

## B. Was There Mutual Aid?

There is no doubt that the worsening of living conditions in the camp exacerbated the struggle for existence. Every former prisoner knows that life in each camp was conducted on two levels: the official and the internal.

Its general fate was decided by the Germans, but in everyday life three factors influenced it:

- the mental and physical resilience of the prisoner;
- the ability to adapt;
- mutual assistance.

In the Apparatebau camp, the situation was no different, and it is possible to distinguish the various frameworks within which the individual was aided by others:

1. Couples and relatives;
2. Male and female “cousins”;
3. The “Camp Family”;
4. Ultra-Orthodox Jewish groups (Chassidic and others);
5. Underground groups affiliated to a faction or movement;
6. Aid from Poles.

### **Regarding the very existence of mutual aid, the testimonies offer different opinions.**

According to Hanka Richter, who was in the camp with her mother, there was a profound difference between those who were starving like her and the various “prominent people” - tailors, shoemakers and wealthy people, who received money from Poles with whom they held their property.<sup>1</sup> Hanka was not alone in her views. Here are some answers for example:

**Pola Zygiel:** “There were many like me, no one helped them.”

**Ilana Chrust:** “I don’t remember that there were any cases of solidarity.”

**Bela Motylińska:** “There was no organised mutual aid in the camp, everyone took care of themselves and helped friends and relatives. But people took great care of each other.”

**Dawid Krakauer:** “In this period and situation, all standards change. A friend is not a friend, not a neighbour, not a relative. Everyone who knew you, doesn’t know you. Each for himself, to save his own skin. One’s only mission is to survive. I was not familiar with the concept of mutual aid at all.”

There is no doubt that opinions of this kind reflected an undesirable social situation, as **Liber Brener** describes it:

“During this same period, the following negative phenomenon may be observed - whoever is able to use fouler language feels himself ‘stronger’, and a ‘competition’ develops in this field.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Testimony of Hanka Richter, YVA, 3494/M-49/E

<sup>2</sup> Brener, *Resistance and Destruction*, p. 79. [TN: On p. 150 of the Yiddish original.]

Up against all the “slanderers” stands **Naomi Zohar**, as spokeswoman for local patriotism:

“There was something special in our city... For the most part, we were the same people - first in the ghetto and then in the camp. It wasn’t like Jewish populations (different ones) that met in terrible camps and hatred arose amongst the Jews, because of differences in origin and background... **Here, somehow, one saved the other and that stopped (the hatred).** Here, relatively speaking, the conditions were different.”<sup>3</sup>

A researcher, faced with the multitude of answers, must take into account the fact that views are fuelled by personal experience. And if he strives to reach the truth, he has no choice but to follow the facts.

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<sup>3</sup> Naomi Zohar, 0.3/7659.