

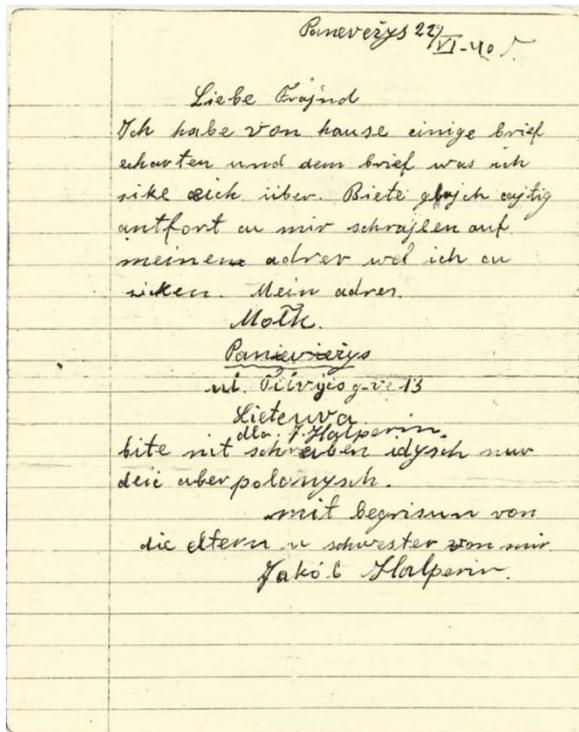


Preface

To my family and friends:

I am writing this book many years after my visit in Munich and after visiting the hospital in which I was born, while the harsh images of European Jewry and of the entire Jewish People rise once more before my eyes.

This book was written in an attempt to trace the fate of my family members, the great majority of whom perished in the Holocaust - except for my mother Miriam (*née* Halperin) and my father Majer Chaskewicz, who survived. My mother's brother, Juda-Lajb Halperin, his wife Alta and her son from her first marriage, Zvi (Hersz) Cirulnik, also survived. Zvi (Hersz) immigrated to Israel through *Aliyat Ha'Noar* [Youth Immigration], against his stepfather's wishes. Zvi fell during his military service, about which I shall subsequently write in detail.



My mother Miriam also told us occasionally about another brother of hers, whose name was Jakób Halperin - an intelligent and resourceful man, who was the hope of the family. With the onset of the War, he fled to Russia. Yet he was unable to convince anyone in his family to join him. He maintained correspondence with his family in Poland, but contact was severed with the start of the operations of annihilation and so his fate is unknown.

The letter which Jakób Halperin sent to his family from Russia [Soviet Lithuania]

What was the fate of my kinsmen and what happened to my parents during the course of the War? These questions, and many others, gnawed at my mind. But every time I tried to ask, every time I wanted to ascertain details and gather information, I came up against a fortress wall - a wall of silence. My mother chose to hold her tongue – why? To this question, too, I received no answer. I only, later, understood the meaning and the reasons for that silence, once I began to collect material for the writing of this book.



Our brethren experienced unimaginable suffering during the Second World War. They were deported, imprisoned, burnt, executed and buried alive – just for being Jewish.

At the end of the horrific years of the War, the majority of the survivors returned to the cities and towns from which they had been exiled, and to the houses in which they had lived. Their aim was to try and settle there once again, but their hopes were dashed. They discovered that they were no longer welcome - their house had been looted, their possessions had been stolen and they were, once more, subjected to threats and acts of violence. This humiliating and aggressive attitude towards them added to their suffering and pain.

Not only had they survived six years of suffering and torture, they also did not have where to return to, and they were forced to wander, to find themselves a place and a home, to see to their future, to rehabilitate their lives and to locate relatives and family members who had survived.

To build a new life – that was the mission of the survivors. They picked up the broken pieces, while repressing the harsh memories and dark secrets, and gazed forward in the hope of a better future - a future of revival.

And they did this silently and said nothing. The oppression, the despair, the suffering, the destruction and the killing during the years of the War, and after it also, were so unreal, so inhumane and so inconceivable, that our parents and friends, who survived the Holocaust, chose silence.

Rabbi Israel [Meir] Lau, a Holocaust survivor who later [1993-2003] was to become the [Ashkenazi] Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel, explains the meaning of this silence in his book *Do Not Raise a Hand Against the Boy*, “The memories of those dark days were so difficult [to bear], that they became introspected, keeping their pain and their grim secret inside their hearts”.

In the first years following the War, they did talk, but only between themselves and with other Holocaust survivors who arrived from their locality and from nearby towns. They asked many questions in a bid to locate missing relatives or to at least receive some scrap of information about them, about the course of their wanderings - but no reply was given. Each one withdrew into his own sorrow and enveloped himself in his mourning and suffering.

Powerless, they pronounced silence upon themselves. They would tell nothing of the horrific years - certainly not to their friends from Israel who had taken them in and, in particular, not to their sons, the second generation.

Their suffering became exclusively their own. The writer Aharon Appelfeld put this very well, "Silence is the language of the Holocaust survivors". Silence is the language they adopted over the course of the years and we, the second generation from the Holocaust and those who came after us, have been unable to crack it open.

This book was, therefore, born from an attempt to comprehend and to decipher the language of my family, and it was written with the feeling that it is our obligation to recruit all the means and resources available to us, and to try and trace the past of our dear ones – those who perished and those who survived - despite the silence that they pronounced upon themselves.

