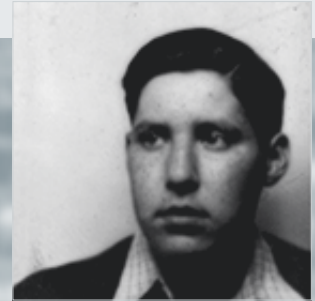
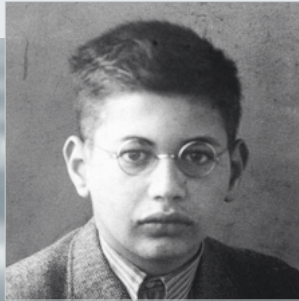


# Surviving in Fear



Four Jews Describe Their Time at the Volkswagen Factory from 1943 to 1945





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# Surviving in Fear

**Four Jews Describe Their Time at the Volkswagen Factory from 1943 to 1945**

With a contribution by Susanne Urban

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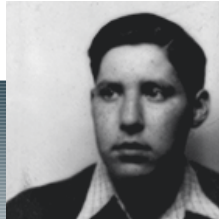
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# Jewish Remembrance.

## Jewish Forced Labourers and Jews with False Papers at the Volkswagen Factory

SUSANNE URBAN

### **I. Forced labour at the Volkswagen factory**

In many ways, Jews working at German armament factories during World War II were something of an exception. Of the roughly ten million forced labourers in the wartime economy in Germany, they constituted a minority estimated to be no greater than 100,000 individuals. Their survival was completely contrary to the Nazi policy of extermination, which claimed the lives of the majority of Jews in the German region of control. The central aim of the regime was the genocide of the Jews in Europe. The forced labour of Jews, both male and female, in concentration camps, on Nazi-run building sites and in armament factories was a secondary measure that ran parallel to the planned killings in the Nazi extermination camps. Any examination of the situation of those affected and the events they recount

today must take this into consideration.<sup>1</sup> When the first 300 Jewish men, from Hungary, were relocated from the Auschwitz concentration camp in May 1944 to work on assembly of the V 1 flying bomb, almost 12,000 of the workers at the Volkswagen factory – well over half the workforce of 18,000 – were forced labourers. The men, women and children, most of whom came from the Soviet Union and Poland, suffered under a treatment based on racial hierarchy and the classified nutrition quality. People were subjected to heavy and often unfamiliar industrial labour under the unforgiving gaze of all-powerful German supervisors and guards. From the summer of 1940, increasing numbers of forced labourers – a kind of foreign proletariat underclass – were subordinated to the German workforce that had not been conscripted to the military.<sup>2</sup> Accounting

for fluctuation, it is estimated that a total of 20,000 individuals from across Europe were affected in this way.<sup>3</sup>

The 300 Jewish men were by no means the first concentration camp prisoners to arrive at the Volkswagen factory, which had been the site of a camp between April and October 1942. The inmates of the concentration camp, euphemistically known as “Arbeitsdorf” [“work village”], were political prisoners from Germany, Poland and the Soviet Union as well as so-called “Asoziale”.<sup>4</sup> Although a strategy was in place from the end of 1941/beginning of 1942 to progressively refocus the labour potential of concentration camps for economic purposes, the forced labour of Jewish prisoners within the boundaries of the German Reich was not envisaged at the time when the role of camps started to change.<sup>5</sup> However, by the time “eastwards” deportations

out of Germany began to accelerate, the forced labour of Jews in ghettos in the occupied territories of the 'General-gouvernement' in Poland and even the Soviet Union – for the armed forces and on war-related transport construction projects – had become every bit as routine as the slaughter of most of the arrivals.<sup>6</sup> On the subject of Jewish forced labour in Eastern Europe, the minutes of the Wannsee Conference held on 20 January 1942 had stated: "Under proper guidance, in the course of the final solution the Jews are to be allocated for appropriate labour (...). Able-bodied Jews (...) will be taken in large work columns to these areas for work on roads, in the course of which action doubtless a large portion will be eliminated by natural causes. The possible final remnant will (...) have to be treated accordingly."<sup>7</sup>

In March 1941, "Reichsführer-SS" Heinrich Himmler had proposed to extract construction workers from the "Jewish contingents" formed in the annexed areas of Poland as a result of "resettlement measures" in order to push ahead with housing construction in "Stadt des KdF-Wagens" [Town of the Strength Through Joy Car]. At the same time, an additional 3,000 Polish Jews would be accommodated in a specially built concentration camp. The plan was finally shelved when Hitler refused to allow Polish Jews to be brought into the Reich. However, Himmler's ideas attracted interest in industrial quarters; the initiative would have given a fresh boost to urban planning activities, which were significant in terms of peace planning but hampered by labour shortages.<sup>8</sup> The fact that the Volkswagen factory was deploying forced labourers of all kinds as a matter of course suggests that the company must have been considering the recruitment of Jews and concentration camp prisoners even as local Nazi officials were expressing misgivings at the notion

of such workers being accommodated in the "Stadt des KdF-Wagens". Forced labour soon became an everyday event, consciously integrated into the company's division of industrial labour. Otto Dyckhoff, Technical Director of the Volkswagen factory, drew up an ethnic labour hierarchy that envisaged the simplest machines being operated by "primitive people from the east and the south" whilst the more important tasks were reserved for Germans.<sup>9</sup>

As the area under German control expanded, the workforce inevitably became multi-ethnic. In numerous European countries, civilian workers were enlisted, 'recruited' under duress or simply conscripted on the street. French and Soviet prisoners of war were incorporated into the forced labour system, along with Italian military internees beginning in October 1943. With arms production efforts stepped up in the wake of the German defeat at Stalingrad, the shortage of workers persisted. Early in 1944, as weapons production was progressively decentralised and moved underground, the authorities turned to concentration camp inmates to fill the gaps in the workforce. In March 1944, Ferdinand Porsche personally approached Heinrich Himmler to request 3,500 concentration camp inmates to excavate and operate an underground factory in Lorraine. The following month, an 800-strong contingent of prisoners from the Neuengamme concentration camp arrived at Laagberg, southwest of the Volkswagen factory, in order to build mass accommodations.<sup>10</sup>

Just one month later, a changing room in the basement of Hall 1 was prepared to house the 300 prisoners selected to be the permanent staff of the Lorraine mass production camp. They were to be instructed in building the Fi 103 flying bomb, better known as the V 1. The military occupation of Hungary in March 1944 meant that Jews who had been



safe from the Nazi extermination programme suddenly found themselves under German rule. Because Allied military successes had severely restricted access to new workers, the Hungarian Jews were seen as a replacement for forced labourers from the USSR, despite the machinery of death established by Adolf Eichmann. The majority of those deported by train to Auschwitz were selected to die in the gas chambers on the arrival platform known as the “ramp”. However, a small number were taken to the Auschwitz-Monowitz camp and deployed as forced labourers within the branch camp system or at industrial facilities located some distance to the west.<sup>11</sup>

In May 1944, production engineer Arthur Schmiele was sent by the Volkswagen factory to Auschwitz-Monowitz. His task was to pick concentration camp labourers with an aptitude for metalworking on the basis of a number of simple tests. The men selected were subsequently transferred under SS guard to the Volkswagen factory, where dormitories had been equipped with bunk beds and the shop floor had been hermetically partitioned to assure the secrecy of the V-1 project and to receive the new inmate workers. After the traumatic shock of the concentration camp at Auschwitz, working in an industrial environment with regular rations and less prominent SS guards meant that conditions at the Volkswagen factory were perceived as relatively favourable. No doubt an absence of fatalities during the deployment of roughly four weeks also reinforced this impression.<sup>12</sup>

Shortly after the heavy bombing raid on the Volkswagen factory on 29 June 1944, the inmates were evacuated to the Lorraine village of Tiercelet, where an iron ore mine was earmarked for expansion into an underground factory. Here, the group encountered the remaining 500 Hungarian Jews from the group originally screened by Arthur

Schmiele who had been brought to Tiercelet directly from Auschwitz in mid-June 1944 to make the structural preparations for the installation of machinery, and also to build a crematorium. The branch camp of the Natzweiler concentration camp, originally intended for up to 10,000 Jewish concentration camp prisoners, now had a maximum strength of just 861 prisoners. Despite frantic efforts, it proved impossible to start production before Allied forces arrived at the end of August 1944.<sup>13</sup> But for the prisoners, the saga of fear and emaciation continued. When 500 Jews were transferred to the Kochendorf branch camp to expand an underground production facility for jet engines,<sup>14</sup> the 300 specialists were taken to Dernau, where a production line for the Fi 103 had been set up in a railway tunnel.<sup>15</sup> At the end of September 1944, the SS ordered the 300 inmates to the Mittelbau concentration camp. Here, the state-run company Mittelwerk GmbH, which took the place of Volkswagen as “main contractor” in October,<sup>16</sup> was concentrating on mass production of the Fi 103. Exposed now to the sole authority of the SS, prisoners began to die; only a third of the group survived by the end of the war.<sup>17</sup> The working conditions were especially hard for Jews, and their rations were particularly poor. The forced labour of Jews had become another facet of the extermination programme.

Meanwhile, the situation of those concentration camp prisoners employed directly in arms production at the “Hauptwerk” [“main factory”] was markedly different. The 550 Hungarian Jewess from Auschwitz, who had been housed in Hall 1 of the Volkswagen factory in place of the Jewish men at the end of July 1944, generally recall their accommodation, rations and work duties as being non-life-threatening. For them, making antitank mines and bazookas was seen as a suspension of time rather than “Vernichtung

durch Arbeit [death through labour]“. However, occasional prisoner deaths served as a reminder that the efficient utilisation of labour – the prisoners had taken jobs on the production line previously occupied by “Ostarbeiter” [workers from the Soviet Union] – was not so far removed from the violence of the concentration camp system. Time and again, it is the monotony of the work that the survivors recall; the brutality of the SS guards and German foremen is scarcely mentioned. Nonetheless, the fear of death was a constant companion of this group of prisoners, which grew in number to around 650 women following reinforcement transports from Dachau concentration camp and the branch camp at Porta. In particular, the evacuation to Salzwedel fueled anxiety that death was still a possibility, even in the final hours of the Nazi regime. Luckily for these women, they were liberated by American troops before their guards had a chance to perpetrate a massacre, as had happened at Gardelegen and elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>

In mid-September 1944, an initial contingent of 250 concentration camp inmates, mainly Russian men, was transferred from Buchenwald concentration camp to assist with moving production capacity underground into an asphalt mine near Eschershausen. They were used to construct prisoner accommodation at the “Hecht” branch camp near to the village of Holzen. By the end of the year, the group had grown to nearly 500 prisoners. Their main duties were building roads, laying railway tracks and installing water pipelines. Driven on by SS guards and officials from ‘Organisation Todt’, and suffering from the effects of malnutrition and appalling hygiene conditions, many prisoners were physically incapable of withstanding the demands. At least 78 bodies were later buried at the “Ehrenfriedhof” – the Cemetery of Honour. The number of concentration camp

inmates was rising. Starting in early October 1944, almost 400 Jews and so-called “Mischlinge” [“half-castes”] formerly exempted from deportation from the German Reich began to arrive at an OT [‘Organisation Todt’] camp at Lenne near Vorwohle. Around 500 Jews selected as metalworkers in February 1945 and earmarked for the scheduled production start-up at the Hils dispersal complex were also transferred from Buchenwald.

At least some of the 1,000-plus concentration camp inmates, in a woefully emaciated state by the end of March 1945, were transferred yet again. On 3 April 1945, another transport reached the main camp at Buchenwald. Other prisoners were taken to Watenstedt, from where a joint evacuation transport departed for Bergen-Belsen. An air strike on Celle and the ensuing manhunt left over 2,000 dead.<sup>19</sup>

In terms of the total number of 20,000 forced labourers at the Volkswagen factory, the number of Jewish concentration camp prisoners, estimated at 2,000, was not particularly high. The total does not include those few Jews who assumed a false identity and ‘escaped’ into forced labour as a means of avoiding the extermination at Auschwitz. For example, Polish Jew Sara Bass and her sister Lea came both as Catholics to Germany and worked as nurses at the Volkswagen factory. Sally Perel, a Jew born in Peine in 1925, survived the persecution as an apprentice at the Volkswagen factory in Brunswick. He had been apprehended by German soldiers in the operations area of Minsk and escaped being shot by passing himself off as a “Volksdeutscher” – a term describing foreign-born Germans who had applied for German citizenship. His story, which was believed by the German military authorities, subsequently earned him an assignment to the Volkswagen factory, where he lived out

the rest of the war. Both Sara Frenkel and Sally Perel changed their identities and belonged to the small group of Jewish survivors whose lives were spared purely by chance.

## II. Structures of remembrance

Remembrance is a significant theme for several aspects of Judaism, including biblical, scriptural and historical subjects, as well as more modern events.<sup>20</sup> The exhortation “Zachor!” – the reminder to the Jewish community to “Remember!”, which since time immemorial has been an established aspect of the Jewish faith – also remains a secular element of modern Jewish society. ‘Remembrance’ not only refers to historical events of biblical and ancient times, such as the festivals of Pessach, Purim and Chanukka; it also serves religious self-affirmation and social self-assertion in the diaspora. Today’s remembrance of the Shoah – the genocide of the Jews in Europe – has blended into this tradition. The state of Israel, which was founded soon after the war in 1948, took in over 300,000 survivors of the Holocaust. Remembrance and commemoration developed here in a different way to that in other Jewish communities around the world, such as those in the USA, Australia or even Germany. Yad Vashem,<sup>21</sup> the principal Jewish/Israeli memorial and Holocaust research centre, was established in 1953 in Israel.

The common starting point in Jewish forms of remembrance is the singularity of the Holocaust, as defined by Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer. Although he classifies the 20th century as an era of two World Wars interspersed by genocide, “ethnic cleansing”, massacres and mass murder, he regards the extermination of the Jews as being unparalleled to this day even within the unrelenting cycle of crimes against humanity. Stemming from his reflections on the

ideology of anti-Semitism, Bauer saw the Holocaust as “unanimous, total and universal”, in contrast to the murder of around 500,000 gypsies and even the policy of occupation in Eastern Europe, which cost millions of lives.<sup>22</sup> Within Nazi ideology and rule, central importance was ascribed to anti-Semitism and the concept of the “Final Solution”; these policies determined a course of action, regardless of cost or potential benefit. The annihilation of the Jews was expected to bring about a kind of National Socialist Utopia, almost a new world. The uniqueness of the crime is also evident from the singular humiliation and complete economic exploitation of Jewish victims prior to their murder, and from the attempt to erase Jewish culture from the collective memory of humanity.

This explains why eyewitness reports continue to play such a vital role in Jewish remembrance as the principal means of documenting the Holocaust. These documents demonstrate the ongoing life of the Jews – in ghettos, concentration camps and death camps, in hiding, with partisans, with false papers and under assumed identities. During their persecution, in fact, many Jews clung to the tradition handed-down from generation to generation of bearing witness to Jewish life and death. Countless reports were made, both official and private. In order to bear witness for posterity, letters, diaries, appeals and wills were written by Jewish children, adolescents and adults. Some of these documents found their way into systematically organised underground archives, such as that at the Warsaw ghetto. Their writing was a kind of defence against the dread of oblivion as well as the approach of death in a world of perpetrators and collaborators. Many witness accounts from the time of the Holocaust and the post-war period mourn those killed, curse the murderers and even swear

revenge; others plead for justice and assistance. Numerous sources resonated with the wish that despite all German extermination measures, the Jewish people would not perish, but would rise again. Collective survival thus converged into a fixed star of remembrance, no matter how distant it may have seemed.

In the post-war period, the few Jewish survivors faced numerous problems. Everyday life revolved around making a new start, fitting back into their old homes or finding somewhere to make new ones, securing a new job, searching for family members or starting a new family. In particular, those Jewish people who sought refuge in Palestine or the newly founded state of Israel encountered a fresh struggle for individual survival within a hostile Arab environment. For all of those forced to live without their murdered family members or friends, the Holocaust etched itself into their consciousness all over again, even if those affected said nothing. For non-Jewish forced workers returning after years of war and forced labour to a world blighted by German domination, the immediate post-war years were also a time for dispelling the things they had experienced and suffered so that they might rebuild their lands and make room for a new life.<sup>23</sup>

Many Survivors said little in their daily lives and in public. However, they broke their silence in court, giving testimony at the Nazi trials, from the opening of the Nuremberg trials in 1946 to the first Auschwitz trial in Frankfurt in 1964. Although the testimony shed light on their experiences and their survival, the courts, which were charged with determining punishable acts by examining recollected facts, had a limited interest in education. As a result, brief statements concerning specific acts did not generally come to be regarded as actual texts of remembrance. This was not true of the

Eichmann trial in Israel in 1961, mainly because public prosecutor Gideon Hausner saw the trial from the outset at least partly as a process of elucidation. At that time, contemporary witness reports from surviving Jews were generally still not regarded as historical documents whose subjectivity did not automatically preclude a scientifically founded historiography. The only accounts to have gained public recognition and wide acceptance were those virtually canonised literary descriptions, such as the diaries of Anne Frank or the early publications by Elie Wiesel.

Individual life stories of those affected did not permeate the public consciousness to any great extent until the late 1970s. The American TV series “Holocaust“, which was broadcast in Germany in 1979, almost certainly played a large part in this. Since then, the shift in perspective towards personal perceptions and individual treatments, which counterbalanced the standpoints preserved in documents and statements left behind by the perpetrators, has driven various efforts to assemble individual recollections and inspired a wealth of publications, both literary and historical. The documents produced by the perpetrators and the persecuting administration are no longer sufficient in themselves to record the reality of life at that time. It is now accepted that the reports of Jewish survivors are relevant as historical documents. Today, no regional study of the Jewish persecution or investigation into forced labour would be able – or indeed prepared – to overlook the remembrances of those affected. Nonetheless, handling and researching contemporary witness reports has presented methodological problems that still require further discussion.<sup>24</sup>

The importance of recorded recollections in terms of historical writing was recognised and contemplated earlier in the USA, where “oral history“ had been an established

element of the science of history for many decades.<sup>25</sup> This also meant that the witness statements of Holocaust survivors have been utilised here in greater depth. Analyses were subsequently carried out on the structures of and discrepancies between the individual narratives and recollections of the displaced and persecuted. These made use of autobiographical accounts and interviews to determine whether the persons in question documented events during or immediately after liberation or, as was most often the case, decades later. A striking difference was ascertained between affected persons with access to written notes or documents and those who solely relied on their own memories. The course of a person's life after the persecution also had a major influence on recollections: meetings with other Jewish survivors and hearing their stories and experiences were just as significant as acceptance into new communities, personal fortune or misfortune and the establishment of new families. Dates and places doubtless have to be verified. The perspective of the survivors certainly shifted to events, to the people and situations they encountered. Failures to recall (for cognitive reasons) and repeated accounts of experiences led to revisions and reworkings.

For this reason, American historian Henry Greenspan described the statements of those persons affected as the "recounting" of experience rather than "testimony".<sup>26</sup> The reports of some survivors turned out to be subjective and emotionally influenced narratives rather than empirical and dispassionate historical analyses. Despite the desire to preserve and contextualise the past through statements and recollections, many survivors still find it extremely difficult to talk about their experiences. For many it is not easy to revisit a time of humiliation and fear of death and still do not talk freely about the past. At times during the inter-

views, images of suffering rose from the depths and into the present-day consciousness of survivors, releasing long-buried feelings, fears, loss and grief. Although all witnesses have their own personal taboo subjects, most can describe their traumatic experiences of persecution and the threat of death in clear terms. The Holocaust thus cannot be said to be indescribable.

The proper and sensitive treatment of these witnesses, without reducing them to mere sources of quotations, is at odds with the tendency described by Greenspan of arriving at a one-sided evaluation that fails to account appropriately for life after liberation by excluding balancing factors. The various spheres and levels of experience should therefore find a place within the overall historical context; this is the only way in which universal experiences and manifest differences between the various victim groups can become clear. One particular feature in the remembrances of Holocaust survivors is the fact that they attribute their escape to historical circumstance. All Jews were part of an overall group allocated for extermination. Given this fact, a search for the logic of survival is evident in many recollections of survivors. Zalman Grinberg, a survivor of the Dachau concentration camp, articulated this characteristic of Jewish remembrance in his address to former concentration camp prisoners on 10 June 1945: "We belong in the mass graves of all those who were shot in Kharkov, Lublin and Kovno. We belong with the millions gassed and incinerated in Auschwitz and Birkenau. We belong with the tens of thousands who died under the strain of forced heavy labour, plagued by swarms of lice; we belong to those forced to live in filth, those who starved and froze to death in Łódź, Kielce, Buchenwald, Dachau, Landshut, Utting, Kaufering, Landsberg and Leonsberg. We belong with those who were gassed, hanged,

tormented and tortured to death in the concentration camps. We ourselves are part of those millions of people who fell victim to these sophisticated and organised systems of murder. We are not living – we are dead! ... Can you rejoice in your liberation? Are you capable of celebrating? ... We may be free, but we don't know what to do with our free and unhappy lives. At this time, it would seem that humanity does not understand what we have been through and experienced during the war. We cannot believe that it will understand even in the future. We have forgotten how to laugh, we have no more tears, we still cannot conceive that we are free – and all because our dead comrades will always be beneath our feet.<sup>27</sup>

This reveals a fundamental point of difference. Civilian forced labourers from the Netherlands or France, for example, experienced fear of death through bombing raids or punitive measures of the Nazi regime. National Socialist racial ideology placed the Slavs – including Poles, Russians – and even Gypsies a long way down the ethnic hierarchy; their deaths were tolerated. In the case of Soviet prisoners of war, death was caused by hunger and shooting. For the Jews, however, there was no prospect of survival. Despite the millions killed in Eastern Europe and the murders of gypsies, the central objective of the Nazi rulers remained the extermination of the Jews and of European Jewry.

This may be why so many contemporary witnesses keep returning to the question of why they, personally, were the ones to survive. In their own survival, they seek a higher meaning. The literary works of Primo Levi, Jean Amery, Aharon Appelfeld, Ruth Klüger and others also seek a definitive explanation for the open wound of survival.<sup>28</sup> Former Jewish forced labourers are confronted with the dual questions: why was I given the chance to escape immediate liqui-

dation through forced labour, and why was I allowed to live when my death had been preordained and the vast majority disappeared without trace?

For those in question, forced labour at the Volkswagen factory may have been a brief interlude in the story of the persecution. However, the experience stands out for them as a time of relative quiet that offered a greater chance of survival than Auschwitz. Even those who survived under an assumed identity were forced to ask themselves: why were other people unmasked as Jews, and not me? Why was I not betrayed by the people I met, even though they knew my Jewish origins?

### III. Four lifelines

Jewish texts of remembrance concerning Holocaust survival are full of questions that find only the most simple of answers. For Moshe Shen, Julie Nicholson, Sara Frenkel and Sally Perel, luck and a few decent people were the key factors. With little in the way of anecdote, their recollections constitute chronologically-based narratives – of life before the Holocaust to liberation and new families. Very few colourful episodes are recounted; instead, their accounts are dominated by long sections dealing with specific aspects of particular importance. When compared to the recollections of other forced labourers, one striking difference is the fact there is no mention of everyday occurrences such as a trip to the cinema or a walk by the Mittelland Canal. This is because concentration camp inmates were not at liberty to leave the camp or their place of work.

The following reports provide totally contrasting insights into the experiences of four personally affected individuals. Although they were all caught up in the Nazi persecution and extermination machinery because they were Jewish,

they all have completely differing perspectives on the Volkswagen factory, its dispersal sites at Dernau and the Lorraine village of Tiercelet, the city hospital and the Brunswick “Vorwerk” [“satellite factory”] where apprentices were trained. Whereas Moshe Shen and Julie Nicholson, as concentration camp inmates, were completely subject to the absolute power of the camp authorities,<sup>29</sup> Sara Frenkel came to Volkswagen as a Polish forced labourer with some freedom of movement. As an apprentice toolmaker at the Volkswagen factory, Sally Perel was in a unique position; although he possessed the freedom of a young German, the restricted life in the hostel made him particularly fearful of exposure. It is these different experiences that have produced four highly individual narratives.

When they were pulled into the maelstrom of Nazi persecution and annihilation, our four contemporary witnesses shared a background of experiences drawn from the rich spheres of Jewish life. Sally Perel was born in 1925 in Peine, not far from Brunswick. His first encounter with Jewish life in Eastern Europe came when his parents, who were originally from Russia, moved to the Polish city of Łódź in 1935 because of the growing anti-Semitism in Germany. Sara Frenkel, née Bass, grew up in the Polish town of Lublin. Moshe Shen and Julia Weiss, now Nicholson, are from the border area between Hungary and Romania. Although this region was Romanian between 1918 and 1940, it became Hungarian after the second “Wiener Schiedsspruch” [Vienna arbitration].<sup>30</sup> Moshe Shen was born in the Transylvanian town of Sighet and grew up in Nagyvárad. Julie Nicholson was born in Cluj (known as Klausenburg in German and Koloszvár under Hungarian rule) in what is now Romania. She lived there until moving to Budapest as a student in 1940.

Sara Frenkel was the first to come to the Volkswagen factory together with her sister Lea. She had seen in Lublin the brutal Nazi regime after September 1939, which had led to the rapid ghettoisation of the Jews. When the deportations began in September 1942, she and her sister managed to escape using papers acquired with the help of a Catholic priest that showed them to be Poles. After six months on the run in the region around Lublin – constantly in fear thanks to their awareness of the nearby Majdanek death camp – they registered for work in Germany as Polish civilian workers. In March 1943, they both arrived at the Volkswagen factory, where they were forced to work as nurses in the hospital. Unlike the concentration camp inmates at Laagberg, Sara Frenkel does not remember hunger as being life-threatening. Fear, however, was ever-present; discovery of her real identity would have meant at least deportation and almost certain death. The same applied for her sister. Sara Frenkel’s memories of survival at the Volkswagen factory revolve around two coordinates. One is fear. The other is the deaths of over 360 newborns and infants, the children of forced labourers from Eastern Europe who died in a factory-owned facility.<sup>31</sup> For her, the death of babies often just a few weeks old epitomises the inhumanity of the Nazi system. Her experience of the death of defenceless infants most in need of protection has become something that won’t allow her to rest. Sara Frenkel, who never spoke about her experiences until 20 years ago, plays down her own grief in her recollections, placing the emphasis instead on the children of the forced labourers killed at the Volkswagen facility. After her own liberation, she made it her duty to disregard herself and honour the memory of those children. When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, Sally Perel, who had fled there in the fall of 1939, passed himself off as

a 'Volksdeutscher'. He subsequently served as an interpreter for a frontline unit before being assigned to the Volkswagen factory in Brunswick in June 1943 by a regional office of the Hitler Youth movement in Estonia. Having been taken on as an apprentice toolmaker, he was admitted to the associated youth hostel and received specialist and political instruction as a member of the Hitler Youth. Just like Sara Frenkel, he survived under a false identity with an ever-present fear of discovery. For Sally Perel, assuming the identity of a model Nazi youth almost led him to reject and deny his Jewishness; Sara Frenkel, meanwhile, concealed but never surrendered her identity as a Jew. In common with other Jewish children and teenagers, the young Sally had to live with a split identity. The conflict between Jupp and Sally and the search for his own core has defined his life ever since. Sally Perel is the only one of the contemporary witnesses recounting their stories here to have set down his experiences in literary form.<sup>32</sup> During the mid 1980s, he underwent a period of enforced rest following an illness, and only then did he allow himself to remember. His reading tours around the Federal Republic of Germany were driven by his determination to do everything possible to combat anti-Semitism, racism and intolerance and thereby make a difference in the world.

Moshe Shen and Julie Nicholson arrived at the Volkswagen factory in 1944 as concentration camp inmates. With the experience of Auschwitz behind them, both regarded the Volkswagen factory as a strangely shimmering stopover on their journey through the National Socialist camp system. In May 1944, Moshe Shen and Julie Nicholson were deported from Hungary, where approximately 825,000 Jews were living at the time. It is estimated that 560,000 of those lost their lives during the Holocaust.

With the persecution in Hungary intensifying, and having been detained at Auschwitz, a posting to the Volkswagen factory was a chance to draw breath for Moshe Shen. The conditions under which he had to live and work at the Volkswagen factory, and later at Tiercelet and Dernau during summer 1944, allowed him to believe in the possibility of survival. The other stations on the journey to liberation – Mittelbau-Dora and finally Bergen-Belsen – confronted Moshe Shen and his father with a reality that was deteriorating with every new location to the point where day-to-day existence was threatened. Fear increased as death approached. In retrospect, having lived through such an experience, Moshe Shen regards the conditions at the Fallersleben "Hauptwerk" ["main factory"] as relatively tolerable. Although his main impression today recalls a comparatively bearable situation, he doesn't go as far as two other survivors in the group who talk of an almost "normal life" at the Volkswagen factory or their "best time" during the persecution.<sup>33</sup> Since the 1980s, Moshe Shen has confronted the forced labour he carried out and his concentration camp experiences to an ever greater extent. He has come to regard the close relationship between father and son as a central contributing factor in his survival. Having emerged together with his father, he can perceive at least a grain of logic in the fact of his survival.

Julie Nicholson went from Budapest to Auschwitz and from there to Bergen-Belsen before being transported to the Volkswagen factory in summer 1944. She was therefore familiar with the centre of death before she arrived at the factory by the Mittelland Canal. When she fell ill there, her greatest fear was being sent back to an extermination camp or put to death under a "sick selection" by means of benzole or air injection. At the time, Julie Nicholson believed it was

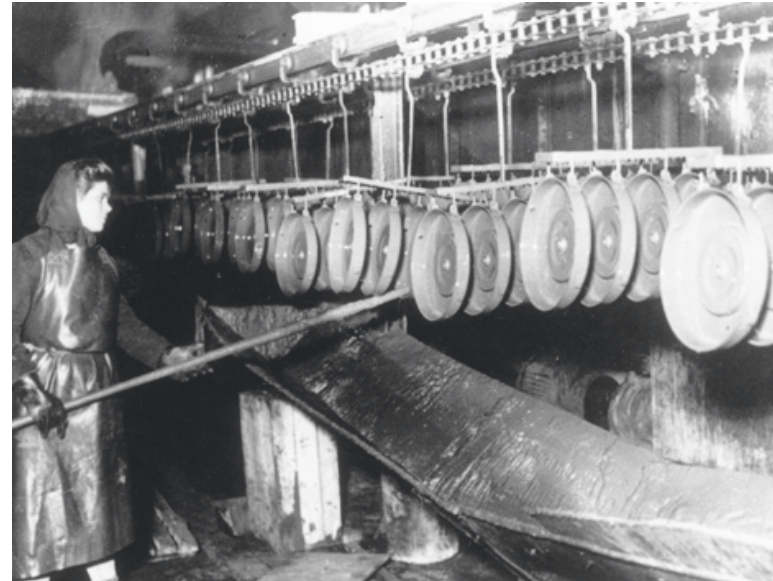


a German nurse who had saved her life in the city hospital. It was only in the early 1990s that she discovered that it was a Jewess living under a false identity who had come to her aid – Sara Frenkel, who also tells her story here. The fact that Julie Nicholson survived the Volkswagen factory is closely linked to her stay at the city hospital, which supplanted her fear of death with new hope of survival.

She was subsequently moved to Salzwedel, another branch of Neuengamme concentration camp, where around 1,500 Jewish women, mainly from Hungary and Poland, were forced to work until being liberated on 14 April 1945. From that point onwards, time became a blur for Julie Nicholson. Then, one day, an American tank appeared at the gate. Julie Nicholson is keen to stress that she has made her peace with her experiences and with history. She admits to having dealt with the things she went through very soon after being liberated. Clearly, this early process of reflection made her path back into normal life relatively smooth.

In common with very many survivors, none of these four settled in Germany or their countries of origin after liberation. Moshe Shen and Sally Perel went to Israel. Julie Nicholson at first tried to find her roots again in Cluj, but soon left the town of her birth, living in various places before finally emigrating to Australia. Sara Frenkel went to Belgium with her husband, who was unable to live in his former homeland of Germany.

This publication tells the life stories of four Jews during the Holocaust; four survivors describe their path through humiliation and forced labour. Their words, at times through the pain of recollection, invite us to listen and reflect on their version of events. Regardless of political, moral or historiographical considerations, these autobiographical accounts offer specific insights into the abyss of Nazi policy



Forced labourer at the production line of antitank mines at the Volkswagen factory.

and its contempt for human life. They provoke us to apply certain standards to present-day deeds. By publishing internal texts by former forced labourers, Volkswagen AG wishes to provide sufficient access to their perceptions and place the spotlight on the affected persons and their approaches to deal with the past.<sup>34</sup>

Anyone affected by the narratives of these persecuted individuals will draw lessons from the history of National Socialism, almost as if these recollections have been added to their own store of memory. Learning about Julie Nicholson, Moshe Shen, Sara Frenkel and Sally Perel means ceasing to be a detached observer and becoming a “secondary witness”.<sup>35</sup> This can be seen as the legacy of the Holocaust survivors.



Moshe Shen after arriving in Palestine, 1947.

# Moshe Shen

Moshe Shen was born Mozes Schön on 7 August 1930 in the Romanian town of Sighet. His father, Dezső, was a forceful personality with strong principles formed by Zionist ideals and motives. The considerable influence that he had on his son was later cited as the decisive factor in their shared survival. In 1937, the family moved to the Transylvanian city of Oradea Mare, which became part of Hungary and was renamed Nagyvárad under the terms of the second “Wiener Schiedsspruch” [Vienna arbitration] in 1940.

When the German Wehrmacht marched into Hungary in March 1944, the Nazi policy of Jewish extermination reached into the sovereign territory of Germany’s former ally. As far as Moshe Shen is concerned, the deportation of all Jews without exception from Hungary to Auschwitz was

Mozes Schön (left) and an acquaintance at the Belsen DP camp, 1946.



the first and primary objective of the Germans following the invasion. Midway through May 1944, the Schön family was forcibly transported to Auschwitz along with the other Jews from the town. Moshe Shen was 13 years old at the time. When he arrived at Auschwitz, however, his father hurriedly advised him to give his age as 20, which he did. He and his father survived until the end of the war; his mother was murdered at Auschwitz.

After two weeks or so, father and son were transported to the Volkswagen factory in a group of 300 Hungarian Jews. They were moved to Tiercelet in Lorraine a few weeks later, then to Dernau near Koblenz and then to the Mittelbau concentration camp at Nordhausen. Their final destination was Bergen-Belsen, where Moshe, now 15, and his father were liberated on 15 April 1945.

Having been subjected to forced labour and become physically emaciated, Mozes was seriously ill and spent almost all of the next year in a British army hospital at Celle. Moshe Shen, his name now Hebraised, arrived in Palestine in early 1947, followed by his father just a few weeks later. During the same year, Moshe was recruited by the Haganah, the Jewish underground military organisation, and took part in the Israeli War of Independence in 1948. He remained an officer in the Tsahal, the Israeli Defence Forces, until 1954. Moshe Shen married in 1953. After leaving the army, he studied economics and accounting at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and at Tel Aviv University. Moshe Shen joined the Alexander Muss High School in Hod HaSharon in 1979. He went on to be appointed Principal and worked there until 2000, although in 2001 he took up a new role as Director of Finance.



Moshe Shen and his wife, 2002.

He has four children and eight grandchildren. In common with many survivors, Moshe Shen regards his family as an important symbol of life in the face of the destruction once envisaged for him and every other Jew in Europe. He is a friendly, engaging and charming man with a subtle sense of humour. When talking about the days of persecution, he smokes one cigarette after another. He was instrumental in dedicating a classroom in the school at Hod HaSharon as a place of remembrance to the 300 Jews transported from Auschwitz to the Volkswagen factory. Nameplates, pictures and documents have become part of the fabric of everyday school life. Moshe Shen believes that remembrance should be a daily practice, not something confined to one designated day per year.

Moshe Shen deceased in January 2012.



Mozes Schön, 1942.

INTERVIEW

## Moshe Shen<sup>36</sup>

### For Concentration Camp Inmates like us, Survival was a Question of Time

I've spoken about those days many times. I think there's even a witness statement about the deportation and my story at Yad Vashem. Every time I tell the story, however, different details come to the fore depending on the subject I'm discussing. There's very little to say about my time at the Volkswagen factory. However, the episode seems important in the wider context of modern-day Wolfsburg. So I'll tell you how I ended up there and what happened next. Volkswagen was completely different from the things that happened beforehand and afterwards.

### Childhood and a strict father

I was born in 1930. I'm from Sighet in Transylvania, a place that belonged once to Hungary and then to Romania – it seemed to change hands all the time. I used to say I was Hungarian or Romanian depending on the circumstances, what was better for me at the time. I was at kindergarten with Elie Wiesel, but that's neither here nor there.

When I was seven, we moved to a town called Oradea Mare, which was Nagyvárad in Hungarian. A lot of towns had up to three names – Hungarian, Romanian and German – on account of the different populations. All the members of my family were Jewish. My grandparents were devoutly religious, but my father was less so. Even though he went to a Yeshiva, a religious Talmud-Torah school, he came into contact with Zionism at a young age.<sup>37</sup> The rabbis at the Yeshiva didn't like the idea of secular Zionism, so they threw him out. So my father was a committed Zionist, something that was unusual for a Hungarian Jew at that time. Hungarian Jews were patriots, but my father was such a Zionist that he even spoke fluent modern Hebrew. He worked as a journalist for a Jewish daily newspaper in Transylvania. The paper is still going here in Tel Aviv. He started it up again after the Aliyah following the Holocaust.<sup>38</sup> In 1934 and 1935, he had been a correspondent for the newspaper Ha'aretz, which was published in Palestine at the time. Here in Israel, I found articles he had penned in a publishing archive.

As for me, I was in a Jewish school, where I had a Hebrew teacher. My father was determined that I should learn Hebrew, and found various ways to put pressure on me. When I wanted a bike, he told me I'd have to learn the Ivriyth word for bicycle. Within half a year, I'd learned how to say 'bicycle' in Hebrew and went around repeating "ofanajim, ofanajim, ofanajim" over and over. My father wasn't particularly keen

for me to have a bike, but I got one by learning the right word in Hebrew. It was even German-made. My family was always linked to Eretz Israel,<sup>39</sup> and we were visited by envoys of the Keren Kajemeth and others.<sup>40</sup> At the time, my father was the secretary of Mizrachi, a small party that even then existed in Palestine.<sup>41</sup> He was the secretary for Transylvania.

### **Too late to flee**

During the interwar period, Hungary had introduced anti-Jewish laws. Anti-Semitism was also apparent in Nagyvárád. Jews had been banned from certain professions; for example, they were no longer allowed to be lawyers, and Jewish public servants were made redundant. Universities were given Jewish quotas. On top of the many legal restrictions, there was also hostility from the general population. As far as I could see, the Hungarians were more inclined towards anti-Semitism than the Romanians. Romania turned its back on its Jewish population, but the Hungarians themselves actually organised deportations to forced labour camps in Germany and to the death camps in what is now Poland.<sup>42</sup> I had already come across anti-Semitism as a child. “Nice young boys” were always trying to pick a fight with us Jews. They used to abuse us by saying “dirty Jews” or other curses like that. It was nothing out of the ordinary at the time.

So you can see that even before the Germans invaded on 19 March 1944, there was already discrimination and social exclusion. But then we had to contend with all of the German regulations overnight. They brought in the yellow “Star of David” on 23 March 1944. Jews were put in ghettos and deported by the hundreds of thousands, starting in May 1944. They were taken to Auschwitz or other concentration camps, made to do forced labour or killed. The Germans were having transport problems. The trains to Auschwitz

had to be punctual, but they were overloaded. It was the Hungarians who helped them coordinate things.

At the start of 1944, my family had received papers to emigrate to Eretz Israel. Even though we received them before the Germans invaded, they arrived too late. There was no chance to get away. We were unable even to reach Budapest, from where we might have been able to get to Palestine. So although we were in possession of emigration papers, we all ended up in the Nagyvárád ghetto. In the early summer of 1944, we were taken out of the ghetto and transported to Auschwitz in the first wave of deportations – the entire family. I was with my father the whole time from that point onwards.

### **Auschwitz**

I can still remember how we were taken to the station and put on the train. The whole family was together: my father, my mother and I. We arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau,<sup>43</sup> and that’s where the selection took place. This would have been some time in the middle of May 1944. The night we arrived at Auschwitz was the last time I saw my mother. She was separated from us when they divided the men from the women.

We already knew some things about Auschwitz. There were Polish Jews who had escaped the camp, and we’d also had contact with resistance messengers – my father had helped them reach Romania. So we had some idea about Auschwitz. But we had no idea it would be so terrible. The problem was the sheer scale, it was unbelievable – it just overwhelmed the powers of imagination. As soon as we got out of the train and became separated from my mother, my father whispered to me that I should give my age as 20 if they asked. I had no idea how he seemed to know what was in



store for us, but he said the right thing. So I stood there before the “committee”, that examined us and made the selection. I can’t remember whether or not Dr. Mengele was there. I didn’t wait for anyone to ask me how old I was, I just said, “I’m 20 years old!”, and they sent me to the right. There’s even an original list in Germany that shows I was born in 1924. My father was also sent to the right. We were together until the liberation. We went through the usual procedure: shower, change of clothes, being issued with camp clothes, and so on. But we weren’t at Auschwitz long enough to be tattooed with numbers. We only stayed at Auschwitz for a matter of days, but it felt like weeks to me. The conditions were dreadful. We stayed in one of the huts, we were not working. There was one roll call after another.

### **The selection of prisoners for the Volkswagen factory**

One day, during another roll call, one of the soldiers in charge said, “Are any of you precision engineers? All the precision engineers, step forward!”. My father said, they want precision engineers, we’d better put our names down. They lined us up one behind the other. At the front of the line, there was someone carrying out the selection – someone with a familiar name. Some say he saved Jews, but how would anyone know?<sup>44</sup>

A year before this scene at Auschwitz, I had been at school. I wasn’t always the star pupil. I was good at football and riding my bike, but I failed Latin. My father was a strict man. I won’t go into the punishments he used to dish out to me. In 1943, because of my poor performance at school, my holidays were cancelled. Instead, I was told to get a job. I was a 13-year-old boy, where was I supposed to go? My father had a friend who worked in a hotel. So I went there and told him my father said I had to work, and could he please give me a



Mozes Schön (left), his father Deszö (centre) and another member of the group of 300 at the Belsen DP camp, 1946.

job. He said, “Look, let me talk to your father, then you won’t have to work.” So he spoke to my father, but he couldn’t convince him to back down. In our street in Nagyvárád, there was a bicycle shop. One day I took my bike there, and I asked the owner whether I could work for him. He asked me why, so I told him the whole story. He said, “Your father has brought you up well!” – and he gave me the job. He told me I could work there, but I’d have to do everything he said, including cleaning and tidying up. Anyway, I started work there, and after a few weeks he let me do minor repairs. Whenever he was fixing something, he used to ask me what bolt and which wrench he should use, what kind of tool was the right one. He taught me everything. I soon knew how to judge bolt sizes and so on, and during the summer I started using the caliper.

Back at Auschwitz, on the right side of the desk, there was another table with a caliper and one bolt. The man said, “Measure that bolt!”, so I picked up the tool and the bolt and

measured it in a second. There were several other men between my father and myself, and he didn't know what to do with the tool. They sent him to the left. Straight away I sensed we had a problem, because I just knew we had to stay together. My father kept going to the back of the queue, failing the test and getting sent to the left. How he managed to keep rejoining the group, I have no idea. But I know he was determined to stay with me. When it was his turn once again, the man behind the desk recognised him and asked what he was doing back at the front of the queue. This man only said the bare minimum to the other prisoners; my father was the only one that he talked to for more than one minute. In fluent German, my father replied, "That's right, I have been here before, because I am a precision engineer." The man asked what kind of precision engineer he was, as he clearly didn't know how to use a caliper. My father explained that he had been responsible for replacing original parts, and you don't need a caliper to do that. "What kind of machines did you repair?", he was asked. "Typewriters", he replied. Having been the editor of a newspaper, he used to use typewriters all the time, and that was the first thing that came to mind. The man behind the desk could clearly see my father was intelligent. He was looking for people who could work in a kind of human chain, just like on a conveyor belt. Each person had to help the next. That's why he included him in the group, and that's how my father and I ended up in the group of 300 Hungarian Jews selected for the Volkswagen factory.

### **Isolation and work on the "secret weapon"**

It was some time in the middle of June – I can't remember the exact date – when we arrived in what is now Wolfsburg. There were already some Jews working at the factory. Other

Jewish women from Hungary arrived a bit later. At Volkswagen we stayed in the factory itself, not in a concentration camp or other kind of camp.<sup>45</sup> As I recall from the darkness, we slept in the cellar<sup>46</sup> of Hall 1. The beds were there, we ate there, and we went to work from there. We were working in shifts, switching from a night shift to a day shift and back again every two weeks. The shift was invariably 12 hours. It took five minutes to get from our accommodation to our workplaces along a corridor. Normally we wouldn't see daylight.

We, that is the 300 Jews from Auschwitz, were working on production of the "secret weapon", the V 1. We were totally separated from the other forced labourers. We had our own sleeping quarters and virtually no contact with anyone outside of our group. We had some inkling that we were working on a special weapon. Everything was top secret, and we were watched very carefully. But we didn't know exactly what we were making. To us it looked like an aeroplane of some sort, but with no room for a pilot and a curious tail fin. At first we had no idea what it was supposed to be. Then one night, one of our group said, "Guess what it is we're making!". This being night time, we were able to talk quietly. And he told us about the V 1. We knew that our work was supposed to help the Germans win the war. But we were also in possession of other information. We used to eavesdrop on conversations between the Germans, and we used to take strips of newspaper from the toilets or out of the rubbish. In this way we put together scraps of information on the current situation. That's how we found out that the Allied invasion of France had taken place, that the British and Americans had landed at Normandy. We thought the war would have to end soon. We didn't know a thing about the Russians. We knew it was just a matter of surviving for



a bit longer. Now and then we tried to converse with the other forced labourers. Sometimes we managed it, but that was extremely dangerous.

### **Encounters with Germans**

We were replacing young German workers from the Luftwaffe who had been engaged in V 1 production before being sent to the front or posted elsewhere. Needless to say, our supervisors were all Germans. They were older people – not exactly friendly, but not too bad. At least they were fair. They taught you what you had to do, and if you made a mistake in your work, they'd smack you one. But that was the end of it. In the context of those times, that wasn't bad. A number of German civilians also worked there. The German workers showed us some respect. They weren't especially forthcoming, but they weren't anti-Semitic either. The SS guards supervising us were completely different. They were certainly anti-Semitic, and of course we were frightened of them.

### **Escape from Auschwitz?**

Of course you can't compare the conditions at the Volkswagen factory with those at Auschwitz. There's just no comparison. The food was just typical camp food, but as good as it gets: hot soup once a day, a chunk of bread and margarine, cheese, even jam and coffee. We were given two meals a day. Compared to what came before and after, I'd have to say the living conditions at Volkswagen were pretty good. It wasn't exactly a five-star Hilton, but it was bearable. About two weeks after we arrived, the Allies bombed the factory.<sup>47</sup> They also hit Hall 1 and our shelter. One of the men in our group said, "Let's hope we don't lose our jobs!". He had a good sense of humour. The truth is, without our jobs we might have gone back to Auschwitz.



Mozes Schön (left), his father Deszö (right) and other survivors at the Belsen DP camp, 1946.

### **Unexploded bombs and recollections**

Apart from assembly work, they also made us do extremely dangerous "outside" work, like when bombs that landed on the company premises failed to explode. When that happened, we'd have to make a big hole, climb in and dig around the ones that didn't go off. Only then would a professional come and defuse them. Each time, twenty or thirty people had to climb into the pits, knowing that there were oil drums and other flammable materials nearby. At other times, we had to put out fires on the premises. The flames always reminded me of Auschwitz. The fires at Auschwitz were terrible, they smelt of burning flesh. At the time of the deportations from Hungary, the crematoria were overworked, so they were burning the bodies in the open air. You could smell it, you could feel it. You felt you should offer a prayer for the dead. That's what I thought of when there were fires at the factory.

### **Tiercelet concentration camp**

We spent a few weeks at the Volkswagen factory, I'd say no more than six or eight weeks.<sup>48</sup> Then they took us by train to the Longwy-Thil branch camp, which was part of the Natzweiler concentration camp complex. That was in Lorraine in France, not far from the Maginot line. The whole group of 300 Jews from Auschwitz was taken there. This was the summer of 1944, and they wanted to transfer production to the Thil concentration camp. The 500 other Jews who had been selected at Auschwitz were already there, but once again we were separated from them. The plan was to create an underground factory for the "secret weapon". Heavy machinery was brought in to excavate a tunnel. We were no longer working as precision engineers, we were hauling rocks. It was summer, we were in a concentration camp – you can imagine the situation. It was nothing like the Volkswagen factory. However, we still belonged to Volkswagen,<sup>49</sup> and this still wasn't quite a "normal" concentration camp. The bread rations were slightly more generous, and we got slightly larger portions of margarine and cheese. The coffee was different, the soup was different. In terms of quality, things were better. Some of the French helped us by smuggling food into the camp.

It was in Thil that the first member of our group died – not from being beaten or mistreated, but because he was very ill and lost a lot of blood. We stayed in Thil for the whole summer, until September. The structure of things had changed – our group now had a supervisor and a number of foremen. Our supervisor took his job very seriously. If I'd seen him or got my hands on him after the liberation, I can't say what I would have done with him.<sup>50</sup>

One of the prisoners, a man called Jenö Holländer, was able to escape. The guards were in a panic, because we were

bearers of secrets. I heard later that he had been helped by the French resistance and managed to alert the US army about the secret factory at Tiercelet. Because he escaped, there was a roll call. They rounded us up with machine guns. Then they assigned a French prisoner, a hostage, to our group in order to make up the numbers. I think the guards did this because they were worried about what their own superiors would say.

### **"Rebstock camp" at Dernau**

The Allies were coming closer, so we were packed onto a train once again. This was the end of the summer.<sup>51</sup> We arrived at another camp in Dernau, near Koblenz. This was a small camp, perhaps a couple of huts and a small factory. Yet again, though, we weren't allowed to mix with the others.<sup>52</sup> Conditions here were not quite up to the standard of Tiercelet. The same man who had selected us at Auschwitz came to the Dernau camp. We were still working for Volkswagen.<sup>53</sup> Again, our purpose was to prepare tunnels. My job was to smash holes in the rock face using a hammer. We weren't working on the "secret rocket" any more.

Here's something else that happened at Dernau: I used to push a trolley that was used to take away the rocks. We passed through some vines, and I got caught trying to pick a couple of grapes. The guard made a note of my number. Next morning, I was called forward. They gave me 35 strokes with a whip made of rubber or some kind of rubber baton, I can't remember now. For weeks I couldn't sit down. Then it was the time of the main Jewish festivals of Rosh HaShana and Yom Kippur.<sup>54</sup> One of the men could remember the prayers, so he cut a paper cement sack into 'pages' and wrote them down.

### **A hell underground**

Sometime during the autumn, we were bundled back onto the trains and taken to Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp.<sup>55</sup> From this point onwards, we had nothing to do with Volkswagen.<sup>56</sup> In Dora, it was the SS that was supervising production of the V1. Dora was terrible. The production process was the same, we were still making the V1, but now we were under SS control. Thousands of people died at that camp. Today there's a memorial on the site. People from all over Europe were incarcerated at Dora: criminals, Jews, Russian prisoners of war and Dutch people. Our Auschwitz group no longer existed as a unit. Roll calls would last for hours, standing in the freezing cold. Then we would have to work for 12 hours. We'd get a maximum of five or six hours' sleep, and virtually nothing to eat. Every morning dead bodies were taken out of the hut. Whenever the Allies bombed the factory or its facilities, production at Dora would be shut down for days on end. The railway was destroyed early in 1945, which knocked out the transport links for production.<sup>57</sup>

### **Fear**

Was I living in fear all the time? No, I wouldn't say so. We were scared we might be executed for talking to someone, but the fear wasn't permanent. Nobody knew what tomorrow would bring, everything might change overnight. When the Volkswagen factory was bombed, that was the first time we experienced that kind of insecurity. We didn't know what might happen, whether we might be sent back to Auschwitz. The fear was greater at Tiercelet, we'd all look up when the bombers were heading for Germany at night. In Mittelbau we just existed. Were we living in fear? I don't know.

### **Sabotage**

Sabotage did take place. As far as I know, none of my group carried out sabotage at the Volkswagen factory, but it did happen later on at Dora. One of the saboteurs was a man now living in Israel. He looked so stupid, nobody thought he was capable of remembering his own name. His job was to take a little pot of paint and go over any scratches or other blemishes on the finished flying bombs. Germans are very pedantic like that. Even if the flying bombs were built to explode, they still had to look spotless when they did so. But he also had a little cutting tool hidden away somewhere. As he was applying the paint, he would cut through some of the wires on the finished rocket. He didn't really know what he was doing, he just snipped away here and there. A few weeks later, a big committee arrived at Dora. They wanted to know who was deliberately sabotaging their "wonder bomb". They took away four or five people who they thought were responsible and hanged them in the entrance to the



Emigrants' luggage is stacked prior to departure at the Belsen DP camp, 1947.



Demonstration at the Belsen DP camp against the immigration policy of the British in Palestine, 1947. Mozes Schön can be seen bottom right.

tunnel that you had to walk through to get to work. Next to the bodies they put a sign saying, “This is what happens to saboteurs“. They left them hanging there for two or three days. The sabotage didn’t stop, though. Another committee appeared, and more people were hanged. This happened three or four times. The people who were hanged were Russians. Nobody guessed that this stupid-looking man in our group was the saboteur. I found out what actually happened after the war. The flying bombs were launched by a catapult, but after a few minutes they would begin to wobble and simply fall out of the sky. They never hit their targets. That was because of sabotage in our group.

### **End of the road: Bergen-Belsen**

My father and I had been together for the whole time since May 1944. Early in April 1945, thousands of prisoners were put onto trains and moved from Dora to Bergen-Belsen. We



Moshe Shen (bottom centre) at Kibbutz Yagur, 1948/49.

were amongst them. The journey there was horrendous. The SS packed around 100 people, including us, into a single open carriage. It took ten days to arrive. The only food we had was things we’d managed to steal in the chaos following an Allied bombing raid on Dora – one piece of bread and some canned beef. People were dropping dead throughout the entire journey. They kept having to stop the train to unload the bodies. One night a German soldier appeared and told us to sit down. Then he just started firing at a certain height, and anyone who hadn’t been able to get down low enough was killed. In the carriage I was in, just 20 people were still alive when we reached Belsen. I had to crawl to the hut on all fours. The distance we had to cover wasn’t much more than a kilometre, but it took me hours.



My father managed to get hold of some sugar beets from somewhere, and that kept us alive. When the English, our liberators, arrived, we were no longer able to go out and meet them. For that reason, we weren't given food straight away. That saved our lives, in fact, because we didn't succumb to diarrhoea as so many others did.<sup>58</sup>

### **After the liberation**

I was in hospital in Celle for more than one year after we were liberated. My father was also in hospital for a long time. For us as Jews, life after liberation was very different from others who had been at the Volkswagen factory or in one of the concentration camps later on. The Poles were forced labourers; the Jews were slaves. The Poles worked in a camp, and when they were freed, they just went back home. They could return anywhere they wanted, and so could the Dutch. The Dutch had civilian clothes. They might have been forced workers who had to behave in a disciplined manner, but they weren't concentration camp inmates. Unlike them, we couldn't take a single step without being watched. The SS were there to guard us, not them. Compared to us Jews, their lives were relatively normal.

### **The family was annihilated**

My mother never came back. My father and I were the only survivors in my family, along with an aunt and a brother on my father's side who had been transported to the Soviet Union and didn't come back until 1951. He had been classified as a Hungarian soldier rather than a forced labourer, so after the liberation he was deported to Russia. As you can see, very few of us survived. My father had had nine brothers and sisters. One of my mother's sisters also came back; she hadn't been living in Sighet at the time of the deportations.



Moshe Shen (top centre) in the Israeli army, 1950.

### **To Israel**

Having been liberated, where were we supposed to go? We couldn't go back to Hungary, there was nothing left there. After the liberation, we went to Israel. Before that, we stayed in the Displaced Persons camp at Belsen. I actually arrived in Palestine legally. Ten thousand certificates had been issued for young survivors. I arrived in Israel in the spring of 1947, and my father was there a few months later. By the time of Pessach in 1947,<sup>59</sup> I was on a ship headed for Palestine.



# Julie Nicholson

Julie Nicholson was born Julia Weiss in 1922 in the Romanian city of Cluj in Transylvania. Cluj was annexed to Hungary in 1940 and was thereafter known as Koloszvár. After the end of World War II, the city and the region were returned to Romania. Julia's family was middle-class and fully assimilated into local society. Her father, Alexander (Sandor), was a lawyer, and her mother, Piroska—or Piri as she was known—was a housewife. Julia's brother, Janos, was three years older than she. Following the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, Julia, who had completed her studies at art school in Budapest, was arrested at the city railway station and deported to Auschwitz shortly thereafter. Throughout the persecution, from the time of her arrest until the liberation, Julia had the great fortune to have the company of Julia Kertesz, a friend from Cluj.



Julia Weiss in Cluj, 1927.

Julia Weiss was later deported from the Auschwitz death camp to Bergen-Belsen, where her parents and brother were also taken. They were housed in the 'Ungarnlager' [Hungarian Camp], the intention being for them to join those taken to Switzerland as part of the 'Kasztner Transport'. However, just as the Allies were getting closer, they were instead transported to Tröbnitz. Julia's father died there but her mother and brother survived.

Julia was deported to Fallersleben as a forced labourer. From the Volkswagen factory, at the beginning of April 1945, Julia and her friend were taken to Salzwedel, a sub-camp of Neuengamme, which was liberated in mid-April 1945 by the American Army.

Following the liberation, Julia remained in Germany for some time, the main reason being that possibilities for

transport to her hometown of Cluj were scarce. She lived in a kind of DP camp that had been erected in a former pilot's school. Towards the end of her time in Germany, she lived for a while in a commandeered private house in Tangermünde. Within a few months, she and a friend she had met while at the camp were able to reach Hungary with the help of some Yugoslavians who were returning home, and in 1946 she managed to travel from there back to Cluj. There, she was reunited with her mother and brother.

Julia moved to Bucharest, fell in love with Oskar Feldman, whose family, originally from Odessa, had lived in Romania ever since the communist revolution. In 1947, Oskar went to Munich, where he worked for JOINT<sup>60</sup> and trained as a photographer. Julia followed him, enduring a somewhat eventful journey, and they were married that same year.



Julie Nicholson in Paddington, 2005.

Paris was the next stop for the young couple in 1948, where they stayed until 1949 when they boarded a ship in Genoa, bound for Australia. Julia became Julie. The couple had two sons but their marriage crumbled. Julie married for a second time, this time to an Englishman, and changed her name to Julie Nicholson. She worked primarily as an interior designer, and then took a job at a teacher training college, teaching art and art history. Following her retirement, she was actively involved in art consultancy.

Julie Nicholson was a tall, gentle yet strong woman with a keen sense of humour. She lived in a small house, where she surrounds herself with pictures, books, lovely old furniture and her dog. Her refuge was a small, wild and colourful garden, and there, as she spoke, it was clear that she no longer had any religious beliefs; she believed only in creation, the spirit of nature. She was a warm-hearted woman, wishing for nothing more than that people live together in peace and mutual respect.

Julie Nicholson described the circumstances leading up to the death of her father as the “greatest tragedy of my life”. Julie Nicholson felt no guilt that she survived; she saw her survival as her duty.

Julie Nicholson deceased in summer 2007.





The Weiss family in Cluj, 1930.

INTERVIEW

## Julie Nicholson<sup>61</sup>

### To Preserve History and Learn its Lessons is an Essential Task

I have spoken about my past and the persecution many times and I have made my peace with it. When I told friends that I was doing this interview, they wanted to know where the text would be ending up and asked me why I wanted to talk about it again. I feel it is important. People need to know what others are capable of. Anti-Semitism is on the rise again and, even though I think that the only chance for Jews lies in proper assimilation into local society, I also know

that anti-Semites don't care how you define yourself. In their eyes, a Jew will always be a Jew – a rose is a rose is a rose. It is important to preserve history. And to learn its lessons. It is an essential task.

### Sheltered childhood

I was born Julia Weiss in 1922 in Cluj. I was brought up in a warm and loving home. My parents were intelligent people who were very happily married. My family was not well-off but we had enough money and belonged to the middle class. I had a brother, Janos, who was three years older than me. My father, Alexander – he was called Sandor in Hunga-



Julia Weiss in Cluj, 1926.

rian – was a lawyer. My mother was a housewife and had help from a non-Jewish governess. We were happy. We were totally assimilated into local society and were not involved in Zionism to any degree. Humour was always very important in our house, and I have always kept a hold on this sense of humour. We had a lot of books and my father was an editor for the local newspaper. I was therefore always very aware of what was happening in the world as I was growing up. I remember our daily lunchtime meals. We all sat at the table together and discussed the latest events. I wasn't exactly crazy about reading at that time so I always



Julia Weiss in Cluj, 1940.

asked what was in the paper each day. And when my father explained the latest news, I always asked – it became a bit of a running gag: “Is that good for us, Dad?“, meaning: is it good or bad for us as Jews? Of course, because of these discussions, we knew what was happening in Germany. I had two aunts, my mother's sisters, who were studying dentistry in Berlin and who returned to Cluj in 1933. I always knew the Jews were not well-liked and that being Jewish was a burden. However, I personally did not come into contact with anti-Semitism during my childhood or youth. Perhaps it was because I was brought up in such a sheltered environment.

I now think that I was able to cope better with what life threw at me during the war precisely because I had had such a happy and wonderful childhood.

Our Jewish identity was not connected with religion. We were Jewish by birth but we did not attend any of the big Jewish celebrations in the synagogue; I didn't even know when they were exactly. Like many Jews, my family promoted the virtue of Zedaka, or charity, but they did it from a secular standpoint. My father gave money to the Zionists and he gave money to the Communists – if anyone needed anything, they got it. What the organisations used the money for was their business. He was a very wise, just man. Perhaps the high degree of assimilation and the disinterest in religion were a consequence of the fact that my father, who was originally from the small town of Munkacs in Czechoslovakia, had been brought up in very strict and orthodox household. He had made a radical move away from this family tradition. My mother came from an upper-class family and she remained a little 'snobbish' all her life. She was wonderful, very clever, just 'snobbish'.

My brother, Janos, wanted to study chemistry but there was a minimum academic average for Jewish admissions to university, so he was not accepted. So, like my father, he studied law. I went to school in Cluj, but I didn't particularly enjoy it. Instead, I loved working with my hands, even as a child, so I made dolls, and other things. When I finished school, I desperately wanted to go to Italy to train at what was then a well-known doll manufacturer. My parents had very modern ideas and did not force me to do anything I didn't want to do; instead they encouraged me to develop my talents. As a teenager I had been allowed to do as I pleased. But they wouldn't allow me to go to Italy because the war had already broken out. The Germans had occupied



Julia Weiss with her parents, Sandor and Piri, 1940.

Poland and Italy had sided with Germany. My father put me to the test: "If you can manage to get accepted into art school in Budapest, I will let you go". The only proviso: I had to show I was sufficiently independent and grown up.

So I went from office to office, filling out papers and introducing myself, and finally I was accepted into the "Atelier" School of Art in Budapest. I studied there from 1939 to 1943 and enjoyed four wonderful years in Budapest. Once, when I was visiting my father – which was always lovely as we went out together – he said two sentences to me, which I have never forgotten and which helped me get through the awfulness of the persecution. The first was: "At the end of the day you are alone." This surprised me because he was so happy with my mother, but I think he was trying to tell me to be independent and strong enough to live on my own. The second sentence was: "Even the wisest of men will make eight mistakes every day." Since then, self-criticism has been an important element of my life; every criticism you make of yourself helps you to be a better person.

When I graduated from my studies in Budapest, I wanted to continue being independent, even from a financial point of view. So I worked, did further studies and lived in a house on



Julia Weiss and a friend in Budapest, 1943.

the sixth floor. It was a humble lifestyle but I was independent. When I went home for the holidays, I explained that, in order to save money, I used the stairs and not the lift. This annoyed my father but I asserted myself.

By the end of 1943, my father had clearly learnt a great deal about the fate of Jews in Europe through his work as an editor. All I knew was that the Jews were being persecuted, but that was as far as my knowledge went. My parents let me go back to Budapest in 1944. They didn't think the perse-

cution could affect us. It is hard to understand this attitude, but Cluj did of course belong to Hungary, and Hungary was not occupied. Moreover, my father had fought in the Hungarian army in the First World War and he believed this would protect us if necessary. He believed in comradeship and a positive degree of honour and decency.

### **Arrested in Budapest**

One morning, I was having a bath. It was 19 March 1944. My friend, who I lived with, called to me that my mother was on the telephone. I jumped out of the bath, dripping wet, and went to the telephone. My mother said: "Come home immediately. The Germans have just stormed in!" I packed my things, and told my boyfriend René, who wasn't Jewish. He accompanied me to the railway station in Budapest. It was the first day of German control in Hungary, but I didn't see any German troops in the city. With hindsight, I think perhaps I didn't want to see them and that I just didn't have a clue what was happening. Perhaps I was even naïve.

So my boyfriend was carrying my bags and at the station, someone stopped me. I think it was a Hungarian police officer. He said: "Are you a Jewess?" I answered honestly: "Yes." The officer also asked my boyfriend. He said he wasn't. The officer said: "Your friend can go. He will take care of your bags. You come with me." He opened a door somewhere in the station and pushed me through it. He closed the door. It was horribly dark. I couldn't see anyone but I could sense that there were other people in the room. When the light came on, I saw that there was another girl from Cluj, a friend of mine, who had also been on her way home.

The girl was Julia Kertesz; we always called her Uli.<sup>62</sup> From that moment on, we stayed together until the liberation. I didn't know it then, but it was a great relief for me at that

moment, when I saw her. There was somebody I knew, a friend! The next day, or the day after that, we were taken by train to Kistarcsa, where the Hungarians were gathering Jews to be deported. There were some huts, and not much else. We were about an hour from Budapest. I don't know who was guarding us. What does it matter whether it was Germans or Hungarians? We were being persecuted by both. There were several hundred people in Kistarcsa, but I don't know exactly how many. We had only the clothes we had been wearing when we were arrested. It had become cold and I was wearing my winter coat. The few items of jewelry I had on had already been taken from me, including a small watch which I liked very much. I have never seen another watch quite so pretty. I still remember standing at a window once, looking out and seeing a man there, the father of a very dear friend of mine in Budapest. When I saw him, I thought: "If even he has been incarcerated, what is going to happen to us?" I suddenly felt very scared. I don't know how long we were in Kistarcsa. I don't think it was that long.

From then on I had very little sense of time and I have hardly any recollection of the rest of our deportation, and even less of the food or which day was which. It is all very blurred. It was like that until the liberation. I was rarely scared. I always thought I would survive. I considered everything and thought: "Interesting, how things turn out." I was curious to know what was happening around us. But I always thought it couldn't really be happening to me. This was a subconscious mindset, perhaps even a protective barrier, which protected me from everything that befell me. I also maintained my sense of humour throughout. Uli used to say: "Your sense of humour was one of the reasons we survived." Maybe there was an element of truth in what she said.

## **Auschwitz**

I no longer remember how we left Kistarcsa, what the journey was like or how long we were travelling for. We were transported in cattle trucks, but it was not overcrowded. I was able to urinate. There were no problems with missing buckets or the like. At some point we arrived in a country where we couldn't understand the language or the road signs. I now know that we had arrived in Poland. The next thing I remember is arriving in Auschwitz, the doors on the trucks opening, and the cry of: "Alles aussteigen!" (Everyone off!) They yelled at us that we could either travel in a lorry or walk. Uli and I were glad of the opportunity to walk after the long journey so we decided to go for the second option. We didn't know it at the time, but this decision saved our lives. All those who got in the lorries were sent immediately to the gas chambers.<sup>63</sup>

We then had to endure the whole procedure – our pubic hair and underarm hair was shaved off. We had to hand over our last belongings. I was given a blue suit with long sleeves, a kind of dress, like a sack, with shiny cuffs, which were covered in dead lice. I didn't know what the things stuck to the cuffs were at first. And because I am so tall and have big feet, I was given men's shoes, but with no shoelaces. The clothes had been worn by people who had already been murdered, but I didn't realise that at the time. Then, we were tattooed with numbers. Mine was 80,519. Interestingly, the hair on our heads was not shaved off completely, just to above the ears. I didn't register anything to start with. I was still afraid for my parents and my brother – not for myself. I just hoped that they were ok. And I wanted to let them know I was ok – well, that I was alive. It helped a great deal to know Uli was with me. We talked about home, about our families, reminiscing about happy, untroubled times. There was one thing

we regretted most of all: that we were still virgins and that we might die before we had experienced what it was like to be in love.

### **Everyday life in Auschwitz**

Our block, number 15, was guarded by two Jewish Polish prisoners, the “Blockälteste” [block eldest]. They were horribly cruel. I suppose they had to be, just to survive. I can remember the roll call very clearly. We often stood up to our ankles in mud. We stood lined up in fives. I was at the back because I was tall. And they counted us and we stood there for hours, whatever the weather.

And the food? It was dreadful; a kind of foul-smelling, runny brown liquid. Then there was bread and a little of something that reminded me of jam. It was supposed to be coffee or tea. But I wanted to survive, that was my goal. So I knew I had to eat everything, regardless of what it was, in order to keep my strength up. And so I forced myself to eat it: one sip for my father, one sip for my mother, one sip for my love etc. right through to one sip for my dog.

The toilet situation was bad, because it was long trenches with wooden boards with holes in them. For two weeks I couldn't go to the toilet and I was in terrible pain. There was no paper either. It was awful. My periods stopped from the moment I was deported to Auschwitz, and they only started again long after the liberation.

Once I became aware of what happened in Auschwitz, my greatest worry was for my family. I was afraid for them. Strangely, right up to the liberation, I have no recollection of seeing corpses and dead or murdered people – not even during the months I spent in Auschwitz. I suppose, once again, some subconscious self-protection mechanism had set in. I didn't see any dead bodies.

### **Working in Auschwitz**

It wasn't immediately clear to us that Jews were being killed in Auschwitz. It was only later that we realised. We saw the chimneys, the thick, acrid smoke and gradually understood what was happening. Everything was organised so perfectly, in a very German fashion. It was all so perfect – a perfect, horrific death machine. The first work I had to do was in a sort of quarry. We had to haul rocks back and forth. Once, a rock fell on my toes. You can still see the scar.

Then there was a new roll call and we were asked: “Who can speak German?” I raised my hand immediately, and so did Uli. Then the next question: “Who has neat handwriting?” I immediately raised my hand again. We were called forward. We were told: “You are going to work in the office!” It wasn't true office work, but they had probably thought when we arrived that some of the girls in our group could be useful for ‘office work’ and so that was why they hadn't shaved all our hair off. It meant the end of hard manual labour but it was grim nevertheless.

We were given blue, white and green filing cards and had to write on them the names, dates of birth and places of origin of the new prisoners. There was no office; we stood outside and had to register each person after they had finished going through the whole procedure – from the selection and the number tattooing to the hair shaving. After that, they became part of the Auschwitz cycle. Some survived, others were cremated, others were deported again. I don't know the details of what eventually happened to all those I registered. We didn't witness any selection taking place among the newly arrived prisoners. We weren't involved in things like that. Fortunately, we were spared that experience. One day, a transport arrived from Theresienstadt. They were all elderly people, mainly elderly women. I don't know why



we bothered registering them, because they were no doubt killed shortly afterwards. It was dreadful; all these elderly women, small, emaciated, intimidated. Many of them didn't even know their names anymore, so I just wrote any old names on the cards. It made no difference anymore. It didn't matter. The main concern for the Germans was that they had the right number of registered prisoners. I couldn't just keep going on at these poor elderly women until they remembered their names. So I just thought up names at random and left them in peace.

### **Encounter with Mengele**

One day there was a selection and we all had to undress. Then we had to appear before two SS officers. One of them, I later found out, was Mengele. He was a good-looking man; he resembled my former boyfriend René from Budapest, which is why I found out later that it was Mengele I had come face to face with. We weren't embarrassed, because they weren't men; they were Germans, not human beings, so we felt no shame. I wasn't a woman in front of them. Those who were too thin were sent off to the right, to the ovens. Then Mengele stopped me and asked: "Where are you from?" "Block 15", I said. He yelled at me: "No, not that, where do you come from?" "Hungary", I said. He waved me away. He didn't know where I was from because I was so tall. Most women in Hungary are small and short, so I stood out. I don't know if the fact that I was tall helped me.

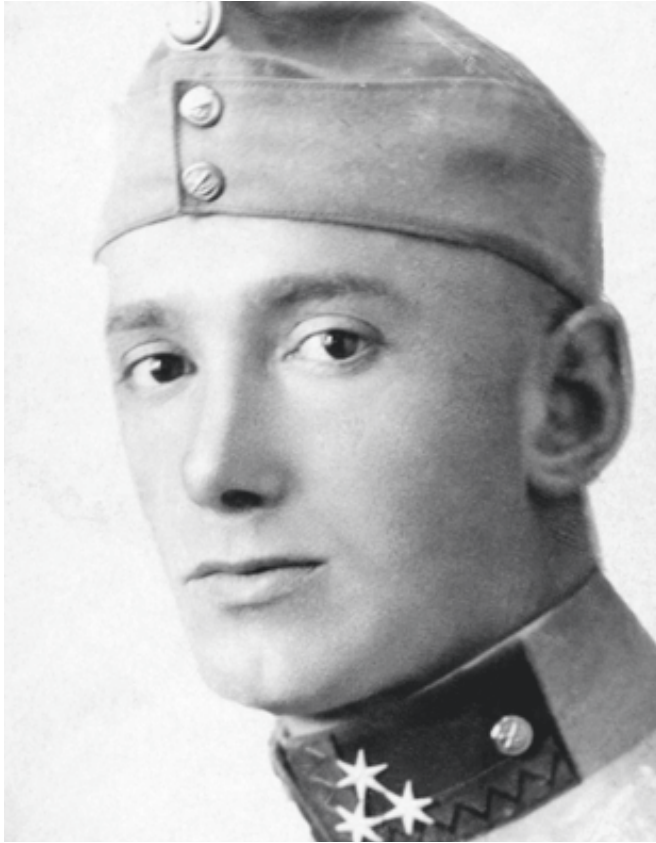
### **From Auschwitz to Bergen-Belsen**

I can hardly remember how long I was in Auschwitz; it was probably a few months. It must have been late autumn 1944 when Uli and I were deported to Bergen-Belsen. Whether we were deported because the troops were getting closer, I

don't know. Probably.<sup>64</sup> There were rumours and the general hope that the army was getting closer. Which army it was, I didn't know or couldn't guess. There was just the hope that someone at some point would free us. Again, how I got to Bergen-Belsen, I don't know. It was cold; it was winter. We were housed in a sort of hut, sleeping on the floor. It was all a bit makeshift. It was snowing and we washed ourselves with the snow, to get rid of all the dirt and the lice. I became terribly ill, but I didn't care. I just wanted to feel clean again. One day, a German came into the tent or hut and called me, my friend and another Julie from the Netherlands by name. The next thing we knew, we were in Fallersleben at the Volkswagen factory. I didn't know why at the time; I found out later.

### **Attempt to contact the family**

I later discovered why I had been sent to Fallersleben. My parents and my brother had remained in Cluj and had been assigned to a 'special transport'.<sup>65</sup> 'Important' Jews, not only from Cluj but from all over Hungary, were gathered together in a group, and, with authorisation from the German authorities, they were to be taken to Switzerland. Uli's parents were also assigned to this transport. So my parents, together with the others from the group, were in Bergen-Belsen when we arrived. For them it was intended to be just a stopover before they were taken to Switzerland. The young man who brought us what was described as morning coffee had contact with the group assigned to this 'special transport'. He told us that there were other people from Cluj in Bergen-Belsen, and we discovered that it was our parents! This young man smuggled paper and a pen in for us and we wrote a note to let them know we were alive. My father had been a major in the First World War and always expected to



Alexander Weiss as a soldier in the First World War.

be met with military decency. He went to see the camp's commandant and asked: "My daughter is here. May I go and see her?" The result: his daughter was sent to Fallersleben. My father, mother and brother were taken out of the special transport and later removed from Bergen-Belsen. My father died in Tröbnitz of meningitis; my mother and my brother survived. Uli's parents were also taken out of the special transport. My mother later told me that my father's last words were: "Don't go home until you have found Julia". It saddens me greatly that my father died. Somehow that is the only thing I feel guilty about. If he had not received the note, he would not have gone to see the commandant. But what was I supposed to do? I wanted him and my family to know I was alive.

### **Everyday life at the Volkswagen factory**

From Bergen-Belsen, Uli, the Dutch girl and I were taken by train to Fallersleben, accompanied by maybe two guards. At the factory, we were put with the prisoners who were already there. Altogether, we numbered several hundred women and children.

Our accommodation was completely different from what we had experienced in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen. There were beds; it wasn't luxurious but at least the bunks were only two beds, one on top of the other. It was clean, there were showers, there were toilets. For other people, this was normal, but not for us. It was something to get excited about. I can't tell you what the food was like; I don't recall. We were often hungry, and we were painfully thin, so it can't have been that good. But I can't even remember if we each had crockery, or whether we sat at a table or on the floor when eating.

Thinking of a camp hierarchy, Fallersleben was a place where survival seemed to become a possibility once more. You could have hope there. But not surviving was not something I ever considered. I always believed I would survive, both in Auschwitz and later. I didn't want to give up. Survival was my foremost priority and it was a great help to be able to talk about home with Uli. We held on tightly to these memories.

### **Working at the factory**

I hardly remember the factory. I don't think I have ever seen the building from the outside. On the first day – it was winter – we had to take metal parts from where they lay on a huge pile and carry them to somewhere else. It didn't make much sense, but perhaps they didn't know what to do with us.



After that, I worked at a drilling machine. I had to clamp a long, hollow metal pipe into a machine and press a lever down. This punched two holes into the pipe. Then I put it on one side and started again with a new pipe. It wasn't hard work; the pipe wasn't heavy and there was no way I could injure myself. I don't know if I was supposed to do any kind of 'check'. Anyway, there I stood, punching holes into the pipes. Somehow I found out that these were parts for the V2, Hitler's 'Wunderwaffe'.<sup>66</sup>

It was much harder working on the conveyor belt. Other girls had to spray tall, round metal plates with colour. They breathed in the fumes. There weren't any masks or anything. It was very bad for their health, which of course didn't matter to those doling out the work. I remember one girl who became so ill we had to leave her behind in Salzwedel, where we were evacuated shortly before the end of the war, after the liberation. She couldn't walk anymore. I think about her sometimes, and would dearly like to know what happened to her. I think the effects of this work only became clear in some people much later. The Germans did not speak to us, apart from when they were giving us orders.

I remember one very unpleasant experience – it was all unpleasant, but this was just undignified. I had to go to the toilet, and the female SS officer who was guarding us apparently decided I was taking too long. She came into the toilet and screamed: "Out!". "I just have to clean myself off", I said. As I came out, she kicked me in the behind. It didn't hurt, but I thought to myself: "Where am I? Why did she do that?" It was simply awful being there. I can't remember us being subjected to any physical attacks. I don't know if that's because I didn't see them or because there weren't any.

## **Contacts**

We had no contact with the other forced labourers. On the one hand we were just Jews under orders from the concentration camp officers. On the other hand, there was a hierarchy and we were at the bottom of it. Russians or other nationalities were simply not interested in us. The only person I occasionally exchanged a few words with was a French forced labourer, who had a different status in the camp compared to us. He was a bit like a machine supervisor. He was tall and blond, good-looking. It was dangerous for him to speak to us, the Jewish women. As Jews, we were completely isolated. The rest of the people there were all German. I particularly recall the pretty Yugoslavian girls who appeared one day in the factory.<sup>67</sup> They all had long, dark hair, worn braided and pinned up on one side. They all wore it like that. They looked so different to us; so healthy, athletic and strong. You could tell that they were fighters. My impression of them was a positive one, and in my eyes they represented the good life.

Within the group of prisoners, Uli and I were able to make some friends. My aunt was there. I also befriended two women; an older woman and her daughter. They were both from Hungary. I also found a friend and companion in a young woman the same age as me, Eva, a staunch communist. She told me a lot about evolution and revolution, but I didn't listen properly. Because I still believed in God then, and communism was an alien concept to me. Eva became a doctor and lives in Cluj now.

## **In the hospital block**

My aunt Sara Goldstein, née Burger, worked in the hospital block at the camp. She was actually a dentist but her role there was general doctor. She was responsible for the Jewish

prisoners. I had to go to the hospital block because of my appendix. The story had begun back in 1944 – a few days before I was arrested in Budapest I had suffered pain in my abdomen. We had taken advice as to whether I should have my appendix operated on and had decided against it. The pain had gradually disappeared and now, in Fallersleben, it came back without warning and with a vengeance. I was in absolute agony. A French doctor or nurse, a prisoner of war or forced labourer, looked at me and said I needed an operation immediately.

When I was collected to be taken for the operation, the others thought I was going to be killed. I remained confident, thinking that it could only get better; an operation would help me. I was the only one who didn't think I was going to be killed.

What sticks in my mind was the kind reaction of an SS warden called Annemarie. She told my fellow prisoner, who was wheeling me to the hospital on a stretcher, to be careful and not to shake me about as it would hurt me. This was an unexpected human reaction from a warden and it did me good. I then recall that I was lying on the operating table and was told to start counting. I counted to 25, and then I passed out. Then I woke up and realised I was still alive and lying in hospital. I still ask myself why they bothered operating on me at all. They could have left me to die; I was only a Jew after all. But perhaps it was better if I lived and could carry on working. It was probably a win-win situation – if they operated and I survived: good. If I died: again, good. Russian prisoners of war were lying in beds opposite me. There was no communication, because they knew I was a Jew so they probably disliked me.

I only found out later that I almost died. They had left me lying somewhere after the operation and it was Sara Fren-

kel, who I assumed was German, who had helped me.<sup>68</sup> I didn't realise at the time though. Another German nurse had said there was no point in bothering with me; I was going to die anyway. It was thanks to Sara that I pulled through. During my convalescence, I was helped, unintentionally, by a particularly cruel nurse – probably the same one who had wanted to leave me to die. She screamed at me: "Get up!" "I can't!", I said. So she dragged me out of bed, which caused my wound to open. This was a good thing, because the wound was full of pus, so it broke open and everything from inside the wound poured out over my legs. It was disgusting; it stank. However, I would have suffered internal poisoning if the wound hadn't opened. I don't know what had gone wrong during the operation. I don't know what else happened in the hospital block. I was just glad I was alive.

But then there was the episode with Sara and the egg liqueur. It was such an important moment for me. It was so wonderful, so kind. I can remember it all so clearly. Sara called me into the nurses' station. She said: "Come with me. I want to give you something." I was so touched by how friendly she was. Just the fact that a German nurse, as I thought, had asked me into her room and offered me some egg liqueur gave me hope. This was a German woman, being friendly to me, a Jewess. Sara – or, as I thought of her at the time, the German nurse – was so pretty, so friendly. It was so nice. The thought that a German woman had taken pity on me gave me hope that there were still decent people in the midst of all this cruelty. She could have been punished just for talking to me and for allowing me in her room.

I only found out around ten years ago that she was also a Jew. I have to admit that in some ways I was pleased that a Jewish woman could be so smart as to hide herself away at Volkswagen. I think it's fantastic that she could disguise

herself as a nurse and survive as a result. But at the same time, I was disappointed because it upset my image of human kindness. I had at the time thought it was a German woman who had attended to me even though I am a Jew. Not all Germans hate me. And yet it was a fellow Jew who had attended to me and not a German. She made such an impression on me; she was so pretty with her rosy cheeks and bright eyes.

I don't know how long I stayed in hospital; at any rate my wound hadn't yet healed completely. Not long afterwards, our group was sent to Salzwedel, because the Americans were getting closer. I could hear the bombing and saw the anti-aircraft fire and I heard the sirens, but I didn't really notice the air raids on the factory. I stayed in the hospital block during the raids. Nobody offered to take me to a bunker. I just lay in bed. But even then, I never thought I would die. I never gave up. There were also rumours that we wouldn't have to wait too much longer for the liberation. This was important as it gave us an extra boost of hope. After my stint in the hospital I was given the nickname 'The operated one' in our group – because in the situation we were in it was exceptional for a Jewish girl to be operated on at all, let alone survive.

### **Evacuation from the camp**

We weren't in a position to make any of our own decisions so when we were told we had to get in a train again, we did. My wound from the operation was not yet healed and my fellow prisoners carried my small bundle of belongings. I wasn't allowed to carry anything. I don't remember how the evacuation came about or when it was.<sup>69</sup> I just remember there being a train. As we were taken from Fallersleben to Salzwedel, I still didn't think we were going to be killed. It

was indeed a camp, very different from Fallersleben, and I don't understand why we were left alive because it didn't make any sense, but I was still confident I would survive. We weren't made to work anymore. I don't remember what we were given to eat or what our accommodation was like. I can imagine though, that it was an appalling situation, because there was hardly anything to eat anyway, and as we weren't working, I'm certain nobody saw the point in giving us food.

### **Liberation**

The first thing I remember in Salzwedel is that the gates opened. Then a huge tank drove in, with American soldiers sitting on it.<sup>70</sup> Most of the Germans had probably made a run for it. As I went out through the gates, I saw a dead German lying by the side of the road. As far as I remember, this was the first dead body I had seen since my deportation. I don't know how that is. I felt somehow sorry, which was strange. I wasn't pleased to see a dead German.

My recollection of the liberation is inextricably linked with this moment. Suddenly the gates opened, the tank arrived and someone said something like: "Hi there". The liberation was a surreal experience. I can't remember how I felt. But it was the first decision I had been able to make for myself in many months: that I could go where I wanted. We – Uli, Eva and I – looked at one another and said: "Come on, let's get out of here!" And we went, along with hundreds of others, into the small town. The windows in most of the houses and shops had already been smashed, so the looting began. Everyone got themselves clothes and food and anything else they could find. But I saw a small stuffed duckling in a shop. I took it. When I was a child, my aunt, who studied in Berlin, had sent me a stuffed chick like this one. I don't know why the Germans stuff chicks, but that's by the by. Anyway, I took

this chick and that was my 'booty'. It was a symbol of my childhood, a lost happiness. I kept this chick for a long time, until it was eventually eaten by moths.

After that I remember tanks with American soldiers, who threw chocolate and other food to us. Some of the girls climbed onto the tanks, but I didn't.

The women from Salzwedel – except for the one girl, who was ill from breathing the poisonous fumes while at Volkswagen – were housed in former Nazi pilots' lodgings, which were now being used as a reception camp under American command. There was a hospital there and my aunt worked as a dentist. I helped her. We were very privileged. We also ate with the Americans and there, for the first time in my life, I was given cornflakes and peanut butter. They were wonderful! The Americans were very friendly and at some point asked a few of us girls whether we wanted them to show us the countryside, and go on a little outing with them. We were delighted, and said yes. Each girl went alone in a Jeep with one or two Americans. I went with a Major and his driver. At some point, the car stopped and they tried to rape me. I didn't know much English, but I knew: "No!". They hassled me, offering chocolate, stockings, all sorts. I kept saying: "No! No!", and was able to hold them off. But it was a horrendous experience. They didn't resort to violence but I was so disgusted by their behaviour. I was thin and scrawny; I had just been liberated. What did they want from me? This experience was one of the reasons why later I didn't want to visit the USA. I have never forgotten what they wanted to do to me. To me, the Americans were peanut butter and this experience.

After that, we went to a town on the River Elbe, where we lived in a private house. We three girls – Eva, Uli and me – shared a room and slept in a double bed. One day, three

Russian soldiers came into the room and looked down on us. Then they left the room. We must have been too thin for them; we must still have looked too much like prisoners. We didn't know it at the time, but we had just had a narrow escape from being raped. There, in the house on the Elbe, I got to know a doctor, who came from Oradea Mare. We began a nice little romance – not an affair, but we offered one another some warmth and affection. But the relationship didn't outlive our later separation. When he came to visit me in Cluj, it was already over.

### **News of the family**

It was another six months roughly before I was home again. I already knew my father was dead. I think it was in Salzwedel that I found out. It was after the liberation. I was standing in a line of women, who were all waiting for food. The British were handing out the food. So we were standing there waiting, talking amongst ourselves, as you do. I asked a young woman next to me where she came from. She wasn't from Hungary. When I said where I came from, she said: "Oh, Cluj! I met three people from Cluj." It turned out that they had seen my family. She had probably come from Tröbnitz, where my family had been sent. She said: "The man is dead." "And the woman and the young man?", I asked. "Are they ok?" She said they were. I registered the fact that my father was dead, but I couldn't cry. Somehow the news didn't really sink into my consciousness. It was news, that was all. It wasn't real. I didn't cry. I cry easily, but at that time, I couldn't.

### **Back to Cluj**

It was difficult to get back because there were no trains, we had no papers and we had no money. Somehow we met some Yugoslavian men, and they had papers enabling them



Julia Weiss and her brother Janos in Cluj shortly after the war.

to make the journey. We poor Jewish things had nothing. The only thing I had that belonged to me was a heavy German uniform coat. And the stuffed chick. So they looked after us. Eva and I travelled east in a cattle truck, but we didn't mind. The main thing was we were going home. We travelled with them to Hungary and from there, went on a Russian freight train to Cluj. The train was full of Russian soldiers, but Eva and I survived the journey once again unmolested.

When I arrived back in Cluj, the first person I met was the husband of my beloved aunt. He looked at me and said: "I am not surprised to see you again." I was amazed; I had survived quite a few camps after all. He had also been in camps. But he said at the time: "Those with a strong will had



Portrait photograph of Julia, taken by Oskar Feldman, 1947.

more chance of survival than those with a strong constitution." Perhaps he was right, given that I was thin and I had become ill at various points. I had never been very strong physically. But I had eaten every bit of muck we had been given in order to survive physically and mentally. Being with Uli the whole time had also been an important factor. We were able to support each other mentally.

My parents' house was located a little outside Cluj on a small hill. I went to it and my mother opened the door. Our house had been divided up. It no longer all belonged to us. Almost all our belongings had disappeared; only a few pieces of furniture remained.

The thing that particularly shocked me was the condition of my parents' former marital bed. The people who now lived



Julia Feldman, Munich, 1947.

in my parents' bedroom had sawn it in half. It was a painful symbol of the forcible separation of my parents through the death of my father.

### **In Bucharest**

A few weeks after I got back to Cluj, I went to Bucharest to see my aunt who arranged work for me as a graphic designer. I lived with her and slept in the consulting room of the dental practice, where her divan was. It was of particular help to me during this time that my aunt showed such interest in my experiences during the war, and my time in Auschwitz and the other camps. I opened up to this aunt, who, unlike the aunt deported to Fallersleben, had not been displaced. Everything poured out of me. It was a healing process; nothing was summarised. I started right at the beginning. I wanted everyone to know how much we had suffered, how much I had suffered. But the world wasn't interested in any of the survivors, let alone the young Jewish girl from Cluj. Life went on and we Jews were unimportant.

### **From Bucharest to Australia**

Also in Bucharest, I met Oskar Feldman, a young man, the same age as me, whose parents came from Odessa, and who everybody called Kara. He had survived the war in Bucharest. He wooed me in a lovely, old-fashioned way and I was very taken with him. Our relationship developed. He wanted to be a photographer.

Neither of us could live in communist Romania. In 1947, Kara went to Munich, worked at JOINT as an interpreter and, with the help of JOINT, completed his training as a photographer. I followed him a few months later when he wrote to say he could now support us both and that I should come out to be with him. It was an eventful journey. I became a member of a designer delegation and received a document that enabled me and 35 other designers to travel to Vienna to a conference. None of us returned to Romania.

In Vienna, I stepped out of the railway station and bumped straight into my former boyfriend René. He had thought I was dead and had by that time married a charming woman, who I later got to know. René, for his part, had taken my bags in Budapest back to my home – and he had taken out my beloved teddy bear. He had known what this teddy bear meant to me and had rescued him. And so I got this small bear from my childhood back. I still have him now, standing on the mantelpiece.

From Vienna, I travelled to Salzburg and from there, because I had no papers, I crossed the border hidden in a packing crate. Border control seemed to take forever. But I could hear birds twittering and I knew that there was still a world out there beyond the darkness. Once over the border, my escape helpers let me out of the crate and we continued on to Munich. Kara and I were so delighted to see one another again that he had a blue mark on his cheek from where my

nose had been. We married and lived there at 17 Prinzregentenstraße in an apartment belonging to Dr. Otto Graf, who was a lovely man. A German couple with children also lived there but they were unpleasant people, probably even proper anti-Semites. In 1948, we travelled to Paris. While there, I was taken to hospital one night in the most terrible pain. The wound from my operation in Fallersleben had not been stitched properly and had not healed together cleanly. It had spread and I had to have an ovary removed. I survived and the doctor assured me straight away that I would definitely still be able to have children. But in 1948 I wasn't thinking about children yet; that came later. When I had become pregnant in Munich, just after our wedding, we had decided not to have the child because our future was still so uncertain.

In 1949, we boarded a ship in Genoa, bound for Australia. I didn't want to go to the USA, Canada seemed to me to be too cold, so we decided on Australia. We knew nothing about the country, apart from that it had some odd animals – kangaroos and the duckbilled platypus. And that it was a long way from Europe. Later, my mother and my brother also lived here in Australia.

### **Life as a task**

I had the number on my arm removed by a doctor in Australia at the end of the 1950s. The doctor had been detained as a prisoner of war in Japan during the Second World War. He felt I should no longer keep the number on my arm. As a former prisoner, he said he could imagine how much I had suffered. I sometimes regret now that I no longer have the number on my arm. It was a part of my history.

I don't feel any guilt that I survived while others died, but I do sometimes think: "Thank you for letting me survive, but



Julie Feldman shortly after her arrival in Australia, 1949.

why me? What is my duty?" Germany to me is a country like any other. I don't feel hatred towards anyone. As a result of my experiences, I feel and know that hatred and brutality cannot solve any of the world's problems, but that, in contrast, love and mutual understanding will bring positive results. I try to live my life according to this principle and on the basis of these beliefs.





# Sara Frenkel

## **Sara Frenkel**

Sara Frenkel was born Sara Bass in 1922 in the Polish city of Lublin. Her parents were simple folk. Her father Moshe (Moszea) was a tailor, and her mother, Hensche, was a housewife. The family also included a brother, Chaim, and a younger sister, Lea. After the occupation of Poland by the German Wehrmacht, the Bass family suffered the same fate as millions of Polish Jews. The result was ghettos, forced labour, deportation and, for most Jews, death. Sara and Lea were the only members of the Bass family to survive.

The sisters escaped from the Lublin ghetto in autumn 1942 and remained on the run from then on. They hid from the Germans and their collaborators in Lublin and the surrounding area, and eventually, after a month-long odyssey, they obtained false papers and travelled to Germany to get work.





The Bass sisters, Tel Aviv 1986.

Their experience was an insight into what Sara Frenkel terms the lion's den. The Bass sisters worked in the Volkswagen factory as nurses. To maintain their cover, they had to keep secret the fact that they were sisters. They had contact with other forced labourers, including the Jewish women brought to Fallersleben from Auschwitz, but they had to be on constant guard not to reveal their true identity. Sara and Lea Bass hid behind a quasi-Polish identity but lived in the constant fear that they would be discovered.

After the liberation, Sara Bass met Manfred Frenkel, a Jew of Polish descent born in Brunswick in 1920. From 1933 onwards, Manfred Frenkel had suffered terribly from daily discrimination at school and had left in 1935 to work as an apprentice under the Jewish owner of a shop selling carpets and curtains. However, on 28 October 1938, he was deported

from Germany, together with his parents, as part of the systematic eviction of Polish Jews, to the Polish town of Zbaszyn.<sup>71</sup> From there, the Frenkels moved to Łódź in May 1939. Forced into the ghetto after the German occupation, the whole family was deported to Auschwitz in August 1944. Shortly afterwards, Manfred Frenkel, his brother and his father were selected for forced labour in the Büssing plant in Brunswick. The male members of the Frenkel family were eventually liberated from the Wöbbelin concentration camp near Ludwigslust.

Manfred Frenkel went at once to the town now known as Wolfsburg, where a surviving cousin of his father and her daughters were living with three young women, who, as Jews, had survived by working at the Volkswagen factory with false papers. One of the three young women was Sara



Sara Frenkel in Antwerp, 1995.

Bass – and this was how she came to meet Manfred Frenkel. By the end of November 1945, the young couple were engaged. They married in December and at the beginning of August 1946, their son was born. They called him Chaim, after Sara’s murdered brother.

In 1947, Manfred Frenkel opened a jewelry shop in Brunswick. However, the shop did not bring in enough support to the young family, so the parents decided in 1949 to take their son and move to Israel. In August 1954, they went to Antwerp, where they made a new home. Sara and the now late Manfred Frenkel set up a foundation in 1988, to preserve the Jewish cemetery in Lublin from permanent ruin and to erect a memorial and a museum there in memory of the city’s murdered Jews.

Sara Frenkel is an extraordinary woman who radiates a natural elegance. She displays an overwhelming wish for peace and humanity. The memory of the children killed in the Holocaust or in the forced labour system is still with her today. It is an everlasting pain that gnaws away at her. On rare occasions she is able to push this into the background and then she bubbles with zest for life and urges those around her: “Enjoy life! It may be gone tomorrow!”

## Sara Frenkel<sup>72</sup>

### The Fear was Everywhere

Memories like this can only really be shared with people who have lived through the same experience. Nobody else can really understand. To other people it may be like reading a newspaper, which is thrown out once the last page has been read. My husband and I used to talk about it all. There is so much to say that cannot be put into words. There are things that can be put into words and things that you just feel. Emotion is emotion. Some of my friends tell me I should leave it be and not talk about it. But I say we should remember the dead children in particular. That's where reporting comes in. Remembering is something very different.

### Family

I was born Sara Bass in 1922 in Lublin, Poland. My parents were good people, my father, Moshe (Moszea) was a tailor. My mother's name was Hensche. I had a brother, Chaim, and a sister, Lea. Lea and I were the only ones to survive. We were still living in Lublin when the Germans invaded.

### German occupation

After conquering Poland, the Germans forbade us Jews from attending school. Consequently, two friends and I turned to the Red Cross and asked to train as nurses. Completing the course was great, and I was really happy about it. My father could no longer earn a living as a tailor. The streets were teeming with Germans, who hit and bullied the Jews or even took them away just like that. They were German, the people doing this. At school, though, I had learnt that

German people were cultured, they were poets, authors, big industrialists, the country was rich and the people had all that they wanted. But those same Germans had now come to Poland and were persecuting us.

### Fleeing to the countryside

When Mr Koter, a member of the Agrarian party from Dombrowicz, visited us, my father told him all about the anti-Jewish measures and reprisals. The party member advised my father and brother to move to Dombrowicz, to the country, where my father could work as a tailor. Both heeded his advice and moved to the country hoping that, there, they would be able to escape the anti-Semitic backlash. My mother divided her time between living with us and living in the country, when my grandmother looked after us girls.

### One night in Majdanek

One day a letter arrived, which summoned my brother to report for work with the German occupation troops. We knew that if he went, he would never return. Everyone died there, everyone. During this forced labour, Jews were abused and killed. For that reason, we didn't reply to the letter from the German authorities. Then, one night, the gendarmerie knocked at the door. The caretaker called to us that we should open the door. I opened the door to our flat and they asked for my brother. We told them we didn't know where he was. As a result, I had to go in place of my brother. That night, the market square in Lublin was crowded with people who had been dragged from their homes in the ghetto.<sup>73</sup> Then we had to walk in rows to the Majdanek camp.<sup>74</sup> Majdanek – a word which later came to signify murder.

When I was there, a brand new hutted camp still stood on the site, surrounded only by barbed wire. There were no gas chambers – yet. So, I went to Majdanek. Just imagine, I was there. At Majdanek. Only for one night. But I was at Majdanek.<sup>75</sup>

We were assigned to the huts. At night we were supposed to lie on the pallets – but I didn't lie down, instead I held onto the bedpost all night long. I didn't want to lie down. In the morning they let us out. There was no work though, nothing. Then I saw my grandmother standing at the fence. At that time it was just a simple barbed wire fence, not an electric one. My grandmother passed me a basket containing bread and some milk over the fence. Then, as I made my way back to the hut, I met a girl in the camp grounds. She spoke to me but I didn't know who she was. She said: "We were in the same class, we were in the same class at school."

I was pleased that I wasn't alone in the camp. We saw how the forced labourers were led in and out. We were so very much afraid, it was pure fear. We sensed what lay ahead. That's why we plucked up all our courage and headed towards the gate. Then the commandant came towards us – a small man, in uniform, an officer, he was wicked – my voice trembling from the fear, I told him we wanted to give the basket back to my grandmother. He called to us: "You dogs, you dogs. You'd better come back, you dogs." "But of course!", we replied, and headed towards the gate. The guards saw that we had spoken to the commandant and they thought we had permission to leave. That's how we got out. We simply didn't answer their questions and got out – an angel must have been watching over us. When I got back home, we, my mother, sister, grandmother and I, also went to Dombrowicz.

### **Liquidations**

The killing began in September 1942.<sup>76</sup> We all had to gather together and my parents instructed us three siblings to leave the market square and run to where the Poles were. Suddenly, my brother was stopped by an SS soldier and ordered to show his papers. My sister and I just continued on. He was arrested. Then Chaim was gone. We went on anyway. A baker's wife, who was afraid to hide us, sent us to a church. The SS were also at the church and we were warned that if we didn't remove our head dresses people would know we were Jewish. We heard shot after shot and saw dead people lying on the vehicles that passed us.

### **One step away from death**

We continued on towards Dombrowicz. We were thirsty but could not get any water. Only when we reached a stream could my sister and I quench our thirst. When we arrived we hid in a barn that belonged to a farm woman we knew. We had to leave though, we were constantly on the move from one barn to the next, never knowing where we would find help. We turned back to Lublin, where we were snuck into the nearby Majdan Tatarski ghetto. At least there we were with Jews. But during that same night we moved again because of the threat of the ghetto would be cleared. One day later, on 9 November 1942, everyone had gone and the ghetto was empty. Once again, my sister and I had survived. One night we hid in Lublin's cemetery, we saw people being shot there. We had to keep moving on. We were always one step away from death, always afraid.

### **False papers**

During the day, Lea and I always went into Lublin and sat in the park. One day, as we were walking through the streets,

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03

Art	Name
poln.	Ho [unclear]
poln.	Schlags [unclear]
2300 poln.	Fromowicz Julian
2318 poln.	Hollmann Scheine
18533 poln.	Audel Matis
18479 poln.	Schneidleder Jos
18466 slow.	Kohn Naftali
18266 poln.	Buttermann Wol
18252 poln.	Erdapfel Josef
14273 poln.	Jesturim Dawid
14277 poln.	Kolbe Hersch
374 poln.	Grüba Stein Mose
17807 poln.	Makrauch Moses
17579 poln.	Bass Moses
17648 poln.	Weinblatt Bf
17779 poln.	Rosenthal
19272 poln.	Kleinberg
18486 poln.	Ehrlich S
19759 poln.	Lerner
1833 poln.	G
366 poln.	F
79 poln.	S

Part of a document from the Majdanek extermination camp, with Sara Bass' father's name listed under number 17,579.

a man came up behind us and tapped us on the shoulders. He asked us: "Aren't you the Bass girls? Do you have papers to be wandering around so freely?" The man's name was Wlachislaw Janczarek. He knew my father through his brother-in-law. Of course we had no papers whatsoever. Mr Janczarek took us back to his house and told us to return in a couple of days, when he would give us birth certificates stating that we were Gentiles. A few days later, Mr Janczarek really did give us two birth certificates. One for me, which had belonged to his sister-in-law, Stanislaw Gorczyca, and one for my sister, in the name of the sister-in-law's neighbour, Maria Taracha. Mr Janczarek sent us to the employment office with our birth certificates. We were to voluntarily register for work in Germany. He said that would be the best thing to do.

### From one hide-out to another

At the employment office, they asked about our parents, our family and our priest. We ran away. So it was back to hiding again. Lea and I then found some work, knitting and shopping for a lady. We spent winter of 1942/43 at her house. The family definitely suspected that we were Jewish and eventually told us that Jews were being searched for and they needed to clear the house for Germans. But that was just an excuse, in reality they were afraid of employing us any longer. A woman living with the family talked us out of the idea of registering for work in Germany. She sent us to her fiancé, who worked at the Bonifratro Hospital. The fiancé then sent us to a matron.

We were unsure as to where to go in the meantime, so in a shop that I used to go to for the lady, I spoke to a Jewish prisoner who worked for Florstedt, the commandant of Majdanek. Mundek helped us and sent us to a barracks where other Jewish prisoners worked for Germans. We could work and sleep there for one day. We went back to Mundek and ended up sleeping at the commandant's house; at that time he still lived in the town and not the camp. At the hospital, matron Maria took us in. I confided in her and told her that we were Jewish. She appreciated our honesty and wanted to help us. She sent us to an orphanage. Mundek, on the other hand, wanted to send us to the partisans. This plan failed because we needed weapons and money, but we were only young girls. We were in despair over it all. We continued sleeping in the commandant of Majdanek's cellar. Mundek let us in every night. Eventually, in our distress, we decided to go and register voluntarily at the Majdanek camp, if only to be somewhere. We got close, saw the gate, a gang of labourers, a corpse that was being carried by other captives, and we ran away. The next day is a complete blank for me.



Sara Frenkel and Father Jan Poddebniak in Lublin, 1988.

### **The helpful priest**

The following day, Sister Maria sent us to Father Jan Poddebniak at the Wniebo Wziety church. I told him our story and said: “If you want it, Father, we will both stay alive.” He said he knew of some farmers we could stay with, but that it would be very dangerous. Our only other option was to voluntarily register for work in Germany. We showed him our false birth certificates. He took them and promised to sort it out. He let us sleep at his house. The following day we visited Mundek and he thought this was a good solution, especially as his sister had also been sent to Germany to work with false papers. Mundek was a brave man. He supplied partisans and prisoners at Majdanek with medication and weapons, which he stole from the commandant.

### **To Germany**

Father Poddebniak sorted out our papers and registered us for work. He asked us to write to him from Germany. Mundek gave us a case containing a little money, soap, bread, bacon, a candle, matches, a pencil and paper, and the address of a lady we were also to write to. Then the priest sent us to a collection camp where we were to be examined. My sister looked so wretched, but the doctor at the collection camp

knew about us and confirmed that we were fit to work. Then we drove off towards Germany. First we went to Magdeburg, then to Lehrte. It was March 1943, more than six months of fear, flight and hiding were behind us. And now?

### **Hutted camp**

In Lehrte, we were taken to a hutted camp. In the evening we were allowed water to wash ourselves. I got talking to an old guard soldier. He asked where we were from, what we had studied etc. I told him that, after grammar school, I took a course with the Red Cross and that my cousin – referring to my sister – was still at school. The man thought this would be very helpful as they were looking for nurses. He asked what we had in our little case and was amazed to see the money and piece of bacon. As he wanted to make sure that we would find work as nurses, I gave him both the money and the bacon. I was afraid that I didn’t know enough to work as a nurse, and as for my sister, she couldn’t do anything at all. The man calmed us down, saying we shouldn’t be scared as we would certainly manage to put on a bandage, take a temperature and serve meals. At the following day’s roll call, someone immediately called out: “Where are the two nurses?” We had the elderly soldier to thank for that.

### **Nurses in the town hospital**

From Lehrte, we went to the town hospital – the hutted hospital – in what is now Wolfsburg. It was part of the Volkswagen factory. We were given a room in ward 7. After our previous experiences, this was almost inconceivable: there was a cupboard, a bed and normal food. Yet we could not shake the fear of being found out. If we had let just one Jewish word slip we would have given ourselves away.

### **The doctor**

Dr. Körbel, the company doctor in charge at the Volkswagen factory,<sup>77</sup> decreed that we didn't have to wear a "P" or any other sign on our clothes. Even when German nurses from the "Deutschen Frauenschaft" – real female Nazis – demanded we wore the P sign, he saw to it that we could take it off again. I was free to do as I pleased, because as Polish nurses we were not supervised. Dr. Körbel was kind, but he couldn't do a great deal for us. The nurses could have done more.

### **The hutted hospital**

The hospital was not – as others were – housed in a stone building, but was made up of huts instead. My sister and I were responsible for the forced labourers. Russians and Poles were treated on the ward. The huts only had one door at one end, and anyone wanting to get to the toilet had to run across the whole yard only those who could move, of course.

My sister and I worked in ward 7. There were people with TB, diphtheria and typhus in our ward. We had to do everything, wash the patients and give them their meals, clean the huts and the toilets. Doctors sometimes made the rounds. Linen and food were scarce. There was hardly any medication for the Poles and the Russians. There was so much suffering. We had nothing. We were a long way from home. People today can no longer comprehend this.

After a while I was placed in the newly built ward 8, which had larger rooms and its own toilets. But conditions were still poor. Russians and Poles were put there. Dutch, French and German patients with contagious TB were admitted to ward 7. Shortly before the end of the war, women – German women – with diphtheria, typhus and syphilis were admitted to ward 8. The German nurses refused to tend to the

women. You had to know how to tend to someone with such an illness without infecting yourself. The nurses did not do it, my sister did it instead. She had to tend to the wounds without gloves, without disinfectant, all she had was a basin of water with Sagrotan, a disinfectant. The nurses still got cross with her because apparently she worked too slowly. My sister complained about having to do everything alone. She then had to officially apologise, otherwise she would have been sent to camp 18, Volkswagen's penal camp, which had concentration camp conditions.<sup>78</sup>

### **Patients**

One of our patients was named Stefan, and he came to us from the concentration camp.<sup>79</sup> This man was severely emaciated. So he was put on our ward, Sister Helene decided that he should stay with us and also work as a caregiver. He was very helpful and cared for the patients. There were also two Ukrainian girls stayed with us and helped us. This meant Sister Helene and I no longer had to do everything on our own on old ward 7. There was no bath or showers in the huts, we had to wash the patients at the wash basin instead. Often this was not possible, the patients were in such a bad way that they couldn't even stand up. Furthermore, they only got one and a half slices of bread and a little jam for breakfast. It was a measly meal for the sick Poles and Russians, and they had to lie on a wooden pallet with a straw mattress. That was ward 7, where I started out. Then a new hut was built, and I was assigned in ward 8.

We once had a Dutchman who, as a student in Amsterdam, had been taken out of university and forced to work at the Volkswagen factory. When he came to us, his hands and toes had been frozen off. He no longer resembled a human being. And we said: "Oh look, there's a new patient." A very nice



Diese Arbeitskarte berechtigt nur zur Arbeit bei dem genannten Betriebsführer und wird beim Verlassen dieses Arbeitsplatzes ungültig

**Generalgouvernement**

Arbeitskarte  
gültig nur für die unten bezeichnete Arbeitsstelle  
Nr. **IX 3/471**

Bestandort: **Gortsecha** (St. 2)  
Namen: **Stanislaw**

Arbeitsort: **Dombrow** (St. 1) (Wohnort: **Warschau**)

Arbeitsort (St. 2): **Stadtkrankenhaus**

Arbeitsort (St. 1): **KdF, Stadt Gifhorn**

Arbeitsort (St. 2): **Sanitätsleiterin 27 04**

Arbeitsort (St. 1): **beantragt**

Arbeitsort (St. 2): **Stadtkrankenhaus**

Arbeitsort (St. 1): **KdF, Stadt Gifhorn**

Arbeitsort (St. 2): **12. März 44**

Arbeitsort (St. 1): **15. Dez. 44**

Für den Inhaber der Arbeitskarte werden überwiesen:  
(Der eingezahlte Betrag und der Tag der Einzahlung ist vom Betriebsführer mit Tinte einzutragen. Nicht radieren! Nur einmal monatlich überwiesen!)

RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)
RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)
RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)
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RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)	RM _____ am _____ (Poststempel)

### Arbeitskarte

für ausländische Arbeitskräfte  
aus Generalgouvernement

Sara Bass' work card for 1943/44 from the Volkswagen factory where she went by the name of Stanislaw Gortsecha.







In the new hospital hut, 1944. On the bed at the top is Sara Bass, on the right in the bed is Stefan, who was brought to the hospital from the Laagberg camp and who stayed to work as caregiver.

Russian female doctor said: “Come on, let’s go and check on the new patient.” While we were chatting, the doctor whispered: “I don’t think he’ll make it.” I asked who it was. She said: “A Dutchman, from camp 21.”<sup>80</sup> That was a penal camp, a concentration camp. Later, I asked him how his extremities had come to be frozen off. We got him through it. We also admitted women and men who had cut off their hands in a machine. We had three or four patients we couldn’t really help. Those that we did help had to return to work as soon as possible.

### **Girls from Auschwitz**

The Hungarian girls who came to the Volkswagen factory from Auschwitz in autumn 1944 lived and worked in Hall 1. Some of them were also admitted to the hospital. When the Jewish girls were first taken ill, SS women came along to keep watch, but later on the SS women no longer super-



F.l.t.r.: Lea Bass, Stefan and Halina L. Kanarek, who lived in the Volkswagen factory with false papers in the name of Helene Leszczynska, 1944.

vised them. Some of the Hungarian girls were suffering from typhus, one had cancer, and one had an inflamed appendix. Word soon got around that the girls were from Auschwitz.



Sara Bass in front of the new hut, ward 8, 1944.

The Dutch and the French received medication, the Russians and the Poles hardly got any. And what about the Hungarian girls? The care they received was very poor. When the first girls from Auschwitz arrived with wounds from working in the anti-tank mines, we did all we could to help them. Two or three girls gave us keep-sakes. They wanted to thank us in some way, they didn't think that there were still people left who would treat them as human beings. They would sew a pretty little purse or something else for us. Or they would write us a letter. We always received something from them. The girls were afraid and therefore barely spoke to us. We gave them all the food and medication we had. They didn't know, however, that my sister and I were also Jewish. You could always see the fear in their eyes. We also had two girls come to us with hernias, which they developed from having to carry such heavy loads during rubble clearing duties.



Frits Ten Haff, a Dutch forced labourer, with Sara Bass, 1944.

Later, the hernia was operated on. I knew how that felt because I too had once developed a hernia from having to carry heavy loads. Everything hurt.

The Hungarian girl with the inflamed appendix was admitted late one evening. After the operation, a German nurse said that we shouldn't bother tending to this woman as she was going to die anyway. The girl was still under anaesthesia. We wanted her to survive, so all we did was put a small bowl of water down to wet her lips but did not give her anything to eat. The girl lived. A little later on we – the nurses – made some egg liqueur using alcohol from the pharmacy and a few eggs we'd managed to stash away. I asked the Hungarian girl, who had undergone the appendix operation, to come into our office, where she drank a little of our "liqueur". She was a pretty girl and I wanted to bring her some joy. She couldn't have known that we were both

Jewish. The German nurses didn't want to have anything to do with the women from the concentration camp. We had to care for them ourselves. Also, we did not receive any medication to give the girls. But we wanted to do everything we possibly could to keep them alive.

### **The dying children**

Ward 8, where I worked, was reorganised and the forced labourers' babies came to us. A woman would give birth in hospital and then after a few weeks she would have to go back to the factory. They were not allowed to keep the children. There were always 10 to 14 children in the hut at the "Ostarbeiter" [workers from the Soviet Union] camp. Later, a hut was put up on Schachtweg.

It was impossible to separate the healthy children from the sick ones in these huts, and child after child died as a result. One day, I needed some sulphate for two babies who were around eight months old, but I was not given any. The nurse in the pharmacy said there was no sulphate available for ward 8. The children died. There was hardly any medication available for the little ones anyway.

The parents couldn't do anything to stop their children being taken away. Most of them were not married, they had to work, a child was born. We were all away from home. We were young and innocent. Becoming pregnant could therefore happen to anyone.

But all the hospital patients helped to give the children something to eat. I couldn't give all the children food on my own. There was a shortage of nappies, of medication, of everything. We couldn't pick up all the children, sing them songs and cuddle them. They went without love.

In summer 1944, the conditions in the hut and the illnesses were so bad that the hut was disinfected and repainted and



Marcel, a French male nurse who was later sent to camp 21, 1944.

an 'isolation ward' was set up. The healthy children were moved to a different hut in Rùhen, known as the "children's home", and later on, the sick children also ended up there. All of the children in Rùhen died.<sup>81</sup>

When the hut was renovated, I was asked to go and work with the children in Rùhen but I didn't accept the posting. I refused it. That wasn't work, I didn't want to see that. There, the children lay in dirt and the rooms stank of urine and faeces. The place was full of lice and bugs. The food was bad and there wasn't enough water. So after a day I immediately went back to the town hospital to see the sister of ward 8, and I told her: "I want to be honest, please give me work, wherever you like, anything, sweeping the streets, cleaning toilets, anything, but not there. Anywhere but Rùhen, I cannot work there." That's why I was sent to the factory, where I worked for the Red Cross. I was happy so long as I didn't have to work in Rùhen. Rùhen was too terrible.





F.l.t.r. Top: an Italian, Frits Ten Haff, and another Dutch forced labourer. Centre in white blouse: Sara Bass. Bottom: Halina L. Kanarek and Lea Bass, 1944.

## Sophie

The babies really were lovely, but all of them died in Rùhen at some point. There was one little girl in particular who was very special. Her name was Sophie, the poorest little child. Sophie's mum was from the Ukraine.

Sophie was seven months old and was still at the hutted camp. That was before the facilities in Rùhen became available. She was almost starved, very thin and permanently had sickness and diarrhoea. I often took Sophie in my arms. I knitted her things out of gauze bandages. The child never cried. Her mother sometimes came to see her but was never allowed to stay long, and of course she had had to leave the child in the hut just a few weeks after the birth.

The child couldn't eat, but she had to eat in order to survive. So I pinched her little nose, which made her swallow,

and that was when I gave her something to eat. I also taught her to crawl. It was truly amazing that Sophie was alive, and all the women and men from the "Ostlager" [East camp] came to help. They were all so happy and glad. Then it was announced "The child is to go to Rùhen!". I said: "No! The child will stay here. She's no bother. I'll take her on as my child."

I told Dr. Körbel that I wanted to have the child for myself. He just said that I was not married and had to work. Thus, Sophie ended up in the children's camp in Rùhen. It was a long walk to Rùhen, more than two hours, but I still visited her. The factory was already being bombed at that time and it wasn't always possible to go there. One day I told the sister that I was going to visit Sophie. She replied: "There's no point in going. Sophie has died." Even today, this is still very painful for me. So many children died there.

As did Sophie. If she were alive today, she might have had a grown up daughter of her own. Straight after the war I also went back to Rùhen, some children were still alive there. They were covered in lice and were lying on the floor. It was terrible. And I couldn't help. There was also a similar home in nearby Brunswick.

## The murder of a pilot

Towards the end of the war, the Volkswagen factory was heavily bombed. I happened to be in the factory during one particularly heavy air raid, but I survived. During the attack, though, I lost the locket with my parents' photos in it. Then I went back to the hospital. The whole place was in turmoil. Two American pilots who had been shot down had been captured. One was already dead when he reached the ground, and the other was to be handed over to the police by a Hitler Youth leader. Yet when the injured man was

brought to the hospital, the guards, who were 'Volksdeutsche', lunged at him. The 'Volksdeutsche' who worked in the factory were worse and more fanatical than all the other Germans. They beat the American terribly with batons and steel pipes.

I was told about it and then I saw him. The American, such a handsome young man, was still alive. He was tall, blond, young and handsome. He had a silk scarf, or it may have been a silk stocking, and a gold chain around his neck. They must have been from his girl. A German sister refused to tend to his serious injuries – she would not, of course, nurse an American. But she did steal the chain and silk scarf from his neck. Then they gave him an overdose of morphine and he died. They killed him with the morphine. After the war, a trial was held to investigate his death.<sup>82</sup>

### **Good Catholics**

I wrote numerous letters to the Catholic priest in Lublin. We showed people his replies, that way nobody would suspect that my sister and I were Jewish. One day we were ordered to go to the Gestapo. We were afraid that there might be a problem with our papers. Instead, the Gestapo official referred to one of the letters I had written to the priest, which said: "We are well. We have found some nice work". So he asked us if we wanted to become 'Volksdeutsche' as we were doing so well and were so happy. I didn't know what to say, I started to babble, spoke about my parents, said I couldn't make the decision without them, and I also pointed out that we were, indeed, Catholics. Polish Catholics, I said, could not be real Germans. I prattled on. The official just thought that I was stupid. So then all he did was call my sister and me "idiots". Then we were free to go. I was so afraid that our papers would be checked, but the official simply had a



Wiczek, who, as a Polish Jew with false papers, concealed his true identity and lived in the Polish camp of the Volkswagen factory. Here he is pictured in Berlin after the war, 1946.

stupid Catholic Pole in front of him. At least so he thought. We also found out later from the priest that Mundek, the Jewish prisoner who had helped us so much, had been shot. How sad. He was such a good person.

### **Jews with false papers**

My sister and I were not the only Jews with false papers at the Volkswagen factory, there were definitely some others. There were probably around ten of us altogether. We all somehow lived hidden behind a false identity. There was Wiczek, for example, who was a Jew from Poland but worked in the factory as a Polish forced labourer.

In 1946, he went to a UNRRA camp near Berlin.<sup>83</sup> Then he went back to Poland, and my husband and I never heard from him again even though we had been in contact and we had written to each other. All I can think is that he must have been killed in one of the anti-Semitic pogroms back in Poland. Otherwise he would have got back in touch with us. There were also another two girls, Halina and Toschka, who



Sara (left) and her sister Lea Bass (right) with several other surviving Jews, who after the liberation in 1945 met in Fallersleben, near Wolfsburg. Halina L. Kanarek is in the centre.

were also forced to work in the hospital and who went to Israel after the liberation. Halina has since died. I don't know what happened to Toschka. The girls were always being ordered to go to the Gestapo for one reason or another, they wanted to see the missing papers from Poland. Both were terribly afraid. But then the Red Army moved into Poland and no one could check anything so they stayed alive. I even think that Tosia, the Russian doctor, was Jewish.

After the war, there were five of us Jewish girls in the hospital, including a mother and daughter. We were also joined by a Jewish man, who had escaped the Warsaw ghetto, and a Majdanek survivor. They had all somehow managed to

smuggle themselves into the factory and were not discovered. And there was also Sally Perel, who pretended to be German and even joined the Hitler Youth.<sup>84</sup> After the war, I also got to know Sally Perel in Brunswick. He met my future husband when he left the camp, and they became friends.

### **Fear**

I was always afraid because we couldn't escape. A Polish girl might accidentally – not maliciously but accidentally – say that my name was Sara because she may have known me. Then they would have put me in the concentration camp. So I count myself lucky not to have been found out. I wasn't hungry, just afraid. Always afraid.

### **Life in the aftermath**

I was lucky. Not everyone managed to escape. There wasn't much you could do. It wasn't easy. You can't just cast off your fate as you would an uncomfortable coat. You carry the weight of those experiences and memories throughout your life. My husband and I could talk for hours about it. But now that I'm alone I have nobody. So I pick up a book, read and immerse myself in a whole new world. Somewhere completely different.

You didn't just stay alive, you survived. Your roots? They no longer exist. You don't have roots. You search for what you have lost, but it doesn't come back. Everything has gone.

### **Remembering the children**

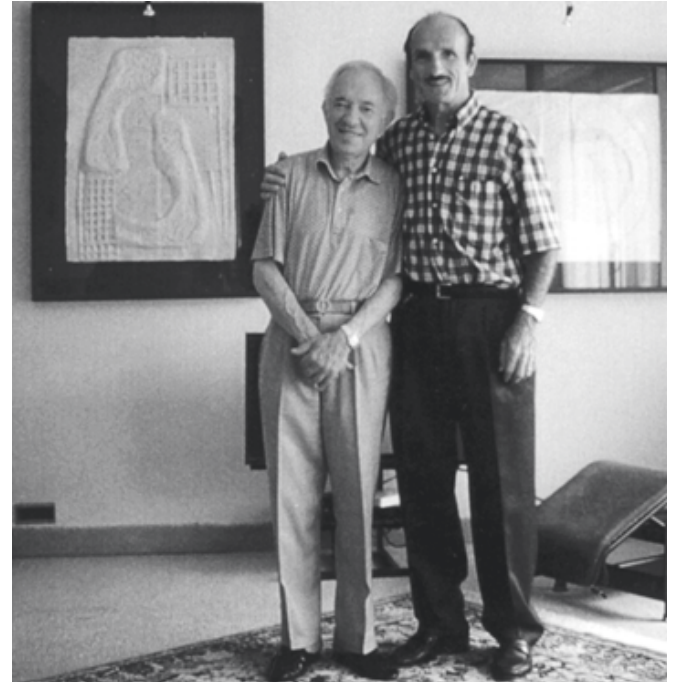
Almost 20 years ago, my husband and I travelled around northern Germany and also visited Brunswick, where he was originally from. We went to Wolfsburg. Today it is a pretty town, it has no huts at all. In Wolfsburg I saw a road sign for Rühren and immediately thought that I had to see



A photo from the German man's house, where Sara Bass and her sister lived after the liberation, in what is now Wolfsburg. She took the photo with her as she was convinced that people would later deny having been involved.

whether there was anything left of the children's graves. I was sure the old Catholic cemetery would still be there. My husband went into a florist's, asked about the cemetery and about the children's grave. The lady showed us the cemetery and said curtly: "Yes, it also has one of those children's graves." We drove to the cemetery where we met an elderly lady. I asked her about the Rühren children's grave. She said very abruptly: "I had nothing to do with that!" – and simply walked off. Another lady came towards me and asked: "Have you a child here too?" "No", I said, "but I worked with the children. I was in Rühren and saw everything."

Then we reached the grave. It had just been All Saints' Day, so flowers had been placed on all the graves in the cemetery. This grave, however, didn't have a single flower on it, not one. Everything was overgrown, completely wild. There was just one headstone with the Lord's Prayer on it, nothing else. What use is the Lord's Prayer, I thought angrily. How will that



Manfred Frenkel (left) with a friend in Antwerp, 1990.

help the children after their deaths? My husband kept saying that it shouldn't be allowed. And then we spoke to Volkswagen and came to an arrangement with the church. Finally, a memorial stone was put up and the gravesite tidied up. Today, wreaths are always being placed there. After all, all those children were innocent. They were born and died just a short time later. They didn't experience motherly love, or that of a grandmother. Nobody took them in their arms and sang them a little song. And today? Today there is more war, more murder. There are more children's graves. For 82 years now, I have known nothing different, only war here and war there. Hunger here, hunger there.

### **Loneliness**

Sophie is not here, my friends are no longer here, my husband is no longer here. Everyone has gone. I'm alone again.





# Sally Perel

Sally Perel, as he is most commonly known, was born in Peine on 21 April 1925. His parents were Jews of Russian descent. When the reprisals at school increased and the anti-Semitic climate grew more threatening, the family of six left Germany in 1935 and moved to be with their relatives in Łódź Poland. When the Germans invaded Poland, Sally's parents sent him and his brother, Isaak, to the East, to the Soviet Union, where many Jews from Poland fled. Sally found a place in an orphanage, his older brother went to the Baltic provinces and the third son of the family was a soldier in the Polish army.

Having been disoriented and uprooted, young Sally at first became a staunch Communist. The German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 was a traumatic experience for this now independent young man. During an armed forces





Snowball fight in Brunswick in the Hitler Youth home, 1943.

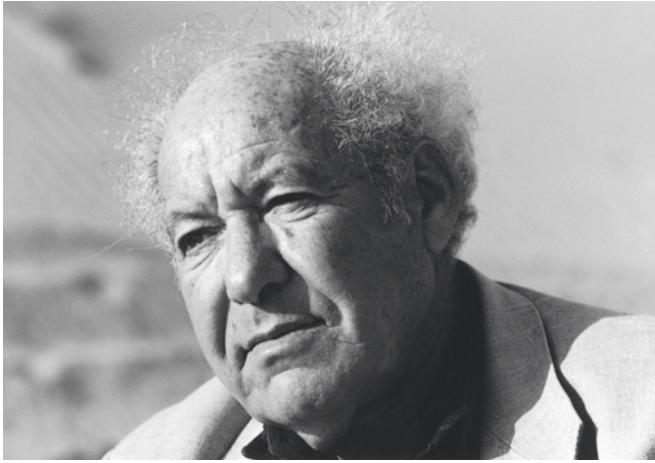
selection process, he concealed his Jewish identity and pretended to be Josef Perjell, a 'Volksdeutscher'.

He survived up to the end of the war under this false identity. After serving some time in the armed forces, he became an apprentice at the Volkswagen factory in Brunswick and a member of the Hitler Youth. He survived as a German, and had to suppress his Jewish identity.

After the liberation, he found his two brothers again. His parents and his sister, Bertha, did not return. Finding his identity was something that, until recently, troubled him greatly. In 1947, Sally Perel started attending the ORT<sup>85</sup> school in Munich where he took a course in precision engineering, putting to use the knowledge he had learnt at the Volkswagen factory. When a recruitment office opened in Munich for Haganah,<sup>86</sup> the underground military organisa-

tion operating in Palestine, Sally registered. The founding of the State was imminent and a war with the neighbouring Arab States was anticipated. Sally Perel wanted to fight for his people and his future homeland. Two days after the State of Israel was founded, the journey commenced, but the ship only left Marseille at the end of August 1948. When Sally Perel arrived in Israel, he had two free days and immediately visited his brother David, who already lived in the country with his wife. After this short break, Sally Perel, under Moshe Dayan in Regiment 68 of the Jerusalem Division, played his part in protecting the young State from destruction.

Two years later, Sally Perel's civilian life began. The young man found building a new life hard, yet as he says himself, his apprenticeship as a toolmaker at the VW "satellite factory" helped him along. He worked and was able to build up



Sally Perel in Israel, 2001.

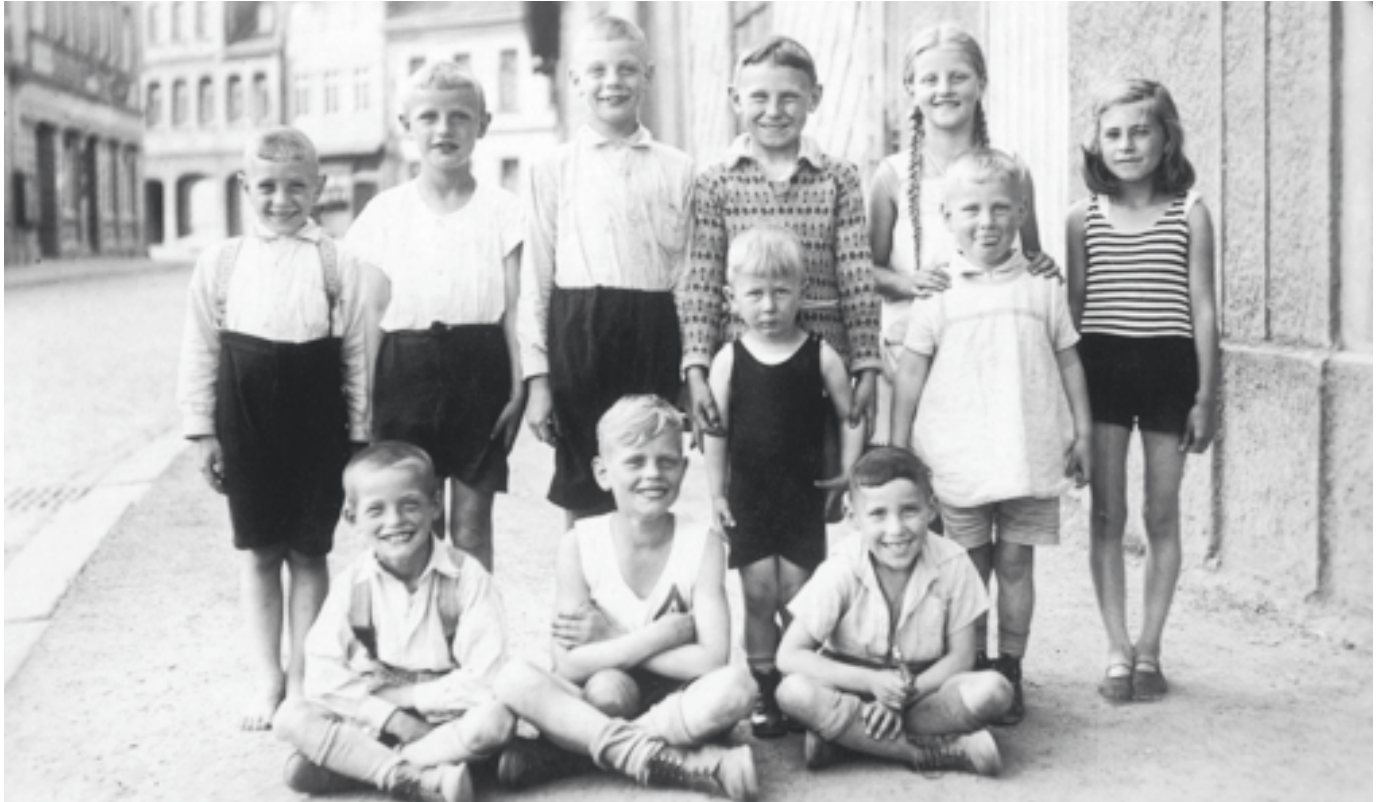
his own livelihood, he married in 1959 and had two sons. Sally Perel also now has three grandchildren.

In 1981, Sally Perel had to undergo a heart operation, after which he decided to retire. In his own words, in the “unfamiliar peace, the suppressed thoughts crept out from the darkened room“. The Hitler Youth, Jupp, was suddenly present again. Sally said: “The inner turmoil and the conflict between Josef and Sally now hit me with its entire force“. This resulted in Sally Perel writing “Hitlerjunge Salomon“, which he first published in German in 1992. This has now been translated into numerous languages. In 1990/91, Agnieszka Holland directed a film called “Europa, Europa“, which was based on the book.

Since then, Sally has visited German schools, given readings and talked to young people about his survival and he has asked himself the question posed by those who want to know what being a survivor really means. Sally Perel is a small, energetic and warm-hearted man. Whenever he talks about the Holocaust he always says emphatically: “I lost my

God in Auschwitz. No religion can explain the ashes of the dead children to me.“ He relentlessly criticises religious and political fundamentalism of any kind. His credo is “explain, question, appeal, think, pass on the truth, reconcile and promote peace“.

In 1999, Sally Perel was awarded the ‘Bundesverdienstkreuz’ [Federal Cross of Merit]. Sally sees this honour as an incentive to continue his activities and reconciliation work and he says: “It is in my numerous reading trips to Germany and my many encounters with young people in Germany that my unique survival of the Second World War has found its true purpose.“



Children in Peine, Sally front right, 1934.

INTERVIEW

## Sally Perel<sup>87</sup>

### Fear of Detection was my Constant Companion

I wrote my story down years ago.<sup>88</sup> My experiences are undoubtedly outstanding, but who could have known back then what path their own destiny would take. The stories of other survivors are just as unique.

Take Roman Frister, for example, who described in his novel how he only survived the Holocaust by stealing the cap of a fellow concentration camp inmate, after his own had been stolen from him. It was impossible to survive in a concentration camp without a cap.<sup>89</sup>

\_\_\_\_\_ For more than 40 years I kept my experiences to myself until the day came when I no longer had a choice. Over the years, I came to understand that the trauma I was trying to suppress had to come out. I couldn't live with the emotional pressure and no longer wanted to. In order to free myself from this pressure, I really had to write from my soul.<sup>90</sup>

SALLY PEREL



Sally Perel and his sister Bertha (both middle front) in Peine, 1928.

The book was republished in Hebrew in spring 2004, which means that my granddaughter can now finally read my story for herself.

### **From Peine to Łódź**

I was born in Peine, near Brunswick, in 1925, and had a happy childhood. My parents had emigrated to Germany from Russia in 1918. I was banned from school at the age of ten.<sup>91</sup> The National Socialist terror was increasing. We fled to Łódź in Poland. During my time there, I was terribly

homesick for Germany, but at least in Łódź I was able to go to school again. Then came 1 September 1939. The actions of the German occupying forces were atrocious. We are all familiar with the images today. Our parents sent my 29 year-old brother, Isaak, and me away. We were supposed to flee to the East to escape the situation and the threat of being placed confined to a ghetto. My sister Bertha stayed with my parents and my brother David, as a Polish soldier, was captured and held as a prisoner of war by the Germans. We were extremely afraid for him.



### **From Łódź to Grodno**

At the end of December 1939, we reached the Bug river and the Red Army. I was taken to an orphanage in Grodno. My brother went on to Vilnius to join his girlfriend Mira. My sister Bertha also came to Grodno unexpectedly after she had managed to flee the Łódź ghetto with a friend. We received news of our parents once a month in postcards. My brother Isaak had married Mira by that time. David had been released from captivity and was in the ghetto with my parents. Although my family was scattered all over the place, I was happy in the orphanage. I believed in the communist ideology. I had become a staunch advocate of class war.

### **A nightmare**

When the Germans invaded the Soviet Union on 21 June 1941, all the Jewish children in the orphanage fled further east with their caregivers. The group became separated on the way. Suddenly, I found myself all alone somewhere near Minsk. Other people were there, just no-one I knew. It was a nightmare. I found myself surrounded by death, fighting and destruction. I was only 16.

### **A Jew turned 'Volksdeutscher'**

Suddenly it was completely quiet. The dust settled and Germans stood before us. We all had to form lines in front of them. People were sorted into groups and somehow word got out that Jews were being shot in the woods there and then. I stood in line, the German army before us. Jews were singled out by members of the unit I was later to belong to. Soldiers led the Jews into the woods, where members of the SS were waiting to execute them. Many of the German soldiers later tried to deny the murders, claiming that they



The 12th Tank Division in the USSR, June 1941.

had not killed anyone, they “just” separated the Jews from the group.

When my turn came, I knew if I told the truth I would be dead. So I said I was not a Jew, but a ‘Volksdeutscher’. I knew if it didn’t work I would be shot. But the soldier believed me. All the others had to pull down their trousers so the soldiers could see if they had been circumcised. But he believed me without proof. Why me and not the others? It’s not as though I look particularly ‘aryan’, and there are definitely certain differences in the appearance of different races. Jews from Eastern Europe were often easy to identify as Jews. Particularly if they were religious. And a Jew from Eastern Europe looked different to a German or a German Jew. But I didn’t have to drop my trousers.

I visited this soldier, with whom I was in contact right up until his death, with three journalists, two Germans and an Israeli, when the film “Hitlerjunge Salomon/Europa, Europa” was released. We asked him why he had believed me

without ordering me to drop my trousers. I served in the same unit as him for almost a year after the incident near the woods. He remembered me well. He said “A voice inside me whispered to me to believe this boy, you.”

Before the selection, the soldier had been ordered by his company commander to find an interpreter. After I had told my lie about being a ‘Volksdeutscher’, he asked me whether I could speak Russian. I told him I could. He took me away from the line of Jews and told his company commander that he had found a ‘Volksdeutscher’ who spoke Russian.

### **My salvation was pure coincidence**

My salvation was unintended. I once gave a speech at the Thomas-Mann high school in Lübeck. The soldier who had believed my story about being a ‘Volksdeutscher’ was also there. I had taken him with me, but none of the pupils in the hall knew who he was. When I told them how he had asked me if I was a Jew, I mentioned that the soldier was actually sitting with us in the hall.

The pupils went silent. Many of them stood up and looked at him. As I started to continue with my story, one of the pupils said “Can I ask the man a question?” and proceeded to ask: “Mr Weidemann, how would you have reacted if he had said he was a Jew?” The former soldier stood up – an old man – and said in a shaking voice “I would have told him to walk on for 10 metres and then he would have been shot.” He was honest. Obviously there was uproar in the hall. Everyone was crying, including me. I stepped down from the podium and said “Ehrenfried, I really appreciate that answer, and you have just lifted a weight from your shoulders that has been burdening you for a long time.” I have great respect for his honesty. He was not prepared for a question like that. And that was why the truth came out so

spontaneously in his answer. An answer that was in strong contrast to those given by all the others, who insist they neither saw nor heard anything.

### **The birth of Jupp**

What happened in the field near Minsk is best described in the following way: Salomon Perel went into hiding and the ‘Volksdeutscher’ Josef “Jupp” Perjell from Grodno was born. I was accepted into the German army and given a uniform. As part of the 12th Tank Division, I was now working as an interpreter for the Germans. I, the Jew, was now forced to help the Germans in order to survive. I had been fleeing from them since I was 10 years old. The fear of detection looked like it would be with me forever.

### **No resistance**

The jokes made by the Germans about the Nazis and nicknames such as ‘fat Hermann’ for Hermann Göring can’t really be counted as resistance. That was harmless. That wasn’t resistance. Resistance – I neither saw nor heard anything of the kind. Not even among the soldiers. It was even said on the Russian front that anyone who still believed in a socialist paradise had now been shown “by Adolf” that it did not exist. Now they were completely convinced by National Socialist Germany. “Good thing we have Adolf” was the general opinion. I never heard anything anti-war and I was with the German army from summer 1941 to summer 1942.

### **Support in high places**

I only found out the reason behind my coming to Brunswick in summer 1943 at a meeting of the 12th Tank Division veterans many years later. One of the things I was told by some of the other former officers was that a niece of Captain von

Münchow, who wanted to adopt me after the war, had spoken up for me. Münchow owned a lot of land in Pommern near Stettin, and his niece was Henriette von Schirach, the wife of Baldur von Schirach, the leader of the Hitler Youth.<sup>92</sup> The Captain had probably contacted her and passed on his recommendation. The 'Reichsjugendführung' [National Youth Leadership] had also contacted the regional authorities responsible for me in the East.

I was stationed in Estonia back then, working in the former Reval as an interpreter in unit 772. I had already been commended for "bravery on the front". A secretary from the National Youth Leadership accompanied me to Berlin, so that I could go back to life as a civilian and start an apprenticeship. I was finally given an apprenticeship in the satellite factory of the Volkswagen in Brunswick and was assigned to one of the apprentice hostels there.<sup>93</sup> I was not even 18 years old and was already given major privileges. Me, the Jewish boy.

### The home in Brunswick

The home for the Volkswagen apprentices in Brunswick was located on the road to Gifhorn. It consisted of eight homes or houses, which were all under the control of the Hitler Youth and each had its own specialist technical field. There were the patrol team, the marines, the air force, automotive engineering, technical services etc. I belonged to the Technical Services Department. There must have been a vacancy in that field at the time. I was told that I would unfortunately not be accepted into the SS. I was too small and would not fulfil the other necessary criteria anyway. What was I supposed to say to that? Me, the Jew called Salomon.

At the start of my apprenticeship I had to pass a small technical test, which involved taking something apart and

Mein Lebenslauf. →  
Bin am 21 Dezember 1925 in Garten (Wilna) geboren. Mein Vater war als Webermeister in der Fabrik beschäftigt und die Mutter war zu Hause. Als einziger Junge ging ich 1932 die Volksschule an zu besuchen. Als ich 11 Jahre alt war verstarb mir mein Vater. Laut Vorhof die Schulzeit glücklich nach Beendigung der Volksschule trat ich auf die Mittelschule über. In dieser Zeit, also am 17 September 1939 besetzte unser Gebiet der Russe. Trotzdem konnte ich aber meine Schulbildung fortsetzen. Da die Hauptausbildung in russischer Sprache stattfand lernte ich während der Besatzungszeit die russische Sprache. Nach ein schwerer Schlag traf mich als meine Mutter im Mai 1941 von den Russen verschleppt wurde. Als im Monat später nach der Kriegserklärung die deutschen Freitruppen Garten besetzten meldete ich mich sofort als

Solnetcher zur Wehrmacht. Ich kam zu einer Panzerabwehrabteilung in einer Panzer Division. Ich hatte mich bei allen Operationen im mittleren und nördlichen Abschnitt der Ostfront sehr gut gehalten. Darüber ich auch ein einwandfreies Zeugnis bekommen habe. Am 1 Oktober 1942 wurde ich wieder von der Wehrmacht entlassen zwecks weiteres Lernen. Von der NSDAP Reval wurde ich nach Berlin und von da aus nach Braunschweig auf die Volkswagenschule geleitet.  
Perjell.

Handwritten CV of Josef Perjell, 1943.



PA

29.6.1943

Der Bannführer

An den  
Chef der Befehlsstelle Osten  
der Reichsjugendführung  
s.H.J.v. Gebietsmädelführerin Eggemann  
Berlin NW 7  
Luisenstr. 36 III

Der von dort überordnete Jugendliche Josef P e r j e l l hat sich hier einer psycho-technischen Eignungsprüfung unterziehen müssen und ist nach dieser als Lehrling des Volkswagen-Vorwerkes angestellt worden. Außerhalb der Arbeitszeit ist er der Jugendwohnheimanlage des Volkswagen-Vorwerkes eingegliedert und wird von hier aus erzogen.

Heil Hitler!

(Eggert)  
Bannführer

Josef Perjell joins the Volkswagen satellite factory in Brunswick, 29.06.1943.

Recommendation for Josef Perjell to be taken on as an apprentice at the Volkswagen factory, 25.05.1943.

Der Chef der Befehlsstelle Osten  
der Reichsjugendführung

Eg/B.

An den  
Führer des Bannes Volkswagenvorwerk  
Bannführer E g g e r t

B r a u n s c h w e i g  
Gifhorner Straße 180

Berlin NW 7, am 25. Mai 1943  
Luisenstr. 36 III  
Fernruf 42 59 71

Br.-Jug. Nr. 468	/
27. MAI 1943	/
Erledigt von:	/
Altz:	/

Von der HJ-Bezirksstelle Estland in Reval wird uns der Jugendliche Josef P e r j e l l zur Ausbildung gemeldet. Obergabtsführer Eier schlägt vor, ihn bei Euch im Jugendwohnheim einer gründlichen Berufsausbildung zuzuführen. Teile doch bitte mit, ob Du die Möglichkeit hast, den Jugendlichen Perjell im Jugendwohnheim aufzunehmen und ihm eine technische Berufsausbildung im Volkswagenvorwerk zu geben.-

Heil Hitler !

A.: *J. Eggemann*  
(Eggemann)  
Gebietsmädelführerin







Apprentice hostels in Brunswick.

putting it back together again, which I passed with flying colours. I was accepted and embarked on my new life. From that moment on, the head of the home became my tutor. He was a member of the SS. They placed me, the Jew, in the custody of an SS man, who was now supposed to take care of me.

#### **Apprentice in the 'Vorwerk'**

Everyone in my home belonged to the Volkswagen factory. Alongside the main site in Fallersleben, a 'satellite factory' was opened in Brunswick in 1938. This was where the future elite specialist workers were to be trained for the Volkswagen factory. Due to the structural weakness in the Brunswick region, the apprentices came from all over Germany.

\_\_\_\_\_ Salomon alias Jupp, the soldier alias Josef, member of the Hitler Youth, had found the ideal disguise to allow him to live in safety. But for how long? Could a person live that way forever? With a borrowed identity and without identity papers? And to top it all I had been circumcised! Could I survive in a regime which fanatically applied every means available to stop any kind of foreigner from infiltrating its nation? A nation it reigned over in such a totalitarian manner?<sup>94</sup>



Sally Perel and Mr Reiter, house master and tutor during the time as apprentice; reunion, 1985.

We were given technical training. There were precision engineers, lathe operators, welders – all kinds of trades. I was trained to be a tool and die maker. In the mornings we had technical or practical training in the factory – it was always three days spent in the factory and three days theoretical work in the school. In the school, we received our technical training – drawing, physics, chemistry, metalworking, everything we needed. The school was also in Brunswick. The school is the only building which is still standing today. Three times a week we had practical work. We usually made die cutters, but we also made beams for the jeep which was rising in popularity at the time but eventually turned out to be a complete flop. Later, we also manufactured individual parts for the V 1.

### **National Socialist education**

In the evenings, we were mostly educated and entertained in the National Socialist way. There were films, speeches to the ‘party comrades’ and so on. Three times a week we re-

ceived theoretical training on this topic in school. We also had to dress differently for these lessons. Everything came in threes in the school. Everything in cycles of three. First, the National Socialist education, secondly, a pre-military education and thirdly the technical training.

It was a work place for apprentices, but we also had drill and roll call. Strong discipline reigned throughout. Lessons were highly political. Even when literature or similar things were being taught, everything was oriented towards “the German spirit”. But “racial education” was the thing that tortured me the most. Jews were a main topic in these lessons. In the eyes of one of my teachers, I was a prime example of the Eastern Baltic race. I felt terrible in these moments.

\_\_\_\_ NS policy demanded unequivocal submission authority. There was no discussion. There was no vote. The majority did not rule. The decisions were made solely by the many leaders, both large and small, and were then implemented by the subordinates, no questions asked.<sup>95</sup>

### **Self denial**

During racial education in particular, I felt like I was being torn in two. That was always the worst. The genealogical trees and everything were terrible. I was living in two worlds: inside and out. But the two did merge at times. I had adopted the German side of me as a means of survival and in doing so the Jew in me has been suppressed to some



Sally Perel (centre) with fellow apprentices on the premises of the home, 1943.

extent. The Jew in me even disappeared completely for a while.

I ended up adopting a form of self-denial. That was really horrid because we were taught in racial education classes about the history of the Jews. Of course, we were taught the official view. The Jew was evil on earth, evil was Satan and therefore the Jew was the devil incarnate on earth. Good was represented by Jesus and God and evil was, without a doubt, the Jew. That was the way the Jews were portrayed. That was what we had to learn. Disgusting pictures of Jews were hung on the blackboard. I can still see the pictures before me now, one with the title "They came from the East". On the pictures they were dirty, stinking creatures. A photo doesn't stink, I know, but you felt you could smell them. Their faces looked like rats. The other picture was of a "rich" Jew with a cigar and top hat, with a poor German farmer lying at his well-polished boots. We also had to watch the films "Jud Süß" and "Der ewige Jude". This was the way the Jews were portrayed to us in racial education.

I knew one thing though: I was no Satan. I only knew that I wanted to live. I knew that I was 16 or 17 years old and had



Class of the Volkswagen satellite factory with supervisor, Sally Perel on the right behind the supervisor, 1943/44.

to survive. Obviously I didn't agree with this "racial education". But everything else – that "the Aryans" were the superior race, the source of culture and creation, combining inspiration and creative spirit in one – that I could believe, believe to fit in with the rest.

### **A second skin**

The more I lived this role, the more I became Josef – Jupp – and the more I began to forget that I was Sally the Jew. And the prouder I was to belong to the Hitler Youth. That was the second skin I grew.

I cried when Stalingrad fell. I can still remember it clearly. That just shows how quickly and how fully I was living and feeling the National Socialist spirit. I had to survive and adapt to the world into which fate had thrown me. I had to shout "Heil!", not louder than the others but not much quieter either. I had to act like everyone else.

I had two souls inside me, the Jewish one and the German one. The soul of the Jewish boy that I repressed to the point of forgetting, and the soul of Jupp, who had the upper hand at that time. It was a defence mechanism which offered me





Frühere Zugehörigkeit zu politischen Parteien — Bänden — Vereinen — Logen oder logenähnlichen Vereinigungen (konfessioneller, sportlicher, fachlicher Art u. ä. m.) unter Angabe der Dauer der Zugehörigkeit

Mitglied in der HJ seit 21. 5. 43 Mitglied-Nr. \_\_\_\_\_ HJ-Ehrenzeichen Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Mitglied in der NSDAP seit \_\_\_\_\_ Mitglied-Nr. \_\_\_\_\_ Goldenes Parteiaabzeichen ja — nein  
 Mitglied in Gliederungen der NSDAP und in angeschlossenen Verbänden:  
 Vom \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ wo \_\_\_\_\_ als \_\_\_\_\_  
 Vom \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ wo \_\_\_\_\_ als \_\_\_\_\_  
 Vom \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ wo \_\_\_\_\_ als \_\_\_\_\_  
 Vom \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ wo \_\_\_\_\_ als \_\_\_\_\_

Letzte Dienststellung in der Hitlerjugend  
 Letzter HJ-Dienstrang Jugendgenosse befördert am \_\_\_\_\_  
 Auf den Führer vereidigt am \_\_\_\_\_ wo \_\_\_\_\_

Ausbildung als HJ-Führer (Sonderausbildung, Lehrgänge an der Führerschule eines Gebietes bzw. an Reichsschulen usw. bzw. als Schießwart, Sportwart, Geländesportwart, Feldscher usw.)  
 Vom \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ Bezeichnung \_\_\_\_\_  
 Vom \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ Bezeichnung \_\_\_\_\_  
 Vom \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ Bezeichnung \_\_\_\_\_  
 Vom \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ Bezeichnung \_\_\_\_\_  
 Vom \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ Bezeichnung \_\_\_\_\_

Angaben über den Besitz von Abzeichen, Scheinen und über abgelegte Prüfungen  
 (Reichssportabzeichen, SA-Sportabzeichen, Reichsjugendportabzeichen, Reichsschwimmschein I und II, DBLG — Grundschein — Leistungsschein — Lehrschein, Gleitfliegerabzeichen A und B, Segelfliegerabzeichen C, HJ-Schießauszeichnung für Schützen oder Scharfschützen, HJ-Reitabzeichen, Führerschein für Kraftfahrzeuge, Motorfahrzeug, Grundschein — Lehrschein für Geländesport usw.)  
 Bezeichnung Reichsschwimmschein I erworben am 29. 7. 43 Nr. 581  
 Bezeichnung \_\_\_\_\_ erworben am \_\_\_\_\_ Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bezeichnung \_\_\_\_\_ erworben am \_\_\_\_\_ Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bezeichnung \_\_\_\_\_ erworben am \_\_\_\_\_ Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 HJ-Leistungsabzeichen in: DJ-Leistungsabzeichen: Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Bronze Nr. \_\_\_\_\_ Letzter F-Zahnkampf: Datum \_\_\_\_\_ Punkte \_\_\_\_\_  
 Silber Nr. \_\_\_\_\_ Führer-Sportabzeichen: Datum \_\_\_\_\_ Punkte \_\_\_\_\_

Abnahmeberechtigung für das DJ/HJ-Leistungsabzeichen  
 Gruppe \_\_\_\_\_ Prüfer-Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gruppe \_\_\_\_\_ Prüfer-Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gruppe \_\_\_\_\_ Prüfer-Nr. \_\_\_\_\_  
 Gruppe \_\_\_\_\_ Prüfer-Nr. \_\_\_\_\_

Reichsarbeitsdienst von \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ als \_\_\_\_\_  
 von \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ als \_\_\_\_\_  
 Wehrdienst  
 von \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ als \_\_\_\_\_  
 von \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ als \_\_\_\_\_  
 von \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ als \_\_\_\_\_  
 von \_\_\_\_\_ bis \_\_\_\_\_ als \_\_\_\_\_  
 Wehrdienst im Kriege — Freiwilliger in einer Panzer-Division, vom 1. Juli 1941 bis 1. Oktober 1942.

Kriegsauszeichnungen \_\_\_\_\_  
 Verwundungen, Dienstbeschädigungen, \_\_\_\_\_

Ich versichere hiermit an Eides Statt, vorstehende Angaben wahrheitsgetreu gemacht zu haben und erkläre nach bestem Wissen und Gewissen, daß mir keine Umstände bekannt sind, die auf meine nicht deutschblütige Abstammung schließen lassen.  
 Folgende Anlagen sind mit dem Stammblatt abzugeben:  
 a) Zwei Lichtbilder (Paßbildgröße — Uniform — ohne Mägel),  
 b) Fragebogen über den Nachweis der deutschblütigen Abstammung. (Der Fragebogen wurde separat eingereicht — wird umgehend nachgereicht.)  
 c) Beglaubigte Abschrift des letzten Schulzeugnisses und des Gehilfen-/Gesellenbriefes.


Braunschweig den 6. September 1943  
 Josef Porjell  
 (Branche: U-Boot)

\* Anmerkung: Nichterfülltes ist zu durchstreichen.

without saying — you didn't have anything to do with foreigners. But there was no law stating that we were not allowed to talk to them. Close contact and friendships were forbidden but there was no rule against talking. The education was enough. Nobody sought contact with the foreigners. That was the way we were educated. It was never said directly, but we knew it was just not done to have contact with foreigners. It was drummed into us that they were second class citizens, a lower race — particularly the "Ivans",

the Russians and the Polish. But we had no contact with the French and the Dutch either. I never had any opportunity to make contact. The forced labourers were taken back to the huts after work. There was one girl, Czajka, from the Ukraine. I was a little bit in love with her — as much as you can be at 17. The love was purely platonic. The forced labourers were allowed into the air raid shelters with us. They were separated of course, but you could make eye contact or whisper a few words. But other-

# Personalbogen

Jugendgenosse		Hitlerjugend			
Name: Perjell		Eintritt in die HJ:			
Vorname: Josef		Mitglieds-Nr.:			
Wohnort: Braunschweig		Bestätigt als: Rottenführer am 9.11.43			
Straße Nr.: Gifhornstr. 100		Befördert zum: am:			
geb. am: 21.12.25		" " " "			
geb. in: Garten/Wilms		" " " "			
Beruf: Schüler / Maschinenschl.		" " " "			
Staatsangeh.: Volksschweizer		Führertätigkeiten:			
Konfession: kath.		Angehöriger der Sonderformationen:			
Wieviertes Kind: 1		* MoHJ - Flieger-HJ - FZ - MZ - SZ - Streifendienst			
Lehrjahr	Heim Nr.	Stube Nr.	Datum		
1	7		18.6.43		
2	7		30.8.43		
Bemerkung					
					
				* Marine-HJ - Nachrichten-HJ - Reiter-HJ	
				Besondere Ausbildung:	
				Feuerwehr als:	
				Luftschutz als:	
				Feldscher als:	
				Funker als:	
				Flak als:	
				Ski als:	
				Teilnahme an Lehrgängen, Lagern und Wettbewerb:	
Bez.:	Ort:	Datum:			
Reichsberufswettbewerb:					
Besonderes Interesse: Foto, Zeichnen, Basteln usw.					
Leistungsprüfungen:					
* DJL - HJL - ABC - Reichssportabz. - Reichsjugend-					
Sportabz. - Reichsschwimmschein I u. II - Grundschein-					
DLRG - Leistungsschein - HJ-Schießabz. - Leistungsabz.					
Mo-HJ - Scharfschützentrabz. - Segelflughandzeichen-HJ					
Abnahmeberechtigungen in der HJ					
* Schießwartausweis - Geländewartausweis					
Abnahmeberechtigung für Leibübungen					
Sonstiges: <i>Lehrjahre 1943</i>					

Personal details of apprentice Josef Perjell in the Volkswagen preliminary plant, 1943.

wise it was only with glances. I dreamt of her a lot. The other boys in the school had never dreamt of a "Russian girl". They weren't equal as people. Who would trust a Russian woman? So I guess there were still some differences between us. In the country, Germans did have relationships with forced labourers, but of course we had the benefit of a special education. We saw the forced labourers as the enemy and not as people.

The worse thing was, I knew I actually belonged on their side, on the side of the forced workers and not the Germans. That was the tragic conflict I found myself in. I had to play a certain role and knew at the same time that I really belonged to the other side.

The forced labourers looked relatively well-fed, as the satellite factory had no concentration camp. Most of them looked really well, but you didn't see what was going on inside. There were no Jewish forced labourers in our factory. They were in the Volkswagen factory in the "Stadt des KdF-Wagens" and in the Büssing plants in Brunswick. I never saw them, even if we did know they existed. I went to the cinema once with a fellow apprentice and I saw a group of people in prison uniforms, Jews, being led through the street. They were the prisoners assigned to outside work. And we were taught to hate them.

## Fear

It was my fate too, and the fear was still there. Mostly at night. You were distracted during the day. You were in school with fellow apprentices, you were singing or marching. You were always kept busy. You always had school work or technical work to do. You had to do everything at top speed. You had no time to think and that was what allowed me to push it to the back of my mind. But the memory often came back strongly at night. I cried at night. It was the fear. I had no idea who I was and where I was supposed to belong.

## Ideology and jokes about Jews

There was no open rejection of the Nazis. Our supervisor was an SA man and always wore boots and a brown uniform. I also had a technical supervisor, who came from the region now known as Rhineland-Palatinate. It was not



possible to tell if he was a Nazi, but he was very strict regarding order and punctuality.

In the factory itself, the walls of the long production halls were painted with murals depicting the world of Germanic myth and legend. They were propaganda images. I never once heard a bad word spoken against Hitler and the Nazis by my fellow apprentices. But they did tell jokes about the Jews. I can still remember it. They told jokes about “RJF soap”, apparently created from “Reinem Judenfett” or “Pure Jew Fat”.<sup>96</sup> Those were the kind of jokes that were told. The jokes were accompanied by comments about the soap giving off a particularly bad stench. It was also said that the Jews were being eliminated – via the chimney. How did this boy know that? There were also derogatory comments about the Jews in general.

### **The search in Lodz**

I knew nothing about the death camps for a long time. Maybe I just didn’t want to know. At the turn of the year 1943/44, I got official holiday leave and went to Łódź. Officially, I was going to “sort out my affairs”, but really I just wanted to go to the Ghetto to see if I could find my parents. I travelled through the ghetto on the tram for 12 days. But I never saw them. My parents were still there at that time. My mother wasn’t killed until the ghetto was liquidated – in a covered truck.<sup>97</sup> My father died earlier of relatively natural causes. Hunger. But they were both still alive when I travelled through the ghetto. I know that from my second brother, who also survived.

Łódź was another world, another planet. It was there that I realised that my people were being destroyed. My visit to Łódź – the first time that I stood before the barbed wire – was the first time that my two identities, the German and

the Jewish, collided dramatically. Terrible. I ran along the fence looking inside, and what I saw was terrible.

\_\_\_\_\_ Four men were pulling and pushing a lumbering cart laden with corpses. The corpses had been covered with a tattered bit of cloth that was probably once a white sheet. The naked, emaciated limbs of the dead poked out from under the sheet. The bodies had been thrown together in a grotesque entwined heap. The cart hit a pothole in the badly-maintained road. Arms and legs bounced, rose up, fell back down, rose up again and then finally fell back into their original position and were dragged further along over the pavement.<sup>98</sup>

This horrific scene broke my heart. I searched for my mother, my father. I wanted my mother to see me before she died, so that she could die a happier woman. I wanted her to see that I was alive. After an experience like that I went back to Brunswick and was asked questions like: “So, how was your holiday?” I had to tell nice stories. I couldn’t exactly say: “I went to the ghetto to look for my parents.” I sometimes ask myself how I managed to play this role so perfectly. The role that was so opposed to my other identity. It was a deadly opposition. But they say the will to live is deeply rooted in everyone. My mother’s parting comment to me was: “Live!”. And that’s what I was doing.

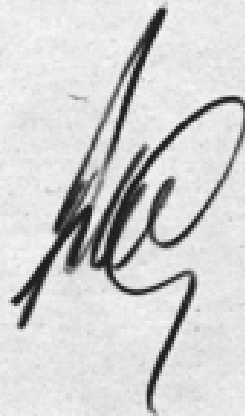
PH.

Aktennotiz

Der Jg. Perjell kam am 29. 5. 1944 um 21.40 Uhr vom Ausgang zurück und stieg, da der Zapfenstreich um 40 Minuten überschritten war, über den Zaun.

Da die Führung des Perjell in letzter Zeit zu wünschen übrig läßt und P. bereits über 18 Jahre war, wurde er aus der Jugendwohnheimanlage am 30. 5. 1944 in das Barackenlager überwiesen.

Braunschweig, den 2. 6. 1944  
We.

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, likely belonging to the author of the file note.

File note outlining an incidence of inappropriate behaviour by Josef Perjell, 02.06.1944.

### **Bombing of Brunswick**

I had a 'Volksdeutscher' passport and one day I was summoned by the authorities in Brunswick because I had no document from Grodno proving my pure German family line. Yet again, I was afraid that my real identity could be found out. But the office that was waiting for confirmation of my papers from Grodno was destroyed during a bombing raid. I was thankful for that.

I was never really able to take pleasure in the bombing raids in general though. In one of the worst bombing raids on Brunswick, my good friend Björn Folvik, a Norwegian

quisling – a collaborator – was killed. I wrote a poem for him spontaneously in the bunker. I only wrote it for myself, but it also proves how deeply I was entwined in the ideology. My friend was dead and I wrote a poem about him as my fellow apprentice and about his bravery. That was near the end of the war. But for me it was not yet the end of my belief in a victory. This belief also remained very much alive in our school. The change in situation did not even sway me. My consciousness was so clouded that no beam of reality could get through. I still felt like "one of them".



\_\_\_\_\_ The war was virtually decided. And we continued to pursue our dreams of total power. I was inextricably entwined in this world that had been forced upon me, and events had completely numbed my senses. I had no qualms about supporting the dangerous and exciting last efforts of the Germans to turn the situation around. As the German Reich was in the throes of death, I joined the others in the desperate attempts to save it. We joined the “Volkssturm”, the German territorial army, the “spontaneous” troop of children, members of the Hitler Youth, women, the elderly – anyone who was still able to hold weapon – in an attempt to defend the Fatherland against the approaching enemy forces.<sup>99</sup>

### **Liberation**

As the end of the war approached, I didn't know what I wanted or who I was. I took my duty in the 'Volkssturm' seriously, but never really wanted to fight against our liberators. Everything was a paradox. Even when the Americans captured our group on 22 April 1945, I still didn't say I was a Jew. I could not throw off the identity that had become such an integral part of me. I was relieved to get rid of my label but I still did not say that I was a Jew.

\_\_\_\_\_ Where should I begin? What would my future bring and how would it tie in with the past? Would I be able to rebuild my sense of self, which had been torn apart? Would I be able to repair the shattered basis of my existence? Would it be possible to build up a new existence on an unstable foundation? I had thrown off my borrowed identity but I had still not found the real me. Something had come to an end, but there was nothing new to take its place.<sup>100</sup>

I was free, but the forced labourers, who were now also free, moved into the home where I had all my things. I was still in my Hitler Youth uniform. Where should I go? I was afraid that the forced labourers would seek revenge, so I went where they had come from – to the huts of the Volkswagen factory in Brunswick. Many forced labourers set off home quickly after the liberation, but some were still living in the huts. Some of them wanted to attack me. One time, some drunken Russians came to me and thought I was a Nazi. I shouted: “I'm a Jew, Jewrej!” The roles had changed suddenly after the war. But I didn't really leave the Hitler Youth in me behind for a long time. He remained deep inside me.

### **I am a Jew**

I was a member of the Hitler Youth and a Jew at the same time. I had no idea who I really was. Shortly after the liberation, I was in Brunswick on the way to the city authorities to collect food vouchers. You had to pick up these vouchers to get food back then. Suddenly, a haggard man came towards

me in the street, still dressed in a prisoner's uniform. He still had the "Judenstern", the "Star of David", on his clothes. I had thought there were no Jews left. I hesitated, turned around, walked over to him and asked: "Are you really a Jew?" It was this meeting that really reminded me that I was a Jew as well. I told him and he did not believe me at first. I cried and asked him where he came from. He came from Brunswick, had been in the ghetto in Łódź, then in Auschwitz. He had even met my brother David in Łódź. The man was called Manfred Frenkel. He later married Sara Bass, who had survived the Holocaust with false papers working as a nurse in the Volkswagen factory.<sup>101</sup> That was my first meeting with a Jew after the war. Suddenly I was no longer alone.

### **Interpreter again**

I then served as an interpreter for the Soviet occupying forces. Now I was working for them against the Germans. It was the exact opposite to the situation back in 1941. I was based mainly in Oebisfelde, the border town between the Allied zones. Oebisfelde was in what was to become the German Democratic Republic, GDR, and Fallersleben, later renamed Wolfsburg, remained in the West. At the start, Manfred, Sara and I lived together. But Manfred Frenkel had not been able to build a life in Germany. So they went to Antwerp, where he established a career.

### **Survival is the main thing**

I found my brother Isaak again. He told me that our brother David had also survived. Isaak came to Oebisfelde, David was already in Israel. Our sister had been murdered. Isaak, who had been through the worst of all of us, first in the ghetto in Wilna and then in Dachau, has always said, "We sur-

vived and that's the main thing." I tell myself the main thing is that I didn't survive at the cost of others. There were those who did survive at the cost of others, but we can't judge that today either. The main thing is that some people survived. We judge according to the social norms of our time and not the norms at Auschwitz. No one can judge – people can only ask how they would have acted in the same situation.

I never felt regret or guilt about the way I survived. I tried to take action and for that reason I survived, just as my parents wanted me to. If I had acted differently, I would not be here today. And saving a life is the most precious thing on earth. The life of a person is priceless. There is nothing above it. But still, I often dreamt during my time in the Hitler Youth that I came home and my parents didn't want to see me. I'm sure that if I had been able to get out of the tram in Łódź when I visited and had found my parents, they would have wanted to see me. I was their child after all.

Of course, I did get weird comments from other survivors. Once one said: "Your Holocaust was a deluxe Holocaust." I replied that I would have done anything to get into the ghetto or the work camp and not have to live every moment under the swastika in constant fear of being found out. My Holocaust was not a deluxe Holocaust. Another said: "I would have committed suicide in your position rather than wear a swastika." I told him that it was easy for him to say that now, sitting in his comfy armchair.

When I think of the children who were hidden in cloisters – nobody judges them because of their dual identity. And these children had to pray to Jesus three or four times each day. But at least they had Jesus to pray to and to thank for saving them. Who should I pray to? The Nazis saved me. I couldn't just go to them and say "Thank you".

### **Divided memories**

There are two people from my time in Brunswick who I am still in close contact with. We see each other regularly. But they never really wanted to hear my story. They were willing to talk to me about everything, about the teachers, which ones were stupid, the nicknames we had given them and so on. We talked about one of the 'Bannführer' [commander of the Hitler Youth in Brunswick] who had a homosexual relationship with a boy from the Hitler Youth, who slept in the same room as me. The 'Bannführer' was sent to the front. Nothing happened to the boy, he stayed with us. We talked about everything, our girlfriends, who were members of the 'Bund Deutscher Mädel' [the female equivalent to the Hitler Youth] – our visits to the cinema, about everyday things back then. But as soon as I tried to talk about my personal experiences and feelings, they said "Leave it, Jupp! It wasn't that bad." To which I replied: "Maybe not for you, but for me it was."

They have all now seen the film based on my memories and think I exaggerated. Firstly, it is not a documentary film, and the director injected humour and irony into the story. She also had to find a way to portray extremely difficult truths on the screen. That is the freedom of art – exaggeration to enable to the audience to understand the subject matter. In the film, our house master had made stupid comments about knives and forks "Knife in the right hand, fork in the left", which he never said in real life. The things he actually did say were much worse. He used to read passages from "Mein Kampf", for example. Before every meal, he would stand on the balcony above the dining hall. There were loud speakers in the hall and we all had to stand straight and listen to certain passages of propaganda texts. The worst moments were the ones where we had to sing songs like

"When Jewish blood drips from your knife...". Only then did we get anything to eat.

I saw this house master again after the war. In the home, he was responsible for our education and for speeches and drill. In the film, the director had put rather banal words in his mouth that he had never said in real life. That was the terrible irony. She showed the value placed on education while, elsewhere, millions of people were being killed. But my former fellow apprentices don't understand this. They only say that he never spoke like that. That what he said in real life was much worse! And the teacher, who got hysterical in the film when he spoke of the Jews, never lost his nerve in real life. The film just reflects a symptom. They were fanatics. A way had to be found to portray that on the screen.

My former fellow students don't need to feel guilty or ashamed. I don't blame them at all. All the while they were at the school with me they were still "harmless students". Once they left school to join the army, that's when there are other questions to ask. At that point everyone is responsible for his own actions and must know what he has done. All the while they were with me, they did nothing.

Today, these people live in a democracy, but they still say that the years in the home were the happiest time of their youth. The Nazi system had given everything to the nation's youth. Obviously for certain reasons: they needed willing cannon fodder for the future. We had everything in the Volkswagen factory. Everything was done for us, our clothes were ironed and we had enough to eat. We were even given pocket money and took part in excursions and musical events. We had everything a young person could want and we got it free of charge.



Sally Perel during a reading at the Wismar vocational school November 2003.

### **No hatred**

Hatred is a foreign concept to me. But I am strongly against people who pass on such ideologies and bring up children in that way. Young people are raw material and adults know exactly what they are doing to the youth with an upbringing like that. You can do anything you want with young people. Every totalitarian system tries to win over the young people. In the factory homes, we were taught to hate. Teaching a child to hate is tantamount to teaching it murder.

### **The separation from Jupp**

Jupp was still a part of me. Sometimes he appeared in me as a young National Socialist. For example, when I saw documentary films about the NS regime. When the first

swastikas appeared, Jupp was there again. Of course I wanted to get rid of him, but he saved my life and I loved him for it.

In October 2003, a high school here in Raanana called me to ask if I would be willing to accompany a group to Poland. I told the teacher: “No, I’m sorry, but I’m not the right person to do it. You will have to ask someone who was in the ghettos and camps. I was shouting ‘Heil Hitler’ at that time, you will have to find someone else.” The teacher insisted, saying “Shlomo, come with us!”. Obviously I couldn’t say on the phone “Believe me, Shlomo would love the chance to finally visit Auschwitz, but Jupp doesn’t want to go.” He invited me to a meeting anyway, to watch the film with 200 pupils. The teacher said: “We can discuss it some more and then start looking for somebody else to come with us to Poland.” After the film, 200 pupils asked me to go with them. They wanted me to go, they really wanted it to be me. How could I say no?

I had no idea what to expect. I arrived in Poland, in Warsaw, and it was really cold. We reached the ‘Umschlagplatz’ [place for assembling Jews before deportation], then a wood, where there is a mass grave of 800 Polish and Jewish children. The SS had even thrown some of these children into the grave while they were still alive, killing them afterwards with hand grenades. I had never stood at a place like that. I began to cry. I was shaken up. Some of the pupils came over to me, put their arms around me and begged me to stop crying. One said: “Look, we’re not crying.” I replied: “I’m sure you will all cry to at some point.” That was my first time at a place like that. I had never visited a former concentration camp. Then we arrived at Auschwitz. When we entered the Jewish huts with all the children’s shoes, everyone cried. We lit candles and everyone said the names

of people who had been murdered in their family. Everyone had prepared what they wanted to say and I had written a few lines down about my parents and my sister. I stood there and couldn't say a word. I just cried. Many of the pupils put their arms around me, and then I asked one of the girls to read the lines I had written.

When she was finished, I made a vow to myself: "Jupp, you're staying here in Auschwitz. You're not coming back to Israel. You're staying here. Dead." I returned to Israel a different Shlomo Perel than when I had left. Jupp is still in me, but the ideology is gone. I had needed the confrontation with Auschwitz to make that possible. At some point in the next few summers I want to visit Łódź and visit my father's grave in the Jewish cemetery. I want to say to him: "Papa, after more than 60 years I can fulfil your last wish." He always told me: "Never forget who you are." I can now live more freely knowing that. I was in Łódź when we made the film, but I wasn't ready for a confrontation back then. My experience in Auschwitz was something different. I finally got rid the little Nazi in me. It was cathartic. I was happy to be whole again and not to have this constant fight going on inside. Jupp and Sally were reconciled in Auschwitz.

# Notes

- 1\_\_ See: Raul Hilberg: *The Destruction of the European Jews*, New York 1985; Raul Hilberg: *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933 - 1945*, New York 1992; Saul Friedländer: *Nazi Germany and the Jews: The Years of Persecution 1933 - 1939*, New York 1997; Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labour in Germany under the Third Reich*, New York 1997 (first German version published in 1985).
- 2\_\_ Hans Mommsen; Manfred Grieger: *Das Volkswagenwerk und seine Arbeiter im Dritten Reich*, Düsseldorf 1996, p. 498ff.; see also Manfred Grieger: *Zwangsarbeit im Volkswagenwerk. Historische Entwicklung, persönliche Verarbeitung und betriebliche Erinnerungsformen in: Industrie und Zwangsarbeit im Nationalsozialismus. Mercedes-Benz, VW, Reichswerke Hermann Göring in Linz und Salzgitter*. Edited by Gabriella Hauch in conjunction with Peter Gutschner and Birgit Kirchmayr, Innsbruck 2003, pp. 49-65; Klaus-Jörg Siegfried: *Das Leben der Zwangsarbeiter im Volkswagenwerk 1939-1945*, Frankfurt am Main; New York 1988.
- 3\_\_ Klaus Kocks; Hans-Jürgen Uhl: "Learning from History". Comments on Efforts by Volkswagen's Workforce, Labor Representatives, Executives, and Corporate Management to come to Terms with the Issue of Forced Labor during the Third Reich, Wolfsburg 1999.
- 4\_\_ Mommsen/Grieger, *Volkswagenwerk*, p. 496ff.
- 5\_\_ See Hermann Kaienburg: *Die Wirtschaft der SS*, Berlin 2003; Jan-Erik Schulte: *Zwangsarbeit und Vernichtung. Das Wirtschaftsimperium der SS: Oswald Pohl und das SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungshauptamt 1933 - 1945*, Paderborn 2001; Michael Thad Allen: *The Business of Genocide. The SS, Slave Labor, and the Concentration Camps*, Chapel Hill, NC 2002.
- 6\_\_ From the range of publications, see for example: Dieter Pohl: *Holocaust. Die Ursachen, das Geschehen, die Folgen*, Freiburg 2000; Dieter Pohl: *Nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung in Ostgalizien, 1941 - 1944. Organisation und Durchführung eines staatlichen Massenverbrechens*, Munich 1997; Christian Gerlach: *Kalkulierte Morde. Die deutsche Wirtschafts- und Vernichtungspolitik in Weißrußland 1941 bis 1944*, Hamburg 2000; Leni Yahil: *The Holocaust: The Fate of European Jewry*, New York 1990.
- 7\_\_ Quoted according to Peter Longerich: *The Wannsee Conference on 20 January 1942*, Berlin 1998.
- 8\_\_ Mommsen/Grieger, *Volkswagenwerk*, p. 432ff.; for information on the effects of the NS regime on the German people, see also: Götz Aly: *Hitlers Volksstaat. Raub, Rassenkrieg und nationaler Sozialismus*, Frankfurt am Main 2005.
- 9\_\_ Mommsen/Grieger, *Volkswagenwerk*, p. 411.
- 10\_\_ *Ibid.*, p. 766ff.
- 11\_\_ Götz Aly and Christian Gerlach: *Das letzte Kapitel. Realpolitik, Ideologie und der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944/45*, Frankfurt am Main 2004; The Nazis' Last Victims. *The Holocaust in Hungary*. Ed. by Randolph L. Braham and Scott Miller, Detroit 1998; *Genocide and Rescue. The Holocaust in Hungary 1944*. Ed. by David Cesarani, Oxford; New York 1997; for information on the change in the concentration camp system towards the end of the war, see: Schulte, *Zwangsarbeit*.

- 12\_\_ For information on the history of Hungarian Jews under German occupation, as well as the group of 300, see also the recollections of Moshe Shen, p. 24ff. and the subsequent submissions.
- 13\_\_ Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 803ff.
- 14\_\_ Ibid., p. 869; see also Klaus Riexinger and Detlef Ernst: Vernichtung durch Arbeit – Rüstung im Bergwerk. Die Geschichte des Konzentrationslagers Kochendorf, Außenkommando des KZ Natzweiler-Struthof, Tübingen 2003.
- 15\_\_ Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 867ff.; see also Wolfgang Gückelhorn: Lager Rebstock. Geheimer Rüstungsbetrieb in Eisenbahntunnels der Eifel für V2 Bodenanlagen, Aachen 2002.
- 16\_\_ Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 707f.
- 17\_\_ Jens-Christian Wagner: Produktion des Todes. Das KZ Mittelbau-Dora, Göttingen 2001, p. 244ff.
- 18\_\_ Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 896ff.; for information on Gardelegen, see: Joachim Neander: Gardelegen 1945. Das Ende der Häftlingstransporte aus dem Konzentrationslager „Mittelbau“, Magdeburg 1998.
- 19\_\_ Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 870ff.; Zwangsarbeit für Industrie und Rüstung im Hils 1943-1945, Vol. 4. Edited by Detlef Creydt, Holzminden 2001, p. 127ff.; Mijndert Bertram: April 1945. Der Luftangriff auf Celle und das Schicksal der KZ-Häftlinge aus Drütte, Celle 1989.
- 20\_\_ Daniel Krochmalnik: Amalek. Gedenken und Vernichtung in der jüdischen Tradition, in: Erlebnis - Gedächtnis - Sinn: Authentische und konstruierte Erinnerung. Edited by Hanno Loewy and Bernhard Moltmann, Frankfurt am Main 1996, p. 121-136; Yaacov Lozowick: Jüdische Erinnerung und die Schoah, in: Die Gegenwart der Schoah: Zur Aktualität des Mordes an den europäischen Juden. Edited by Helmut Schreier and Matthias Heyl, Hamburg 1994, p. 93-110; Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi: Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory, Seattle; London 1982; see Harald Welzer: Gedächtnis und Erinnerung, in: Handbuch der Kulturwissenschaften, Vol. 3: Themen und Tendenzen. Edited by Friedrich Jaeger and Jörn Rüsen, Stuttgart 2004, p. 155-174.
- 21\_\_ See: [www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)
- 22\_\_ Yehuda Bauer: Rethinking the Holocaust, New Haven, CT 2001, p. 14ff. and p. 267.
- 23\_\_ Henk 'tHoen from the Netherlands also described the disinterest of the Dutch community in the experiences of former forced labourers in the German armaments trade and the reserved behaviour. He wanted to leave the experiences of the war behind him and focused on his studies and building up a career and family. For more information see: Henk 'tHoen: Zwei Jahre Volkswagenwerk. Als niederländischer Student im 'Arbeitseinsatz' im Volkswagenwerk von Mai 1943 bis zum Mai 1945, Wolfsburg 2002.
- 24\_\_ „Niemand zeugt für den Zeugen“ Erinnerung und historische Verantwortung nach der Shoah. Edited by Ulrich Baer, Frankfurt am Main 2000.
- 25\_\_ Lebenserfahrung und kollektives Gedächtnis. Die Praxis der „Oral History“. Edited by Lutz Niethammer, Frankfurt am Main 1985; Remembering: Writing Oral History. Edited by Anna Green, Auckland 2004.
- 26\_\_ Henry Greenspan: On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Recounting Life and History, Westport, Connecticut 1998, p. 169; see also Harald Welzer: Das kommunikative Gedächtnis. Eine Theorie der Erinnerung, Munich 2002.



- 27\_\_ Zalman Grinberg, Yad Vashem Archiv, 0.33/1122.
- 28\_\_ See: Primo Levi: *If this is a Man?*, Harmondsworth; New York 1979; Jean Amery: *At the Minds Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities*, New York 1986; Aharon Appelfeld: *The Story of a Life*, New York 2004; Ruth Klüger: *Still alive. A Holocaust Girlhood remembered*, New York 2001.
- 29\_\_ Wolfgang Sofsky: *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, Princeton, N.J. 1997.
- 30\_\_ See: Friedrich Christof: *Befriedung im Donauraum. Der Zweite Wiener Schiedsspruch und die deutsch-ungarischen diplomatischen Beziehungen 1939-1942*, Frankfurt am Main 1998; Manfred Grieger: *Rumäniens nationaler Aufbruch zu politischer Repression und gesellschaftlicher Armut 1859-1990*, in: *Was früher hinterm Eisernen Vorhang lag. Kleine Osteuropakunde vom Baltikum bis Bessarabien*. Edited by Bernd Bonwetsch and Manfred Grieger. Dortmund 1991, pp. 196-216.
- 31\_\_ Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 762ff.
- 32\_\_ Solomon Perel: *Europa, Europa*, New York 1997.
- 33\_\_ Izhak Shamir on 29.5.1989 and Josef Ganz on 1.1.1990, quoted from Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 865.
- 34\_\_ Jean Baudet: „STO à KdF – 1943-1945. Die Erinnerungen des Jean Baudet“, Wolfsburg 2000; 'tHoen, Volkswagenwerk; „Abfahrt ins Ungewisse. Drei Polen berichten über ihre Zeit als Zwangsarbeiter im Volkswagenwerk von Herbst 1942 bis Sommer 1945“, Wolfsburg 2004.
- 35\_\_ Ulrich Baer: *Einleitung*, in: *Niemand zeugt für die Zeugen*, p. 7-31, here 5.
- 36\_\_ The text is based on the interview carried out with Mosche Shen on 5 May 2004 in the Israeli town of Hod HaSharon
- 37\_\_ For information on the secular Zionism analysed by Herzl, which declared the aim of establishing a Jewish state, see: Theodor Herzl: *The Jew's State. A Critical English translation*, Northvale N.J. 1997; Michael Brenner: *Zionism. A Brief History*, Princeton, N.J. 2003.
- 38\_\_ Aliyah is Hebrew and means advancement, referring to the Jewish immigration to Israel.
- 39\_\_ Eretz Israel: Hebrew for the country Israel; often used as a term for pre-state Israel.
- 40\_\_ Keren Kajemeth Leisrael (KKL) is the Jewish National Fund established in 1907. Through donations to the KKL, land was purchased in Palestine, where Zionist pioneers could settle. Since the founding of the Israeli state in 1948, the KKL has been responsible mainly for the reforestation of the country; see Adolf Böhm: *Der jüdische Nationalfonds = Keren kajemeth le'israel*, Vienna 1922.
- 41\_\_ Mizrahi is the abbreviation for „Merkaz Ruchani“ (spiritual centre). The religious-Zionist party was founded in 1920 in Wilna (Vilnius) and has been based in Jerusalem since 1922; see Tewa S. M. Zambrowsky: *Then and Now: 70 years Mizrahi*, Marczak Olami Press 1971.
- 42\_\_ For information on anti-Semitism in Hungary and Rumania, see: *Ungarn und der Holocaust. Kollaboration, Rettung und Trauma*. Edited by Brigitte Mihok, Berlin 2005; *The Treatment of the Holocaust in Hungary and Romania during the Post-Communist Era*. Edited by Randolph L. Braham, New York 2004; Radu Ioanid: *The Holocaust in Romania. The Destruction of Jews and Gypsies under the Antonescu Regime, 1940-1944*, Chicago, Ill. 2000; *Rumänien und der Holocaust. Zu den Massenverbrechen in Transnistrien 1941-1944*. Edited by Mariana Hausleitner, Berlin 2001.
- 43\_\_ For information on the history of Auschwitz, see: Hans Mommsen: *Auschwitz*, 17. Juli 1942. *Der Weg zur europäischen „Endlösung der Judenfrage“*, Munich 2002; *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*. Edited by Yisrael Gutman, Bloomington, Ind. 1998; Sybille Steinbacher: *Auschwitz. A history*, London 2005.
- 44\_\_ On behalf of the Volkswagen factory, plant engineer and SS Head Squad Leader, Arthur Schmiele selected the group of 300 male Hungarian Jews to carry out work in the factory, see: Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 863f.
- 45\_\_ Moshe Shen, who arrived with the group of 300 Hungarian Jews in the first week of June, is referring to the prisoners from the Neuegamme concentration camp who were housed in Laagberg from April 1944. There were no Jews in this group, however. The Hungarian Jews arrived at the Volkswagen factory at the end of July 1944. See *ibid.*, p. 766ff. and the recollections of Julie Nicholson, p. 33ff.
- 46\_\_ Moshe Shen recalls the ground-level foundation as a cellar.
- 47\_\_ Moshe Shen is probably referring to the major American air attack on 29 June 1944, see Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 634ff.
- 48\_\_ The group of 300 Hungarian Jews was relocated a few days after the air raid on 29 June 1944 and arrived in Thil on 6 July. *Ibid.*, p. 866.
- 49\_\_ For information on the trend towards decentralisation in the Volkswagen Group, see: *ibid.*, p. 803ff.
- 50\_\_ The „Kapos“ or supervisors were part of a system of prisoner self-management in concentration camps. Many used their position of power to their own advantage, for example by beating other prisoners, resulting in them being remembered as „active perpetrators“ by survivors. For more information, see: *Abgeleitete Macht – Funktionshäftlinge zwischen Widerstand und Kollaboration*. Edited by the Neuegamme Concentration Camp Memorial, Bremen 1998; Revital Ludewig-Kedmi: *Opfer und Täter zugleich? Moraldilemmata jüdischer Funktionshäftlinge in der Shoa*, Gießen 2001.
- 51\_\_ The group of 300 was relocated to Dernau at the beginning of September 1944. The evacuation took place extremely quickly in an attempt to escape the fast-approaching Allied troops and the prisoners were crammed into freight cars and had to survive an air raid during the day-long journey, Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 869.
- 52\_\_ For information on the history of the „Rebstock“ concentration camp, see *Ibid.*, p. 867ff.; Uli Jungbluth: *Wunderwaffen im KZ „Rebstock“*, Briedel 2000.
- 53\_\_ The workers in Tiercelet and Dernau belonged to the VW subsidiary company „Minette GmbH“, see: Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 814ff.
- 54\_\_ Rosh HaShana is the Jewish New Year celebration in September/October (1st and 2nd Tischri of the Jewish calendar). Yom Kippur, „Day of Atonement“, is the most important Jewish religious celebration and is a strict fasting day. On Yom Kippur, Jews are also encouraged to do penance and ask for forgiveness.
- 55\_\_ On 27 September 1944, the prisoners were moved to the Mittelbau concentration camp near Nordhausen, where they formed the workforce for a large underground factory. For information on Mittelbau-Dora, see: Wagner, Produktion.
- 56\_\_ Arms production was controlled by the state-owned Mittelwerk GmbH, which organised the business according to the instructions of the SS, see: Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 702ff and Wagner, Produktion, p. 181ff.
- 57\_\_ After 22 February, 1945, there were more and more air raids taking place. The worst were on 3/4 April 1945, see *Ibid.* p. 279f.

- 58\_\_ Bergen-Belsen concentration camp was handed over to the English troops on 15 April 1945, freeing thousands of dangerously emaciated prisoners. See: Ben Shephard: *After Daybreak: The Liberation of Belsen, 1945*, London 2005; Joanne Reilly: *Belsen: The Liberation of a Concentration Camp*, London 1998, see also: [www.bergenbelsen.de](http://www.bergenbelsen.de).
- 59\_\_ Celebration in remembrance of the Jewish exodus out of Egypt in March/April.
- 60\_\_ The „American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee“, (JOINT) was founded in 1914 in the USA by Jews of German decent and supported the Jewish immigrants from Germany and Europe in the 1930s. Following the liberation and the end of the Holocaust, JOINT provided extensive help to the Jewish survivors and delivered 50,000 tonnes of food, 4,000 tonnes of clothing, 475,000 school books and 500,000 prayer books to the Jewish DPs, see: Yehuda Bauer: *American Jewry and the Holocaust. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1939 - 1945*, Detroit 1982.
- 61\_\_ The entire text is based on an interview with Julie Nicholson, carried out on 6/7 January 2005 in Paddington near Sydney, Australia.
- 62\_\_ Her friend, Julia Kertesz (Szücs is her married name), has published a text outlining her experiences, see: Julia Kertesz: *Von Auschwitz ins Volkswagenwerk. Erinnerungen an KZ Haft und Zwangsarbeit*, in: *Dachauer Hefte*, No. 8, Munich 1992, p. 69-87. The information, dates and assessments expressed in this publication do not always correspond fully with the recollections of Julie Nicholson. For example: Julia Szücs states that Julie Nicholson was taken prisoner on 19 April and that she herself was captured a day later on 20 April 1944. Inconsistencies in recollections are common owing to the individual experiences and different ways of dealing with events. Julie Nicholson does not generally recollect precise dates and periods of time. Julia Kertesz could also have assimilated information she read or discovered a later date into her own memories. The perceptions and reports from Julie Nicholson generally lack the dramatic touches and details, which can be seen in the sequences relating to the registration work in Auschwitz and the events in Bergen-Belsen.
- 63\_\_ The first train deporting Jews left Kistarcsa on 29 April 1944 and went via Budapest to Auschwitz. The wagons contained 1,800 Jews, most of whom were gassed following selection on the ramp on arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Only one third were intended to carry out forced labour, see: Aly/Gerlach, *Kapitel*, p. 254.
- 64\_\_ Julie Nicholson was deported to Bergen-Belsen at the end of October 1944. From autumn 1944, evacuation transports took place from the concentration camps in the East as the Red Army approached. The prisoners were taken to other camps in German or Austrian territory, see Wagner, *Produktion*, p. 267ff.
- 65\_\_ With the German invasion of Hungary and the organisation of the „Final Solution“ by Adolf Eichmann and his men, several attempts were made to stop the deportations and to save the Hungarian Jews. Rudolf Rezsö Kasztner, head of the Zionist workers, (Vaadah) promised Adolf Eichmann five million Dollars in exchange for the Jews who were to be taken to Switzerland. Following a down payment of several thousand dollars, a transport of 1,684 Jews, including children, women and men, was organised, arriving at Bergen-Belsen in autumn 1944. Until the end of November 1944, numerous trains travelled to Switzerland, giving freedom to almost 1,500 people. 288 Jews, including the Weiss family, never made it to Switzerland, see: Hilberg, *Destruction*, p. 906ff.; Yehuda Bauer: *Jews for Sale? Nazi-Jewish negotiations, 1933 - 1945*, New Haven 1994.
- 66\_\_ Julie Nicholson is likely to be referring to the bazookas manufactured in the factory; other prisoners had to paint and assemble antitank mines, see Mommsen/Grieger, *Volkswagenwerk*, p. 896ff.
- 67\_\_ In January 1945, partisans captured in Yugoslavia were also taken to work in the factory as forced labourers, *Ibid.*, p. 898.
- 68\_\_ See the text by Sara Frenkel, p. 65ff.
- 69\_\_ The train journey to Salzwedel, the branch camp of Neuengamme, began on 7 April 1945, Mommsen/Grieger, *Volkswagenwerk*, p. 901f.
- 70\_\_ The liberation took place on 14 April 1945, see: Ulrich Kalmbach and Jürgen Maria Pietsch: *Zwischen Vergessen und Erinnerung. Stätten des Gedenkens im Altmarkkreis Salzwedel*, Spröda 2001; Ulrich Kalmbach: *Laßt es ruhn? Salzwedel im Nationalsozialismus*, Spröda 1999.
- 71\_\_ Friedländer, *Jews*, p. 289f.
- 72\_\_ The text is based on interviews carried out on 28 April and 3 August 2004 in Jerusalem with Sara Frenkel, as well as a written CV of the interviewee (Wolfsburg town archive; also in the Corporate Archives of the Volkswagen AG, Z 300, No. 77).
- 73\_\_ The ghetto in Lublin was established on 24 March 1941, see: Hilberg, *Destruction*, p. 238f.
- 74\_\_ The camp, which was originally known as „Kriegsgefangenenlager der Waffen-SS Lublin“ (Prisoner of War Camp of the Waffen-SS) and then renamed „Waffen-SS-Konzentrationslager Lublin“ (Waffen-SS Concentration Camp at Lublin) in February 1943, was initiated by Heinrich Himmler during a visit to Lublin on 21 July 1941 and established by Odilo Globocnik, a high-ranking SS officer and Chief of Police for the Lublin district. The camp comprised a total of 22 huts, two of which were used for administrative and supply purposes. The different groups of prisoners were kept separately in these huts. Later, seven gas chambers were added, as well as two gallows and a crematorium. Around 500,000 people, mainly Jews, were transported to Majdanek. At least half of these people died of starvation or torture or were murdered in the gas chambers, see: „Aktion Reinhardt“. *Der Völkermord an den Juden im Generalgouvernement 1941 - 1944*. Edited by Bogdan Musial, Osnabrück 2004; Dieter Ambach and Thomas Köhler: *Lublin-Majdanek. Das Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager im Spiegel von Zeugenaussagen*, Düsseldorf 2003; Anna Wisniewska: *Majdanek. The Concentration Camp of Lublin*, Lublin 1997.
- 75\_\_ Sara Frenkel was probably in Majdanek in spring 1942.
- 76\_\_ Between March and October 1942, Jews were „relocated“ from Lublin to places such as Majdan Tatarski. The Jews based there were deported to Majdanek in November 1942, where they were killed, see: *Aktion Reinhardt*.
- 77\_\_ For information on the conditions in the town hospital affiliated with the Volkswagen factory until 1944, the treatment of the forced labourers there and about Dr. Körbel and his sentencing as a war criminal, see: Mommsen/Grieger, *Volkswagenwerk*, p. 757ff. and Siegfried, *Leben*, p. 224ff.
- 78\_\_ For information on the company's own camp 18, see: Mommsen/Grieger, *Volkswagenwerk*, p. 718ff.
- 79\_\_ He came from the Laagberg camp, the branch camp of Neuengamme concentration camp, see *Ibid.*, p. 766ff.
- 80\_\_ For information on camp 21, see: Gerd Wysocki: *Arbeit für den Krieg*, Brunswick 1992, p. 334ff.
- 81\_\_ For information on the „children's“ home in Rühen and the death rate, which reached 100 percent by the end, see: Mommsen/Grieger, *Volkswagenwerk*, p. 765 and Siegfried, *Leben*, p. 235ff.

- 82\_\_ The American had been seriously injured by three shots due to the alleged „flight risk“ he posed, see: Manfred Grieger: Industrialisierung und Stadtwerdung im Nationalsozialismus, in: Topographie der Erinnerung. Edited by Frank Ehrhardt, Brunswick 2004, p. 166.
- 83\_\_ The UNRRA, the United Nations Rehabilitation and Relief Agency, was a UN authority founded in November 1943 in the USA, which helped refugees and Allied citizens in the liberated countries in Europe and the Far East. The main aims of the UNRRA were to provide help and to return the millions of Displaced Persons (DPs) to their homes. The UNRRA came under the control of the occupying forces in question in the three Western zones. They took care of the DP camps, see: The Story of U.N.R.R.A., Washington 1948.
- 84\_\_ See: The recollections of Sally Perel on p. 67ff.
- 85\_\_ ORT, „Obschtschestwo Rasprostranjenja Truda“ [Organization for Rehabilitation through Training], founded in 1880 in St. Petersburg as an organisation for the promotion of trade, prepared Jews in vocational schools for the immigration to Palestine or provided them with career opportunities. After the Second World War, ORT became active throughout Europe, particularly in the DP camps in Germany, Austria and Italy. See Leon Shapiro: The History of ORT. A Jewish Movement for Social Change, New York 1980.
- 86\_\_ The Haganah, Hebrew for defence or protection, was founded in 1920 and is regarded as the direct forerunner of today's „IDF“, the Israeli Defence Force. It played a major part in the foundation of the Israeli state and its military protection, see Yaacov N. Goldstein: From Fighters to Soldiers. How Israeli Defense Forces Began, Brighton 1998.
- 87\_\_ The whole text is based on an interview with Sally Perel on 11 April 2004 in the Israeli kibbutz Givat Hayim.
- 88\_\_ Sally Perel: Ich war der Hitlerjunge Salomon, 1st edition, Berlin 1992; numerous republications since.
- 89\_\_ Roman Frister: The Cap: The Price of a Life, New York 1999.
- 90\_\_ Perel, Hitlerjunge Salomon, p. 8.
- 91\_\_ Soon after 1933, Jewish children were gradually banned from taking part in school activities In September 1935, the Reich Education Ministry issued a circular order stating that racial separation should be introduced at all German schools as fully as possible. For more information, see: Peter Longe- rich: Politik der Vernichtung. Eine Gesamtdarstellung der nationalsozialisti- schen Judenverfolgung, Munich 1998, p. 45 and 97.
- 92\_\_ Baldur von Schirach (born 1907) was appointed „Reich Youth Leader“ in June 1933 following his acceptance into the NSDAP in 1925. Von Schirach was replaced by Arthur Axmann in 1940, but retained his policy-making power over the Hitler Youth and, as 'Gauleiter' and 'Reichsstatthalter' in Vienna, was responsible for the deportation of 185,000 Austrian Jews. See also Michael Wortmann: Baldur von Schirach. Hitlers Jugendführer, Cologne 1982.
- 93\_\_ For information on the operational training system in Brunswick, see: Mommsen/Grieger, Volkswagenwerk, p. 227ff; Ulrike Gutzmann and Markus Lupa: Eine Braunschweiger Standortgeschichte, Wolfsburg 2005.
- 94\_\_ Perel, Hitlerjunge Salomon, p. 71.
- 95\_\_ Ibid., p. 86.
- 96\_\_ „RIF soap“ and the rumours that it was made from the bodily fat of murdered Jews serve as proof that the German public were aware that the Jews were being murdered. Such soap was never actually made, however. The name actually stood for „Reichsstelle für Industrielle Fettversorgung“ (RIF) or the Federal Institute for Industrial Fat Supplies, see: Hilberg, Destruction, p. 1034.
- 97\_\_ The ghetto in Lodz was evacuated between June and August 1944 and the Jews liquidated, see Letzte Tage. Die Lodzer Getto-Chronik Juni/Juli 1944. Edited by Sascha Feuchert, Göttingen 2004.
- 98\_\_ Perel, Hitlerjunge Salomon, p. 148.
- 99\_\_ Ibid., p. 169.
- 100\_\_ Ibid., p. 173f.
- 101\_\_ See also the recollections of Sara Frenkel on p. 51ff.

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