

# THE MOTHER WHO LIVED A MIRACLE

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*(When they ordered her to have an abortion she refused. When they threatened to kill her baby, she found a hiding place. A stranger took her child away, but through the years she kept faith that somehow he would come back to her.)*

Linden Boulevard is in the heart of Brooklyn, a vast American urban plain; and on a warm Sunday afternoon the street is full of life — children riding bicycles and jumping rope, women wheeling baby buggies, a man washing his car, a father in a red sports shirt calling, "Look out!" to his child who is chasing a baseball into the busy street. Life is precious here, children's lives.

In darkness at four o'clock in the morning on March 10, 1957, several automobiles drew up in front of the canopied apartment building at 55 Linden Boulevard, picked up a woman and her husband and their young son and headed for Idlewild Airport. They were friends taking Regina and Saul Gotz to meet their first-born, Benia, whom they had not seen since he was one year old. He was due to arrive at 5 A.M. on a plane from Russia.

Regina Gotz, a dark-haired, pretty woman of forty, growing heavy, recalls: "I remember standing at the airport and looking out from the custom-house. I felt very weak. I tried to imagine in my mind how big he would be, how thin he would be, how he would look. I heard a big noise, people asking questions, and the customs guard said he would let us in, then the plane came up and the people got off. I said to my husband, 'Do you see him?' 'Yes, I do.' 'Where?' I couldn't see faces. Then I saw that boy in the heavy Russian coat and the fur hat. I will never forget the expression on his face — lost and frightened and bashful, his eyes full of tears."

Shyly he kissed his mother. He was fourteen years old now. The last time his mother and father had seen Benia was through the barbed wire enclosure of a Jewish ghetto in Lithuania, where they had watched a Gentile woman wheel him away from them in his carriage.

Regina Gotz had given birth to her baby secretly — against the pleas of her husband and her mother, against the warning of the ghetto leaders — hidden in a tiny closet with firewood piled up against the door so that the Nazis would not discover her.

She was twenty-four years old when the Germans overran her home town of Shavel — a dark-haired girl with a quick smile and gray, beautiful eyes. Three years earlier she had married Saul Gotz, a tall, slender, reserved man whose manner was as thoughtful as hers was lighthearted. "I married him because I loved him," she says. "I could stay for hours in the window only to look out for his silhouette coming, his left shoulder a little picked up. I could see him coming from far, far away. Girls are not so romantic now, no?"

During the Russian occupation of 1940, Regina, three and a half months pregnant, had a miscarriage. The Nazis came in June, 1941, and Jews went into hiding. Germans looted their homes. Regina gave her silver, linens, jewelry and clothing to non-Jewish friends for safekeeping; later, if she survived, she could trade them for food. The Germans and Lithuanian fascists took Jews to the woods, made them dig their own graves and shot them. This happened to Regina's sister, her sister's husband and their baby. "Later we found the baby's shoe beside the grave." That first weekend, too, Regina's two younger brothers were killed.

The Jews who survived were finally put into a ghetto — a mile-square slum enclosed by barbed wire. No townsfolk were allowed to go near the wire, nor might the Jews within it go near it. There were

twenty-five hundred inmates — among them Regina, her mother, her brother Jacob and her husband Saul. Every morning at six-thirty you could see ghetto prisoners line up at the gate under German guns and march out in columns to do forced labor in factories and fields. Every evening they returned, were counted, then went to their dwellings — miserable hovels struggling up a hill.

A Jewish administration ran the ghetto — subject of course, to the approval of the Gestapo — and Saul Gotz was a member of it. A man of stern conscience, he had terrible responsibilities. The administration, the buffer between the Jews and the Germans, had to dole out the inadequate food, arrest people for violating Nazi restrictions and produce workers demanded by the S.S.

"The ghetto had an unforgettable look", Regina Gotz recalls. "No spark of life. You didn't see a smile, not even on the children's faces." Day and night the streets were empty. It was like a dead city. In the winter, potatoes hidden under the Gotzes' bed froze. To get wood for fuel, the people tore down fences and sheds, cut all the trees in the ghetto, even took the wooden tombstones from the old Jewish cemetery. The food ration was hardly enough to sustain life. Everybody obtained food illegally, and smuggled it in. They became expert smugglers. They bribed guards. One woman traded a mink stole for five pounds of lard.

Quarrels arose because they lived so close together. A few Jews, currying favor from the Germans, denounced other Jews for smuggling. But the ghetto had its heroes too.

Dr. Wulf Peisachowitsch, head of the ghetto hospital, smuggled in medicine. The Germans ordered him not to treat patients with communicable diseases — they would shoot them instead — but he did. Another hero was a man who came with a horse and wagon and pumped the contents of the outdoor toilets into a big barrel and hauled it out of the ghetto. In the empty barrel he brought in food and instead of selling it gave it to the sick. In the full barrel he smuggled out children. "That man," Regina Gotz says, almost in awe, "a poor horse and wagon driver, no education, but he was one of the most respected figures in the ghetto. I don't know how many lives he saved. And risked his own life every time."

On June 15, 1942, the Gestapo decreed that pregnant women in the ghetto must submit to abortions.

The Nazis refused to provide anesthetic but doctors smuggled it in. Some women waited, hoping the Germans would lose the war before their babies were born. "We seldom got one who was only one or two months pregnant," Dr. Peisachowitsch has said. "They kept saying, 'Hitler will be dead before I give birth.'" They waited as long as they dared. One woman waited until the seventh month; her child was aborted alive and a member of the administration smothered the child.

Regina Gotz learned she was pregnant in mid-January, 1943. She had pneumonia, and a doctor, examining her, told her she was four and a half months pregnant. She had not known; like many women in the ghetto, she had long since ceased to menstruate.

"The night I was told I was pregnant," she has said, "I was so happy, as a mother. I felt that the baby was going to be born and going to be alive. I don't know how, because it was against everything logical. I thought, I'll run away from the ghetto. But then, how can I? My mother lost all her other children; I can't leave her. Then, my husband can't run, too many know him, men his age are mobilized. I didn't know what to do. But then I was a fatalist. Maybe something will change." When Saul came home that night she told him. "He was very unhappy. He didn't say anything. He was quiet, shocked. Then he said, 'Now it had to happen'". His position was not easy. Not only would she by bearing the child endanger her own life and his and those all in the house; he also was caught in a moral dilemma, for as a member of the administration he had had to persuade other women to undergo abortions, and now his own wife refused.

Day after day she discussed it with Saul and Jacob and her mother, Mrs. Thon. They wanted her to

have an abortion. Her determination grew. "I was all alone. Then the torture began. My husband was called by the administration leaders two or three times a week to bring me over for an abortion. He would tell me, 'They called me in again today.' How could I be responsible for my family and the others? Finally he told them he could do nothing with me. So I was called in by the administration myself. They said I had to do it. I said I wouldn't." She felt that, having had a miscarriage earlier, if she had an abortion now, she might never be able to bear a child. Saul resigned from the administration.

"I used to lie down in bed near the window and look up at the clouds, and in the forms of the clouds I used to figure out how the baby's face and body would look. In the clouds I made his eyes, his head, his curls, everything. I raised the baby in my imagination before I had it." The news was good; the Germans had surrendered at Stalingrad. Perhaps they would lose the war before the baby was born. Russian bombs aimed at a nearby tannery fell in the ghetto. Many Jews were killed.

Once during a bombing, the Gotzes ran to hide in the orchard by the cemetery. Regina Gotz recalls, "I was happy then that the baby was not yet born — that I had it with me, to protect it." But Russian victories might mean death for the Jews; the Germans might kill them so as to be unencumbered in retreat. Jews who worked at the railroad station saw two sealed trains filled with Jews passing through town, headed for the extermination camps.

Others in the house learned Regina was pregnant. They too wanted her to have an abortion. In all, forty-one people lived in the house, including two babies. Some were old and sick; some were young; some had been wealthy; nearly all had lost husbands or parents or children before they found sanctuary in the ghetto. Some thought only of themselves and some were brave and generous. One of them worked for the German commandant; the others feared him — Regina especially, now that she was pregnant.

The Gotzes shared a bare little upstairs room with eight others, all but two of their relatives. The room was small, about 12 by 10 feet, lit by a single naked electric bulb, with double-decker bunk beds around the walls. Regina Gotz was extraordinarily devoted to her mother. Mrs. Thon was then about forty-nine, a short, sad woman. "She had lost two sons and a daughter and a son-in-law and a grandchild," Regina says. "She had high blood pressure, and we had the doctor come and lower her blood pressure by taking blood out of veins with leeches. She tried to clean the house while we were working. She took care of babies. She washed and ironed. We were around her as much as we could be." Regina's brother Jacob was young, husky, good looking, blond, capable. He worked in a machine shop in town and had excellent connections with Christians. He fell in love with a young woman in the house, Esther Ziv, who with her baby had found sanctuary there after her husband was killed.

As for Regina, pregnant: "I was like a prisoner. I stayed in my room. I felt it on my conscience; I felt guilty, ashamed, that it was not right what I did. But the feeling to do it was stronger." She never went out in the daytime. Often she heard German curses, Jewish screams. Late at night she took walks with her husband. She kept away from the man who worked for the German commandant. "I stayed in my room and I lived with my child. I was thinking if only a woman could be pregnant not just for nine months but longer, then I would keep him in myself and maybe the war would be over. The biggest part of my life was in my mind, not in reality."

Saul and Jacob prepared a place for her to bear the child in secret — a closet across the kitchen from their room where they stored food and firewood. Saul and Jacob emptied it and scrubbed it. There was no electric light; they brought in a kerosene lamp. There was no window; they cut a hole in the wall. The walls were rough boards; they collected newspapers, made a paste of water and precious flour, and tried to paper them. They brought in a cot, table and bench. They piled stove wood outside in the corridor to hide the door should the Germans come into the house. They procured a rubber sheet and sterile cotton and gauze from the ghetto hospital. They saved soap and they prepared a kerosene stove. They found a basin to wash the baby in. By now Saul had ceased to talk about an abortion. "He just kept quiet."

On the night of June 3, Regina slept but little. At 4:30 A.M., "the water broke"; she got up and

walked a few steps to her mother's bed and awakened her. "She said, 'Be calm, go back to bed. We have plenty of time; be patient.' She explained to me about the pains, that I should call her when I was having the pains every ten minutes." Regina paced the floor. It was dark. She dared not turn on a light. She went to the kitchen alone and washed her hair. She heated a pan of water. She went back to bed and lay down. Saul awoke and asked what was the matter. She told him it was nothing. She waited. The others left for work. About 7 A.M., her pains became regular — ten minutes apart, she judged. She went to her mother's bed again and together they went into the closet and closed the door. "Then everything disappeared around us," Regina says. "No ghetto, no people, nothing." Outside the closet, Saul piled stove wood against the door to hide it completely. Then he left.

"I was very calm," Regina recalls. "I knew I had wanted this and I had to do it myself." Her mother told her to lie down on the cot. "Through the little window it was a beautiful day. I saw the flowering trees and a woman planting beets in the garden beyond the wire and I thought, how can she be so peacefully planting beets and the whole world so calm when this is going on? Everybody should protest what is going on here. But when those pains come you don't think anything. My mother gave me instructions — bear down, sit, lie. I remember once crawling around on my feet and hands, crawling from pain. She told me to lie down quiet, to strain myself, to scream once or twice because it would make me feel better, but I was afraid to scream because just beyond the next wall was the man we were afraid of." At the end of the day, when Saul and the others returned, Regina and her mother were still in the barricaded closet. The others gathered in the kitchen to wait, bunched together, facing the closet. No sound came from it. "Once my husband came in and I asked him to go away right away. I wanted only my mother. Her arms were all blue, maybe that I pinched her instead of screaming. When I pushed out the child I was terribly torn but I did not scream out. My mother cut off the child. She hit him and he screamed, then I didn't feel anything. I didn't know anything. I was too exhausted."

Near midnight Regina hemorrhaged seriously. Saul hurried to Dr. Joseph Luntz, gynecologist at the ghetto hospital. At the risk of his life he came and stopped the bleeding. The other tenants, who had waited all evening in the kitchen, went to bed. Regina kept her baby beside her the rest of the night. "I stayed awake the whole time so the rats would not get him." The baby weighed about nine and a half pounds. She named him Ben Zion — son of Zion. It had been her father's name.

The next day was a terrible day in the ghetto. The Germans caught a young man who lived in the Gotzes' house smuggling a package of cigarettes into the ghetto, and decided to make an example of him. They forced Jews to build a scaffold. They went through the ghetto with dogs, driving everybody out of the houses to witness the hanging. Regina could hear them. Saul had covered the closet door completely with firewood. The S.S. came to her house. All its residents were standing outside conspicuously, but the Germans went inside anyway. They searched the house but did not find her. "After a while it was quiet. And so it was the whole day. Nobody spoke a word as they came from the hanging. Nobody cried. Everybody was like a stone. One life, Benia, had come into the world and another, the one they hanged, had left it."

In the days that followed, Regina busied herself with the baby. "I kept my baby always close to me, and when he woke up I took him to my breast so he wouldn't scream or cry. I washed the baby, fed the baby, lived in a world of my own. I seldom moved out of the closet. My mother brought me food. After the baby was born, everybody was interested in him, came in just to look at him, that he would be well. I was not alone any more."

The war was going badly for the Nazis. Mussolini fell. The Russians were advancing closer. A Christian friend of Regina Gotz's sent word that she had better get her child out of the ghetto because soon the Germans would kill all Jewish children and ship the adults to extermination camps. Regina's brother Jacob approached a Catholic priest, Father Lapis, in town. Father Lapis said a Christian widow, a Mrs. Sadauskiene, might take the child. Regina talked it over with her family. Was it right to give the child away? Should not its fate be hers? Would it be safe? Could Mrs. Sadauskiene care for it properly? Regina decided; she would smuggle the baby out.

They had to pick a rainy night, when few people would be abroad. It had to be a night when a guard they could bribe was on duty. Dr. Peisachowitsch gave Saul some sleeping pills. Saul punched air holes in a suitcase. A friend in town sent two bottles to Regina and one night Regina filled the bottles with her milk. She gave the baby the sleeping pills — he was three and a half months old — put him in the suitcase and with Saul set forth.

Outside it was storming. It had been raining all day; the mud was knee-deep, and now a cold autumn wind had risen. Regina and Saul walked through the mud, the suitcase between them, Saul carrying it and an umbrella. At the gate a guard stopped them. Regina put her diamond engagement ring in his hand and told him they were taking some clothing to town to trade for food. He let them pass. "We went along the wire close to the cemetery with the hope that the soul of my father resting there will keep an eye over us and will make successful that trip."

They walked an hour across the fields. At the railroad tracks Germans were patrolling beneath bright lights. "The bright light made it seem as if the whole world knew what we were doing." But the patrol paid no heed. They crossed the tracks, and in the blackness of the fields Regina sank to her knees in mud and briars. Saul half-carried her as well as the baby in the suitcase. They came to a hut with a lamp in the window. It was the signal previously arranged. They went in. It was a tiny house — a kitchen with an earth floor and thatched roof, a second room with a wooden floor; but it was clean and warm and quiet, and Mrs. Sadauskiene, a tall, thin woman of about fifty, was friendly. "I'd never seen her before but liked her from the first." She had prepared a crib beside her own bed. Regina put the suitcase on the bed and opened it and took out the baby. She laid him on the bed and pressed her ear to his heart to see if she could still hear him breathing. "And I could."

Mrs. Sadauskiene tried to calm Regina, saying she had raised a son and knew how to handle children — "that I should be quiet and be sure she will do her best and Jesus Christ will help her, and she made the sign of faith, she crossed herself, as if she'd swear to me she would do it."

Saul returned to the ghetto, but Regina stayed. "I wanted to see how she'll give the baby his first bottle, how he will take it, how she'll handle it." Twice a day for the first week she would refill the bottles with her milk and pass them through the wire and Mrs. Sadauskiene's son would pick them up.

Next morning Regina took off her Jewish badges, dressed as a peasant in Mrs. Sadauskiene's clothes and went to town. German soldiers were everywhere. She met Father Lapis on the street outside his church. He gave her a false birth certificate for Benia. "He was so tender and good and he calmed me down and blessed me and hoped that all would be over soon." She went back to Mrs. Sadauskiene's house. She wrote a note asking whoever found it to explain to the child who he was and what had happened to his parents. She added the names and addresses of relatives in South Africa, Russia and Palestine. She buried the note in the dirt floor of the kitchen. She refilled the bottles with her milk. She held and kissed the baby. She left, found a work column, slipped into it and got back into the ghetto.

A few weeks later the ghetto was liquidated and everybody, including the Gotzes, was moved to a second ghetto on the other side of the tannery. Saul and Regina Gotz shared a room the size of a bathroom with three other people. They and Mrs. Thon worked in the tannery, washing wool in large machines — heavy labor. One day when the workers returned, the ghetto was empty. The Germans had shipped all the children — about six hundred thirty — and about twenty old people to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. A panic ensued. Perhaps a dozen children, including Esther Ziv's, had been hidden and were safe. In the confusion Esther escaped from the ghetto with her child. She ran to the market in town and threw the child into a passing wagon, making note of the license number; then she hid in a peasant's house.

Everybody knew that soon they all would be shipped to the extermination camps. Before tills happened, Regina Gotz wanted to see her baby once more. She sent word by Jacob to Mrs. Sadauskiene. On Benia's first birthday, June 4, 1944, Regina and her husband and mother hid near the wire, and soon Mrs. Sadauskiene came along outside the wire, pushing a baby carriage. She stopped opposite them and

pretended to adjust the baby's diaper. She picked him up and held him so they could see. Then she passed on.

A few days later, all who remained in the Shavel ghetto were put in, columns and marched through the gate and down the road, with black-uniformed S.S. guards at their sides. Saul, marching a few ranks ahead of Regina, turned every now and then to encourage her. She was weak, but her mother was weaker and needed her help. Her brother Jacob had disappeared. "Like people going to death we went, not knowing where we went. A lot of us fainted. They were kicked by the S.S. to get up again." It was hot, a beautiful July day. The road was dusty. They marched all day, and after midnight came to a wood by the railroad tracks and stopped. Most fell to the ground, exhausted. A few tried to run. The S.S. shot them. A long freight train arrived, composed entirely of boxcars, and they were put into the boxcars and the doors were sealed; the train started, for what destination they did not know.

They were packed in so tightly that they could not sit down with their legs stretched out. They had no water, no light, no food. The train ran on and on, all night and all the next day and all the next night, perhaps longer — the survivors lost track of time. And at last it stopped. The Jews were loaded into trucks and hauled away. Along the road Regina Gotz saw a sign, "Tiegenhof," so she knew they were in Germany. They entered a beautiful pine forest and drove through it to an opening in the woods, where they saw a high wire fence. It was the concentration camp called Stutthoff, near Danzig. The gate closed behind them.

Inside, all was peaceful and lovely, "We saw many houses that looked wonderful — white, with red roofs, and around the — windows some boxes with red flowers in them" There were thousands of other people here. Beyond the pretty houses were two big barracks and a smaller building; and from the smokestack of the smaller one black smoke was pouring. It was a crematory where inmates were burned after, they were put to death in gas chambers.

They were told to sit on the ground. The grass was lush. Birds sang all around. The Germans ordered the men to rise. Regina and Saul kissed and said goodbye. "We didn't say anything except if we will be alive someday we will see each other in Shavel where our child is." The men were marched away.

The guards ordered the women up, marched them into one of the big barracks and told them to get undressed to be deloused. S.S. troops and prisoners of war came in with whips and began whipping them. "They did it just to make a panic, to make us run. We ran into the shower room under the water; it was cold, we ran out; they whipped and pushed us, we ran again, we didn't know where to run, one in one direction, one in the other, on top of each other, they whipped us to a certain direction, then shipped us back, all naked, shivering, then whipped us to a place where they said would be the medical examination. It wasn't a medical examination. You opened your mouth and if they saw a gold bridge or a gold tooth they tore it out with force right then, with blood all over your face. They looked through our hair for jewelry. They took off our wedding rings. My mother's ring was hard to take off, and I thought they would break her hand.

Then they said would be the gynecological examination. This was because some women hid jewelry inside of them. Then they whipped us again. Naked we ran outside under the sky. Before our eyes was a pile of shoes, another pile of blankets and another pile of dresses, and they told us to take them. Whatever you could find you grabbed whether it fit or not. they kept whipping .and we were naked running. One grabbed one shoe and one the other; one grabbed a shirt, a dress, and ran to a big barracks, and they told us to get dressed. You saw a big dress on a small woman, a big woman with a dress so little it left her thighs bare. We looked at each other and began to cry and laugh hysterically. We sat down there on the floor in a big room. We were very kind to each other."

The men's camp adjoined the women's, separated from it by high barbed wire charged with electricity. In the towers were machine guns. At night the women could hear the sounds of their husbands being beaten. "It was so terrible to hear them screaming like children."

One day through the wire she saw Saul. His head was shaved; she did not recognize him at first. He made a sign to her, a clenched fist, meaning "Be strong." He threw a tiny package over the wire to her. In it were a piece of torn shirt, a piece of soap, a needle and thread. "That little piece of soap helped me to keep away the lice. That little piece of cloth I made a brassiere for myself, and a towel, and a little bag, and in the bag I kept my comb, my little piece of bread, my soap and my towel."

In September, 1944, after they had been at Stutthoff a little more than a month, S.S. guards came into the barracks and announced they needed a group of three hundred women. To go where? all wondered. To work?? To the crematory? Regina's thoughts flew to her mother. She noticed that the S.S. men, as they moved around the room picking out the three hundred, were taking only the strong-legged ones; perhaps they were going to work. Swiftly she combed her mother's hair and shortened her dress to make her look younger, and they joined the column of women. At the gate a guard seized her mother and threw her aside and drove her back to the barracks. Regina jumped out of the column too. A guard knocked her down, then whipped her back into the column and through the gate. As she went she saw her husband through the wire; once again he made the sign with the clenched fist. She could not see her mother. She never saw her again.

With the other women Regina marched for a day to a beautiful wood. They were shown a stack of tents and ordered to erect them. They were shown a pile of straw and told to gather some to sleep on. They fought over the straw. The tents were small; ten women were put in each.

At 5 A.M. they were aroused by a piercing whistle. One from each tent went to get a pail of coffee and a half loaf of bread for her tent. This was the food for ten women for the entire day. The whistle blew again and they went outside, still wrapped in their blankets, shivering. They marched to a pile of shovels, put them on their shoulders, formed a column and marched two hours. The guards stopped them and told them to dig. At first they thought it was their own graves they were digging. Later they learned they were digging trenches for the German troops.

The weather grew colder. Many with frozen hands or feet got gangrene and died. Others died of pneumonia. None was buried; they were simply thrown into a ditch. "If one dies with shoes on, or a coat or a dress, you are happy to steal it and put it on yourself. I mean they made animals of us." The camp's toilet was a long ditch with a plank across it a quarter mile from the tents. "In the night when it was cold you had to run often to the toilet. The bladder got weak, everybody got diarrhea. You got not one night's sleep. One woke up to go to the toilet and stepped on the others, and they scolded her. "Why did you step on my feet?" and "Why not let me sleep?" and she had to run through the rain and fog in the dark woods, and if she didn't — you know, 'make it' to the toilet she was whipped.

"More and more was the suffering from the cold. We woke up stiff, our eyelids white from vapor, the hair at our temples white, the blankets white. Lips were so cracked and frozen you couldn't talk, so we couldn't understand each other. In the morning you were not able to hold your coffee without help." Christmas Eve, the S.S. officers had a dinner, and after it they sent word that they would give the women a present; the women gathered outside the officers' building, and the cook came out and threw bones to them in the snow. They fought over them, and the S.S. officers watched, laughing.

Then there was another move. The Russians were close and the women were taken deeper into Germany. Day after day they marched. Other columns of marching women joined theirs, perhaps two thousand or more. "We tried to revive ourselves by eating snow. If you stopped to go to the toilet you were shot down, so you went without stopping. We were losing more and more people." One night as they slept in rotten straw and animal dung in a stable, a woman, screaming, bore a child. She left it in the stable.

At Praust, another concentration camp, the trench digging began all over again. "I felt it was the end. But then I was thinking about my baby, thinking I would like to die, thinking maybe he will be alive, thinking I have to live, and I thought, if you went through that march maybe it is a sign that you have to live." The cold was terrible. "I remember physically I couldn't do it. When they said they would hit us, we

said, 'Shoot us'. We didn't care any more." But by now the Nazis didn't seem to care either.

Regina dreamed often of her baby. She saw Mrs. Sadauskiene pushing the carriage across the snow; the carriage kept upsetting and Benia kept falling out, and Mrs. Sadauskiene kept picking him up. Once she dreamed of finding Benia at the bottom of a deep hole. "I lived between dream and reality, mostly dream. Always that little house where Benia was, looking for him and saving him." She thought of running away to him. One day, working, she lay down in the trench, half fainting, half hiding; she decided to stay. In a few minutes, she was covered with snow. She lay there a long time. It was warmer under the snow. As in a dream, she heard the guard above shout, "Eintreten!" and heard the other women forming a column to go back to camp. Then the guard cried, "Who's missing?" and swore and fired into the air. "I did not care at all. Let him do what he wants. But they were disgusted too. They all went away."

She lay still, perhaps two hours, then raised her head. It was dark. She got to her knees but was too stiff to rise farther. She crawled along the trench till she came to a shallow place; she crawled across the field in the darkness, crawled a long time, and came to a house. Her hands were too stiff to knock on the door; she scratched and rubbed on it.

A woman opened the door, tall, thin; she dragged her into the kitchen and locked the door. Regina, on the floor, said, "You know where I am from. I have readied my last day. I lost everybody in my family. I don't have anybody. I have a little child who may survive. You are a mother and I am a mother. If you can, save my life. If you can't, give me a drink of water and some bread and call the Gestapo." The woman let her stay.

Regina posed as a German refugee from bombed-out Danzig. She became a member of the family. Evenings the house was full of German soldiers; they ate there. A few times they questioned Regina; she fended them off. Days she cleaned the house. At night she often woke up screaming.

The last German gasp, the Battle of the Bulge, had failed. At the front, Germans were dying by the thousands. Then the Allies' bombs fell. Day after day the family was driven to a bunker in the yard. One evening a bomb hit the house and killed the woman who had saved Regina.

They went on living in the ruins, the rest of them, until the Germans ordered all civilians evacuated to Danzig. The family, in a panic, began packing everything they could carry. Regina, who had been through it before, told them, "Take nothing but food, throw away your bundles, don't waste your strength. Try to keep alive and keep your family together; you can't go on carrying bundles." They wandered from wood to wood, hundreds and thousands of people. The roads were packed with soldiers and civilians. Germans on the run, Regina posing as one of them. Danzig was in flames. They were to go aboard ships but had to hide in a wood till the bombs stopped falling. German officers were tearing their insignia from their uniforms and burning their papers. Regina watched. "What these people had done to us, now was done to them". That night it stormed and the bombing stopped, and they embarked and were taken to Copenhagen, Denmark.

It was March, 1945. Denmark was still under German rule. Regina, masquerading as a German, was put in a camp for civilian German refugees. Hitler died and German troops were withdrawn.

Now the Danish police took over. Regina could not convince them of her true identity. One day a Jewish woman and her small son visited the camp, inquiring about relatives. "When I saw that boy — it was the first Jewish child I had seen, he reminded me of all the children and of my own boy Benia — I cried and kissed him and kissed him. Poor boy, he didn't understand, he didn't expect so much love." She felt a desperate need to find out what had happened to Benia and Saul. But how? Perhaps news of them had reached her friends and relatives in South Africa, Russia or Palestine. But she could not remember their names and addresses. Her mind was near the breaking point. She couldn't even remember the fictitious name in which Father Lapis had made out Benia's false birth certificate, nor could she recall the name of Mrs. Sadauskiene.

After many weeks a rabbi and a representative of B'nai B'rith came to see her. "I fell on the rabbi's neck, hugged and kissed him — the rabbi, which is not allowed to do." They obtained her release from the camp, fed and clothed her and found her a home with a Jewish woman. She asked B'nai B'rith to find out whether her husband and child were alive but could furnish little information to help. One day she thought she recognized Saul's picture in a newspaper photograph of bodies found in the extermination camps. But she could not be sure. Nothing was certain.

She tried to establish a normal life for herself. She met a young Dane who helped her learn Danish and got her a job. She spent her money extravagantly on clothes. "I wanted nice things after all that. But I wanted too much. It was not normal." The young Dane took her dancing and to dinner. She was still a good-looking woman, only twenty-eight. He proposed to her. But she had to know what had happened to Saul and Benia. "I remembered Saul had said, 'If we will be alive someday we will see each other in Shavel where our child is.'" She went to the Russian Embassy — Lithuania was then and still is a part of Russia — but she could not even tell them the name by which Benia probably was known if he was alive.

Finally, she recalled the name of a girlhood friend now living in Tel Aviv. Regina cabled her. Two days later she got an answer: Benia was alive in Shavel and so was her brother Jacob, who had escaped and joined the underground there,

"That was to me — I don't have words to express my happiness. I thought of myself, of Benia, what I went through, and it was not for nothing. And I'm not by myself in the world." Her friend in Tel Aviv gave her Jacob's address. Regina cabled him directly. He replied, "Happy you are alive. Benia, Esther, Chadiva and I are well." Chadiva was Esther's child by her first husband. In a letter that followed, Jacob told Regina his story. In the underground he had found Esther and they had fought the Germans together as partisans and after the war had married. Once Jacob had been seriously wounded. He had kept an eye on Benia throughout. The Russians had driven the Germans out, then the Germans had counterattacked, and for weeks the two armies had seesawed back and forth. During that time Mrs. Sadauskiene had taken Benia and hidden with him in the forest. For months she had been unable to get milk for him. After the war Esther and Jacob found Esther's daughter, Chadiva, whom Esther had tossed into a peasant's cart when she escaped from the ghetto. They wanted to have Benia with them too, but Mrs. Sadauskiene would not give him up to anybody except his parents. Everybody had thought them dead. Later Mrs. Sadauskiene, shown Regina's cable and subsequent letter, gave Benia to Jacob and Esther. He was two years old.

About a week after Regina learned that Benia was alive she received a second cable from Tel Aviv. Saul, her husband, was alive too, in Munich. "That was too big a shock to me. I fell back in a certain helplessness." Her friends in Denmark helped her. A Red Cross man came to see her: he was flying to Germany next day and would search for Saul. In two weeks, he returned; he had checked every refugee camp and had not found Saul. But another letter came from Tel Aviv; Saul was now in Italy. The Red Cross found him there. Regina received a letter from him. All the years of tension and struggle and separation suddenly bore down upon her. She collapsed and for three months was in a hospital with a nervous breakdown.

Saul kept writing and cabling, but their reunion looked hopeless for a long time. Both Italy and Denmark were crowded and neither would admit anybody until they had got rid of hundreds of thousands of German internees. The hopes for a reunion with Benia were not much brighter. Wartime restriction's were still in force; it would not be easy to get him out of Russian Lithuania.

Regina went from one person to another in Denmark, seeking ways of reaching either her husband or her child. Finally she met a girl who knew the Italian consul. He granted Regina a temporary visa good for one month's stay in Italy.

It was June, 1947. She had been in Denmark two years. She bought new luggage, clothes, table linens, silverware — "Something to begin a life with"— and took a train for Rome. "I couldn't imagine how it will be, seeing each other after three and a half years. I was very upset and nervous. I was really like sick. We passed some beautiful places, the Alps, the Dolomites, and I was thinking, Well, why didn't I

pass those places in time that I could enjoy that beauty? When we came to the Swiss border at Lake Como, we had to get off to go through customs, and they were looking through my baggage, nice things, I was well dressed, I looked very good, and I saw my husband running toward me. I wouldn't have recognized him. He had lost his hair, his teeth, his cheeks were sagging, his eyes had an expression, I don't know, he was lost. We had to wait till I came out of customs into Italy. Then we held each other."

They rode to Rome together. "We were like two strangers, we didn't know what to talk about. I kept calling him by the name of my friend in Denmark. It was hard for me to say his name. When I came into the room he had prepared in Rome, I was exhausted and tired; I had felt so much I was unable to feel anymore at all. It was a nice room, very plain furnished, fruits and wine and sandwiches on the table. But no plates. I took off my dress to wash myself and got in my pajamas and asked him where are his things. He told me that he hasn't got anything, no pajamas, nothing. His clothes were old, his shoes were worn. I opened my suitcase and took out dresses and shoes and table service in silver, dishes and butter and cheese and bread. He looked at me as if he would admire me and I felt terrible bad and full of pity because I in this moment was superior to him, I have things and he doesn't have anything." War destroys many things besides life.

Saul had been taken from Stutthoff to Dachau, then to various work camps. On the whole, he had had an easier time than Regina, though he too underwent a long, terrible march. Regina has said, "It took a long time till I felt really again that he was my husband as he used to be before." Her temporary visa was extended repeatedly. Saul went to work for a Jewish refugee agency. "He started to earn a salary. He got used again to starting in life. Little by little we felt more and more a feeling of happiness. Then we began to work about Benia."

They went together to the Russian Embassy in Italy but accomplished nothing. At irregular intervals they received letters from Jacob. Wartime censorship was still in force. The letters were very guarded and never discussed plans for the future. Jacob could tell them little except that Benia was well physically but was a difficult, nervous child. Once he sent a picture of Benia, a tall, thin child alone in a park. Regina and Saul could not even be sure he bore their name.

Regina dreamed of him constantly. "I dreamed every night and woke up in the morning and thought, I can't go on with my life. I dreamed I'm running with Benia in a storm in a wide field by myself to hide him, the wind tearing my rags from me, and nobody wants to take him and the Nazis are already around, all by myself alone. Sometimes I saw a little shoe in the snow." It was the shoe of her sister's baby, found after the baby was murdered by the Germans.

They began to despair of getting Benia to Italy. There was a limit to the time they could stay there themselves. Regina became pregnant. The baby was born March 11, 1949, and they named him for a prophet, Amos. Then Jacob wrote that Benia had meningitis. Regina wanted to send him something. She received permission from the Russian Embassy in Rome to send a five-pound package by air mail. She filled it with candy, shoes, socks, underwear, a shirt, a sweater, toys. She packed it carefully and paid duty on it and mailed it. "I lived for two months thinking that our child would get his first present from his mother." Then the package came back. She thought Benia had died of meningitis. She wrote to Jacob but received no reply. So this was how it all had ended, her years of struggle to bear and save her child.

In the meantime, she and Saul had applied for permission to enter America. The permission came through. They had little heart for the journey, but there seemed to be nothing left for them in Europe. Perhaps in America they could somehow start anew. With their baby Amos they arrived in New York on April 24, 1950. Friends took them to their home on the East Side of New York. Louis Segal, general secretary of the Farband Labor Zionist Order, a fraternal insurance society, befriended them as he has other immigrants. They leaned on him for advice and help. Saul went to work for him. Regina has said, "Mr Segal has a big heart full of love for people in need."

In need they were. They had no money, no home, no English. Saul suffered a heart attack. They

had come to a strange new land. Saul at the age of forty-two, Regina at thirty-three, to start life over with nothing but each other and the infant Amos. Once again they did not know whether their first-born, Benia, was dead or alive. They wrote repeatedly to Jacob and Esther. For five years they wrote but got no answer. They gave up. Perhaps all were dead; who could know? They ceased to write.

Then in April, 1955, they received a letter from Esther's brother in Tel Aviv; Benia, Jacob and Esther were in good health in Lithuania. They had written to Tel Aviv, wondering why they had heard nothing from Saul and Regina — didn't they care about Benia any more? And why hadn't they answered Jacob's letters. Apparently the letters of both had been censored. Regina wrote again. Stalin had died and censorship was eased. A reply came at once.

Esther wrote that she and Jacob were rearing Benia, their own boy and baby girl, her daughter by her first marriage and the son of the peasant who long ago had saved her baby daughter. Mrs. Sadauskiene still lived in Shavel and they kept in touch with her. They lived in Kovno. Benia was now nearly twelve years old. He had thought he was their child until he was about seven. Then, after he had done poor work in school, the school, assuming he was an orphan, had inquired into his home life with his "foster parents". Jacob and Esther let him think he was an orphan; it seemed kinder, for it appeared unlikely that Saul and Regina would ever be able to reclaim him.

Regina and Saul now wrote that they wanted to bring Benia to America. Jacob and Esther told him the truth about his life. He became confused and depressed, couldn't eat or sleep, lost interest in his schoolwork. He felt unwanted, felt that Esther and Jacob were trying to get rid of him, couldn't understand why Regina and Saul didn't come to visit him if they loved him. He was afraid to go to America. Nor at first did Esther want to let him go. She wrote that she could understand Regina wanted him — "he is your flesh and blood." But at the same time she had reared him with her own love and sacrifice and she felt that Benia belonged to her. She said she would do what was best for Benia, what he wanted; she and Regina after all wanted the same thing for the boy — his happiness. At length Benia himself wrote to Regina and Saul. It was a pleasant, polite but rather distant letter, telling them meticulously how he helped his "father" with his work and helped around the house, how he played with other children, how he was getting along in school, asking how Regina and Saul lived and what hobbies his brother Amos had, and saying finally that he was looking forward to the time when he could go to America and see his true parents — but only if "Papa and Mama," that is, Esther and Jacob — went with him. This was impossible. For months Regina and Esther corresponded. Esther agreed to let Benia go. She wrote that she was trying "to fill his heart with love" for Regina. Gradually Benia changed his mind; he would go to America.

But how could it be arranged? How could he be got out of Russia? Regina and Saul asked Saul's employer, Segal, to help. Segal consulted many people, but nobody held out much hope. Among others whom Segal consulted was one of the authors of the present article, S. L. Shneiderman, a correspondent for an Israeli newspaper at the United Nations. One day in the UN delegates lounge, Shneiderman approached the permanent Soviet representative A.A. Sobolev and told him the story of Benia Gotz. To Shneiderman's surprise, Sobolev showed keen interest and asked for more details. Saul and Regina wrote to Sobolev on May 23, 1955, but months passed with no results. When Shneiderman again turned to Sobolev in October, the Soviet representative assured him that the parents' letter was being considered in Moscow and even indicated the case was not hopeless. Again a long wait ensued, during which Saul and Regina wrote to Marshal K. Y. Voroshilov and Nikita Khrushchev. Some time after this they had word from Esther that she and Jacob had been interviewed by local Soviet officials. Saul and Regina sent a petition to Washington for Benia's immigration; it was forwarded to the United States consul in Moscow. Esther wrote that Benia was having a hard time. Regina recalls, "He wouldn't talk to them, he didn't eat, he was nervous. But she said he was getting used to the thought that he wants to be with us." The American consul in Moscow said he would expedite the visa. Esther wrote that they had furnished photographs and a birth certificate to Russian authorities. In February, 1957, Esther wrote, "The moment, has come for me to face the necessity of separating from our dear Benia. I can scarcely see what I am writing, for my eyes are filled with tears. But stronger than all my feelings is my desire that you remain in good health and be able

to do everything for him and to make him happy."

On Saturday, March 9, 1957, Regina and Saul received a cable from Esther in Moscow; Benia was on a plane bound for America, due in New York at 7 A.M. the next day. Saul kept calling the airport through the night. The plane was two hours early, due at 5 A.M. At 4 A.M. about twenty-five friends gathered at the Gotzes' apartment and drove to Idlewild. Their younger child, Amos, who was eight, went with them.

At the airport Benia came down the plane's ramp wearing an enormous Russian greatcoat, carrying a plywood suitcase in one hand and clutching his passport in the other. He walked hesitantly toward his mother and father, frightened, trying to smile. He kissed his parents shyly. Then Amos, an exuberant, bouncy lad, fell all over him and saved the situation. The two boys clung together in the swirling crowd.

They took him home to celebrate with their friends. On the door was a sign in Russian. "Welcome," and on the curtains the same sign in English. The apartment was full of flowers, and there was a cake with the words in Russian "Welcome, Benia, to your new home." Regina says, "I don't remember much about the party except that Benia called me into the room we had prepared for him and said, 'Mother, I brought you something,' and opened his suitcase and took out an embroidered tablecloth, and all of a sudden like from a dream I saw my mother before my eyes — my mother had made it for me with her hands many years ago."

Benia, a tall, slender, bright boy of fourteen, has a shy smile, black hair, dark skin. He entered the first year of Erasmus High School in Brooklyn. The school was so big and the children so boisterous that they frightened him. Once he came home in tears — the other children had laughed at him. He had been a good student in Lithuania; now, knowing little English, he was having hard going. His mother hired an English tutor for him.

"Often he gets upset," Regina said recently. "He's a very complicated boy. No wonder — he loves his old land, his memories there, his friends and teachers. He can't tolerate it if someone tells him how good things are here. We showed him the highest building in the world here in New York and he doubted it; he had been told a building in Russia was the highest. Once he asked how much is a pound of butter, a loaf of bread and how much his father earned in a day, so he could compare with prices in Russia. He asked if all the races were allowed to go to colleges together here. I told him about the Fifth Amendment and the open press and took him to the UN and he was amazed at the freedom of mind, freedom that people can hear what's going on behind the political scenes."

Everything seemed strange to him. "The first day I wanted to clean his shoes and he couldn't understand. He said, 'No, I'll clean yours.' At the table if I get up to go to the phone he stops eating to wait till I come back." Segal gave him a United States Savings Bond, and he was disappointed that he had to wait ten years to cash it for full value — "What if I have to leave before then?"

Regina says, "The only thing that makes him happy is his stamp collection. Saul gave him a nice album and a catalogue. He goes in his room by himself for hours to work with his stamps. I feel he releases that way. Once he told me a dream he had. He had grown up and built a house and there was a living room, a kitchen and a very big bedroom, and in the bedroom there was a big bed against one wall and another big bed against the other wall and a little bed in the middle. He said one of the big beds was for his mother and father in Russia, the other was for us, the one in the middle was for him, and he was trying to provide for all of us. It was hard to provide."

Benia and Amos get along fine. Amos is as boisterous as Benia is quiet — overactive, noisy, bouncing into the house from play covered with dirt, frequently in trouble with his parents. Often when Amos's father threatens to punish him, Benia intercedes. "Let me talk to him, I can help him." Just before Benia arrived, Amos's third-grade classmates wrote congratulatory letters to Amos. One wrote, "I am very happy that your brother came to you from Lithuania and that he, like Moses, because Moses was a Jew, and they didn't drown him in the water and your brother didn't die either."

Benia did not die, nor, strangely enough, did many of the people who participated in saving his life

and that of his dauntless mother. The peasant woman, Mrs. Sadauskiene, who gave the baby shelter, still lives in the Lithuanian village. The old Catholic priest, Kungias Lapis, who found the hiding place for Benia and gave Regina Gotz a forged birth certificate, still has his parish in Shavel and is loved by all the surviving Jews of the ghetto. Dr. Joseph Luntz, who saved Regina Gotz from bleeding to death giving birth to Benia, is now a practicing physician in Lake Ronkonkoma, Long Island.

The story of each of these brave people seems like a miracle in itself. But for Regina Gotz, the greatest miracle is her proof that even in the darkest hours of humanity, courage, faith and human kindness could not be killed. "Even when hating seems to close up every hope, you can still live the miracle of love."

*The End*