Dawid Sierakowiak

Dawid Sierakowiak was a fifteen-year-old Polish Jew when the Germans invaded his homeland in 1939. He regularly chronicled his daily life in his diary. He graduated from the Lodz Ghetto Gymnasium (the equivalent of high school in the United States) in 1941. He was active in politics in the ghetto, as a communist and as a member of the underground. Sierakowiak died in the Lodz ghetto of tuberculosis at age nineteen.

Lodz, Poland, was a textile center with the second largest Jewish population in Europe. In 1940, the Nazis forced 350,000 to 400,000 Polish Jews into a sealed ghetto. In 1941, these were joined by 20,000 more Jews who had been displaced and relocated by the Germans from other European countries. While the Lodz ghetto served as a huge work camp for the German war effort, it also was the scene of transports to the death camps. By the end of the war, almost all of the ghetto inhabitants were dead, either from the unbearable conditions in the ghetto or as a result of having perished in the camps. Left behind, however, were diaries, journals, notebooks, and poems that provide a chronicle of ghetto life. These excerpts from Sierakowiak’s diary begin with entries from 1939, when the Germans invaded Poland.
I go to bed, but at 5 a.m. loud voices in the apartment wake me. Our neighbor Mr. Grodzenski, with his crying wife, is urging us to leave. Where? What for? Nobody knows. Run, run, run away as far as possible; move with care, stumble, forget everything—as long as you run from danger. My mother, my beloved, everlastingly sensitive mother, shows unusual composure as she consoles Mrs. Grodzenski, dismissing her from her ridiculous plans. Slowly, the contagion of mass hysteria, as well as the psychosis of crowds heading for slaughter, is eliminated. Father loses his head; he doesn’t know what to do. Other neighbors come in, Jews, to seek counsel. They say that it’s recommended that everyone able to bear arms leave the city, since the enemy will send them to work camps. They don’t know what to do. The matter is considered and the decision is made to stay put. Whatever will be will be.

People are constantly on the move. Groups of men are heading toward Brzeziny to report for duty, while at the same time reservists and recruits are running away. Following them are women carrying bundles on their backs, filled with clothes, bedding and food. Even small children are running. All the leaders have left, so, for fun, we acted like we were the leaders, playing that role till noon.

Meanwhile, the situation is becoming ever more tense. Everyone has a different story to tell. Someone said that 150 English airplanes are waiting in Sieradz, another that the Germans have already occupied Zduńska Wola and are heading toward Łódź. The news gets stranger and more fantastic all the time.

Aunt Estera came to us with her children, and the house is filled with crying. Abek and Jankus ran away to Brzeziny. What is to be done? What can be accomplished? At 5 p.m. a kind of potato soup materialized: that’s today’s dinner. Other people might not even have that much. My father runs to our uncle, uncle back to father, but the decision remains the same: we will stay put and not run. In the afternoon a civilian patrol is organized in our neighborhood. My father signs up for it. In the evening Ryszio Wojcikowski returns with his father. They’ve bought bicycles and are leaving once again. The roads are impossible.

I go to bed, expecting, for the first time, a good night’s sleep. Unfortunately, there is no fear of air raids now. When you want to take over something, you don’t destroy it. In the evening a column of Polish soldiers began arriving in town. They march quietly, in formation. It’s hard to tell whether they’re advancing or retreating. A little later some armored tanks left the city heading for the front... What will tomorrow bring?

Thursday, September 7, 1939

Today there was nothing new. Like everyone else I went outside this morning, did nothing but talk about what will happen. Will they, or won’t they come? We dragged ourselves to Pabianicka Highway to watch the approaching Polish military column. So that’s how a retreating army looks, rather like a regular army...
passing by. Can it be hoped that they won’t come? Will there be another “Miracle on the Vistula River”? Will we live to see another Mass? We sit together, boys and girls, trying to chase our worst thoughts away. It’s no use. What will happen?

Our neighbor’s brother came on horseback. He says the Germans are being pushed back and our columns are holding fast. The afternoon newspaper claims that the French are marching into Germany and that the Poles are holding fast. A militia is being organized. My father has signed up. Maybe now he’ll regain his composure and calm down.

In the evening we could hear the cannons boom and see a fiery glow in the south. Can it be so near? Some fellow claims that Lodz will be taken any moment now. I’m going home to bed, so I won’t hear or see anything. Come what may! Maybe there’ll be a miracle . . . . Marne, oh Marne, if only it could happen again. Maybe a miracle is possible.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 1939—LODZ

Lodz is occupied. It’s been quiet all day, too quiet. As I sit in the park in the afternoon, drawing a portrait of a girl I know, the frightening news reaches us: Lodz has surrendered. German patrols are on Piotrowska Street. Fear, surprise . . . . surrendered without a fight? Maybe it’s just a tactical maneuver. We’ll see. Meanwhile, conversations cease, the streets empty.

Mr. Grabinski returned from town and told everyone how the local Germans greeted their compatriots. The Grand Hotel, where the General Staff is to be headquartered, is decked with flowers. Civilians, including boys and girls, are jumping into passing military cars with a happy “Heil Hitler.” One can hear loud German conversations on the streets. Whatever was hidden in the past, under the pretext of patriotism and civic-mindedness, now shows its true face.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 1939—LODZ

An announcement in Polish and German (German first) was posted this morning, advising calm while German units enter the city. It was signed “Civic Committee for the City of Lodz.” A little later I went over to Pabianicka Highway to see the arriving army. A great number of vehicles, but the soldiers are nothing out of the ordinary. They differ from Polish soldiers only by the uniforms they wear, which are steel gray. Their expressions are boisterous—after all, they are the conquerors! A car of officers with Martian-like faces speeds by like lightning. The street is quiet, watching the passing army with indifference. It’s quiet, all quiet. We get back to our neighborhood, sit on benches, talk, and joke. What the hell! Damn them.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 1939—LODZ

The first manifestation of the German presence: Jews were being seized to do digging. An elderly retired professor, a Christian who lives in no. 11, warned me about going into town. A decent man. What should I do now? Tomorrow is the first day of school, who knows what’s happening to our beloved school. My friends are all going to attend, just to see what’s going on. But I have to stay home. I must. My parents feel they don’t want to lose me yet. Oh, my beloved school! Curse the times I complained about getting up early or about tests. If only those times could return!

LODZ, SEPTEMBER 11, 1939

Jews are being seized again, and beaten and robbed. The store where my father works was robbed, as the local Germans freely indulge their whims. People speak about the way Jews are treated at work: some are treated decently, but others are sadistically abused. Some Jews were ordered to stop working, to remove their clothes and stand facing the wall, at which point they were told they’d be shot. Shots were fired in their direction, and though nobody was killed, this was repeated a few times.

LODZ, SEPTEMBER 13, 1939

Erev Rosh Hashanah [Rosh Hashanah eve]. I haven’t gone out and won’t now that the sad holiday is approaching. It’s no different from a sad ordinary day, when all one has is bread and (occasionally) herring. According to an order issued today, stores are to remain open tomorrow. What a blow to the Jews on Rosh Hashanah, the worst in ages! However, the synagogues are to be closed. There is no possibility of communal prayer for mercy. All basic personal freedoms are cancelled. Though I’m not old fashioned (I’ve considered it my freedom to avoid prayer every year), this prohibition is painful, for I understand what faith means to the devout. It’s an irreparable crime to take away someone’s only happiness, his belief. The Jews will not forgive Hitler for this. Our vengeance will be awesome.

LODZ, SEPTEMBER 15, 1939

German agents remove Jews from all food lines, so that a poor Jew who has no maid is condemned to die of hunger.

LODZ, SEPTEMBER 16, 1939

Store-robbery continues. They get everything they can. Epsztejn’s jewelry [and] watch store was completely emptied, and they scarcely got away alive.

SEPTEMBER 19, 1939

. . . listened to Hitler’s speech about Danzig, ranting, raving, insulting, begging, ingratiating himself, but above all lying and lying. He lied that Poland started the war, he lied about the barbaric persecution of Germans in Poland and lied about his own, always peaceful, intentions.
LODZ, SEPTEMBER 20, 1939
The Germans have introduced the German mark alongside the Polish zloty (2 zlotys per mark) and the civic committee scrip. And a few anti-Semitic orders have been issued, namely that Jews cannot have more than 1,000 marks and can draw only 250 marks per week from the bank. Stores are being robbed less often, but grabbing people for work continues.

LODZ, OCTOBER 3, 1939
People are gradually getting used to the new conditions and are returning to their jobs.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 1939—LODZ
I have not escaped the sad fate of my compatriots being seized to do work. Yesterday I took a shortcut to school, passing buildings covered with swastikas, many German cars, a lot of soldiers, and Lodz Germans wearing swastikas. I managed to evade them and, emboldened, took the same road today. A youth holding a big stick ran over, yelling in German: "Come, let's get to work! You're not allowed to go to school." I didn't resist, for no identification card would have been of any use there. He took me to a certain square where several Jews were already working, clearing the ground of leaves. He wanted me to jump over a high fence, but when he saw I wouldn't do it, he left me. The work on the square was supervised by a soldier, also with a big stick, who told me to fill some puddles with sand.

I've never been more humiliated than when I saw those passers-by smiling and laughing at someone else's misfortune. Oh, you stupid, ignorant ofals, you simplicons! We don't need to feel ashamed; only our tormentors should. Enforced humiliation isn't humiliation. But the anger, the helpless fury of being forced to do this stupid, disgraceful task filled with provocation tore me apart. One thing is left: revenge!

After about a half hour of work, the soldier gathered all the Jews, some with their hats turned the wrong way (for the sport of it), lined us up, told one of us to put away the shovels, and dismissed the rest of us. It was supposed to be a show of magnanimity. I got to school halfway through the first class, my first lateness ever. The teachers can do nothing. "For reasons beyond the Jews' control."

This evening we found out that one of the Germans who live in our neighborhood is "eying" the Jews, "keeping watch" over them. This completely unnerved my poor anguished parents. Meanwhile, it was announced in school that students who do not pay at least some tuition will be barred from classes. What will happen to me? We will see.

LODZ, OCTOBER 6, 1939
Hitler called a meeting of the Reichstag, where he laughed at the former Polish government, rightly so, and where he gave his "final" offer for peace. His terms, given on the radio earlier this week, are unacceptable. He said that he is even ready to resolve the Jewish question, and ridiculed the British rule in Palestine. At any rate, the speech brought nothing new.

LODZ, OCTOBER 8, 1939
Today the Jewish community council announced that it will provide 700 Jews for work. Will they now stop grabbing people on the street?

LODZ, OCTOBER 18, 1939
The Germans have set up a police station in our area and are going through apartments belonging to Jews, taking away radios, carpets, quilts, etc. They'll probably throw us out of our apartment soon.

LODZ, OCTOBER 19, 1939
No bread, no coal to be had.

LODZ, OCTOBER 20, 1939
An order was issued today forbidding Jews from trading in textiles, leather, and clothing. A Jew is not allowed to buy any of these, and he can sell these goods only to Christians. A shoemaker can buy leather for repairing heels and soles but not for making new shoes. It's true that this order hurts the black market in clothing; still, thousands of Jewish families are being brought to ruin.

LODZ, OCTOBER 22, 1939
Sunday, 11 a.m. A knock at the door. In comes a German officer, two policemen, and the super. The officer asks how many people live in the apartment, looks over the beds, asks about bedbugs, then if we have a radio—and finally leaves disappointed. He took radios from our neighbors (of course, they only go to Jews), as well as mattresses, quilts, carpets, etc. He found nothing of value in our place. Father was very frightened because he was praying in a tallis [prayer shawl], but the officer didn't notice. It's lucky, because people say that in such cases the Germans drive the Jews into the street and make them run until their tallis and tefillin [phylacteries] fall off. They took our neighbor Mr. Grabinski's only down quilt. Now it's 100% sure that they'll throw us out of our buildings.
OCTOBER 28, 1939
They ordered Mrs. Heller out of her apartment by 4 p.m. tomorrow; the administration gave her an empty apartment but only until she finds another one. Now we are all endangered.

LODZ, NOVEMBER 7, 1939
And so it's happened. Today's Deutsche Łódzcher Zeitung announces the annexation of Lodz to Wartheland (the western part of Poland, annexed into the Reich) and, thus, to the Greater Reich. Of course, the appropriate orders have been issued, namely: Jews are not allowed to walk on Piotrkowska Street, since it's the main street; Jews and Poles are to yield always and everywhere to uniformed Germans; wearing four-cornered hats, uniforms, army coats, shiny boots, and military belts is forbidden. Jewish bakeries are permitted to bake only bread. Jewish stores are to be marked "Jüdisches Geschäft" [Ger: Jewish business] next to a yellow Star of David inscribed with the word "jude" [Ger: Jew]. It's a return to the yellow patches of the Middle Ages.

LODZ, NOVEMBER 8, 1939
Terrible things are going on in town. Jews are grabbed and ordered to report tomorrow to a designated area, to bring a shovel, food for a day, and 20 zlotys. What's new idea: Was it a kind of agony? Posters on street corners announce the annexation of Lodz to the Reich. A Nazi Youth Party was formed in the city: marching, singing, parades—one wants to stay home to keep from seeing all of this.

A meeting of "The Jewish Elders of Lodz" with the authorities was called for tomorrow. We'll see what comes of it.

LODZ, NOVEMBER 9, 1939
The Germans came to school yesterday and ordered that its Polish-Hebrew sign be taken down and the library made orderly.

The Jews who were grabbed for work and told to bring food and money were released after one day and their money taken from them. Those living on Piotrkowska Street can buy a pass for 5 zlotys per person. Everything is done for money. The community elders meeting with the authorities have not yet returned.

LODZ, NOVEMBER 10, 1939
There is talk that the Jewish elders were jailed and also that they were released. We were advised in school not to venture out tomorrow, the 11th of November, the traditional Polish national holiday. They hanged 3 criminals in Balut Market today: 2 Poles for murder and a Jew for blackmarketeering, so it's rumored—

to scare us. They're afraid of provocation. I am sure nothing will happen; nobody would dare attempt anything.

LODZ, NOVEMBER 11, 1939
It's quiet in town, though yesterday and today they arrested a lot of teachers, activists who fought for Polish independence (in 1918), policemen, etc. The daily Dziennik Łódzki is discontinued as of today. An order was issued that all signs must be written in German, correctly, since we are now part of the Reich! As of the 15th all Poles and Jews must give up their radios. We'll have no news after that. The Germans do whatever they want.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1939—LODZ
The synagogue was burned down. Barbaric methods for annihilating the world are being activated. They demanded 25 million zlotys in exchange for stopping the terror. The community didn't have it, so it didn't deliver. Something is wrong with the Germans. Since yesterday they've been engaged in terrible plunder, robbing wantonly, whatever they can: furniture, clothes, underwear, food. All Lodz German males, 18 to 45, are being mobilized today for Selbstschutz [Ger: self-defense]. Since the regular army is leaving, someone has to stay and guard the city. We'll get the brunt of it. It's worse dealing with one Lodz German than a whole regiment from Germany.

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 1939—LODZ
We're returning to the Middle Ages. The yellow star is again part of the Jew's garb. An order was issued today that all Jews, regardless of age or gender, must wear a 10-centimeter armband—of "Jewish-yellow" color—on the right arm, directly below the armpit. In addition, Jews are to observe a curfew from 5 p.m. to 8 a.m.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 1939—LODZ
The mood in town is depressed. It's hard getting used to the idea of being persecuted. The Germans are on the lookout for provocations from "yellow-armbanded Jews." There's a lot of opportunity now to ridicule and provoke. It'll be interesting to see how the Poles react. Will they join the German rabble?

The required armbands were prepared at home.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 1939—LODZ
The Poles lower their eyes when they see Jews wearing yellow stars. Acquaintances console us that it will not be for long. Meanwhile, the Germans show complete indifference. The curfew for Poles and Germans has been changed: they may go out at 6 a.m. (it was 5 a.m. before), but now they can stay out till
8:30 p.m. (It was 8 before). We can stay locked in our homes from 5 p.m. It doesn't matter. There will be better times.

LODZ, DECEMBER 6, 1939
The first Chanukah candle was lit. Father made a hole in a potato, poured in some oil, inserted a wick of braided cotton, and lit it. All our Jewish neighbors are waiting for a new Chanukah miracle. Maybe the fervent prayers of millions of Jews to be liberated will be answered! We have a buyer for our wardrobe and couch, who will give us 130 zlotys for both pieces. (They cost us 350 zlotys.) He is a German, a very decent man, known for his kindness toward Jews. Father is trying to secure a permit from the authorities allowing him to make the sale so that he can pay the rent.

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 7, 1939—LODZ
The ZUS administration gave its permission to sell the furniture. Father is still worried constantly; he gets upset very easily. I wish everything could finally be taken care of. Everyone is surprised that nothing's been heard about Hitler lately. There is speculation that he is dead or removed from power. There is news that Germany has suffered heavy defeats in the air and at sea.

LODZ, DECEMBER 8, 1939
The cupboard-wardrobe was finally sold and rent paid till Dec. 31. There are new rumors of all kinds, probably just gossip.

LODZ, DECEMBER 9, 1939
Today we heard about Jews being badly beaten on Reymont Square yesterday; even 3-year-old children were kicked. Jews are now living on messianic prophecies. A rabbi has said that on the 6th day of Chanukah a judgment, and liberation, will occur. Uncle says there are few Germans and not many soldiers on the streets. I'm annoyed by such talk, would prefer to hear nothing.

LODZ, DECEMBER 10, 1939
A great many of the large buildings in the city center have been “cleared” of Jews, and there's talk of sending a large number of Jews from Lodz to the Protectorate—not a pleasant prospect.

LODZ, DECEMBER 11, 1939
Father came home with the news that starting today at 6 p.m. Jews will be deported from Lodz. All the neighbors packed bags, bundles, etc., and we did also, but nothing happened, and everyone eventually went to bed.

LODZ, DECEMBER 12, 1939
I saw a frightful sight. A Jew was being hit with a huge pole by a German. The Jew kept bending lower and lower without turning around, so as not to be hit from the front.

A new order was issued today: The yellow patches are to be removed, and 10 cm. yellow Stars of David are to be worn on the right chest and on the right side of the back.

LODZ, DECEMBER 13, 1939
There was more fear and anxiety when Dadk Hamer came to tell us that Jews are being driven into the empty market halls in Nowo-Zarzewskas Street, to be sent into the Lublin district.

This evening we heard that the Jewish community administration has announced that the Jews must leave Lodz. Apparently, during the next four days, anyone can leave for any destination, except the Reich, and after that mass deportations will begin. The community administration will give the poor 50 zl. each and has started sending them out as of today. There is terrible panic in town, everyone has lost his head, but knapsacks and bundles are being packed.

LODZ, DECEMBER 14, 1939
Mass arrests continue into the third day: thousands of teachers, doctors, engineers with families (babies included) are driven into the empty market halls and then to German prisons. The same happens to old activists, former legionnaires, even ordinary rich men. Quite often, groups of important people are dispatched to their death.

It seems that Lodz is really going to be cleared of Jews. For the time being, only the poor are registering. They get 50 zl. per person and are literally thrown out of town: first transported by rail to Koluszki and from there let go.

LODZ, DECEMBER 15, 1939
It gets worse all the time. Last night some Jews were evicted from a few places in Batory and sent to the Reich. It's not known where they are, or what happened to them. Everywhere people have their bags packed with essentials. Everyone is very nervous.

LODZ, DECEMBER 17, 1939
The Jews are to remain in town till March 1, and then—out! They say that 80 frozen babies from Koluszki were sent to Lodz today. These babies belong to deported Jews.
LODZ, DECEMBER 31, 1939
The last day of 1939, a year that began with tension and ended with war. Let's hope next year will be better, for no one knows what awaits us.

* * *

MARCH 24, 1942
This evening there was suddenly news that another 15,000 are to be deported immediately, in groups of a thousand a day. Everyone is saying that now all the ghetto's inhabitants will go.

MARCH 25, 1942
I feel very sick. I read but can't study at all, so I'm working on English vocabulary. Among other things, I was studying Schopenhauer. Philosophy and hunger, some combination.

MARCH 26, 1942
Again, total confusion. The deportations are continuing, while at the same time the shops are receiving huge orders and there's enough work for a few months.

MARCH 28, 1942
Today we bought an étagère (my pre-war dream) and a kitchen table with drawers from our neighbors who are being deported. These—and some other household items—all for two packs of local cigarettes.

MARCH 30, 1942
Aside from the deported, a number of people have left in the last few days, taken out by relatives (for big money).

APRIL 9, 1942
Rumkowski made a long speech today but said nothing of importance. It's the demagoguery of a megalomaniac.

APRIL 19, 1942
Mother cried when I came home today. She's the only one in our family who is unemployed and in danger. Father, whose rage intensifies all the time, revealed his true nature today. He wants to get rid of Mother, as he has not even lifted a finger to do anything for her. All he does is scream at her and annoy her on purpose.

Oh, if only things with Mother were different: the poor, weak, beloved, broken, unhappy being! As if she didn't have enough trouble, she has to put up with these noisy quarrels (which according to Father are due to my "indifference" toward the family, or rather toward him). If we could only save her. We'll settle with Father after the war.

Since Mother isn't feeling well, she's decided to give my father only 25 kg. of bread from her loaf (rather than the 50 kg. she used to). He doesn't like it, but he's probably figured out that if she were not around he'd have even less.

APRIL 20, 1942
The ghetto is going crazy. Thousands of those at risk are struggling every which way to get jobs, mostly through influence. Meanwhile, the German commission started its work. All those examined by the commission get an indelible letter stamped on their chests, a letter whose significance nobody knows.

APRIL 23, 1942
Last night the police went through apartments. Those who have not reported to the commission and could offer no excuse had to give up their bread and food ration cards. Today there were round-ups in the streets. There's talk that soon the entire population of the ghetto will be stamped.

Another group of people left today by bus, to join relatives in Warsaw. They say that things in Warsaw are wonderful. The ghetto is open, and one can buy anything for money; work is paid for, and it's easy to get. Meanwhile we perish here.

APRIL 24, 1942
A commission came to our shop today, and they stopped by our room. These people come from another world—those rulers, those masters of life and death. Their look doesn't in the least suggest a quick end to the war.

APRIL 29, 1942
Again I have no desire, actually no strength to study. Time is passing, as is my youth, my energy and enthusiasm. The devil knows what will be rescued from this pogrom. I'm gradually losing hope that I shall come back to life, or be able to hold on to the one I am now living.

MAY 7, 1942
Things in the ghetto are ever more scandalous, but we are now in such a state of exhaustion that I truly understand what it means to lack the strength to complain, let alone protest.

MAY 18, 1942
In the last few days, with frightening speed, my legs have become weak. I almost cannot walk because it tires me so. Still I can't avoid it, since my unit works on the third floor.
MAY 31, 1942
In the evening when I returned from the shop I was missing a few teaspoons of honey (which we received instead of marmalade), and Mother was missing even more honey.

JUNE 1, 1942
The days pass imperceptibly, and no change is visible. The food supply has improved; however, the specter of next winter is confronting everybody. Everyone realizes all too well that he won’t last through the winter (I’m not talking about those who gorge themselves, of course)—and pessimism is getting worse all around. "Fütcher die Krieg wird enden vor dem Winter, oder wir wandeln." It’s true: we’re pushing on with our last strength.

JUNE 26, 1942
Today I heard that two people went to Warsaw. Apparently, one of them ate so much the day he got there that he was in bed with a high fever for a week. At least he felt full, something I haven’t experienced in two years.

MONDAY, JULY 14, 1942
It seems that last year Rumkowski said that he couldn’t save everyone and, therefore, instead of having the entire population die a slow death, he would save the "top ten thousand."

JULY 27, 1942
Apparently, they’re deporting a huge number of Jews (ten thousand a day) from Warsaw. Accompanying this, of course, were pogroms, and those being deported were shot. The Elders there committed suicide. However, they didn’t go through the kind of extreme suffering we have had, and there is no end for us yet.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 1
The first day in this new, fourth year of the war has brought the terrible news that the Germans have emptied all the ghetto’s hospitals.

In the morning, the areas around the hospitals were surrounded by guards. All the sick, without exception, were loaded on trucks and taken out of the ghetto. There was a terrible panic, because it’s no secret, thanks to people who’ve recently come from the provinces, how the Germans “take care” of such evacuees. Hellish scenes occurred during the moving of the sick. People knew that they were going to their death! They fought the Germans, and were thrown onto the trucks by force. In the meantime, a good many of the sick escaped from the hospitals which the Germans got to a little later. It’s said that even the sick in the Marysin Preventorium were shipped out. In our office nobody could think about work (I’m now in an office which distributes payments to the families of people working in Germany). It seems no work was done in other offices and factories, either. People are fearing for their children and for the elderly who aren’t working.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 2
Having discovered that many of the sick escaped, the Germans are demanding they be brought back. On the basis of hospital records, the homes of the escapées’ relatives have been searched and the sick captured. On this occasion, the Jewish police committed a crime unlike anything, it seems to me, committed previously in the ghetto.

The Germans demanded a full complement of all those on the hospital registers. The police found a novel way of doing the job, following instructions from people with influence to spare any of their relatives who escaped. They went to the homes of other sick people, namely those already deported, and asked where
the sick could be found. When the unfortunate families answered that the sick were most probably deported, since they had never come back, the police detained some of these relatives as hostages, until the “escapists” were turned in. And when the Germans sent in vehicles today to fetch the rest of the sick, some of these hostages were included among them, as substitutes for sick people with influential relatives.

The mood is still panicly, though things progress their normal way. It feels as though something is hanging in the air.

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 3

It seems the Germans have asked that all children up to the age of 10 be delivered, most probably to be murdered. The situation resembles what happened in all the surrounding small towns prior to deportations and differs only in the precision and subtlety which prevails here. There everything was sudden and unexpected.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 4

There is terrible panic. No work is being done anywhere. Everyone is trying to get jobs for those not working. Parents are trying everything possible to save their children. The registrar’s office was sealed after the lists were completed.

Now any attempt at falsifying birth certificates, registry books or other documents is for naught. Today in our office job assignments were given out in great haste, even though there is talk that they’re meaningless, because there will be orders confining everyone indoors. That way medical teams can decide who is fit for work.

As an office worker, I was able, despite great difficulty, to get a job in the furniture factory for my mother. In spite of this, I’m terribly worried about her, because she’s enervated and weak. She’s not sick though and has worked in the vegetable gardens on the outskirts of the ghetto all along, and she cooks, cleans and does laundry at home.

In the morning, children between 8 and 10 were registered at the school office for work, but at 12 o’clock it was announced that these registration lists would be void. At 2 o’clock our office was closed, and we were all told to go home until further notice. All factories, offices and agencies were closed, except for food supply, sanitation wagons, police, firemen and various guards. Panic is increasing by the minute.

At 4 o’clock Rumkowski and Warszawski, the head of many factories, spoke at 25 Lutomierska. They said: Sacrificing the children and the elderly is necessary, since nothing can be done to prevent it. Therefore, please do not hinder our effort to carry out this action of deporting them from here.

It’s easy for them, since they’re able to get the Germans to agree not to take the children of factory heads, firemen, police, doctors, instructors, bureaucrats, and the devil knows who else. All kinds of favoritism will also be set in motion, and the Germans will get entirely different people than the 25,000 they’ve demanded, people who are fit for work but who’ll be sacrificed for the elderly and children with pull.

In the evening, my father’s cousin came to us with her 3-year-old girl, trying to save her. We agreed they could stay and later took in her whole family as well, because they’re afraid to stay home, in case they’re taken as hostages for the child.

Later there was an air raid; a few bombs were dropped, producing sounds that were bliss for every Jew in the ghetto.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 5

My saintly, beloved, worn-out, blessed mother has fallen prey to the bloodthirsty Nazi beast!!!

In the morning fright enveloped the town, as news spread that last night some children and elderly were taken from their homes and placed in empty hospitals, from which they’ll be deported beginning Monday, at a rate of 3,000 a day.

After 2 p.m., vehicles with medical examiners, police, firemen and nurses drove into our street, and the raid began. The house across from us was surrounded and after an hour and a half three children were brought out. The cries, screams and struggles of the mothers and everybody else on our street was indescribable. The children’s parents were completely frantic.

While all of this was going on, two doctors, two nurses, a few firemen and policemen quite unexpectedly came to our house. They had a list of the tenants in every apartment. The doctors, sour and angry, from Prague, began examining everyone very thoroughly, despite objections from the police and nurses. They fished out many “sick and unfit” people, as well as those they described as “reserve.” My unlucky, dearest mother was among the latter, which is no consolation, since they were all taken together to the hospital at 34 Ligawicka.

Our neighbor, 70-year-old Mr. Miller, the uncle of the ghetto’s chief doctor, was spared, and my healthy though exhausted mother took his place!!! The doctor who examined her, an old geezer, looked and looked for some ailment, and when he was surprised he couldn’t find any said to his companion, in Czech, “Very weak, very weak.” He wrote down those two wretched words, despite protests from the police and nurses present. These doctors apparently didn’t know what they were doing, because they also took David Hammer, a 20-year-old who has never been sick in his life. Thanks to his cousin, who’s an official, he was re-examined and released, and the two doctors were denounced to the Chairman and not allowed to examine anyone else. But what good is this to me? My mother fell into the trap, and I very much doubt anything will save her.
After my mother’s examination and while she was frantically running around the house, begging the doctors to save her life, my father was eating soup. True, he was a bit bewildered and approached the police and the doctors, but he didn’t run outside to beg people he knew in power to intercede on her behalf. In short, he was glad to be rid of a wife whom life was lately getting too hard, a fact which Mother had to struggle with. I swear on all that is holy that if I knew Mother would not be sent to her death, that she’d survive after all, I’d be very pleased with things the way they are.

My little, exhausted mother, who has suffered so much misfortune and whose life has been one long sacrifice for family and others, would probably not have been taken because of weakness had she not been robbed of food by my father and Nadzia. My poor mother, who always believed in God and accepted everything that came her way, kept her clarity of mind even now, in spite of her great agitation. With a certain resignation and a heart-rending logic, she spoke to us about her fate. She agreed when I said that she’d given her life by lending and giving away so much food, but she said it in such a way that I knew she had no regrets, even though she lived it dearly; there were things to value greater than life itself—such as God and family. She kissed each one of us goodbye, took a bag with some bread and potatoes in it, because I forced her to, and left quickly to meet her terrible fate.

I could not muster the strength to look at her through the window, or to cry. I was like a stone. Every now and then nervous spasms gripped my heart, my mouth and my hands. I thought my heart would break, but it did not. It allowed me to eat, think, talk and go to bed.

Up till now I’ve considered myself an egoist where life was concerned. However, I’m not sure that it would make that much difference to me if I went to death together with my mother.

It exceeds human endurance to have heard the words Mother said before she was taken and to know that she is an innocent victim. It’s true she was designated for the reserve contingent, but our officials will give away the healthiest reserve for the infirm whom they protect. Cursed capitalist world!

Hala Wolman came to see us in the evening. She works as a nurse in the hospital Mother was taken to. She consoles us that Mother is scheduled for a re-examination and that she’ll be released. But nothing can make me happy now, because I know what it means when thousands of condemned have pull—and reserve victims are put in their place.

Nadzia cried, screamed and carried on, but that hardly moves anyone now. I am silent and near insanity.

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 6

Yesterday afternoon notices were posted that from 5 p.m. until further notice no one may leave his apartment without a pass from the police. Excepting, of course, these, those, the others, and so on! Apparently, there is going to be a serious raid. At night a great many people were taken in other neighborhoods, but ours was relatively quiet. So far, all this is being done without the Germans and without slaughter—the one thing everyone fears. But let it happen—if only Mother could be returned to me!

Today, at 6:30 I went to Hala Wolman and took a towel, some soap and clean underwear for Mother—articles she requested yesterday through Hala, who promised she’ll do everything she can to have Mother re-examined and released. Rather, apparently moved by his conscience overnight, went to two or three acquaintances in the morning, seeking help—to no avail, of course.

Tonight there was no air raid and little said about miracles coming to us from the outside.

The heat is still extraordinary. In spite of the ban, people are running around the streets, everyone seeking help in his adversity. Now there is talk that the Germans are accompanying the medical teams, and they are deciding who should go and who should stay. All children previously exempted have now been told to report to one hospital, and though Rumkowski insists that the children’s registers are iron-clad, no one believes him. Even policemen, instructors and managers are despairing. The cries, mad screaming and wailing are now so common that not much attention is paid to them. Why should I be moved by some other mother’s cries, when they’ve taken my own mother away? No revenge would be enough for this deed!

On Bawarna Street huge gallows have been erected to hang some people from Pabianice who ran away before it was cleared of Jews. The devil knows why they need these gallows.

People who are hiding children in attics, lavatories and other holes are losing their heads in despair. Our street, which is very near the hospital, is filled all day with the wails of passing funeral processions, which follow the wagons of victims. In the evening my father was able to get to Mother. He said the hospital is real hell—everyone is in terrible condition, everything is confused. Mother, apparently, is changed beyond recognition, which narrows her slim chance for release.

At times I get such jitters and heart spasms that I think I’m going insane or entering delirium. In spite of this, I cannot stop thinking of Mother, and suddenly I find myself, as though I were split in two, inside her mind and body. The hour of her deportation is approaching with no rescue in sight.

It rained a bit this evening, with some thunder and lightning, which did not lessen our suffering any. Even a torrential rain could not renew a torn heart.