

The Other Tchaikowsky



Courtesy of Piotr Paszkowski

André Tchaikowsky (c. 1938)

André at age 3, about one year before the invasion by the German army. Uncle Ignacy had become André's surrogate father, which was only natural since everyone was living in the same house. André's mother seemed disinterested in being a parent and was pleased to share the responsibility with other family members.

Chapter 3 - Survival (1939-1945)

By September 14, 1939, the German Army had surrounded Warsaw and delivered a demand for unconditional surrender. Instead of giving up, the people of Warsaw began to fortify the city. The German response was a seven day around-the-clock air raid, which destroyed one fourth of Warsaw and killed 20,000 people. The Russians invaded Poland from the East on September 17, advancing to borders established by a secret protocol contained in the Pact of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union. By September 28, the Polish state had ceased to exist and had been partitioned into German and Russian zones.

Miraculously, no one in André Tchaikowsky's family died in the Warsaw invasion, and their homes survived intact, but agonizing decisions had to be made, and quickly. Hitler's attacks against the Jews in Germany would surely be repeated in Poland. Where would the family find relative safety? How long would the war last? Where would they find an income to provide the necessities of life? Ignacy and Irena Rappaport crossed into the Russian zone. Celina and Nicholas Sandler, with Felicja and Robert Andrzej, continued to live at 1 Przejazd Street, uncertain what to do next. Dorka and Edward Lanota also remained in Warsaw.

Renata and Michael Swieca closed down the Cedib cosmetics business and fled Warsaw for the village of Sarny, which was part of the Russian zone. After one month, they moved deeper into the Russian zone to Lvov, and then to Vilna, Lithuania. Anatol Swieca also escaped to Vilna, but left his wife and child in Warsaw. Anatol had believed the statement in Hitler's declaration of war on September 1 that he would "not war against women and children." He never saw his family again.

Almost immediately, the Germans started to confiscate Jewish businesses and industries and to close Jewish retail stores. All over Poland synagogues went up in flames. But André Tchaikowsky's family were not quintessential Jews. They wore no Jewish garb, no beards or sidelocks, and few people knew them to be or thought of them as Jews. The only real clue was that the Sandler home at 1 Przejazd Street was in the center of the Warsaw Jewish district.

In October 1939, barbed wire fences were set up enclosing the main streets of the Jewish district. Signs were posted at street corners saying, "Danger: Epidemic Zone." The Germans ordered the institution of the Judenrat, a council of prominent Jews who acted as intermediaries between the German authorities and the Jewish population. Although movement was restricted, the Jewish district remained open to other parts of the city.

Nicholas Sandler was no longer able to work at his profession and his law office was closed. Grandmother Celina spent most of her time visiting friends around Warsaw, gathering bits of information about the war and their situation. All radios and printing presses were banned; anyone caught with either was executed. Felicja and Robert Andrzej spent most of their time at home. No longer would they be able to take their long walks in the parks. Felicja seemed confused and weak, as if not quite understanding what was happening around her. Robert Andrzej couldn't stop talking about all the wonderful noise and excitement caused by the airplanes.

To pass the time, Felicja showed four-year-old Robert Andrzej the correlation between the ink specks on the pieces of paper she kept on the piano and the different sounds that came from pressing the white and black piano keys. Robert Andrzej found the piano game to be fun. He had heard his mother play the piano many times and now he knew the trick. Within a few days, he was making his own ink specks and playing the little tunes he had written. Everyone was impressed with how quickly Andrzej learned this. Even though the tunes were simple, could it really be that he had learned to read and play so quickly? However, time at the piano had to be limited. The household was tense and there were limits to how long Andrzej could "practice." Besides, Nicholas was not feeling well and he preferred quiet.

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In contrast to the relative quiet inside the Sandler home was the horror of the war outside. Mass indiscriminate killing swept across the land. In early November 1939, a Jew shot and killed a Polish policeman at 9 Nalewki Street, in the center of the Warsaw Jewish district. Although the killer was identified, all 53 male inhabitants of 9 Nalewki Street were executed. It was the first Jewish district mass arrest and murder and it threw the Jewish population into panic. Jews expelled from western Poland streamed into Warsaw and the Jewish district swelled to 250,000. Another 150,000 lived in other parts of the city. On January 5, 1940, Jews were forbidden to be in the streets between nine at night and five in the morning, or to do any trading outside the predominantly Jewish section.

By the summer of 1940, with Warsaw in the grip of the Nazi terror, Robert Andrzej, not yet five years old, was reading everything he could get his hands on, novels, poetry, books of any kind. He was writing in Polish and sending letters to his relatives around the city. Grandmother Celina was amazed by young Andrzej's piano playing. He was practically teaching himself and his little hands seemed to fly over the keys. Perhaps this was his calling: Robert Andrzej Krauthammer, concert pianist. At about this time, Andrzej announced what he wanted to do with his life -- he wanted to be a poet. Celina was overjoyed with the multiplying prospects for her grandson's talents, but how were they to escape this present danger?

Before the war, only a few died each day in the Jewish district of Warsaw, virtually all from natural causes. Now, nearly 100 died each day from starvation and disease. Sadness entered the home at 1 Przejazd Street in the summer of 1940. Nicholas Sandler, the grand old man who quietly went about his business, who supported Grandmother Celina for more than 20 years and added stability to the lives of his step-children, died of heart failure. There was so much death in the Jewish district that Sandler's death went practically unnoticed, but it was from a natural cause and he received a proper burial in the Warsaw Jewish cemetery.

On October 3, 1940, the German Governor of Warsaw announced that all Jews living outside the Jewish district would have to leave their homes and move to the Jewish district. Whatever belongings could be moved by hand or on carts could go with them. The rest had to be abandoned. Warsaw was to be divided into three "quarters": one for Germans, one for Poles, and one for Jews. The Jews, who constituted one third of Warsaw's population, were to move into an area that constituted less than two and a half per cent of the total area of the city. More than 100,000 Poles living in the area designated for the Jews were ordered to move to the "Polish quarter," thus losing their houses and their livelihoods as well.

The activity was frantic and panicky. An eye-witness, Toshia Bialer, remembers the scene in the Jewish quarter:

Try to picture one-third of a large city's population moving through the streets in an endless stream, pushing, wheeling, dragging all their belongings from every part of the city to one small section, crowding one another more and more as they converged. No cars, no horses, no help of any sort was available to us by order of the occupying authorities.

In the "Ghetto," as some of us had begun to call it, half ironically and in jest, there was appalling chaos. Thousands of people were rushing around at the last minute trying to find a place to stay. Everything was already filled up, but still they kept coming and somehow more room was found.

The narrow, crooked streets of the most dilapidated section of Warsaw were crowded with pushcarts, their owners going from house to house asking the inevitable question: Have you room? The sidewalks were covered with their belongings. Children wandered, lost and crying, parents ran hither and yon seeking them, their cries drowned in the tremendous hubbub of half a million uprooted people.

In retrospect, Grandmother Celina consistently made the right decisions in her maneuvers to survive the war. She constantly analyzed her situation, kept flexible to change, and maintained her network of friends and

contacts. When the announcement was made establishing the three "quarters" in Warsaw, Celina courageously took advantage of the confusion and moved from the "Jewish quarter" to the "Polish quarter." It was a great risk since Jews found outside the "Jewish quarter" were to be shot at sight. Further, anyone hiding a Jew was to be executed, along with everyone else in the building where the hiding took place, and everyone in the buildings on either side and in the building across the street.

Felicja elected to stay in the Jewish district at 1 Przejazd Street. The primary reason was Albert Seidenkamm, a dentist and an official in the Judenrat with whom she had fallen in love. There were few good situations in the Jewish district, but his situation was better than most. Unlike Felicja, Albert had a very Jewish look and there was really no possibility for him outside of the Jewish district. It was believed that the forming of the "Jewish quarter" was going to be the final move by the Germans, and that those inside must now sit tight and wait for the end of the war. It wouldn't be easy, but they would survive.

On November 15, 1940, the "Jewish quarter" was officially named the Warsaw Ghetto. The Ghetto was walled in and Jews were not allowed to leave. Jewish masons, supervised by Nazi soldiers, built walls 3 meters (10 feet) high that encircled the entire Ghetto area, enclosing the 400,000 Jews of Warsaw. An official German document gives an idea of the crowding:

The Jewish district covers an area of 403 hectares [995 acres]. The Jewish Council, which claims to have conducted a census, estimates the population of this area at 410,000 Jews while our own observations and calculations point to 470,000 to 590,000 Jews. Adopting the statistical figures of the Jewish Council and subtracting empty lots and cemeteries, the population density equals 1108 persons per hectare of built-up territory, or 110,800 per square kilometer [247 acres]. The corresponding figures for the city of Warsaw as a whole are 14,000 persons per square kilometer of the total metropolitan district and 38,000 persons per square kilometer of built-up and inhabitable space. The Jewish quarter comprises 27,000 apartments with an average number of 2-1/2 rooms each. Consequently, the average occupancy can be put at 15 persons per apartment and 6 to 7 persons per room.

Most of Robert Andrzej's family had lived in the Jewish district before it became the Ghetto. Conditions were a bit easier for them than for the average family living there. At 1 Przejazd Street, which had gained more family members and friends, Robert Andrzej had been prevented from any piano practice and the keyboard cover was kept closed. It was just too crowded for any kind of commotion. Young Andrzej, increasingly rambunctious, wasn't fond of restrictions. His response to the closed keyboard cover was to play the cover. He set music on the piano, and sat for hours rapping his fingers on the "keyboard" in pantomime playing.

Jews in the Ghetto realized that they had no choice but to come to terms with the days ahead in their prison. They began to transform their environment. Schools were opened, musical and theater groups were formed, and gave regular performances, goods were manufactured and sold within the Ghetto, and thousands of Jews made a living from smuggling. But for the smugglers, the occupants of the Ghetto would have starved to death. Wealth was determined by negotiable portable property -- furniture, household goods, cash and jewelry. The more personal property one had, the greater opportunities for sale or barter. The well-to-do habituated the used-merchandise street markets near the entrances to the Ghetto, selling their belongings. Thousands of non-Jews came to buy at bargain prices in the street markets of the Ghetto. Although the Jews were forbidden to leave the Ghetto, non-Jews from the other quarters could freely enter by showing their identity cards. Money raised from such sales provided the means to purchase food from the smugglers, and life could continue.

Grandmother Celina, unlike the majority of the Jews who risked death to live in the "Polish quarter," was a frequent visitor to the Ghetto, and always brought a food package. Although it was prohibited to bring any type of food into the Ghetto, making the intended fate of the occupants obvious, Grandmother Celina risked

all to bring food to family and friends. She used two techniques to get the food past the entrance policemen. One was simple bluff. If an inquiry was made about her package, she would forcefully say something like, "Just get out of my way. This is something for a friend and has nothing to do with you." The second technique was bribery. She would offer the policeman some money to look the other way for moment while she passed through the gate. She learned that the Jewish police could be bluffed, but the German police demanded a bribe. If she had met with a guard who was neither bribable nor bluffable, the penalty would have been a heavy fine or possible assignment to a forced-labor brigade. The greater risk was discovery that she herself was a Jew, for which the penalty was death. But she was never discovered, and managed dozens of trips in and out of the Ghetto without incident.

Robert Andrzej, a callus on every finger from his piano "practice," was occasionally allowed to play the keys. He also continued to write his own music, begging for opportunities to play the piano so he could hear what he had written. By the spring of 1941, Robert Andrzej, now five years old, was attending a kindergarten established in the Ghetto by his cousin Halina Swieca. Halina was a beautiful woman of twenty-three, rather serious and quiet. She was delighted to have Robert Andrzej in her class. Halina remembers the kindergarten:

"He was in my kindergarten, and it really was a kindergarten, which was almost impossible in the Ghetto except that I had the use of a private garden. It was a small one, very near my flat, so my students could play in the garden. In winter, it was all right. The children of the owners of this garden were in my kindergarten, my nursery, for a very small fee. But during the summer, they wanted to make more profit out of the garden, and I can understand it. One of the owners was a friend of Dorka. And by pure accident, she met me in the Ghetto, and realized that I had to be Dorka's sister, or some relative, because I was so much like her. She wanted me to work with her little daughter. The daughter survived, and her brother survived too. Their mother was a wonderful lady; she didn't survive. But I had priority because their children were in my kindergarten, so if I could pay them such and such a sum, then they would give me the use of a big part of the garden. The other part was cultivated with legumes and so on."

Young Robert Andrzej didn't fit into the kindergarten very well. Although usually well-behaved, his intellectual abilities were beyond those of the other children and he was bored. The garden school expanded with the addition of a class for older children. This new class was taught by Halina Swieca's younger brother, Tigo. Robert Andrzej was transferred to the new class of older children, but then something happened. Halina Swieca-Malewiak remembers:

"One day my brother came to me and said he was having a little problem with Robert Andrzej. So what happened? Andrzej has thrown a stone at a classmate's head. Well, he was the youngest one in this group, and a bit strange, and the others wanted him transferred. It was impossible to have him in my kindergarten group. So I asked the headmaster, 'What should I do?', and he said he wanted to speak with Andrzej's mother. Andrzej started crying and begged that I shouldn't tell his mother, that he preferred anything else, but not a word to his mother. I said, 'Why?' Andrzej said she would give him an awful beating, and he couldn't stand it."

Felicja did not beat young Andrzej then or at any other time. It was just Andrzej's attempt to manipulate the situation and to prevent disclosure of his stone throwing. There never was any doubt that Felicja loved Robert Andrzej, but something was missing in her nature to be a real mother. She seemed bored and uninterested in raising a child. Of course, there was no father to provide part of the discipline and part of the rationale for some pattern of child rearing. Albert was too busy with his other responsibilities to be a father to Andrzej.

The priority given to the garden for use as a school, instead of for growing vegetables, has significance. There was always a serious lack of food in the Ghetto and every possible patch of ground that could grow anything was used for that purpose. The school existed only because Halina Swieca was related to Dorka and Edward Lanota. The Brest Trials had made Edward Lanota a hero of Polish communists and Polish communists were mostly Jewish. After Poland's defeat in September 1939, a communist resistance movement, the Communist People's Army (AL), was eventually formed. Edward Lanota was a ranking officer in the AL.

On June 22, 1941, Germany invaded the Russian zone and drove the Soviets from eastern Poland in two weeks. Germany now commanded all of Poland and all of Eastern Europe. Ignacy and Irena Rappaport, who were hiding in the Russian zone, returned to Warsaw to find a place to live in the "Polish quarter." Ignacy met Edward Lanota and subsequently joined the AL, using the name Ignacy "Romanowitz." In the AL, Ignacy used his knowledge of chemistry, setting up laboratories to produce bombs. He also wrote a manual on how to make explosive devices from ordinary things available at drug stores.

The winter of 1941-1942 was harsh. The Germans did not allow fuel to be delivered to the Ghetto and the deaths from starvation were added to by deaths from freezing or hypothermia. After the first snow had fallen, some 70 children were found frozen to death on the steps of ruined houses. Eight Jews, six women and two men, left the Ghetto in search of food, but were caught and executed. Since the most active Ghetto smugglers were children, as a punitive measure and as a warning, German policeman gathered and executed a group of 30 Jewish children. In January 1942, more than five thousand died of starvation in the Ghetto. Grandmother Celina continued her visits to the Ghetto and made a significant contribution toward supporting the entire family. She brought food and money, and left with jewelry and belongings to sell at the "Polish quarter" markets.

Felicja and Albert Seidenkamm were married. Felicja and Robert Andrzej then left 1 Przejazd Street and moved into Albert's flat. Robert Andrzej was jealous - he didn't like the idea of sharing his mother. But Albert was gone so much of the time that it didn't really matter. What did matter is that Andrzej no longer had access to a piano at the new flat. Andrzej practiced by putting the music in his lap and playing the table.

On July 18, 1942, a train of several dozen wagons was moved to a railway siding adjoining the Ghetto at its northern limit. Nothing was said, nothing was done. The train just sat there for everyone to see and to wonder at.

Escape from the Ghetto (1942)

Halina Swieca, Robert Andrzej's kindergarten teacher, remembers a moment that followed soon after the arrival of the train:

"It was a Saturday, a free day of work for me in the Ghetto. I met with the other teachers at our little garden, to be free for a moment. It was sun shining and raining. We went into the little garden tool hut to protect us from the rain. It was so still. The sun was shining through the rain. My brother Tigo came towards us; he was so beautiful, and so pale, like a sheet. He looked like the angel of death. He said, 'The Germans are planning to finish us.' We couldn't believe it. Three days later it started."

Beginning July 22, 1942, the Judenrat was to deliver to the Ghetto railroad siding, at 4 pm each day, 6,000 Jews for "resettlement in the East." Their actual destination was nearby Treblinka and its three gas chambers. The deportations from the Ghetto continued, almost without pause, until September 12, 1942. In those seven weeks, a total of 265,000 Jews disappeared forever.

The news of the Ghetto liquidation spread quickly. Family members planned their escape. Among the first to leave were Halina Swieca and her mother. Halina Swieca:

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"I remember I told the way to Celina and it was very simple. There was a transit road. German soldiers checked every car and truck that passed through this road. There were a lot of people who came to the Ghetto in those days to buy everything; everything was very, very cheap. We knew that we had to leave the Ghetto because you didn't know if they would come for you this day or the next. If you had an Aryan look, and could pay the soldiers, and make believe you were a Pole, then it was easy. We were in a truck and went through this gate, and then by foot to Zoliborz, in northern Warsaw, where we had friends waiting for us."

Grandmother Celina arranged for the escape of both Felicja and Andrzej, but Felicja refused to leave Albert, and Albert could not, they felt, escape detection because of his Jewish appearance. Reluctantly, Celina agreed that the difficulties of hiding both Felicja and Andrzej would be great, and chances of survival for Andrzej would be better if he were by himself. Celina dyed Andrzej's hair blond with peroxide, dressed him as a little girl, then simply walked out of the Ghetto past the policeman. Celina never saw Felicja again. Sometime between July and September 1942, Felicja and Albert became part of the history of Treblinka.

Andrzej was put into hiding at the home of a Warsaw Catholic family to whom Celina paid an ever increasing "rent." He was restricted to the house, and in time of danger, hidden in a bedroom armoire. At night, the bedroom belonged to Monica, an unmarried (and pregnant) daughter. Andrzej slept inside the wardrobe. Grandmother Celina knew there would be problems trying to keep an extremely active child out of sight, but there was little choice.

In his unpublished autobiography, André Tchaikowsky described his life in hiding in chapter "1942":

How long had I been in this wardrobe? Seven weeks? Two years? I had meant to count the days, but I had forgotten. Anyway, there weren't any days in the wardrobe or any hours. That dark was always equally complete. The chamberpot was in one of its corners to be located by touch. I had now learned to do that as I had learned to use it silently. This had been very difficult at first. Once I upset the pot, and some of the mess seeped out into the room. This made Saint Monica very angry. "Never mind the filth," she said, "though that's bad enough" (she had to clean up after me with her own hands). But what if a neighbor or some stranger had been in the room? Do I want the Gestapo to make an end of them all at one go? That's what they get for saving my shitty life at the risk of theirs. Would I rather be moved down to the cellar where the rats will eat me? No? Then I'd better watch out and keep quiet. For God sakes, it's not as if a lot had been asked of me. Just don't move, and make no noise, that's all. And shit where you have been told to. Why any animal could have been trained to do that in much less time. But it's beyond our own dear "wonderboy."

I was very contrite after that, and I did keep quiet, at least my body did and hopefully, after a time, my mind would grow numb as well. The pot apart, there was nothing in the wardrobe but darkness and me. Kola had been told that Eskimos see no daylight at all for half the year. Had I been here half a year, and would it turn me into an Eskimo? Did Eskimos also bite their fingernails? No. They had other occupations, building igloos, training seals for circuses. Sometimes they saw the Northern Lights high in the sky. That only happened once or twice a year when the Eskimos had been particularly good and God saw fit to grant them a reward. The lights went off again at the first sin.

This, of course, was also the reason why I could not see the halo around Saint Monica's head. It was visible only to the worthy. Even without the halo, the evidence of Monica's holiness was quite strong enough. A positive miracle had taken place in that humble abode. In a few months' time Monica was going to be blessed with a baby, and she wasn't married. The mystery of the immaculate conception had only recently been explained to me, and it took me some time to realize that the hitherto unique privilege had been bestowed again, and on my

hostess's daughter. Awed by the revelation I knelt down inside the wardrobe and prayed, silently, of course, to the new holy virgin. I also thanked the Lord for making a witness of his second coming, for this was indisputably at hand. All the signs were there. The word was to become flesh again. Monica's flesh.

By the time she had locked the wardrobe door that evening, my greeting had been thoroughly rehearsed. "Blessed be the fruit of thy womb," I chanted, adding whatever other bits of scripture seemed relevant to the special majesty of the occasion. My eyes were lifted heavenward so the sudden blows on my cheek took me by surprise, but I managed to keep up the litany through the slaps and kicks that now followed Monica's own litany, louder than mine and, if anything, even more fervent, and addressed directly to myself. "You shit. You filthy stinker. You crass Jewish louse. They should have cut your big tongue out, not your foreskin. I'll teach you to stick your hooked nose into matters that do not concern you. I'll teach you to spy and eavesdrop on people whose one toenail is worth more than your stupid head. Though, no, your head is worth something in ready cash, and in fact it might come in handy," she added with a sudden smile.

At that time, to my confusion, she began to cry. "Oh what have I done? What have I done to deserve all this? Even this little rat now laughs at me. Rat! Rat!" At last I understood. Monica was feeling unworthy, full of Christian humility, as only a saint could be. She found herself overwhelmed at being not just the object but the actual vessel of grace. It was vital that she be reassured. "Dry your tears, Star of the Sea," I intoned. "If you had not deserved it, it wouldn't have happened. You know this as well as I ... Ouch!." I had to yell for Monica had grabbed my hair and was now spitting in my face again and again with what I realized must be righteous wrath. She then let go of me, rushed into the next room, and came back carrying a sodawater siphon. The jet went straight into my face, and I fell sideways into a corner of the wardrobe, happily missing the full chamberpot. Saint Monica then slammed and locked the door.

By that time, of course, I was thoroughly used to spending my nights in the wardrobe. At first Monica usually took me out about eleven at night, when no neighbor was likely to drop in, and put me into bed right in the front room on a sofa that might not have been quite adequate for an adult, but was ample for me.

Monica and her invalid mother always said it was asking for trouble, and one night a lady from the next flat did drop in on them. There was just enough time to throw a bedcover and couple of cushions over me. Covered by these I could not judge whether Monica had succeeded in making the sofa look unoccupied, but the lady must have been taken in for she refused the proffered chair and sat heavily down on the sofa an inch or two from my foot. Unable to move or breathe I concentrated on the conversation in which the two terrified women did their best to sound casual. "Are you sure you wouldn't be more comfortable in the rocking chair?" "Oh no, thanks. You know I love your sofa."

At some point I must have passed out. After that my keepers decided it was too risky to let me out into the room except on Gram's weekly visits, during which Monica would stand guard at the window while her mother listened for footsteps outside the front door. At a whisper from her, I would be rushed back into the wardrobe and all traces of my presence obliterated. While drying their shoes on the outside doormat, the visitors could hear Monica's strident voice reciting French irregular verbs which Grams corrected whenever it seemed plausible. The neighbors came to be quite impressed by the calm fluency of Monica's French teacher. Grams was due to visit me the day after the revelation. It never occurred to me to ask where she lived, how often she was forced to change her hiding place, or about finding me a

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new one, or where she found the money to pay for my keep and for herself. I took it for granted she would appear on the appointed day, and she always did. My hosts looked forward to her visits, far more than myself. She brought them money, and me, love.

She also invariably brought some cotton wool and a vial of oxygenated water. This was used to dye my hair blond in order to make me look less Semitic, just in case I was found (the implausibility of a Gentile child living in a wardrobe never seemed to occur to her). It also enabled Grams to keep in practice for a beauty parlor she would undoubtedly open as soon as the war was over. At present she was clearly off form. Sometimes she used too much dye and made me an Albino. Once she burned right through the hair and left me with a round bald patch on the top of my head, making me look as Monica observed, "just like the saint I thought myself to be." But what I hated most was the dyeing of my eyebrows and eyelashes. I kept my eyes tightly shut lest the stinging acid find its way through my lids and burn my sight out. Then the world would become a wardrobe.

While this took place, Grams would submit me to an examination. She asked me to recite The Lord's Prayer and Ave Maria, and posed random questions on the tenets of the Roman Catholic religion. This was easier for me than for her; she obviously didn't know them herself and seldom could have spotted a mistake. Then she would make me recite all the details of my latest identity. Name, birthplace, my parents' names, and where I had been brought up. There was a far harder task, as Grams only thought it safe if she obtained fresh identity papers every week or two, and I constantly had to memorize, digest, and identify myself with a new set of data. Usually I managed all right, but I still knew far more about Jesus' life than about my own. Altogether, he felt to me more real.

Sometimes both catechisms were combined in an attempt to catch me off my guard, somewhat like this. -- Where was Jesus Christ born? -- In Bethlehem. And you? -- In Pinsk. -- Idiot! That was the last time! Can't you read anymore? -- Bialystok. -- That's better. -- What's your father's name? -- Adam Yanowski. -- And the Holy Virgin's husband? -- Saint Joseph. -- Who massacred the innocents? -- Herod. -- And who does it today? -- The Jews. They crucify Christian children and then drink their blood. This last answer always made my hosts smile.

The night before this particular visit I found it harder than usual to run over the required answers in my mind. The imminence of the next incarceration made all my knowledge of the first seem dull and old hat, and my own identity too contemptibly small an affair to deserve attention. Besides, I was hungry. Monica had forgotten my dinner. Or perhaps in preparation for the second

advent I was meant to fast. Saints had lived on locusts in the desert. There were no locusts in the wardrobe, only crowds of lice. Grams' bleach kept them out of my hair, but not out of my clothes. Still I wasn't tempted to eat lice, not yet.

In the morning a silent, stern Monica opened the door and pointed outward into the room. The smell of food was far more important to me than Grams' presence. While I ate, Monica's mother gave the usual exhaustive account of the risks and emotions my presence in the house continually exposed them to. Grams heard it with composure and a show of contrite sympathy, waiting for the other woman to come to the point. She knew that, among other vicissitudes, the cost of living would inevitably have to be mentioned, and this was her cue for offering to raise the terms on which I was kept. This time the transition from lament to negotiation seemed particularly long in coming, and Grams finally found it necessary to take the initiative.

"Would they," she asked, "find a twenty percent rise adequate?" The mother was about to answer, but Monica silenced her with an abrupt gesture. "Look here!" she said impulsively. "We have just about had it with your brat. Take him away will you? He stinks." This was true. I did. "Why? What has he done?" exclaimed Grams. She turned to me with a frown and asked me the same question in her most disciplinary voice. I was opening my mouth to explain when Monica hastily cut in. "Oh never mind what he's done. He's been true to his own filthy self. There's no point in going into it. Just take him and go, hear me? Go." "Now? In broad daylight? Where can I take him?" "What do I care? We've had our share of him. Take him to the gestapo and claim a reward." "Now, Miss Monica!" "To the gestapo! That's where he belongs! We should have done it long ago, and we may if you don't hurry up." "Monica!" said the mother. "Are you crazy? The whole house can hear you." "Let them!" yelled Monica. "Let them all come! Let them see the little vermin for themselves. I'll call them."

She took a step towards the door. But Grams was already standing there, her arms crossed, feet apart, and a set look on her face that made it very hard to believe she had no teeth of her own. I saw Monica's mother reach out for the sodawater siphon and realized where the trick came from. She directed it at Monica, who did not see it. There was a very short silence. "Very well, Miss Monica," said Grams quietly. "The gestapo are two streets away. Won't they ask us a few questions though? Won't they be curious to know where the boy has been? Who has hidden him and fed him and looked after him? It's only fair, after all, that so much kindness should not go unrecognized."

"Are you blackmailing us?" Monica now sounded amazed rather than angry, and her mother softly put down the siphon on the table. They both stared at Grams. "That would be a change, wouldn't it. Think for yourself. You may yet prefer 'the little vermin' as you call him not to be discovered. The penalty for hiding a Jew is the same as for being one. And you know what that is, don't you. You can see them hanging from the lampposts all over town. Sometimes they are hanging upside down. Which takes much longer. You wouldn't look your best that way."

Grams voice was calm and patient, just as if this was another French conjugation. She stared straight at Monica, who by now was quite silent, and allowed herself more and more time between the phrases. "Whatever happens to the boy shall happen to you Miss Monica. I will see to it that it does. He

won't abuse your generous and disinterested hospitality for a minute longer than necessary. I also want him out of here for his sake. There is only a question of finding him another place. This may take an hour or a month. I cannot tell which. Until then I am afraid you will have to go on putting up with him, especially as you seem to be making a speciality of unwanted children."

Strangely enough, this last puzzling remark upset Monica more than anything else. She hurled herself at Grams, who seized her arms. "You Jewish scum! How dare you!" "Shhh", from the mother. "If I didn't dare, Miss Monica," said Grams, still gripping her opponent's arms "neither my boy nor myself would be here. All I do is dare, every minute of every day. It takes far more than you to frighten me. Remember, the boy knows your value. The boy knows your name, your address, he's been here for two months, and he even knows that you've repeatedly accepted payments for defying the authorities. If he doesn't tell the gestapo when he's caught, I will. See to it that he's safe."

She let go of Monica and went over to the mother's wheelchair. There was no haggling this time. Grams simply took some money out of her bag and put it into the woman's hands. I

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don't know if the amount had been increased. "And that's the gratitude we get," said the mother. "We should have known." I couldn't help thinking that she was taking a leaf out of Grams' own book. "You get all the gratitude you deserved," replied Grams. "And anyway, you don't want gratitude, you want cash. Stop giving yourselves airs you can't afford."

She kissed me on the forehead and went out, without even dyeing my hair. The silence seemed to go on forever. I was afraid of making the least movement which might attract the two women's attention. Somehow I felt that I could only be punished atrociously and irredeemably for Grams' sins and for all my forefathers. Monica had sat down and was now crying. I was longing to comfort her, but I didn't dare. What apology could possibly make up for Grams' blasphemies? What atonement for the inexplicable fact that despite Monica's holiness Grams had managed to cut more of a figure? It was a wonder God had allowed that.

After a while they began to talk of small things without any reference to Grams or myself. They sounded tired. The mother presently took up a book; Monica got up and moved a few things about the room. There was nothing to tidy up, but Monica acted as if there was. And this was how she came across me. She pulled me to my feet and gave me a long, silent look which terrified me. I wholeheartedly endorsed her evaluation of myself as vermin. Do lice know they are vermin? And if they do, they must be miserable. There was nothing in me but shame, dirt, and fear. Monica took her time reading these from my cringing face.

Still silent, she pointed out the wardrobe with her chin. I went in and sat down in my usual corner. The lock clicked. I slept. It was a great relief when the next day she reprimanded me in the usual vehement way. I'd been afraid that she would never speak to me again. Why should someone who had conversed with the archangel Gabriel talk to the likes of me?

Such was André's later recollection of his life in hiding in Warsaw, perhaps embellished to convey the strength of the impression this situation made on his young mind.

In early October 1942, Ignacy "Romanowitz" was at the wrong place at the wrong time. The Germans rounded up 50 known leftists and members of the AL, Ignacy among them. Irena came to Grandmother Celina for help, as the Germans were watching Irena's home for other AL suspects. Celina gave her money to buy new identity papers and Irena went into hiding. It was hopeless to try to save Ignacy. On October 16, 1942, Ignacy and 49 other leftists were hung at a gallows on Leszno Street. In the space of a few months, Celina saw the destruction of both her children. All she had left now was her grandson Andrzej.

The "resettlement" of the Warsaw Ghetto ceased in September 1942, since the remaining 63,000 Jews refused to leave their homes. On April 19, 1943, after initial attempts to drive the Jews from their homes failed, the Germans began the systematic destruction of every single building in the Ghetto. The Jews fought for their lives, but the struggle was brief; it was over by mid-May, with 7,000 Jews dead and 56,000 sent to death camps. The Ghetto was completely leveled and ceased to exist. In theory, there were no Jews left in Warsaw.

At the end of May 1943, Celina moved Andrzej from the home of the Catholic family to the home where Irena was living. Andrzej, now seven years old, had as playmates two other Jewish children who were also hiding at that same location. In July 1943, Grandmother Celina and Andrzej left Warsaw for the country home of a wealthy Warsaw family. Prior to leaving Warsaw, Celina obtained extremely good forgeries of identification papers for herself and Andrzej. Celina Janina Sandler became "Celina Janina Czajkowska," and Robert Andrzej Krauthammer became "Robert Andrzej Czajkowski." The name "Czajkowski" was a transliteration of the Russian name Tchaikovsky. Intentional or not, Andrzej's new surname was one of the most famous in the world of music.

Chapter 3 - Survival (1939 - 1945)

Andrzej must have been glad to be out of Warsaw. Not only did he no longer have to sleep in a wardrobe, or deal with his former wardens, but the country family had a dog he could play with. He spent a good deal of his time writing short stories, poems and letters to relatives. Often he would include one of his stories with a letter. To his Aunt Irena, he wrote on August 7, 1943:

Dear Aunt,

I sympathize with you. I'm very sorry to learn about your sickness. I hope you get well as soon as possible. Why don't you come and visit us? Here is my address in Miedzylesie - ul. Malinowa 3. We have a dog called Bum. I beg you to write back to me. Perhaps your condition is better by now? How is it, how are you getting on? I will send you a 2nd fairy tale as soon as I get a new notebook. How is Dan getting on? Perhaps well. And his sister?

Isn't this a clever letter! Write back and tell me how clever it was.

Kisses, Andrzej

Irena was ill at the time with typhus. She was working at the Polish Hygienic Institute where her job was to feed lice. The lice were used to make anti-typhus vaccine, but somehow she caught the disease. "Dan" and "his sister" mentioned in the letter were two Jewish children being hidden by Irena.

Return to Warsaw (1944)

There are clues that something dreadful happened at the country home. Andrzej's cousin Charles Fortier (previously, Kazik Zeidenstrumph) believes Andrzej was with other children and told them his name was really Krauthammer and he was actually Jewish. This was reported to the Germans. The country home was burned to the ground and its occupants executed, although Celina and Andrzej managed to escape. Some years later Andrzej told an American woman in Fontainebleau, France, that during the war the Germans burned down his house and his parents were killed. Andrzej himself fabricated a story that during this time he wasn't in the countryside at all, but was smuggled to Paris for a while and then smuggled back to Poland. Although not true, this smuggling story is often repeated in biographical descriptions and reference books. What is known is that Celina and Andrzej left the countryside and returned to Warsaw in the Spring of 1944.

On August 1, 1944, an uprising broke out in Warsaw. The two resistance movements, the communist AL with 500 soldiers, and the AK with 36,500 soldiers, along with other organizations, took part in an attempt to drive the Germans out of Warsaw. When the fighting reached their neighborhood, Celina and Andrzej, along with other women and children, ran to the basement of their building. Shortly afterward, German soldiers smashed down the basement door and confronted the frightened group shouting, "Where are the men?" Celina, knowing they were about to die, took Andrzej's hand and reassured him that there would be no pain, and it would all be over in just a few seconds. Someone in the group answered that there were no men in the basement. To everyone's disbelief, the soldiers left without harming anyone.

An agreement between the German command and the Polish Red Cross permitted women and children to leave Warsaw on September 7 and 8, 1944. Like thousands of other civilians trapped during the Warsaw uprising, Celina and Andrzej were rounded up and sent to the Pruszkow concentration camp. Immediately, there was a crisis. Andrzej suffered an attack of appendicitis requiring an emergency operation. Celina realized the risk of taking him to the camp hospital, but there was little choice. Andrzej, with his blonde hair, was checked into the hospital. The appendectomy was successfully performed and Andrzej was placed in a children's ward to recover. However, it wasn't an ordinary children's ward, but a ward for disturbed children, since they had the only available beds. Andrzej, after two years of being hidden, enjoyed this freedom and the social possibilities. He started telling non-stop stories, making everyone around him laugh. He read his poems to anyone who would listen. Celina visited Andrzej as much as possible and tried to keep him quiet.

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The German doctor who performed the operation noticed the dark hair roots on his patient's head, and, since Andrzej was circumcised, he must have realized that this was a Jewish child. By then the commandant of the hospital, indeed the entire hospital, had heard of this amazing little boy. He was told that Andrzej could discuss a variety of topics at an adult level and composed poetry. At the end of the week, just prior to Andrzej's release from the hospital, the commandant moved him into a large ward area so he could read his poems to the adult patients. Given that some of the poems were anti-German, the commandant must have viewed the situation as amusing or therapeutic rather than threatening. The doctor didn't expose Andrzej; perhaps he thought it would embarrass the commandant, or perhaps the doctor had seen enough death, or perhaps he saw something unique in the bright young boy. Certainly, Celina must have been going crazy trying to keep Andrzej under control. The poems were read and Andrzej loved the attention and the stir he had created. When the time came, Celina got him out of the hospital fast.

The poems Andrzej wrote in the hospital were saved, as were other poems written during the war. Celina eventually gave them to Halina Swieca-Malewiak. An example, translated to English:

Scarlet Rose

Oh scarlet rose, fed on our blood,
Watered with the tears of our suffering,
Torn like our souls,
Weeping over the fate of our land.

Our nation, seeing blood, seeing tears,
At first sinfully hoped to save itself by itself,
Now we beg the Son of God, begging and crying,
Save us, oh Lord.

But the Lord punished our pride,
And sent a war of annihilation.
On the third day of May 1940, everything changed.
Thrice cursed Germany robbed Poland of independence.

Too late for the white eagle to rise,
And shout: "Fight for Freedom".
"Wake up", shouts the eagle, trying to raise our spirits,
To call us to fight.

The importance of the date in Andrzej's poem -- May 3, 1940 -- is not known. It may have been a date of personal significance as it doesn't coincide with any recorded historical event.

The uprising in Warsaw continued until October 2, 1944, when the resistance was crushed by superior German equipment. Edward Lanota died in the Old City with five other members of the AL. Warsaw was evacuated. The resistance armies were sent to prison camps, the civilians to concentration camps. German artillery then razed Warsaw -- nearly every building was destroyed.

In early 1945, Russian soldiers liberated the Pruszkow concentration camp. The war was over for the inmates. Grandmother Celina and Andrzej Czajkowski had survived. Celina had lost both her children, and of her ten brothers and sisters, only three were alive at the end of the war. Of the sixteen children of the Swieca brothers and sisters, nine were alive in 1945 to represent the family in the second generation. In the third generation, of the five children before the war, only two survived, and Andrzej was one of them. The 3,300,000 Polish Jews at the start of the war had been reduced to 50,000 at war's end.

Survival of Karl Krauthammer

Karl Krauthammer had left Warsaw in humiliation and anger and returned to Paris in 1935, just a few months before Andrzej was born. He immediately joined the family fur business with his parents, brother Herman, and sister Gisele. Survival depended on some manner of employment, so they did what was necessary. In 1937, Karl's brother Herman was identified and sought by the police for working without proper papers. He left the family home and hid at the apartment of Celina's sister, Mala Swieca-Zeidenstrumph, who, by this time, had shortened her name to Mala Zeiden. The crisis passed and Herman returned to the business. In 1938, Karl wrote a letter to Felicja saying that he had prepared all the papers necessary for her and Andrzej to move to France. Felicja refused to return to him. In this decision, she sealed her fate.

Strangely enough, when Germany invaded France, the Glasburg-Krauthammer family was able to conduct business legally for the first time. Initially, business was quite good. However, in April 1941, Germany introduced the same restrictions for the French Jews as applied to the German Jews. After this date, no Jew was allowed to engage in any wholesale or retail trade. The Glasburg-Krauthammer family didn't wait around to see what would happen next; instead, the fur business was closed and the family escaped to Nice in southern France.

Germany occupied all of France after November 11, 1942, except for eight departments in southeastern France, including Nice. These departments were under Italian jurisdiction. The Jews in these departments were relatively safe until September 1943, when 5,000 Jews in Nice were hunted down and deported to Auschwitz. The Glasburg-Krauthammer family fled to Toulouse in "free" France. It was easy to find a family willing to hide Jews in Vichy France and the Glasburg/Krauthammer family found refuge in a chateau near Toulouse. They remained in hiding in Toulouse until the German surrender. Karl was especially affected by the tensions of hiding; unlike other family members, he did not leave his room for more than a year.

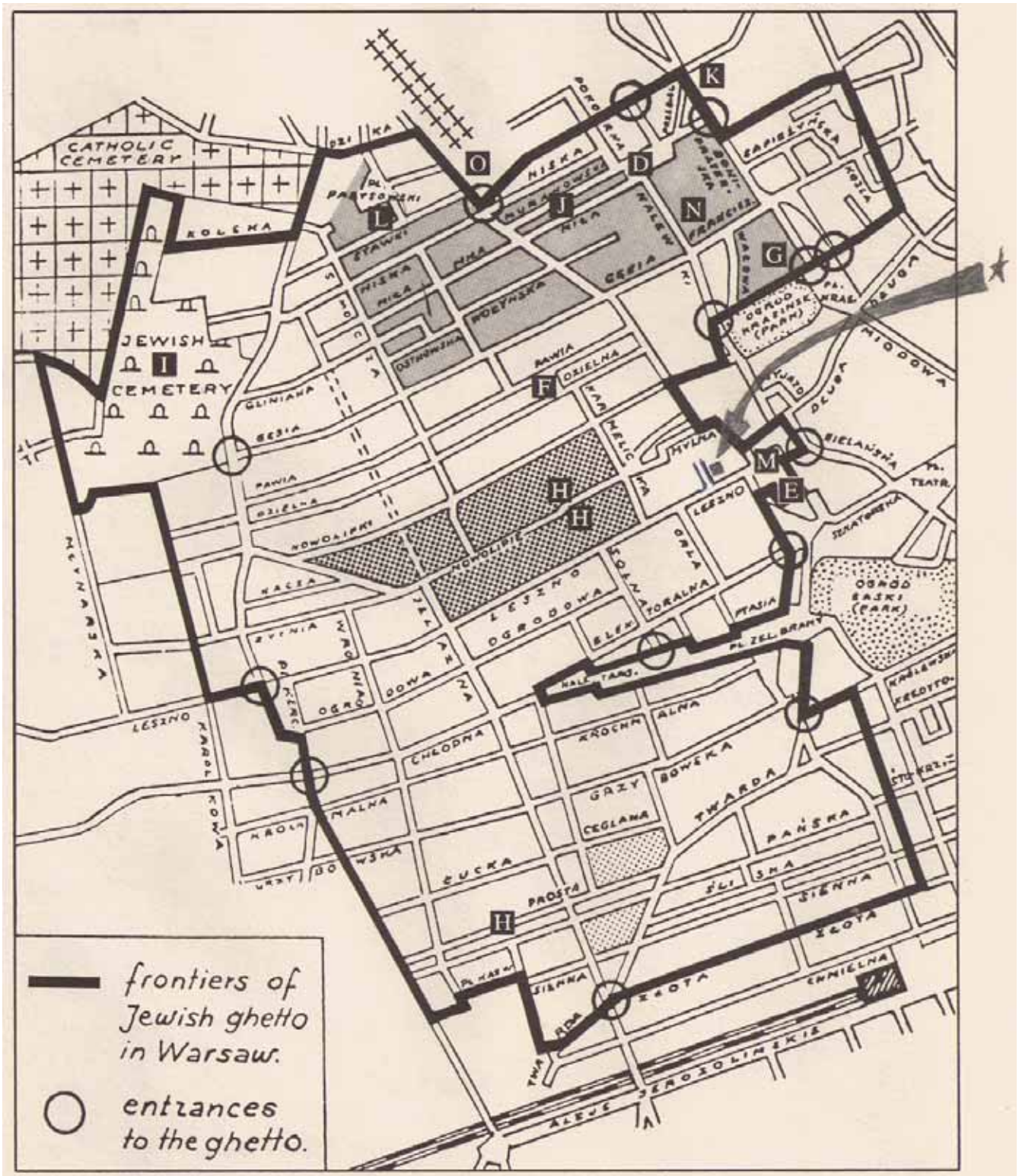
The course of the war changed; the allies invaded France. By late summer 1944, the Germans had been driven from France and the Glasburg-Krauthammer family returned to Paris. The fur business was restarted and the entire family was granted French citizenship. For Karl, however, the effects of the war lingered. He had suffered a deep depression while hiding in Toulouse and was practically unable to function upon the return to Paris. A doctor prescribed electroshock therapy. The pattern of depression and electroshock treatment continued for the rest of his life.



Courtesy of Ulrich Keller

Warsaw Jewish District (c. 1940)

The Warsaw Jewish district was the precursor of the Warsaw ghetto. The walls were three meters high with another meter of barbed wire. After November 15, 1940, the Jewish district became the Warsaw ghetto and any Jew discovered outside of its boundaries was subject to execution.



Courtesy of Hermann Verlag

Map of Warsaw Ghetto (c. 1940)

The original ghetto boundaries of October 15, 1940. The Sandler home at 1 Przejazd Street was at the corner of Leszno Street (see arrow). Most of André Tchaikowsky's family lived in the ghetto, but some risked death by living in the Warsaw "Polish quarter."



Courtesy of Ulrich Keller

Warsaw Ghetto Dead (c. 1941)

Most of the deaths in the Warsaw ghetto were from starvation. Due to the heroic efforts of Grandmother Celina, the family of André Tchaikowsky always had sufficient food. The worst month in the ghetto for starvation was January, 1942, when 5,123 died. The bodies shown here would be stripped and burned.



Courtesy of Halina Swieca-Malewiak

Dorka Swieca-Lanota (c. 1939)

Dorka Swieca-Lanota, Celina's sister and André's great-Aunt, was married to a well-known communist leader, Edward Lanota. Dorka had been a fervent communist, but during the war abandoned communism and became a Roman Catholic. It was not uncommon for Jews to become Roman Catholic during the war.



Courtesy of David Rubinger

Typical Eastern European Ghetto Entrance (c. 1942)

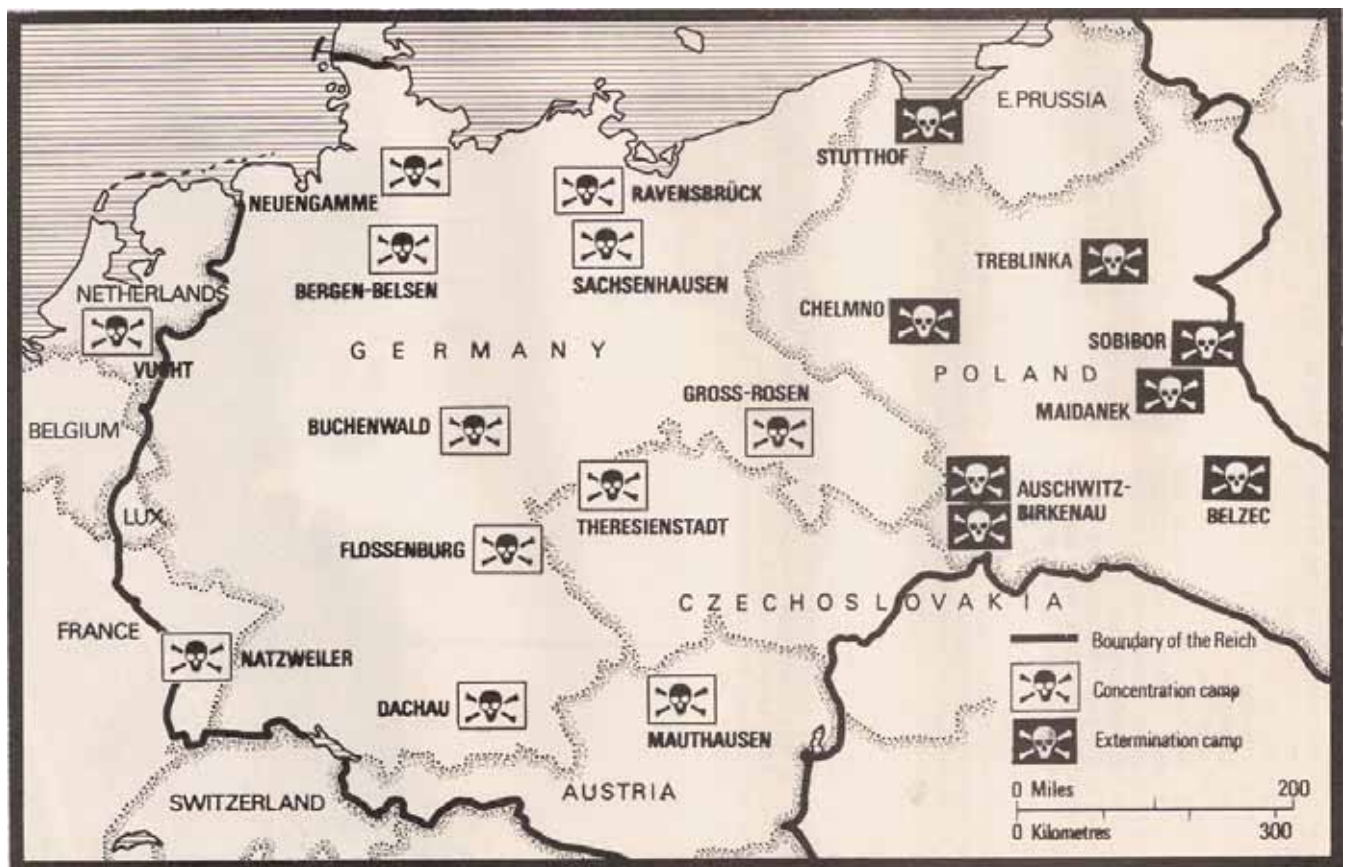
Grandmother Celina traveled frequently to the Warsaw ghetto to bring food and money to members of her family. André Tchaikowsky, hair dyed blonde and dressed as a girl, escaped the Warsaw Ghetto through the courage and ingenuity of his Grandmother.



Courtesy of Yivo Institute

Ghetto Residents Boarding a Death Train (c. 1942)

Starting July 22, 1942, 6,000 Jews were transported each day from the Warsaw Ghetto to Treblinka and to death. After seven weeks, 265,000 Jews had been murdered. André Tchaikowsky's mother probably died in this manner. She could have fled the Ghetto, but chose to stay with her new husband, Albert.



Courtesy of Richard Natkiel

German Concentration and Death Camps (c. 1943)

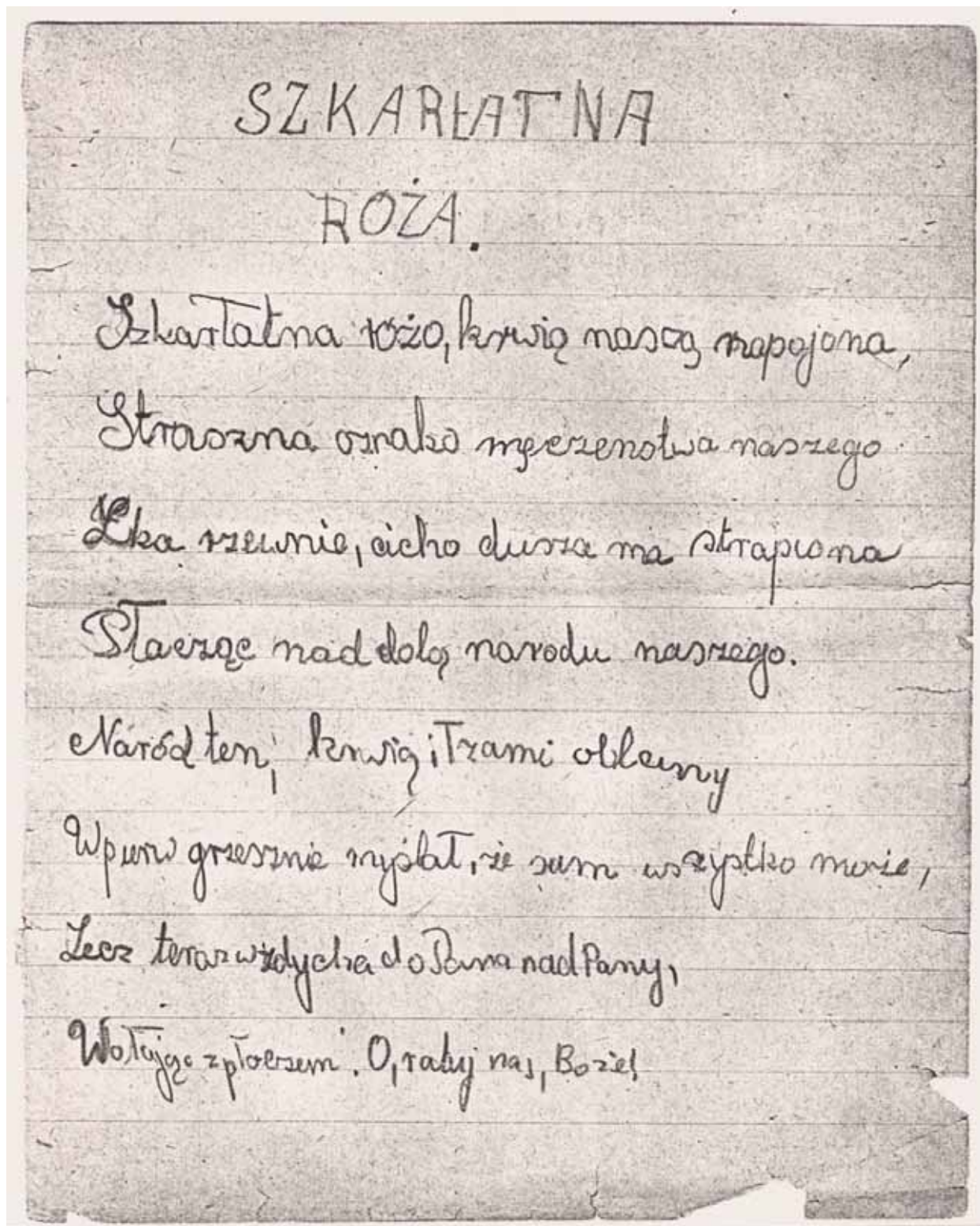
At the Nuremberg trials in 1945, it was estimated that the German Death Camps consumed 5,700,000 Jews. Poland suffered the most with a loss of 3,000,000. All Death Camps were located in Poland, and Jews from all the conquered lands were transported there, without food or water, for trips lasting up to 10 days.



Courtesy of Irena Paszkowska

Ignacy and Irene "Romanowitz" (c. 1939)

Ignacy Rappaport was known in the AL resistance movement as Ignacy "Romanowitz." After his execution as a leftist on October 16, 1942, Irena assumed a new identity and went into hiding. Within a few months, Celina saw the destruction of both of her children. She devoted the rest of her life to her grandson Andrzej.



Courtesy of Halina Swieca-Malewiak

First page of "Scarlet Rose" - A poem by Andrzej (c. 1944)

Andrzej wrote a series of poems during the Warsaw Uprising (Aug. to Oct. 1944). During a period of hospitalization at the Pruszkow concentration camp, Andrzej read his poems to other patients. Celina was terrified that such activity would result in discovery that they were Jews. (See text for translation.)



Courtesy of Gisele Juttès

Karl Krauthammer (c. 1941)

The brothers Karl Krauthammer (right) and Herman Glasburg, sister Gisele Glasburg-Juttès, and their father. The children belonged to Gisele. This photo was taken in Nice just after the family had fled Paris. Later they went into hiding in the Toulouse area.