

## GHETTO ■ MORRIS IN THE LODZ GHETTO

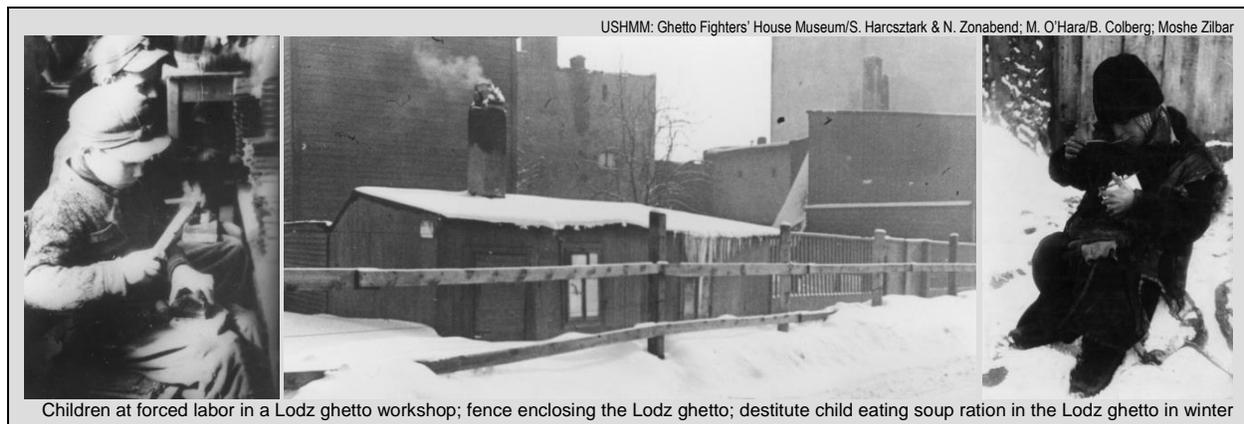
*Born in Pabianice, Poland, Morris Glass was 11 years old when Germany invaded his country in 1939. He and his family endured four and a half years in the Pabianice and Lodz ghettos. In August 1944 the residents of the Lodz ghetto were sent to Auschwitz, where Morris, his father, and his brother were separated from his mother and two sisters, whom he never saw again.*

**F**or four and a half years, from 1940 to 1944, I lived in Jewish ghettos, first in my hometown, Pabianice, and then in neighboring Lodz. I was almost 12 when my confinement began, and I was 16½ when it ended. In the intervening years, I came to know well the grim reality of ghetto life—it was a life of hunger, disease, filth, fear, and death. Because the conditions were so deplorable, many people died from starvation, malnutrition, and disease while confined in the ghettos. Along with the other ghetto dwellers, my family suffered greatly. But somehow we survived. Wretched as our situation was, as long as we were together and able to sustain and comfort one another, life had meaning.



I could not believe the sights and smells that greeted me when I reached the Lodz ghetto in August 1942. It was like something out of a science fiction book. It was worlds away from the Pabianice ghetto, and it was horrible beyond my ability to describe it. As we approached the ghetto, I could smell it—the stench was horrible. On entering, I saw dilapidated buildings, neglected pavements, flooded gutters, and crowded, narrow streets. I saw a barbed-wire fence topped by electric wires, and it had German guards stationed every hundred meters or so along it. Most startling of all were the people—they looked like walking death. The expressions on their faces were entirely different from any I had ever seen. It was as though they were not even human.

My first impressions were supplemented later by images that are seared in my memory. Foremost among these is the image of people pulling carts full of sewage. The faces and clothing of these people still haunt me. Their clothes were rags, and their faces bore the mask of death. And the smell was overwhelming in its awfulness. It is simply impossible to describe. Men, women, and children desperate for food pulled these carts to receive an extra ration of



bread. I still remember the children moaning, "Mama, Mama." Starvation is indeed a harsh master!

*The Nazis had been sending Jews and Roma [Gypsies] from the ghetto to the Chelmno death camp. Soon after Morris and his family arrived, the Nazis deported over 20,000 victims in one week, primarily old and sick people, and children under ten. This became known as the Gehsperrre [curfew].*

The Gehsperrre began when Rumkowski\* announced that the Germans had demanded that 20,000 Jews be deported. Those designated were children under ten, the elderly, and the sick. The announcement was followed by eight days of agony and terror as the selections were made and the victims deported. No one went to work. Every day we were forced to stand in a line in front of our apartments until the selections had been completed. Anyone found inside a building was shot. Grouped in families, we stood silently, prayed, and waited for the arrival of the SS and the Jewish police. When they approached, we stood very still. I held my breath and looked straight ahead. I was terrified that I would do something to attract attention to myself. The SS would look up and down the rows of Jews and then they would point at a person and persons to come forward.

***When a child was selected, the parents would fall on their knees, clutch the child, cry, beg, and plead. . . . It was heartbreaking; it was unbearable.***

red when an elderly person was selected. The elderly knew that they were going to their deaths—I heard some of them repeating the schema [last prayers] as they were led away. It was heartbreaking; it was unbearable.

Although several people were taken from our building, my family and my aunt's family were spared. My parents did what they could to look younger. My father shaved his beard, and my mother and my aunt rubbed red beets on their cheeks to give color to their faces. What I suspect really saved us was our ages and the fact that we were relatively healthy.

So after the Gehsperrre we settled into a daily life of hard work and hoped that by working we could survive. At first we were wary of what might happen next. However, as the deportations became more infrequent and then virtually stopped, we became almost complacent. We developed a feeling that our lives would continue in this mode until somehow we were liberated. But it was not to be. The decision to destroy all the Jews under Nazi control had been made. We had simply been granted a reprieve in order to serve the interests of the Third Reich.



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\* Chaim Rumkowski was the Jewish man appointed by the Nazis as leader of the Jewish administration (Council of Elders) in the Lodz ghetto. Rumkowski and his family were deported on the last transport from the Lodz ghetto to Auschwitz, where they were killed.

Within the Nazi system of exploitation and control, my family and the other Jews of Lodz tried to maintain some semblance of normal life. As promised [by Rumkowski], my family was given an apartment in the building where my aunt Balcia Kantorowicz, her husband, and their seven daughters lived; it was on the third floor. Our happiness at being reunited with our relatives was muted when we learned that two of our cousins had already been deported and that another was dying of tuberculosis. I would watch as she died—she was only 13.

Our apartment consisted of three rooms and compared to our apartment in the Pabianice ghetto, it seemed small, cramped, dirty, and antiquated. However, we soon found out that it was luxurious compared to the lodgings of most people. My brother and I shared a bed in the kitchen, my sisters shared a bed in a small bedroom, and my parents slept in the living room. Sleeping was difficult, not because of the crowding, but because of the bugs. As soon as the lights were turned off, bugs would come out of the plaster walls; when you turned the lights back on, you could see them everywhere. Actually, we did not need to see the bugs to know that they were there; we could feel them as they crawled over our bodies and bit us. We always had bites, tiny red marks everywhere. Bugs were a plague throughout the ghetto.

One good feature of our apartment was a balcony. Father used this little space to grow tomatoes and other vegetables like beets and lettuce to supplement our meager diet. People grew food wherever they could find space.

Cramped, bitten, and lacking heat and sanitation,\* we nevertheless had our family intact. Having a family to come home to, share concerns with and embrace, helped me cope with the hunger and fear which might otherwise have overwhelmed me. My family sustained me, and gave me a reason to live.

I especially remember how my parents comforted me whenever the SS appeared in the ghetto. The sight of the SS terrified me. You never knew what they would do—sometimes they snatched people and sometimes they seized property. I was a skinny little kid and the SS were big, or so they seemed to me. Their black uniforms were adorned with a death's head, and they carried guns and whips. Knowing how frightened I was, my parents would move close to me, and after the SS had left, they would comfort me with a hug and a kiss. I remember my mom saying to me, "Child, we will get through this." I was so frightened by the SS that, even after I came to America, I was still afraid whenever I saw someone in uniform.



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\* The apartment had no running water or indoor toilet, so the residents had to use a outhouse which "was almost always overflowing with sewage," Morris remembers.

We were all working. In fact, the reason that the Lodz ghetto lasted as long as it did was that its factories were producing materials that were vital for the German military. We produced everything imaginable. We had metal factories where parts for trucks and cars were manufactured. We made uniforms and boots for the soldiers, and we produced pots, nails, furniture, and many other necessary commodities. Everyone in Lodz worked. It was not an option. If you didn't work, you didn't eat. Furthermore, as far as the Germans were concerned, and as they had made abundantly clear during the Ghesperre, if you could not work you were worthless.

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In a landscape with little humor, one play on words that circulated in the ghetto went like this:

Who is going to be the loser of the war?

The **JID** or Yid [slang for Jew]—**J**apan, **I**taly, and **D**eutschland [Germany].

Who is going to be the winner?

The **ACHSE** [the Axis: German for an alliance of two or more powers]—the **A**mericans, **CH**inese, **S**oviets, and **E**urope.\*

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Although I did not know about it at the time, the one authentic source of news in the ghetto was a radio that one of the residents, an engineer named Widawski, constructed. Father listened to this radio; however, he did not tell me about it until after we were deported. Not only having a radio but also listening to one was punishable by death. Somehow the Gestapo learned about the radio. When they came to arrest Widawski, he committed suicide so as not to betray anyone.

Once the radio was gone, we were cut off from any verifiable accounts of the war except our own eyes and ears. By the summer of 1944, we occasionally saw Allied planes flying eastward, and we could hear the artillery on the Eastern Front, presumably from the conflict raging in and around Warsaw. This could only be good news.

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It was difficult to keep up with time. Whereas before the war, life seemed to move from one special day to the next, life in the ghetto seemed to lurch forward in some strange way without reference to the calendar. We lost any concept of time except in relation to how many days there were until we would get rations. We all knew when the food was coming: it was the only unit of time that mattered. Food was the main topic of conversation.



We usually received our rations every ten days, and, as anxious as we were for food, the process of obtaining it was grueling. First, we had to stand in a line to receive the ration card. Each family received one card with the rations for the entire family. You then had to stand in another line to receive the food allotment, and after that, you had to stand in a third line to receive the bread allotment. I hated standing

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\* The Axis nations were Germany, Italy, and Japan. The Allies included the United States, Nationalist China, the Soviet Union (Russia and its satellite territories), and European nations including the United Kingdom (Britain) and France (after the end of Nazi occupation).

in those lines. I would be exhausted from work, and then I would have to stand and wait and wait in some line. Our family took turns, and that made it a little more bearable.

The rations that we received were small, and the quality of the food was poor. We had barely enough food to survive for a few days, much less ten. The bread was not really bread; I don't know what it was made of, but it was rumored to contain a lot of sawdust. We received enough for each of us to have a small slice of bread each day. The food ration consisted mainly of potatoes, unbleached flour, and kohlrabi, a vegetable similar to a broccoli stem or a cabbage core. Kohlrabi was disgusting; I absolutely hated it. Occasionally we received beets, radishes, cabbage, or turnips, and sometimes we got a can of horse meat, some margarine, or a little brown sugar. On rare occasions, we would receive potato peels—yes, potato peels. They were extra food, and were considered a reason to celebrate.

Yes, the hunger was so terrible that there were times when I really didn't care to go on any longer, but fear of dying was greater than the hunger. It didn't help to sit and bemoan the circumstances, so I tried to accept the situation, adjust, and make the best of it. That was not always

easy to do, but I was born with an optimistic and cheerful outlook. These innate qualities helped me to plod on.

Added to the hunger and cold was the constant sight of the dead and dying. Everywhere there were beggars—skeletons begging for food. There was nothing to do but to ignore them. We were surrounded by the bodies of dead people. When I went to work there would be corpses on the streets; this was especially true during the winter. After a while, I became almost inured to the sight of dead people. In addition, there were the carts filled with corpses, maybe 20 to 30 bodies in a cart. These carts were pulled by



A body in the street of the Warsaw ghetto, 1940-41

skeletal men, women, and children who were just one step away from death themselves. People were dying in such large numbers that the ghetto was forced to resort to mass unmarked graves where the bodies were just dumped in one after another.

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About a year and a half without deportations, by the spring of 1944 we were beginning to think that maybe, just maybe, we would survive, that we would outlive the war. We were turning out an enormous amount of items essential to the German military, and we felt assured that this productivity insulated us against death. We simply could not imagine that a people as logical as the Germans would bite the hand that was feeding them. Yes, the Germans were logical, but unfortunately for us, they followed their logic even when it was self-destructive. At the heart of Nazism was the goal of creating a Master Race, primarily by eliminating inferior races and people. In the final year of the war, attaining this goal took precedence over winning the war. The Lodz Jews would perish.

*In spring 1944 the Nazis began liquidating the ghetto—rounding up the residents to send them to their deaths in Auschwitz and Chelmno. At first they told the Jews they were being sent to Germany for forced labor and asked for “volunteers.” The Glass family went into hiding.*



About a week after the evacuation announcement, when it became obvious that few Jews would volunteer for the transports, the Germans began to force us into the trains. They would seal off an area and then march the captured Jews to the station. At this point my family went into hiding.

Our hiding place was in the basement of a former soup kitchen. The manager of the kitchen was a friend of my parents, and my mother had worked there. Hiding there with our family were the manager, his wife, and his two children, and the manager’s brother,

his wife, and his three children. There were 15 people in all. Fortunately, our hiding place was fairly large—we could all sit at the same time—and it was not too primitive. While I was totally ignorant about the plan to hide, it was obvious that preparations had been made well in advance. Canned goods, flour, potatoes, and even aspirin and Band-Aids had been stored there. We thought we could manage because we were sure that the Soviet army would liberate us shortly.\*

I don’t remember how long we stayed in the cellar, but it must have been a number of weeks. After the first week or so, we began to leave the cellar at night to get some fresh air, and sometimes we slept on the floor of the kitchen. It was quiet at night because there were no roundups or transports—the Germans were wary of being in the ghetto after dark. During the day, we stayed in the cellar and wrote in journals, played checkers or cards, and read; we did not talk much because there was so little oxygen. After we had been in hiding about two weeks, we started to hear the Germans announcing on loudspeakers that anyone found hiding in basements, attics, or anywhere else would be shot on the spot. It was not long before we heard shots signaling executions.

The announcement and the shots caused some of us, especially the younger ones like me, to wonder whether hiding was the best plan. We started saying things such as, “Look, if the Germans find us, they will shoot us immediately, but if we go to Germany to work, we will have a chance to survive.” The more shots that we heard, the more afraid we became of being discovered, and the more convinced some of us became, including me, that we should leave our hiding place and join the deportees. Finally my father said, “Let’s make a decision, and let’s

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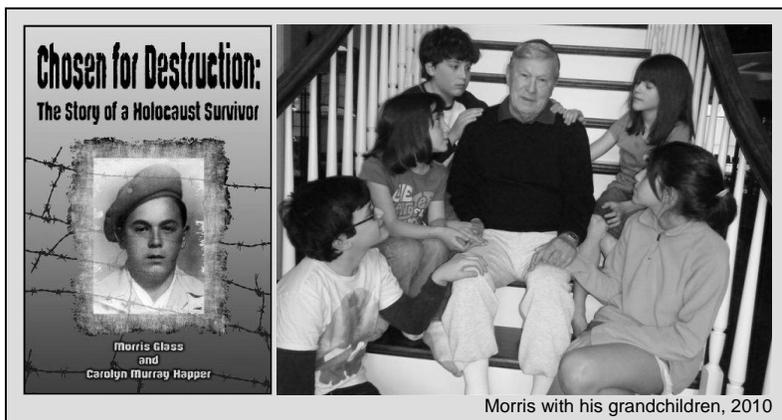
do it democratically by a vote using a secret ballot. Whatever the majority decides is what we will do.” Later Father said things to me that suggested that he was fairly sure of the fate that awaited us once we were on the trains. Nevertheless, he was not certain, and so he did not try to persuade us. The majority voted to come forward. Most of the young people felt relief and were happy; most of the adults were not happy.

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\* The Soviet army entered Lodz on January 19, 1945. Only 877 Jews were still alive, having been ordered to clean out the ghetto.

Once the decision was made, we dressed in our best clothes and started walking toward the train station. We were soon joined by an escort of Jewish police who helped us walk up a plank into a cattle car. Once we were in the cattle car and the door was sealed, we knew we had made a mistake. Unfortunately, it was too late. We were now headed for Auschwitz, a place I had never heard of.

Soon after the family arrived in Auschwitz, Morris's brother was sent to a work camp in Germany, and Morris and his father volunteered to work in Germany in order to leave Auschwitz. They arrived in the Dachau concentration camp in October 1944, where his father died from the hard labor and brutal treatment. In April 1945, as U.S. troops approached Dachau, most of the prisoners were marched to a train as the Germans evacuated the camp. Morris escaped the train and survived on the run until American troops secured the area.



Of 42 members of his family, only Morris, his brother, and a cousin survived. While in a Displaced Persons (DP) camp in Italy, Morris learned that his brother had survived and was in a DP camp in Germany. Through an uncle's sponsorship, they came to the U.S., arriving in New York City in June 1949. Morris settled in New Jersey where he bought and expanded a coat manufacturing company. There he met his wife Carol; they have seven children, 18 grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren. In 2000 they moved to Raleigh, NC, where three sons lived. For years Morris spoke across the state to school, military, and public groups about his Holocaust experience. In 2011 he published his Holocaust memoir, *Chosen for Destruction: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor*, co-written with historian Dr. Carolyn Murray Happer.

[Read other selections from Morris's narrative in Ch. 1 (Anti-Semitism) and Ch. 7 (Liberation).]

#### **ONLINE RESOURCES**

- Video: Morris Glass's presentation with Carolyn Happer (co-author of Mr. Glass's memoir, *Chosen for Destruction: The Story of a Holocaust Survivor*, 2011), Raleigh Weekend C-Span, 16 May 2013, 28:56  
[www.c-span.org/video/?313006-1/chosen-destruction](http://www.c-span.org/video/?313006-1/chosen-destruction)
- Video: Morris Glass's presentation to the Naval Hospital Camp Lejeune, April 2013, video possibly taken by the U.S. Dept. of Defense, uploaded on YouTube by the *Jacksonville Daily News*, NC  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSkq-kYI\\_o](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XSkq-kYI_o)
- The Lodz Ghetto, overview and resources (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)  
[www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/lodz-ghetto](http://www.ushmm.org/collections/bibliography/lodz-ghetto)
- Voices from the Lodz Ghetto, online exhibition (USHMM)  
[www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/voices-from-lodz-ghetto](http://www.ushmm.org/information/exhibitions/online-exhibitions/voices-from-lodz-ghetto)
- Lodz Ghetto, archival footage (1:35, USHMM) [encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/lodz-ghetto](http://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/film/lodz-ghetto)

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