



A Jewish water carrier in the Lublin ghetto, 1941, a necessary figure in the absence of running water. The Germans required all Jews in the ghetto to wear the arm band shown here. (AP/Wide World Photos)

PART

III The Holocaust Experience

Variety of Opinion

The prisoners developed types of behavior which are characteristic of infancy or early youth. . . . When a prisoner had reached the final stage of adjustment to the camp situation, he had changed his personality so as to accept various values of the SS as his own.

Bruno Bettelheim

The assumption that there was no moral or social order in the concentration camps is wrong. . . . Through innumerable small acts of humaneness, most of them covert but everywhere in evidence, survivors were able to maintain societal structures workable enough to keep themselves alive and morally sane.

Terrence Des Pres

It wasn't ruthlessness that enabled an individual to survive — it was an intangible quality, . . . an overwhelming thirst — perhaps, too, a talent for life, and a faith in life. . . .

Richard Glazar, as told to Gitta Sereny

Maidanek was hell . . . where the art of cruelty was refined to perfection and every facility of modern technology and psychology was combined to destroy men mentally and physically.

Alexander Donat

What it was like to be swept up in the Nazi whirlwind of violence and misery has been told in the memoirs of hundreds of survivors. Although each one presents only a small piece of the puzzle, together they give us a sense of the variety of what were, after all, many millions of Holocaust experiences. How were the victims treated, and how did they react in the camps? Was there anything they could do to enhance the chances of living through this terror? This section briefly contrasts two conflicting views on these issues and then, at greater length, delves into two of the most revealing and memorable survivors' accounts.

Bruno Bettelheim, for many decades until his death in 1990 one of the world's leading child psychologists, was himself an inmate of Nazi concentration camps for about a year in the late 1930s. Although he escaped the Holocaust itself, he called on his own experiences and those of others to formulate an influential view of the experience. The systematic dehumanization of the victims in Nazi camps, Bettelheim argues, crippled inmates psychologically and caused them to regress to childlike behavior. The conclusion implied by this line of reasoning seems inescapable: Utterly at the mercy of a pitiless totalitarian leviathan, the victims could do little to influence their fate one way or another. Those who survived until they could be liberated by outside forces were, above all, incredibly lucky.

Terrence Des Pres, an American professor of literature, has drawn on accounts by survivors in an effort to refute Bettelheim's claims. Rejecting the psychological method, Des Pres attributes the inmates' behavior to raw necessity rather than regression. Moreover, he observes that many acts of mutual kindness and aid were decisive in determining whether individuals lived or died. Survival was to some degree in the victims' own hands. It was more a matter of being determined to outlast one's tormentors, and of helping and being helped, than it was of luck.

Gitta Sereny sought to illuminate the Holocaust experience by interviewing Franz Stangl, commandant at Treblinka, who was sentenced to life imprisonment in Germany after his extradition from Brazil in 1967. Stangl told her that his most vivid memory of the death camp

was that the victims went to their fate passively, like cattle in a slaughterhouse. Sereny attempted to round out Stangl's story by interviewing several of his surviving victims. One of them, Richard Glazar, was a young Jewish student from Prague when he was sent to Treblinka in October 1942. Glazar's story, reproduced here, begins with his arrival at the death camp and ends with his escape during a revolt by the inmates on August 2, 1943. Glazar made his way to Germany where he survived the war disguised as an ordinary foreign laborer.

Alexander Donat survived the Warsaw ghetto uprising, imprisonment in the Maidanek camp, and forced labor in the Radom ghetto and in Germany. His experiences as a slave worker at Maidanek are presented here. A Warsaw journalist, Donat and his wife watched the doomed resistance in the Warsaw ghetto from an attic hiding place. They were then sent to Maidanek where Donat nearly succumbed to brutal forced labor on the road building detail. What probably saved his life was being sent to work in the camp kitchen and later the motor pool. "I was one of the lucky ones," Donat writes of his assignment to the kitchen.

Was that merely a casual turn of phrase or something to be taken literally? Both of these memoirs should lead us to reflect on the nature of the camp experience, the reactions of the victims, and the qualities that preserved life in the Holocaust. Was survival largely fortuitous or did it depend in great part on the attitudes and actions of the inmates? In thinking about these matters, remember that the survivors' stories are not necessarily typical. Most of the Jews who fell into Nazi hands did not live to tell their stories, and no one can be certain how much their experiences differed from those of the survivors. It is also well to keep in mind that the Holocaust was a vast and complex process that involved millions of people. It can never be neatly encompassed in the accounts of two, or even two hundred, survivors.

Bruno Bettelheim

Helpless Victims

The prisoners developed types of behavior which are characteristic of infancy or early youth. Some of these behaviors developed slowly, others were immediately imposed on the prisoners and grew only in intensity as time went on. Some of these more-or-less infantile behaviors have already been discussed, such as ambivalence toward one's family, despondency, finding satisfaction in daydreaming rather than in action.

Whether some of these behavior patterns were deliberately produced by the gestapo is hard to ascertain. Others were definitely produced by it, but again we do not know whether this was consciously done. It has been mentioned that even during the transportation the prisoners were tortured in the way in which a cruel and domineering father might torture a helpless child; here it should be added that the prisoners were also debased by techniques which went much further into childhood situations. They were forced to soil themselves. In the camp defecation was strictly regulated; it was one of the most important daily events, discussed in great detail. During the day, prisoners who wanted to defecate had to obtain the permission of a guard. It seemed as if education to cleanliness would be once more repeated. It also seemed to give pleasure to the guards to hold the power of granting or withholding the permission to visit the latrines. (Toilets were mostly not available.) The pleasure of the guards found its counterpart in the pleasure the prisoners derived from visiting the latrines, because there they usually could rest for a moment, secure from the whips of the overseers and guards. However, they were not always so secure, because sometimes enterprising young guards enjoyed interfering with the prisoners even at these moments. . . .

In speaking to each other, the prisoners were forced to employ the familiar *du* ("thou") — a form which in Germany is indiscriminately used only among small children; they were not permitted to address one another with the many titles to which middle- and upper-class

From *Surviving and Other Essays* by Bruno Bettelheim. Copyright 1952, © 1960, 1962, 1976, 1979 by Bruno Bettelheim and Trade Bettelheim as Trustees. Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.

Germans are accustomed. On the other hand, they had to address the guards in the most deferential manner, giving them all their titles.

The prisoners lived, like children, only in the immediate present; they lost feeling for the sequence of time; they became unable to plan for the future or to give up immediate pleasure satisfactions to gain greater ones in the near future. They were unable to establish durable object-relations. Friendships developed as quickly as they broke up. Prisoners would, like early adolescents, fight one another tooth and nail, declare that they would never again look at one another or speak to one another, and become close friends once more within a few minutes. They were boastful, telling tales about what they had accomplished in their former lives, or how they succeeded in cheating former men or guards, and how they sabotaged the work. Like children, they felt not at all set back or ashamed when it became known that they had lied about their prowess.

Another factor contributing to the regression into childhood behavior was the work the prisoners were forced to perform. New prisoners particularly were forced to perform nonsensical tasks, such as carrying heavy rocks from one place to another, and after a while back to the place where they had picked them up. On other days they were forced to dig holes in the ground with their bare hands, although tools were available. They resented such nonsensical work, although it ought to have been immaterial to them whether or not their work was useful. They felt debased when forced to perform "childish" and stupid labor, and preferred even harder work when it produced something that might be considered useful. There seems to be no doubt that the tasks they performed, as well as the mistreatment by the gestapo which they had to endure, contributed to their disintegration as adult persons.

The author had a chance to interview several prisoners who before being brought into the camp had spent a few years in prison, some of them in solitary confinement. Although their number was too small to permit valid generalizations, it seems that to spend time in prison does not produce the character changes described in this paper. As far as the regression into childhood behaviors is concerned, the only feature prison and camp seem to have in common is that in both the prisoners are prevented from satisfying their sexual desires in a normal way, which eventually leads them to the fear of losing their virility. In the camp this fear added strength to the other factors detrimental to adult types of behavior and promoted childlike types of behavior.

When a prisoner had reached the final stage of adjustment to the camp situation, he had changed his personality so as to accept various values of the SS as his own. A few examples may illustrate how this acceptance expressed itself.

The SS considered, or pretended to consider, the prisoners to be the scum of the earth. It insisted that none of them was any better than the others. One of the reasons for fostering this attitude was probably to convince the young guards who received their training in the camp that they were superior to even the most outstanding prisoner, and to demonstrate to them that the former foes of the Nazis were now subdued and not worthy of any special attention. If a formerly prominent prisoner had been treated better than the others, the simple guards would have thought that he still had influence; if he had been treated worse, they might have thought that he still was dangerous.

The Nazis wanted to impress on the guards that even a slight degree of opposition to the system led to the complete destruction of the person who dared to oppose, and that the *degré* of opposition made no difference in the punishment. Occasional talks with these guards revealed that they really believed in a Jewish-capitalistic world conspiracy against the German people. Whoever opposed the Nazis was supposed to be participating in it and was therefore to be destroyed, independent of his role in the conspiracy. So it can be understood that the guards' behavior to the prisoners was to treat them as their vilest enemies.

The prisoners found themselves in an impossible situation, due to the steady interference with their privacy on the part of the guards and the other prisoners. So a great amount of aggression accumulated. In the new prisoners this aggression vented itself in the way it might have done in the world outside the camp. But slowly prisoners accepted, as the expression of their verbal aggressions, terms which definitely did not originate in their previous vocabularies, but were taken over from the very different vocabulary of the SS. From copying the verbal aggressions of the SS to copying its form of bodily aggressions was one more step, but it took several years to make this step. It was not unusual to find old prisoners, when in charge of others, behaving worse than the SS. In some cases they were trying to win favor with the SS in this way, but more often they considered it the best way to behave toward prisoners in the camp.

Practically all prisoners who had spent a long time in the camp

took over the attitude of the SS toward the so-called unfit prisoners. Newcomers presented the old prisoners with difficult problems. Their complaints about the unbearable life in camp added new strain to the life in the barracks, as did their inability to adjust to it. Bad behavior in the labor gang endangered the whole group. So a newcomer who did not stand up well under the strain tended to become a liability for the other prisoners. Moreover, weaklings were those most apt to eventually turn traitor. Weaklings usually died during the first weeks in the camp anyway, so to some it seemed as well to get rid of them sooner. Old prisoners were therefore sometimes instrumental in getting rid of the "unfit" — in this way incorporating Nazi ideology into their own behavior. This was one of many situations in which old prisoners would demonstrate toughness, having molded their treatment of these "unfit" prisoners to the example set by the SS. Self-protection required elimination of the "unfit" prisoners, but the way in which they were sometimes tortured for days by the old prisoners and slowly killed was taken over from the *gestapo*.

Old prisoners who identified themselves with the SS did so not only in respect to aggressive behavior. They would try to acquire old pieces of SS uniforms. If that was not possible, they tried to sew and mend their uniforms so that they would resemble those of the guards. The length to which prisoners would go in these efforts seemed unbelievable, particularly since the SS punished them for their efforts to copy SS uniforms. When asked why they did it, the old prisoners admitted that they loved to look like the guards. . . .

The satisfaction with which some old prisoners enjoyed the fact that, during the twice-daily counting of the prisoners — which often lasted for hours and always seemed interminable — they had stood really well at attention can be explained only by the fact that they had entirely accepted the values of the SS as their own. These prisoners prided themselves on being as tough as the SS. This identification with their torturers went so far as copying their leisure-time activities. One of the games played by the guards was to find out who could stand to be hit longest without uttering a complaint. This game was copied by some of the old prisoners, as though they had not been hit often and long enough not to need to repeat this experience by inflicting pain on fellow prisoners.

Often the SS would enforce nonsensical rules, originating in the

whims of one of the guards. These rules were usually forgotten very quickly, but there were always some old prisoners who would continue to follow the rules and try to enforce them on others long after the gestapo had forgotten about them. Once, for instance, a guard inspecting the prisoners' apparel found that the shoes of some of them were dirty on the inside. He ordered all prisoners to wash their shoes inside and out with water and soap. The heavy shoes, when treated this way, became hard as stone. The order was never repeated, and many prisoners did not even execute it when given. Nevertheless there were some old prisoners who not only continued to wash the inside of their shoes every day but cursed all others who did not do so as negligent and dirty. These prisoners firmly believed that the rules set down by the SS were desirable standards of human behavior, at least within the camp situation. . . .

Among the old prisoners one could observe other developments which indicated their desire to accept the SS along lines which definitely could not originate in propaganda. It seems that once prisoners adopted a childlike attitude toward the SS, they had a desire for at least some of those whom they accepted as all-powerful father-images to be just as kind. They divided their positive and negative feelings — strange as it may be that they should have had positive feelings, they had them — toward the SS in such a way that all positive emotions were concentrated on a few officers who were rather high up in the hierarchy of camp administrators, although hardly ever on the governor of the camp. The old prisoners insisted that these officers hid behind their rough surfaces a feeling of justice and propriety; he, or they, were supposed to be genuinely interested in the prisoners and even trying, in a small way, to help them. Since nothing of these supposed feelings and efforts ever became apparent, it was explained that the officer in question hid them so effectively because otherwise he would not be able to help the prisoners. The eagerness of these prisoners to find support for their claims was pitiful. A whole legend was woven around the fact that of two non-commissioned officers inspecting a barracks, one had cleaned his shoes of mud before entering. He probably did it automatically, but it was interpreted as a rebuff to the other man and a clear demonstration of how he felt about the concentration camp.

After so much has been said about the old prisoners' tendency to conform and to identify with the SS, it ought to be stressed that this

was only part of the picture. The author has tried to concentrate on interesting psychological mechanisms in group behavior rather than on reporting types of behavior which are either well known or could reasonably be expected. These same old prisoners who identified with the SS defied it at other moments, demonstrating extraordinary courage in doing so.

Terrence Des Pres

The Will to Survive

With only one exception, so far as I know, psychoanalytic studies of the camp experience maintain that it was characterized by regression to "childlike" or "infantile" levels of behavior. This conclusion is based primarily on the fact that men and women in the concentration camps were "abnormally" preoccupied with food and excretory functions. Infants show similar preoccupations, and the comparison suggests that men and women react to extremity by "regression to, and fixation on, pre-odipal stages." Here, as in general from the psychoanalytic point of view, context is not considered. The fact that the survivor's situation was itself abnormal is simply ignored. That the preoccupation with food was caused by literal starvation does not count, and the fact that camp inmates were *forced* to live in filth is likewise overlooked.

The case for "infantilism" has been put most forcefully by Bruno Bettelheim. A major thesis of his book *The Informed Heart* is that in extreme situations men are reduced to children; and in a section entitled "Childlike Behavior" he simply equates the prisoners' objective predicament with behavior inherently regressive. Bettelheim observes, for example — and of course this was true — that camp regulations were designed to transform excretory functions into moments of crisis. Prisoners had to ask permission in order to relieve themselves, thereby becoming exposed to the murderous whim of the SS guard to whom they spoke. During the twelve-hour workday, furthermore, prisoners

were often not allowed to answer natural needs, or they were forced to do so while they worked and on the actual spot where they worked. As one survivor says: "If anyone of us, tormented by her stomach, would try to go to a nearby ditch, the guards would release their dogs. Humiliated, gadded, the women did not leave their places — they waded in their own excrement." Worst of all were the days of the death marches, when prisoners who stopped for any reason were instantly shot. To live they simply had to keep going:

Urine and excreta poured down the prisoners' legs, and by nightfall the excrement, which had frozen to our limbs, gave off its stench. We were really no longer human beings in the accepted sense. Not even animals, but putrefying corpses moving on two legs.

Under such conditions, excretion does indeed become, as Bettelheim says, "an important daily event", but the conclusion does not follow, as he goes on to say, that prisoners were therefore reduced "to the level they were at before toilet training was achieved." Outwardly, yes; men and women were very much concerned with excretory functions, just as infants are, and prisoners were "forced to wet and soil themselves" just as infants do — except that infants are not forced. Bettelheim concludes that for camp inmates the ordeal of excremental crisis "made it impossible to see themselves as fully adult persons any more." He does not distinguish between behavior in extremity and civilized behavior; for of course, if in civilized circumstances an adult worries about the state of his bowels, or sees the trip to the toilet as some sort of ordeal, then neurosis is evident. But in the concentration camps behavior was governed by immediate death-threat; action was not the index of infantile wishes but of response to hideous necessity.

The fact is that prisoners were systematically subjected to filth. They were the deliberate target of excremental assault. Defilement was a constant threat, a condition of life from day to day, and at any moment it was liable to take abruptly vicious and sometimes fatal forms. The favorite pastime of one *Kapo* was to stop prisoners just before they reached the latrine. He would force an inmate to stand at attention for questioning; then make him "squat in deep knee-bends until the poor man could no longer control his sphincter and 'exploded'; then beat him; and only then, "covered with his own excrement, the victim would be allowed to drag himself to the latrine." In another instance prisoners were forced to lie in rows on the ground,

and each man, when he was finally allowed to get up, "had to urinate across the heads of the others"; and there was "one night when they refined their treatment by making each man urinate into another's mouth." In Birkenau, soup bowls were periodically taken from the prisoners and thrown into the latrine, from which they had to be retrieved: "When you put it to your lips for the first time, you smell nothing suspicious. Other pairs of hands trembling with impatience wait for it, they seize it the moment you have finished drinking. Only later, much later, does a repelling odor hit your nostrils." And as we have seen, prisoners with dysentery commonly got around camp rules and kept from befouling themselves by using their own eating utensils. . . .

The condition of life-in-death forced a terrible paradox upon survivors. They stayed alive by helping to run the camps, and this fact has led to the belief that prisoners identified not with each other but with their oppressors. Survivors are often accused of imitating SS behavior. Bruno Bettelheim has argued that "old prisoners" developed "a personality structure willing and able to accept SS values and behavior as its own." But that needs clarification, for in order to act like an SS man the prisoner had to occupy a position of real power. A cook could lord it over other prisoners, a locksmith could not. Among *Kapos*, block-leaders and other high camp functionaries, there were indeed prisoners who accepted SS standards as their own — this man for instance:

His speciality was strangling prisoners with the heel of his boot, and he would stand erect in the pose of a Roman gladiator, enjoying the approval of the other Kapos, who would speak admiringly of a "good, clean job."

Almost certainly, however, that man had been a killer before he came to the camps. For prisoners like him the camps did not cause brutality so much as simply endorse it. Bettelheim's observations are based on camp conditions in the late 1930's, a time when positions of power were held exclusively by criminals — by men and women who, prior to imprisonment, had been murderers, prostitutes, thieves. The concentration camps had long been a dumping ground for criminals, both in Russia and in Germany, and in the Nazi camps this type was exploited by the SS as the most suitable channel for the delegation of power.

But this is not a case of imitation: such prisoners were like their masters from the start. The Nazis knew their own kind and naturally established an order reflecting SS values. That criminals had so much power was one of the most deadly conditions in the camp world; and only slowly, through years of intrigue, threat, bribery and assassination, were underground resistance groups able to replace the criminal *Kapos* with men of their own. This kind of maneuvering was most successful in Buchenwald, least effective in the Soviet camps. One of the cardinal facts about the camps was that everywhere a battle raged between the "greens" and the "reds" — between those imprisoned for real crimes and those imprisoned for opposition to the regime.

The assumption that survivors imitated SS behavior is misleading because it generalizes a limited phenomenon, but also because it overlooks the duality of behavior in extremity. Eugen Kogon, a member of the Buchenwald underground, points out that "the concentration-camp prisoner knew a whole system of mimicry toward the SS," an "ever-present camouflage" which concealed true feelings and intentions. *Strategic* imitation of the SS was enormously important because thereby political prisoners held positions of power which would otherwise have gone to the criminals. In the following instance, a new prisoner, a baker, is attacked by a passing SS guard:

With purely animal rage, he pulled off the baker's upper garments and tore them to shreds, and then whipped his bare back until the blood oozed. . . . Then the overseer, a Czech-German "political," noticed what was going on. He immediately rushed over and began shouting, "You god-damned Jewish dog! You'll work for the rest of the day without clothes! I'm sick of the trouble you lousy Jews give me!" He made a threatening gesture, and then roared, "Come with me!"

The SS guard left, confident that the baker was in good hands. Then the overseer took the baker into a tool-shed where it was warm, dressed him, washed his wounds, and gave him permission to stay in the shed until it was time to quit work.

Or take Franz, the *Kapo* of an SS storeroom in Auschwitz. Every day crates of food were "accidentally" dropped and reported as "shipment damage." The contents were then "organized" — for Franz, for his men and others in need. In the "open," however, there was another Franz:

As we walked . . . past other kapos and SS men he began roaring at us. . . . As he shouted, he swung at us with his club. To the passing SS men he looked and sounded a splendid kapo, heartless, brutal, efficient; yet never once did he hit us.

Imitation of SS behavior was a regular feature of life in the camps, and large numbers of prisoners benefited because positions of power were secretly used in ways which assisted the general struggle for life. Even small jobs — working as a locksmith for instance — dovetailed into the larger fabric of resistance. . . .

Prisoners survived through concrete acts of mutual aid, and over time these many small deeds, like fibers in the shuttle of a clumsy loom, grew into a general fabric of debt and care. At roll-call, for instance, or *Appel*, as it was called in the Nazi camps, prisoners had to form up hours before dawn and stand at attention in thin rags through rain and snow. This occurred again in the evening, and took at least two hours, sometimes three and four, and every survivor remembers roll-calls which lasted all night. Prisoners had to stand there the whole time, caps off, caps on, as SS officers strolled past the ranks. Any irregularity was punished savagely, and irregularities were numerous. Prisoners fainted, collapsed from exhaustion and sickness, simply fell dead on the spot. "Those winter *Appels*," says a survivor of Buchenwald, "were actually a form of extermination. . . . In addition to those who regularly fell dead during *Appel*, there were every day a number who contracted pneumonia and subsequently died."

To fall and be noticed by an SS man was to be beaten or shot, and the universal practice among prisoners was to use their own bodies to prop up inmates no longer able to stand. Almost all reports by survivors include moments at roll-call when an individual either gave, or was given, this kind of support: "I was so weakened that during roll call I could scarcely stay on my feet. But the others pressed close on either side and supported me with the weight of their bodies."

Help was forbidden, of course, but there was some safety in numbers, for among so many thousands of prisoners packed together, the SS could view any particular rank only briefly. But despite danger, the need to help persisted, often in elaborate ways. It regularly happened that sick prisoners were carried to roll-call by comrades, who then took turns supporting them. Sometimes this went on for days, and care for

the sick did not end with roll-call. Many men and women were nursed back to health by friends who "organized" extra food, who shuffled the sick man back and forth from barracks to barracks, who propped him up at roll-call, and kept him out of sight during "selections" and while he was delirious. In one case a prisoner with typhus was smuggled every day into the "Canada" work detail and hidden in the great piles of clothing where he could rest. This particular rescue involved getting the sick man through a gate guarded by a *Kapo* whose job was to spot sick and feeble prisoners and club them to death. Each day, therefore, two prisoners supported the sick man almost to the gate, and then left him to march through on his own. Once past the guard they propped him up again.

Prisoners in the concentration camps helped each other. That in itself is the significant fact. Sometimes it was help individually given, as in the case of a girl in Birkenau who, "at the risk of being severely beaten if her absence in the potato-peeling room was discovered, every evening . . . brought coffee to the sick. The last time she brought it was on the eve of her own death." Sometimes it took the form of one group helping another, as when a work squad had to carry sacks of cement from the storeroom to a building site:

I was equal to the job, but working with us were weaker men who grew exhausted after a few trips. The younger of us, myself included, pitched in to help them. We had agreed among our group that we would help one another to whatever extent was possible, rather than surrender to the dog-eat-dog philosophy which poisoned the minds of some prisoners.

And sometimes help came collectively, unplanned and uncalled for, where and when it was needed:

For example, five women are pushing a conveyor car loaded to the brim with gravel . . . the car jumps the track . . . then it gets stuck in the sand. The women stop, completely helpless. Fortunately the chief is not around. All efforts to replace the car on the tracks are fruitless; the heavy-laden car will not budge and the chief may appear at any moment. A clandestine congregating begins. Stealthily, bent figures sneak toward the derailed car from all directions: the women who work on the mound of sand, those who level the gravel, a group just returned from delivering a track. A common exertion of arms and backs raises the car, the spades dig into the sand under the wheels and heave —

*and the loaded car moves, shivers. Fear gives strength to the workers. With more pushing, one wheel is on the track. A *Kapo* comes rushing from afar, she has noticed people missing at various points of work. But before she can get there, one more tug, one more push — and the gravel-laden conveyor car proceeds smoothly along the tracks.*

The survivor's experience is evidence that the need to help is as basic as the need for help, a fact which points to the radically social nature of life in extremity and explains an unexpected but very widespread activity among survivors. In the concentration camps a major form of behavior was gift-giving. Inmates were continually giving and sharing little items with each other, and small acts like these were enormously valuable both as morale boosters and often as real aids in the struggle for life. Sometimes the gift was given outright, with no apparent relation between donor and receiver:

One evening we were served a soup made with semolina. I drank this with all the more relish since I often had to forgo the daily cabbage soup because of my bowels. Just then I noticed a woman, one of the prostitutes, who always kept very much to herself, approaching my bunk, holding her bowl out to me with both hands.

"Micheline, I think this is a soup you can eat; here, take mine too."

She emptied her bowl into mine and went without food that day.

The assumption that there was no moral or social order in the concentration camps is wrong. Except peripherally and for brief periods similar to the "initial collapse" of individuals, the general condition we call chaos or anomie — what philosophers designate as the "state of nature" — did not exist. Certainly it did not prevail. Through innumerable small acts of humanness, most of them covert but everywhere in evidence, survivors were able to maintain societal structures workable enough to keep themselves alive and morally sane. The "state of nature," it turns out, is not natural. A war of all against all must be imposed by force, and no sooner has it started than those who suffer it begin, spontaneously and without plan, to transcend it. . . .

The survivor is the figure who emerges from all those who fought for life in the concentration camps, and the most significant fact about their struggle is that it depended on fixed activities: on forms of social

bonding and interchange, on collective resistance, on keeping dignity and moral sense active. That such thoroughly *human* kinds of behavior were typical in places like Buchenwald and Auschwitz amounts to a revelation reaching to the foundation of what man is.

Richard Glazar, as Told to Gitta Sereny

Surviving Extermination Camp Treblinka

"I saw men with blue armbands on the platform, but without insignia. One of them carried a leather whip — not like any whip I'd ever seen, but like something for big animals. These men spoke very strange German. There were loud announcements, but it was all fairly restrained: nobody did anything to us [the prescribed pattern for transports arriving from the West]. I followed the crowd: 'Men to the right, women and children to the left,' we had been told. The women and children disappeared into a barrack further to the left and we were told to undress. One of the SS men — later I knew his name, Küttner — told us in a chatty sort of tone that we were going into a disinfection bath and afterwards would be assigned work. Clothes, he said, could be left in a heap on the floor, and we'd find them again later. We were to keep documents, identity cards, money, watches and jewellery with us.

The queue began to move and I suddenly noticed several men fully dressed standing near another barrack further back, and I was wondering who they were. And just then another SS man (Miete was his name) came by me and said, 'Come on, you, get back into your clothes, quick, special work.' That was the first time I was frightened. Everything was very quiet, you know. And when he said that to me, the others turned around and looked at me — and I thought, my God, why me, why does he pick on me? When I had got back into my

From *Into That Darkness* by Gitta Sereny. Copyright © 1974 by Gitta Sereny. Reprinted by permission of Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.

clothes, the line had moved on and I noticed that several other young men had also been picked out and were dressing. We were taken through to the 'work-barrack,' most of which was filled from floor to ceiling with clothes, stacked up in layers. Many of the clothes were filthy — we had to tear them apart by force, they stuck together with dirt and sweat. The foreman showed me how to tie the things together into bundles, wrapped up in sheets or big cloths. You understand, there was no time, not a moment between the instant we were taken in there and put to work, to talk to anyone, to take stock of what was happening . . . and of course, never forget that we had no idea at all what this whole installation was for. One saw these stacks of clothing — I suppose the thought must have entered our minds, where do they come from, what are they? We *must* have connected them with the clothes all of us had just taken off outside . . . but I cannot remember doing that. I only remember starting work at once making bundles, I *thought* as the foreman had told me, but then he shouted, 'More, more, put more in if you want to stay around.' Even then I didn't know what he meant; I just put more in. Even though stuff was being carried in from outside, the very clothes the people who had arrived with me had taken off minutes before, I think I still didn't think; it seems impossible now, but that's how it was. I too went outside to pick up clothes and suddenly something hit me on the back — it was like being struck by a tree-trunk: it was a Ukrainian guard hitting me with one of these awful huge whips. . . . 'Run,' he screamed, 'run' — and I understood from that moment on that all work in Treblinka was done at a run."

Later somebody whispered the truth about Treblinka, "But carefully, carefully," Richard said.

Life in Treblinka was always incredibly dangerous, always hung on a thread, but perhaps the most dangerous time was each morning, after the arrival of the transports, while the queues were moving up through the tube towards the death-camp and while the gas chambers were in operation.

"There was an incredible rivalry amongst the SS men," Richard said. "You see, they weren't just an amorphous mass, as people now like to imagine them; they were, after all, individual men, with individual personalities. Some were worse, some better. Almost every one of them had their protégés amongst the prisoners, whom they played off against each other. Of course, one can't look at this in the same way one might consider other 'organizations' where heads of sections have

their favourites. Obviously, no ordinary standards of emotion or behaviour can apply; because all of existence, for us especially, and up to a point, at least by reflection, also for them, was reduced to a primeval level: life and death. Consequently all ordinary reactions became special, or at least very different. Perhaps some SS men developed a kind of 'loyalty' to one prisoner or another — though one hesitates to call it that; there really was almost invariably another, and usually nefarious, reason for any act of kindness or charity. One must always measure whatever they did against the deep fundamental indifference they felt towards all of us. It was of course more than indifference, but I call it that for want of a better word. Really, when one wants to evaluate how they behaved and what they were, one must not forget their incredible power, their autonomy within their narrow and yet, as far as we were concerned, unlimited field; but also the isolation created by their unique situation and by what *they* — and hardly anyone else even within the German or Nazi community — had in common. Perhaps if this isolation had been the result of good rather than evil deeds, their own relationships towards each other would have been different. As it was, most of them seemed to hate and despise each other and do anything — almost anything — to 'get at' each other. Thus, if one of them selected a man out of a new transport for work, in other words to stay alive at least for a while, it could perfectly easily happen — and often did — that one of his rivals, and make no mistake about it, in one sense or another they were all rivals, would come along and kill that man just to spite him [send him into the queue to be killed] or else 'mark' him, which was tantamount to death [anybody 'marked' went with the next transport]. All this created a virtually indescribable atmosphere of fear. The most important thing for a prisoner in Treblinka, you see, was not to make himself conspicuous. To this, too, there were degrees — which I will tell you about later. But basically it meant, first of all, not to do anything 'wrong' — the 'wrongest' thing being to work at anything remotely less than one's top capacity. And there were a hundred and one other arbitrary 'wrong' things, depending only on who saw you. Of course, I am not talking about any kind of insubordination; I mean in the context of our lives that would have been impossible — simply unthinkable. What one had to do was to develop to a fine art one's understanding of how to remain alive.

"All this applied much more during the first six months than the

second. The whole Treblinka time needs to be divided into four phases. The first one was the months under Dr Èberl [before Glazar himself — or Stangl — arrived]. The second one, already under Stangl, but in the beginning of his rule, was still a period of utter arbitrariness where one SS might select a man for work and an hour later, he might be dead, sent 'up' by another. Phase three — after the beginning of 1943 — was one of comparative stability: there were less transports; the SS by then knew their comparatively safe jobs far from the shooting war *depended* on their proving themselves indispensable by running efficient camps, so they began to value useful workers. And by that time, too, the prisoners had become individuals of sorts to them. They had, so to speak, 'tenure' in their jobs; there was a terrible kind of communality of basic purpose between the murderers and the victims — the purpose of staying alive.

"Finally phase four was the two, three months before the uprising in August 1943 — a period of increasing insecurity for the Germans when the Russians were approaching and the SS had begun to realize what it would mean if the war was lost and the outside world learned of what had been done in Treblinka, and that they were in fact individual men, individually accountable. And that it followed that they might, eventually, be able to make use of individual prisoners [to speak in their defence].

"However, these are generalizations; the reason why, the morning of our arrival, it was fifteen or thirty minutes before somebody managed to whisper to us what Treblinka was for, was that this was phase two of the camp's existence and fear dictated every move."

Richard Glazar, as I had learned to understand by then, has an extraordinary capacity for recall, and for relative detachment — essential if this particular story is to be bearable — and, in a wider sense, of value.

"How can one say how one reacted?" he said. "What I remember best about the first night is that I decided not to move, to . . . how can I say it . . . stand, sit, lie very very still. Was it already an unconscious realization that the main thing was not to be noticed? Did I instinctively connect being 'noticed' with 'movement'? I don't know. I told myself, 'Swin along with the current . . . let yourself be carried . . . if you move too much, you'll go under. . . ."

"That night I wasn't hungry. I mean, there was food — there was

always food after the arrival of 'rich' [Western] transports — but I couldn't eat. I was terribly terribly thirsty, a thirst that continued all evening, all night. . . .

"I remember, that evening in the barrack, the others watching us new ones. 'How are you going to behave?' they wondered. 'Are you going to scream, shout, sob? Are you going to go mad, hysterical, melancholy?' All these things happened; and from the next night on, when I myself was one of the 'old' ones, I watched the 'new' ones in exactly the same way. It was not curiosity — nor was it compassion. Already we were beyond such simple feelings; we did it in response to a need within ourselves; we needed to prove to ourselves, over and over, that everyone was the same as oneself, with the same fears, the same aggressions — perhaps not quite the same capacities. There was a kind of reassurance in both these things, and watching the new arrivals became a kind of rhythm, every night. . . ."

Richard spoke a great deal about "relationships" and how important they were to survival. "My friend Karel arrived in a transport the day after I had come. His whole family were killed at once but he was twenty-one years old and strong like me, so he too was among the lucky ones to be selected for work. From that moment we were never apart until 1945 when we returned to Prague together — they used to call us the twins. . . ."

The small Czech contingent of which Glazar was a part, so important in the life of the camp, is even today spoken of by other survivors, and by former SS men too, with a kind of awe. "They were special," said Samuel Rajzman, who lives in Montreal and is, in terms of wisdom and achievement, a rather "special" man himself. "They had a special kind of strength, a special life force." "The Czechs?" said Suchomel. "Oh yes, I remember them very well. They were a special group: Masarek, Willie Fürst — they worked in the tailor shop under me. And then there was Glazar. Those lads slept on and under feather comforters. They were tidy — really tidy." And Berek Rojzman in Poland, also mentioned the Czechs. "I slept next to them. They were — they were a sort of elite group. Masarek," he said with awe, "and of course Glazar. I knew them all." It is gratifying to him to speak of them.

Richard says they were aware of this feeling in the other prisoners. "At the time," he said, "it was shaming for us. They seemed to feel we

were superior to them. One of the Poles, David Bart, said once, 'You must survive; it is more important than that we should.' But there were very few of us. At the 'peak period' of the camp — autumn and winter of 1942 — there were a thousand work-Jews, eighteen of them us Czechs. Two of us survived, that's all." (Altogether about 250,000 Czech Jews were killed during the "Final Solution.")

At the beginning of what Glazar called phase two, the SS (Stangl, no doubt, with his talent for organization) decided they could use certain professionals and people with qualities of leadership to improve efficiency. With few exceptions (one of them a woman, and an informer who was later "executed" by the revolt committee) the members of this "elite" were Warsaw Poles over forty; doctors, engineers, architects and financiers. They were given the best, and slightly segregated accommodation, and arm-bands with the word *Hoffjude* — "Court Jew" (denision even in privilege) — the main purpose of which was to protect them from some SS man's murderous whim. (Of the Czechs, only Rudolf Masarek — much younger than the others — was eventually to be appointed a "Court Jew.")

"Later, when we were in phase three," said Richard, "the arm-bands became unnecessary; they took them off then because they found it embarrassing to flaunt them before the rest of the slaves when they came back at night, half dead from exhaustion."

Six of the young Czechs, all arriving within days of each other, became close friends; but even within the six, they paired off in twos. "There was Karel and me," said Richard. "We worked from October until March in the warehouse, more specifically in 'men's clothing' — they called us 'Karel and Richard from Men's Better Overcoats.' The one who arrived next was Robert Altschuh, a twenty-seven-year-old medical student, and after him thirty-two-year-old Hans Freund; he'd worked in textiles in Prague. Five days after us Rudi Masarek arrived; he was twenty-eight, tall, blond, blue-eyed; his family had owned one of the most exclusive men's shirt shops in Prague. . . ." (When Suchomel first saw Masarek, he said, "What the hell are you doing here? You aren't a Jew, are you?")

"Rudi was a sort of 'golden youth,'" said Richard. "You know what I mean? His had been the world of sports-cars, tennis, country-house weekends, summers on the Riviera. He was a half-Jew; there really was no reason for him to be there. Except that in 1938, after the Austrian

Anschluss, he had fallen in love with a girl from Vienna who was Jewish. He married her the day before the regulation came into effect that Jews had to wear Stars of David on their clothes. Of course, he didn't have to wear it, but the day after his wedding he had the Star sewn on all his suits and coats. When she (though not he) was ordered to Theresienstadt, he went with her. And when she (not he) was ordered to Treblinka, he came with her there too. She was killed immediately. Rudi was an officer, a lieutenant in the Czech army, and he was later of decisive importance in the planning and execution of the revolt. But after his wife was killed it was three weeks before he would speak to anyone; he had been assigned to work in the tailor shop under Suchomel, who, by comparison to some, was relatively decent." Richard shrugged his shoulders. "That doesn't mean Suchomel didn't beat us; all of them beat us."

"The last arrival of our particular group, ten days or so later, was Zheho Bloch — a photographer in ordinary life. He too was a Czech officer, also good-looking, with brown hair, a strong square sort of face and a muscular body. He was the military brain behind the planning for the uprising — for a long time. Both he and Rudi — and Robert too in other ways — were immensely important to us and to the camp as a whole. Zheho and Robert became inseparable; and Rudi Masarek and Hans Freund. All of us had great respect for Galewski, the Polish camp-elder; he was an engineer of note, in his forties I think, tall, slim, with dark hair. He looked and behaved like a Polish aristocrat, a very remarkable man."

"Our daily life? It was in a way very directed, very specific. There were various things which were absolutely essential to survival: it was essential to fill oneself completely with a determination to survive; it was essential to create in oneself a capacity for dissociating oneself to some extent from Treblinka; it was important *not* to adapt completely to it. Complete adaptation, you see, meant acceptance. And the moment one accepted, one was morally and physically lost."

"There were, of course, many who did succumb. I have read more or less everything that has been written about this subject. But somehow no one appears to have understood: it wasn't *truthlessness* that enabled an individual to survive — it was an intangible quality, not peculiar to educated or sophisticated individuals. Anyone might have it. It is per-

haps best described as an over-riding thirst — perhaps, too, a *talent* for life, and a faith in life. . . ."

"If I speak of a thirst, a talent for life as the qualities most needed for survival," said Richard Glazar, "I don't mean to say that these were deliberate acts, or even feelings. They were, in fact, largely unconscious qualities. Another talent one needed was a gift for relationships. Of course, there were people who survived who were loners. They will tell you now they survived *because* they relied on no one but themselves. But the truth is probably — and they may either not know it, or not be willing to admit it to themselves or others — that they survived because they were carried by *someone*, someone who cared for them as much, or almost as much as for themselves. They are now the ones who feel the guiltiest. Not for anything they did — but for what they didn't do — for what . . . and this cannot be any reflection on them . . . for what simply wasn't in them to be."

It was quite clear that Richard did not mean to say that people died because they didn't have these qualities. To be chosen to live even for an extra day was nothing but luck, one chance in a thousand: it was only that if they had this incredible luck, then these qualities, he thought, gave them a chance to survive longer. . . .

"In our group," said Richard Glazar, "we shared everything; and the moment one of the group ate something without sharing it, we knew it was the beginning of the end for him. *Food* was uppermost in our minds; for a long time eating was an end in itself; we'd be given tin plates of soup at lunchtime, and bread and coffee. While the Western transports went on, there was so much food around, we used to throw the soup and bread away. There was a huge mountain of mouldy camp bread around [confirming what Suchomel had already told me, and contradicting Stangl's story]. We only drank the coffee. No, they didn't mind our taking food from the transports [presumably as long as they didn't know] — there was so much, you see. Of course, the SS and the Ukrainians had first choice, but there was much more than that. We stole it, and we bought it too. That is, the Ukrainians would help themselves to most of it and then sell it back to us for gold, American dollars or jewellery. They had no means of getting at the valuables — they guarded the outside work details and the camp itself,

but the work camp, inside, was worked by Jews, and guarded by the SS. The group who actually worked on registering the valuables — millions in money and stones — were called the 'gold-Jews.' SS-man Suchonnel supervised them too; he did that and the tailor-shop. . . ."

"Later in the autumn," Richard Glazar went on, "we were allowed a thirty-minute lunch break when we could talk, and everybody would ask each other, 'What have you "organized" today?' And that always referred to gold, money and food. After a while we did begin to think that we must *do* something; plan something; resist. But the work and the unremitting tension made us fearfully tired, just tired you know, and one used to say to oneself, or to close friends, 'We *must* think — we *must* plan,' but then we'd add, 'We'll think tomorrow, not today.'"

"Did we become hardened, callous to the suffering, the horror around us? Well, one can't generalize; as with everything in life, people reacted differently. One did, I think, develop a kind of dullness, a numbness where the daily nightmarish events became a kind of routine, and only special horrors aroused us, reminded us of normal feelings, sometimes this would be connected with specific and special people, sometimes with special events."

"There was the day when Edek arrived — he was a small fourteen-year-old boy. Perhaps he arrived with his family, perhaps alone, I don't know; when he got off the train and stood on the ramp, all one could see of him was his head and his shoes; in between was the accordian he'd brought, and that was all he brought. An SS saw him and said right away, 'Come, come,' and from that day on he played for them. They made a kind of mascot of him; he played everywhere, at all hours, and almost nightly in their mess. And just about the same time a famous opera singer arrived — a young one, from Warsaw — and somebody drew him to the attention of the SS and he too was pulled out. It wasn't long after that that they started the fires; we saw them for the first time in December, one night, through the barred window of the barrack; the flames rose high, high above the camp, flames in all colours: red, orange, blue, green, purple. And in the silence of the camp, and the terrible brightness of the flames, one heard nothing except little Edek playing his accordian and the young singer singing *Eli Eli*.

"Robert Altschuh said later that night — and that was the first time we had thought of it that way — 'They are trying to find ways to hide the traces; they are burning the corpses. But they aren't going to find it so easy — even one corpse doesn't burn easily, and hundreds of thousands of corpses. . . . ?'"

"So you see, that night, on the one hand we had allowed ourselves to be emotionally overwhelmed by this 'special event' — the fires. But then, only minutes afterwards, it was in a way cancelled out — and perhaps, although we may not have realized it, deliberately so — by Robert's scientific consideration of the problem of how to burn hundreds of thousands of corpses. He had a lot of ideas on it; he analysed the human body for us, what burned and what didn't burn; who would be easier and who more difficult to burn. And we listened, you know — with interest."

"Secrecy? Good heavens, there was no secrecy about Treblinka; all the Poles between there and Warsaw must have known about it, and lived off the proceeds. All the peasants came to barter, the Warsaw whores did business with the Ukrainians — it was a circus for all of them. . . ."

I asked Richard Glazar whether there were girls among the "work-Jews" and he said "Yes, there were girls. They worked in the kitchen and the laundry, in both the lower and upper camps. Of course, anyone who was sent to work in the upper camp, girls or men, knew they'd never come down again." (There is one single case on record — the carpenter Yankiel Wiernik — of someone moving back and forth between both parts of Treblinka. And although several people from the "upper camp" survived the August uprising, an authentic escape from there before then is unknown and considered impossible.)

"Yes," said Richard, "of course most of the — few — girls who were there paired off with somebody. Love? It's hard to say; relationships, strong friendships, yes — and yes, perhaps love; Kapo Kuba was in love — or lived with, if you like, a girl called Sabina. All the girls who were there were young and attractive; they only picked young and attractive ones, many of them blondes or redheads. Anyway, Sabina was found in bed, I think, with Kuba once, or something like that, and Kùther, one of the very bad SS men, said, 'We can't have all this whooring about,' and sent her up to work in the laundry at the death camp. Well, Kapo Kuba volunteered to go up too, to be with her."

They didn't let him. But what would you call that? Not love? [Kuba is dead. "Sabina" is one of the two girls who survived, and lives in Israel.]

"Then there was Tchechia. She was in love with Rakowski, the former camp elder. And he, they said, was in love with her. Stacie shot him when he discovered (through an informer) that he had planned an escape for himself and Tchechia, and found gold on him. Perhaps Tchechia slept with other men afterwards. But can you wonder? Did it really matter? . . ."

"Escapes?" said Richard Glazar. "Yes, there were a few, three I think which were successful, all in phase two; afterwards it became impossible."

He was to tell me later that two young men — "they were twenty-four and twenty-five, I think," he said — were smuggled out of the camp in the very first train to be sent out of Treblinka with the victims' clothes and other belongings. "It was the last two days of October or the very first of November. We helped to hide them; it was all very carefully organized to get the news out to Warsaw."

"At the end of November, beginning of December, seven men from the Blue Command tried and were caught. Kurt Franz shot them in the *Lazarett* and then called a special roll-call and said that if anybody else tried, particularly if they succeeded, ten would be shot for each one who escaped. . . ."

"[T]he revolt was being planned from November 1942. Very very few people knew about it, and even fewer were actually on the planning committee. It was headed of course by the camp elder, Galewski, and until March, when catastrophe struck us, Zheho Bloch was the military expert on it."

"The period between late October and the beginning of January was the peak period — that was when most of the transports arrived, sometimes six of them — 20,000 people a day. At first mostly Jews from Warsaw and the West, with their riches — above all enormous quantities of food, money and jewels. It was really incredible how much and what we ate; I remember a sixteen-year-old boy who, a few weeks after his arrival, said one night he'd never lived as well as here in Treblinka. It was — you know — very very different from the way people have written about it."

"You see, we weren't dressed in striped uniforms, filthy, lice-

ridden, or, for much of the time, starving, as the concentration camp inmates mostly were. My own group — the Czechs — and the 'court-Jews' dressed extremely well. After all, there was no shortage of clothes. I usually wore jodhpurs, a velvet jacket, brown boots, a shirt, a silk cravat and, when it was cool, a sweater. In hot months I wore light trousers, shirt and a jacket at night. I shone my boots once or twice every day until you could see yourself in them, like in a mirror. I changed shirts every day and of course underclothes. We had no body-lice ourselves, but there were of course vermin all over the barracks — it was inevitable with all that was brought in by the transports. I'd wear a pair of pyjamas for two nights or so and then they'd be full of blood-spots where I had killed bugs that crawled up on us in the night, and I'd think to myself, "Tomorrow I must get new ones; hope they are nice silk ones; they are still on the way now." That sounds terrible, doesn't it? Well, that is how one became. One was very concerned with the way one *looked*; it was immensely important to look clean on roll-call. One thought of small things all the time, like, 'I must shave; if I shave again, I have won another round.' I always had a little shaving kit on me. I still have it. I shaved up to seven times a day. And yet, this was one of the most torturing uncertainties; one never knew how the mood of the Germans 'ran' — whether, if one was *seen* shaving or cleaning one's boots, that wouldn't get one killed. It was an incredible daily routine; you see, one SS might consider a man looking after himself in this way as making himself 'conspicuous' — the cardinal sin — and then another might not. The *effect* of being clean always helped — it even created a *kind* of respect in them. But to be seen doing it might be considered showing off, or toadying, and provoke punishment, or death. We finally understood that the maximum safety lay in looking much — but not *too* much — like the SS themselves and the significance of this went even beyond the question of 'safety.'

"At the beginning of winter the huge transports from the East started coming," Richard said. "The [Eastern] Polish Jews; they were people from a different world. They were filthy. They knew nothing. It was impossible to feel any compassion, any solidarity with them. Of course, I am not talking about the Warsaw or Cracow intellectuals; they were no different from us. I am talking about the Byelorussian Jews, or those from the extreme east of Poland. . . ."

"Things changed very much towards the middle of January," said Richard Glazar. "That was the beginning of phase three: fewer and fewer transports; less food and of course no new clothes. This was when the plans for the uprising were being worked on very intensely. And then, in the very beginning of March 1943, real catastrophe struck us.

"Küttner smelled something — there is no other way of putting it. He sensed that something was going on, and with perfect instinct he picked on the one person who was almost irreplaceable for us: Zhelo Bloch, the revolt committee's military expert. What Küttner took as a pretext was that some men's coats had disappeared, and Zhelo was in charge of them. He came to our barracks and raged; two men were shot on the spot, several were beaten. And Zhelo was sent up to Camp II.

"It was the most terrible blow to our morale, an anti-climax which is indescribable now. It wasn't only, you see, that he was so necessary, in a planning sense; it was that he was loved. Contrary perhaps to some of us, he was very much one of the people. Don't misunderstand me, I only mean that, of all of us, he was the one person who could talk to anybody, give anybody a sense of faith in himself and his capacities; he was a born leader, of the best kind.

"The evening he went was the end of hope for us — for a long time. I remember that night so clearly; it was the one time in all those months that we nearly lost control; that we gave way to emotion. It could have been the end for us.

"Robert Altschuh cried like a child. Of course, he had been closest to Zhelo; they needed each other. Zhelo was essential to Robert because he was a *doer*, but Robert was just as essential to Zhelo because he was an intellectual; they complemented and reassured each other. Zhelo had relied utterly on Robert intellectually. It was Robert who was the 'psychological' planner; who would explain the Nazis' psychology to us; he who advised us when to lie low and when to make ourselves noticed. He had an unfailing instinct for what was the right approach, and when. On the other hand, he was physically frail, and Zhelo of course was very strong. Without Zhelo's physical strength, Robert collapsed. Hans Freund, too, despite his closeness to Rudi Massarek, somehow couldn't recover from the psychological blow of Zhelo's going. It took some weeks before Rudi came into his own as a leader —

by that time much of Hans's effectiveness had gone." ("Freund and Altschuh," he was to write later, "were still alive at the time of the revolt. But in all probability they died in the course of it.")¹

"The evening of the day Zhelo was sent up to Camp II, I remember we were lying on our bunks; it was not quite dark. It was very very quiet. And suddenly Hans Freund said, 'We aren't human beings any more. . . .' It was something we had ceased to — or never did — think about. Certainly we had never talked about it; regret for the loss of one's sensitivity and compassion was something one just couldn't afford, just as one couldn't afford remembering those we had loved. But that night was different. . . .

"I can only think of my wife and boy,' said Hans, who had never, with a word, spoken of his young wife and small boy from the day he arrived. 'I never felt anything that first night after we had come. There they were — on the other side of the wall — dead, but I felt nothing. Only the next morning, my brain and stomach began to burn, like acid; I remember hearing about people who could feel everything inside but couldn't move; that was what I felt. My little boy had curly hair and soft skin — soft on his cheeks like on his bottom — that same smooth soft skin. When we got off the train, he said he was cold, and I said to his mother, 'I hope he won't catch a cold.' A cold. When they separated us he waved to me. . . ."

During the many many hours Richard and I talked, he never faltered; this was the only time. It was late at night, his family had gone to bed; his house is so deep in the country, there wasn't a sound except the occasional shuffle or wheezing from a cow in a nearby field. We sat in his living room which was dark except for a lamp on his desk. He hid his face in his hands for long minutes. I poured some coffee his wife had made before she went to bed. We drank it without talking. "Did you see this?" he asked then after a while, pointing to something behind me. I turned around. In a cabinet, on a shelf by itself, a beautiful small Bristol-blue glass jar. "How lovely," I said. He

¹Although the lists of survivors of Treblinka and Sobbor are believed to be complete, it is impossible to place accurately the circumstances of the deaths of those who perished during or after the revolts.

shook his head, stood up, walked over, picked it up and handed it to me. "What do you think it is?" There was half an inch or so of something in the bottom of the jar. I didn't know. "Earth," he said. "Treblinka earth."

"Things went from bad to worse that month of March," he went on. "There were no transports — in February just a few, remnants from here and there, then a few hundred gypsies — *they* were really poor; they brought nothing. In the storehouses everything had been packed up and shipped — we had never before seen all the space because it had always been so full. And suddenly everything — clothes, watches, spectacles, shoes, walking-sticks, cooking-pots, linen, not to speak of food — everything went, and one day there was nothing left. You can't imagine what we felt when there was nothing there. You see, the *things* were our justification for being alive. If there were no *things* to administer, why would they let us stay alive? On top of that we were, for the first time, hungry. We were eating the camp food now, and it was terrible and, of course, totally inadequate [300 grammes of coarse black bread and one plate of thin soup a day]. In the six weeks of almost no transports, all of us had lost an incredible amount of weight and energy. And many had already succumbed to all kinds of illness — especially typhus. It was the strain of anxiety which increased with every day, the lack of food, and the constant fear of the Germans who appeared to us to be getting as panic-stricken as we were.

"It was just about when we had reached the lowest ebb in our morale that, one day towards the end of March, Kurt Franz walked into our barracks, a wide grin on his face. 'As of tomorrow,' he said, 'transports will be rolling in again.' And do you know what we did? We shouted, 'Hurrah, hurrah.' It seems impossible now. Every time I think of it I die a small death; but it's the truth. That is what we did; that is where we had got to. And sure enough, the next morning they arrived. We had spent all of the preceding evening in an excited, expectant mood; it meant life — you see, don't you? — safety and life. The fact that it was their death, whoever they were, which meant our life, was no longer relevant, we had been through this over and over and over. The main question in our minds was, where were they from? Would they be rich or poor? Would there be food or not?

"That morning, all of us stood around everywhere, waiting. The

SS did too: for once they didn't care whether we worked or not. Everybody was discussing where they would be from; if only it were from somewhere rich like Holland.

"When the first train pulled in, we were looking out through the cracks in the wall of our barrack, and when they got out, David Bart called to one of the Blue Command, 'Where are they from?' and he answered, 'The Balkans.' I remember them getting off the train, and I remember Hans Freund saying, 'Ah yes, you can see they are rich. But they won't burn well, they are too fat.' This was a very, very special transport of rich Bulgarians who had lived in Salonika — 24,000 of them. They had already spent some time in a camp together; they were organized and disciplined, and they had equipped themselves with a special supply-car for the long journey. When the Blue Command opened those doors, we nearly fainted at the sight of huge pieces of meat, thousands of tins with vegetables, fats and fish, jars of fruit and jams, and cakes — the black earth of the ramp was yellow and white with cakes. Later, after the Bulgarians had been taken away, the Ukrainians fought us for the food; we managed 'accidentally-on-purpose' to drop some of the big wooden chests in which the jams were packed. They burst open, the Ukrainians beat us with their horrible whips, and we bled into the jam. But that was later; oh, the SS were very, very careful with this transport; if the Bulgarians had had the slightest idea what awaited them, they wouldn't have stood still for it. It would have been a bloodbath. But they hadn't a clue; even then, in March, almost April, 1943 — with nearly a million already killed in Treblinka, . . . three million or so by then in all the extermination and other camps in Poland — they were as full of illusions as we Czechs had been six months before. They still didn't know. The mind just boggles — with all the hundreds, the thousands of people who by then knew — how could they not have known? Marvellous-looking people they were; beautiful women, lovely children; stocky and strong-looking men; marvellous specimens. It took three days to kill them all. And ten days later we had processed all their belongings. Imagine, at fifty kilograms a person — that's what each was 'allowed' to bring for this 'resettlement' — there were 720,000 kilograms of *things*; incredible, how the machine proved itself in those ten days.

"This is something, you know, the world has never understood;

how perfect the machine was. It was only lack of transport because of the Germans' war requirements that prevented them from dealing with far vaster numbers than they did; Treblinka alone could have dealt with the 6,000,000 Jews and more besides. Given adequate rail transport, the German extermination camps in Poland could have killed all the Poles, Russians and other East Europeans the Nazis planned eventually to kill. . . .

"The revolt was planned for the late afternoon of August 2," said Richard Glazar, "so as to give people the maximum chance to escape in the dark. . . . At 2 p.m., an order came through from the committee that from that moment no Jew would be allowed to die; if there was any threat from anyone, the balloon would have to go up earlier than planned. At ten minutes to four Kuba said something to Kuttner and shortly afterwards Kuttner started to beat a young boy. That was what started it — at three minutes to four, probably about two hours early. . . ."

"My main memory of the revolt," Richard said, "is one of utter confusion; the first moments were of course madly exciting; grenades and bottles of petrol exploding, fires almost at once, shooting everywhere. Everything was just that much different from the way it had been planned, so that we were thrown into utter confusion. . . ."

"Within minutes," Glazar said, "it was more or less each man for himself. There were groups who escaped together as planned, but of each group only a few made it. Of the twenty-five of us in the camouflage unit who had planned to stay together, six, possibly eight, got out. Only four of us are alive today. . . ."

Surviving Slave Labor at Maidanek

Alexander Donat

Maidanek was hell. Not the naive inferno of Dante, but a twentieth-century hell where the art of cruelty was refined to perfection and every facility of modern technology and psychology was combined to destroy men physically and spiritually. To begin with, in accord with Germanic efficiency — *Ordnung muss sein!* — the new shipment of prisoners was taken to the camp office (*Schreibstube*) where "scribes," mostly Czech and Slovak Jews, sat behind tables. One of them carefully filled in a long form for which I had to supply my name, date of birth, occupation (I said printer), and then came the question: "When were you arrested?" I looked at him surprised. Was he trying to mock me? Could it be that he didn't know? "Well, when were you arrested?" he repeated impatiently.

"We weren't arrested. We were rounded up during the uprising."
"All right, all right," he said, in a bored voice. "But when?"

I gave him the date. He handed me the form he'd filled out and told me to go to another table. I glanced at the form and had only enough time to read a few words at the end. They gave me a jolt: "S.D. (for *Sicherheitsdienst*, the Nazi security police) . . . sentenced to life imprisonment. . . ." I handed the form to the clerk at the table indicated and he gave me a numbered piece of canvas. I looked at my number: 7,115. From that moment I ceased to be a man, a human being; instead I became camp inmate 7,115.

After the formalities, we were driven to an empty barrack where a few moments later our new master appeared: the Barrack Elder (*Blockälteste*) of Barrack Number Five. Short, heavy-set, and a former policeman, Mietek Szydlower was a native of Lodz who had been sent to Maidanek from the Warsaw cauldron in September, 1942. With brutal frankness he told us what it was like there.