to stop the German movement of ammunition and soldiers. One of our main functions was to disrupt the transportation system.

I teamed up with fellows who were experts in explosives; some were engineers. Most often I acted as a lookout for them; they did the skilled work that I wasn't trained to do. My job was to guard them, alert them, and cover their retreat.

These sorties were offensive attacks. We tried to do the utmost damage to the Germans and were ready to shoot if we were in danger.

. At times we had to use our pistols. That made us especially vulnerable because the Germans were equipped with superior weapons. Shooting was our last resort.

Sometimes we ambushed and shot at German staff cars to try and kill specific officers. It was difficult to know how many we hit because we had to escape from the scene quickly. I was always ready, however, to fire another shot to make sure we completed our mission.

These activities all took place in Brussels or close to it. Brussels is a broad metropolitan area made up of many distinct districts. After a while we reduced the amount of railway sabotage we did because the Germans retaliated by executing disproportionate numbers of local people. This was too high a price to pay.

After a couple of months our group of fifteen had become a hot target. In late February 1943 the leaders decided to ship us out to England.

We gathered one evening in the basement of a house on the Rue Verte. We were about to leave Brussels in order to fly to England. We were celebrating our departure: that night we were to drive to a place near Antwerp where a plane would land, pick us up, and transport us to England.

I'd spent all my Belgian money that afternoon. There wasn't much one could buy in those days so I bought some silly things

just to get rid of it. I thought I'd be in England the next day; I wouldn't need Belgian money any more.

I'd developed the habit of studying every building I went into to devise ways of leaving it: I'd learned that it was often easy to enter an establishment but quite difficult to get out, especially to get out fast. The house we were assembled in that night was one I'd been scrutinizing for some time.

We were enjoying the party, happy and optimistic about our move; we ate and drank wine, toasting the group. Our leader, a French officer, was with us. Among us were Russians and other eastern Europeans who had escaped from prisoner-of-war camps or deserted the Axis troops. We were all shipping out together.

Suddenly we heard German boots stamping down the steps. Stamp Stamp Stamp. Storming the basement door. Shots were fired through the door.

The moment I heard boots, I jumped straight up. I knew that sound, its meaning: get out or be shot. We would all be dead.

I rushed up the inside stairs of the house as the Germans burst through the basement door. The place rattled with gunfire. The Germans had machine-guns and heavy ammunition; we had only small pistols to fight them off.

The building we were in was three or four stories high. I raced to the top floor as fast as I could.

I knew there was a ledge outside a window—it was the top of a small wall jutting into a courtyard. I thought, "I'll sit near the window. If they come after me, I'll get out and hide on the ledge."

All this took only a few minutes. There was continuous shooting. Then the boots started up the stairs. They stomped into every room.

I clambered out on the ledge. Figures appeared at the window and shone strong lights everywhere. They spotted me. They yelled, "*Gib auf!*" (Surrender).

The moment I heard that, I jumped. I didn't know where I would land. The ledge was three or four stories high; I dropped from there to the courtyard.

In European cities the interior courtyards surrounded by buildings and walls are paved with brick or stone. I could have

broken my back or legs on the pavement or seriously injured myself; at the moment I didn't feel anything.

I had little time to think. A German came out on the ledge right after I jumped. He shone a flashlight on me and started to shoot.

There were several doors leading into the courtyard. I thought, "I'll run for a door and try it. If it opens, I'll be able to get away; if it's locked, I'm trapped, cornered."

The German was shooting and shooting and shooting. I scurried towards a door and pushed hard. It opened.

I fled through the door into a house. I was in a dark hallway. I ran to the other end. I thought, "I'd better get out of here. They may surround the area; maybe it's surrounded already."

I opened the front door and stepped onto a street opposite the Rue Verte. I kept on going, going, going. Then I saw a streetcar and jumped on board. After a few stops I transferred to another streetcar going in a different direction. I did this several times until I was far from the Rue Verte.

I thought maybe I had been hit somewhere. I was wearing a beret; I removed it. There were five bullet holes in it but I wasn't hit. The closest call that I'd had for some time and I wasn't hurt.

I went to see the Austrian woman again. I told her what had happened.

People are often betrayed; it was common during the war. Someone must have spilled our plans or unwittingly betrayed us. The French captain who led us was frequently involved with prostitutes on the Rue Verte. Some prostitutes acted as informers for the Germans. I was sure that one of them had betrayed us to the Gestapo.

CHAPTER XVI
RETURN TO FARMING

My underground-army career was over. Judgement advised that I couldn't operate effectively in that sphere any more.

I was bent on returning to farming: I'd intended to do so immediately after my release from St. Gilles. Now my Austrian friend concurred. She made inquiries and put me in contact with a Dutchman named Dirk.

Dirk was a painter who'd married a Belgian girl and settled in Belgium. He had the ruddy face and blond hair of Dutchmen depicted in many Flemish and Dutch paintings. He was a burly, jolly, happy-go-lucky man.

When I met him, he offered to help me find a job on a farm. He was living north of Brussels beyond Laeken in an outer suburb called Strombeek-Bever.

One Sunday morning we canvassed the neighborhood farms. Dirk persuaded a farmer and his wife to hire me. So I went to work for them.

I lived with a very poor family; my room cost a trifle yet it was income for these people. I was able to eat on the farm—a major advantage of farm work since I didn't have ration tickets.

The farming was mixed: there were animals and extensive crop land. The farmer was getting rich by selling on the black market. Grain brought high prices there so workers were denied an extra slice of bread.

The farmer's wife was especially niggardly and a slave-driver: she wanted maximum work for a minimum amount of food. In her view the farmhands never worked hard enough and always ate too much. It was a wretched place.

I often visited Dirk. He was always in a cheerful mood: he would laugh and ridicule all the privations. Whenever I came, he offered me a meal; he was extremely generous. Since I didn't have ration tickets, he shared his own rations with me.

Sanitary conditions on the farm were also deplorable; it was foul there. One day my left hand began to swell; it grew larger and larger. I bathed it in hot water and swallowed pills given to me by a farmhand, but with no improvement.

After a while I realized that I had to see a doctor. My hand had become huge and distorted. I appealed to Dirk; his sister-in-law recommended a young doctor in a district close to where I worked.

I went to the doctor and he said, "I have to cut this open right now. If I don't, you may lose your hand. You have blood poisoning."

He made an incision on the back of my left hand between the last two fingers. A gush of blood mixed with pus and dirt spurted out.

With sulfa drugs unavailable, the hand needed slow, painstaking cleansing. Three days of repeated washing went by before the infected matter drained away completely.

After approximately a week, my hand healed. The doctor had operated superbly and I was deeply grateful for what he had done. Without Dirk and his wife and the sister-in-law who directed me to the doctor, I might have lost it. What would I have done then? I doubt that I could have survived the war with only one hand.

Manure must have invaded a pimple or blister and infected it. Working in the stable—a neglected, dirty one—I could not keep my hands clean.

The last two fingers of my left hand did not fully regain their strength. For a while I thought I had lost the ability to milk: milking requires two strong hands-pressure has to be applied equally with both.

I was impeded by my left hand for some time, but slowly I retrained it and the hand recovered its strength.

Apart from this crisis, I was never really sick during the war. I don't remember being sick over a period of four to five years. I always forced myself to feel well; I couldn't afford to be sick.

I continued working on that farm. But when my hand was healed and had regained its strength, I realized that I was fed up with the farmer and his stingy wife.

Furthermore, I was not very welcome at the house where I lived. The people were acting nervous and scared: they let me know every day that I wasn't welcome there. The man was working again in the coal mines near by and my rent was no longer essential for them.

So I decided to take a chance somewhere else. Not much could be gained by staying where I was.

I heard talk of a shortage of farm laborers on the other side of Brussels at Waterloo. So I went there by streetcar.

At that time Waterloo was a quiet, rural town set in rich, rolling farmland. I walked down the main street, Chaussée de Bruxelles, and stopped at a farm called Ferme de Mont St. Jean. I asked for work. No help was needed.

I walked on past the Gendarmerie (Police Station) and stopped at another farm. I asked the farmer if he needed any help. He returned, "You know how to milk?" He led me into the barn and told me, "Sit down and milk."

I sat down; he gave me a pail. He watched as I milked and saw that I milked very well. "Good," he said. "You've got a job."

At that point a job was easy to find in Waterloo because the Germans had picked up many young Belgian men and sent them to work in Germany. There was a serious shortage of farmhands.

The farmer in Waterloo was unable to provide me with a bedroom; I wanted to live on the farm, at least for a while. I suggested to the farmer, "I'll sleep in the stable;" and he agreed.

I slept in the stable for more than six months. Each night I made up my bed of straw in the corner. Sometimes the animals got loose and could have run me over. Though it was precarious in that respect, I soon felt quite comfortable there.

The farmhouse, kitchen garden, and barns were in the centre of Waterloo. The fields were on the edge of town.

Fernand, the farmer, was a young fellow whose father had recently died. He and his elderly mother were running the farm together; they needed a great deal of help.

They kept thirty or forty milking cows. I did all the milking by myself. Sometimes they joined me in cleaning the stables, but they couldn't do this when they had work to do in the fields.

Because I did nothing else, I was able to handle the work by myself. I was happy to work all the time. I couldn't visit Dirk. I couldn't saunter in the streets because of frequent heavily armed German patrols in the district.

My one diversion was going to the movies: I went on Sundays before the afternoon milking. The town cinema was on the main street close to the farm. I saw many French films starring the actresses Danielle Darieux, Edwige Feuillères, and Michele Morgan among others.

The resistance was very evident in the Waterloo area. People were resisting openly; several uprisings occurred. Often there was shooting in the streets.

When I drove the cows out to pasture and brought them back in for milking, I would pass by a house behind the communal administration building which I recognized was used by the resistance. With rebellion so close to the surface, the Germans were massing troops in the locality to subdue the population. It was a very explosive spot.

In Waterloo the lice in my hair were a plague. My hair grew fast in those days and I had to have it cut often. I would sit in the barber's chair thinking, "What if he sees the lice? He'll throw me out." The barber wouldn't tolerate lice on his combs and scissors; nothing worse can infest a barbershop.

I was always on tenterhooks in the shop, especially when the barber was cutting my hair. I thought, "The lice will come out at any moment. I'm covered with them. The barber will notice the nits."

Finally I decided to do something about it. I went to a pharmacy in Waterloo and asked for a remedy for lice. The pharmacist gave me some powder and I used it again and again all over my body.

After a while I seemed to lower the numbers; gradually the lice disappeared. It took a long time to control them because I was sleeping in the stable. I didn't live in sanitary quarters or keep sufficiently clean. I wasn't changing my clothes enough-I couldn't; I didn't have many clothes. These factors all contributed to the problem, yet I managed to overcome it.

I had another stubborn problem at the time. After I moved to Waterloo, a boil developed on my neck. Then I was plagued

with boils—large, ugly, painful swellings. They ballooned on my neck and the back of my head.

I had no treatment for boils. I let them ripen until they burst, then squeezed them. Pus poured from them like water.

I had one boil after another, a constant affliction. Even now there are marks on my neck and head where the boils were. People suggested they were associated with my age—young adults are susceptible to skin eruption. But the boils were unusually severe so I'm inclined to think they were related to either poor hygiene or malnutrition.

In Waterloo I walked through town with the cattle every day, driving them from the stable to the pasture and from the pasture back to the stable. The Germans had set up posts to check everybody but they never questioned me. Time and time again I went through their check posts and they didn't ask me anything. I was Jean, Jan Van Capelle, *vacher* (cowherder). I was so shabbily dressed and insignificant-looking that the Germans never stopped me.

I didn't tell anyone in Waterloo that I was a Jew. In Strombeek-Bever the people I'd worked for and those I lived with knew I was Jewish. After my experience with them, I stopped identifying myself as a Jew because I'd observed that people were uneasy with me around: knowing I was a Jew made them tense and irritable. It seemed to make them feel guilty. Maybe they were fearful that they themselves would be arrested.

Consequently, I decided that I wasn't going to mention it again. I told nobody; no one in Waterloo knew who I was. It was the best way to proceed. From then on I lost my identity completely. This was April 1943.

I stayed in Waterloo for a long time working extremely hard with never enough to eat. Three slices of bread was the most I was allowed at a meal and I could have eaten six. I compensated for this by milking directly into my mouth; I drank milk straight from the udder. It never made me sick; I may have developed immunity to the bacteria. On the other hand, the boils may have resulted from drinking the milk. But I kept up my strength this way. Though the farmer gave me too little to eat, I took advantage of what was available.

I worked very hard on that farm. In the beginning I thought I wouldn't be able to keep it up, that I couldn't keep on working like that. But I grew accustomed to it.

From what I knew, the Germans had conquered most of Russia by this time and were successful even in Africa. So I couldn't conceive of the war ending with anything other than a German victory.

It seemed to me sometimes that my struggle was all in vain, that I was straining myself to the limit and that I couldn't win. I wasn't optimistic at that point.

What drove me on, however, was the thought of premature death. I decided to do whatever I could to hang on to life. It was my basic motivation: to stay alive as long as I could. One way or another I tried to scramble through, to see if I could escape what the Nazis had decreed for Jews. Yet I didn't really believe I would succeed.

One thing was certain: I was never going to surrender. I was never going to give myself up to be delivered to a concentration camp. This resolve was foremost in my mind. All my effort was aimed at avoiding a concentration camp; it was my main objective. And if ever I had to go to a concentration camp, I was determined to carry at least one dead German on my back.

Fernand, the young farmer in Waterloo, was hoping to get married and took up with several girls. He began to count on having me around: I relieved him of many tasks. He let me plan and follow up my own work on the farm.

Then he married. His wife moved into the house and proved to be much nicer than him or his mother. She saw that I had few clothes so she gave me his old pants and shirts. She was very considerate and tried to help me as much as she could.

I always kept the money I saved with me. I had nowhere to put it— I didn't know of any safe place—so I hid it in a pocket of my jacket or under my pillow at night.

I carried my mother's bracelet on me for several years. I kept it through all the jails without its being discovered. In one jail the Gestapo took my jacket away; when they returned it to me, the bracelet was still in the pocket.

One day in Waterloo the old lady asked me to dig up her vegetable garden. I dug it up and somehow lost the bracelet. Though I looked for it carefully, I couldn't find it. I never found it after that.

In the fall of 1943, there was a bumper crop of sugar beets which had to be dug out of the ground by hand. Crews of contract workers travelled from farm to farm throughout Belgium to bring in the harvest.

A crew came to the farm where I worked. These people worked in the fields for long hours; I would meet them and talk to them at night.

I became friendly with the leader of the crew who asked me in surprise, "Why do you stay in this hole? What are you doing here? It's a miserable job and you never get enough to eat." I had told him about the three slices of bread and he saw it with his own eyes. He said, "They're rotten people. All they want is to make loads of money on the black market." The farm was within easy access to the black-market trade in Brussels.

"What are you staying here for?" he asked. "You get nothing out of it. Why don't you go to Liège in the eastern part of Belgium? You'll find big farms there and nice people. You'll get a good job there; the way you work, you'll get the best job in Belgium! You have nothing to worry about."

I didn't make a move for a while. I thought, "I have no legal papers; it's dangerous for me to move across Belgium. If I go, who knows what might happen? The farmers there might not hire a guy without papers." Since my release from St. Gilles, the identity card was useless: my Belgian alias was probably on a Gestapo list.

Eventually, in October of 1943, I had reached the limit with three slices of bread, unending work, and sleeping in stables. It simply wasn't right. To live like that was almost as demeaning as being in a concentration camp. I thought, "I'm barely surviving. Who knows how much longer this war will last?" I couldn't see an end in sight.

There were employment agencies at the time which placed workers with farmers needing hands. The migrant workers knew an agent in the region near Liège; they had given me his name.

I wrote to the agent. He answered and told me to go to a specific farm.

I decided that I would take the chance and go out there. Maybe I would find a different way of life, improve my situation.

CHAPTER XVII
WORK NEAR LIEGE

I left Waterloo. Over my shoulder I carried a bag like a potato sack with a few clothes in it.

From Brussels I took a train via Louvain. West of Liège I disembarked at the small station of Fexhe-le-Haut-Clocher.

I asked the station-master for directions to the farm. His reply indicated that I was expected there.

I walked a zigzag route from the station through a pretty town of low, red and brown brick buildings. The fields belonging to the farm stretched beyond an old church.

The brick farm buildings were constructed like a fortress. The barns, stables, sheds, and handsome farmhouse formed a quadrangle around an inner courtyard. In the middle of the courtyard lay a large manure pile which strangely enough exuded no smell. Surrounding the buildings, gardens and fields extended to the far distance.

The farm was stocked with horses, cows, and bulls—about forty horses and forty or fifty cows and calves. The farmer was breeding steers and horses and had many young animals. It was very progressive farming.

I was hired by the farmer and immediately given a room in the attic of the farmhouse. It was small with little in it but, at least, it was a room. It was decent, civilized.

I began my work as a milker. Whenever I saw the farmer, Monsieur Roberti, in the first week I was there, I thought that he looked unwell. He was a young man, about thirty-five years of age, with a wife and two children.

The farmer died suddenly at the end of the week. The whole place became unsettled. Farmhands gossiped about whether or not the widow could manage the farm by herself.

I focussed on milking. With Monsieur Roberti gone, I was left alone. The widow, Madeleine, helped me irregularly.

A short time later, her father arrived from Liège. Retired, over sixty years old, he'd been a prosperous farmer, a breeder of horses and bulls. Now, faced with his daughter's predicament, he came out of retirement to take charge of the farm.

Monsieur Degive was a stern-looking man. He had injured a leg and limped.

After a while it became too much for the widow to help with the milking; she had many other things to do. Instead she gave me more responsibility and asked the maid Claire to help me.

Claire wasn't trained so I taught her how to milk and she soon acquired the skill. She helped me every day and especially on Sunday because, on that day, we stopped work early. On weekends when Claire went to visit her parents, the widow helped with Sunday's milking.

Claire was the daughter of Polish immigrants. Her father worked in the mines near Liège. She had grown up in Belgium and spoke fluent French. She had blond hair and a pale, round, Slavic face with broad high cheekbones.

I was a very skilled milker. I had learned from the Friesians, the best milkers in the world, and these Belgian farmers took notice of it; they respected me for my work.

I milked and cleaned the stables. I worked all the time—I never went out. If the farmers were suspicious of my cloistered life, they never talked to me about it.

The old man, Monsieur Degive, became quite interested in me. I was the only worker who stayed overnight; all the others left. Many were married and lived in the village.

At night the farm was a medieval stronghold. The animals were in the stables. A solid, wooden gate closed it off completely.

One day the old man gave me the farm key and told me to open the gate every morning and close it every night. So I became the gatekeeper.

The first thing I observed on this farm was that I could eat as much as I wanted. The part of Belgium around Liège was a rich area; but the farms in Waterloo were productive, too. Here, however, people were much more generous. If they were concerned about the black market, it wasn't obvious to me. Maybe its importance to them was on a large scale, not just to sell a few extra slices of bread or glasses of milk.

The old lady, Madame Degive, sincerely grew to like me. She taught me how to bake bread. Once a week she baked thirty-two enormous round loaves in an outdoor oven. I was the one who always helped her to place the bread on long handles straight into the oven; then I pulled the handles out. I helped her to do this every Friday.

In the evenings I ate with the other farmhands in a room off the kitchen. After they'd eaten and left, the old lady would call me into the kitchen and give me another meal—a better one than the workers ate; it was part of the family's meal.

The old lady would tell me to polish her grandsons' shoes: in this way she allowed me to 'work' for the extra food she gave me. But having me clean the shoes was just a pretext.

Later the boys came to me; they were lively youngsters about eight and ten years of age. I would tell them stories and they were so keen! Every night they ran to me while I polished their shoes; they wanted to hear another story.

I told them stories from the Brothers Grimm, from Wilhelm Busch's Max and Moritz, and from the Bible. Also, I made up stories: I was hard pressed now and then to think up a new one. I noticed that after a while even the old man was listening to my stories.

Sometimes I helped the boys with their schoolwork; perhaps in doing this I revealed too much of myself. I certainly showed that I was more intelligent than I appeared to be and that I wasn't the person I pretended to be. The old man may have talked to his wife about it: he knew there was more to me than first appeared. But no one ever said a word to me about it.

CHAPTER XVIII
MONSIEUR DEGIVE

When I opened the gate in the morning, the old farmer sometimes came out and talked to me. One morning he said, "You know, Jean, I'd like to have your papers. I can clear you from going to Germany. You don't have to go to work there; you can stay here. I have good contacts; I can fix it up completely. Don't worry; I can clear you."

I answered, "Ah..." I began to tell him a tale. "I don't have my papers," I said. "I left them with my uncle in Brussels."

Twice he asked me for my papers, then he gave up. He realized that I had no usable papers. He never mentioned it again. He never asked me about anything.

Monsieur Degive knew that there was something clandestine about me. Puzzled—he took a chance on me.

I established a close relationship with him. He was a very intelligent man and saw some potential in me.

He went out of his way to be kind to me. He tried to teach me skills that he knew well. For instance he asked me if I would like to learn something about horses; he was an experienced horse breeder.

Sometimes we sat up together all night waiting for a mare to foal. A horse's birth is very difficult, especially if the foal comes out legs first. The old man taught me how to pull out the foal, when to pull and when not to pull. His instructions were excellent and I was appreciative.

He detected that I was interested in learning, so he also taught me how to breed bulls. He was a renowned bull-breeder. He said to me, "You have to look for the quality here and quality there. You have to look for this feature and that."

He owned a magnificent bull. Other farmers came to have their cows inseminated by the bull and he put me in charge of this service.

He said, "You're going to handle the bull. I don't want anyone else to control him." So whenever a cow was to be impregnated, I had to run with the bull, lift up the cow's tail, and control the bull.

Other farmhands were afraid of the bull, but the old man told me, "Once the bull knows you, you don't have to worry about him. Don't be frightened of him. He won't do anything to you." And the old man was right; he knew.

With thirty or forty milking cows and many young cattle to care for, I performed a demanding job. Still, the attitude and trust of Monsieur Degive more than compensated me. He did more for me than he was obliged to do in many ways,.

I was much happier there than I'd been on other farms. I was well fed and housed and made to feel like a human being. I worked very hard although not harder than in Waterloo and the treatment I received was better. I could even put my earnings under my mattress and leave them untouched for weeks.

I bantered often with Claire. She was cheerful and bright; she caught on to things fast. However, I didn't want to get involved with any girls—the situation was too unstable—so no intimacy ever developed between us.

These farmers were members of the Catholic church; everyone in the area was Catholic. The priest would visit the farm on his rounds and, when he saw me, asked why I wasn't attending church. The only explanation I could think of was: "I have so much to do; I don't feel like going to church." He asked me once or twice but didn't insist; he didn't hound me.

Some of the other workers asked why I never went to church. Subtle pressures were put on me to become more involved with them socially or to go out with girls.

Claire never invited me to her parents' home. I never went to Liège which was only ten kilometres away. Some of the farmhands invited me to come with them for a beer or go out with them on the weekends; some meant it genuinely. But I always shrugged off these invitations. I wouldn't expose myself to police checks or raids; it was too dangerous.

After a while the old couple had decided I was working too hard and should have some help. Someone was picked to help me clean out the stables each day.

We became good friends. He was a bachelor who lived in a village nearby and owned a small farm of his own. He was independent—he worked for the widow Roberti to protect himself from deportation to Germany. At the same time he obtained grain and feed for his animals and earned extra money.

This fellow always reported to me what he'd heard on *Radio London*: he listened in the evening when *Radio London* was broadcasting in French to Belgium and told me the latest news each morning—otherwise I wouldn't have known what was going on. I followed the course of the war through him and he also kept me informed on activities and events in the region.

At one point I was thinking of buying a shirt. For several years I'd been wearing the farmer's hand-me-downs and none ever fitted me properly.

My friend said he could buy me a shirt on the black market so I told him to go ahead. He bought a rough shirt of heavy, coarse material with wide green and brown stripes on a white background. I paid four hundred francs for it—a month's wages. I'd worked fourteen to sixteen hours a day for thirty days to earn enough to buy the shirt. Yet, in normal times, I wouldn't have worn such a shirt; I would be ashamed to wear it today.

Once in a while this bachelor invited me to his home: he said we could play cards and visit here and there. Nothing ever came of it, however: there were several villages to pass through on the way to his home and I would have had to come back late at night on my own. Without papers, I didn't want to risk it.

One day the fellow said, "You know, our farmer here is very close to the Germans." A revelation to me, but people in the district were talking about it.

Some time later I was sitting by myself in the stable milking the cows. Suddenly trucks swung into the courtyard. I heard motors spinning, clatter, and German voices.

I tried to crouch between the cows, hoping I wouldn't be seen. But the Germans saw me.

"Get up! Get up! Get up!" was the command. "Where are your papers? Who are you? What are you doing here?"

They were grabbing at me and scouring the place. It was a *razzia*.

I said, "Wait...Look...My papers are upstairs in my room." The officer signalled to a soldier to go with me and check my papers.

The soldier and I went up to my room and I looked around there as if I was searching for papers. Then the German said something I'll never forget.

"*Du bist doch ein armer Teufel.* (You're such a poor devil). Why don't you go to Germany? Your room is so bare. You have nothing here. You're so poor—you don't even have a pair of good pants; you have nothing. In Germany you would be much better off."

I answered, "Sure...but I was born here. I came from here."

He rejoined, "You know, it's..." He was speaking to me half in German, half in French. I showed that I understood German-and he forgot about my papers!

Suddenly the sergeant-major walked in announcing, "O.K.; everything's O.K. Let's go. I checked all the papers downstairs. Everything's in order."

What papers had the farmer shown him? I don't know what happened; I never knew. I never heard any more about it. The old man never mentioned it to me and I never talked to him about it. A strange relationship existed between him and me.

The old man owned a special horse and carriage which he used for visitors. One day he remarked to me, "Jean, you're now in charge of the carriage. You're going to drive it whenever I need you." Sometimes he had guests in the evening after workers had gone home. I was the only one around then.

The first time I drove the carriage he said to me, "Go to the station, Jean, and pick up a German general." He added, "The general knows I'm sending you for him—I told him Jean will pick him up."

So there I was with a comely little horse and carriage. I drove to the station, tied up the horse, and stood at the exit. The general arrived with his adjutant. They saw me and greeted me, "Jean! Jean!"

The general was in high spirits. He and the adjutant shook my hand. They both climbed into the carriage and I drove them to the farm.

I let them out of the carriage and the general gave me a ten-franc tip. Then he and his assistant entered the house.

I heard laughter and toasts over wine from the dining-room that night. There was feasting and drinking and merriment.

They stayed overnight. At six o'clock the next morning, again I was ready with horse and carriage. I took them back to the station and the general gave me another tip.

I repeated this scene many times, for many weeks in a row. The general arrived by train every Wednesday night. I drove him from and to the station. He came for dinner and stayed overnight. He was the military commander of Liège. Obviously my friend the bachelor had spoken the truth: the shrewd old farmer had powerful German connections.

We were well into 1944. From about March of that year I used to see German V-2 rockets streaking across the sky. Often they fell on Liège.

On June the sixth the American and British forces landed in France. Workers on the farm couldn't stop talking about it; they all told me the news.

From then on, my bachelor friend had exciting reports for me daily. He informed me when the Germans were retreating and the underground had begun to be more active; he conveyed the smallest detail to me. He pinpointed the Allied advance. "The Americans and the British are there now. They're coming here; they'll soon be here."

As the Allied armies approached Belgium, local resistance to the Germans began to emerge. One night members of the resistance occupied our farm and captured German soldiers found wandering in the fields—deserters from the German army, mainly Poles or Baltic nationals who'd volunteered or were pressed into military service and were renegades.

My impulse was to join the resistance at the first opportunity: I wanted to be involved in the action. But the guys left swiftly in the middle of the night.

The Germans swept back. They burned down farm after farm trying to smoke out resistance fighters who kept moving around the countryside. The farm next to ours was flattened completely; the Roberti farm wasn't touched. Presumably our boss indeed had the right contacts.

Slowly, gradually, the tenor was changing; the course of the war was changing. One day my co-worker told me the Americans were near at hand, lodging in the area and turning up everywhere in jeeps.

Then an American jeep drove into our courtyard one day. Four Americans were in it. They asked for directions.

I was standing in the courtyard with the widow Roberti. When I saw the Americans enter, I couldn't conceal my joy. The war was coming to an end. An end to a tangle of problems.

I talked to the Americans in English. I lost my self-control; I forgot myself completely.

I hadn't spoken English for about six years; I'd never spoken to an American. But their accents didn't confuse me. I had no difficulty understanding them.

The Americans were surprised when I spoke English. The widow Roberti was speechless.

I showed the Americans around the farm and told them a little about it. A short while later they left.

I remained on the farm doing my job as usual. After my experience with the resistance in Brussels, I wasn't really keen on getting involved with it again; I was more interested in joining a regular army.

The Germans slowly pulled out and left the whole area. The Americans moved in but were still advancing so resistance groups took over and administered everything.

The resistance began to mete out punishment and arrest all types of collaborators. Women who had fraternized with German soldiers were publicly humiliated. And one day thirty or forty resistance fighters carrying guns drove into the farm; their vehicles pulled up in front of the house. They wanted to arrest the old farmer!

Monsieur Degive was standing mute on the front steps. Then suddenly he pointed at me and said, "Ask that man what I've done for him, which side I've really been on, whose side I've been on all along."

The resistance commander turned to me. He walked over and questioned me. "Yeah," I affirmed. "I've been hiding here for almost a year. He protected me; it's only due to him that I'm still alive. What he says is true."

There must have been some speculation and gossip about me locally because the commander and his men believed what I said; they believed the old man and me. The leader ordered his men to withdraw and they left without further question.

The old man never mentioned the incident afterwards; he never talked about it to me even once.

I kept on helping Madame Degive with the bread. She continued to give me a double supper. Everything went on as usual.

A few weeks later, damaged railroad lines were repaired and train travel to Brussels was re-established. I advised Monsieur Degive that I was anxious to visit my uncle in Brussels. The old man knew immediately that I would never come back. His wife knew it, too. They said to me, "Sure. Of course. Goodbye. 'Bye. 'Bye."

I saw in their faces that they knew I would never come back. They knew, too, that I wasn't Jan Van Capelle—that I was somebody else. They had known for some time that I wasn't the person I pretended to be. But they never asked who I was, they never asked me where I'd come from; and I really appreciated that.

The old farmer had saved my life and I'd saved his. We were quits, it would seem; but I owed him much more than he owed me. He was old at the time; I was young, just twenty-two, with my adult life ahead of me.

Admittedly, I'd worked nonstop, every day of the week. I never went out. Workers used to comment, "You work so hard. Why don't you go out on weekends? Have a little fun." Most of them didn't understand what my situation was, but Monsieur Degive understood. And within these narrow limits, he made my life very tolerable. I owe him a great debt for this.

His wife, too, was unusually kind. She was a tough woman; both were tough and stern but, on the scale of virtues, they rated very high.

They liked me so much that they wanted me to stay there permanently. To encourage this they tried to stimulate something between the maid and me: if I would marry Claire, the old lady suggested, they would set us up in a house.

I wasn't eager to adopt any such plans. They wanted me to stay because, as a worker, I wasn't easy to replace; but I needed to return to what, for me, was a more normal life.

I thought maybe I could join the British or American army before the war came to an end. The resistance wasn't doing much militarily and I wanted to hit the Germans where it counted; go after them myself.

CHAPTER XIX
BRUSSELS, 1944

In September 1944 I said good-bye to Fexhe-le-Haut-Clocher and took the train to Brussels. Everything was out in the open there: people were gathering in public places again and Zionists were starting to organize.

In Brussels I felt at liberty for the first time in many years. It was strange to be able to walk around anywhere without running into guards, check posts, or mass arrests.

I went out to Strombeek-Bever to look for Dirk, the painter, and found him there. He told me that after the last time I'd seen him in 1942 he'd hidden a number of Jews. He had been caught, arrested, and sent to a concentration camp. He'd been released and came home not long before my return.

According to Dirk I could get work with the British army; its main supply centre in Europe was located in Brussels. Huge storage depots, especially for food, had been installed in the city. Dirk had worked there briefly and knew that laborers were being hired regularly.

I was taken on at the depot. A satisfying meal was served at noon and the wages were high. With my earnings, I could maintain myself adequately.

Since I was used to hard work, I was able to carry heavy sacks and boxes all day long. We unloaded lorries that arrived from the coast and loaded others that were going to the front. It was a massive undertaking.

While I was moving bags of potatoes I broke my glasses. I had to lift a bag, walk up to a pile, and throw the bag over my head—my glasses soared with the potatoes. The lenses broke.

I had never lost or broken my glasses until then. That afternoon I had the lenses replaced by an optician. The prescription was the same as it had been in 1938 when I left home; my eyes hadn't changed.

One Sunday I decided to ride out to Waterloo and see what was going on there. After an absence of over a year, I dropped in at the farm where I'd worked. The young wife and Fernand were out but his miserly mother was there.

She seemed quite glad to see me. She invited me to sit down and have a cup of coffee. We talked and she told me what had happened in the year I'd been away and brought me up-to-date about people I'd worked with.

Then she asked me to come back to work there! She promised to give me a room. I had just left a much better job than hers and was looking forward to a different kind of life altogether so her offer didn't appeal to me. This time I wasn't in Waterloo to find work; I was just visiting.

My job at the depot held no real challenge for me. I was renting a pleasant room overlooking a beautiful garden—far more agreeable living arrangements than my previous ones had been-and I was able to save some money; but meanwhile I noticed that the American army was advertising for interpreters. I presented myself at the army headquarters, filled out an application, talked to an American officer, and was tested for language proficiency.

I didn't expect anything to materialize from this. One evening, however, when I returned from work, I found a message in my room informing me that someone had called requesting me to be at American headquarters the next morning at ten o'clock, sharp.

I'd already been tested for languages. In German and French I was perfectly fluent. I spoke Dutch and English, too, though my English was less fluent at that time than I would like to think it is today.

At ten o'clock the next morning I appeared as requested. Immediately I was led to an officer who asked, "Are you ready to join us?"

"Yes," I answered. "When?"

"Today," he said.

Jolted, I said, "Oh! Why..?"

He charged ahead. "We don't have much time. There's a war on. We can't wait. Are you willing to attend a swearing-in ceremony this morning?

I'd been waiting for this opportunity; I snatched it. "O.K." I nodded. "Sure."

"Go in right now," he ordered. "We'll swear you in."

The same day, I gave up my room and the few possessions I couldn't carry with me. Several hours later I checked in and was issued a uniform.

I moved out of Brussels with the American army that afternoon.

CHAPTER XX
INTERPRETER IN GERMANY

The first place we came to was Maastricht. Dispatched from Brussels, we arrived in Maastricht—of all places—that evening.

The American army had taken over an old hotel near the railway station. I went to look around; I hadn't been in Maastricht since the middle of 1942.

There was no war damage in Maastricht. I walked to the district where my aunt and her family lived: her house was intact but occupied by strangers. I spoke to some neighbors and none of them could tell me anything about the Schmidts.

I stayed there a few days and used my spare time trying to find people I knew. I'd met many people there in the past.

On the second or third day while roaming around, I saw a familiar face on a balcony. It was Mr. Brunn. He and his wife were staring in my direction; they didn't seem to recognize me. I was in an American uniform.

I called out, "Mr. Brunn, don't you know me? Don't you recognize me?"

"Oh!" he said, "Moishe! It's you!"

"Yeah," I smiled; "it's me. What's happening here, Mr. Brunn? Where's my aunt and the others?"

"Ah," he stammered, "you know...your aunt and the children-your uncle-they all went away; they were taken away. They haven't come back."

The Brunns were Jews from Germany who had lived in Holland a long time. They'd been fairly wealthy. They'd escaped deportation by hiding somewhere; their two daughters had not been in hiding and had been arrested. My relatives, the Schmidts and the two Brunn children were gone.

The Brunns told me about the roundup that took place in the Maastricht area. Jews were herded together and carted away. The elderly Brunns were among the few who were left.

I said to them, "Look, I have to go. We're moving out of Maastricht soon. But whenever I can I'll come and see you."

I did that: whenever I had leave, I went to spend some time with them. Theirs was a hollow existence. Though they hoped at first that their daughters would return, they never did. The old people had lost everything.

I became like a son to them. They looked forward to my visits and pampered me with all kinds of food and fuss.

After I joined the Americans, I found myself facing a sudden counter-offensive by the Germans. In the middle of December the Germans made a fast move across Belgium towards Antwerp. They tried to sever the British from the American troops by splitting through the centre of the Allied front. The action took place a short distance from our position.

During three days of dense fog, German paratroopers dropped from the skies. American soldiers didn't know who was who: they were calling to one another, thinking the Germans were standing right beside them.

I was south of Maastricht at the time. My unit didn't know all the details but we knew there was fighting very close to us.

Then the sun came out. The German push was cut off; the Battle of the Bulge was over. This was the only engagement in which my company was imperilled.

After that we moved into Germany. I had never dreamed of ending up there. It was just by a stroke of luck in signing on as an interpreter that suddenly I was returning to Germany.

I experienced a strange feeling when I crossed the border in an American uniform. The crossing point was southeast of Maastricht and fierce fighting was going on there. Planes and bombs were screaming around us.

For the first time I saw German cities completely destroyed. The cities we drove through were endless rubble; there was almost nothing left. Walls had tumbled down. We had to be careful where we stepped.

Generally, my group moved into an area immediately after it had been bombed. We were sometimes the first ground force to push forward.

There were several soldiers with me once when we were ordered to occupy a specific building. The Germans were still

shooting from the rooftops at the time, yet I felt fearless and I recall running way ahead of the other guys.

Astounded they asked, "How come you're running ahead of us? What do you think you're doing? Aren't you scared?

I answered exultantly, "No! I'm not scared. I'm happy!" And I forged ahead even faster. They couldn't understand it.

Afterwards they insisted on talking about my behavior. Some of the guys were perceptive and intelligent; a few were college graduates. They questioned me, "How come you're not scared?"

"Because I know you guys are scared," I answered. Several had suffered emotional collapse.

"I am enjoying this war," I told them. "I've been longing for combat for years. I only wish I could fight more! I haven't fought enough!"

I'd been suppressed for years. The Nazis had muzzled me; they had almost crushed me. I hadn't been able to make a move. Thinking of what they'd done to me made me ache to tear them apart.

I wanted to fight, to take revenge. I had to vent my rage.

We moved northwards in Germany. We were on the west side of the Rhine and the German army withdrew over the river to the east side.

I was stationed then in Krefeld, less than one hundred kilometres from Wattenscheid, but Wattenscheid was still in German hands. The Rhine divided the two sides and artillery firing from both banks was ferocious.

My unit was billeted in a rich man's villa outside Krefeld. In it we discovered a large wine cellar full of bottles of choice German wine.

This sparked the longest party of my life. We all shared the spoils. I drank six bottles of wine, four litres or a gallon, by myself; I drank bottle after bottle without stopping.

I remember being deliriously happy! I sang and played the fool—the happiest man in the world and utterly drunk. Eventually I couldn't move without falling down.

We emptied the whole cellar to the last bottle. I was out of commission for at least three days; I couldn't get up. I was in a sodden haze.

None of our group reported for duty. We couldn't; we were wrecked for three days. Officers, men—everyone.

We were never reprimanded for this and the incident stays in my mind as a celebration of the Nazi defeat. A Hallelujah Victory Celebration. I had a wonderful time.

We were still on the west side of the Rhine; the east side was held by the Germans. Their batteries kept blasting across the river, destroying their own cities in order to hit us.

I was never involved in the battles that were going on; I was kept behind the front line. Sometimes, however, I had to go forward to investigate or interrogate.

The army was taking German prisoners and some were high-ranking officers. We needed to pry information from them about German positions and the strength of their troops.

The questioning was conducted fairly, unlike what I'd experienced with the Gestapo. The captives were seated in a room and we talked to them; the technique wasn't harsh. I never saw any brutality.

Sometimes we captured an SS man trying to pass himself off as an ordinary soldier. Though I was supposed to be only the translator, in cases like these I participated in the questioning by bringing out points the Americans had not thought of. I was well aware of SS crimes.

The 'Black Shirts,' however, never gave a straight answer; they feigned innocence and denied everything. It was difficult to deal with them: I felt like taking a stick and beating them over the head—of applying their own methods to themselves. The Americans wouldn't tolerate such tactics so, in some ways, I felt under restraint. I had to sit and listen to the garbage they spewed out.

Interrogations of regular officers were much simpler; the Americans tried to deal with these on a soldier to soldier basis. Strategy and emplacements and military strength were what mainly interested them, as well as the civilian situation on the other side of the Rhine. The American army had to plan its advance into Germany so as to minimize the loss in human lives. The war was still being fought and, at that time, the Americans weren't much interested in probing into criminal responsibility.

The Americans made a distinction between the regular army and the SS, knowing that soldiers would ultimately be released whereas the SS might be brought to trial; they therefore guarded the SS more securely. During interrogations, however, the distinction never came out because, as yet, we had no witnesses or evidence against the individual SS officer. Suspecting that a particular person had been a concentration camp guard wasn't proof and we didn't have the mandate to pursue such suspicions. It was often exasperating.

Even after they had lost the west side of the Rhine, the Germans still believed they would win in the end. The prisoners we took were very defiant; they weren't ready to give in. Their defiance annoyed me more than anything else. When it was obvious to the rest of the world that they were whipped, they still acted like the master race.

Often we captured soldiers of fifteen or sixteen. They knew next to nothing but were fanatic Nazis: I was shocked by the fanaticism still rampant in Germany. I was horrified to find that belief in Hitler was stronger in 1945 than it had been when I left seven years earlier. It was alarming. The Germans believed their government's propaganda that they had really won the war, but had been betrayed by a mysterious force. They couldn't grasp that Hitler had lost the war; this was an impossibility to them.

While I was stationed in Krefeld, I met a German who identified himself to me as a Jew. He told me he'd been living in Krefeld with a German family. I don't know if it was true or not; he may have been a Nazi who chose hastily to call himself a Jew—a safe cover suddenly whereas, previously, it had been the greatest offense in history. Allied victories made an enormous difference for Europeans on the allied side of the front line in this respect so I was disinclined to believe the man's story.

From Krefeld I moved south along the Rhine to Koblenz, then up the Rhine to Mainz. When we could finally cross the Rhine River, in March or April 1945, I was posted in Würzburg.

The allied armies moved in different directions across Germany: one moved south, another north, one east, and one west; I was attached to the army in the south. My unit never came across any concentration camps.

Then we began to hear the horror stories. When the camps were liberated by allied troops, photographs of the survivors and ghastly reports appeared in the world press. What went on in the camps became common knowledge. And none of it surprised me. I was shocked only by the extremes to which the Nazis had gone. I'd known that many people would die under their heel—I hadn't imagined the numbers would be so great.

At the end of April 1945 we heard that Hitler had killed himself. We weren't sure if it was true—there were rumors it wasn't. He had said he would fight from the mountains of Bavaria; we were close to that area and expected to have to keep on fighting. It was a time full of rumors and uncertainties though we were confident that the war would end soon.

We read the army newspaper, *The Stars and Stripes,* eagerly every day. One day it was headlined: WAR ENDS.

May 7, 1945, the Germans signed the surrender simultaneously in Reims, France, and Berlin. War in Europe was over.

We all congratulated each other and expressed deep satisfaction. The end of the war against so threatening and powerful an enemy was indeed a great occasion.

The American soldiers were happy that they'd be able to return home. There were parties and festivities among us. It was a grand holiday.

I stayed on in the army of occupation. The American sector was mainly in the south. The part of Germany where I came from was under British command. The French occupied the sector near Strasbourg and the Russians were in what was then East Germany.

With the war over, my unit became involved in civilian administration. I was an interpreter in many cases investigating irregularities, crimes, or disputes.

The languages I used were German, English, and occasionally French. The first time I encountered some French Canadian soldiers I guessed they were talking French but scarcely understood what they were saying. It sounded strange to me. When they switched, more or less, to European French, we communicated with each other more readily.

Each of the allied armies had an engineering division that was rebuilding the sector's railroads. My unit was assigned to the railroad system to help keep American supplies and personnel moving through the country. I worked around train stations then.

A few times I thought of visiting Wattenscheid. The distance was under 350 kilometres (little more than 200 miles) but transit lines were still disrupted. There was widespread wreckage and the trains weren't running on schedule.

Also, Wattenscheid was in the British zone. It wasn't easy to travel between zones-we needed special permission—and I didn't expect to find anyone there whom I particularly cared to see so I didn't pursue it.

My plan was to go back to Holland eventually. I'd been admitted there before the war with a valid visa; I could resume my interrupted journey from there to Israel.

Holland was liberated at the very end of the war, a few days before the surrender. Formidable combat continued there much longer than in other areas with Canadian troops fighting alongside the British.

I couldn't travel to Amsterdam or Franeker until the war was over and then it took months to repair the railroads. I followed the progress through reports in newspapers.

The longer I stayed with the army the more I felt it was a waste of time. There was nothing I could learn. It wasn't interesting. It was peacetime service, working a routine shift and eating huge meals.

The food was ample, of every variety and no stinting of it: we could eat as much as we wanted. It was all brought from the United States in cans and packages. The quality and quantity were much greater than had been available during the war.

On my first morning in the army in Maastricht, I ate twelve eggs for breakfast. I hadn't eaten eggs for years: the farmers hadn't kept hens because they required too much feed. I got very sick as a result of my greed.

Even afterwards when I ate less greedily, I suffered diarrhoea for several weeks before adjusting to the rich diet. Then, where food was concerned, the army was ideal. Mess had become its best feature.

I also learned fluent English-American army English, of course. The soldiers came from many parts of the United States and told me all kinds of things about the country and life there. They talked of black citizens. There were no blacks in my outfit; they were segregated from whites and served in different units. Many were truck drivers.

I met a few Jews from New York and New Jersey. I met many people; but, despite this, it did not seem particularly interesting at the time.

Actually, I hated being in Germany. I was full of resentment toward the nation.

My work was directly with trains, railroad workers and passengers. Sometimes survivors of concentration camps came through on trains and I talked to them. They told me horrible stories about the camps.

Once in a while I was given leave. I had free passes to travel on trains so I managed to visit the Brunns a few times.

I had to travel from Würzburg to Maastricht via Liège where I changed trains. I had lived near Liège for a year but had never been there. When I finally got there, I could see it was large and sprawling and, no doubt, a fine city. Nevertheless, the only part I walked through was the station; I felt no attachment to the place.

On a visit to the Brunns one evening in mid-1945 I arrived in Maastricht late because the train had been delayed. At the door of the house I met a girl; she was searching for a key. I didn't know who she was. Finally she found the key and unlocked the door.

She knew about me from the Brunns and let me into the house; we went in together. The Brunns were out.

I asked her who she was and heard her story. She was living with the Brunns, who were trying to adopt her. She was a German-Jewish girl whose parents had been killed by the Nazis. She'd been hidden for several years by some miners in the district of Maastricht. She was eighteen years of age and engaged to marry a Jewish man who owned a small shop in Heerlen, an industrial town near Maastricht.

The Brunns returned home and we all sat down to a meal. I'd brought food packets in my bag.

I stayed at the Brunns for a number of days and sometimes talked to Shoshana. She wasn't around very often.

I was paid regularly by the army and was issued two hundred cigarettes every week. I wasn't a smoker so I sold the cigarettes. Altogether, at long last, I was accumulating a sizable sum of money.

There was nowhere to spend money. Würzburg, for instance, was a city in ruins. Few buildings were standing. My unit was living in railroad cars.

So I saved all my money. I couldn't deposit it anywhere—it had to be on me; that was the safest place. I kept it in my pocket or under my pillow as before. Then, when I visited the Brunns, I left my savings with them.

When I was able to travel to Brussels, I decided to spend a leave visiting my friend Dirk. I stuffed my duffel bag with food and cigarettes, soap and razor blades-all kinds of scarce items; I wanted to repay his many kindnesses and his friendship toward me.

I went out to Strombeek-Bever and found him at home. His wife was there, too. They'd just become proud parents.

Dirk was so happy to see me. He welcomed me with warmth. I unpacked all the goodies I'd brought, and he and his wife danced with delight. I spent a few glowing days with them.

I visited the Brunns several times during that year, 1945. Each time I met Shoshana. She would ask me about the army and about Germany: she hadn't been out of a narrow neck of Holland for many years and she was curious about other places.

The Germans slowly took over the railroad system; the Americans had handed it back to them. We remained in charge of the railroad workers and were still checking the trains, but I felt that I was frittering away my time. There wasn't much to do.

One day a Jewish girl came to our office at the station. She was on her way from Frankfurt to Munich and complained that she couldn't find a seat on the train.

I said, "I'll try to get you a seat." I went with her into a first-class carriage. A German was sitting there, an arrogant man who looked like an SS type. I could imagine him flicking a whip and lashing out at people. I couldn't bear the sight of the man.

I said to him, "Is this your seat?" I spoke to him in German. He didn't answer me. He pretended he didn't hear me; he didn't see me.

I repeated, "Is this your seat?" No response.

I grabbed him by the coat. I demanded, "Is this your seat?"

He answered, "Yes. Yes." Each word was like gunshot.

"Where's your ticket?" I persisted.

He showed me his ticket. I snapped, "Get up! Get up!" and I told the girl, "This is your seat now. You sit here."

I don't know if his ticket was for that seat; I didn't look at it. All I saw was a *fahrbissener* (rabid, fanatical) Nazi. I said to him, "Come with me."

He sat motionless. He didn't budge.

I pulled him up. I shoved him.

He was bigger than me, tall and solid, a heavy-weight; I was no more than middleweight. But I had an American uniform on and I was seething with anger.

I pushed him forward. I drove him along the platform. He barely moved so I shoved him like they used to shove me. I hit him in the ribs like they hit me, like they hit so many of us.

I ordered, "Go on. Faster. Move! Move! Faster! Faster!" I grew angrier by the minute, more and more excited.

He reached the top of the staircase leading down from the platform. Again he didn't move. I shoved him. Then I kicked him. I kicked him so hard that he rolled right down the stairs.

He lay at the bottom and didn't get up. I walked away. I left him there. I paid no more attention to him.

Some Americans working in the station saw what happened and objected to my actions. "You're not supposed to do that," they said. "We're going to report you."

"I had to do that," I countered. "It's my job. The guy's a Nazi—he behaves and looks like a Nazi. I had to do that. You do what you want. If you want to report me, report me."

They reported me to a senior officer. They said that while I was on duty I had hit a German passenger and thrown him down the stairs.

A major was in command of our unit. I was summoned to his office. "What happened?" he demanded. "What were you doing?"

I replied, "Major, that was my revenge." He knew something about my experiences. He knew I'd been in the underground army.

"I had to do that," I explained. "I had to get it out of my system. Penalize me if you want to; do what you want."

"Forget it," he grumbled. "I haven't seen anything; I don't know anything. Only don't do it again."

Later the other soldiers told me they had taken the German to the hospital. His arms and three ribs were broken.

I had really let go. I had to deal with Germans every day and I couldn't pay them back for what they'd done to me and others.

I never mixed with Germans. I kept to the American compound; I could live there in complete isolation. The army had its own supplies, its own canteen, American movies and entertainment.

The major commanding our unit wanted to recommend me for officers' training school and the regular army. He laid out the opportunities for me: "You can go to the United States. You can get an immigration visa, become an American citizen."

I enjoyed my association with the Americans—I found them refreshing compared to Europeans. But I wasn't interested in their enticements at the time. My plan was to go to Israel; I had no other goal. After all that I'd been through, I was convinced that there wasn't a future for Jews anywhere but in Israel.

It seemed to me that even Americans didn't like Jews very much. I noticed that some American Jews were always looking over their shoulders to see if they'd said the right thing and done the right thing.

After a while the army days grew longer and longer. I decided the time had come to resume my fitful journey to Israel. I resigned from the army.

CHAPTER XXI
RETURN TO HOLLAND

Early in January, 1946 I went to the Brunns' in Maastricht. I was back in civvies again.

I asked Mr. Brunn for my money and he told me that a few weeks earlier, the Dutch Secret Police had searched the house hunting for black-market goods and money; they'd rummaged everywhere. They'd missed finding my money by a hair's-breadth. It was stashed among the linens.

I left Maastricht and took a train up north. The trains were running again, but travel was slow and often interrupted; many bridges hadn't been rebuilt.

I spent about two days getting to Franeker. I arrived and found that everything there looked the same. Nothing had changed.

I took a room in a small hotel. The next morning I went to the town hall.

In most West European countries, every resident is registered in the local city hall. This was the custom in Holland.

I presented myself to the town clerk. "My name is Moritz Schnitzer. I lived here in Franeker for a few years until late 1941; I was registered in this office. I'm a Jew from Germany; I'm stateless; the Nazis took away my citizenship—you've heard what happened."

"I've lost all my papers because of the war. You know what happened during the war—we were all pushed from place to place. I lost my resident visa and my Dutch work permit; now I need to establish my identity."

He stared at me. "What? What's this you're saying? Is it true what you said?"

"Sure it's true!" I answered. "Ask some other people." He was a young man. "Ask older people—they'll tell you it's true."

Dumbfounded, he answered, "All right. What's your name? I'll look it up in my files."

He scanned some files and returned about five minutes later holding a paper. "Moritz Schnitzer. Yes. You died in 1942."

"What do you mean?" I exclaimed. "How could I have died in 1942? Don't you see me here? I'm here. It's 1946. I'm standing in front of you—I'm not dead."

"It says you're dead. And it has the official stamp."

"I don't care if it's stamped or not," I protested. "I'm here right in front of you. How can I be dead?" I pointed at the document. "See the picture? It looks like me doesn't it?"

"Yeah," he agreed. "It looks like you."

"Then how can I be dead if I'm standing in front of you?"

He was stumped. "I don't know what we can do. I can't do anything about it. You're dead and that's that."

The death had been certified by someone in the local administration. The Germans had probably furnished a list naming people who were dead and no one had questioned it.

I said, "Look, there has been a mistake. There has to be a solution."

He finally conceded. "I'll talk to the mayor."

The mayor was in his office. The clerk went up to consult him.

Soon the mayor came down and questioned me. "You're one of the Jewish boys who was here before?"

"Yes, I am," I asserted.

"I see. That's very interesting," he said. Still hesitating he repeated, "Is this true what you're saying?"

"Certainly it's true," I replied. "You see my picture there. I know this place. I've been here before. I'm no stranger to Franenker. I lived here for two years."

He relented. "Sit down for a few minutes." He searched through a law book and a code of regulations, then he said, "All right. If you can bring me a witness who'll testify that you are Moritz Schnitzer, then we'll fill out all the papers for you and give you an identification card."

My one recourse was to go to a farmer I'd worked for. Maybe the farmer would recognize me and be my witness.

I walked out of the building and along the main street. I passed the old train station; the structure was still there.

I continued down the Harlingerweg toward the farm that used to be situated three minutes by bicycle from the *hachshara.* There I turned in.

A farm laborer saw me. He recognized me right away! He gasped, "Ah, Mose!" They had called me 'Mose' on that farm.

He came over and embraced me! Then he called the farmer.

The farmer came out; his name was Van der Berg. "Mose!" he cried. "You!" And he kissed me!

There were tears in his eyes—A Friesian farmer crying! I had always thought those people had no emotions. My unexpected return had fractured a deep reserve.

The next thing the farmer did was take me into his living-room. I had never seen the living-room before; I had always been in the stable.

Then he sat me down in the kitchen. He said, "You must eat with us."

I saw his two sons—they knew me, too; they had worked with me. And his wife remembered me. What a *simcha* (celebration) it was! An unbelievable reception.

Van der Berg kept saying, "I'm so happy to see you and that you're alive! I'm so happy! We talked about you all the time. We wondered what had happened to all the boys and girls...what had happened to all of you. It has been so long... so many years; no news. People said that all of you died and now you're here."

These people were religious believers. To them, it was as if I'd come back from the dead. They were awed to see me alive.

The farmer himself offered to accompany me to the town hall. He said immediately, "I'll take my bike. You take my son's bike." And away we went.

We entered the town hall and the office of the mayor. Van der Berg declared, "Of course Mose is Mose! I know him! Sure! It's true what he says!" And he signed papers, affidavits, as my witness.

That cleared the detritus from my life. I could be my own self again. in Franeker in 1941 I'd lost my true identity when I

fled the Gestapo sweep; in the same place about five years later I regained it.

It's difficult to explain the effects of living with a false identity. When I changed my name to Jan Van Capelle, I knew that I had to conceal many aspects of my personality. In a sense, I had to cease being the type of person I'd been until then. To achieve this I censored everything I said and did; I controlled myself every minute. I mumbled or said nothing so as not to reveal too much. This was very hard to do sometimes: people tend to equate silence with unfriendliness and resent it.

With false identities, I no longer felt German. I felt like nothing I had ever been. I had had to earn my daily bread by the sweat of my brow at the lowest level of society. Like an actor, I had had to play a role—to appear to be dull and crude without education or refinement. Reading or discussions had been banned.

Both as Jan Van Capelle and Eli Hart, I couldn't disclose that I had any special knowledge of Germany or personal relationship to Germany. Otherwise, as Eli Hart I was able to reveal more nearly who I was.

The problem with false identities was that I was generally with other people; I slept and worked beside other people. And I couldn't afford to give myself away by chattering asleep or awake. I was concerned that, when I was sleeping, someone might get information from me that I wouldn't want to divulge. I was always afraid that someone might question me some day or something might happen to unmask me. But it never happened. No one had ever said anything to me about something I didn't want known or hadn't deliberately told.

However, I'd had enough of being someone else. I was tired of withholding so much and expecting to be discovered. I wanted my own identity again.

Now I had it. I had received an identification card.

I thanked van der Berg and said good-bye to him. I was leaving Franeker and going to Amsterdam.

CHAPTER XXII
AMSTERDAM, 1945

I had to wait around for the one train a day. The Germans had seized many railway cars and taken them to Germany. Few passenger cars were available at that time; we travelled under primitive conditions in freight cars. At last, a couple of days later, I reached Amsterdam—*Makom* (The Place) as the Friesians called the city.

I thought it would now be simple to obtain ration tickets, which were still in use; basic foods were rationed. Also, I needed an updated visa to stay in Holland.

I went to the city hall in Amsterdam and learned that, before being issued these papers, I would have to see the Secret Police. "Many war criminals are sneaking in here. We can't give out anything before you get clearance."

I hurried to the Secret Police. Three or four people were ahead of me. They were under great strain.

My turn arrived. I told the policeman who I was and that I'd been on *hachshara* in Holland until the end of 1941. I added a few more facts.

The policeman observed, "You are *Yehudi*" (a Jew).

I replied, "Yes, of course. You know what we went through, all of us."

He nodded. "Sure," and gave me the necessary clearance. "You're kosher now," he remarked. He happened to be a Jew!

I walked out with my clearance papers and returned to the city hall. I'd had a visa before the war; now it was renewed. I was a legal resident of Holland again.

By January 1946, the Mizrachi Organization was running a residence in Amsterdam for people who were planning to settle in Israel. Men who'd been in the Jewish Brigade of the British Army had founded this residence which was called a *Beth Chalutz* (pioneer house). It had sleeping and eating

accommodations for displaced people so I stayed there on my return to Amsterdam.

Meanwhile the Zionist group I'd been affiliated with was about to set up a new *hachshara* in Dieren-Doesberg near Arnhem. It had been started from scratch about two weeks after I arrived in Amsterdam because people like me were surfacing after all the years.

The only other person to reappear from the group that had been located in Franeker was Bram, the Dutch fellow who'd escaped with me in November 1941. After he and I had split up, he'd succeeded in crossing over to England. There he'd joined the Dutch army-in-exile.

Things balance out in strange ways. In 1941 I had probably saved Bram's life. Then after the war, he was the source of a momentous turn in my life.

I met him in Amsterdam in January 1946. Through him, my brother subsequently learned that I was alive: Bram mentioned me to a friend in England who knew my brother and that person told Eddi about me.

I was in residence in Amsterdam when I received a telegram from Eddi. It came from Canada and read:

OVERJOYED TO HEAR YOU ARE ALIVE. I AM O.K. CABLE ANSWER ABOUT EVERYTHING. WILL SEND PARCELS, MONEY. WIFE AND I WILL SEE YOU HERE SOON.
LOVE,
EDMUND

I cabled an answer immediately to let him know I'd received the telegram. He wrote me by airmail the same day outlining details of his past five years and formulating plans. His cable and letter were dated February 5, 1946, one day after my twenty-fourth birthday.

CHAPTER XXIII
ON HACHSHARA IN DIEREN-DOESBERG

I moved to the hachshara at Dieren-Doesberg a few days later; I wrote to Eddi from there. I wasn't thinking seriously about his proposal to go to Canada; I was set on going to Israel.

I was the only survivor of Franeker to participate in the new *hachshara*. Bram didn't rejoin because he'd contracted tuberculosis during the war. Since I had been on hachshara before, the organizers put me in charge. I was the most experienced person there.

In Dieren I did something that Rabbi Yehoshua Wolf had wanted me to do earlier: I gave the religious lessons. I performed all the functions that Rabbi Wolf had performed in Franeker.

We built a busy *hachshara*. We had between twenty-five and thirty members, most of us working on farms as we'd done in Franeker. This time, however, we sent some members to learn trades.

I myself went back to farming—by now it was easy for me. I enjoyed it, too; I found the work satisfying compared to working in an army of occupation.

Some of us worked on contract as was common in Belgium during the sugar-beet season. Teams of us took on specialized jobs for farmers. We worked very hard.

We also enrolled in a study program at a local agricultural school. In response to our request for instruction in theoretical farming, the principal gave us an initial course on the chemistry of soils and fertilizers; I picked it up very fast. This surprised me since I hadn't studied much chemistry before. At the Adath Israel Gymnasium in Berlin I'd done a little science but forgotten all of it. And this was eight years later.

I memorized every formula our instructor wrote down,

quickly and accurately. He said to me one day, "In all the years that I've been teaching, I've never had a student who grasped a subject as fast as you do."

I took several more of his courses and he got to know me well. Then he said to me, "I'd like to send you to the Agricultural University in Wageningen. I want to sponsor you."

He was mentally stimulated by teaching our eager group and appreciated my learning ability. Usually he taught slow-witted or uninterested farm boys and couldn't drive anything into their heads. To my astonishment—and provoking some thought—he was offering me a college education at his own expense.

Our courses were given in the evenings because of our daytime work. I was attending a class when someone came to fetch me. "There's a phone call for you from Canada."

We didn't have a phone in the *hachshara* so I went to take the call in a hotel. Eddi was on the line with his father-in-law. "We're glad you survived the war, Moishe," his father-in-law said. "Now we want you to come to Canada."

I told him, "Thanks for the invitation but I want to go to Israel. I've been preparing myself to go for seven years since 1939. That's why I'm here on *hachshara*... "

I had started the hachshara; I was in charge of it. I couldn't leave the group. I explained this to Eddi and his father-in-law.

Afterwards, just as they had at the start of the war, the British blockaded Israel. Legal immigration was impossible. The only way to enter was covertly on what was called 'Aliyah Beth.' This method was a roundabout and dangerous process; some Jews who tried it lost their lives in the attempt. Most who came from camps for displaced persons in Europe were turned back and interned by the British in Cyprus and elsewhere; they were often detained for months.

I continued writing to my brother while still planning to go to Israel. I was helping build an active organization in Holland. We now had several hundred members.

Then who arrived in Dieren? Unexpectedly, Shoshana. She suddenly appeared and wanted to join the kibbutz.

"I thought you were going to marry a man from Heerlen; I thought you were engaged to him!" She had always given me

the impression that she would be married soon.

"I was engaged to marry him, yes, but I couldn't go through with it. I didn't like him that much."

She became a member of the *hachshara* in Dieren; she left Maastricht and moved in with us. We saw more and more of each other; I fell in love with her. And she with me.

I'd impressed her as experienced; I'd knocked around. The other man was settled in Heerlen—a not too exciting life.

Shoshana was a talented artist, a potter. She was attractive with black hair and big brown eyes; and after a while I asked her to marry me.

She was under twenty-one and a ward of the state: after the war, the Dutch authorities had begun to take an interest in orphaned Jewish children because of pressure from the churches. The Protestant Church, for example, had been trying to convert some children who'd been saved by church members during the war. The state therefore assumed guardianship of these children.

To marry Shoshana, I needed permission from the state. So I went to to the Ministry of Social Welfare in Amsterdam and explained my situation to the officials.

They made all kinds of complications. They said that I had no income and wasn't settled. As the ones responsible for deciding what was in her best interests, they refused permission for the marriage.

I told Shoshana, "We can't get married here but we'll be leaving Holland; the government will have no jurisdiction over you then. We'll get married in France on our way to Israel. It isn't much of a problem."

Everyone in the kibbutz knew our plans; we spent all our spare time together. Whenever I was called to Amsterdam, apparently she was painfully lonely.

On occasion I had to be in Amsterdam at our head office. I'd become secretary of Bachad, the Young Mizrachi of Holland; I was the senior member of the organization for a time.

We had a group of fifty or sixty members in Amsterdam. I devoted considerable energy to organizing the group.

In Amsterdam I always stayed in a hostel called the Joodse Invalide. Jewish people of all ages lived there. It was the only

public place in the city where one could eat kosher food.

I met my distant cousin, Avram Heller there. He was the younger brother of Moishe Heller who'd been with me on *hachshara* in Franeker.

Avram's father and mother had survived the war and were staying at the hostel. Avram had come from his kibbutz in Israel to be with them; at the same time, he was acting as *shaliach* (envoy) for the Kibbutz Hadati movement, a branch of the Bachad. He spent about a year in Holland.

Avram and I worked side by side in the Mizrachi Organization. Since I was familiar with Dutch conditions and he was a first-rate organizer, he advised me on what should be done and helped me to carry out programs.

I met hardly any Jews I'd known before. I tried to find the Kosters in Amsterdam and was told that, a few months after I'd left his home, Professor Koster had been arrested—on the grounds that he wasn't wearing a yellow star. The only one of his family to survive the war was the deranged child, who'd been placed in a non-Jewish home.

I tried to locate members of my family when I reached Amsterdam in 1946. I haunted the refugee agencies and checked every register. Jewish groups including the Zionist Organization, plus the Red Cross and United Nations, had established offices in West European countries and were actively tracing and resettling people: they published lists of survivors and tried to locate relatives; it was a massive international effort. But my parents' names and Benno's never emerged.

I continued my search for many years. I pursue this information to this day.

Eddi, too, made inquiries through Canadian, American, and English organizations. We tried to locate anyone we'd known who was missing.

When reports described how the Nazis had killed six million Jews, I was still optimistic that Benno, at least, had survived: he had youth and strength to his advantage. But slowly I accepted the fact that Eddi and I were probably the only ones alive in our immediate family. My parents, my brother Benno, my paternal grandmother, the Schmidts, the Brunn girls, the group in Fra-

neker, Piefke Levy, and many others had disappeared.

Passover 1946 arrived. We were scheduled to leave Holland after the holiday; the entire group on *hachshara* was planning to move down to Marseille to board a boat for Israel.

I spent Passover in Maastricht with the Brunns. Shoshana was there, too.

The holiday was interrupted by a call from our head office asking me to come to Amsterdam immediately. I hurried there and found our leaders assembled, Avram Heller among them. They enjoined on me to wait in Holland and not rush to Marseille: I would get stuck in Marseille, they warned, and wouldn't be able to stir from there for some time. I would be more useful to the movement by remaining in Holland.

I returned to Maastricht and reported this to Shoshana. She exploded with anger: she accused me of delaying and betraying her, of renouncing the marriage. She stormed that my refusal to go to France after Passover was because I didn't want to marry her.

I tried to explain that I had no authority to go to Marseille—none of our group could go; she wasn't free to go either. But she misconstrued the situation, and railed that it was all my doing—that I'd manipulated the council into postponing our departure. Then she broke off our engagement.

She was blaming me when, in fact, political events had militated against our going. What hurt me most was her urging me to go with her to France, as previously planned, despite the council's decision. She refused to understand that it would have been rash to do it.

We both stayed at the *hachshara*. That summer I became more involved with running the head office and organizing the Amsterdam group so I took a room at the *Joodse Invalide* for a few months.

The year was drifting by. A symphony orchestra was formed in Arnhem and concerts began. Some members of the *hachshara* were musically trained so, in the fall of 1946, the group decided to attend a series of concerts. There was a concert every month and I became quite fond of classical music.

The Concertgebouw Orchestra had given concerts when I lived in Amsterdam in 1941-1942. The Kosters attended those

concerts; I never did because I kept away from public gatherings. After the war, however, I heard the Concertgebouw Orchestra in its concert hall in Amsterdam.

Whenever I went to Dieren, I saw Shoshana. I still cared for her very much and she seemed to feel something for me, too, but we kept our distance.

Our organization continued to hold us back, stalling everything. The leaders declared that a chance to leave would come before long. "Don't move," they said. "The border to Israel will open one day soon. Stay put for now."

My brother was writing to me regularly, repeating, "Come to Canada. You can study here; you were always a good student. If you come, you'll be able to develop yourself, do what you want to do. If you go to a kibbutz in Israel, you'll never be able to study."

By then, in my twenty-fifth year, I knew that if I didn't study soon, I would never study. I'd never yet seen the outside of a university, let alone the inside. And I'd always dreamed of studying something, of being somebody someday. Here I was. After twenty-five years my greatest achievement was surviving the war. I had no other achievement.

Eddi dangled the bait before me continually. He asserted, "You have an obligation to educate yourself. You haven't done so yet; you didn't have the opportunity. Come to Canada. You'll have the opportunity."

After a while I began to think, "Here I am, sitting in Holland. I can't go to Israel. I'm bogged down in nowhere land. I have wasted time in jails, then with the army. Now I'm in the same fix again."

Our leaders counselled, "Be patient. Run the *hachshara* until we're ready to move." They hesitated to risk having too many people interned by the British. It was a very trying period.

Early in 1947 I discussed the situation with Avram Heller. I put all the facts to him and asked him, "What should I do?" He knew my history; I'd told him everything. Now I underlined the point "I have a chance to study."

Avram agreed with Eddi's opinion. "If you go to Israel, you'll end up in a kibbutz. You'll have no chance to study. Now you

have a chance to study; go!"

He himself had lived in a kibbutz in Israel since about 1936. "If you have a chance to study," he said, "study. Then come to Israel after you've finished."

This was the compromise he proposed. This was the solution.

I was leaning in that direction of my own accord. I'd been coming to the conclusion that my life had been miserable enough. As I had a chance to educate myself, I thought I should do so. And Avram helped me to reach that decision.

When I announced my plan, Shoshana heard about it and confronted me again. She told me not to go to Canada. She was afraid that, if I went, she would never see me again. She wanted me to go to Israel as she still was planning to do. She suggested we should marry, as we planned before.

By now I was wary of her. I'd often seen her moody and sensed it would be difficult for me to deal with her. She tended to put pressure on me impulsively.

We became quite close again. She urged me not to go, to stay with her. However, I was determined to go.

I realized I couldn't take Shoshana with me. My brother was living with his in-laws. He could only accommodate one person; he couldn't look after a couple—it would be too heavy a burden on him.

So I told Shoshana that, later on, if we still felt strongly about each other and if it was materially possible, I would try to bring her to Canada. This didn't satisfy or convince her.

CHAPTER XXIV
ON THE WAY TO CANADA

Eddi then obtained a visa for me. Near the end of January 1947, he wrote to tell me the visa was on its way by surface mail and would reach The Hague in two months' time. I was then to present myself to the Canadian Embassy in The Hague.

I needed an additional travel document. I had only the identification card I'd obtained in Franeker. So I went to the Dutch police and requested a document that would permit me to travel. They refused to give it to me. "You're not Dutch," they explained.

"Then how can I travel?" I demanded. "I'm stateless. But I have a chance to go to Canada—and you can get rid of me."

Whenever I'd applied for an extension of my visa, I'd been given the run-around: the police had conveyed clearly that I wasn't welcome. Now I flung at them, "I'm not welcome here, so why don't you give me a chance to leave? Give me a travel document and I'll leave; you'll be rid of me. you won't have to deal with me any more."

They wouldn't do it. They refused to do anything.

In March I finally went to the Foreign Office in The Hague. I told the officials there, "I'd like to get a document so I can leave the country. I don't want to stay here any longer; I'm disgusted with this country."

I was blunt and brutally frank. "You don't want me. I don't want you. So give me a travel document. Then I can go."

About a week later they sent me a document. It was an identity certificate for use by aliens travelling from Holland to other countries.

In April I presented myself at the Canadian embassy. The prospective immigrants there were all women, war brides who wanted to join their husbands in Canada; I was the only man.

Very few displaced people were immigrating as yet—it was too soon after the war. In fact, as odd as it sounds, Canada still had no Minister of Immigration: the Immigration Branch was part of the Department of Mines and Resources!

I spoke to the Visa Officer who told me that I needed to have a medical check-up. After the check-up, I went back to him and, examining the chart, he said, "Everything is O.K."

He was about to stamp the visa in my travel document when he recalled, "You have to buy a ticket before I can give you the visa. You need a boat or airplane ticket for Canada; then come back for the visa."

I hied myself to the KLM office and did I have *tsuris* (trouble) there! No one would sell me a ticket. "How come you won't sell me a ticket?" I asked. "I have a visa waiting for me."

I told Royal Dutch Airline officials, too, that I wanted to get out of Holland. They could get rid of me. That tactic often worked for some reason: they sold me a ticket which I paid for with the money I'd saved while I was with the American army. The ticket was very expensive: it cost about one thousand dollars for a one-way fare from Amsterdam to Montreal.

The Canadian official then stamped the immigrant visa into my travel document. I was ready to go.

Before going on to Canada, I intended to visit relatives in England. The British embassy in The Hague granted me a temporary visa for the United Kingdom.

Also, at that time, overseas flights couldn't land in Montreal; I had to fly via New York. So the American consulate in Amsterdam gave me a transit permit.

For the last few days in Holland, I went to visit the Brunns. On the last day I visited Shoshana, who was then in Amsterdam. I said good-bye to the three people who had been closest to me in Holland.

May 1, 1947. I left Amsterdam and flew to London in a small plane.

Even when I arrived in London, I had some difficulty. I was detained at Croydon airport by the British police.

My cousin was waiting for me while police held me back for over an hour. I don't know why—perhaps because I was travelling on an unusual document, or maybe they were checking my

identity against lists of war criminals.

I had difficulty at every stop because of my irregular document. Fundamentally the problem was that I'd been born in Germany. This hampered me during the war—I could never admit to my birthplace—and now, even after the war, it was still tripping me up.

I was finally allowed to go through. I hadn't seen my relatives since 1937 when they had left their home in Dortmund, Germany.

Some days later I continued on my way. I took the train from London's Euston Station to Glasgow, Scotland. From Glasgow I went by bus to Prestwick where the flights for New York took off.

On the sixth of May, I flew from Prestwick to Iceland, from Iceland to Newfoundland, and from Newfoundland to New York. When I landed in New York, I was led aside. An epidemic of some sort had erupted in London and, since I'd come through there, I had to be inoculated.

I was hurried away to be given a needle. My brother stood waiting, bewildered when I didn't walk out!

Then I had to pass through Customs. I wasn't carrying much baggage, but I had to line up like everyone else.

Eddi saw me then. He sneaked in between the Customs Inspectors and came to my side. He was unbelievably happy!

An emotional moment seeing him again! I hadn't seen him for nine long years. We had last been together in 1938.

He looked very well—much better than I did. I had been on the road from London for about two days and I hadn't shaved. Eddi took me to a barbershop for a shave and a haircut. Then we boarded a plane to Montreal.

We arrived in Montreal and my travel document was stamped 'Landed Immigrant, Montreal Dorval Airport, May 7, 1947.'

CHAPTER XXV
EPILOGUE

In June of 1981, my late wife Leah and I flew to Europe. I wanted to show her the area where I was born and also the places and jails I had inhabited during the war.

Forty-three years after I had left my home town, Leah and I returned to Wattenscheid. We arrived by car and I couldn't recognize a thing. We parked the car and walked around, and gradually I picked out two landmarks—the Catholic and Evangelical churches. Then everything fell into place.

The coal mines are closed and, instead of slag heaps and grime, the streets are immaculately clean, the buildings freshly painted, the environment green and apparently free of pollution. Our home and main store are gone, leaving nothing in their place but a large empty lot: this becomes the outdoor market square one day a week and, at other times, provides parking for cars and bicycles for the adjoining business district which has become a pedestrian shopping mall. A tall new department store stands at the limit of what was once our property but the name emblazoned on the structure is not Hermann Schnitzer. Similarly, our former shoe store on the Oststrasse is tenanted now by a store with a different name. However, the large Woolworth store that was there when I was growing up is still there. And some of the buildings around the 'old market' square—our home—have been designated heritage sites. One of these is the Schulte Apotheke which still houses the pharmacy plus the office and home of Dr. Robert Schulte, my boyhood neighbor and friend.

Robert greeted us at his door with quick recognition and warmth and swept us into his home to meet and sit down with his family. He telephoned the Schrocks: Erwin had recently died—to my great regret—but Hedwig was still as sweet and

good and beautiful as ever. She and another employee of my parents—a woman who had had a boyfriend in the SS—had saved pictures of my family and loaned them to us to make copies for me and Eddi. Hedwig told me of my mother's courage in venturing out of the Dortmund ghetto by covering the Jewish star with a fur neckpiece; my father's retention of his dignity by always being impeccably dressed; and Benno's tears and concern for my parents in spite of his own exhaustion.

From Bochum with its mixture of sad reminiscences, heartwarming encounters, an unanswerable undertone:

WHY? HOW COULD IT HAVE HAPPENED?

We visited several spas. Some, such as Bad Kreuznach, have essentially disappeared into the encroaching industrial area; others, such as Bad Neuenahr or Schlangenbad, are as pristine and perfect—and unreal—as they ever were.

We drove to Holland next and looked for the camp that had swallowed up my friends. Poorly-marked roads in a desolate region led eventually to a nature preserve frequented by happy cyclists and hikers. Buried within an unwholesome-looking vaporish swamp there is a simple unadorned memorial: a glass-enclosed case displays a model of Westerbork camp and a short piece of rail symbolizes the many transports that carried 100,000 Jews, mainly Dutch citizens, from there to Auschwitz and other death camps. The memorial was put up by a Jewish youth organization, not by the Dutch government. Perhaps the Dutch prefer not to draw attention to a camp which they themselves set up in 1938 to intern Jewish refugees from Germany and which the Nazi conquerors later took over ready-made for their diabolical purposes.

The town of Franeker was next on this odyssey. It's unchanged, picturesque and pretty. The old station building, site of the *hachshara*, has been modernized with new windows and doors and is now a private home. The van der Berg farm and the other farms I knew in the region are still operating family farms. And at the former Zuider Zee, the beautiful old sailing port of Hoorn maintains the island prison where I was jailed in 1940 by the Dutch and from which I was released a

few days later, courtesy of the German army.

Amsterdam has almost obliterated its ancient Jewish quarter; Jewish life as it existed there in the 1930's has disappeared. The magnificent historical structure of the Portuguese synagogue is a solitary relic. As in so many other European cities, the streets of Amsterdam are essentially *Judenrein* (free of Jews).

A Swiss colleague, Jean Neyroud, tried to unearth the document I was forced to sign in 1942 which ordered my expulsion from Switzerland, but he was told that such documents had all been destroyed. Were they destroyed?—or are the Swiss authorities reluctant to publicize what they did during the war years? The question nags me especially since my colleague was warned that I could be arrested even now if I returned to Switzerland because I had entered illegally in 1942. I returned to Switzerland nevertheless, in 1981 at the invitation of the Chemical Society of Bern and later at the request of Swiss television to recount my wartime experiences. In La-Chaux-de-Fonds we quickly spotted the ineradicable image, the cantonal jail, though it has been enlarged with a new wing since the fateful day I spent there in 1942.

From La Chaux-de-Fonds we drove toward the Doubs River in heavy rain and mist. The road is narrow and sparsely travelled with steep cliffs on both sides of the river which flows violently. The whole area is thickly wooded and not much developed to this day. Where one crosses into France at Fournet Blancheroche, the church in the little village square still dominates the heights and I silently recalled the old priest who thought that Piefke and I were angels.

At Besançon we visited the cathedral and the Archbishop's palace. Then, after careful perusal of a city map, we found the awesome prison fronting on a deceptively quiet road. In Arbois, too—the town of Louis Pasteur—we located the church, now a museum, and, close by, the quiet street flanked by a high jail wall.

In Dijon we visited the railway station from which I was shipped as a prisoner to Belgium. In Brussels we tramped through much of the city, including the seedy area near the Gare du Nord and along the Rue Verte, which is still a red light

district. The prison at St. Gilles, which we didn't revisit, was reportedly still functioning. And Waterloo has become a busy suburb of Brussels; Fernand's farm is no longer there.

Then we drove to Fexhe-le-Haut-Clocher. It's still isolated: the main highway passes a few kilometres north of it. We easily found the Roberti farm but it was no longer in use. The buildings were deserted and run down, windows were broken, and weeds were growing in the farmyard. An old caretaker told us that the farm was to be put up for auction for a housing development.

Curiosity finally took us to Wavre. It proved to be a busy industrial city south of Brussels. In the main square stands an eloquent memorial to the martyrs of the resistance: obviously the citizenry had been active in fighting the Nazi occupation. Since my Belgian identity card was issued in Wavre, we checked the city map in the display case outside the city hall; and, yes, there is a Chaussée de Bruxelles. In the telephone directory, we found several listings for the name Van Capelle. Coincidence? Or a miracle? Was my passion for football so trivial after all?—it gave me Jan Van Capelle and, with him, guardian angels in the city of Wavre, Dirk the painter, and last but certainly not least, the old farmer Monsieur Degive.

P.S. In March of 1999, after 25 years of repeated enquiries, my Swiss colleague, Jean Neyroud, managed to secure an extract of the 1942 record from the prison of La Chaux-de-Fonds. It stated that M. Schnitzer, prisoner No. 249, a person of the Jewish religion, was returned to the French border on August 28, 1942. Thus, 57 years after throwing me to the Germans, the Swiss police confirmed this event—without an apology...