



The Beginnings of the Quest: Munich and the Hospital in Which I was Born

On 26th December 1986, my wife Zahava and I, together with our friends Harel, Chana and Benny, landed in the Munich airport in the early hours of the morning. The plane parked at the end of the runway, far from the terminal. At once, we experienced the special attitude towards the flight that had arrived from Israel - the bus which took us to the terminal was escorted by an armoured vehicle, in which there were a considerable number of armed German soldiers.

The entire way, from the border control checkpoint, to retrieving our luggage and then going out into the city, we were under the escort of local soldiers and policemen. (Note: In that period of the '70's and '80's, due to the acts of terror perpetrated against Israeli and Jewish targets across Europe, the German authorities increased their alertness and took pains to protect El-Al flights and the passengers arriving from Israel and returning there.) After passing through the Border Police's checkpoint and retrieving our luggage, we went out to the Avis company's offices to receive the vehicle we had rented for the ten-day holiday.

We began driving around the city of Munich, trying to locate the hospital in which I was born. This was a special request of my mother Miriam. She had been adamant, "You *must* visit the hospital. Call me when you arrive there".



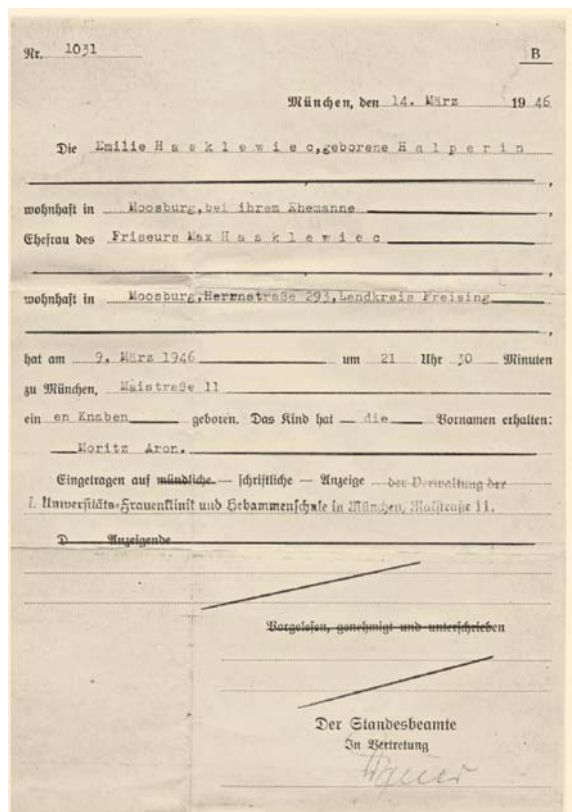
The façade of the hospital in Munich where I was born

After a trip which took about two hours, we stood at the hospital's threshold. We were impressed that the building had withstood the War and was perfectly preserved. It had not been damaged by the Allied bombers.

The neighbourhood surrounding the hospital had been rebuilt and the hospital had remained imprisoned in a row of long buildings, one adjacent to the other - an incredibly clean, residential neighbourhood.

I called my mother from the phone box next to the hospital and told her that I had found the place: Maistraße 11.

“That’s correct”, she agreed, adding, “Please go into the hospital, because you are the first Jewish child born in Munich after the War. I beg you to do it”. Seeing as how I doubted this claim, I found no reason to fulfil her request and we left the spot.



Nr. 1071 B
München, den 14. März 1946

Die Emilie Hasklewicz, geborene Halperin
wohnt in Moosburg, bei ihrem Ahnemann
Ehefrau des Friseur Max Hasklewicz
wohnt in Moosburg, Hermitenstraße 293, Landkreis Kreising
hat am 9. März 1946 um 21 Uhr 30 Minuten
zu München, Maistraße 11
ein en Knaben geboren. Das Kind hat die Vornamen erhalten:
Moritz Aron.
Eingetragen auf mündliche — Schriftliche — Anzeige — der Verwaltung der
I. Universitäts-Frauenklinik und Hebammen Schule in München, Hofstraße 11.
D. Anzeigende
Bergelstein, genehmigt und unterschrieben
Der Standesbeamte
In Vertretung
Hiller

Certificate of release from the hospital



Geburtsurkunde E 1
(Standesamt München III Nr. 1071-46)
Moritz Aron Hasklewicz
ist am 9. März 1946
in München, Maistraße 11 geboren.
Vater: Max Hasklewicz, Friseur
Mutter: Emilie, geborene Halperin
Änderungen der Eintragung:
München, den 2. Mai 1946
Der Standesbeamte
in Vertretung:
Hiller
S. 46 1900 H. Vornachler.

My birth certificate

I’ve chosen to begin my story with this trip to Munich and the visit to the hospital in which I was born, knowing that, in the future, I would engage in researching my extended family and I would attempt to trace its bitter fate. But I did not imagine, at the time, that after twenty-five years, I would decide that the time had come to do so.

I did not imagine that this visit to Munich would be the first step in a long, tortuous and shocking quest across Poland - in the camps, the towns, the extermination facilities, the mass graves, the forests and the roads - and all this is a bid to overcome the behaviour of my mother and the majority of Holocaust survivors who opted for silence, and to attempt to complete, to some extent, the information I desired so much to obtain.

The journey to Poland and the meetings with Holocaust survivors, which took place decades later, completed the picture to a certain degree.

• • •

True to her silence, my mother never told me or my brother Natan (who is my junior by five years) what happened to her over the course of the wretched War. She only saw it fit to tell of three [?] events - one, regarding my birth about ten months after the end of the Second World War. "You are the first Jewish child born in Munich after the War", she would repeat to me and she would go on to tell me how much she had suffered during the pregnancy and of her wariness of the German doctors.

My special status as "the first Jewish child born in Munich" accompanied me for many years. My mother never stopped reminding me of it. And I still continue to ask - how did she come to this conclusion?

In addition, my mother occasionally recounted that she had been married before the War and she mentioned her little daughter, who was always with her from the day the War began. My mother, under a false identity, fled with her little daughter from the murderers. She passed herself off as a Polish woman and was in constant fear of being caught and identified as a Jew. She was afraid Polish peasants would turn her in and she feared she might meet one of her acquaintances from the past, who would call her by her real name - as indeed happened to her once on a railway journey. She recognised a Polish acquaintance, who had been her classmate, and she gestured to him in sign language not to approach her, whereupon he acquiesced to her entreaties and ignored her.

In the course of her flight, her daughter died. My mother Miriam would not tell us about the circumstances of her death - where it had happened, when and how. Had she died of exhaustion, or due to an illness, or had she perhaps been murdered by German soldiers who were pursuing my mother, who immediately after catching her killed the infant?

It was those bloodthirsty troops, who mercilessly murdered one and a half million defenceless children and another four and a half million adults, who took the life of the helpless baby girl. That was the conclusion that I reached, but my mother refused to discuss it. She would only repeat that she had hidden in woods and on farms – and, with that, our conversation would end. We did not know who her first husband had been, what her surname was [at the time] and in what [line of work] her spouse had been engaged.

My mother Miriam, however, did speak extensively about her parents' home in the town of Lututów, before the outbreak of the War. More than once she talked about her family's life. She was proud of her parents and her ten brothers, and she described her father's revered status, both among the town's Jews and also among the Polish neighbours, who came to him from time to time to seek his counsel and to receive monetary or other aid.

My mother was extremely proud of her activity in the Youth Movement and in her volunteering to raise money for the Zionist Movement. She would also add, with a smile, how she had managed to persuade the town priest to give a donation.

Apart from this, we know nothing. No testimony has remained, oral or written, regarding the experiences of my mother and the rest of her family who did not survive the inferno.

This being the case, all that we - the second generation from the Holocaust - could do was to recruit all the means at our disposal and approach anyone who could assist us. We located friends who told us about our parents. We collected data and documents [and] we spoke with survivors who agreed - after much vacillation - to open the vaults of their hearts, having promised them that we would serve as their mouthpiece and that we would pass on the scant information to the children, grandchildren and descendants, so that they, too, would know, if only a little, of what they and their relatives went through during the days of the Holocaust.

We wished to contact many more, but it was a difficult mission. Some were unwell [and] others had passed away. Thanks to the few who agreed to meet, and with the aid of documents which came into our hands, we have been able to link detail to detail and glean a picture – albeit an incomplete one – of the fate of my relatives.

