

# Re-Imagining the Holocaust in Biography, Autobiography and Comics: Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

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Literature always intervenes. That is to say that literature (more generally, all kinds of stories, poems, paintings, photography, cinema and art) always speaks to that which *has* to be said, to what *is not said*, to what most of us would like to ignore, forget, bury and put away. It also speaks *for* us and *to us* of experiences, issues, desires and pains which we (most of us at any rate) are incapable of speaking.

So how does one *intervene* on the Holocaust—perhaps the best-documented tragedy of the twentieth century. How does an artist “see anew,” that which has been seen again and again and again. The graphic arts provide one answer as with the illustration here on your right, an homage to Nazi-Antagonist/Photographer/Montage Artist John Heartfield that appeared in an issue of *The New Yorker* back in the 1990s.



But what if you want to *combine* the immediacy of the visual arts with the lingering, refractive magic of the written word? Then you get something like the chapter I am asking you to read, “The Noose Tightens,” Chapter four from Art Spiegelman’s Pulitzer Prize winning opus *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History*. *Maus* is striking because of the way it re-imagines the violent history of Jews in Europe in the twentieth century, but it is also important because of the way it rethinks the whole category of the “comic book,” redefining and expanding the category of Literature in the process.

Literature has never been the same since the advent of photography, motion pictures and television. And this not a bad or a good thing.<sup>1</sup> It just is. And as students of literature in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we ought to be prepared to speak to the complexities of literary projects which are no longer strictly literary. *Maus* is just such a project—a magical and disturbing fusion of fine art and the written word, of semiotics and semantics.

As you read, ask yourself the following questions: Is *Maus* a novel? Is it a biography of Vladek Spiegelman or an autobiography of Art Spiegelman, the author/illustrator? Is *Maus* fiction or is it

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<sup>1</sup>Too many of us are content to assign our experience to boxes labeled “good” and “bad” and never really test our ability to think.

history--or, rather, is it one of those rare textual artifacts which calls into question categories like fiction and history? Art Spiegelman's *Maus* will test your ability to read. It will tax your skills as a reader of novels, as a student of art, as a screener of cinema, and as a person living through a rich, fractious, and unpredictable moment of United States history.

*If you like Maus and want to know more, here is a mini-guide with useful information:*

Spiegelman, Art.

*Maus : a survivor's tale*; New York : Pantheon Books, 1986; 159 p. : ill. ; 23 cm.

"Happy, Happy, Ever After": The Transformation of Trauma between the Generations in Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*

Elmwood, Victoria A.

*Biography*, Volume 27, Number 4, Fall 2004, pp. 691-720 (Article)

Abstract: This essay considers *Maus* as a work that spans the genres of autobiography and collaborative biography. In analyzing the ways that Spiegelman struggles to narrate an identity within a family for whose founding trauma he was absent, the essay also investigates the ways that he seeks to intervene in public debates on visual art of the Holocaust.

No Time Like the Present: Narrative and Time in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

McGlothlin, Erin Heather.

*Narrative*, Volume 11, Number 2, May 2003, pp. 177-198 (Article)

Abstract: *Maus*'s use of visual images.

Memory as Forgetting: The Problem of the Postmodern in Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* and Spiegelman's *Maus*

Berlatsky, Eric.

*Cultural Critique*, 55, Fall 2003, pp. 101-151 (Article)

abstract: How Spiegelman's *Maus* stage the problem of the postmodern.

The Religious Meaning of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

Tabachnick, Stephen Ely.

*Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Volume 22, Number 4, Summer 2004, pp. 1-13 (Article)

Abstract: Via his father's testimony, Art Spiegelman in *Maus* seems to demonstrate that there is divine intervention in human affairs. Vladek's predictive dream about Parshas Truma (Exod. 25-27), as well as the prediction of the Polish priest at Auschwitz and the Gypsy fortune-teller's prognostication to Anja, point to the presence of a divine hand in Vladek's and Anja's survival.

Necessary Stains: Spiegelman's *Maus* and the Bleeding of History

Levine, Michael G.

*American Imago*, Volume 59, Number 3, Fall 2002, pp. 317-341 (Article)

Abstract: "In making MAUS, I found myself drawing every panel, every..."

Forced Confessions: The Case of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*

Budick, E. Miller.

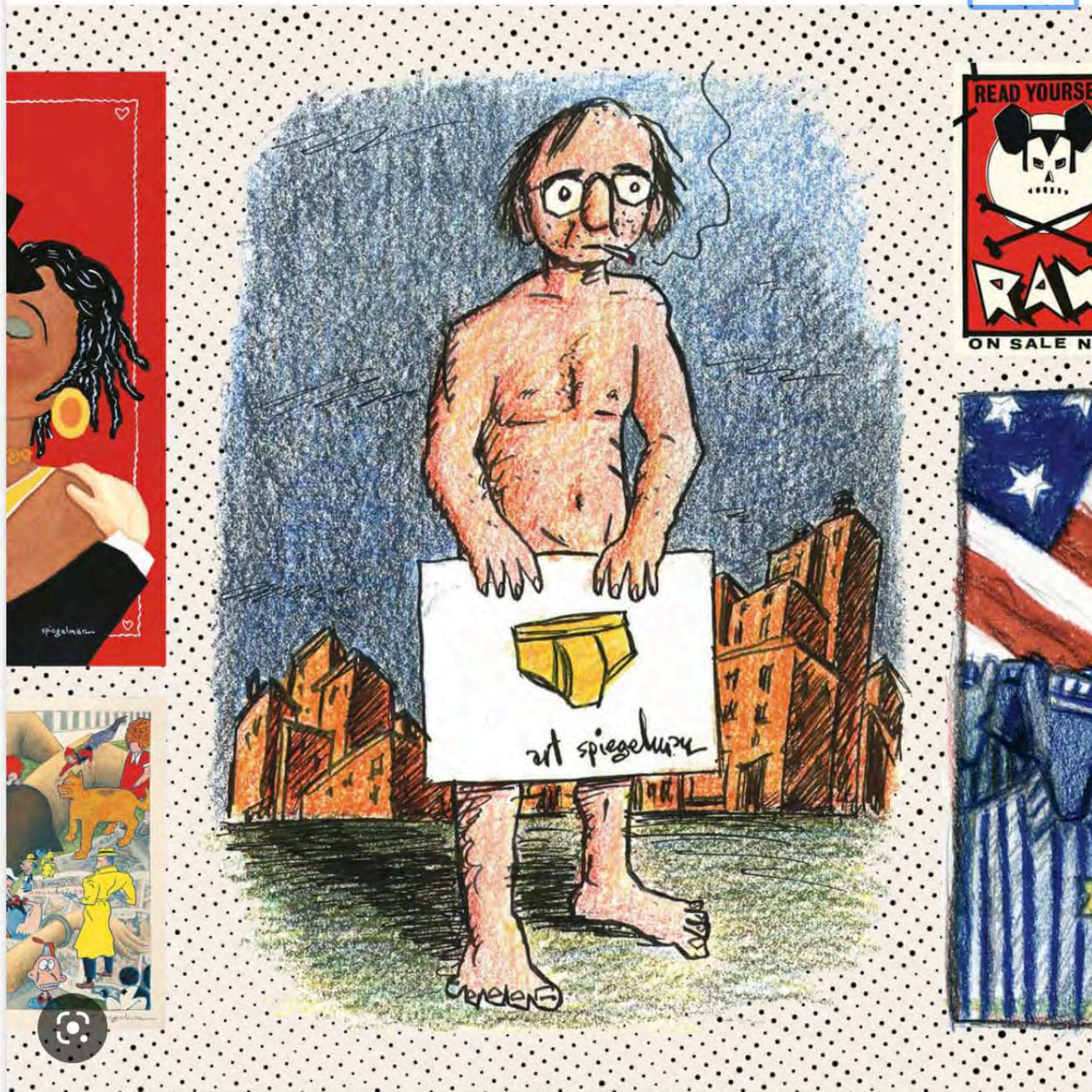
*Prooftexts*, Volume 21, Number 3, Fall 2001, pp. 379-398 (Article)

Abstract: We aren't even past the first chapter of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* when the father exacts a promise from the son that the son will violate over and over again in the writing of his text. Certain "private things, I don't want you should mention," Vladek admonishes his son. What justifies the telling of other people's private lives, especially over their own objections, even when the goal of the text seems (as in the case of *Maus*) to be something as commendable as informing the public of an event like the Holocaust?





The Guardian



Graphic artist Art Spiegelman on Maus, politics and 'drawing badly' | Art Spiegelman | The Guardian

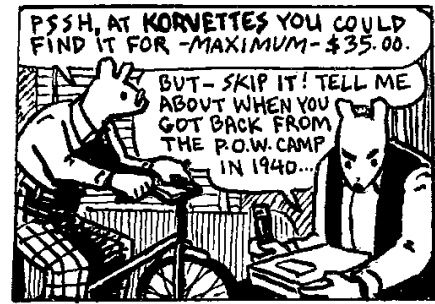
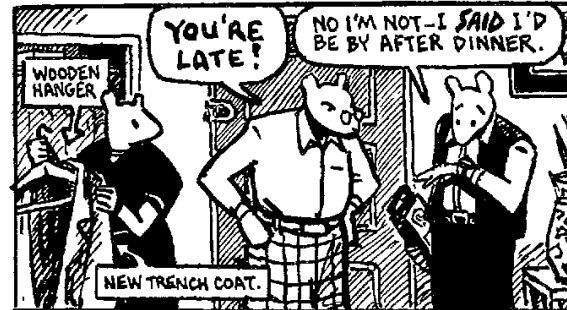
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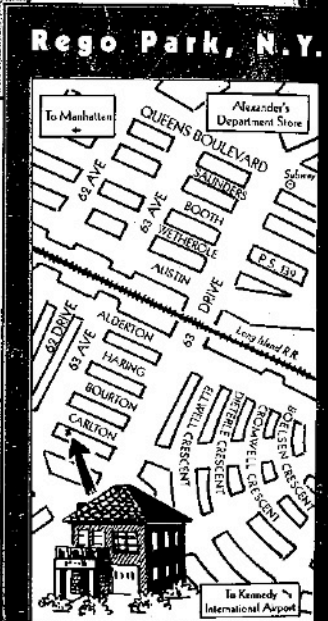
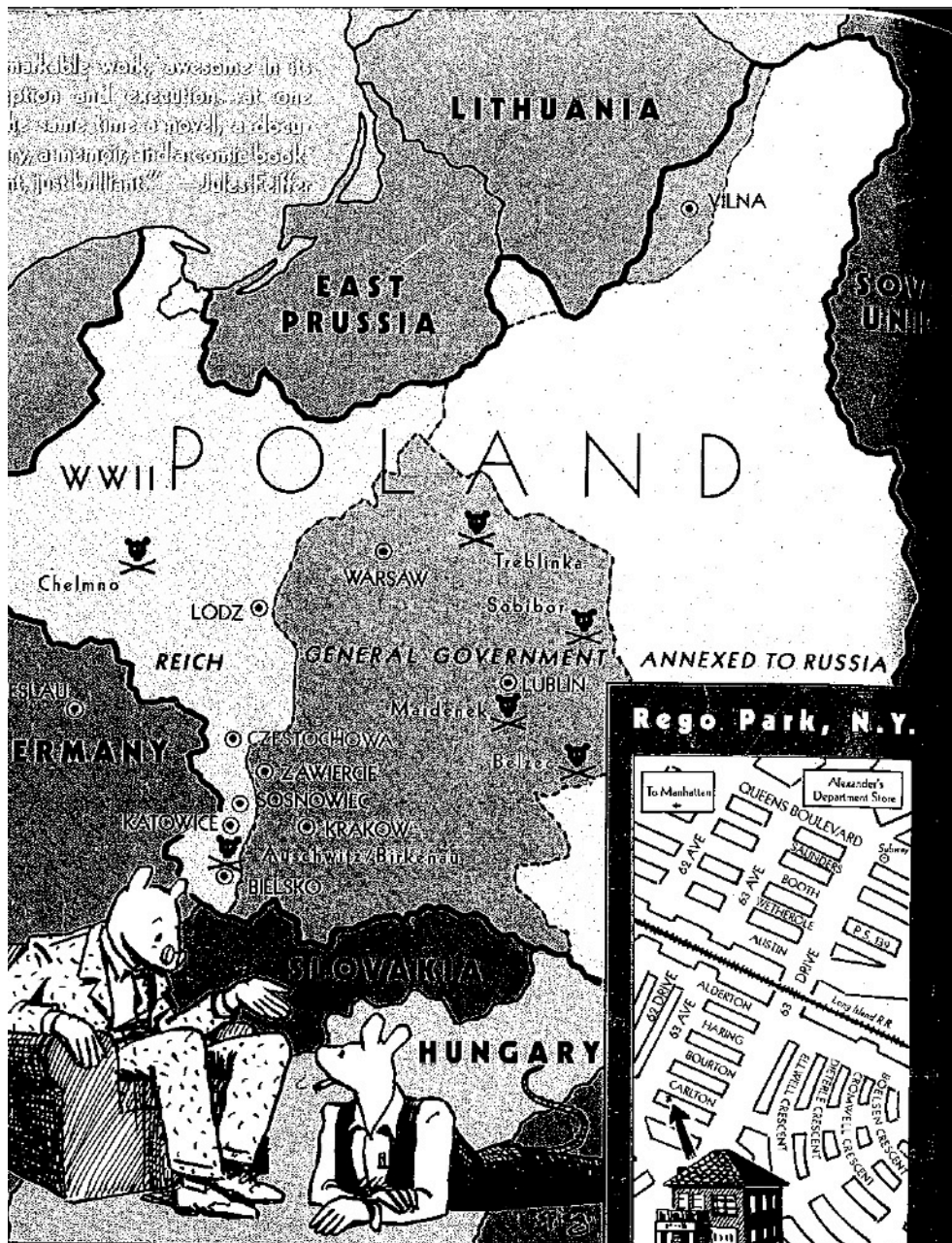








...walkable world, awesome in its  
 option and execution, at one  
 the same time a novel, a clear  
 by, a monument, and a comic book  
 at just brilliant." —Julius Koffler



...pic story told in tiny pictures." —New York Times

...et triumph, moving and simple—impossible to describe accurately, and impossible to achieve in any  
 ...m but comics." —Washington Post

...aus is a powerful memoir about Vladek Spiegelman, a Jewish survivor of Hitler's Europe, and about  
 ..., a cartoonist who tries to come to terms with his father, his story, and History. Moving from the gates  
 schwitz to the sidewalks of Queens, this is the ultimate survivor's tale—and that, too, of the children  
 somehow survive even the survivors. The Jews are portrayed as mice, the Nazis as cats, but put aside

# MAUS



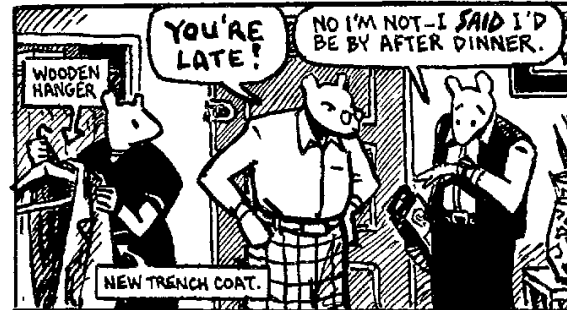
## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE NOOSE TIGHTENS



A SURVIVOR'S TALE





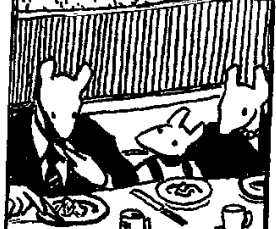




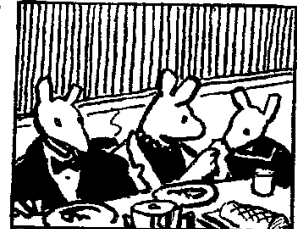
WHEN FIRST I CAME HOME IT LOOKED EXACTLY SO AS BEFORE I WENT AWAY!!!

IT WAS STILL VERY LUXURIOUS. THE GERMANS COULDN'T DESTROY EVERYTHING AT ONE TIME.

IT WAS TWELVE OF US LIVING IN FATHER-IN-LAW'S HOUSEHOLD...



IT WAS ANJA AND ME, AND OUR BOY, RICHIEV...



ANJA'S OLDER SISTER, TOSHA, HER HUSBAND, WOLFE, AND THEIR LITTLE GIRL, BIBI...



AND IT WAS ANJA'S GRANDPARENTS. THEY HAD MAYBE 90 YEARS, BUT VERY ALERT...



AND, OF COURSE, IT WAS MY FATHER-IN-LAW AND MY MOTHER-IN-LAW...



AND ALSO THE 2 KIDS FROM YOUR UNCLE HERMAN AND AUNT HELEN: LOLEK AND LONIA



HERMAN AND HELA WERE LUCKY. THEY WERE VISITING THE N.Y. WORLD'S FAIR WHEN THE WAR CAME. THIS SAVED THEM.



AH, GRANDMOTHER - YOUR STEW IS EVEN TASTIER THAN I REMEMBERED.

NO - IT'S NOT LIKE BEFORE THE WAR, VLADEK - I CAN'T GET THE FOODS I NEED.

EACH OF US GETS COUPONS FOR 8 OUNCES OF BREAD A DAY, AND A TINY BIT OF MARGARINE, SUGAR AND JAM PER WEEK. THAT'S ALL!

SO HOW DO WE MANAGE?



I'VE DONATED A LOT TO THE GEMEINDE - THE JEWISH COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION - AND WOLFE WORKS THERE... SO WE GET A LITTLE EXTRA.



AND THERE'S THE BLACK MARKET. WITH MONEY YOU CAN ALWAYS GET ANYTHING!



IT'S DANGEROUS, THOUGH. THE NAZIS TAKE YOU OFF TO A WORK CAMP FOR BREAKING ANY MINOR LAW.

WORSE - EVEN IF YOU DON'T BREAK ANY LAWS!

... AND THOSE THAT ARE TAKEN AWAY - THEY'RE NEVER SEEN AGAIN!



WELL, WE SHOULD BE HAPPY WE'RE ALL TOGETHER WITH ENOUGH TO EAT.

BUT WE MUST REALLY TIGHTEN OUR BELTS UNTIL THE WAR ENDS.

COME - LET'S PLAY RUMMY WHILE THE LADIES CLEAR THE TABLE.



HAS THE FAMILY BEEN TAKING GOOD CARE OF MY BIELSKO TEXTILE FACTORY?

DON'T YOU KNOW? ALL JEWISH BUSINESSES HAVE BEEN TAKEN OVER BY "ARYAN MANAGERS"...



I WENT TO OUR FACTORY IN LODZ, AND THEY SAID, "BETTER GO HOME TODAY, OLD MAN...TOMORROW WE'LL CARRY YOU OUT."

WHAT?



BUT ISN'T ANY MONEY COMING IN?

NOT A SINGLE ZLOTY. AND THE FAMILY WANTS TO LIVE THE WAY IT DID BEFORE THE WAR!



OKAY, VLADEK - CUT THE CARDS.

BUT, WOLFE - WHAT KIND OF WORK ARE YOU DOING?



JUST A LITTLE OFFICE WORK FOR THE GEMEINDE ... BUT A FEW MONTHS AGO FATHER-IN-LAW TOOK ALL HIS VALUABLES HOME FROM THE BANK SAFE.

HOW LONG CAN SAVINGS LAST?



DON'T WORRY SO MUCH, VLADEK. YOU'LL SEE ... THE WAR WILL BE OVER LIKE LIGHTNING!

JA! LIKE LIGHTNING!

ACH!

WOLFE LOOKED ONLY TO PLAY CARDS.

I WENT THE NEXT DAY TO MODRZEJOWSKA STREET. HERE PEOPLE STILL MADE MONEY, FROM SECRET BUSINESSES...NOT SO LEGAL...



(PSS - FOOD COUPONS FOR REICHSMARKS?)

VLADEK SPIEGELMAN!

MR. ILZECKI! WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN SOSNOWIEC?

ILZECKI USED TO BE A CUSTOMER OF MINE - THE BEST TAILOR IN KATOWICE.



THE NAZIS MOVED ME TO AN APARTMENT HERE. I MAKE UNIFORMS FOR THEIR OFFICERS... AND SUITS ON THE SIDE WHEN I CAN GET THE CLOTH.

ARE YOU STILL IN BUSINESS?



I DON'T KNOW. I JUST GOT BACK FROM WAR PRISON.

WELL, IF YOU GET ANY CLOTH, COME SEE ME. THIS NOTE WILL GET YOU PAST THE DOORMAN.

THE NOTE TOLD THAT I WORKED WITH HIM. SUCH A PAPER COULD BE USEFUL TO HAVE.

I WENT THEN TO SHOPS WHAT STILL OWED ME MONEY FROM BEFORE THE WAR...



BUT I CAN'T PAY YOU! A GERMAN RUNS MY PLACE NOW. I'M LUCKY JUST TO HAVE A JOB!



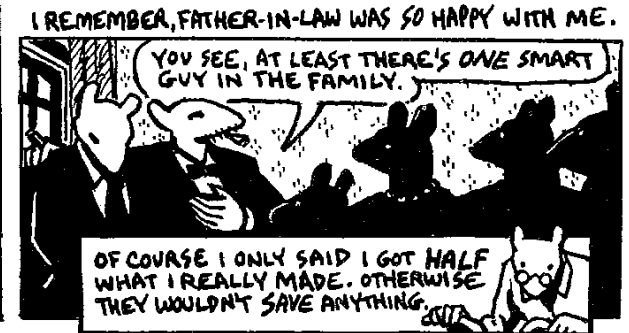
THEN ADVANCE ME A FEW YARDS OF MATERIAL WITHOUT COUPONS.

OKAY, OKAY. HIDE THIS UNDER YOUR CLOTHES.



MR. ILZECKI, PLEASE.

SO I MADE A NICE FEW ZLOTYS THE VERY FIRST WEEK I CAME HOME.

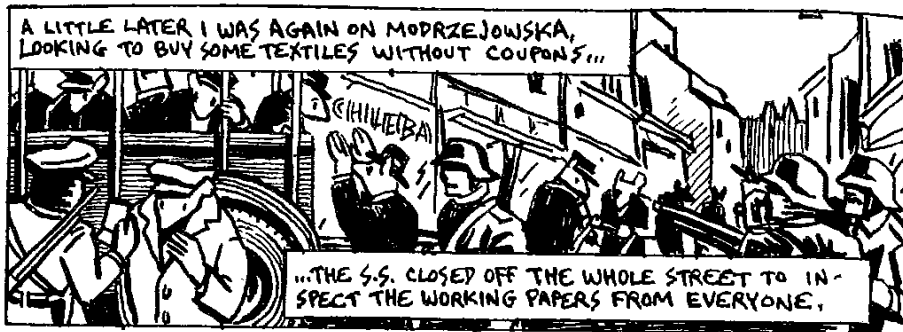


I REMEMBER, FATHER-IN-LAW WAS SO HAPPY WITH ME.

YOU SEE, AT LEAST THERE'S ONE SMART GUY IN THE FAMILY.

OF COURSE I ONLY SAID I GOT HALF WHAT I REALLY MADE. OTHERWISE THEY WOULDN'T SAVE ANYTHING.





A LITTLE LATER I WAS AGAIN ON MODRZEJOWSKA, LOOKING TO BUY SOME TEXTILES WITHOUT COUPONS...

...THE S.S. CLOSED OFF THE WHOLE STREET TO INSPECT THE WORKING PAPERS FROM EVERYONE,

I DIDN'T KNOW BEFORE ABOUT THIS.



I MANAGED TO DISAPPEAR INTO A BUILDING.



BUT THEY TOOK MAYBE 50% OF THE PEOPLE AWAY.



I TALKED ABOUT IT TO FATHER-IN-LAW...

THEY ALMOST GOT ME! I'LL NEED MORE THAN JUST ILZECKI'S NOTE!



IT'S TRUE.

COME... WE'LL VISIT A FRIEND OF MINE WHO OWNS A TIN SHOP. I THINK HIS OVERSEER CAN BE BRIBED.



AND SO IT WENT... OKAY, VLADEK...

SINCE WE MAKE THINGS FOR GERMANY WE CAN GET YOU A PRIORITY WORK CARD.

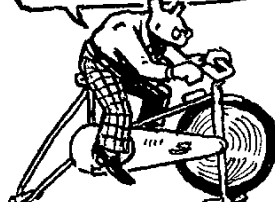


REMEMBER, IF THERE'S A ROUND-UP, RUN IN HERE AND PRETEND YOU'RE WORKING.



I LEARNED HERE TO DO THINGS WHAT WERE USEFUL TO ME WHEN I CAME TO AUSCHWITZ.

AND SO WE LIVED FOR MORE THAN A YEAR. BUT ALWAYS THINGS CAME A LITTLE WORSE, A LITTLE WORSE...



FATHER-IN-LAW HAD A NICE NEW BEDROOM SET...



THE GERMANS LOOKED TO GRAB SUCH FURNITURE, BECAUSE IN STORES IT WASN'T ANYMORE TO GET.

WOLFE AND I SLEPPED EVERYTHING VALUABLE DOWNSTAIRS FOR A POLISH NEIGHBOR TO HIDE.

ANJA'S MOTHER HAD GALLSTONES. THE DAY THE GERMANS CAME SHE LAY IN THE BED.

OOH ARE WE LEAVING THE OTHER BED UPSTAIRS?

JA. MOTHER-IN-LAW IS TOO SICK. SHE NEEDS A GOOD BED.



PLEASE DON'T TAKE HER BED-LOOK AT HOW SICK SHE IS.

THE DOCTOR IS HERE EVERY DAY.



FATHER-IN-LAW HAD AN OLD FRIEND WHO CAME ALWAYS OVER TO PLAY CARDS.

HIDDEN, WE HAD NO USE FROM THE FURNITURE, SO WE SLEPPED IT AGAIN UPSTAIRS TO SELL.

...AND THEY LEFT WITHOUT TAKING ANYTHING!

YOU KNOW, I MET A GERMAN OFFICIAL WHO WOULD PAY WELL FOR A BEDROOM SET...



YOU HAVE EXCELLENT TASTE IN FURNITURE, HERR ZYLBERBERG. THANK YOU.



MY MEN WILL BE RIGHT BACK TO GET YOUR WIFE'S BED TOO!..



YOU CHEATED US LAST TIME, JEW! WAIT! I HAVEN'T BEEN PAID, YET.



HE WAS SO UNHAPPY AFTER. SO UNHAPPY!



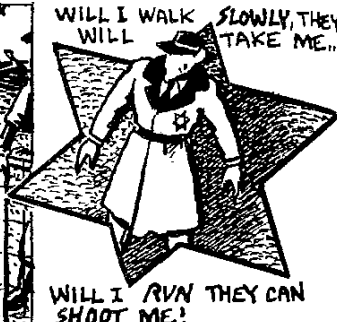
ONE TIME I WAS GOING TO SEE ILZECKI. THIS WAS LATE IN 1941, I THINK. HIS HOUSE WAS VERY NEAR TO A TRAIN STATION...

... AND IT WAS GOING ON THERE SOMETHING TERRIBLE.



I HAD TO PASS NEAR—AND THEY WERE GRAB-BING JEWS, IF THEY HAD PAPERS OR NO!

WHAT HAD I TO DO?



WILL I WALK SLOWLY, THEY WILL TAKE ME...

WILL I RUN THEY CAN SHOOT ME!

THEN FROM FAR, I SAW ILZECKI WALKING, SO I WENT HASTY OVER TO HIM.



ALLO! MR. SPIEGELMAN! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? DON'T YOU SEE WHAT'S GOING ON?



QUICK—COME UPSTAIRS WITH ME UNTIL THE TRAINS LEAVE!

ILZECKI LIVED IN A VERY FANCY HOUSE. HE WAS THE ONLY JEW THERE.



SO I SAT WITH HIM AND HIS WIFE A GOOD FEW HOURS. WE HEARD SHOOTING AND SCREAMS.

HE SURVIVED ME MY LIFE THAT TIME.

ILZECKI HAD A SON THE SAME AGE LIKE RICHIEU. IF YOU ONLY COULD SEE HOW THOSE CHILDREN PLAYED TOGETHER.



LISTEN, VLADK-



I HAVE A GOOD FRIEND, A POLE, WHO'S WILLING TO HIDE MY SON UNTIL THE SITUATION GETS BETTER.

WE CAN'T KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN TO US— BUT WE MUST KEEP OUR CHILDREN SAFE.



... I THINK HE'D TAKE YOUR BOY TOO. YES, YOU MAY BE RIGHT, LET ME SPEAK WITH MY FAMILY.

BUT, I'M TELLING YOU, IT WAS SOMETHING TERRIBLE GOING ON IN OUR HOUSE WHEN I EVEN MENTIONED IT.



WHAT? HAVE YOU GONE CRAZY?

HOW CAN YOU EVEN THINK OF GIVING RICHIEU UP TO COMPLETE STRANGERS?!

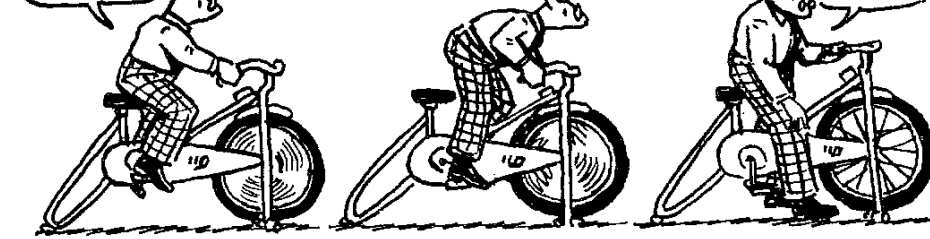


I'LL NEVER GIVE UP MY BABY. NEVER!

ILZECKI AND HIS WIFE DIDN'T COME OUT FROM THE WAR.

... BUT HIS SON REMAINED ALIVE; OURS DID NOT.

... AND ANYWAY WE HAD TO GIVE RICHIEU TO HIDE A YEAR LATER.







SO... OKAY. I'LL MAKE IT SO HOW YOU WANT IT. 1941?... AT THE END OF 1941 THE GERMANS CAME WITH SOMETHING NEW. WOLFE RAN FROM THE GEMEINDER...



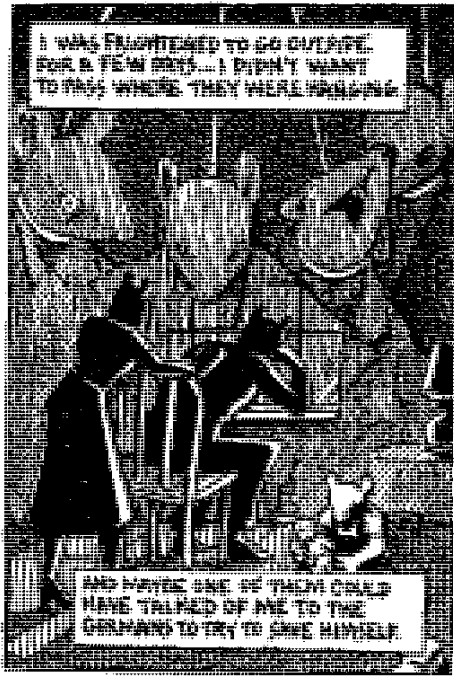
ALL 12 OF OUR HOUSEHOLD WERE GIVEN NOW TO LIVE IN 2 1/2 SMALL ROOMS...



TOSHA INSISTED ON GETTING THE PART OF THE ROOM WITH THE WINDOW. IT DOESN'T MATTER, VLADEK. I'M JUST GLAD THE WHOLE FAMILY CAN STAY TOGETHER. IT WAS NO MORE THE LUXURY LIFE WE HAD BEFORE.

FOR A COUPLE MONTHS I DID HERE STILL MY BLACK MARKET BUSINESS. THEN CAME MORE BAD NEWS, VERY BAD...



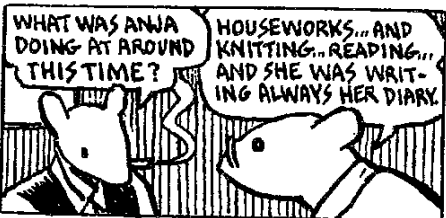


I WAS FRIGHTENED TO GO OUTSIDE FOR A FEW DAYS... I DIDN'T WANT TO FIND WHERE THEY WERE HOLDING...

AND MAYBE ONE OF THEM COULD HAVE TALKED OF ME TO THE GERMANS TO TRY TO SAVE HIMSELF.



ACH. WHEN I THINK NOW OF THEM, IT STILL MAKES ME CRY... LOOK-EVEN FROM MY DEAD EYE TEARS ARE COMING OUT!



WHAT WAS ANWA DOING AT AROUND THIS TIME?

HOUSEWORKS... AND KNITTING... READING... AND SHE WAS WRITING ALWAYS HER DIARY.



I USED TO SEE POLISH NOTEBOOKS AROUND THE HOUSE AS A KID. WERE THOSE HER DIARIES?

YES, AND ALSO NO.



HER DIARIES DIDN'T SURVIVE FROM THE WAR. WHAT YOU SAW SHE WROTE AFTER: HER WHOLE STORY FROM THE START.

OHMIGOD! WHERE ARE THEY? I NEED THOSE FOR THIS BOOK!

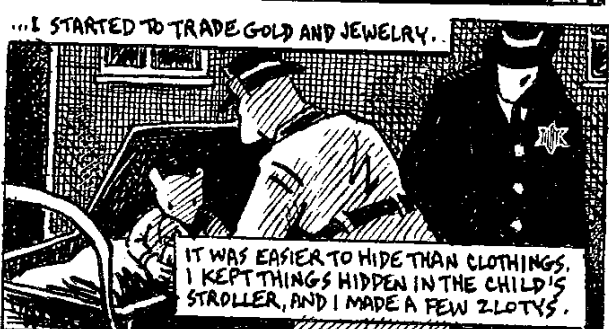


COFF! PLEASE, ARTIE, STOP WITH THE SMOKING. IT MAKES ME SHORT WITH BREATH.

I THINK IT'S ALL YOUR PEDALING!



DON'T BE SO SMART! ...WHAT I WAS TELLING YOU? YES... AFTER THE HANGING I LOOKED FOR ANOTHER BUSINESS...



...I STARTED TO TRADE GOLD AND JEWELRY.

IT WAS EASIER TO HIDE THAN CLOTHINGS. I KEPT THINGS HIDDEN IN THE CHILD'S STROLLER, AND I MADE A FEW ZLOTYS.



FOR A WHILE I HAD ALSO A FOOD BUSINESS THAT I DIDN'T YET TELL YOU...



I MET SZKLARCZYK. HE HAD A BIG GROCERY ON MOPRZEJOWSKA...

YOU'RE ZYLBERBERG'S SON-IN-LAW, RIGHT? COME INSIDE AND WAIT FOR THE RAIN TO STOP

SO, TOGETHER WE SAT AND SPOKE, AND HE HELPED FROM TIME TO TIME, A CUSTOMER...



SORRY - YOU DON'T HAVE ENOUGH COUPONS TO BUY 1/2 KILO OF SUGAR.

STILL... SHE WENT OUT WITH 1/2 KILO. I SMELLED I COULD ARRANGE SOMETHING.

THEN A LITTLE MORE WE SPOKE AND HE MADE TO ME A PROPOSITION...



MAYBE YOU COULD SELL MY "EXTRA" ITEMS TO SMALL SHOPS IN THE AREA ... UNDER THE COUNTER.

IT WAS DANGEROUS TO CARRY THESE THINGS - BUT MAYBE I COULD BE LUCKY.

WHEN SOMEBODY IS HUNGRY HE LOOKS FOR BUSINESS...



ONE TIME I HAD 10 OR 15 KILOS SUGAR TO DELIVER...



HALT, JEW! WHAT ARE YOU CARRYING?

WHAT WAS I SUPPOSED TO SAY? FOR THIS I COULD REALLY HANG!



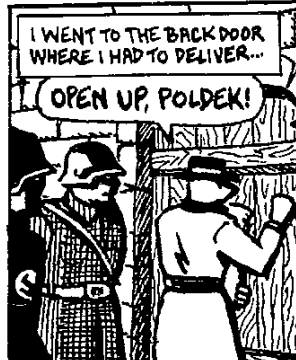
SUGAR.



...I'M TAKING IT OVER TO MY GROCERY STORE.

OH. YOU HAVE A SHOP?

I MADE SO THEY WOULD THINK IT WAS LEGAL.



I WENT TO THE BACK DOOR WHERE I HAD TO DELIVER...

OPEN UP, POLDEK!



...I'VE GOT OUR SUGAR. ?!

AND THEY LEFT ME GO WITHOUT EVEN CHECKING MY PAPERS!



BUT WHEN WE CAME TO STARA SOSNOWIEC, ALL MY BUSINESSES BECAME HARDER... IT WAS NOT SO EASY TO MOVE AROUND.

THE TIN SHOP FINISHED—THE OWNER WAS THE ONLY JEW THEY LET WORK THERE. I GOT THEN A JOB IN A GERMAN CARPENTRY SHOP.

FATHER-IN-LAW AND LOLEK WORKED ALREADY THERE, FOR REALLY NO MONEY. I DIDN'T NEED THIS BEFORE, BUT NOW I HAD TO HAVE THE WORK PAPER.

WOLFE COULD HAVE ARRANGED ME A JOB AT THE GEMEINDE... BUT I DIDN'T WANT TO PUT MY HANDS THERE WHERE JEWS WERE BEING TAKEN.

AND THEN IT CAME AGAIN SOMETHING NEW FROM THE GERMANS. WE GOT A NOTICE...

"ALL JEWS OVER 70 YEARS OLD WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO THERESIENSTADT IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA ON MAY 10, 1942..."

"...A COMMUNITY BETTER PREPARED TO TAKE CARE OF THE ELDERLY THAN OURS IN SOSNOWIEC..."

IT DOESN'T LOOK TOO BAD! LIKE A CONValesCENT HOME.

**NOTICE:**

ANJA'S GRANDPARENTS HAD ABOUT 90 YEARS. WE'VE BEEN TOGETHER—A FAMILY—FOR 70 YEARS. WE DON'T WANT TO BREAK APART NOW!

DON'T WORRY. WE WON'T LET THEM TAKE YOU.

WE DIDN'T YET KNOW OF AUSCHWITZ—OF THE OVENS—BUT WE WERE ANYWAY AFRAID.

...SO, IN THE YARD, WE MADE A HIDING PLACE, A BUNKER...

CUT-AWAY VIEW:

STORAGE SHEDS

FALSE WALL

GRAND-PARENTS

WE SNEAKED FOOD TO THEM, AND—WHEN IT WAS SAFE—WE TOOK THEM INSIDE A LITTLE.

SEVERAL TIMES CAME THE JEWISH POLICE TO OUR HOUSE...

OUR RECORDS SHOW THAT MR. AND MRS. KARMIO LIVE HERE. THEY HAVEN'T REGISTERED FOR TRANSFER.

YES—MY WIFE'S PARENTS—THEY LEFT WITHOUT A WORD A MONTH AGO.

JEWISH POLICE?

YES—WITH BIG STICKS.

SOME JEWS THOUGHT IN THIS WAY: IF THEY GAVE TO THE GERMANS A FEW JEWS, THEY COULD SAVE THE REST.

AND AT LEAST THEY COULD SAVE THEMSELVES.

AND A MONTH AFTER, THEY AGAIN CAME TO FATHER-IN-LAW.

MR. ZYLBERBERG, YOU AND YOUR WIFE MUST COME WITH US.

IF THE KARMIOS DON'T TURN UP IN 3 DAYS YOU TWO WILL BE SENT IN THEIR PLACE!

HE HAD STILL A LITTLE "PROTECTION" FROM THE GEMEINDE, SO THEY TOOK ONLY HIM AWAY—NOT HIS WIFE.

HE WROTE THAT WE HAD TO GIVE OVER THE GRANDPARENTS. EVEN IF THEY TOOK ONLY HIM AWAY NOW, NEXT THEY WOULD GRAB HIS WIFE, AND THEN THE REST OF THE FAMILY.

HE SAT A FEW DAYS THERE, THEN HE SENT TO US A NOTE

SO, WHAT HAPPENED?

WHAT HAPPENED? WE HAD TO DELIVER THEM!

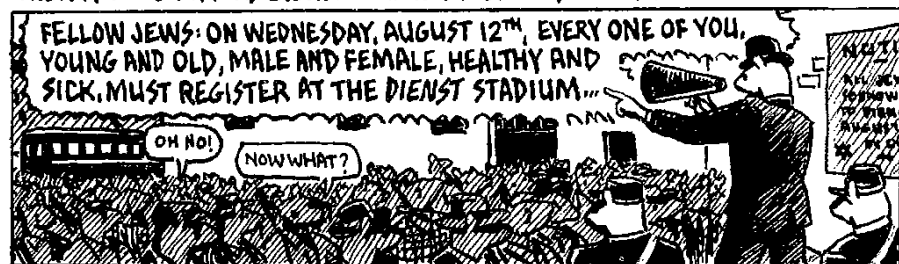
THEY THOUGHT IT WAS TO THERESIENSTADT THEY WERE GOING.

LET US KNOW IF YOU NEED ANYTHING!

BUT THEY WENT RIGHT AWAY TO AUSCHWITZ, TO THE GAS.

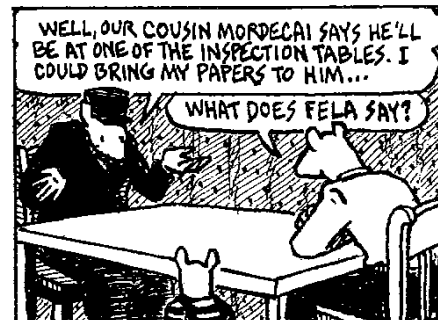
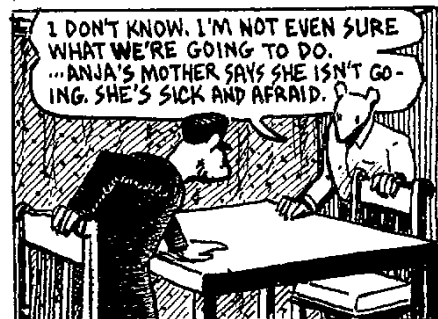


AFTER WHAT HAPPENED TO THE GRANDPARENTS, IT WAS A FEW MONTHS QUIET. THEN IT CAME POSTERS EVERYWHERE AND SPEECHES FROM THE GEMEINDE...

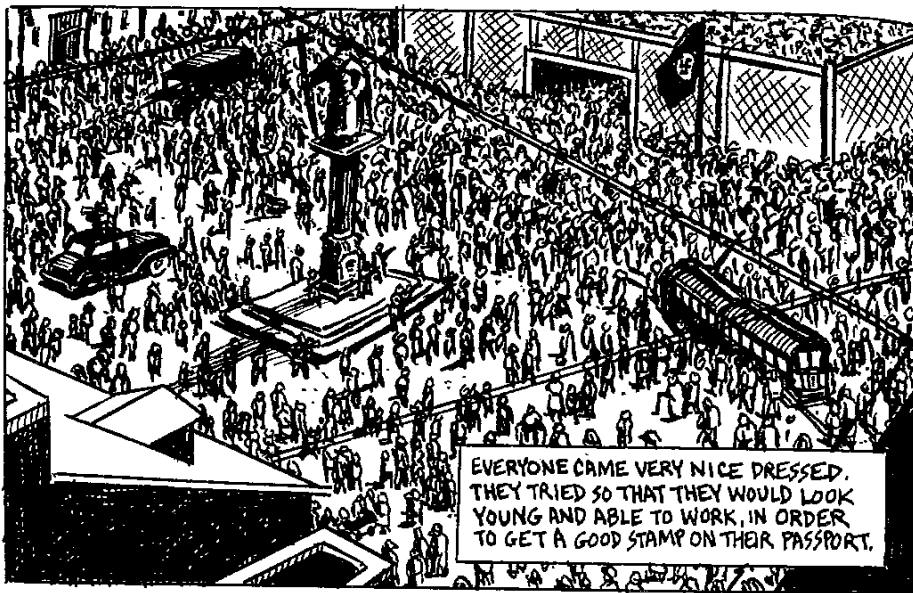


MY FATHER - HE HAD 62 YEARS - CAME BY STREETCAR TO ME FROM DABROWA, THE VILLAGE NEXT DOOR FROM SOSNOWIEC.

AFTER MY MOTHER DIED WITH CANCER, HE LIVED THERE IN THE HOUSE OF MY SISTER FELA, AND HER FOUR SMALL CHILDREN.

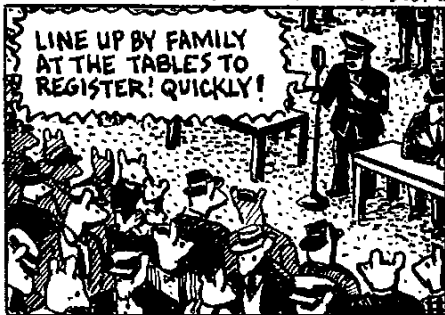






EVERYONE CAME VERY NICE DRESSED. THEY TRIED SO THAT THEY WOULD LOOK YOUNG AND ABLE TO WORK, IN ORDER TO GET A GOOD STAMP ON THEIR PASSPORT.

WHEN WE WERE EVERYBODY INSIDE, GESTAPO WITH MACHINE GUNS SURROUNDED THE STADIUM.



LINE UP BY FAMILY AT THE TABLES TO REGISTER! QUICKLY!

THEN WAS A SELECTION, WITH PEOPLE SENT EITHER TO THE LEFT, EITHER TO THE RIGHT.



OLD PEOPLE, FAMILIES WITH LOTS OF KIDS, AND PEOPLE WITHOUT WORK CARDS ARE ALL GOING TO THE LEFT!

WE UNDERSTOOD THIS MUST BE VERY BAD.

ME AND ANJA CAME TO THE TABLE WHERE MY COUSIN WAS SITTING...



AH, YOU WORK AT THE CARPENTRY SHOP. GO TO THE RIGHT.

SO WE GOT STAMPED OUR PASSPORTS AND CAME QUICK TO THE GOOD SIDE OF THE STADIUM. THOSE THEY SENT LEFT, THEY DIDN'T GET ANY STAMP.

WE WERE SO HAPPY WE CAME THROUGH. BUT WE WORRIED NOW- WERE OUR FAMILIES SAFE?



LOOK! THERE'S POPPA, WITH LOLEK AND LONIA!



WE SAW WOLFE AND TOSHA. OUR FAMILY SEEMS TO BE OKAY.

DID YOU SEE MY FATHER?

I COULDN'T SEE ANYWHERE MY FATHER.

BUT LATER SOMEONE WHO SAW HIM TOLD ME... HE CAME THROUGH THIS SAME COUSIN OVER TO THE GOOD SIDE.



SPIEGELMAN... TO THE RIGHT.

THEN CAME FELA TO REGISTER...

HER, THEY SENT TO THE LEFT. FOUR CHILDREN WAS TOO MANY.



FELA!



MY DAUGHTER! HOW CAN SHE MANAGE ALONE- WITH FOUR CHILDREN TO TAKE CARE OF?

AND, WHAT DO YOU THINK? HE SNEAKED ON TO THE BAD SIDE!



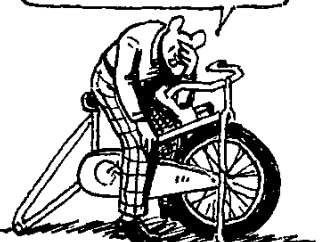
AND THOSE ON THE BAD SIDE NEVER CAME ANYMORE HOME.

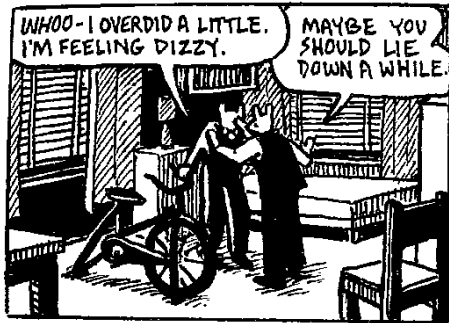
THOSE WITH A STAMP WERE LET TO GO HOME. BUT THERE WERE VERY FEW JEWS NOW LEFT IN SOSNOWIEC...



ONE FROM THREE THEY KEPT AT THE STADIUM... MAYBE 10,000 PEOPLE- AND WITH THEM, MY FATHER.

WELL... IT'S ENOUGH FOR TODAY. YES, ARTIE?...





WHOO - I OVERDID A LITTLE. I'M FEELING DIZZY. MAYBE YOU SHOULD LIE DOWN A WHILE.



ARE YOU FINISHED? UH-HUH. MY FATHER'S WORN OUT. HE'S TAKING A NAP.



HE WAS JUST TELLING ME ABOUT THE TIME EVERYONE IN SOSNOWIC HAD TO GET HIS PASSPORT STAMPED. IN THE STADIUM? YES... THEY GOT MY MOTHER THEN.



SHE WAS TAKEN, WITH EVERYBODY ELSE WHO WAS GOING TO BE DEPORTED, TO FOUR APARTMENT HOUSES THAT WERE EMPTIED TO MAKE A SORT OF PRISON...



THEY PUT THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE THERE... IT WAS SO CROWDED THAT SOME OF THEM ACTUALLY SUFFOCATED... NO FOOD... NO TOILETS. IT WAS TERRIBLE.



PEOPLE JUMPED OUT THE WINDOWS TO END THEIR MISERY A LITTLE QUICKER. GOD.



BUT MY MOTHER SURVIVED THAT. HER BROTHER WAS ON THE JEWISH COMMITTEE, AND HE HID HER IN A COAL CELLAR 'TIL ALL THE TRANSPORTS LEFT.



THEN HE GOT ME A JOB SCRUBBING THE PEOPLE'S FILTH - VOMIT, EXCREMENT! - OUT OF SEVERAL APARTMENTS, AND I MANAGED TO SMUGGLE HER OUT.



EVENTUALLY SHE AND MY FATHER BOTH ENDED UP IN AUSCHWITZ. THEY DIED THERE.



WHERE ARE YOU GOING? YOU DIDN'T DRINK YOUR COFFEE. I JUST THOUGHT OF SOMETHING. MY FATHER MENTIONED THAT ANJA USED TO KEEP A DIARY, AND I VAGUELY REMEMBER SEEING THEM ON HIS SHELVES IN THE DEN.



I DOUBT IT. I WOULD HAVE NOTICED THEM. WELL, THERE'S SO MUCH JUNK IN THERE, IT'S WORTH A SHOT.



LOOK AT ALL THIS STUFF!... OLD MENUS HE PICKED UP ON CRUISES... A PILE OF STATIONERY FROM THE PINES HOTEL...



INCREDIBLE! FOUR 1965 DRY DOCK SAVINGS BANK CALENDARS... I'LL BET HE NEVER EVEN HAD AN ACCOUNT THERE. HE DRIVES ME CRAZY! HE WON'T EVEN LET ME THROW OUT THE PLASTIC PITCHER HE TOOK FROM HIS HOSPITAL ROOM LAST YEAR!



HE'S MORE ATTACHED TO THINGS THAN TO PEOPLE!



I REALLY DON'T KNOW HOW LONG I CAN TAKE HIM. I REALLY DON'T. I BETTER BE GETTING HOME. I'LL LOOK FOR THOSE DIARIES NEXT TIME.



WAIT! PUT EVERYTHING BACK EXACTLY LIKE IT WAS, OR I'LL NEVER HEAR THE END OF IT! OKAY... OKAY... RELAX.





# Night: Elie Wiesel's memoir and how it preserved the Jewish identity

**Elie Wiesel was just 15-years-old when he was sent to Auschwitz, facing a daily struggle to preserve his identity in inhumane conditions as "prisoner A-7713". For our Amnesty teen takeover week on identity, Julia Routledge looks at his memoir, Night**

● **Anne Frank's diary: teen identity amid wartime memories**

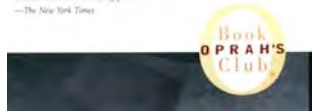


📷 Children, like Elie Wiesel, were numbered and photographed after arriving at Auschwitz concentration camp. Photograph: AFP/AFP/Getty Images



ELIE WIESEL  
WINNER OF THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE

"A slim volume of terrifying power"  
—The New York Times



THEY CALLED HIM Moishe the Beadle, as if his entire life he had never had a surname. He was the jack-of-all-trades in a Hasidic house of prayer, a *shtibl*. The Jews of Sighet—the little town in Transylvania where I spent my childhood—were fond of him. He was poor and lived in utter penury. As a rule, our townspeople, while they did help the needy, did not particularly like them. Moishe the Beadle was the exception. He stayed out of people's way. His presence bothered no one. He had mastered the art of rendering himself insignificant, invisible.

Physically, he was as awkward as a clown. His waiflike shyness made people smile. As for me, I liked his wide, dreamy eyes, gazing off into the distance. He spoke little. He sang, or rather he chanted, and the few snatches I caught here and there spoke of divine suffering, of the Shekhinah in Exile, where, according to Kabbalah, it awaits its redemption linked to that of man.

I met him in 1941. I was almost thirteen and deeply observant. By day I studied Talmud and by night I would run to the synagogue to weep over the destruction of the Temple.



One day I asked my father to find me a master who could guide me in my studies of Kabbalah. "You are too young for that. Maimonides tells us that one must be thirty before venturing into the world of mysticism, a world fraught with peril. First you must study the basic subjects, those you are able to comprehend."

My father was a cultured man, rather unsentimental. He rarely displayed his feelings, not even within his family, and was more involved with the welfare of others than with that of his own kin. The Jewish community of Sighet held him in highest esteem; his advice on public and even private matters was frequently sought. There were four of us children. Hilda, the eldest; then Bea; I was the third and the only son; Tzipora was the youngest.

My parents ran a store. Hilda and Bea helped with the work. As for me, my place was in the house of study, or so they said.

"There are no Kabbalists in Sighet," my father would often tell me.

He wanted to drive the idea of studying Kabbalah from my mind. In vain. I succeeded on my own in finding a master for myself in the person of Moishe the Beadle.

He had watched me one day as I prayed at dusk.

"Why do you cry when you pray?" he asked, as though he knew me well.

"I don't know," I answered, troubled.

I had never asked myself that question. I cried because . . . because something inside me felt the need to cry. That was all I knew.

"Why do you pray?" he asked after a moment.

Why did I pray? Strange question. Why did I live? Why did I breathe?

"I don't know," I told him, even more troubled and ill at ease. "I don't know."

From that day on, I saw him often. He explained to me, with

great emphasis, that every question possessed a power that was lost in the answer . . .

Man comes closer to God through the questions he asks Him, he liked to say. Therein lies true dialogue. Man asks and God replies. But we don't understand His replies. We cannot understand them. Because they dwell in the depths of our souls and remain there until we die. The real answers, Eliezer, you will find only within yourself.

"And why do you pray, Moishe?" I asked him.

"I pray to the God within me for the strength to ask Him the real questions."

We spoke that way almost every evening, remaining in the synagogue long after all the faithful had gone, sitting in the semi-darkness where only a few half-burnt candles provided a flickering light.

One evening, I told him how unhappy I was not to be able to find in Sighet a master to teach me the Zohar, the Kabbalistic works, the secrets of Jewish mysticism. He smiled indulgently. After a long silence, he said, "There are a thousand and one gates allowing entry into the orchard of mystical truth. Every human being has his own gate. He must not err and wish to enter the orchard through a gate other than his own. That would present a danger not only for the one entering but also for those who are already inside."

And Moishe the Beadle, the poorest of the poor of Sighet, spoke to me for hours on end about the Kabbalah's revelations and its mysteries. Thus began my initiation. Together we would read, over and over again, the same page of the Zohar. Not to learn it by heart but to discover within the very essence of divinity.

And in the course of those evenings I became convinced that Moishe the Beadle would help me enter eternity, into that time when question and answer would become ONE.

AND THEN, one day all foreign Jews were expelled from Sighet. And Moishe the Beadle was a foreigner.

Crammed into cattle cars by the Hungarian police, they cried silently. Standing on the station platform, we too were crying. The train disappeared over the horizon; all that was left was thick, dirty smoke.

Behind me, someone said, sighing, "What do you expect? That's war . . ."

The deportees were quickly forgotten. A few days after they left, it was rumored that they were in Galicia, working, and even that they were content with their fate.

Days went by. Then weeks and months. Life was normal again. A calm, reassuring wind blew through our homes. The shopkeepers were doing good business, the students lived among their books, and the children played in the streets.

One day, as I was about to enter the synagogue, I saw Moishe the Beadle sitting on a bench near the entrance.

He told me what had happened to him and his companions. The train with the deportees had crossed the Hungarian border and, once in Polish territory, had been taken over by the Gestapo. The train had stopped. The Jews were ordered to get off and onto waiting trucks. The trucks headed toward a forest. There everybody was ordered to get out. They were forced to dig huge trenches. When they had finished their work, the men from the Gestapo began theirs. Without passion or haste, they shot their prisoners, who were forced to approach the trench one by one and offer their necks. Infants were tossed into the air and used as targets for the machine guns. This took place in the Galician forest, near Kolo-may. How had he, Moishe the Beadle, been able to escape? By a miracle. He was wounded in the leg and left for dead . . .



Day after day, night after night, he went from one Jewish house to the next, telling his story and that of Malka, the young girl who lay dying for three days, and that of Tobie, the tailor who begged to die before his sons were killed.

Moishe was not the same. The joy in his eyes was gone. He no longer sang. He no longer mentioned either God or Kabbalah. He spoke only of what he had seen. But people not only refused to believe his tales, they refused to listen. Some even insinuated that he only wanted their pity, that he was imagining things. Others flatly said that he had gone mad.

As for Moishe, he wept and pleaded:

“Jews, listen to me! That’s all I ask of you. No money. No pity. Just listen to me!” he kept shouting in synagogue, between the prayer at dusk and the evening prayer.

Even I did not believe him. I often sat with him, after services, and listened to his tales, trying to understand his grief. But all I felt was pity.

“They think I’m mad,” he whispered, and tears, like drops of wax, flowed from his eyes.

Once, I asked him the question: “Why do you want people to believe you so much? In your place I would not care whether they believed me or not . . .”

He closed his eyes, as if to escape time.

“You don’t understand,” he said in despair. “You cannot understand. I was saved miraculously. I succeeded in coming back. Where did I get my strength? I wanted to return to Sighet to describe to you my death so that you might ready yourselves while there is still time. Life? I no longer care to live. I am alone. But I wanted to come back to warn you. Only no one is listening to me . . .”

This was toward the end of 1942.

Thereafter, life seemed normal once again. London radio, which we listened to every evening, announced encouraging

news: the daily bombings of Germany and Stalingrad, the preparation of the Second Front. And so we, the Jews of Sighet, waited for better days that surely were soon to come.

I continued to devote myself to my studies, Talmud during the day and Kabbalah at night. My father took care of his business and the community. My grandfather came to spend Rosh Hashanah with us so as to attend the services of the celebrated Rebbe of Borsche. My mother was beginning to think it was high time to find an appropriate match for Hilda.

Thus passed the year 1943.

Born in the town of Sighet, Transylvania, Elie Wiesel was a teenager when he and his family were taken from their home in 1944 to the Auschwitz concentration camp, and then to Buchenwald. *Night* is the terrifying record of Elie Wiesel's memories of the death of his family, the death of his own innocence, and his despair as a deeply observant Jew confronting the absolute evil of man. This new translation by his wife and most frequent translator, Marion Wiesel, corrects important details and presents the most accurate rendering in English of Elie Wiesel's testimony to what happened in the camps and of his unforgettable message that this horror must never be allowed to happen again.

"Wiesel has taken his own anguish and imaginatively metamorphosed it into art."

—CURT LEVIANT, *Saturday Review*

"As a human document, *Night* is almost unbearably painful, and certainly beyond criticism."

—A. ALVAREZ, *Commentary*



**ELIE WIESEL** is the author of more than forty internationally acclaimed works of fiction and nonfiction. He has been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the United States of America Congressional Gold Medal, the French Legion of Honor, and, in 1986, the Nobel Peace Prize. He is the Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities and University Professor at Boston University.

A reading group guide for *Night* is available at [www.fsgbooks.com](http://www.fsgbooks.com).



