

*Modes of Survival, Techniques of Hiding,
and Relations with the Local Population:
The Polish Case*

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Aktion Reinhardt began in the spring of 1942.¹ One of the first liquidations was the Lublin Ghetto, which was annihilated in mid-March 1942, and many Jewish communities and ghettos followed shortly thereafter. It was during that period that many Jews began to search for contacts who would be willing to help them and to look for hiding places, where they might stand a chance of surviving. Owing to the nature of the buildings and surrounding areas, the countryside offered more favorable conditions than the urban areas.² A village can be defined in many ways. It is often thought of as a settlement, either compact or dispersed, that has no civic rights or town status, and village life is associated with farming activities in the surrounding fields.

- 1 Aktion Reinhardt began on March 16, 1942, with the partial liquidation of the Lublin Ghetto to the Bełżec extermination camp. Many rural Jewish communities were liquidated in the spring and summer of 1942. Only some of the rural and *Shtetl* Jews were transferred to death camps; the greater part of them were murdered on the spot. See Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998).
- 2 Several scholars have recently focused on the fate of Jewish children during the war; for more information, see Joanna B. Michlic, *Jewish Children in Nazi-Occupied Poland: Survival and Polish-Jewish Relations during the Holocaust as Reflected in Early Postwar Recollections* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2008); Emunah Nachmany-Gafny, *Dividing Hearts: The Removal of Jewish Children from Gentile Families in Poland in the Immediate Post-Holocaust Years* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2009); Witold Mędykowski, "Sprawiedliwi, niesprawiedliwi?: O złożoności stosunków pomiędzy ratującymi a ocalonymi w okresie Zagłady," in Edyta Czop and Elżbieta Rączy, eds., *Z dziejów stosunków polsko-żydowskich w XX wieku* (Rzeszów: IPN-Uniwersytet Rzeszowski, 2009), pp. 27–35.

According to one sociologist, "the village is a local community which complements the function of the production with function of the family and does so in a manner consistent with maintaining social control."³ The latter remark seems particularly relevant.

Rural conditions — the distance from towns; the isolation of farms one from another; sparse population; the proximity to fields and woods — meant that the occupation authorities were able to exercise only relatively poor control over the population. However, other elements of country life, such as the sense of community and a lack of anonymity, led to a situation in which any stranger was immediately identified and evaluated, and upon further consideration was eventually accepted or rejected. Such a person would be considered as hostile or friendly, "ours" or "alien." In the countryside, apart from any actions on the part of the occupation authorities, there was relatively strict social control by the community.

Any changes in the status quo were immediately noted and discussed, with the news spreading rapidly within the local community, but often not going beyond the boundaries of the village. There was no anonymity in rural areas, everyone "alien" was observed, evaluated, classified and given a nickname, so conspiracy in the country was difficult and sometimes impossible, and these conditions hindered the success of Jews trying to secrete themselves in the villages.

In order to hide in the country, which precluded anonymity, the choice was either to remain in complete secrecy or to let the community know that there was a Jew hiding. The latter choice obviously required the cooperation of all of the villagers. The possibility that a secret would not be kept was a serious threat, for if there was a denunciation, the matter could end tragically. It is important to distinguish between not maintaining confidentiality and denunciation. Spread of the news could end tragically for those in hiding, but it depended upon those who got the information and how the mechanism of searching and disclosure of Jews in hiding operated.

The Role of Village Administrators and the Relative Absence of Germans in the Villages

There were no German or Polish police stations in most of the villages. The few existing stations had only a minimum number of police officers

3 Definition according to Jan Turowski.

and usually served several villages.⁴ Hence, German control over the vast and sparsely populated rural areas in Poland was relatively ineffectual. This control was for the most part maintained by village administrators, who were supposed to inform the police about Jews in hiding.⁵ There were also informers who updated the police or village administrators (*sołtys*). Writing anonymous denunciations, so prevalent in the cities,⁶ was much less developed in the country, owing to a significant degree of illiteracy. There were no phones in most of the Polish villages during the war, so information was generally transmitted in person.

The information that was known to the nearer or wider circle of people that knew of Jews in hiding eventually would begin to spread beyond control.⁷ Even if passed on in good faith, it could inadvertently reach the wrong people, who would use it to find them. However, such information could be and was used depending on one's needs. In the case of family and neighborhood quarrels, it was exploited for purposes of blackmail or to gain an advantage over the other side.⁸

Clearly, then, it was important that the fact that there were hidden Jews be kept secret, sometimes even from those closest — spouse, children,⁹ par-

- 4 On the organization of the police in the General Government, see: Bogdan Musiał, *Deutsche Zivilverwaltung und Judenverfolgung im Generalgouvernement: Eine Fallstudie zum Distrikt Lublin, 1939–1944* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 1999), pp. 27–30; Stanisław Płoski et al., eds., *Okupacja i ruch oporu w dzienniku Hansa Franka 1939–1945*, vol. 1, 1939–1942 (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1970), pp. 37–56; Adam Hempel, *Pogrobowcy klęski: Rzecz o policji 'granatowej' w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie, 1939–1945* (Warsaw: PWN, 1990), pp. 62–124.
- 5 The village administrators were forced to sign a declaration obliging them to inform the authorities about Jews in hiding. See the text of the declaration, Yad Vashem Archives (YVA), microfilm no. JM.3588 (Regierung des Generalgouvernement: Hauptabteilung Innere Verwaltung: Abteilung Polizeiangelegenheiten — Politische Polizei) original sig. II/374, GKBZHP.
- 6 Jan Grabowski, "Ja tego Żyda znam!": *Szantażowanie Żydów w Warszawie, 1939–1943* (Warsaw: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2004); Barbara Engelking-Boni, *Szanowny Panie Gistapo: Donosy do władz niemieckich w Warszawie i okolicach w latach 1940–1941* (Warsaw: Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2003).
- 7 YVA M.49.E/3512, testimony of Selman Birnfeld from Medynia, August 26, 1947, p. 2.
- 8 Wiktoria Śliwowska, ed., *The Last Eyewitnesses: Children of the Holocaust Speak*, vol. 1 (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005), testimony of Henocho Rafael Lisak, pp. 99–104.
- 9 *Ibid.*

ents¹⁰ – and certainly from neighbors. There were cases when two adjacent neighbors hid Jews, but neither revealed that information to the other until the truth was known after the war.¹¹ Adherence to the conspiracy was vitally important, because if relationships should change, information could be revealed or used to one's detriment later on.¹²

In villages that were scattered and in some cases accessed with difficulty – those in the mountains, forests, or swamps – concealment was relatively easy. Moreover, many villages had a system of spreading messages and warnings about the arrival of strangers. If the danger of discovery was coming from raids conducted by larger, motorized units, the sound of the engines could be heard from far away. During the war, farmers were obliged to deliver certain quantities of agricultural products. To ensure compliance, there were often organized police searches in the various villages,¹³ during the course of which, the authorities could also come upon Jews or escaped Soviet prisoners in hiding.¹⁴ Sometimes information was leaked at the local level, and the villagers were warned before the searches began.¹⁵

- 10 Jakub Gutenbaum and Agnieszka Latała, eds., *The Last Eyewitnesses: The Children of the Holocaust Speak*, vol. 2 (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2005), testimony of Marian Finkielman, pp. 47–58.
- 11 YVA M.49 E/3501, testimony of Lejbka Fryd, from Dobre (Mińsk Mazowiecki), April 26, 1948.
- 12 YVA M.49.E/3512, testimony of Selman Birnfeld from Medynia, August 26, 1947, p. 2.
- 13 During one of these such *Aktionen* in Wereszczyn, a district of Lublin, in May 1942, approximately 100 Jews and 20 Poles were killed. Half of the village was burned. According to the testimonies, the *Aktion* was a punitive response for hiding Jews and assisting hidden Soviet POWs, YVA TR/17/292 (OKL/Ds. 7/71/W1).
- 14 YVA TR.17/293 (OKL Ds.2/71/W1), p. 3; YVA TR.17/306 (OKL/Ds/97/71/Lp).
- 15 A recent study about the survival of Jews in Dąbrowa Tarnowska from the time the ghettos were liquidated until the liberation presents the Polish police, commonly referred to as the Blue Police, in a very unfavorable light. According to the findings, most of the murders of Jews in hiding were committed by the Polish police rather than the German functionaries: see Jan Grabowski, *Judenjagd: Polowanie na Żydów, 1942–1945: Studium dziejów pewnego powiatu: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów* (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów, 2011). However, it would be questionable to draw conclusions about the whole country on the basis of this limited study. We know of some cases where the Polish police assisted Jews, in direct contrast to the denunciators and citizens who actively turned them over to the police. In one such case the police freed a young boy to the astonishment of the denunciators: see YVA M.49.E/3512, testimony of Selman Birnfeld from Medynia, August 26, 1947, p. 2.

The changing political and military situation in late 1942 and early 1943 did not have any beneficial effect on the situation in the countryside. On the contrary, 1943 saw the most extensive liquidation of ghettos and annihilation of any remaining Jewish population centers. After the ghettos were liquidated, the Germans organized raids on Jews in hiding in the forests and the villages. Denunciations spread and the authorities reinforced their repressive methods.

The Nazis also tried to work on the conscience of the Polish population through antisemitic propaganda.¹⁶ Denunciation of Jews became something desirable, 'a good thing,' for which one could receive a reward. Hiding of Jews was 'evil' and deserved punishment. Thus, the Nazis created an inverted hierarchy of values. Large-scale German propaganda presented Jews as vermin, enemies, diseased, and as people with negative moral values.¹⁷ One witness wrote:

The Polish population was incessantly under the pressure of anti-Jewish propaganda. I recall the posters that were put up everywhere.¹⁸ To this day, I remember their text (as a child, I experienced a shock). I quote: "Stop and read, dear onlooker, how Jews beset you. Instead of meat, chopped rats, dirty water added to milk, and dough with worms, kneaded by foot."¹⁹

There were accompanying drawings of an unshaven, hooked-nose Jew holding a rat by its tail and lowering it into a meat grinder; a milkman pouring dirty water into jugs of milk; and a Jew making bread or cake. Even if the

16 Jan Grabowski, "Propaganda antyżydowska w Generalnej Guberni, 1939–1945," in *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i Materiały*, vol. 6 (2010), pp. 117–158; Lars Jockheck, *Propaganda im Generalgouvernement: Die NS-Besatzungspresse fuer Deutsche und Polen, 1939–1945* (Osnabrück: Fibre, 2006); Klaus-Peter Friedrich, "Die deutsche polnischsprachige Presse im Generalgouvernement (1939–1945), *NS-Propaganda für die polnische Bevölkerung*, *Publizistik*, vol. 46, no. 2 (June 2001), pp. 162–188; Lucjan Dobroszycki, *Reptile Journalism: The Official Polish-Language Press under the Nazis, 1939–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

17 Jan Grabowski, "Propaganda antyżydowska w Generalnej Guberni, 1939–1945," in *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i Materiały*, vol. 6 (2010), pp. 117–158; Anti-Bolshevik propaganda, in addition to the Nazis' antisemitic propaganda, was also disseminated during the war, YVA O.6/373, 383.

18 This poster was published by Jan Grabowski in *Zagłada Żydów: Studia i Materiały*, vol. 6 (2010), p. 133.

19 Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 1, testimony of Emanuel Elbinger, p. 31.

German propaganda was not entirely convincing, there were many persuasive elements, including the idea of reward and punishment. The greater part of the population had witnessed the persecution and knew that killing a Jew did not carry any punishment. The corollary, then, was that Jews had no rights, so it was permitted to rob, cheat, steal, and kill them.²⁰

It must not be forgotten that during the war, there was not only a lowering of moral standards, but cruelty, death, and suffering were familiar phenomena. There was a general lack of control. Anyone who had a gun in his hand was the master of a situation and the power belonged to the mighty. Polish authority figures — village administrators as well as community leaders and priests — seemed either to be silent or to operate in secret.²¹ Although some individuals tried to help, their voices were not generally heard.²² Often, the possibility of aid was dependent on baptism. Prejudices and prewar antisemitism caused the Jews to become even more alien; moreover, unlike most of their fellow citizens, they also had a different faith, and were of a different race, religion, and culture. Despite the fact that rural Jews had lived in villages all their lives and thought themselves members of the community — during the persecution they were often excluded from that community.²³

20 YVA M.49.E/2802, testimony of Icek Lerner from Komarówka, September 21, 1947, p. 2.

21 The Germans made it quite clear that helping or rescuing Jews would result in the death penalty, so the more moral among the community leaders and clergy had to act in secrecy. Any open action against the authorities would lead to immediate reprisal. Nevertheless, there was always the possibility to subtly influence the actions of other people, followers or believers. Researchers have compared different kinds of illegal wartime activities, including the rescue of Jews. The consensus seems to be that it was equally dangerous to assist Jews as it was partisans, but one might say that the rescue of Jews was much less attractive than assisting the Polish underground.

22 One of the most important voices in favor of rescuing Jews was that of Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, a well-known writer and avowed antisemite. Carla Tonini, *Czas nienawiści i cza troski: Zofia Kossak-Szczucka — antysemitka, która ratowała Żydów* (Warsaw: ŻIH, 2007); Joanna B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), pp. 166–169; 170–171.

23 It has yet to be properly explained as to how Polish neighbors, being in quite intimate relations with the Jews, who spoke the same language, with whom they frequently attended school, played, traded with, and so forth, were able to betray them in the presence of foreign people, speaking a foreign language and clearly acting against the Polish society.

The Penalty for Hiding Jews

Hiding Jews was threatened with sanctions, which increased in severity over time. During the raids and searches the punishment depended on the whims of the police or other authorities engaged in the action. Most of the Jews found were shot on the spot or taken to the collection points, where larger groups were formed before being taken to places of execution. The most extreme penalty suffered by those who harbored them was murdering all the members of the family and burning their house down.²⁴ In some cases, while the Jews were shot on the spot, those who had harbored them managed to successfully beg the Germans for forgiveness and for their lives. The penalty for helping Jews was not applicable only to hiding them, but also for assisting them in any way and providing them with food. For example, the *Kreishauptmann* (county leader) in Rzeszów announced on July 6, 1942, that on July 7, there would be an *Umsiedlung* (resettlement) of Jews, and issued the following proclamation:

... (2) Every Pole who would in any way because of his behavior disturb the resettlement or help to disturb the resettlement will be shot; (3) Every Pole, who during the resettlement accepts a Jew or hides a Jew will be shot; (4) Every Pole, who without authorization enters an apartment of a resettled Jew will be shot as a thief.²⁵

For the affected Jews, surviving without some help from the local population was virtually impossible.

Children Hiding and Trying to Survive Alone

Children have great capacity for adapting to their environment, and such adaptation was necessary for survival under conditions of occupation and persecution. In many cases, even very young children had to depend only on themselves. Rural conditions gave Jewish children some opportunities for survival during the Holocaust. Certainly the vastness of the terrain and

24 Mateusz Szpytma, *The Risk of Survival: The Rescue of Jews By the Poles and the Tragic Consequences for the Ulma Family from Markowa* (Warsaw: IPN, 2009).

25 See a poster published in Elżbieta Rączy and Igor Witowicz, eds., *Zagłada Żydów na Rzeszowszczyźnie: Album pamięci* (Rzeszów; Warsaw: IPN, 2004), p. 155.

the relatively poor penetration of these areas by the occupying forces were very important factors. Apart from arrests and searches for Jews in hiding owing to denunciations, life in villages far from urban centers was lived on the fringes of events. Occupation forces were unable to inspect all the farms over large areas, so what searches there were involved generally individual households that were suspect or denounced, but sometimes they covered entire villages.²⁶ Owing to the scattered nature of rural dwellings, the occupation forces had to find local collaborators and ensure cooperation with the community authorities — village administrators and others. Moreover, in the final period of the occupation, partisan movements increased their activities, which further limited the entry of occupation forces into the rural areas. If those forces did enter an area, it was generally to search for and eliminate the partisans and their supporters or to enforce the mandatory delivery of agricultural products (*kontyngenty*).²⁷

In spite of all the hindering factors noted above, Jewish children in rural areas had considerable room to maneuver in order to find a safe place to hide. As already noted, this possibility was dependent upon an accepting attitude on the part of the local people. Basically we can talk about four modes of survival open to children during the Holocaust.

1. As a first option, we can mention the most obvious form of survival: children knew that they were identified as Jews and did not deny their identity, nor did they hide. This was possible in rural areas that were at a considerable distance from urban centers.²⁸ Under such conditions, there was no fear of the sudden arrival of police or military forces. Even in the case of denunciation, information circulated among the local community and people could warn them in advance. Topographic conditions allowed for finding temporary shelter until the danger had passed.²⁹

26 Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 1, testimony of Chuwcia Weicher, pp. 206–212.

27 The occupation forces were relatively limited in number, and after the Battle of Stalingrad in early 1943, as the partisan movement began to grow, their efforts went into anti-partisan actions. In contrast to the full control of the territory during the first period of the occupation, when a single gendarme or policeman moved freely, toward the end of the occupation such movement became very dangerous. In case of suspect or concrete information of collaboration with the partisans or hiding food in a particular community entire villages were searched.

28 Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 1, testimony of Roman Lewin, pp. 193–199.

29 Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 1, testimony of Karol Galiński, pp. 169–175.

In this case, as the children could not hide their identity, they were at the mercy of changes in attitude toward them by the local people, groups of bandits, and partisans. Hostility could turn the children into victims. Living in the open provided a certain level of security and alleviated to some extent the constant anxiety. Sensing danger or being warned by others, they could find temporary shelter or run away.

2. The second mode of survival involved concealing their identities but not hiding physically. This was possible for children who did not have physical characteristics that betrayed their origins.³⁰ This, of course, was more problematic for boys because even if their facial characteristics belied the fact that they were Jewish, the so-called “check” as to whether they were circumcised would remove all doubt.³¹

For girls, who lacked the physical features that would give away their Jewish origins, this second option was less risky.³² Nonetheless, hiding their identity required the knowledge and the ability to conduct themselves as Gentiles, for which they had to create a new life story that would be coherent in every detail. While in close contact with a foreign environment, any small inaccuracy could have far-reaching consequences.³³

Disclosure of Jewish origins could occur as the result of ignorance regarding modes of behavior or variants in speech or habits. Suspicion could arise from an excessive display of intelligence, learning ability, or behavior not appropriate to the given situation. An ability to learn or high intelligence could be explained by urban roots, in contrast with the norms of children growing up in a rural environment. However, ignorance of the customs was a fairly clear indication of Jewish origins. In one case, a girl living on a farm helped to prepare Christmas Eve dinner and put meat on the table. Immediately everyone understood that she must be Jewish because a good Christian would know that the meat would not be eaten until Christmas Day.

3. The third mode of survival was going into hiding. This was necessary in clear cases of outward physical Jewish characteristics and the danger from their environment or from the looming threat of the occupation authorities.

30 YVA M.49.E/2748, testimony of Henryk Press of September 3, 1947, p. 1.

31 Joanna B. Michlic, *Jewish Children in Nazi-Occupied Poland*, p. 49.

32 YVA M.49.E/2759, testimony of Sonia Szternszys of September 29, 1947, p. 1.

33 Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 1, testimony of Hanka Grynberg, pp. 176–186.

In such cases, there was no real contact between the child and the environment. People hiding them knew about their origins and those hidden were entirely dependent on their rescuers.³⁴ People hiding such children became part of the whole conspiratorial system and placed themselves in potentially dangerous situations, which meant that they had to take every precaution. The interest of neighbors in rural communities could be attracted by behavior that deviated from the norm in any way. For example, a single person or small family might suddenly begin to purchase larger quantities of bread and other products or expensive goods, the last perhaps being an indication of a sudden and unexplained increase in available funds. Members of a family might also start keeping themselves apart from their neighbors.

Such behavior gave rise to curiosity and interest and might lead to questions and even denunciations. In rural areas, there was a certain intimacy among the residents and it was difficult to maintain anonymity. The neighbors would become aware of nearly every change of behavior or sudden isolation, which were infallible signs of something strange going on and were likely to cause suspicion. There may have been rather different reasons for changes in behavior, but during the mass exodus of Jews from the ghettos and the period of intensified mass killings, one of the main causes of such changes was simply hiding Jews.

If Jewish children were able to take care of themselves they usually fled when faced with refusal of further shelter and looked for other places to hide or sought out friends or acquaintances. In such cases, leaving their actual shelter automatically revealed their identity, which made finding another refuge more difficult. In many cases, Jewish children in hiding for an extended period were not able to survive in the hostile and changing reality of the occupation.

4. There was also a fourth mode of survival. There was a rather small group of Jews who hid themselves — those who did not have any permanent shelter or who changed shelters periodically. They acted independently or had only minimal contact with a few people who could occasionally help them. Although this kind of hiding, while relatively easy from late spring until early fall, was very difficult if not impossible in winter, but there were cases of Jewish children living this way.³⁵ During the difficult conditions of heavy winter, there was not much chance of survival because of problems

34 Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 1, testimony of Chuwcia Weicher, pp. 206–212.

35 Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 1, testimony of Roman Lewin, pp. 193–199.

in getting food and traces of movement left in the snow. There were cases of children entering a farm, sleeping in a barn to take advantage of the animals' body heat, and then asking for food from the peasant family, but this was a very problematic way of surviving for a long period. In one case, a Jewish boy hid in haystacks and went to farms to beg for food every three or four days.

Adapting to the rural conditions was very important for continuing survival.³⁶ Jewish children who hid their identities, as well as those who did not, had to learn to adjust. Adapting to the rural way of life allowed for greater acceptance on the part of that environment. If one did not actually hide one's Jewish origin, that did not mean that one should flaunt it. It was necessary to blend into the rural environment as much as possible. Among the memories of Jewish boys hiding in the countryside, we find testimonies about such perfect adaptation to the environment that they could not be distinguished from others. While working on the farms and looking after cows in the meadows with other workers, they learned acceptable patterns of behavior. Some Jewish boys became so accustomed to rural living that they did not want to leave and continued living in the villages even after the war.³⁷

Adapting to the environment also required that Jewish children in hiding adopt a Christian mode of behavior, the most important aspect the ability to display a familiarity with Christian prayers and customs. Using expressions such as "Oh, Jesus," "Oh God," "God forbid," "let Him be praised," and so forth, could immediately warm the atmosphere.³⁸ Similarly, various religious practices such as recitation of prayers, making the sign of the cross, and taking part in the celebrations were signs of belonging to the Christian community and removed suspicion.³⁹

Avoiding contact with Jews and ignoring the murder of Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators was essential.⁴⁰ Any hint of solidarity with the Jews could be seen as suspect. It was particularly painful for those hiding their identities when they encountered people recounting desperate stories and had to keep their emotions in check. Evinced sympathy for other Jews, engaging them in conversation, or looking to connect with them could

36 Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 1, testimony of Maria Kamińska, pp. 84–86.

37 YVA M.49.E/2755, testimony of Ludwik Jerzycki of September 27, 1947, p. 1; YVA M.49.E/3512, testimony of Stefan Birnfeld from Medynia, August 26, 1947.

38 YVA M.49.E/3516, testimony of Szlama Rotter, October 29, 1947, p. 2.

39 Gutenbaum and Latała, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 2, testimony of Marian Finkielman, pp. 47–58.

40 YVA M.49.E/2740, testimony of Rozalia Bernet, September 1, 1947, p. 1.

lead to exposure. As there was always the danger that their true identities would somehow be revealed, children living under false identities had to be vigilant, had to be able to anticipate deterioration in a situation, and to run away when danger threatened and look for other opportunities to continue hiding.

In many cases, Jewish children in hiding who realized that they were soon to be discovered tried to find sympathetic people and ask them for help. Children hidden in a previously unknown place had to depend on their own ingenuity, agility, and speed of response. In the case of imminent discovery, they often trekked several miles to another village, where, once again, they tried to seek employment⁴¹ and to find support by falsifying their origins.⁴² Such a change might serve for a shorter or longer period — until the next threat of exposure.

On the basis of testimonies of Jewish children and those who helped them, we can identify the incredible resilience of children who assimilated quickly and adapted to the practices of the environment, the local way of speaking and behavior. They were inventive in the presentation of their life stories and were often able to react to the threat of danger. Especially in case of young children, their instinctive behavior was their greatest asset. They were able to completely obliterate their past and conform perfectly to the environment. However, with age, such adaptation became more difficult. The awareness of one's origin and identity and memories of the family and home were serious obstacles. It was especially difficult in extreme situations, such as when hearing stories about the murder of Jews or even being a witness to such an event and maintaining an indifferent mien.⁴³

In summary, I would say that the survival of Jewish children in Poland during the Holocaust depended on their flexibility, the ability to adapt, and good fortune. During the German occupation, the conditions were changing and evolving, sometimes in unexpected directions, but in any case their relationships with the local population and its support were of fundamental importance. The Jews' chances of survival was heavily dependent on the nature of those relations.

41 Gutenbaum and Latała, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 2, testimony of Marian Finkielman, pp. 47–58.

42 Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 1, testimony of Henocho Rafael Lisak, pp. 99–104.

43 Śliwowska, *The Last Eyewitnesses*, vol. 1, testimony of Marianna Adameczek, pp. 3–4.