Memories from the Pale of Settlement: All About Mother

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Mother—unpredictable, remote, a mournful expression on her face. Hiding a secret she refuses to share with anyone. Always afraid that something bad is going to happen, something unexpected that she is powerless to prevent. 'If you don’t run around outside, bad things won't happen to you,' she'd declare morning, noon and night. 'Never go outside with wet hair.' 'Never go out without a sweater before the first of May—and no white shoes before then either.' And of course: 'Don't drink water after eating watermelon' and 'Class trips are an invitation to disaster.' The same held true for youth-group activities and a hike to the top of Givat Ha-Moreh. 'Don’t sing too loud.' 'If you sing in the morning, you’ll cry at night.' Disaster lurks in every corner and must be avoided at all costs. But we can outrun it, Mother knows, if we just act cautious and level-headed.

On rare occasions, she was gay and carefree. Sometimes Father could even get her to laugh. Babies always made her smile—until she remembered that they too were in danger and it was her responsibility to save them. This is simply how it was.

One Shabbat afternoon when I was six, we were lying together on the living room couch that opened up into a bed. I don’t remember where Father and my brother Menachem were at the time. In any case, she was crying. I asked her why, and she answered that everyone had died and only she was left and she didn’t know why and what a pity it was that she hadn’t died too. I was hurt to the bottom of my six-year-old heart. But you have me! I protested.

She made no response. Yet somehow, I find it hard to believe that she was cold and indifferent by nature; after all, she had managed to learn from someone that mothers do guard their young. And yes, she tried to be the perfect mother, in the sense that she shielded us from any physical danger that she could prevent. But her spirit was so scarred that she was incapable of offering warmth, love, kindness. She had to forget the *shtetl* she had come from. The parents she had betrayed. The brother she had abandoned to his fate. The life she had renounced. As far as she was concerned, it was her betrayal that had brought them to their tragic end. So desperate were her efforts to erase them from her memory that they left her with no energy to give anything to anyone.

It was obvious she knew that her family was of a lower social status than Father’s. In Europe, they never would have married in the first place. But even here in Israel, everyone knew that she had "married well"; the trouble is that this particular well had long since run dry. Father was not a person who knew how to accumulate wealth or hold onto it. He thought that money was important; but since he had never known true need, and had been raised to trust that his intellectual abilities (which were the natural result of his social standing and education, or so he'd been taught to believe) would always make it possible for him to earn a living, he didn't consider it important enough to be frugal—or at least not to the degree that Mother felt was necessary to safeguard our future. He wasn’t willing to throw money away, but he was prepared to spend it on nice things.

Since she refused to talk about her past, I was forced to scrounge for whatever crumbs of information I could get. She had two pictures in her

possession—one of Saba (Grandfather) Avraham Chaim, Savta (Grandmother) Mindel, and Uncle Yehezkel together, and the other of Uncle Yehezkel, walking with a friend through the streets of Dombrovitse. Grandfather is wearing a cheap *kapote* (the long, traditional coat of the Jews) and a small cap, indicating that he was not someone of high social standing. He was a small man, atypically swarthy for Eastern Europe, but not for a Jew living there. He was one of the “dark Jews” of the Pale of Settlement. But where had they come from? Did they wander from the Middle East, circle North Africa, pass through Spain, France and Germany, and arrive in Ukraine by way of Poland? Or maybe they had come north from Asia Minor to Eastern Europe? Perhaps they were the descendants of the Celestial Blue Gok Turks, the ancestors of the Khazars. There’s no way of knowing. Based on her stubborn preconceptions and obstinacy alone, Mother could have been an honorary Turk.

Mother told me that her father, Avraham Chaim, had bought and sold goose feathers together with his business partner and neighbor Baruch Fishman, father of Yehoshua (Shaya) Fishman, who showed up on our doorstep in the summer of 1960 with his wife and three children. The Nazis, who were likely the cause of Mother’s silence, actually helped me gather additional bits of information about our family. At the roll call conducted by the Ukrainians under Nazi orders on the eve of the mass slaughter at Sarny on August 27, 1942, the profession of my grandfather, Avraham Chaim Vorona, was listed as a *shmattnik*. Sasha/Yisrael, the young man who translated the document for me, wrinkled his forehead in confusion at the unfamiliar word. Despite Sasha's excellent Hebrew, which he had learned as part of the *Na’aleh* new immigrants' program and during his army service with the *Givati* brigade,

he did not know a single word of Yiddish, having grown up in Soviet Russia; hence he had no way of knowing that a *shmattnik* was a ragman.

In the Dombrovitse memorial volume, Yitzhak Fogelstein wrote about the poverty-stricken Jews of Tsarsky Street whom the Nazis decided were fabulously wealthy individuals who were sucking the life force out of Europe. Among them, I found my grandfather the ragman. Fogelstein portrays him as an honest man of dignity who spent his days traveling among the *goyishe* villagers, from whom he presumably bought the goose feathers and to whom he later sold the quilts and pillows that he fashioned from them. (The process involved stuffing the goose down into old clothes that he sewed together after begging and buying them from people who had grown tired of them.) Yes, my grandfather was a ragman.

From this same roll call, I learned that my Uncle Yehezkel, who was born in 1918, left school after only four grades and became a tailor. It's likely that he learned how to sew quilts from his father, and helped him in his work. When he was murdered in 1942, he was 24 and still unmarried. Poor people married late, and Uncle Yehezkel did not have many worldly goods to offer a potential bride. Fogelstein wrote that my grandfather’s non-Jewish acquaintances in the villages where he used to buy the goose feathers owed him 200 zlotys the day the Nazis poured into western Ukraine—money that they of course immediately denied any knowledge of. This suggests that, apart from being a *shmattnik*, he may also have been a small moneylender of sorts.

In Dombrovitse, "the town of the green forest," I found traces of the Vorona family dating back to around 1830. Someone from our family, possibly named Yosef, lived there with his wife Dishel and produced the two other lines

of the family that I was able to trace. The father of this Yosef was born in Sarny, the killing field, in the early 19th century. One crazy evening while searching the JewishGen site, I discovered an Igor Vorona living in Seattle, Washington and sent him an e-mail. It turned out that he had emigrated to Israel from the Soviet Union with his parents and grandfather, and his grandfather's father, Zvi Hirsch, had been born in Rovno in 1880. Igor's grandfather, Reuven, left Rovno with the retreating Russian army in 1919, and settled in what came to be called Voroshilovgrad. Igor's parents moved to Israel, where he grew up, but Igor later moved to the States. Thanks to him, I managed to get to an unknown Vorona who had lived, possibly in Sarny or Rovno, in the mid-18th century and was the forebear of all the other Voronas. All of them shared the name Zvi Hirsch, a common thread binding all the generations and virtually every branch of the family. Likewise, all of them were small tradesmen and none of them were rich. And something else important: the name Vorona in the Slavic languages is written Ворона, meaning "raven." Obviously the Voronas did not look particularly Slavic—or they were descended from the Vikings…

Savta Mindel, on the other hand, was something else entirely. In the picture I mentioned sits a strikingly blonde woman, her hair carefully gathered at the nape of her neck (or perhaps it was a wig—yes, it must have been a wig). She had light blue eyes, unmistakably Slavic cheekbones, and tightly pursed lips. Savta Mindel was born in 1886 to the Dubelstein family from Bereznitse, a village a few kilometers south of Dombrovitse. She married my grandfather Avraham Chaim in 1906, and moved with him to his hometown of Dombrovitse. For eight years, she was unable to bring a healthy child into the world. All her babies arrived early or died in infancy. In a state of great despair,

she went with Saba Avraham Chaim to see the Stoliner Rebbe. Before the couple had even set food in the rebbe's chamber, he called out to them without lifting his eyes from his holy book: "Mrs. Vorona, go home and do not worry. A daughter will be born to you. You will call her Alte (Yiddish for "old woman") and she will grow old." This family legend, which Mother once told me during one of her better moments, might have been just a pleasant fable, except for the chilling fact that Mother was the only daughter to remain alive from either the Vorona or Dubelstein families…

When Mother arrived in what was then called Palestine, the Jewish Agency clerk took a look at her papers and muttered disdainfully: "What kind of a name is Alte? That's not a name! We'll call you Elisheva!" And that became her name. I never managed to glean the least bit of information about her mother's family, despite traveling to Bereznitse, a tiny village southeast of Sarny, most of whose residents were Jewish. Once upon a time, a famous hassidic rebbe made his home there. A *babushka* (old woman, in Russian), who looked 200 years old but was actually only 76, came out of a wooden cabin painted green and gold, straight out of Hansel and Gretel, and told us that the entire village had been inhabited by Jews, including the house she lived in. As a young girl, she had worked in a Jewish boarding house in the village. She bade us farewell with great sadness and thanked Jesus the savior for giving her the chance to meet such nice people.

Savta Mindel had three siblings, all of them married with families. On August 26, 1942, they, their children, and their parents, Moshe and Dobrushka Dubelstein, were sent on a forced march of 17 kilometers through the splendid forests of the Rovno district to the killing grounds at Sarny. Somewhere along

the way, the Ukrainian guards ordered the marchers to stop and rest. They were told to sit down and look at the ground. Then their children were torn from their arms and the guards began to toss them from one to the other and kick them like footballs. An eye witness who survived recounted that the little ones bleated like slaughtered goats while their parents tore their hair out, beat their breasts, and thrashed about on the ground begging the guards to stop this cruelty. The "game" was halted and the Ukrainians said calmly that it had all been in fun. And these wretched souls preferred to believe them. Or perhaps they were afraid of what would happen should they escape. Maybe the bullets would get them, and their babies would be left at the mercy of these brutes? They trudged on toward Sarny. There, the more senior angels of hell awaited them. Were the young Dubelstein children among the marchers? What did Savta Dobrushka do? I too am a grandmother. What would I have done if my precious grandchild had been being kicked savagely from one boot to another? Would I have lost my mind? Yes, I imagine I would have. After reading the description of the brutal football game in the forests between Bereznitse and Sarny, I knew that my mother was right—disaster does await us at every turn. The trouble is, we never know where it will spring from, and what form it will take.

Mother’s Aunt Leah, the sister of Savta Mindel, had "gone astray" and married a Communist, following him to the workers' paradise some time after 1919. They had two daughters, Genia and Dusia. Her husband disappeared in the Great Purges of Stalin, and fearing that she too would be arrested and her daughters left at the mercy of strangers, she exiled herself by choice to Shadrinsk in Siberia . No one bothered her there. Her daughters married, and I

met her granddaughter Raya in an industrial suburb of Moscow in 1993. She was blonde and blue-eyed like Savta Mindel and looked a lot like my oldest daughter, Sigal. At the time, she was 35 and had two sweet little boys. Amazingly, she married a Jew, someone by the last name of Gershon, but her Jewishness was a vague remnant of family legend. She worked in a factory whose employees populated the entire suburb, and lived in one of those endless apartment blocks that the Soviet regime was so good at building for its workers. When her girlfriends at the plant heard that she was having a guest from Israel, they bought her *The Jewish Cookbook* so that she would know what to make for me… I lost contact with her after Father died. He was the only one in the family who could correspond with her in Russian.

I haven't the faintest idea how the Dubelsteins earned a living. Apparently, they were a little better off than the Voronas, since Savta Mindel was the only woman of her age in Dombrovitse who knew how to read and write and who understood the prayers. Mother told me that during the Kol Nidrei prayer, all the women would crowd around her in the women's section to watch her finger move across the page.

Grandmother must have been extremely meticulous when it came to keeping the house and clothing clean and tidy. How else to explain Mother's pressing the sheets with sweet-smelling laundry starch and dipping them in bluing after washing them by hand in a metal basin over a fire lit in our yard. After the laundry had dried, she would spray it with some water to moisten it a bit and then iron it all carefully and place it pile by pile—everything laid out just so—on the shelves of the wardrobe. There was nothing like sinking into a bed laid with linens freshly washed, starched, blued and pressed by Mother. I can

still smell the wonderful fragrance wafting up from those sheets, and feel the pleasant roughness against my skin.

Savta Mindel was probably very strict with my mother. When Mother was 14, she “escaped” one Sabbath morning to the *Halutz ha-Tzair* (young pioneer) youth-group meeting on the banks of the Horin river, which flowed past the little shtetl, and—horror of horrors—muddied her good white stockings. On the way home, hoping against hope that no one would see her, she ran into Saba Avraham Chaim coming home from shul. “Hurry up,” Saba said, “she’s already waiting for you at home…” Mother climbed up onto the roof, took off the stockings, shimmied down them into her room, changed to a clean pair, and in the dead of night, washed out the filthy stockings and hung them out to dry on the rooftop!

A few days before Shavuot that year, Savta Mindel went to visit her mother in Bereznitse. Wanting to make a loving gesture that would also show how grown up she was, Mother decided to handle the holiday preparations herself. She toiled away, baking cheese dumplings and cheese-and-raisin kreplach and flemni, but got so carried away that she used up all the cheese, sour cream and butter stored in the pantry. Savta Mindel was not happy. Mother’s feelings were hurt—hadn't she only had the best of intentions? But this memory didn’t stop her from criticizing every attempt of mine to take part in household chores. In the end, I simply gave up trying, and earned myself a reputation as someone who never helped Mother around the house… In the end, when I left home I didn’t even know how to make an omelet.

Uncle Yehezkel appeared in the picture too. Unlike his father, he was clean-shaven, wore a European suit, and was bare-headed. This is also how

he appeared in the photograph taken of him with a nameless friend in the streets of Dombrovitse. He had a curly blonde forelock and bright blue eyes like his mother, and didn't look anything like the dark-skinned Jews. The truth is, I strongly suspect that the Dubelsteins were descended from one of the Viking conquerors intermarried with local Slavs who had converted to Judaism—or perhaps from a Jewish girl who had become too friendly with a blonde-haired, blue-eyed goy.

In 1930, Mother rebelled against the status quo. Her involvement in Zionist movement activities earned her the staunch disapproval of Savta Mindel, and the arguments at Tsarskygasse corner of Bletnishegasse became louder and more vocal. With four years of schooling at the Tarbut school, all Mother could hope for was marriage to a tailor like her brother, and a life like the one that her parents and their parents before them had led in Dombrovitse, Bereznitse, Rokytna or, at the most, Sarny or Rovno. Her chances of finding a *shidduch* in either of those "metropolises" looked bleak indeed. And who wanted an arranged marriage in 1930 anyway? Everyone talked about love, although a smart girl knew enough not to take any of it too seriously. The town was peaceful and pretty. The waters of the Horin were clear, the fields lush and sprawling, the forests vast and mysterious. But even a girl who spoke only Yiddish had already heard of other places, America for example, the Borochov kibbutz in Lodz, Palestine—anywhere outside this leafy cage. And in fact, two of Mother's aunts and uncles, Avraham Vorona and his wife, and Feige Vorona and her husband, had both emigrated to the United States in 1913-1914. Had Mother been born at the time, she would surely have envied them or tried to follow in their footsteps. But by the time Mother reached the age when young

people run away from home, the gates of America had already closed. As a result, there was no choice left but to be either a Zionist or a Communist—and Zionism was the less traumatic of the two. At least they didn't totally deny their Jewishness.

At the time, there were only a handful of goyim in the shtetl, mainly the few Ukrainians who had left their farms in favor of an urban livelihood of some kind. But whatever trade they picked, it meant competition for the Jews of the town—and they, of course, did not believe in Jesus. There were those who said that they even slaughtered little children to use their blood for making matzah. Alright, that one was probably just a story, but on the other hand, what could you expect from Christ killers? Mother went most of her life without ever speaking to a goy, Ukrainian or otherwise. For one thing, she spoke nothing but Yiddish. Besides, where do you think she picked up the idea that if you don’t run around outside, bad things won't happen to you? It’s safe to assume, from Savta Mindel. But on the other hand, Savta was stepping up her control, and there’s nothing like tightening the reins to make the horse throw off its rider.

Apparently, it was that summer that the dog incident took place. Mother never told me exactly what happened, but this much she did say: "Those young *shkotzim* (a derogatory name for gentiles) set their dogs on me." I can just picture the scene in my mind's eye, how one afternoon Mother went to the orchard of one of the Ukrainians to buy some peaches. Some young boys playing in the yard saw her approach the gate. “Here comes that dark little Jew girl,” said one. “What do you know?” said the other one. “It’s been a long time since I saw anything that small and black and ugly.” “They’re really afraid of dogs,” the first one egged him on. “Let’s sic the dogs on her!” The exact words

are only in my imagination, but the dogs were indeed set loose on her, and Mother carries a large scar on her shin to this day. She never let us have a dog. Hated dogs to the depths of her soul. Declared that only goyim had dogs, and that she knew what dogs were capable of.

It's possible that the dog incident helped turn her into a Zionist. In any event, Mother lacked a respectable way to leave home, and she had never set foot outside the *shtetl*. She went to Baruch Fishman, and told him that her father wanted a small sum of money as a one-day loan. Fishman saw no reason to refuse. She took the money, crossed the river, walked the few kilometers to the train station, and bought a ticket to Lodz, where she joined the local *hachshara* (a Zionist commune preparing potential *chalutzim* for *aliya*). This was something she actually *did* tell me about. It was the most revolutionary act of her life. To understand how significant it was, you would have to know her. She was the biggest conformist I ever met (see above: white shoes from the first of May…). How did she do it? How did she manage to get off the train in Lodz without speaking practically a word of Polish, and make it from there to the Borochov kibbutz? Perhaps someone waited for her there? Maybe Dina, her distant, controlling cousin from Sarny, who had already left for *hachshara* before her?

In any event, she told me more than once about the thrilling journey to Lodz, the glorious scenery along the way, the wide world that suddenly opened up for her. She said almost nothing about the *hachshara* itself. Along with all the other pioneers-in-training, she worked twelve hours a day at some factory in Lodz. Their earnings went into a communal kitty to run the kibbutz and finance their aliyah to pre-State Palestine. The only thing Mother told me about

life in the commune was that the first year, as Seder night approached, she was hit by a wave of homesickness. In her mind's eye, she saw her parents and brother gathered around the table laden with every imaginable delicacy, singing the Haggadah, and she was filled with regret. Recalling the perfect cleanliness of Savta Mindel's, she decided that she would make her own kosher Passover. And so it was that at the end of a backbreaking day of work, she laundered, starched, blued, and pressed her bed linens; and before going to work the day before Passover, she laid out a special bed for herself just like at home. All day long she waited for the moment when she would get back from work and drink in the familiar fragrance of starched sheets. But alas, when she walked into the living quarters, it turned out that a young pioneer passing through the city had decided to come in and grab a quick nap, and lain down on her wonderful bed in all his filthy clothes! And she cried. Oh how she cried. Not so much for the bed that was dirtied as for thoughts of home.

Two years went by before she visited her parents. Savta Mindel decided that it was better to forgive her rebellious daughter than risk losing her entirely. Together with Saba Avraham Chaim, she waited for Mother at the train station across the Horin River. She was 44 at the time. In the two years since Mother had last seen her, Savta's hair had turned completely white! Her parents tried to convince her to come home, but it was too late. She was a different person now, even if she loved and missed them.

Three years later, in 1935, she received an immigration certificate and made aliyah on the ship *Polonia* together with the sportsmen of the Fourth Maccabiah games. She never saw her parents again, since the commune could not pay for another trip to Dombrovitse. This, then, was her final memory

of her parents—two little figures, one black, the other white, standing downcast at the town's railway station, waving good-bye. Before she left, her mother gave her a giant parcel with two large quilts, a small cover for a baby, two pillows, and a smaller pillow for a baby, all of them filled with the finest goose down. Believe it or not, the comforters traveled to Lodz. They sailed on the *Polonia* from Constanza to Haifa. They passed through the workers' shacks in the orchards of Nes Tziona. They made their way form Nes Tziona to Afula. My brother Menahem grew up with them. I grew up with them. His daughters grew up with them and my daughters grew up with them. Eventually, they started to fall apart, and I was forced to throw them away one by one. But I've held onto the baby cover as a keepsake.

For many years, these quilts were my only tangible reminder of an entire world—a world that Mother rarely allowed me the slightest glimpse of before slamming the door shut again. Like the time when I showed signs of rebellion and Mother called me "Kutza." I asked her what it meant, and she said: "In Dombrovitse, we had a cow named Kutza with a lopped-off tail. She gave lots of milk, but when we'd finish milking her, she would kick over the bucket and spill the milk .You're like Kutza: smart, pretty, but good for nothing." After that explanation, I didn't feel much like bringing up any more old memories from Dombrovitse. Whenever I would ask to do something that Mother was opposed to, Father would chuckle behind her back and softly tease: "In Dombrovitse, they never heard of such things…"

In any event, the goose down comforters were wonderful, both during our childhood at 17 Hashachar Street and after I married, in the 1970s, when we didn't yet have central heating. On those cold winter nights when we'd see

our own breath hanging like smoke clouds in the air, Savta Mindel's quilts always came to the rescue.

Life at the Nes Tziona collective farm was no easier than it had been at the Borochov kibbutz. After the orange-picking season of 1935 was over, Mother, like the other girls on kibbutz, was left without work. Someone said that they were looking for women workers at Kvutzat Kinneret, so Mother, Dina, and a few other girls decided to make the trip. En route up north, their train stopped in Afula. Dina wanted to walk over to Kibbutz Merhavia to see an old friend who had come to Palestine before her, but Mother wasn't interested. Dina told her she'd only be back the following day to take the next train up to the Kinneret, and what would Mother do all by herself in Afula where she didn't know a soul? Mother had always relied on Dina as her protector. Nothing ever frightened Dina —Jew or goy, man or woman. She could work 12, 16 hours a day without tiring, and punch out anyone bothersome with a blow that would knock him flat. She was also unbelievably ugly. I remember her years later, when Mother would send me to "Aunt" Dina's, in the Sharon settlement where she lived for a "vacation." Besides her own housekeeping chores, Dina had a tremendous egg farm with 3,000 hens that she ran with a firm hand, putting her children to work the moment they got home from school, and her husband the minute he came home from an exhausting day of work at Solel Boneh. They offered a weak protest, but no one could stand up to Dina. The family was always in excellent financial shape. Their hard work paid off, but her children never got to their homework until they were drooping with fatigue, and indeed they never went on to higher education.

Mother was made of entirely different stuff. Physically, she was quite strong, but she would never have dared run a business and she apparently inherited her mother's appreciation for learning. She always pushed my brother and me to work hard at our studies even if it meant having to manage without our help around the house. She did this in various ways, some of them indirect and annoying, like reprimanding us over the level of our work; but at other times she would simply say: "Better you should prepare for that test than help me. Something greater will come of you than just being a housewife. A woman, you should know, needs a profession. It's not the money—it's the independence. A woman has to be independent." Imagine, Mother a closet feminist! And Father—the finest, gentlest, most generous man in the world—and still she came to the conclusion that it was better to be independent…

But let's get back to cousin Dina and the trip to Kinneret. Mother already knew how to tell the difference between Dina's usefulness as a bodyguard and her other qualities, and she had no interest whatsoever in going to Merhavia to meet some girls who had nothing to do with her. Dina stood her ground and went on her way. Mother stayed at the station, trudging through the mud to the little kiosk nearby. Standing there was a short, curly-haired fellow who had noticed her from a distance.

"Shalom, pioneer," he said. "My name is Avraham Tomashov. Who are you, and what are you doing here all by yourself?"

"My name is Elisheva Vorona," Mother answered. "We, that is, my girlfriends and I, are on our way to Kvutzat Kinneret, and I got off the train because my friends went to Merhavia to meet someone."

“You’re on your way to Kinneret? What do they have there that we don’t have in Afula?” asked Tomashov.

“Work,” answered Mother curtly.

“What sort of work? Oh, you probably mean farm work. Listen, stay here in Afula. I’ll set you up right away with a great job. Just get on the bike.”

It’s hard for me to believe that Mother trusted this stranger, whom she'd just met, got up on his bike, held onto his waist, and rode off with him into the unknown. But that’s just what she did. She rode with him to the other end of the city, where the Hoz family lived. Shneur Zalman Hoz was head of the local town council at the time, and his wife was looking for a housekeeper. Mother ended up working there until she married Father. No, my father was not Avraham Tomashov but a different man, Baruch Lender, whose Uncle Yoel was married to Fanya, the sister of Avraham Tomashov. Yes, Avraham Tomashov pursued her, but she chose Father, whom she met by way of the family connection. When Mother got married, Mrs. Hoz gave her a large set of fine china from Czechoslovakia, with a geometric pattern in silver and pink. I still have a few of the pieces.

Zalman Hoz’s daughter-in-law, Sarah, was my teacher in sixth grade. She was very strict, and did not come across as a warm person, but I learned a huge amount from her. She taught geography and arithmetic. Geography was her strong suit, and it was while wandering through the atlas for her assignments that I started planning future voyages from South America to Kamchatka, India to Ethiopia. Mathematics, on the other hand, were not her forte. Nor were they mine, so it didn’t really make much difference. She lived with her husband in the home of the senior Hoz's on the edge of town. The one

time I was there, I didn't know that my mother used to clean this very house from top to bottom, long before I was born.

A small photo from 1937 shows Father, Mother, Avraham Tomashov (the eternal suitor), and Tzippora Alperovitch, if I'm not mistaken, all of them sun-browned and leaning on a pile of hay in the field, facing Balfouria I think, the wind playing with their hair. Mother looks happy and in love, small and dark, her slender figure accentuated by her shirtwaist dress. Father is wearing a white shirt that brings out his coal-black hair, relaxed, grinning, happy, as are the other two. Savta Feige , my grandmother-to-be, objected to the romance, saying it was not an appropriate match, but in Palestine everything was different, everything was new, like the Yiddish song of those days: "*Dart ahin vel ich gayn, in mein land vos iz frei, dart ahin vel ich gayn, vu es iz altz fun dos nei*."[1] In Afula of the '30s, class distinctions were considered something shameful that harked back to the decadent past of *galus* (Exile). Since Savta Feige had already become used to doing so many things here that were new to her—like ironing the dresses of her mother-in-law, Savta Chana, for one—there wasn't much point in fighting. Grandfather, Saba David, who was apparently Father's role model, never wasted time on arguments that led nowhere. Everybody in town knew there was no way to engage him in a good quarrel.

Happiness, to quote the well-known Brazilian song, is like a feather the wind carries through the air—and the wind at the time was very strong. In 1939, Mother received a letter from Dombrovitse. Her worried parents thought that they had been mistaken to remain there. War was liable to break out at any moment, and their only recourse, given their modest finances, was a formal

[1] "That's where I'm going/to my land that is free/That's where I'm going/where all things are new (S. Kurtneyer).

petition from their daughter, who was already a citizen of Palestine. Mother and Father were not yet married at the time, although there had been talk of a wedding. She wrote to her parents that it would be much simpler to send the application as Mrs. Elisheva Lender, the wife of an established man—a partner (with his father) in the largest bakery in the north of the country, a landowner with his own home. They were married, but even before the request could be sent, World War II broke out. Dombrovitse was taken over by the Soviets, making the prospect of legal immigration to Palestine even more difficult than before. And illegal means were something the elderly Voronas knew nothing about—nor did my parents. In April 1941, my brother was born. Savta Feige, who was a born copywriter, decided that he would be called Menahem (“one who comforts,” in Hebrew), to console us against the disasters that awaited us. Letters from her older son Vala, who lived in Warsaw, had long since stopped arriving, and rumor had it that he had been killed trying to make it to the Russian-occupied zone. On June 22 of that year, the Germans entered Volhynia.

Chava Rothschild (then Chava Siletsky), who later became the kindergarten teacher of my three daughters, was sent to Saba David's bakery to buy challahs for Shabbat. She was 11 at the time. All of a sudden, she recounted to me some sixty years later, Mother came in crying, shrieking and tearing her hair. Little Chava went home and asked her mother: “What happened to Elisheva? Baruch doesn't love her anymore?” “No, dear,” her mother answered. “She heard that the Germans have entered her birthplace. And she knows that her parents are doomed.”

I have no idea how the rest of the war passed for Mother. Rumors of what was happening in occupied Europe reached pre-State Palestine, of course, but I don't know how much they really penetrated. Savta Feige, for example, refused to believe that the same officers and gentlemen she had encountered in Vladimir Volinsk during World War I—the ones who had clicked their heels, bowed to her, and advised her to leave, since the town was within range of their artillery—could be engaged in the wholesale slaughter of the Jews of Poland and Russia. I imagine that the Yishuv knew on some level but preferred to repress the knowledge and carry on with their lives since there was not much they could do. Even after the war had ended, and the survivors reached Palestine and told their horrific tales, they were not always believed. My friend Esti's mother, Soika Bank, who had been in the Warsaw Ghetto and in Lublin and was saved by virtue of her Aryan appearance, was one of the first to arrive. She came to Kibbutz Neve Yam, and the entire kibbutz gathered in the dining hall to hear what she had to say. Hemda Koslowsky, the mother of Nira, another friend of mine, was a member of the kibbutz. She told me (when I was only 13) that at the end of Soika's hair-raising description, everyone left the dining hall in silence, whispering to one another: "Poor thing. She's lost her mind…"

I guess that, like the others, Mother carried on. Father left the bakery and Uncle Yoel Artzi arranged a job for him at Tnuva (a major agricultural cooperative). He was sent to work at the Tnuva plant in Tiberias, a large and sophisticated operation, to train him for setting up a branch in Afula. Mother told me more than once, in that laconic way of hers, that her years in Tiberias were the happiest time of her life. True, she miscarried twice there, but in the end I

was born, in October 1947. In early 1948, all of us went back to Afula—Mother, Father, Menahem and me.

When I was around six, I divided the world into normal people and people who had come "from there." The latter were dangerous in my eyes, as if they carried some contagious disease. They told stories that weren't intended for the ears of a six year old. But no one cared. And I would go to bed at night focusing my eyes on a point in the room that was obviously from here and could not possibly belong to "there." A plain white wall or ordinary ceiling didn't qualify; they could be from anywhere—like "there," for instance. The heavy wardrobe with the glass display case in the middle was somewhat better, but it too was suspect since Savta Feige said that they'd also had closets like that "over there." The safest thing was a kitschy oil painting of the Kinneret by an unknown painter, which graced the wall of our "living room," that is, the big space that also served as my parents' bedroom at night. That's why I would end up creeping in there and cuddling up in between them. Whatever happened, they would protect me. What an idiot I was! Little did I know that Mother and Father were no safeguard against anything. At that point, Mother already understood that she might have been the one to seal her parents' fate. The Germans and Ukrainians were too far away and nebulous to blame; it was easier to take the guilt on herself. It was obvious that terrible things had happened there. The wife of Richter the housepainter, who lived at the far end of the neighborhood, said they couldn't have children because the Nazis had sterilized her. I didn't understand what that meant, but it didn't sound good. There was hair growing out of her face. She said that was also because of the Nazis. Auntie "Dim," the widow of a rabbi from Antwerp, took off her white silk

shirt in the middle of the living room at Savta Feige's, where she rented a room, and showed us all, without any shame, her naked, scarred back. Somebody bad "over there," in a place she called Auschwitz, had flogged her with a whip.

In the fall of 1953 when I was in first grade, Esterke Perlman, whose father was a police officer, shared a deep dark secret with us during recess: Her father, who had been in Auschwitz, told her that the Germans had taken Jews and made soap out of them after putting them in gas chambers and burning their bodies. I was six and a half at the time. My mother must have known about this. And she did cry on that Shabbat afternoon that I mentioned, and curse her cruel fate. But she didn't really know everything. In the winter of 1960, Shaya Fishman, his wife Shifra, and their three little children suddenly showed up in Afula. They had survived the war and been allowed to return to Poland. In 1960, they were granted permission to leave. They could have emigrated to the U.S., but Shifra decided that they already knew what the goyim were capable of, and none of them could ever be trusted. They were going to Israel. Shifra was 37 at the time. Her oldest daughter, Bilha, was the same age as me. Father set up Shaya with a job as a distributor of dairy products for Tnuva .This was very tough work, but it paid well. They worked very hard together and saved every penny. A few years later, Shifra opened up a store for babies' and children's clothing, which was a great success. For someone who had spent five whole years in the forests—first as a hunted animal and then as a 16-year-old girl among dozens of men in the advance unit of Fyodorov's partisans—and managed to stay alive and sane, no undertaking was too difficult.

That first Shabbat that they were in Afula, Mother made a festive meal in their honor. They made the long trek from Eliyahu Lifschitz's shack, which they were renting, to the workers' housing project, where we lived at the time. Mind you, Mother hated having guests, both because of the bother and because she saw them as taking food out of her little ones' mouths. I can hardly remember any guests in our home. I was never allowed to bring home more than two girls at a time—and even they were not welcomed with open arms. But for the Fishmans, Mother opened up the big table in the living room, spread the colored tablecloth reserved strictly for holidays, and took out the good Czechoslovakian china given to her by Mrs. Hoz for her wedding. On this she heaped the best of Volhynian cuisine: soup with kreplach, chopped liver, *klops* (meat loaf) made with egg and mashed potato, homemade pickles, and for dessert, stewed prunes. Father sent to Migdan's store to get sunflower seeds and nuts.

After the meal, Shaya began to talk about what had happened and how he had survived. He spoke in Yiddish, but I knew Yiddish. I understood everything. Bilha not only understood Yiddish but knew the whole story off by heart, and didn't look the least bit upset. Her little brother, too, sat quietly in the armchair next to the radio, leafing through some picture book that Father had given him. I later remembered only bits and pieces of the Fishmans' stories. Shaya told us that the night before the slaughter, he and some other young men and women had decided to flee to the forest. They passed by the Voronas on the way and asked Yehezkel to join them. They were all going to the forest alone, without their parents. Uncle Yehezkel told them that he couldn't desert his elderly parents, who had no one else. When Mother heard this, she could

not contain herself and wailed inconsolably. Many years later, I read Fogelstein's testimony in the Dombrovitse memorial volume. He recounted that the first to be murdered was my grandfather, Avraham Chaim Vorona. He had tried to flee the ghetto on the night of August 25, 1942 by jumping over his fence onto Bletnishe Street, which was outside the ghetto, but the Ukrainian neighbor from across the way shot and killed him on the spot. I imagine the Vorona family had planned on trying to escape together, and Grandfather was sent out first to "test the waters," on the assumption that if something happened to him, Grandmother still had her son to rely on.

The stories went on and on, and when Shifra got to the part where she pleaded for her life before one of the Ukrainian Banderovcis[2], asking if he too had a sister or mother, I said Enough! and suggested to Bilha that we go out and play. This scene was wiped from my memory for many years, and even after it came back to me, I remembered only the fragments described above. Everything else, I later learned from historical records of what took place in the Rovno district. This additional information partly added to the picture and partly contradicted it. For example, Fishman didn't know about, or didn't mention (or I simply didn't *hear* him mention), Grandfather's attempt to break out of the ghetto. Not that it changed anything: the escapees' chances of survival were very small, and the older they were, the worse their prospects. Besides, the Ukrainian villagers owed him money, making his chances even poorer.

It was only much later that I learned that the Fishmans were part of a group that planned to blow up the bridge over the Horin river—the one that

[2] Members of the Nationalist Ukrainian Militia, which was headed by Stephan Bandera. Their attitude towards the Jews was no better than that of the Nazis, and indeed, they later became Nazi collaborators. Bandera was assassinated in Munich (probably by a KGB agent). He is venerated in the Ukraine as a national hero.

connected the town with the railway station en route to Sarny. The group had formed after word got out that the purpose of the "roll call" in the marketplace the following morning was to bring the Jews to the station and place them on a train to Sarny. Ukrainian friends (yes, there actually were some) told them that pits had already been prepared for them in the forest next to that city. The head of the Judenrat in Dombrovitse forbade the group from carrying out their plan, with the reasoning that the Germans had already ordered such a roll call in the past and then sent all the Jews back to their homes. It was possible, he said, that the Germans indeed wished to assemble all the local Jews in Sarny. In vain, the young men protested that all the Jews of Rovno had already been slaughtered, and the situation was hopeless. He argued that he could not take the responsibility upon himself, and they accepted the verdict.

The Fishmans fled to the forest, all the brothers and sisters. They were familiar with the woods and their pathways, and had never led an easy life, so that indeed both Shaya and Yehiel ultimately survived. All the others fell one by one, some at the hands of the Germans; others, the Ukrainians; some by sickness, some by hunger. Perhaps Uncle Yehezkel had a chance, but he went with Savta Mindel to the roll call in the marketplace; in fact, this is all that can be said with a reasonable degree of certainty, for what took place afterwards branches off into several stories, each of which could be theirs—although I have my theories as to which story they chose.

In Dombrovitse, 4,372 Jews were imprisoned in the ghetto. When the Soviets retreated, at least 250 Jews who belonged to the Communist Party (the Voronas did not) were evacuated along with them; but besides these, hundreds of young men and women fled by train and on foot. All of them left their parents

behind. And most of the parents begged their children not to leave. What, after all, made them "Communists"? If their father was a Communist? Their grandfather? It is hard to estimate how many of these young men and women made it through the war, since most of them later joined the Red Army, and those who survived remained in the Soviet Union. The group that the Fishmans escaped with just before the slaughter included several dozen young people, if not more. For the most part, their parents did not support the move either. Some of those who survived recounted how their parents begged and pleaded with them not to leave. In any event, not every Jew inside the ghetto reported to the marketplace, although the majority did. Heavily guarded by Ukrainian gendarmes and 20 S.S. men, they were marched over the bridge on the Horin. But there a surprise awaited them. When the first half of the group reached the bridge, and those at the head of the line were already inside the station, shots rang out. The marchers, who until then had been following orders, made a desperate break for freedom. The Ukrainian police made no special effort to hunt them down. Only 200 were shot by the guards. Some of the police were bribed, and others saw no point in exerting themselves chasing Jews who were anyway such easy prey. After all, where would they go? Some 1,500 people broke away from the line. Were Uncle Yehezkel and Savta Mindel among them? It's very unlikely. Did Savta Mindel tell Uncle Yehezkel he was free to go? Perhaps. But if she were at all like my mother, she held tight to his hand and didn't let him out of her grasp. Eight hundred of those who escaped made it to Vysotsk and were liquidated along with the Jews of that town on September 9, 1942. Only five of them survived. Another 500 fled elsewhere. Some of these returned to Dombrovitse and tried to get into the courtyards of the Ukrainians;

in most cases, they were turned away. Others fled to the forests. The majority were hunted down one by one in the ensuing weeks, while others—including many mothers with children—turned themselves in to the Germans voluntarily, preferring a speedy death over a long, drawn-out struggle with sickness, hunger, and cold in the coming winter months.

Of all these, only fifty had the good fortune to make it to liberation. Uncle Yehezkel was not among them. And certainly not Savta Mindel. My guess is that they remained in line at the train station and were taken to Sarny. Many of those who stayed in that line had families that they didn't wish to abandon, or were old people who saw no chance of escaping. I can see them as they stood looking on, calling out to those who fled: "Run! Run for your lives!" If Uncle Yehezkel and Savta Mindel made it to Sarny, surely they earned themselves a place in the sixth circle of hell, which Dante designated for heretics. Was not their only fault believing in God the wrong way?

Inside the forest, about one and a half kilometers from the train track, a huge area containing three large wooden shacks was fenced off. In addition, three enormous pits had been dug there. When the Jews of Dombrovitse arrived at the enclosure, they were no more than 2,000. At the site, there were already many Jews from the surrounding towns— Bereznitse, Tomasz-Gorod, Klosov, Rokitna, and smaller places—and they were quickly joined by the Jews from the Sarny ghetto. In all, there were apparently 14,000 Jews there.

The first two days, the murderers were occupied with rounding up their victims. Here and there, Jews who aroused suspicion, or simply fell into the hands of a bored killer, were shot. The major part of the slaughter apparently took place from the early afternoon hours of August 27 into the 28. For the

preceding two days, the people had been held in the blazing August heat without food or water. The shacks held mainly women and children, who cried out piteously for a drop to drink. The Ukrainian gendarmes gave them filthy water from a nearby ditch in exchange for money and jewels. At 2:00 p.m., the first groups were taken to be executed in a corner of the forest. They were forced to strip and descend into the pits, where they were shot in the back of the head. In the meantime, a group of young men got together and cut down the fence, and 3,500 people broke out of the enclosure, trampling one another in their rush to escape. The Ukrainian guards and S.S. men began shooting at them. Some 2,500 were immediately gunned down, but many others managed to flee into the forest. (One hundred of these were fortunate enough to live to see the liberation.) What took place between the breaching of the fence and the massacre inside was a modern version of hell. The three shacks with their occupants were set on fire by the Germans to draw the escapees back to the prison compound. The wives and children of the fleeing men were burned alive, and their screams could be heard far into the distance. The slaughter became more frenzied, as every part of the compound was turned into a slaughterhouse. The most wretched were the little children, who were flung alive into the pits, to be blown apart immediately by hand grenades thrown in their wake. Those who died instantly were the fortunate ones; the wounded were buried alive. Babies were ripped from their mothers' arms and their heads shattered against trees or the ground. Others were torn in two while still alive. Mothers crazed with grief ran about wildly, holding the bloodstained little bodies to their breasts. Where was Savta Mindel? Where was Uncle Yehezkel? Where were the Dubelsteins, their children, their grandchildren?

Did Mother know all this? After the war, Dina's cousin from Sarny, Jakov , who had survived the killing ground in the forest, also made it to Palestine. I got to know him well. He had lost a wife in her ninth month in the Sarny woods. In the DP camp Bad Reichenhalle in Germany, he met Miryam , Dina's sister; they married there and immigrated to pre-State Palestine. Mother told me once, in her usual terse way, that he had left his pregnant wife behind in the pit and run for his life. It was obvious that she was privately critical of him. To her way of thinking, he should have died along with her. But he lived, and went on to have a son and daughter from whom he was blessed to see grandchildren before he died. He was a smiling, good-natured person. In the brief testimony that he gave in 1946 , while residing in the D.P. camp, he did not mention all the horrifying details of the massacre at Sarny, nor the wife and unborn child that he had left behind. But I imagine he told his wife the story, and she told it to Mother, and Mother knew.

At first, Mother would listen every day before the 1:00 news to the radio show "Does Anybody Know?" (for people seeking loved ones who had survived). But later on, she stopped talking about her family. Each year on the 14th of the Jewish month of Elul, she would light a memorial candle, and she would go to synagogue on holidays to recite the Yizkor prayer, but she simply stopped talking about them. I believe that she wanted to forget the whole thing. She had other concerns on her mind. Menachem was drafted and she needed to worry about the future, which left little room for worrying about the past. She made no effort to keep up with the Fishmans, although they did try to keep in touch with her. It wasn't that they were asking anything of her—she just didn't want to be around them. They were a reminder of her betrayal.

Around the time that the Fishmans came to Afula, Mother found out that a first cousin of hers, Yosef Kaufman, whose family had lived in the village of Breste a few kilometers from Dombrovitse, had survived, immigrated to Israel back in 1949, and was living with his family in Kfar Saba. I remember him as a strong, tall man who was very good with his hands. He had a beautifully tended garden around his little house—unlike our overgrown yard in Afula (Father always preferred composing a chess problem to tending our garden, and Mother did whatever she could, but without success). I remember his daughters, who were small and skinny, and seemed strange to me on account of their religious customs. I purposely lost touch with them. They were all bound up with "there"—a place I wanted to pretend had never existed. It was too frightening.

Their father, the son of Zelda Vorona (sister of my grandfather Araham Chaim Vorona) and Yaakov Kaufman of Breste, was a master of any trade you can think of, from tailoring and carpentry to metal working, gardening, tanning, and a few other crafts that I've probably forgotten. He was born in 1914, the same year as my mother, and was one of nine children, all of whom were tailors in Breste. The village was home to only a few Jewish families. All their religious needs were served in Dombrovitse, and the children would walk several kilometers into town each day through the forest to attend school, first at *heder*, and later at the Tarbut Jewish school. Yosef wasn't a great student as a child. In 1996, he told the interviewer from the Spielberg project that the forest was a lot more interesting to him, and he spent long hours there. His love of the forest would later save his life. In Operation Barbarossa, he and his younger brother Tzvi were conscripted into the Red Army. His brother was

killed in battle. Yosef was captured by the Germans and spent several terrible weeks in a detention camp set up for the prisoners. They received no food at all and were put to work at strenuous forced labor on the assumption that they would soon die and others would take their place. Several days later, no trace of grass was left in the camp. Everything was eaten by the wretched prisoners. To his daughters, he also recounted incidents of cannibalism.

But Yosef Kaufman was born under a lucky star. For reasons he never knew (nor will we ever know either), a German soldier came up to him and asked him if he was a Jew. Had Yosef Kaufman known then what he later found out, he would have answered no; but at that point he knew very little—possibly even less than my grandfather and grandmother Avraham Chaim and Mindel Vorona knew when they wrote to my mother in early 1939 asking her to send them a request to immigrate to Palestine. Yosef Kaufman answered that yes, he was a Jew. The German soldier gave him some food, sent him to an easier labor detail. I have no idea why this happened. Perhaps the soldier was a Communist. Or maybe he was a *mischling*, a German with Jewish blood in his veins. Who knows? Who will ever know? But this I do know: Yosef Kaufman was very lucky. Later on the Ukrainian POW were released by the Germans, while the Russian soldiers remained to die in that camp. Yosef began to make his way back to Volhynia together with the other Ukrainians. After a few days, he realized that they knew he was Jewish, and they didn't seem to be big Jew lovers. At the time, people could get food and money for turning over Jews to the Germans. Fearing for his life, he sneaked away from his fellow escapees and continued on by himself, covering 300 kilometers on foot until he crossed the Russian lines and made his way back to Breste. Throughout his journey, he

always found some compassionate peasant woman who gave him food and shelter. I remember Yosef Kaufman as a handsome, impressive-looking man. Like my grandfather Avraham Chaim, he was a "dark-skinned" Jew, but unlike him, he was very tall and had a strong, muscular body and a direct, kindly gaze. It's not surprising that he aroused the sympathy of any peasant women he happened upon. Once back in Breste, he resumed his peaceful existence. The new Soviet occupiers said nothing to him and didn't interfere in his life. He owned no property and attracted no attention. When the Germans invaded western Volhynia, on June 22, 1941, his routine continued as before. The Kaufmans were incarcerated in the Dombrovitse ghetto. When it became known that the Jews of Dombrovitse and the surrounding area were summoned to the final roll call in the marketplace, they escaped from the ghetto through the neighboring courtyards, to the fields and the woods, but the parents and two of the daughters, 27-year-old Genshe and 20-year-old Tzeitl, were caught and met their death in the Sarny forest along with the rest of the local Jews. Sarah, 22 years old, was laid up in the Dombrovitse hospital (possibly under a Ukrainian name) and was apparently killed there. Shlomo was also shot trying to escape. The four remaining children hid in the nearby pine forest. While they were in hiding, the Jews of Dombrovitse were taken to the killing grounds at Sarny. Many others were hunted down in the same forest where the Kaufmans hid, but for the moment, their luck held. They were all young—only one brother, Meir, was married. The rest were too poor to marry just yet. He and his wife Esther had a two-year-old boy named Avraham. For a group of young people, it was not too much to carry one child.

Some weeks later, a Ukrainian neighbor from their village found them. He told them that it was true, the Germans had rounded up everyone and slaughtered them brutally and the Ukrainian gendarmerie had helped. But they, the residents of Breste, did not wish ill upon the Kaufmans; on the contrary, they truly needed them—who else would sew their clothes? Please come back to Breste, the villager begged. No harm will befall you, and no one will turn you over to the Germans. Again, I wonder why the Kaufmans put their faith in this Ukrainian. Was the betrayal of Jews to the Germans not a daily occurrence in these forests? But they were apparently trusting people, and they believed him. They returned to Breste, though not to their previous home, and lived there for several months, continuing in their previous trades. This respite was very significant, for these were the harsh winter months and they had a roof over their heads, clothes to wear, and food to eat. A few months later, the Kaufmans heard that the Germans were looking for them. Someone had talked after all. The Ukrainians helped them move to a different village. They continued to live and work there, passing themselves off as Ukrainians. This was no simple matter, for the last thing one could say about Yosef Kaufman was that he looked like a Ukrainian. At most, one might take him for a gypsy, but at this time and place, being a gypsy was no better than being a Jew.

One day, the Germans arrived. Someone else managed to warn the Kaufmans, and they fled to the forest. It's not clear exactly what happened to them there. It is known that Yosef joined the band of partisans led by Maksim Misyura (which later became part of the Begma division), but by the time the Misyura unit accepted him , his two remaining brothers were gone. Meir, his wife Esther, and their young son, were caught by Ukrainians in Sarniki forests

and murdered in 1943. I do not know the circumstances of their death. Pesach fell in battle in 1944. Now only Yosef and his younger sister Chaya remained. The two of them survived the German occupation, but Chaya volunteered to care for the wounded in the Dombrovitse hospital and was killed in when it was blown up in an air raid after the liberation .[3]

Yosef was the sole survivor of his family. He was happy to find Mother, and she was happy to find him. Nonetheless, though he and his family tried to keep up contact with her, it was a somewhat one-sided effort. They came to visit her, and she welcomed them warmly, but she traveled to see them only rarely. I must admit that I too didn't make much of an effort in this area. In 1962, I no longer wanted to be reminded of my childhood nightmares; I was busy being in love.

When Aunt Leah from the Soviet Union discovered Mother and began writing to her, it was my father who actually conducted the correspondence—not only because he knew Russian and Mother didn't, but because she was not really interested. In 1993, when I traveled to Moscow, he pressed $1,000 into my hand and said to me:

"You have a third cousin near Moscow. Go there and give her the money. What pleasure do we get from it, and for them it will make a real difference."

Mother started shouting at him that he was talking nonsense—she didn't remember them, not the aunt or her descendants.

[3] Yosef gave me the year of her death as 1945. Dombrovitsa was liberated at the beginning of 1944, but the Germans stabilized their lines near Kovel, and for a while continued to bombard Sarny and Dombrovitse. In 1945 they were already on the run westwards, and it is unlikely that they bombarded the town. I believe that Kaufman 80 years old when interviewed , was mistaken regarding the year, and the hospital was bombarded in the early spring of 1944 right after the liberation on the ground, and that's when his youngest sister found her death.

Father said quietly: "Don't pay any attention to her. I only wish I had someone there to do something for."

After he died in 1994, I suddenly understood that when Mother passed away, I'd no longer be able to find out anything more about her or her family, and after all, they are a part of me. Their blood flows in my veins and my daughters'. I had to know more. When I tried to ask her questions about her past, she answered me tersely that she had already forgotten about all that and didn't remember anything of how her mother had looked. I tried to remind her of the two little photographs, but she denied ever having a picture of her parents. After Father died, she went downhill rapidly. I didn't comprehend what was happening. In fact, I ignored it, demanding of her the level of understanding of a young, functioning person.

Four years later, I realized I was deluding myself. The light in the upper floor is flickering out, my brother said to me on one of his visits to Israel. Mother spoke very little, and spent her time sitting on the balcony gazing at the passersby. When the last of her abilities had failed her, and she could no longer function, I moved her to a nursing home. I wept all the way there and all the way back. When I came to tuck her in on her first night there, she lay quietly in bed, not saying a word, but two big tears rolling down her cheeks. Despite it all, there was still some light left. I felt like a criminal. She must have said to herself that all this was punishment for what she had done to her parents. For four years, I went to visit her every day until she no longer recognized me or related to my presence. But I didn't feel any better.

The day after Mother moved into the nursing home, I went with my youngest daughter Rakefet to the house at 17 Hashachar Street to put it in

order before renting it out. On top of the wardrobe in her bedroom, I found a large portrait of her parents, wrapped in newsprint. I have no idea where the picture came from, or how it got there. Was it a photograph she'd had enlarged, or had it been there like this all these years? Mother, of course, was always good at keeping secrets.