

Hela Wajnrach

## Hiding Inside a Machine

In their desperate efforts to save themselves from the claws of death, people sought any sign of a foothold, any breach, any crack though which they could squeeze, in order to conceal themselves until wrath had passed and so that they could remain among the living.

What hiding places were not taken advantage of to conceal the body, what stratagems were not plotted and what inventions were not designed to this aim?

Cellars, bunkers, house pets' kennels, furniture and more and more - even in sacks hanging on the wall. And, on this topic, the well-known pedagogue Mrs Wajnrach, who even in these inhuman circumstances was engaged in teaching children, related an extraordinary incident:

As usual, we were toiling strenuously in "HASAG," cleaning the large machines in the infantry department, whose function was the production of ammunition. The machines had not yet been activated for full production, but we were put to work at an early stage, to sap every drop of life from our bodies and our marrow. Days and nights, we laboured, battered and exhausted, as our lines consistently diminished, both as a result of "natural" dwindling - when people died - and through the murders perpetrated by the Germans at all kinds of different "opportunities." Every German saw himself as master over our lives and as being entitled to do with us anything he wished. This was so in regards to all Jewish men and women, and with children even more so - they were treated absolutely mercilessly. As a result, hardly any children remained with us, barring just a few. One of them was Łucja, my sister's daughter.

### Among the Electrical Wires

All the worker-slaves at the munitions factory lived in one great hall and my niece's existence was only semi-overt. On the one hand, the Germans seemed to pay no heed to her presence - although some precautions were taken in the form of disguising her to look older (a long raincoat, overgrown hair, etc.) - but on the other hand, her life was in real danger every time they went out to seek victims from among the children. And here, one day, the rumour spread in a flash that the *Kommando* had gone out to hunt souls.

Łucja's parents - my sister and her husband - were so distraught, that they were rendered powerless and the principal burden of rescuing the child fell upon my own shoulders. My brain worked at a feverish pace to come up with a plan, because the time I had at my disposal was measured out [to me] with *Scales of Destiny*, on which were balanced Life and Death. At a certain point, my gaze fell on a compartment at the bottom of the machine on which I was working. This compartment was "quite large" and had the advantage of being almost empty, as the electrical wires passing through it only took up a small part of its volume. Without waiting too much, we crammed Łucja into this compartment, in which she remained curled up until the evening hours, when it was apparent the turbid wave had passed.

And another very tragic episode, which has remained etched into Mrs Wajnrajch's memory, brings her, even today - thirty years later (!) - to tears. This was when the Germans were driving freight vans full of children and the convoy happened to stop next to her. The children did not know exactly what was going to happen to them, but their hearts forebode evil. Seeing their teacher, whom they admired and looked up to as the highest authority "who knows everything", they turned to her, crying for help and advice. She was powerless, paralysed, and could not even bat an eyelid, as she accompanied them, with an aching heart and a broken spirit, on their last journey.