

E. The Camp's Family

If the previous frameworks, couples and the family in its various forms, were known from normal life in human society, then the “**camp's family**” was an invention by the prisoners of the Nazi camps, especially women.

It is a well-known phenomenon that single men preferred to fight the war for existence alone. Chaim Gutensztajn asked:

“Who thought about friends then? In a situation like this, who thinks about friends?”.

Women, with a more developed ability to adapt, understood that life together had many advantages. The composition of four to five girls was the most common.

Naomi Zohar's group included her sister-in-law and a few other childhood friends. She explains:

“For those who were alone, the danger of eradication was more tangible. The lone prisoner was among the first victims of the transport. For example, if the overseer, who compiled the list for the transport, knew that the intended victim had a brother in the camp, he took this into account, because he did not want to hear the arguments later, ‘Why did you send him?’

“And in our group, one would help the other. When I was sick with typhus, it lasted for three weeks. My friends brought me drinks. If there were four-five people together, in some way, it saved them, also in terms of morale.

“There were always two or three girls, who knew how to hold the others. We would sometimes sit together and sing. Usually, we sang about our “*Yiddishe Mamme*”, we sang and cried. It helped to maintain a human likeness.”

Natka Glazer's “family” had a different character, including Little Lonia, Hadasa, who was called “Dziunia”, and Jadzia.¹ They were also joined by Hanka Gutglas (*née* Szapiro), Dziunia's cousin, who describes the methods of operation of the “camp family”:

“Among the women, my routine was mutual help by sharing the same blanket, exchanging clothes and other items, sharing extra food, if we managed to obtain it. I was healthy. I usually helped and was not helped. Hanka, my cousin, was sick twice. I would bring her extra food that I obtained.

“We had an uncle in the camp, Burech Horowic, an engineer who was in charge of the bathhouse. He had money and he would give us his rations of bread. There was an oven in the barrack and those, who obtained potatoes and other supplies, would cook soup.”²

¹ See Chapter Eleven, Section I.

² Wizenberg, YVA, 0-33/7147.

Natka Glazer adds a different kind of explanation:

“First of all, our group in HASAG was the same group from school, from the city, from the ‘Big Ghetto’ and the ‘Small Ghetto’. A whole group of youth from Częstochowa. We basically went through the same process, the same education. Most of the parents were religious, but the youth received a secular influence, separated from the family. A similar socio-economic group.

“There were connections from before the War, during the War, and in the camp. Here we lived next to each other. I remember one of us picking out lice for the other, there was a relationship of mutual concern. It was like a family. In sociological terms, they would say that it was a substitute for the family, without professionals deciding on it. Life itself and the people themselves created things that were necessary for existence.

“The girls would also obtain books, read them and talk about them. Everyone, who had something, gave. If someone had a good memory and remembered school poems, then that was often the material around which we could cheer up. We would pass on to each other the poems of Adam Mickiewicz and *Pan Tadeusz*, or the poems of Julian Tuwim.³ We would put on plays and we would cry and there would be suitors and there would be disappointments.

There was everything... There were also Gentiles, who would sometimes bring sandwiches. I don’t know if it was because I was a young girl and he a young lad or because he was a good person.”⁴

In a different way, Dora Szternberg talks about her group, which organised itself on a common ideological basis. The “tone” was set by the communists - Cesia Windman, Różka Działowska, Mania Lewkowicz and Różka Kornfeld. Franka Kozłowska was a member of *Ha’Shomer Ha’Tzair*:

“These women were all active in the underground in the “Small Ghetto”. The two of us, meaning, me and Cesia Windman – we represented *Bnoth Ya’akov* [Heb., Daughters of Jacob]. Each of us worked in a different place, but we lived together and tried to bring something for joint ‘parties’.

“I remember 1st May 1944: Mania Lewkowicz gathered us on her bunk and told us about the importance of this day, about the workers’ struggle, about Rosa Luxemburg. It was something sublime.”

And on Dorka’s birthday, her two best friends, Bronka Gutman and Roma Reis, brought her gifts - a blue nightgown and stockings, which they had sewn themselves from rags. Dora was very moved and, as a sign of gratitude, wrote a poem, “*Fraternitas*” (“Fraternity”), about the power of fellowship that overcomes all obstacles. She decorated the poem with drawings of pansies and gave it to her friends.⁵

³ Adam Mickiewicz, Poland’s greatest poet, lived in the 19th century; Julian Tuwim, Polish and Jewish poet.

⁴ Natka Glazer, YVA, 0.3/9479.

⁵ Testimony of Dora Szternberg, YVA, 0-33/6840

We can give many more examples of the “camp’s family”, a concept that appeared after the War. Bruria Bejski, who was left alone from her entire family, was not familiar with it either. But luckily for her, Miryam, Karola and Sarka also survived:

“We were four friends. It was very important to me that we were friends, because we were really close and shared everything and took care of each other. It helped us very much.”

There is no doubt that artists of all kinds made a significant contribution to improving the general atmosphere, to mutual closeness and to moments of solidarity.

Even an unknown singer (and there were some), who wandered between the barracks and sang in a hoarse voice familiar and beloved melodies, earned the gratitude and a few cents given to him by his listeners. He not only aroused in their hearts a longing for a lost world, he also managed to arouse a little laughter.

And who did this better than Roma Nadelberg, who prepared a “musical” for her audience with hymns and recitations: “My Day in HASAG”:⁶

My Day in HASAG

1

*When dawn rises over the world
The entire HASAG camp is shrouded in fog.
The darkness is slowly dispersing
And a new grey day rises.
Noise and commotion begin
And barrack after barrack comes to life.
The wakeup call does not allow to sleep:
You must get up for work!
Why are you sitting here
And rambling nonsense??
Get off the bunk!
They are already counting outside now!
The one who is late
Harms himself more!
Quick, get in line,
Because here comes the Werkschutz!*

⁶ For the original version of the poem, see appendix.

2

*One, two, three, four, "Kapo", stand still!
One is released; do you still care?
One, two, three, four – straighten the line!
Are you late? Damn you, to the "Wache!"
You will get beaten more!
Hey-ho-hey-him!
For a walk we are going!
Because the work there is waiting
And the manager, too!
So hurry up, faster!
Hey-ho-hey-ha, will all the evil stop?
The Meister pushes, the Werkschutz hits,
And this is your destiny!!*

3

*In the "Labor" a noise is already heard, working at full steam.
The Meisterin screams again and you work like a donkey.
"Hey, work fast!" That's how she shrieks at us,
And our hands are burning, and the blood in our veins is raging!
"Look closely, pay attention, you fellow –
What you deserve, you will get from me in time!!"
Work is swallowing us up at a blistering pace!
The machines are moving and the engines are rattling.
The sweat from our foreheads drips and our hearts tremble!
"Hey, pay attention!
You're making waste, come here quickly!
In the 'Wache' they will teach you, how to work more!"*

4

*The movement of the machines continues and, like a whirlwind, runs.
Today, the quotas were increased.
So, therefore, the pace was hastened!
Suddenly, a break – the soup is brought.
Everything falls silent, the lights go out.
We immediately approach the cauldron
And our soup we take...
Look, look!
Today the cabbage is not so fat!
You eat, laugh and talk.
And why does the time slip by so quickly?*

5

*Once again, you must sit back down,
Amidst the noise and commotion,
And start to work.
The eyes are black and tired
But large.
Staring at the shells, faltering.
Pleading looks
Sent in all directions,
A miserable victim of toil and affliction!
And so, I sit for twelve long hours till the end,
Doing this exhausting work, day after day.*

6

*Bored and turned off.
To the Meisterin I turn
And to her I whisper:
Where did you leave your heart?
Why are you abusing us so much?
Finally, after the day of work,
A quiet hour has arrived, a time for rest.
On the clock, we see it's already seven,
and to the barracks we're returning.*

7

*And now, once more,
We're actually showering.
The showers are very noisy
And you are tumbled about more and more.
But how good and pleasant it is,
Under a warm showerhead to stand;
To soap yourself with the perfumed RIF;
Warming your backside, more and more!
And then rapidly,
We are running to get dressed.
But woe is me, what is this?
Someone's made away with my undies!
And you seethe with rage and helplessness.*

8

*Now you'll want to be sevenfold as pretty,
For your new "cousin"
Eagerly awaits you.
We arranged our rendezvous at the "Cyrk";
What commotion and noise are heard here!
Every corner and every isolated cell
Is filled with pairs in love.
On the bunk we also sit
And he brings latkes and poppy seed cakes.
What a waste of time, think the girls...
But why haven't they turned off the lights yet?
Let's hope they turn off the lights for a short hour,
A sweet hour, like on all nights.*

9

*And suddenly an alarm –
How marvellous!
A mess on wheels, hey-ho!
Dark, pleasant, etcetera...
You can do whatever you want!
The couples kiss,
And the firefighters show off.
What "action", how fun!
One is kissing a girl;
The second one is busy with some scheme!
And who is more of a hero here?
The alarm has been going on for three hours now...
May I call you "you" directly?
It's more comfortable, free, a real paradise!
Don't be afraid, sweetie, kiss me – it's alright!*

(Roma Nadelberg, translation from polish to Hebrew: Rut Sztern)

Mój dzień na Hasagu

Cały Hasag tonie we mgle,
Ciemność rozprasza się,
I wstaje szary dzień:
Zwolna wszczyną się gwar,
Każdy barak ożywia się,
Pobudka nie daje spać:
Trzeba do pracy wstać!!

.....

Czego ty tu siedzisz
I o głupstwach bredzisz?
Złaż-że prędeż z pryczy,
Pewno już się liczy!....

Raz, 2, 3, 4, – capo 100,
Jedna zwolniona, obchodzi cię to?
Raz, 2, 3, 4 – równo stać!
Spóźniona! na wachę!
Taka twoja mać!

Hej – ho, hej – ho,
na spacer by się szło!
Lecz praca czeka, majster też,
Więc śpiesz się, śpiesz!
Hej- ho, hej-ho, czy skończy się to zło?
Majster goni cię – Werkschutz bije cię –
Ach, co za los!

W „Laborze“ już gwarno jest,
Już praca w pełni wre,
Pracujesz jak osioł –
A majstrowa wciąż się drze!
Hej, arbeiten, prędko –
Tak krzyczy raz po raz.

Nam w rękach pali się —
A krew się burzy w nas!
“Haut hin, pass mal auf, Mensch,
Du kriegst jetzt von mir!”

Porywa nas praca w zawrotny swój wir!
Już warczą motory, maszyny w ruchu są,
Pot z nas się leje, zmęczone serca drżą:
“Hej, aufpassen, los,
Du machst Schmelz, komm mal her“
Już Wacha na cię czeka,
A tam nauczą cię!

Ruch maszyn idzie dalej,
Jak karuzela mknie,
Dziś norma (jest) zwiększona,
Więc pośpieszcie się!
Nagle przerwa, obiad już,
Gasną światła i zamiera ruch,
Wnet do kotła zbliżasz się,
Bierzesz zupę...

Dziś kapusta, niezbyt tłusta.
Jesz, rozmawiasz, śmiejesz się...
Czemu czas tak szybko mknie?
Znów trzeba sięść z powrotem,
Z hukiem i z łoskotem
Znów praca rozpoczyna się!

Oczy czarne, zmęczone, lecz ogromne
Na naboje — patrzą nieprzytomne!
I błagalne spojrzenie
Rzuca na otoczenie
Nieszczęśliwa ofiara pracy swej!

I tak siedzę 12 długich godzin,
Wykonuję tę żmudną pracę...
Zwracam się więc do majstrowej
Szepcząc tak:
Gdzie twoje serce?
Czemu męczysz nas codzień?
Gdzie twoje serce.
Już pozostał z nas cień!...

Wreszcie po dniu ciężkiej pracy
Zbliża się fajrantu czas!
Przecież już godzina 7-ma
Do baraków puszczą nas...
A teraz na nowo wykąpać się zdrowo.
W kąpieli bardzo gwaro jest,
Więc rozpychasz się na fest!
Ach jak przyjemnie
Pod ciepłym tuszem stać,
Myć się pachnącym RIFE-m
I pupę sobie grzać!

Potem w try migi –
Ty zechcesz ubrać się
Lecz ktoś ci ukradł figi –
Ze złości wściekasz się!...
Teraz na bóstwo ty zechcesz zrobić się,
Bo twój najnowszy kuzyn
Już dawno czeka cię!
Umówiłam się z nim dziś do „Cyrku“,
Jaki tu jest straszny gwar!
W separatkach i w każdym kąciuku
Pełno zakochanych par!

Myśmy także usiedli na pryczy,
On makówki i placki wziął,

Myśmy się tak cieszyli i śmiali,
Lecz czemu światło – się jeszcze pali??
Niech nawali na małą godzinkę,
Słodką godzinkę jak codzien!

Nagle – alarm, alarm, to mi raj!
Bajzel na kółkach, to mi w graj!
Ciemno, przyjemno, itd
Można robić co się chce!
Parki się całują, strażacy szwicuują,
Co za nastrój, co za ruch!

Jeden romansuje, drugi „kombinuje“,
Który z nich jest większy zuch?
Alarm trwa już godzin trzy,
Pozwól sobie mówić „ty“!
Wygodnie, swobodnie, istny raj!
Nie bój się panna, buzi daj!!

(Roma Nadelberg)

