

## D. The Intrigues in the Warehouse Yard

“I have long wanted to write about what happened to me during those three years of my life, but it was difficult for me to decide, because no pen is capable of describing what I went through... It will be difficult because, in this way, the painful memories will come back to me.

“Nevertheless, I must, so that if I ever want to, after years, when I may be happy, I can remember the years of suffering, the years 1942-1945.”<sup>1</sup>

With these words Miryam Zalcborg opens her story “*Moje przeżycia lagrowe*” (“My Experiences in the Camp”), which she began writing in August 1946.

Four thin notebooks, written in Polish, in calligraphic handwriting, containing memories that are still remarkably fresh, revealing the girl’s inner world. Fifty years later, the author (this time under the name Miryam Zalcborg) gave her testimony in Hebrew to Yad Vashem.<sup>2</sup>

Until the war, Miryam, born in 1929, grew up in a loving family. Her parents took care of her education and even hired a special German teacher for her! At that time, she did not yet know how important it would be one day.

She would never forget the day when she lost her family. The days of the “Small Ghetto” had passed and, in June 1943, she found herself in a group that was brought to the *Apparatebau* factory. She was added to a “Bad transport” (there was also the “Good transport”) and we saw her, together with her friend, barely carrying the boxes of casings in the yard of the *Rekalibrierung*.

Thanks to the help of the foreman, Hanka Szapiro, Miryam was accepted to work in the *Rekalibrierung* warehouse. The warehouse manager was Arthur Heidenblut, who had previously managed the main warehouse, but *Meister* Wunderlich made sure to remove him from there in order to take over his place. Heidenblut was given a warehouse of the *Rekalibrierung*.<sup>3</sup>

Seven people worked in the warehouse under the supervision of the Pole Jan Drzymała. Drzymała took pity on little Miryam, provided her with bread, which she sold in small portions to others, and brought her Polish books to read. The example of humane treatment was given by Heidenblut himself - he chose old or sick women for light work.

Miryam quickly became his protégé, and Heidenblut allowed her to spend the night in the warehouse. What luck! The warehouse was warm and clean. There was hot water and a small wardrobe, a luxury!

And why so much? Because Miryam was a cute blonde with blue eyes, and she looked very much like *Meister* Heidenblut’s beloved daughter. When Heidenblut was not at the factory during the July selection, Wunderlich arrived and saved all the warehouse workers.

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<sup>1</sup> Zalcborg, *Moje przeżycia...*, I, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Testimony of Miryam Zalcborg, YVA, 0.3/6158.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

The most difficult were the moments of longing for mother, father, siblings... and Miryam had already tried to express her feelings in poetry:

*My mother abandoned me long ago;  
Away she went and I was left alone.  
Alone I remain, with no one close to my heart.  
That is why blood constantly flows from my insides.*

*I am at the mercy of these barbarians,  
Thrown into a maelstrom of suffering and agony;  
Far from life, far from my loved ones...  
Amidst turmoil, conflict and unbearable hunger.*

*I lived in constant hope, the mother of the unfortunate...  
Perhaps one day I may rejoice in the bosom of my family,  
And in this faith in a future, that may bide well for me;  
After all the great torments I have endured.  
But, until now, not a sliver of good has come into my life.<sup>4</sup>*

(Miryam Zalcbberg, translated from Polish by Rut Sztern)

Once, Heidenblut asked her why she was so sad. "Because I'm alone", was her answer. "My whole family that I loved perished in a terrible way." Then, the *Meister* suggested that she travel with him to Germany, where he would take care of her as if she were his daughter. She has a pure "Aryan" appearance and she would be saved.

Miryam, confused by the strange proposal, replied that she was afraid of the risk. Her friends actually urged her to agree, because Heidenblut could be trusted. But Miryam thought differently, "I'm sorry, but I never imagined that we could treat these Germans with complete trust - those who brought so many disasters upon us, who made us miserable for life, who took everything from us and who condemned us to eternal torment!!"<sup>5</sup>

And did the others believe it?

Did Izrael Zylberglajt, who received, not only a sandwich, but also kind words from the "American", believe him? After all, he censored every word that came out of his mouth, thought three times about every answer he gave the *Meister*. And why were they so good? Only because of mercy? As I recall, Ilana Chrust once asked *Meister* Niziolek why he was helping her, and he answered her with the question, "When the war is over, will you help me?"

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<sup>4</sup> The author's name is not written on the poem, but it is written in a handwriting similar to that in her diary.

<sup>5</sup> Zalcbberg, *Moje przeżycia...*, IV., p. 78

Ilana evaded giving a clear answer, but in her testimony, she answered in a clear manner:

“He’s the first one I would turn in! Why? Because even though he helped me, he was cruel to the others.”<sup>6</sup>

For Miryam Zalcborg, times had changed for the worse.

Once, Director Lütt suddenly visited the warehouse, found all the girls doing their jobs leisurely and immediately half of them were sent to the factory. In the meantime, a new manager, Haub,<sup>7</sup> appeared in the warehouse. His job was to organise another warehouse. Miryam, as the youngest, remained, but this solution did not last, because the new warehouse was also facing partial liquidation.

One day, Haub informed Miryam and her two friends that they had to move to the “*Labor*” [Ger., laboratory] department. Haub was in a delicate situation - although he could have sent two other girls, it was impossible, because they were the “women” of two overseers, who regularly gave money to *Meister* Haub, and he - the poor, miserable man - could not renounce this support.

This left three victims - Miryam, Sala Dorfgang and Hanka Zalzman. (Miryam wondered why also Sala, since she also pays a “tithes” to the *Meister*). When they arrived at the “*Labor*” department, the impression was terrible! How could we, the spoiled ones of the warehouse, be able to work here?

Luckily for them, Sala and Hanka were sent to work in the packing room (*Packraum*) and Miryam was left alone... In the evening, she returned “home” in tears. The boss promised to arrange a job for her in the packing room as well. *Meister* Tüller, who was known as “Manius”, agreed to accept her, but on the condition that one of the two new arrivals, Sala or Hanka, would go to work in the awful “*Labor*” department instead of Miryam.

And, here, Miryam was faced with the dilemma - would she save herself at the expense of a friend? She did not want to agree to the offer... until, one day, *Meister* Tüller came and took Miryam to work in the packing room. And Sala was not working anyway, thanks to the overseer Bodzechowski, who “sorted” things out. After all, Sala’s father, the shoemaker Dorfgang, still worked in the warehouses on ul. Garibaldi and had no shortage of money.

Miryam summarised,

“That’s how it was. The rich paid, and that was the business and the source of the *Meisters*’s and the overseer’s profits.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, because of the intrigues that controlled labour relations at the *Rekalibrierung* factory, the “good chapter” in Miryam Zalcborg’s adventures ended. Was it the entire team that was tainted with corruption, including the *Betriebsleiter* himself? And who was he anyway?

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<sup>6</sup> Chrust, YVA, 0.3/8258, p.9

<sup>7</sup> Not sure, if this is the correct name, due to unclear handwriting.

<sup>8</sup> Zalcborg, *Moje przeżycia*, IV, p. 116