

## Safta Remembers: Alice Goldblum's Memories of the War Years

To my daughter with love, June 15th, 1982

### Spring of My Life

My father came to Warsaw as a young man from a small town on the Polish-Ukrainian border. He worked and studied law. He was a very clever and handsome man. He was married, but not happy. He wanted children. I don't know how long that marriage lasted, but one day a relative of his came to visit him. She was a very beautiful girl with very long black hair and black eyes. He divorced his wife and married my mother. Soon, I arrived. They were the happiest people and I was a copy of my father. Blond, and at that time, beautiful too. I grew up in a very loving way; very spoiled. My parents were not rich. My father always worked for somebody else. He never bothered to be independent.

My father when he has got some more money used to take us, me and my mother, to very expensive places -- he liked good food and wine -- then to all kinds of museums and galleries. He taught me many things, but I was very young and didn't care so much. Later, I understood and remembered what and how nice that was and how much more I could have learned from him, but it was too late.

I remember also a very nice gentleman who used to come to the house from time to time. He was a relative of my father. I used to call him Uncle Josef. After the war, I tried to find him. He was living in Czechoslovakia. I did find him. I was happy to have somebody who knew my house and my parents and myself. He wrote me a nice letter because I told him not everything, but that I survived. His answer was that he understood, but he is old and he is now a great believer in Jesus Christ and had nothing to do with Judaism. That was all that I had from my family and that was lost. My lost world. It was very hard to start all alone in that big world.

There are many things which at that time I didn't understand and didn't want to know. I was busy with myself. My school days were happy. I played. My greatest fun was skating, even in the summer. We had a skating rink in a very nice park. I spent a lot of my time there. I finished my public school. I went to a private high school. It was run by Mme Marie Sacks in Warsaw, Miodowa Str. I was there one year and the second year rumors started about a war. So we studied, but our minds were with the war already.

In the meantime, I met a nice boy. He came from Lwow (Lemberg) to study medicine. I fell in love. Life was beautiful. I had everything. And then one day -- I was only 16 and one-half years old, I had to be a grown up person because that horrible, hellish time started. That is a long story. I will try to write it down. It won't be easy. Ashes!

In March 1940 I got married. There were only a few people and hardly food. Some friends and a sister of my husband (Jan Nussbaum was his name). I loved him very much and we all cried on that day because of our fate. By the way, his sister I met later in

Germany; such a nice person. A Polish girl denounced her to the Gestapo that she is Jewish and that was her end.

We lived all together in our apartment, but people started to float in from everywhere. The Germans pushed them to Warsaw. They knew that they were going to close that place and make a ghetto out of it. The place was small. A lot of strange people came into our house. It got crowded. People on the floors. My mother did what she could. She tried to help. My father was helpless; desperate. He tried to get us out, but it was impossible. So we had to help.

I looked good, blond. So looked my husband. We went out from the ghetto to buy food and to help people, bringing all kinds of documents for them. So we had some money. My mother couldn't go out because of her beautiful black hair, but she did a lot. She helped in a hospital. For days she went out and was occupied helping everybody. My father had a breakdown and that was his end. One day he told us that he was going to a friend, who had promised to make Polish papers for him (documents to get us out.) The Germans arrested him. They took him to the Gestapo. Somehow friends let us know. We went everywhere. We did everything possible to get him out. The Germans were friendly and promised after a day to let him out, but he never came out. Life at that time was very cheap. We couldn't even get the body. My poor mother was grey and old. The next day, what a misery.

Our contacts with the Poles were still good, so both of us (Jan and I) got some papers, but they weren't very good. The Germans without the Poles didn't know the difference, but the Poles helped them. Anyhow, we decided to rent a small flat and started to live as Poles. It was not easy. My mother didn't want to come with us because she had to stay in the flat and nobody was to know that we left. We left her with all her friends in the ghetto, but we tried to bring her food and see her as much as possible. As everybody knows, the Germans used to take people out every time "for work," but it was for death. When we were there, we also had a few "selections," but we survived.

During that time, so many things happened to me. For instance, my father was a real "European man." But, whenever it was bad with us, I had a dream. In the dream, my father came to me a few time dressed up as an old wandering Jew in a long black coat and with a stick and a white bottle in his hand and a smile on his face: "Darling, you have to run," he would say, and I was running all the time. It started to get harder. One day, my mother went with many, many others. I was desperate. It was already 1942 and everybody thought that the war is going to end. I was outside the ghetto and then we heard that something was going on there. I was standing by the wall looking and listening. How the Poles enjoyed the killing. For instance, a young woman came up to me. The house was burning with three children in it. Their mother took one child after another and threw them down. After a few minutes, she threw herself into the fire. The Poles were laughing and screaming, Bravo! Bravo! My heart was crying. I came home very sick and never went there anymore.

After a few days, still sick, we had to change our flat. It was dangerous and nowhere to go. Then I dreamed again. I saw my father pointing at a house. I saw his smile and a name of a street. It was very far from the place we lived. We went there and there really was a small flat to rent. The people were old and afraid. They looked at me and asked if I was Jewish. Of course I said no, but I told them I had a friend and liked him to be with me. They didn't agree. So we started to live separately. After a few days, with the help of his friends, we found something for him. All thought the news very good that the war is going to end. We got surrounded more every day, less friends and less food. It started to be a hell of a life. We couldn't find work. We couldn't see each other very often, and then one day -- a beautiful September day -- I went to see my love. He was living at that time with two other boys, not Jews, but members of the Polish Underground. Somebody denounced them, which was very easy at that time. The Germans took them to prison. It was a place from which no one came out. I will never forget that moment when I was standing on the street like a pillar, not able to get out a word. I was so badly injured. People going by, some of them asking something. Nothing. I was dead inside.

I don't know how long I was there standing. At that time, at 7 o'clock we were not allowed to be on the street. I couldn't go back to my room. So, I said to myself, "What will be, will be." I didn't care anymore. I wanted to die. Then a German came by. He asked me where I wanted to go. I didn't answer. He took (pointed) his pistol at me. He said that he was going to shoot. Then I smiled (I thanked God that all that hell was over). He looked at me and said that I am looking so lost, maybe he could help. I didn't care. I said that I have nowhere to go. He took me to the police station. Then they asked me all kinds of questions. I said that I am not living in Warsaw. I live in (Grodno) in case they will help me to go home. I couldn't say that I am living in Warsaw, and in the morning I have to go there. They believed me. They gave me a glass of cocoa and a piece of cake, which I hadn't seen for a long time. I was lucky. Next day, I didn't know what to do with myself. I didn't want to live, but I also didn't want to die. After all, I said to myself, I am young, maybe I will live. They (the Germans) believed me when I told them I wasn't Jewish. I thought that after the war, life will be beautiful. People will have learned a lesson and everything will be a pleasure. I was wrong, but at that time I didn't know it. I wanted to survive. To see the Germans suffer. With all those thoughts all my hopes, I started from the beginning. I closed my beloved deep into myself; into my heart with tenderness and affection. The most sentimental time of my life, the most happy, was closed!!!

My New Start: 1942

I was desperate and didn't care. I went to friends, a Polish family. When I knocked on the door, the lady of the house opened it. When she saw me, she almost fainted, but she let me in. She called her husband. I told them my very sad story. Then they promised to help. They let me stay only a few days. I knew it was dangerous for them, because they were known (?). He called some friends. On the third day, he brought me a paper, a birth certificate. It was that of a young girl who had died a few years ago. He knew the priest, and he (the priest) gave it to him. He also took me to a family. They were great patriots; very friendly people. We told them that I was his relative. He was the owner of

the biggest drug store in Warsaw, at the corner of Marszalkowska and Lieluna. They had a son who was in a German prison and a daughter who was very active in the Resistance. He asked them for help and they did. In the meantime, I could stay there. They needed help. As I told before, I wasn't afraid anymore. With my new birth certificate, I went to the Gestapo on Aleje Slucha and ordered an identification card. I was very sure of myself. How I did it, I don't know. I had original papers. It was great. I worked in the drug store and got very friendly with Barbara. She was nice, but she didn't know that I was Jewish. She really liked me. I had many problems at that time. They asked about friends and family. I had to make up stories. At night, we used to make -- prepare -- all kinds of things for the underground soldiers. We also were building barricades and (all Poles were very religious) we prayed a lot. I was the one who never missed that. Many stories I would like to write from that time of my life. I will, but not here. It was a hard time, and then the Poles arose day and night. They were shooting. We brought over from place to place arms. Me and Barbara were very busy helping everywhere. I started to get to fight. The Germans who fought us had everything. Our guns slowly stopped to fire. We got rounded up. If the Germans caught young boys and girls, they shot them right on the place. What a scene. I tried to be between old people. The entire population had to leave Warsaw. Thousands and thousands had only a small bundle with -- no food and no hope. Most of the people they took to the camps with, as I have told, no hope of every coming out. I was between them. A group I was with they put into railway cars without food, without everything, to Germany on a dark night. They opened the cars, with machine guns shooting and shouting, "Out! Out!" The Germans took us into big barracks. We got something to drink, but still no food. We were there a few nights. It was real hell. Big men dressed in black came with flashlights every night and took out a big group. Then we heard shooting, shooting. A long time. They killed and killed. They were so cruel, so insatiable, that there are no words to describe it. I got very sick. Insects were eating us. I was looking like someone sick with leprosy. One night, I decided that's enough. When those insatiable, big black brutes came in, I was one of the first to stand on the line (again my dreams). A few people who were near me also came up. This time they took only younger ones. They put us in big cars and again we started our journey. We traveled a long time. Then we came to a place with a big gate. The gate opened and in we were. We didn't know anything about our destination. We couldn't walk, we were crawling. So we crawled to a big bath. Then all, men and women, had to take off our rags and go into the water. After a few minutes, we got out. Then we all got trousers and big blouses and wooden shoes. We couldn't walk. We crawled. Then we got some coffee and big slices of bread. They put us in barracks. We still didn't know where we were. Everybody fell asleep. In the early morning, two civilians came in and asked us to come up. We stood up in lines. Then they told us that we are prisoners and we have to work to help Hitler to win the war. We will get food and clothes. We will live there and work for German victory. They told us that we are now in Germany -- Westfalen -- and in a town called Reinhausen, where only workers of the biggest German concern Krupp are living and working for the "Führer."

I was very weak and wanted to live so I got up every morning to stand in line to get out to work. Every morning our big boss came to examine us. He was a big sadist. A monster. He always started his day with a prayer "that his Führer is going to win the

war." Everybody has got to answer with God's will he is going to win. But that wasn't enough for him. He has got to kill every morning a man or woman. Then he was satisfied. So, every day we paid. We were so horrified, out of strength and hope. We were so humiliated that nobody did care anymore about anything. In the meantime, I got very sick again. We went every morning to the factories. One day, I -- we -- me and another woman -- have got to pick up iron bars. They were frozen. It was winter. Usually we used rags. I don't know why, but I took that iron bar with my hands and when we put it down -- it was very big -- the skin of my hands I left on that iron bar. I was wounded very badly. They took me to the first aid which was in the camp. The doctor, a middle aged man, was shocked. Although he was a Nazi, something human was in him. He started to cry. The first time I had seen a German cry. Then he said to me that even if it may cost him his life, he was going to do everything possible to help me. He coddled me. My wounds slowly started to heal. I didn't have to go out to work and I was warm inside. It was bitter cold. My angel doctor took care of me. I had learned German at school, but never spoken it, so he brought me back helped me with my German. Then he brought me papers from the office, Polish papers. I had to help to translate them into German, which was nothing to me. So they were satisfied because without doing something you couldn't live there. Krupp didn't pay for not doing something. Slowly, I made up all the lists with the Polish names which they couldn't spell. Then I met my new boss. He was a very big man and I was really afraid of him. Every morning when I came into the room where I had to work, I was very nervous, shaking. One day my boss asked why I am so afraid. So I told him that I am still sick and would like very much to work there, so I hoped he would be kind and let me stay. He asked me from where I am. I told him what he wanted to hear: that I am Catholic, my parents are still living in Poland, and I am lonely. He was a very good man. He asked me not to look at the big cross he is wearing, only at his heart, which is suffering because of the evil which is going on.

From that time he was my best friend. he called me the "Polish Aristocrat." I worked with him and explained all of the Polish problems. He had two sons. One was studying law in Berlin. He wanted me as a daughter-in-law for his son. but his son had to go to the army to fight for the Fuhrer, so I was saved. (By the way, that beast, the first boss, got killed on the Russian border.) My angel doctor didn't forget me. He went away. But somebody, from time to time did send me some food. I think it was him.. I was lucky, because the others in the camp were suffering because of the shortage of food and very hard work. Then the Germans started to pick out the weak men and women and send them into concentration camps. We still worked for the Fuhrer, but we knew that the war was going to end. The American and English planes were in that part of Germany very often because of the factories. We were afraid, but happy. Everybody looked for shelter wherever he could. We ran away. Most of the Germans also ran. But we had no place to run. The town was burning. Everything around us was falling to pieces. And we, a small group, desperate, sitting on a corner of a street and waiting. Waiting for the end of the war and a better future.

We were very optimistic. We thought that we, the prisoners of the Third Reich (Empire), would be welcome, but the truth was bitter. They knew what we had been through, but

(the English) in the beginning they didn't know what to do with us. We were dirty and hungry, so they left us. We started to walk and look for something to eat. So we walked for days and nights. So many strange people. Nobody knows what's going to happen. We came to a small town. Then the English put us into a very big hall. They brought some food and started to organize us. And the English, like the Germans, couldn't spell all those Polish names. I went and offered my help, and that was the beginning of my work with the U.N.R. First of all, I had better food and some money. My status was very low, so I had to live in the camp. It is hard to imagine with how many people I had to negotiate and how many funny stories -- with all that misery -- I had to hear and live. I will write about it later.

After we finished to make up all those lists, I got a job in a small hospital. Everybody has got to get special injections and there were thousands of people, so I started to help. I worked very hard. People were satisfied. Most of them came to me. There I met some doctors from all over Europe. One of them looked Jewish, so I said to him that I am Jewish too. He looked at me and said that it was not yet the time to tell all these people that I am Jewish, but to wait until it will clear up a little bit. So, all my dreams of being Jewish after that horrible war were nothing. I thought that Jews would get a special treat (treatment?) from everybody. But it was an illusion. People hate each other like during the war. One day I had enough. I didn't say anything to anybody. I took a day off and went to Koln. It's a big town in Germany. I asked for the Jewish Committee. I went there and told them that I am Jewish, that I was working in the camp not far away and what should I do because slowly they are sending people away. I know that I will be dismissed and I didn't like the idea of going into another camp. They were very friendly with me and promised to help. So, one day I didn't saying anything to anybody, except for some friends, I took my suitcase and went to Koln. They gave me a room and asked me to come and they will find something for me to do. I met a lot of people there, all refugees. Then, one day there in the committee they expected a very important man. Everybody was very excited. He was born in Koln and very wealthy. I was there when he came. He was very nice and talked with everybody, even with the refugees. So I met Mr. Heyman.

My romance with the Heyman family started. He asked me some questions. Once, when he was young, he visited Poland. So we talked a lot. Then he asked me if I would like to come to London and meet his family. He promised to send an invitation and a ticket. I didn't believe him, but after a few weeks I got a letter from Mrs. Heyman saying she had arranged everything and my ticket is on the way. Everybody envied me that I am out of that misery. People didn't know where to go. Poland was at that time very dangerous. The Poles didn't want us back, and we were hearing all kinds of stories about how many people, after all that hell, got killed. There was no way at that time to get out. Israel didn't exist as a state, but many young people went. It wasn't easy, because the young men who came from Israel didn't want to take everybody. They wanted in the first place young people who could attend (join) the army. So I was meant to be lucky. I said to everybody good bye and left to my new adventure.

When I arrived at the London terminal, there were waiting for me the Heymans and two boys: Alfred and George. They were happy to see me and very kind in every way. They brought me to a beautiful house with a very nice, huge garden and two other boys waiting for us. It was a late afternoon, so dinner was ready. Mrs. Heyman brought me to the room she had prepared for me. It was a very nice room with everything in it. I asked what will be my position here? She answered that, "we will see." After dinner we went to our rest rooms and then they told me the rules of the house. There was a German cook, two English women -- one to clean the house and the other only to do the laundry -- and a gardener. In the meantime, I am supposed to keep Mrs. Heyman company and look after the little boy "Bernie." (?) The men went out every day to work. They had a business in town. It was nice in the beginning. The house was very big. You could read a book or do something for yourself. The boys were very friendly. I told them about my life and the war and they told me about themselves. There was Alfred, a good boy who always did what he was asked to do, and Ludwig, an intellectual who didn't agree with the way of life in the house. He went his way and used to come up always with new ideas. There was George. A very good boy always ready to help everyone in every way, who refused to learn anything except all about cars. There were many quarrels between them. Nothing helped. Everyone went his way. Only Bernhard went to school. He was really a nice and good boy. The parents liked him very much. Slowly they got used to me and, through me, they got what they wanted, because I would go to Mr. Heyman and ask if they could do what they wanted to do. So we were very friendly. It was very nice, in a way, but I got bored. One day I found out that, not very far away, is a Polish club. So, one Sunday I went there. The Heymans didn't like it, but I went there anyhow. I met some Poles who I had known in Germany. There was always something to talk about. We remembered the past and looked forward to the future. One Saturday evening, I met a friend of my father from Warsaw. He lost his family and he didn't know how to start again -- whether to go back to Poland or to Israel. He talked a lot about his past. He was living with an English woman. He invited me for next Sunday to his house. He said that there would be more friends and he would be happy to see me between (among) them.

The first Sunday I met there Mietek Goldblum, who was delighted to see me. He had known my family. We talked and talked for hours. Next Sunday, we met again. That was the first time I met your father and my future husband. It was not easy. The Heymans were very angry. They decided that I needed a rest, so we -- the Heymans, Bernie and me -- went to the south of France to Nice. We were in the most expensive hotels, then we went to Monte Carlo and many, many beautiful places. Then we went to San Remo. We were staying there more than two weeks. It was a real paradise. We were living in a palace, very high up with beautiful gardens. It was a dream. They tried all the time to explain (persuade) me not to meet my Polish friends. They had a friend in Switzerland. He was coming to London. They wanted me to meet him. He was very wealthy and I would have a splendid life with him. They also were going to leave me some money. They wanted to be sure that I am well.

Well, we returned to London. The telephone started to ring. Either Mietek or Artur was ringing. I liked them. I also liked the stories about the (Goldblum) family. I was enchanted after the war. They all survived. It was something unusual to hear. It was like

music. A big family. they were all going to Israel and I am going to have a family. I decided to tell all that lovely story to Mrs. Heyman. They didn't want to believe it. I told them that they knew my family, they know who I am, and I am sure that my future husband will do everything to make me happy after I was left all alone. Mietek knew already at that time that his wife and only daughter hadn't survived the war. Artur was a bachelor and very much in love with me. I liked him a lot and when I told him my story about my marriage and my love story, very happy and very sad, and I don't know if I will be suitable; if I will be good enough for him. But he didn't want to hear about all that. He wanted me to promise that I will never tell anybody anything about my past. He was very jealous. Both of them, Mietek and Artur, they wouldn't let me go. Then I thought about that big family that I am going to share and both of them were so happy. After many years (many years later?), M. told me that he made a mistake and because of me he will never remarry.

It was not easy for me because of the Heymans. They were very unhappy that I was leaving. In the beginning, they didn't want to hear anything about me. Later, they decided to help and I got married again. I went to live with my husband, who was very, very good to me. But life was hard - no money, no work. Then we decided to go to Israel. A factory in Tel Aviv promised him work and a very good wage. In the meantime, I was pregnant and very sick. I called Mrs. Heyman. She sent me her doctor, but was still cross with me. And then I told her that we were leaving for Israel. That was a shock for them. They wanted me to stay until my child will be born. We couldn't stay because of that work which was waiting. The Israelis called every day to say they were waiting. So we left for Israel. After two months, you, my daughter, were born. I was very happy. You were the most beautiful child I ever saw and you looked like my father -- blond and with his eyes. I was crying and laughing.

I am not going to write about that time. It was very hard. The family liked me, everything was fine. But the promised work was only a promise. I was again in trouble and didn't know what to do. But I wrote to the Heymans that I have a baby girl and life here is very hard. I got a very nice answer. First of all, they want to see the baby. Mr. Heyman is not well. They are sending a ticket and I have to come with you. But I was proud and didn't want to show them that I have nothing, even for the baby. My answer was that I am not coming and am sending the ticket back. But that I need some clothes for the baby, because even for money I can't get anything. I got one parcel after another. The most beautiful things. You were the best dressed child in the neighborhood. Everybody loved you.

In the meantime, things started to clear up. My husband got work and good pay. So, I started to breath. The first thing I did, I started to look for a flat. I found one on Jabotynski Str. The woman was old and almost blind. The flat was dirty and ragged but the woman said that she can see that I am desperate. She asked me to take that flat and then said that she can see me moving from here into my own nice -- not flat, but house. So I took it, cleaned everything and started my life anew. In the meantime, Mr. Heyman passed away. I got a letter from Mrs. Heyman that she is not going to keep that big house. She is going to move into a flat and I am welcome anytime. I didn't go. We

(your father and I) started to think about something more stability (permanent). I got some money from Germany (as reparations). We bought a piece of ground across the street and started to build our home there. I got some more money from Germany. I decided to visit the Heymans. I don't know if you remember the flat in Regent's Str. They give you to understand how much they care for you. They invited us for dinner to one of the most expensive places in London. Mrs. Heyman said she has to show you how to behave if you will be invited with people from high society. She believed that you will do that. When we finished building our house she came to visit us because we made everything to give her a good time, but she told me that she is very sick. Nobody knew it. The boys had no idea and she wanted me again to come stay with her. But I could not do that. I was very upset. I grieved a lot, but that was my life now. I couldn't change anything. She died and I couldn't go to the funeral. That was the end of a part of my life.