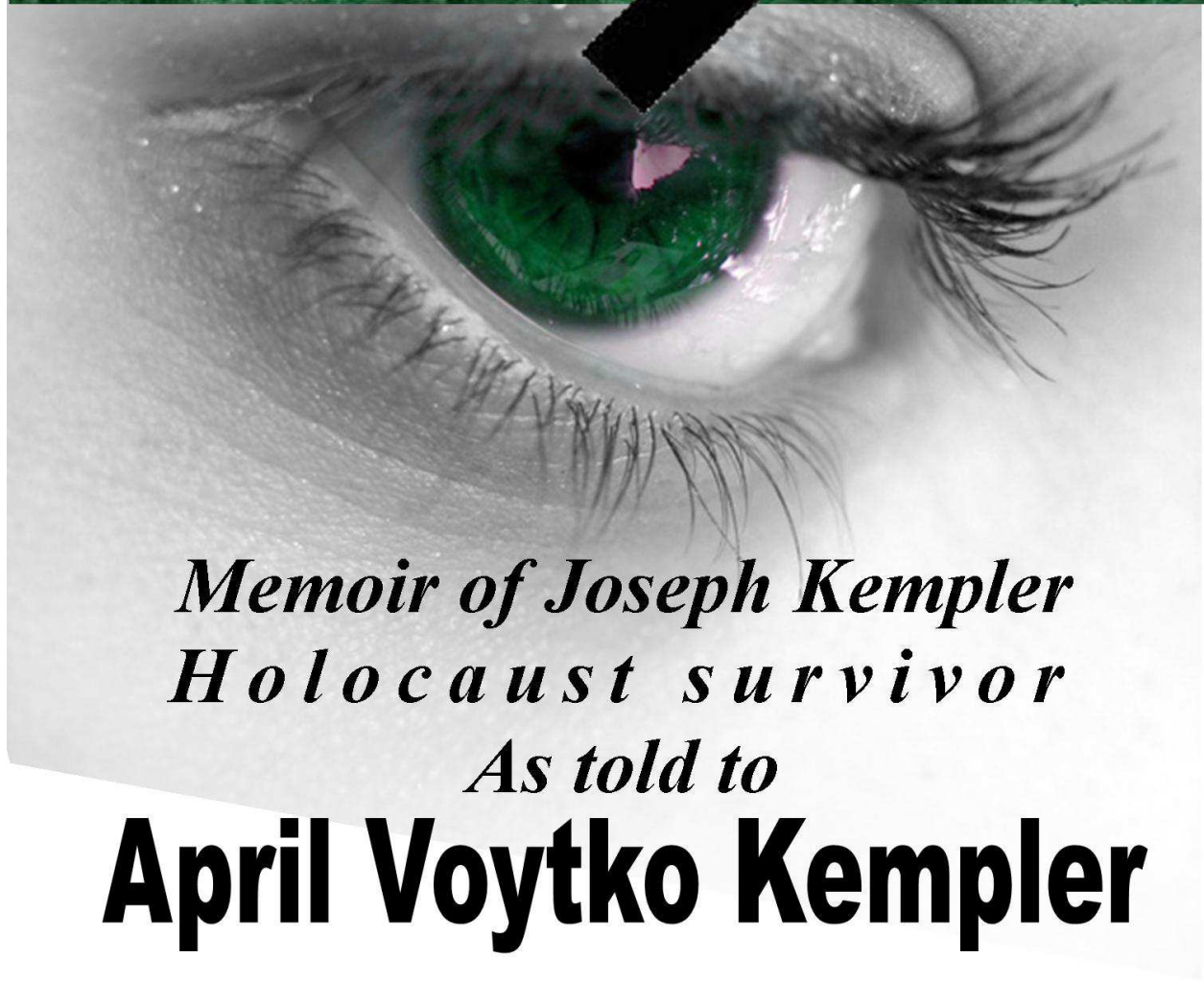


The Altered I



*Memoir of Joseph Kempler
Holocaust survivor
As told to*

April Voytko Kempler

Part I

*“When I was a child, I used to speak as a child, to think as a child, to reason as a child. —1
Corinthians 13:11*

Chapter 1

Who am I?

*Krakow, Poland
Present day*

Krakow was my hometown, my country, and in many ways the beginning of my death.

As a precocious Jewish boy, growing up in Krakow’s Jewish Quarter, I had before me numerous opportunities and advantages. I was an indulged younger son, educated in a private Hebrew school. I dreamed of one day attending university and becoming an engineer. Because of World War II, Hitler, and the concentration camps, what I became instead was a shattered young man without hope for my future, without trust of fellowman, a self-declared god-hater.

I’m in my eighties and my short-term memory goes blank at times. However, I remember my childhood clearly. I remember many things that I have never shared with my children. Especially, why I made the choices I made, and why those choices created within me a dark cavern of guilt, called survivor’s guilt. Will they understand? Can they forgive me?

My children and grandchildren know some of my stories. They know that my older sister and I survived the Holocaust and the other members of our family didn’t.

I didn't teach my boys the ordinary things a father would teach his children: how to throw a football, how to kick a ball, or how to fish. We didn't play catch in the yard. Only once do I remember my son saying, "Come on Dad. Let's toss the Frisbee." We went outside and threw it back and forth a few times. That was about the extent of it. Will they be surprised to learn that I thrilled to play soccer, or how I outwitted my opponents at chess? Will they recognize in their father a carefree and happy young person?

The things we did together as a family were similar to any ordinary family in America. There were camping trips and excursions to Disneyland, even luxury cruises, but I never talked to them about myself. I was with them physically, but mentally I was far removed. My oldest son, David, would often shout out to get my attention, "Earth to Father, come back to Earth!" or "This is Earth calling, is anyone there?" As my boys grew older, they advanced emotionally while I stayed behind. I found it almost impossible to talk to them. David told me I didn't speak eight words to him before he moved out of the house and that it was still hard to connect with me and have a conversation, even after he had grown up. Susie, my daughter by my first wife, was raised in a different household and had an adoptive father. I am sure she noticed the differences between her fathers. At times this must have frustrated her. Over the years, I was in and out of her life, and we never built a consistent relationship.

I live in my own world. I lack the feeling of closeness, and I avoid intimacy. During the war, avoidance was a lifesaving mechanism; without it no one could survive. The problem is that this safety mechanism didn't turn off even after the war. As a child survivor, that part of my personality formed in my brain and became a normal state of being for me. I continue to be a survivor; it never stops. The numbness, the detachment and the disassociation become the life I live with. When I come together with my family, I cannot relate to them as a father relates to his children.

My wife has often remarked how difficult it was to be with me when my boys, David and Paul, had performances in school orchestras or events. It was a challenge for me to be there. I would become some sort of zombie sitting in an audience with eyes glazed over, no expression on my face, as if there were a vacancy sign blinking across my forehead. I totally disconnected from everyone and everything around me. I disappeared into my own world, not even seeing what Paul and David were doing. As a boy, I participated in school plays, recitals, and special school programs. Sitting there in my sons' school auditorium watching all these young people, I was so jealous! Jealous of them, not only because I was restricted from school at the fifth grade but these children were active in school and performing. The kids were having a good time doing all the things I used to do and the memory of it was killing me. I missed it terribly, but I also did not want to sit in a school auditorium with feelings of guilt or remorse. I have so many regrets about all that I missed out on. I didn't want to live vicariously through my children. What I wanted was to recover my missing childhood.

I did not realize how much my children suffered because they could not understand what kind of father I was. The distance was there, we all sensed it, and we were all powerless against it.

¹Some oral testimony is taken from The Mauthausen Survivor Documentation Project archives

My story is difficult to talk about for fear of being misunderstood. When I first came to America and talked about my experiences, Americans dismissed what I said and told me about the problems they endured in this country during the war. I learned not to talk about it because not saying anything is better than being misunderstood by what I say. Most survivors don't speak to one another about their experiences. If somebody says, "I was in this camp," that is enough, there is no need to talk about it further.

If I had not survived the Holocaust, I wouldn't have a family, a wife, children, grandchildren. So many were cut off and never had children. To be given a family is a special treasure. Life is a gift. I was one of the fortunate ones who survived and I cannot account for it. When I dwell on the past I destroy myself mentally and that doesn't do me any good. I want to be happy with my family. My hope is that we will get closer, we will connect. They will know what I went through and will better understand my past, and they can forgive me.

They tell me there is nothing to forgive, this is just how I am, how I have always been, they've adjusted to me, and it is me who hasn't accepted myself. Paul says, "All my life I have been hearing how you want to change things and feel things. You keep saying, 'maybe later it will come, maybe later!' I'm hoping it will come. But you know what? At this point I don't believe it will come. It's not going to happen. I accept that."

Paul's words are hard for me to hear because I want to change so badly. He tells me, "If you lost your leg on a land mine in a battlefield somewhere instead of losing your emotional side in the concentration camps, I wouldn't expect you to be able to run with the Olympic athletes that just wouldn't happen. None of us expects you to have emotions, and you shouldn't be so hard on yourself."

Something other than a leg is gone. I can't find my missing emotions. My children accepted that my emotions are gone and, like the athlete who lost a leg, I should put my lack of emotion aside and learn to "walk" without them. My children tell me they love me, and they want to come to a better understanding of my life. This is good because I can't accept myself the way I am; I continue looking for avenues to come to terms with who I have become and what I went through. I hope that telling my story now will help accomplish what I haven't been able to do all these years.

Chapter 2

Kazimierz

1928 – 1934

Birth to 6 years old

My parents' were hardworking people. My father was more religious than my mother, yet she was the stoic one. Their names were Malka and Max Kempler. Malka was Max's second wife. His first wife died, leaving him two children to raise: Dolek and Dziunka (Jun-ka). Mother, who I affectionately called Mamusia, was an attractive curly headed brunette. She had even features, soft, full lips that seldom curved into a smile and high cheekbones. Tatus, the Polish word for Father, was a handsome, mustachioed man of medium height and build. He had a high forehead, and dark hair.

Dolek (Abraham) was eleven years older than me. He had a lean face and a dark olive complexion. Dziunka, a forward thinking, stylish, young lady, was seventeen years older than me. She had won a local beauty pageant and had enjoyed boasting about her crown. Their relationship with Mamusia was a fond one. Dziunka often said she felt more love and affection for Mamusia than she did her biological mother. We lived together in the Old Town Jewish district called the Kazimierz.

Strongly attached to Mamusia, I was two and a half years old when first separated from her. I sat waiting with Aunt Hanka in the *fiakier*, a horse-drawn carriage, outside the hospital waiting for Tatus to come out with Mamusia so we could finally go home. Evening fell and still we waited. Earlier, Mamusia had gone to the hospital to give birth to her third child. There was a lot of commotion at first. Aunt Hanka, Uncles Szaj, Icek and Shmil, were hurrying about, rushing in and out of our apartment. But now everyone was calm, quiet, yet sad.

“When do we bring Mamusia and the baby home, Tatus?” I ask my father.

He says, “We can't; She won't be coming home to us.” This is all he says, but I overhear my older sister, Dziunka say something about a stillborn girl.

Another girl had been born before me. They called her Rozia, which means Rose. My parents said she was one and a half years old when she began reciting her own poetry, which was merely her own childish speech, but she cleverly made the words rhyme. She was a delight to my mother, I often heard.

I was told Rozia succumbed to Scarlet Fever, a common illness in Poland. At the first sign of the disease she had to be hospitalized. Tragically, Rozia never returned home.

Because it was getting dark, Tatus had to take me with him to the hospital. He had another reason. Calling me by my family pet name he said, “Joziu will cheer her up.” We

couldn't all fit in one *fiakier*, so I was placed in Aunt Hanka's care while Tatus rode in another carriage ahead of us.

I miss Mamusia and sit impatiently waiting to see her. When she is directed toward me there is no light in her eyes; I see her pale, expressionless face. She sits beside me very quiet and still. I try to get her attention, but it is impossible—she doesn't notice me. It's as if I am invisible. Dziunka explains to me that Mamusia is in a catatonic state, but I don't know what that means. I only know she ignores me and she is sad.

Since then, she was unable to care for me properly. I was often left in the care of my grandfather, Mamusia's father. There was something strange about Grandfather. Babcia, Mamusia's mother, on the other hand, was a remarkable woman for her time. She was serious-faced, wore her dark hair parted on the side and slicked back in a bun. Her mouth carried a slight downward expression. Although not worldly wise, she had an innate wisdom. She divorced Grandfather that same year.

"That is unheard of!" her friends said. "What is she thinking to do this sort of thing?" They didn't understand. Jewish women stayed with their husbands. Family members, who knew what had happened, said that Babcia and Grandfather's relationship developed a very deep problem. He had done something unspeakable. They never said what it was, but deep down, I knew he had done something to me. I don't remember what, but I felt a heavy burden in my little chest, one I couldn't share with anyone.

There were always secrets in our apartment it seemed, because when Tatus or Mamusia didn't want me to hear what they were talking about they spoke in Yiddish. I came to despise this language, not only because I couldn't understand what they said, but also in my mind, it meant there was important family information kept from me. I didn't want secrets. Their secret language separated me from Mamusia.

Mamusia would gradually come out of her catatonic state, but not until I was closer to seven or eight years old. It would be a long time before she became more interested in household affairs, or me. In the meantime she kept a straight face, always appeared calm, and never showed her true feelings.

She had lost two children already and didn't want to lose me, so she kept me close to her. Whatever she did and wherever she went, I was always nearby and seldom left alone, our relationship became close.

I was a sickly, skinny child. One cold followed closely on the heels of another. Neighbors and acquaintances called me "*zielony*," Polish for "green." Like most parents, mine were concerned for my welfare and worried about my frequent illnesses. Taking me by the hand, Mamusia and I walked to a famous Polish meat store known for a true Polish ham, where she always bought me a sandwich, loaded with the delicious ham. Eating pork was against our Jewish beliefs—this was not kosher. Encouraging me, Mamusia said, "Please, eat it now. Don't tell your father!"

On another occasion, Tatus took me by the hand and together we marched into the same store. He bought me the same kind of sandwich and begged, "Please don't tell your mother!"

Their secret was safe with me. The ham sandwich was one of my favorite treats and I ate it with great delight.

Although they would never break with tradition and eat non-kosher food themselves, they compromised their beliefs for what they considered to be my well-being, putting me first.

When I was about six years old, I was told that the doctor wanted to remove my tonsils. Mamusia was afraid to put me through an operation because she knew the procedure would be a painful one. She tried to keep it a secret from me for as long as she could. One day she said, "Joziu, we have to go to the doctor. He has to check your tonsils."

I didn't know what tonsils were or why they needed checking, but if she wanted me to do something, I wanted something in return; this was my opportunity.

"I'll do it," I said. "But, I want an electric train."

"Okay Joziu, after we see the doctor." She hustled me out the door, but rather than see a doctor we arrived at a furniture store. A furniture store holds all kinds of amusements for a small child. I had a good time bouncing on, crawling under, and hiding in all the furniture. The next time we went out, she took me into a building that I mistook for another furniture store. I looked forward to the fun I would have. Stepping inside this building, I realized it wasn't at all similar to the furniture store we had gone to earlier. There was a strange atmosphere: people gathered in small groups and spoke in hushed tones. I didn't feel good about being there.

I was told the doctor would like to see me. This announcement struck me with fear. Earlier, I had seen a piano in the room. I ran and hid under it. A man came toward me wearing a white coat. He tried to pick me up, but I was so frightened, I grabbed hold of the piano leg. The white-coated man tried to lift me, but as he did I bit his hand. Ultimately, I had to go with him, but I was angry, scared, kicking and screaming. Mamusia had tricked me. I felt betrayed. They carried me to a room and put me on a bed. A dark mask was put over my face and everything went dark. After the operation my throat was too sore for food. Mamusia gave me ice cream, which felt cool on my throat. Later, when I had recovered, I asked for my electric train, but Mamusia said, "No, we can't afford a train." I viewed this as a betrayal.

Although not wealthy, we lived comfortably in an apartment building located at number 12 Brzozowa Street. The building was nothing remarkable: four stories with an attic and a basement, brick and cement block walls on the outside, cream-colored paint coated the interior. There was a long, winding staircase; old, gray wooden steps; and an embellished wrought iron railing leading the way upstairs. A space in the attic was allocated to each family in the building. We kept our personal storage items here, such as our large laundry bucket and Passover dishes. Deep in the basement was a similar division of space for storing potatoes and coal. In Europe, the first floor is usually one level up from the ground floor, where the caretaker lives. We lived on the first floor just above the caretaker's residence.

In our apartment there was a long corridor with rooms to the left and the right. The first room on the right was what I refer to as the mystery room. This was originally a bathroom with a tub; however, the tub no longer worked and the room was sealed off. No bath would ever be taken in that room. Continuing just past the mystery room was the room for the toilet. The next

doorway opened up to the kitchen. Heading down the left side of the hallway was a room kept separate from our living area. The occupant of that room had his own lock and key, but used our front door. This tenant was a stranger to our family, and I was warned not to disturb him by playing near his door or to pester him with noise. Down the left side of the corridor was my parents' room where I slept in a crib beside them for several years.

The main source of heat came from a tile stove called *piec kaflowy* (pea-etz ka-flovy). The tiles ran from floor to ceiling much like a chimney, but inside the building. Placed at the bottom there was a small hearth and grate where we burned coal. As the heat rose up the tile chimney it radiated off the tiles and was distributed into the room. Mamusia lit the *piec kaflowy* only on special occasions, such as Friday nights when the family gathered for dinner.

The room across the hall, on the right side of the corridor, was a long and narrow dining room. In addition to the dining room table and chairs, there was a small bed for Dziunka and a sofa where Dolek slept.

At night we cuddled up in our thick feather beds and coverings. Mamusia warmed up the sheets with a hot brick, wrapped up in other bedding or clothing to keep it from burning the sheets. She placed the brick at the bottom of the bed near our feet, keeping us toasty all night.

Marysia, our Polish maid, was a great help to Mamusia, assisting her in chores that often were a two-person job, such as the laundry. I loved Marysia. Each day she read to me out of the cheap children's books Mamusia brought home. I never tired of hearing them. "Read another Marysia," I begged. I listened to them over and over again until I knew them by heart. Gradually, I learned how to read them myself.

Our apartment was usually filled with the aromas of Jewish cooking and baking. Mamusia, while not overly religious, observed the Jewish traditions in our home, ensuring we had a kosher home. Any meat for the meal was soaked overnight in a basin of salt water to make sure all the blood was out of it. She was conscientious about not breaking the laws, even while preparing the meal, as in the case of a knife accidentally coming into contact with any dairy product. If that should happen, the knife was to be thrust into the ground, blade first, buried to the hilt, and left for seven days.

Friday family meals were often exciting, yet stressful if Uncle Shmil (Yiddish for Samuel) had been invited to have dinner with the family. He was one of mother's three brothers and my favorite uncle. He had thick black hair, brushed straight back exposing his widow's peak, and a square jaw. He always made me laugh. His eccentric behavior caused Tatus to be frustrated and cross with him, especially when Uncle Shmil was expected for Friday night family dinner and failed to show up.

The Sabbath dinner ceremony is an important Jewish special occasion, and according to my father's wishes, had an important place in our household. Mamusia lead in the Sabbath dinner by first lighting the candles. She then waved her hands over the flames, closed her eyes, covered her face with both hands, and said the prayer.

Before any of this could begin, we had to wait for Uncle Shmil. As we sat there waiting and waiting, Tatus grew angrier and angrier. When he couldn't hold back his frustration any

²The Jewish Passover celebration commemorates the Exodus, the deliverance of ancient Hebrews from slavery in Egypt.

longer, he shouted out in German, “*Zusammenleben!*” This was an expression meaning “living together.” In this case, it meant living together as a family. When Shmil went absent from our dinner arrangement without any explanation, it bothered and hurt Tatus very much. To Tatus, it was as if Shmil was disrespecting the family arrangement of closeness.

Tatus would slam his fist down on the table in one angry gesture, breaking his dish into pieces. The table shook from the powerful blow causing the dishes and glasses to rattle in their places. However, Mamusia had developed a technique for protecting her good dishes. She bought old dishes and put one of those at Tatus’ place each Friday. She may have been flustered, but she remained calm. She never reprimanded him by saying, “Don’t break the dish.” Instead she remained silent and gave him a special dish to break. Until the dish was broken it was as if everyone at the dining room table were sitting on ice. Once Tatus had broken the dish, everyone relaxed and we could get on with the meal in peace.

Often there was the familiar argument between Tatus and Dolek. Tatus wanted to make sure Dolek was on the right career path. Dolek was bright and talented—he wanted to become an artist. Tatus scoffed at that idea. Tatus was a businessman and practical; he didn’t understand art. Finally, to satisfy Tatus, Dolek became an apprentice to a tailor in a workshop where he worked his way up from the bottom tier. He swept the floors, ran errands and heated the irons. He did everything other than tailor garments. Eventually he learned the skill of a tailor and quickly rose to master tailor. His garments were beautifully designed, which I attributed to his artist nature. He never took shortcuts with his work.

While not an outwardly affectionate father, Tatus cared for his family deeply. Mamusia could anticipate a happy mood if she heard him singing “*Długie włosy krotki rozum maja,*” which means, “long hair, short on reason” prompting a smile from her.

Tatus owned a bar, called a *szynk*, located on Sebastiana Street, about two blocks from where we lived. Uncle Shmil worked there and helped out with the cleaning and storing of supplies. This was a very good spot in the Old Town, right at the edge of the park, called the Planty, and the Wawel Castle. There were plenty of tourists meandering through the Planty who wanted a drink at the end of their scenic tour. Tatus’ *szynk* was the only one for some distance. At the *szynk*, Polish fast food was the fare of the day. Tatus took great pride in ownership, and poured his resources and energy into it.

Before I was born, Tatus had a partnership in a hotel, regarded as one of the top hotels in Krakow. The hotel was situated in the number one location, maximizing on the spectacular view of Wawel Castle. Unfortunately, the business went bankrupt. Besides the loss of money it was a big disappointment for Tatus. He tried out various jobs before coming to own the *szynk*.

Tatus worked long, hard hours in order to succeed and Mamusia helped him in the business. Mamusia prepared all the kosher food and desserts that Tatus served to the customers, so when I entered the the *szynk* I was met by the familiar cooking smells of our apartment.

At the front of the *szynk* was a counter where beer, wine and other alcoholic drinks were served. Also displayed were the kosher goodies and snacks Mamusia had brought over on a tray

from our apartment: chopped herring salad, smoked herring, herring in cream, eggs with mustard and horseradish. Mamusia specialized in a Jewish dish called *galareta*; it consisted of a gelatin made from the marrow of beef bones. Considered to be an excellent treat by some, the *galareta* was not to my liking. The restaurant also catered to non-Jews, which was reflected in the pork kielbasa served with sauerkraut and mustard, a pub favorite.

An additional room was furnished with tables and chairs and a billiard table. Downstairs was the basement where supplies and foodstuffs were stored, along with kegs of beer and bottles of wine.

Inside the *szynk* the atmosphere was full of cheer and friendly gossip, complete with enough local characters to make it a fun place. The local *fiakier* drivers would line up their carriages near the *szynk* and wait for the tourists to exit the Wawel Castle. While waiting for the park and castle to close, the drivers came in for a special “pure alcoholic” drink called *Spiritus*. The 190 proof beverage came in a mini-bottle (similar to what is served on an airplane) and sealed with a cork. The drivers held the bottle up in the air, just in front of them, and with a quick, firm slap they hit the bottle square on the bottom. This caused the cork to fly right out of the bottle and shoot across the room. Placing the bottle to their mouths, they gulped the liquid, right down the gullet; then, they gave a fierce swipe across their lips with the back of their hand.

Meanwhile, the other patrons of the *szynk* played billiards and had me keep score for them as the phonograph played a humorous song about women in the background. The *szynk* patrons liked to hear that song over and over again. I looked at them in puzzlement. Why did they like this song so much? I was too young to understand the subtle nuances about women they found so hilarious.

Tatus didn't eat at the *szynk*, I brought his kosher meals from home. I felt a sense of freedom on those occasions, carrying it along the busy sidewalk, acting like a grown-up with somewhere important to go. Tatus greeted me with zest. Taking my cheek between his forefinger and middle finger he pinched down hard between them. “*Hundsfo!*” he'd exclaim. What he meant was, “miserable cur!” This was just one of his strange pet names for me. Mamusia didn't use pet names; she called me Joziu. Mamusia brought me up in a formal way and taught me to be respectful to my elders. I was taught to address grown-ups as *pan*, mister, or *pani*, missus. Each time I greeted Mamusia, or any woman for that matter, I took her hand in mine, bowed slightly, and gently kissed the top of her hand.

Chapter 3

School Life and Religion

1934 – 1936
6 to 8 years old

Because of Tatus' firm religious beliefs he thought it appropriate I attend a Jewish school.

One morning, Mamusia took me to a *cheder*, meaning "room of learning," run by *Chasidim*, a sect of super orthodox Jews. Religious subjects were the only type of subject taught at the *cheder*. I didn't understand this new arrangement; I didn't really want to go to this kind of school.

When we arrived at the school, we were met by a strange looking man. I remember thinking he had so much dark hair, and what a funny looking, bushy beard. I didn't like him or this place. All the boys were sitting in a darkened room rocking back and forth over their books, not reading, but chanting in Hebrew and Yiddish. I didn't understand what anyone was saying.

The bushy-bearded man only addressed Mamusia. They were speaking in Yiddish. What kind of school is this? What are they saying? Why are we here in this dark, strange place? Echoing around me I heard the Yiddish language and I was all the more confused and frightened. The bushy-bearded man turned his black eyes on me. He bent down and reached to take my coat.

"No!" I yelled out. I pulled away and kicked him in the shin. I tried to bite his hand that had grasped my coat. The man became furious and let go.

He took a deep breath then blew it out, attempting to control his temper. Enunciating each word, he spoke in a clear, firm voice, "Please, leave this school."

Mamusia and I were led to the exit, and to my relief we left. I had been rejected from *cheder*. In spite of my father's wishes for me to attend a Hebrew school, Mamusia realized this wasn't a good place for me. She took matters into her own hands, and without discussing it first with Tatus, hustled me to Mizrachi, a private Hebrew school. She left me in kindergarten class and went to discuss the payment arrangements with the school principal.

In order to attend this school my hair had to be cut short and I needed a school uniform, short pants and a plain shirt. Mamusia had always wanted a girl to dress up like a doll. I believe for this reason, with the loss of her two daughters, she dressed me in fancy clothes. For special occasions she dressed me in a silk shirt with pearly buttons. She wouldn't allow anyone to cut my hair. It had grown out in long, blond, curly locks. In later years, I sometimes thought she kept my hair long because it reminded her of the little girls she had lost. She was upset over my required haircut and cried the hardest when it was ultimately cut short.

Mamusia bought my supply of both Hebrew and Polish textbooks before each school year started. I knew how to read before I started Kindergarten, so as soon as Mamusia brought the books home, I read the Polish ones through. I read so voraciously that I finished them in a matter of days.

Dziunka also took an active role in my education. I was often sick and stayed home from school a lot during the first grade. One time when I was sick she brought me a book from the library. I read the book that very day. The next day Dziunka brought me another one. I devoured that one too. Dziunka had introduced me to the public library system. She chose the books I would read and left me the catalog index numbers. When I could go to the library on my own I handed the index number to the librarian who brought me the next book on Dziunka's list. I didn't like her choices in reading material. I borrowed the library catalog and copied the index numbers of the books I wanted to read. My favorite books were about science and new discoveries, animals and nature, and especially adventure stories. I was developing the ability to read quickly and to remember everything I read. Finishing a book in one day was very important to me. The library was closed on Saturdays. So as not to go one single day without a book I checked out two books on Friday.

In the schoolroom there were long benches in rows where the students sat. We each had a short table and a stand for propping up for our books. The mornings were devoted to Hebrew subjects along with religious teachings. At noon we were allowed to return home to eat our lunch, or start the assigned homework. In the afternoons we learned Polish subjects.

As a student I had to wear a *yarmulke* (a small, round skull cap) every day to school. One day, I learned a very important lesson from Mr. Dodeles, by far my favorite teacher. He had been employed at this school a long time, he had even taught some of the students' parents. He was an older gentleman, very refined and proper, short and of slight build. One day I came to school without my *yarmulke*; I had forgotten it and left it at home. Mr. Dodeles caught me without it and made me write a hundred times in neat, fine script: "*Porzadny uczen nie zapomina czapeczki.*" This meant: "An orderly student doesn't forget his *yarmulke*." I never left my *yarmulke* home again.

Although strict he won my respect. He treated each of the students fairly and was sincere in his commendation. Unlike the other teachers, who were all about business, Mr. Dodeles was like a friend.

On May 4, 1935, Josef Pilsudski, the dictator of Poland and beloved national hero, died. My school prepared a very special presentation ceremony in honor of his memory. Someone wrote a poem and I was chosen to memorize it. I wasn't chosen for my great poetry recitation, but as it was becoming known, I had an outstanding memory.

Another of our teachers—not a favorite among us—who was easy to taunt, and who we referred to as The Guinea Pig, wrote a song that all the kids were instructed to sing. A big, loud bombastic song that went:

"It is not true that you no longer exist.

Even though you are gone from us forever; you are not gone from our hearts.

We will not forget you; you are gone but not from our thoughts.”

The kids struggled to reach the low notes. The whole production took on a different mood rather than the somber one it was meant to have. Young children, who were in the audience, burst into giggles, but were quickly quieted by their teachers.

Mamusia was often missing from my school performances. This hurt my feelings. Why wasn't she there? Was she so busy that she couldn't take the time for her only son? Maybe she just didn't care for school functions all that much. Maybe they were too frivolous for her, but I never could forget it.

Mr. Dodeles, although firm and strict, was an outstanding teacher. I learned Polish reading and writing from him. During his lecture, we were made to sit on the school bench with our hands behind our backs. We couldn't move our bodies an inch, and not so much as wriggle our hands. He taught us to speak Polish correctly, and if some student used a common Polish word, he made them put the equivalent of five cents in a metal box on his desk.

When I originally registered for school my family name was not known as Kempler, but as Knobloch. When Tatus' mother, whose maiden name was Knobloch, married his father, it was in a Jewish ceremony not recognized by the registrar. My father was known as Knobloch not Kempler, and I was known by that name, too. It wasn't until I was in the third grade that they had straightened it all out and had determined my legal surname was Kempler. For most of my childhood, I had been an unhealthy, skinny boy, but after my tonsils were removed, I gained weight and began to look healthy and robust. Now that my surname was Kempler, my teachers were confused. One teacher forgot what to call me, and referred to me as “the fat kid in the back.”

Mamusia was not religious and Dziunka and Dolek only went to synagogue when forced. Usually, I was the only one to go with Tatus to the 14th century synagogue he attended. Tatus, while not orthodox, felt the importance of his traditions and showed it by wearing his good, gray, striped pants when he went to synagogue. Reading the Torah and the Talmud were a joy for me. I believed everything I read and was taught. Tatus was pleased to know he was raising a good Jewish boy. His pride in my accomplishments was encouraging and I wanted to please him. Dziunka liked to tease me, and said, “If you don't quit this, you're going to end up a rabbi.”

When I attended synagogue I dutifully recited all my prayers. These were complicated prayers even for adults to deliver, but as a small boy I came to the quick realization that repeating all the words correctly was paramount. There were optional verses within the prayers, but I said every one of the lines so as not to miss one thing. I wanted to get it right and to be right with God. Besides the prescribed Hebrew prayers, there were optional Hebrew prayers, and personal prayers. Whenever I spoke to God in a private personal prayer I did it in Polish.

One day I ruined a new Bible owned by the school. I spilled ink on the corner of the page. The teacher was angry. “You're going to have to pay for that Bible! Tomorrow you come to school with the money for a new one.” I was filled with trepidation, knowing that when I went home I would be in trouble. I knew my parents couldn't afford to pay for a new Bible, and

I didn't want to ask them for the money. What could I do? I worried about it all night. The next morning I prayed to God to help me. Since this wasn't a prescribed prayer, I said it in Polish. But what if God doesn't understand Polish? I translated my short prayer into Hebrew, hoping He would get the message. My prayers went unanswered and Mamusia had to pay for the damaged Bible.

Dziunka met and married Jack Laub, a German Jew. He was a talented musician playing in Henry Rosner's orchestra. Rosner was a famous violinist. Jack played the violin, clarinet and saxophone perfectly. He was from a well-to-do family living in Germany. Rosner's orchestra played in many cities abroad. After Jack and Dziunka were married, Dziunka traveled with the band everywhere they were booked to play. She always returned with little presents for me from their travels together.

Often, Dziunka bought books for me to read. She felt I should broaden my viewpoint from religious theories to include scientific ones. One time when she brought me a book on evolution, I was especially drawn to the illustrations, one in particular, of early man. The first picture showed him as a gorilla, but each subsequent picture showed his development into modern man. This was my first indication that the story about the creation of man from the Bible's viewpoint might not be true.

One evening my parents invited Dziunka and Jack over for dinner. Soon, the after-dinner conversation turned into talk of religion. I was taught to stay out of the way while the grown-ups talked. However, once the subject turned to religion, I got very excited and chimed right in. Before I gave serious thought to my words, I blurted out, "I have a picture of Adam!" All the adults turned to look at me. Mamusia's eyebrows were raised to her scalp. Tatus made a round 'O' with his mouth, and Dziunka and Jack looked perplexed. By the astonished looks on their faces I could tell they forgot I was in the room. After a momentary pause, Tatus said, "You have? Well let's see it then."

I jumped up and ran to get my book. I opened it to the illustration of the rather large, hairy gorilla. Tapping at the page with my finger, I said, "There he is, right there. That's Adam."

There was a stunned silence at the table. Tatus' face turned a rather unnatural and discomforting shade of purple. Between clenched teeth he growled, "Where did you get the idea that that hairy ape was Adam?"

Lacking my earlier conviction, I hesitated to answer, "Well ..." I drew in a big breath, knowing I was about to implicate Dziunka in my folly. Finally, I said, "Dziunka gave it to me."

Tatus swiveled in his chair toward Dziunka. He stared at her a long time before expelling a deep breath. He shrugged his shoulders, looked heavenward and said, "That explains it, then."

His modern-thinking daughter was making a big impact on me. I had naive ideas about religion. I was mixing up the science I was learning in school with my strong faith in God.

³Henry Rosner, a violinist, and his brother Poldek, an accordionist, entertained Amon Goeth, commandant of Plaszow, and his frequent guest Oscar Schindler at numerous dinner parties. Oscar Schindler's fondness for the Rosner compelled him to add the entire Rosner family to his famous list of 1,100 workers saved from death camps. Source: www.oskarschindler.com

Dziunka and Jack had recently returned to Poland from Beirut. The audiences there had been favorable. Now, Jack and his orchestra had a new gig for the summer months playing in Krynica (kri-nee-tsah) at the Patria Hotel. This hotel was renowned as a top resort and spa, owned by the famous Polish tenor Jan Kiepura.

Dziunka invited me to Krynica to spend part of the summer with them. I was so excited, not to see Dziunka, but because this was the first time I was allowed to ride the train alone. Mamusia packed my lunch and brought me to the train station. I said my goodbyes, boarded the car, and soon the train began to move slowly out of the station. I discovered I liked to stand in the corridor between cars by the open window. I spent the majority of the seven-hour trip standing there. Although the journey was long, I wasn't bored for a second! I had a newfound sense of freedom riding on a real train going somewhere unknown.

Once I arrived in Krynica, Dziunka took over the role of mother.

While walking with Dziunka in town we met a woman walking hand-in-hand with a little girl. This woman was a distant relative of Jack's. The little girl whose hand she held so tightly in her own was introduced to me as "Anita." We instantly became bosom buddies. We found out we had a lot in common. We were similar in age (she was a year younger than me), and she lived in Krakow. We both loved the same author, Karl May and talked about his stories. Few authors of the time wrote stories with as much gut-clenching excitement as the German author, Karl May. To me his books were pure magic. He wrote Wild West and Arabian action stories. The common theme running through all his books was brotherly love without prejudice and peace. His characters formed real bonds of unity.

I had a great time with Anita during those weeks in Krynica. When it was time for me to return home, I promised I would find her again.

I learned from Dziunka that Anita and her mother were living in an apartment outside the Kazimierz. They lived together with Anita's aunt, Carolla, and robust uncle, Trauring, a well-to-do German Jew. Now that I knew where Anita lived, I was anxious to find her and resume our summer friendship.

Usually shy and quiet around other girls, Anita was the first girl I could talk to. Although I was a rough-and-tumble boy—dirt and smudges on my face and hands, scraped and scabby knees—I always made sure I was clean before visiting Anita. My family always knew precisely the time I was going to meet her. Dziunka teased me mercilessly, "Oh, oh! His knees are clean. It looks like Joziu is going to see his girlfriend today." She gave a hearty laugh as if she just heard the funniest joke.

Anita and I often went to the movies together. When we walked up and down the street, we held hands. Our favorite thing to do was take the tramway to the end of the line in the countryside before looping back. We walked around a bit, talking about movies and books, and then hopped back on for the long trip home. Anita became my best friend, one who would continually be in and out of my life

Chapter 4

Political Unrest

1937 – October 1939

9 to 11 years old

In 1937 or so, I found a book in the library written by a German man about Hitler's persecution of the Jews, homosexuals, Roma, and Sinti (gypsies), who were incarcerated in the concentration camp of Dachau. By use of photo illustrations, the book emphasized the harsh treatment these groups received. The Nazis forced people to stand with their hands up above their heads for hours on end. They beat them through wet sheets so as not to leave marks on their bodies. Mamusia didn't think it was appropriate for a child my age to read this sort of thing or look at those kinds of pictures, but I did it anyway.

Although I was only nine years old, it seemed I was more knowledgeable about the Jewish situation in Germany than others in my hometown. They didn't want to believe things like this were happening. From their viewpoint, this was a faraway situation; it didn't really affect our life in the Kazimierz. That was about to change.

During 1938, many Jewish refugees from Germany arrived in Poland. They were forced to leave Germany and were only allowed to take their personal belongings in a small suitcase. Carrying only a little bit of money, they were taken by trains and dropped off at Polish borders. These were German Jews, but they were not considered to be of German blood. The German officials and scientists considered them to be Polish Jews who belonged in Poland. Some of these Jewish families lived in Germany since before World War I. This didn't matter to the German officials. They thoroughly researched three generations back to prove where the Jews had originally come from.

We saw a great influx of Jewish immigrants into Krakow. They didn't have a home to go to or means of supporting themselves. They were left at the mercy of the Poles and for the Polish authorities to deal with. The Poles didn't know what to do with the refugees, so they were dropped off in Krakow to be handled by the Jewish residents. However, most Jewish homes did not have enough room for them. Some were put up in schools or synagogues, and out of charity, the Polish Jews brought them food and shared what meager belongings they had. The refugees were pitiful to look at, completely abandoned, without home or country.

Jack's parents, the Laub's, were living in Germany, but when the officials found them to be of Polish descent, they were deported to Poland. They had been sent to stay in a Jewish high school near our apartment. When Mamusia heard the news, she hurried to her kitchen to make a big pot of thick barley soup, called *pecak*. I was dispatched to bring the soup to them at the school. At the high school, I saw a large tangle of people sitting and lying on the floor. There were no beds—people made do with what they had. Some had blankets; none had pillows. They used their suitcases as pillows, propped up under their heads. The Laub's were somewhere in this crowd. I located them and picked my way over and around prone bodies, toward them. Reaching my destination, I proudly offered Mamusia's *pecak* to Mrs. Laub. The Laub's were grateful for the kindness and sent me home carrying their appreciative words to Mamusia.

Despite my worldly reading, I gave little thought at first to the political changes occurring in the world. Overall, I felt people in Krakow were tolerant of the Jewish culture; as I was growing and learning, I began to experience certain changes in my own community. Graffiti painted on city walls was blatantly anti-Semitic, with statements such as, "Go to Palestine" becoming more and more prevalent in Jewish neighborhoods. Sometimes the Polish kids taunted me and fellow Jewish kids with insulting songs about Jews with beards. They meant to put us down and make us feel inferior. I realized the problem wasn't who I was, but whom I was hanging around with. If I stayed among kids who looked like me and could blend in to look like Poles, then I wouldn't come up against this sort of abuse. I learned to avoid those who looked like the super-religious Jew, easily recognizable by their clothing and side curls called *payos* (PAY-us). They wore fur-trimmed hats called *shtreimel* (SHRAY-ml) and long, black

⁴See appendix: Nuremburg Law.

coats. Children, too, wore Jewish skullcaps called a *yarmulke* and wore a four-cornered garment, called *tzitzit*, with special tassels hanging from each corner. In my opinion, these Jews drew trouble to themselves merely by how they dressed.

I heard that there were occasional beatings of Jewish men by Poles. One story circulating was about some superstitious Poles who believed that if they saw a Jewish man with a red beard on New Year's Day, they had to beat him up or suffer bad luck the entire year. Also, the German refugees told us stories about the terrible beatings they experienced before coming to Krakow. They told how their belongings were confiscated, their synagogues burned to the ground, and businesses commandeered. Jews had limited access to universities, and other anti-Semitic rules were beginning to come into being and even law, but I was too young to be affected by them. Sheltered in my home, I felt safe within the confines of my family.

The Polish government knew Germany was militarily aggressive, but they weren't preparing their people for war. Still, people knew something should be done and made their feelings clear with sarcastic rhymes:

Jak Hitler Budował Samoloty

Smigly Rydz Malował Ploty

Hitler is building planes and

Smigly Rydz (president of Poland) is painting fences white.

And:

Jak Hitler Budował Tanki

Smigly Rydz chodził do kohanki

Hitler is building tanks and

Smigly Rydz is going to his lover.

These songs illustrated that, instead of preparing seriously for an all-out attack, the Polish government was wasting time on unimportant matters. It seemed to me when citizens made fun of the government, there was some truth in what they were saying.

In 1938, Dolek had been drafted into the Polish Army and then the Horse Artillery. He wasn't really fit for military life. He was the nervous and anxious type. But, due to his artistic nature, he had developed a beautiful penmanship. As a result, he was granted an office assignment writing letters and other correspondence for his commanding officers.

By then, Hitler was making a big push east toward Poland. By August of 1939, Poland became threatened by Germany. The Polish government now had no choice but to prepare for war. About a week before the German invasion, we began taping X formations in the windows to prevent them from shattering in case of an air raid. In the event they used gas on us, we made cotton masks. People volunteered to dig air raid shelters around the lawns and trees of the Planty. The shelters were built in a zigzag pattern to avoid massive damage caused by bombs. The whole town was called out to participate in digging these air raid shelters. Frequently, I volunteered to help with the digging, not because I was especially patriotic, but because everyone was pitching in to help in the war effort, I wanted to be a part of the action. However, I didn't take it seriously; it was fun and games to me. This was just another adventure that I would write about in my diary.

On August 31, 1939, I took a walk with Uncle Shmil through town. He pointed out the electric and gas companies and said, "If a bomb drops, this will be one of the first places they'll target." He was teaching me a lesson: "Avoid this place at all costs."

Friday, September 1, 1939, I heard planes in the sky and distant explosions. The aircraft sounded like large planes, unlike Polish planes, which were small and easily recognizable. I was almost happy; I didn't feel afraid. Perhaps the military were getting ready for something big to happen. My family didn't have a radio; we relied on newspapers and gossip from neighbors. We had heard nothing. Nobody seemed to realize this was the actual start of war. As it turned out, this was more than practice. We were being attacked by big German bombers.

After breakfast I walked over to my school friend Reiner's apartment near Wawel Castle. When I got there his father told me, "There's a war on."

My eyes widened. "I thought it was just maneuvers."

"Look up there," he said, "and see for yourself." He pointed across the street and up toward the roof. On the roof was a soldier manning a machine gun. My friend and I were transfixed. A German Stuka fighter flew overhead, strafing the building. The soldier manning the machine gun fired back at the plane. This was exciting; we didn't quite understand the significance, but changes were taking place in our lives. The new school year was scheduled to open on Monday, but with the start of the invasion, all schools had been closed. This was fantastic news, as any student not anxious for the school year to start would feel.

While listening in on the Riener's radio, propaganda from the government began to pour in. Not only over the radio, but from loudspeakers set up in the streets. Grandiose announcements of all kinds were made to bolster the Poles' spirits. Statements such as, "How dare Hitler strike Poland! Don't worry. We're going to beat the Germans soon and have them turn tail for Germany."

The bombings were the most severe during the first couple of days. During the initial bombing, my family huddled together in a makeshift air raid shelter in the basement where we kept the coal and potatoes. By day three, there were no bombings, but we heard the planes strafing buildings. After things settled down a bit, Uncle Shmil and I took a walk around town to see what had happened. Surprisingly, there wasn't much damage to be seen. We saw a railway station and a military barracks that had been bombed, but it wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.

On Monday, September 4, 1939, widespread panic spread throughout the town. Polish soldiers were running through town completely disorganized. I walked to the Planty, and saw some Polish soldiers limping back. One soldier, from the cavalry brigade, led his bleeding horse gently by the reins. A crowd gathered around him asking about the current situation. I overheard him say, "The campaign is a lost cause. The troops were brave but the German army was moving too quickly. We had no choice but to retreat." Poland's horse cavalry was no match for Germany's modern motorized army.

Even though the fight was over, dauntless reporters broadcast propaganda nonstop. This kept up for a few days, and then ceased when reality finally sunk in. Loud, frightening sirens blasted throughout the air signaling an attack, and the city was shelled by artillery fire day and night.

We spent the evening of September 5, 1939, in our basement shelter, bags packed, ready for flight, while artillery fire, accompanied by the never-ending sound of bombs, crashed down around us. Uncle Shmil was nowhere to be found. He was a person who seemed to like danger. While we were all huddled downstairs like frightened rabbits, Shmil was sleeping upstairs on the sofa in our apartment.

The local gossip was that sometime during the first few days of the attack, Smigly Rydz and General Władysław Sikorski escaped in a plane to England. It was rumored they knew the war was lost from the very beginning. All the propaganda about beating the Germans was broadcast only to pacify the people. The majority believed the propaganda at first; they thought the Poles could win. Now there was panic. Many people ran back to their homes, packed what belongings they could carry, or put belongings onto horse drawn wagons and headed east, away from the Germans.

Many young Jewish people took off on foot, taking whatever they could carry in their rucksacks. My family wasn't prepared to run east. We had nowhere to go. My parents decided to stay in Krakow and wait to see what would happen.

September 6, 1939 was a surprisingly quiet day as German soldiers entered Krakow. Immediately, they began to organize, converting many of the old and narrow city streets into one-way streets, making it easier for transporting German tanks and equipment. That day, I had gone out on an errand with Tatus, who needed to renew his liquor license for the *szynk*. I was in awe of the rapid changes happening to Krakow. I had never seen anything like this before. We had now entered a peaceful time, it seemed; the shelling and bombing were over. Dziunka had recently sent me a wristwatch. That day during our walk, I had been fiddling with it, and the crown had come loose and had fallen off. All around us there were strange happenings: Tanks rumbled down the street; Trucks loaded with heavy equipment rolled past; However, Tatus was more concerned with business affairs, and I was concerned with one broken wristwatch.

Tatus didn't seem sad or overly worried about the German soldiers; maybe because he had spent time in Germany during his youth. He spoke some German, and he felt comfortable around German people. Perhaps he

felt that the Germans coming to Krakow wouldn't make the political situation any worse than Polish rule. "Germany is a civilized nation full of famous philosophers, poets and scientists," he said. "I believe everything will turn out okay."

The next day, in the Kazimierz, I saw German soldiers walking down the streets. A few soldiers had cornered some bearded religious Jews and were making fun of their dress. With the blades of their bayonets they scraped off one side of the Jewish men's beards. Laughing, the soldiers left the Jews with raw and bleeding faces. This was the first time I was exposed to this kind of persecution. We knew how the German soldiers treated the Jews in Germany. We were told they beat people, they burned synagogues, but Tatus didn't seem worried. Tatus didn't have a beard, so I didn't worry either.

Shortly after Krakow was conquered, a large victory celebration was to be held in the *Rynek Główny*, the Grand Square. Civilian Governor Hans Frank, a Nazi lawyer and one of Hitler's legal advisers, was an honoree. He established himself in offices at the Wawel Castle, and soon after the name of the square was changed to Adolf Hitler Platz. There once had been a big statue of Adam Mickiewicz, a great Polish poet, but it had been destroyed during the invasion and removed.

This was an exclusive celebration for the *Reichdeutschers*, German citizens. No *Volksdeutscher*, a Pole of German background, and certainly no Jew, was permitted to attend. I had a wild notion to attend this event and Mamusia didn't object. To the best of her ability, she dressed me up to look like a young German boy. Early in my life she had protected me, tying me to her side. Now, she allowed me to wander right into the lion's den. At any moment I could be discovered, thereby putting my family and myself in grave danger.

When I arrived at the square, I tried my best to blend in with the German kids. To start, everyone sang the national anthem, thrusting hands high in the "Heil Hitler" salute. Following the anthem were ceremonies and speeches. Afterward, civilian Governor Frank climbed inside his limousine ready to depart. All the kids grouped together at the rear of the car, touching the bumper or trunk as it moved away, singing exuberantly in German. Governor Frank, touched by the demonstration of devotion, spoke to them lovingly in German. At this point in the adventure, I became frightened. I didn't speak German. My *Reichdeutscher* impersonation was going to be discovered, and I would find myself in serious trouble. I made my getaway from the revelers and raced back to the safety of my home.

While the occupation was in force, we had to put up with many changes in our daily lives. We weren't free to live the way we used to. All schools were closed initially, but then only Polish schools were re-opened. All the Jewish schools remained closed indefinitely. Dr. Ohringer was the director of my school. In an attempt to help continue education he arranged a secret school in his home for a select number of students, myself included. This arrangement lasted two or three weeks, but it was difficult to continue it longer because life for Jewish people was becoming further complicated.

Polish money rapidly lost value. Based on my parents' recommendations, whatever money I had managed to save or get from Dziunka, had been deposited directly into a savings account. However, when the war started, all the banks were closed. We had some concern and didn't know if we could retrieve the money. When the bank re-opened it was very difficult to access our money. Outside the bank was a long line of people. I stood waiting in line for what seemed hours. When I did receive my money, it had depreciated greatly and was only a small amount compared to what I had deposited. This would be the least of our worries as the German officers continued to rule in Krakow.

Ration cards were issued for Poles and Jews right away; however, the Jews' ration coupons were meager by comparison. Ration cards became a clever form of forced labor for the Jewish people. Only stamped cards allowed the bearer to receive food. Each Jew from the age of fourteen had a ration card, but in order to receive food, some form of labor had to be completed a certain number of times per month. After the work was performed, the ration card was stamped by a Nazi.

Every day there was a new law or restriction against the Jews. On September 8, 1939, the *Judenrat* was formed. This was a Jewish council set up by the ruling Germans to make sure all the Jews complied with each new restriction or order. The ubiquitous small, round kiosks, which were normally used to announce movies, concerts and various entertainments going on around town, were used in Jewish neighborhoods to post the new orders, laws

and restriction, which were produced daily. The Jews had the responsibility to make sure they read the orders and followed them. The laws specifically humiliated and tested Jewish traditions. For example, September 22 was the Jewish holiday Yom Kippur. On this day, it is forbidden by Jewish religious law to work or eat anything. However, a forced labor order was issued for September 22, 1939. The Jews were made to go out and cover the anti-aircraft ditches and replant grass.

A school friend and I had a good laugh standing in front of the kiosk pretending to read the postings, acting as if there were new horrible orders. We exclaimed and lamented loudly enough to attract the attention of some passersby—it didn't take too much to draw the attention of a crowd in those days. Immediately, a large group of people drew in close around us. We scooted to the back of the crowd and watched with mischievous delight all the frantic excitement we had needlessly inspired.

Late in October, Dolek returned home. He had been serving in the Alpine Horse Cavalry. His group, assigned to the western border of Poland, defended it against German attack. They ended up on the far eastern border near Russia. After losing a fierce battle, Dolek's unit had broken up and dispersed into various places. Poland surrendered on October 6, 1939, and Dolek had to make his way home on foot. He was just twenty-two years old. When he finally arrived home, his spirit was badly beaten down and he became very pessimistic.

Jack and Dziunka had arrived in Warsaw on August 31, 1939, but now they returned to Krakow. They told us what happened to them. On September 28, 1939, Warsaw surrendered to the Germans, but not before the city was devastated by tanks and aircraft bombardment. Warsaw was practically leveled. Jack and Dziunka's apartment building had been bombed and burned, but was still standing. They decided to hide in the ruins for a while with the misguided belief that the same house is never bombed twice. However, the apartment was indeed bombed a second time, forcing them to flee for their lives. The stairway was destroyed by a bomb. Jack jumped out of the second story window breaking his nose and leg in the process. Dziunka and Jack returned to Krakow, Jack on crutches and Dziunka dispirited and depressed.

By October 26, 1939, ritual slaughter of kosher animals (mammals or birds that complied with Jewish religious restrictions for food), practiced by some Jews, had been forbidden, and all synagogues had been closed. We could no longer meet for public prayer. In private homes, *minyans*, a group consisting of ten men, were formed.

The better Jewish apartments in Krakow were taken over by Germans. I felt that those prosperous Jews had it worse than my family because they were thrown out of their homes. Nobody, it seemed, wanted to take over our apartment.



About the Author

April Voytko Kempler

Born in Southern California, April currently resides in Reno, NV with her husband of eighteen years, who doubles as her Editor-in-Chief. April has completed her first book, entitled *The Altered I*, a nonfiction memoir about the Holocaust. This sample is only the beginning of the “altered viewpoint”.

She loves reading, a habit she picked up as a child. Instead of playing with the other kids April could be found with her nose in a book. She reads a variety of genres, but is especially drawn to historical fiction.

When she is not writing or reading she assists her husband in their window treatment design business; answering the telephone, making appointments and helping to install gorgeous draperies on naked windows