

Summer Solstice

By Eugene England

This haunting essay juxtaposes England's memories of his ninth birthday and the days that followed with items recorded in the journal of Janusz Korczak for the same period. Korczak was an author of children's books and also a doctor who cared for orphans in the Warsaw ghetto before being executed alongside them in a Treblinka gas chamber during the Holocaust.

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WHEN I SAW Claude Lanzmann's huge and intolerable film, *Shoah*, which is composed of interviews with survivors of the Holocaust, I first learned that the day the Nazis began the evacuation of Jews from the Warsaw ghetto to be killed at Treblinka was Wednesday July 22, 1942—my ninth birthday. I had to remember that day, how it was for them and for me.

For me it was a bright, hot, early harvest day in Marsh Valley, southern Idaho. We lived on the northeast edge of the town of Downey and raised dryland wheat on eleven hundred acres extending up to the valley's eastern hills. Birthdays made little difference during harvest time. Our whole year's income came down to that five weeks of steady, sometimes frantic, work. We lived in constant worry that hail or wind or fire might take the rest of the crop.

So on that day I heard my father's forcefully cheery, getting-up voice at the usual time, 5 A.M. I had my own room that my father had excavated in the basement, next to the furnace room and coal bin. In the winter I would hear the motor of the automatic feeder start up and begin to run coal into the furnace with its metal worm. Then my father would call me from the head of the stairs where he had turned up the thermostat. But in summer there was only a fine stillness as I came up softly from dreams. My dreams usually were not frightening but possessed of a total, sweet reality that I had no wish to leave. I could sometimes will myself to return to a dream for a while. That morning, feeling unusually alive and conscious of myself, I dressed quickly and went up to the kitchen at the first call. I was full of secret anticipation for the day.

Dad already had a fire going and cracked wheat cereal that had soaked overnight slowly boiling on the Monarch coal range. He said nothing about my birthday but served expertly while I crossed and hooked the rawhide laces up the sides of my boots. I tied them once, then pulled the extra length around the top of each boot and tied it tight enough to keep the wheat out when I shoveled in the truck or elevator bins. We knelt and prayed, my father as usual asking God to hold back the wind and hail and promising to use all the crop in God's service. Then we poured on whole cream, risen in the bottles of milk taken from our one cow, and scooped up blobs of

dark clover honey in our spoons and let it melt slowly into the cream and wheat. I slipped back downstairs for two of the red- and yellow-streaked hybrid crabapples from my grandfather's tree that we had stored there just the week before. I grabbed my two new comic books and *The Black Arrow* and made it back just in time to jump on the running board and frantically swing inside the truck as Dad accelerated, laughing, out of the driveway.

The days were already starting to get shorter, so the valley was still in shadow from the low hills in the east, but the higher peaks in the west were in light. Their black forested northern slopes stood out against the gray sagebrush faces that turned bright tan as the sunline moved down them. Just as we reached our lower field of 320 acres, the one we always started with because it ripened first, Dad slowed, scowled, and suddenly stopped, jumped out, and came around to my side of the truck. I looked down and then could see at his feet the irregular patch of burned Junegrass, two tongues of which had reached almost to our fence line.

"Damn old Tom Burrup to hell," he said. "He keeps a face wouldn't melt butter in town, then drives around smoking and drops his cigarettes in a way could burn us out—and take Criddle's place too." He stood looking south for a minute, across the ripe wheat, brilliantly white even before the sun hit. "He just threw it out. He hasn't got the sense God gave geese."

I knew he was remembering two years before when we nearly lost the field by our own doing. In June, while the wheat was still fairly green, Dad had mowed and raked up for hay two swaths all around the edge and plowed the strip to form a firebreak. Then, for good measure, he had slowly burned the barely ripe Junegrass along the fence lines, with Morn and me and the hired man, Jack Whitaker, walking the strip with wet gunnysacks. At one point just behind us the fire had smoldered its way, straw by straw, through the plowed ground to the grain. Before we got back the fire had widened to ten feet along the edge, the flame and smoke roaring straight up as we stomped and beat together with our sacks. We barely won out, and, as Dad raced back along the line to check for any other breaks, I saw my mother fall to her knees and looked at the white coating of her lips and perceived the first desperation I had ever seen still in her eyes.

Now, as Dad stood there I could smell the sage he had walked through and the ashes still floating up from his boots. A meadowlark three posts up the fence line threw its sharp, rising trill at us and then, as we drove past, flung itself up into the canyon wind from the east and trilled again. I could hear it through the window over the engine still grinding in first gear and could see its flash of yellow. Then our eyes were full of yellow as the sun broke out through Nine Mile Canyon. Dad pulled down the visor and lifted himself from his seat so he could block out the sun and see the road—all the way to the northeast gate of the field, where we had parked the harvester and the old wagon full of fuel barrels and grease cans two days before to begin the harvest.

It still took Dad only one trip around half the field to fill the bin on the harvester with wheat. He did that twice while I waited, reading *Captain Marvel* and *Batman* and taking one nap. This was my first year driving the full truck back down to the town to pick up the hired driver, Bud Crenshaw, so he could sleep an extra hour

(and save us his wages). I put a brown corduroy-covered pillow under me and eased the truck, sunk on its back axle and laboring in low gear, out the gate. Dad watched until I was on the road before starting the next round.

Just outside the gate a small swale crossed the road. As I started up the other side, feeling more confident than the day before, I tried to double-clutch from compound up to first—but the gears wouldn't mesh, and the truck coasted to a stop. I still hadn't learned to synchronize clutch and gas and brake well enough to start while pointed uphill, so I slowly let the heavy truck coast back down so I could start again at the bottom. But the huge wooden bed we had built to hold the loose wheat blocked out the rear window, and, trying to guide backwards with the side mirrors, I misjudged and dropped the left rear wheel off into the gully. The whole truck tipped and a trickle of wheat spilled out the back left corner of the bin.

I ran in a panic across the corner of the field, trampling through the uncut wheat. My tongue had never been able to curl like my father's, so I couldn't stop him with a shrill whistle like his above the engine noise and had to run right up to the front so he could see me. He was furious when I told him, drove the harvester over and out the gate, and became even angrier when he saw the truck. We were both afraid that an axle or spring might be broken and harvesting stopped for a week of repairs while the crop stood in danger. But he calmed down, sent me to the fuel wagon for the log chain, and stood with his hat off and red bandanna hanging loose from his neck as I ran dragging the chain out the gate and down to the gully. "It'll be all right," he said.

He crawled under the front of the truck and looped the chain over the axle, and then I stood holding the end while he edged the harvester by on the right side and backed it up close enough so I could loop the other end of the chain over the rear frame. He slowly pulled out the truck, backed up while I undid the chain, and then drove it to the top of the hill for me. When he came back and saw how much wheat was spilled he got angry again. "That's two bushels, maybe three dollars."

"You could take half my year's wages," I said. But he could see how frightened I was, and when he hit me on the shoulder it was mostly in relief.

"You smartass. You could have turned it over and got yourself killed. Now get on down. Bud will be waiting."

He was right. Bud was just out of high school and living with his parents on the Grant Ward road near the cemetery. He eyed me as I slid over, but neither of us said anything as he drove through the waking town to the far southwest corner, where my father had bought the old Johnson elevator to store our wheat until winter when we could get a higher price. The elevator was extra work and investment, the kind of chance my father was always taking in order to do better—like plowing under the wheat stubble instead of burning it, which built up the soil for long-run fertility but left the fields looking trashy all during their fallow year.

Bud pulled into the corrugated tin shack that covered the elevator pit, carefully straddling the pit, then up the ramp we had built of ties and heavy boards. He then could dump the wheat out the little sliding gate in the back of the truck bed with a minimum of shoveling. I jumped out and ran over to the main elevator tower and turned on the machinery so that a motor-driven metal worm beginning at the bottom

of the pit could take the wheat across to the tower as soon as Bud opened the little gate in the truck. There large cups on a continuous belt picked it up and lifted it thirty feet to be shot from a movable spout into one of the three concrete-block bins, each holding about five thousand bushels.

After we had shoveled out the wheat that didn't run out of the truck by gravity and Ben drove off, I waited until the pit was empty and turned off the machinery and was left to my routine for the day. I had to keep track of time and a close watch so that when Bud approached with a load about each hour and fifteen minutes I could turn on the electric motor, then help shovel the last third out and wait again for the pit to be emptied by the machinery. Bud usually arrived back at the field just as Dad had finished one bin and then waited for another to fill the truck and so on through the day. Usually we did ten loads of eighty bushels each before dark, but by the end of harvest, on the shorter days, only nine. Between loads I was to oil the machinery and take care of plug-ups if anything got stuck or overloaded. Later, as each bin got full, I had to put on a rubber mask with a soft paper filter and climb up a ladder, crawl through a hole in the tin roof, then shovel the wheat out evenly to fill the bin to the top and not let it plug the spout. But until then I had lots of time.

That morning I finished *The Black Arrow*, looked back through the color plates, and imagined a heroic life in forests and castles, places of much water and no dust. At noon Bud brought Dad with him and we left the wheat in the pit and dropped Bud off and headed back home. While Dad took a nap, lying full out on the kitchen linoleum, I helped Mom shell peas. We had fresh corn, peas creamed with new potatoes, and whole-wheat bread for lunch. As we left to pick Bud up again and drop me off, Morn gave me a package to open at the elevator. It was *Kidnapped*, also by Robert Louis Stevenson, and had illustrations like those in *The Black Arrow*, richly colored, dramatic, always a little ominous but satisfying.

I had read only a few pages when Bert Wilson, who lived just over the tracks in a yellow railroad house, came over to play. His father was the Union Pacific section foreman, and went out along the line in his gas-powered cart to supervise his crew. Bert brought Monte Bloxham and Dean Jensen, and, after the wheat ran out, we soon had a rubber-gun fight going around the elevator. That early in the war every boy in town still had an old blown-out inner tube that he had begged from his dad or one of the garages. A proper rubber-gun was shaped like a long pistol, with a clothespin strapped by one leg to the back of the square handle. A rubber band, made from a three-quarter-inch slice across the tube and knotted in the middle to give it stability in flight, could be held by the clothespin and then stretched along the barrel and over the end. It was released by squeezing the clothespin's free leg to open the jaws.

Such a gun had good accuracy up to thirty feet, but our little gang found it too slow in reloading and developed our own refinement. We dispensed with the actual gun but simply slipped one end of the rubber band over a thumb, stretched the other end back with the other hand, and shot.

After Bud came with the second load and left, we waited for the pit to empty, lolling in the shade of the big new bin Dad had built. Then I remembered that on Monday when he and I had checked the bin, making certain it would be ready to fill

at the end of the harvest, it was wonderfully cool. I opened the small door at the base and led the other boys inside. I placed them at four points around the twenty-foot circular cement floor and showed them where the hole for the emptying spout was so they wouldn't step in it. Then I closed the door and instructed them, standing there in the dark: "When I say go, start firing." After each round, I opened the door until we found our weapons, then closed it again, jumped to the side, and yelled, "Go." This turned out to be a popular variation on our game, and, in four years of playing it, none of us lost an eye.

At six o'clock Bud came with Dad's present for me—word that I could ride home after the pit was empty, clean up, and go to the picture show while Dad and Bud finished up. I bathed and enjoyed a slow supper, then got a dime from my treasure box, which held the five dollars I got each Christmas, and walked down the road that ran west, past Grandma and Grandpa Hartvigsen's large home. I cut through the vacant lot across from their place to the main road running south through town, where the wheat trucks were throwing out gravel as they sped past me to the two main elevators.

The town's business section was clustered at a crossroads—a congregation of stores on one corner, an implement dealer on the other, and the small movie theater situated between the two grocery stores. Movies were nine cents, which left a penny for a Tootsie Roll or an all-day sucker or a stick of Smith Brothers licorice. But that night I found that the price had gone up to fifteen cents for a special showing of *Abraham Lincoln*. Determined not to end my day with disappointment, I started running for home, but by the time I got to Grandpa's I knew I couldn't make it in time and ran in his back door, out of breath and crying. He was a wiry, taciturn little man, raised on a pioneer homestead in Hyrum, Utah, by foster parents born above the Arctic circle in Norway, and he didn't know what to do with me. After watching me sit on the milk porch crying a few minutes, he pulled out a big oval leather coin purse with brass reinforcing and interlocking clips that would let him open one side or the other. He poured the coins into his hand, picked out a bright buffalo nickel for me, and motioned me to follow him. Without a word, he took me out to his black hump-backed 1939 Mercury, which he had bought to drive to the World's Fair in New York, and took me to the theater.

I got in after the previews but in time for the Movietone News, footage about the Russian and British retreats and the bloody, continuing battle for Guadalcanal, and then the Bugs Bunny cartoon, full of violence that never permanently hurt anyone. As I walked home in the dark, looking at the clouds of bright close stars, I thought about Lincoln and soldiers dying, then about the black line marking the war fronts on the Movietone maps, steadily moving out from Japan and Germany. That night I dreamed there was a witch at the top of the stairs, her face red in the glow from the furnace door.

After I saw *Shoah*, I not only had to think about my birthday in Idaho; I also had to read the diaries of those who began that day alive in the Warsaw ghetto and books by those who have tried to account for what happened.

On Wednesday July 22, 1942, Janusz Korczak was either sixty-three or sixty-four. At the orphanage he directed in the ghetto, Korczak wrote in his journal the

night of the 21st about family memories. His father had neglected to register his birth so long that he had forgotten the year, and Korszak wrote of his mother being angry each birthday over his father's delay. He wrote also about his grandfather's skill as a glazier and ability to spread warmth and light by installing glass. He thought about his two years in the ghetto and the end he felt coming: "It is a difficult thing to be born and to learn to live. Ahead of me is a much easier task: to die."

Korczak had been educated as a doctor and was involved in college in revolutionary causes. In 1906 he turned from medicine and political action to care for orphans and to work for improved children's rights and education. He became head of both a Jewish and also a Catholic orphanage in Warsaw and introduced new concepts for making orphanages into communities of justice. They were governed by the children and focused on teaching creative self-expression and also personal responsibility to the group. He wrote stories for children that became as popular throughout Eastern Europe as *Peter Pan* and *Alice in Wonderland* in England and America. His most famous book, *King Matt the First*, told of a reformist boy-king's efforts to create a just world for children.

Korczak had established the first national Polish children's newspaper and trained many teachers in his humane methods. Later he became a popular storyteller on the radio: the Old Doctor, full of homey wisdom and wry humor. In 1934, at the height of his career as a dynamic public personality and distinguished educator, Poland signed a friendship pact with Germany, and anti-Semitism came into the open and was given legal status. Korczak was taken off the radio and released from the Catholic orphanage; he saw the Jewish orphans persecuted in the streets; and he was gradually ostracized from the medical community. He had been to Palestine twice and considered establishing an orphanage in Galilee, but the invasion in September 1939 caught him still in Warsaw. Then, despite pleas and offered help from gentile colleagues and friends to take him abroad, he refused: "You do not leave a sick child in the night, and you do not leave children at a time like this."

After the German occupation began, Korczak wrote a story called "Three Journeys of Hershko," in which a demented rabbi tells Hershko that once during a war the enemy burned down the Temple in Jerusalem and the scrolls of the Torah were reduced to ashes. The letters soared to heaven. God decreed that his people were to be burnt, uprooted, and annihilated, but those ascending Hebrew letters would not allow that fate to come upon the entire Jewish people.

When Korczak awoke at 5:30 on his birthday, July 22, he found that Heniek Azrylewicz, father of two staff members, whom he had taken into his room to care for, was dead. The man had been ill for some time, and, just a few days before, Korczak had written, "I don't hear the irritating coughing, I heartlessly ignore the aggressive and provoking behavior of the old tailor." He soon had greater concerns than any guilt he still felt. At 8:00 A.M. word came that the Gestapo had ordered the hospital on the Umschlagplatz evacuated. Fifty of the children were to be transferred to an already horribly overcrowded and badly staffed Jewish children's shelter on Dzielna Street that Korczak was trying to supervise. Hurrying out to try to prevent this action, he saw Jewish police posting notices on the wallboards along Chlodna Street. The notices explained why the hospital was being emptied: the feared

evacuation had begun. Deportees were to gather, with seven pounds of luggage, including provision for three days, at the Umschlagplatz. There they would be loaded on trains that would take them to “resettlement in the East.”

Korczak noticed that the notices were not signed by his friend Adam Czerniakow, chairman of the Judenrat, which governed the ghetto under the Nazis. When he reached the Judenrat headquarters he learned that at 7:30 that morning, Czerniakow had been ordered by an SS major named Hermann Hofle to begin immediate deportation of all Jews from the city. There would be a daily quota, beginning with six thousand to be gathered at the Umschlagplatz loading area by four that afternoon. Czerniakow had asked for the exemption of orphans but had been told only that his request would be considered. He had then refused to put his name on the deportation announcement.

Korczak’s efforts, at the Judenrat and then with the Gestapo, to prevent the transfer of children to his Dzielna Street shelter, took up the morning. As he returned along Sliska Street, he saw the Judenrat police picking up all the beggars in horse-drawn carts. One of the police told him that the first consignment was being filled with inmates from the prisons and refugee centers and the street people. Some of those he talked to were hysterical and already calling the carts death wagons, but others were relieved: no place could be any worse than the ghetto, with its constant brutality, disease, and slow starvation. Perhaps they could manage to survive “in the East” until after the war.

By four o’clock in the afternoon, about when I, eight time zones away, had run the morning’s first load of wheat out of the pit and turned off the elevator, six thousand people were being loaded into forty cattle cars, packed so tight they could only stand. After a journey of fifteen hours, without water or toilets, they were put onto a siding with other trains at the small town of Treblinka. Twenty cars at a time were disconnected and pushed by a small locomotive the four miles to the camp. Suddenly the car doors were opened and a variety of guards, Ukranian, Latvian, German, began pushing them out of the cars, beating them with whips and clubs, and screaming, “Get out, get out. Hurry. Leave the baggage. Get undressed! You’re to be disinfected.”

They were separated—women to the left, men to the right—as they were driven uphill into a kind of funnel, thirteen feet wide. Barbed wire fences eight feet high, interwoven with fresh pine branches, prevented their seeing out, where bodies were being dragged into huge pits. As the new arrivals undressed, all clothes and baggage were taken away by a squad of Jews with blue armbands, men who had been picked out from previous trains to do this until they committed suicide or wore out and were shot. These squads of slaves took everything to special barracks for sorting into bundles of items that could be used someplace in the war effort.

The naked men were the first to be herded up to the two doors of primitive gas chambers at the top of the funnel. Then they were taken by groups of fifty directly into the chambers after each chamber in turn was emptied of bodies from the other side by another squad of Jewish slaves. The naked women and children had to wait up to an hour for their turn. As the yelling of the guards died down, the women could hear the tank engines that provided the carbon monoxide for the chambers. They

could also hear occasional shots from the other side of the fence. There, in what was called the “infirmary” by the guards, the sick and aged and children who had lost their parents—any who might impede the efficient loading of the gas chambers—were made to stand or sit on a board over a twelve-foot deep pit and were shot in the back of the neck.

The women were brought up in rows of five each to the doors of the chambers. There they could hear clearly the screams from inside the chambers, and even the most hopeful realized at last what was happening to them. In the panic of death the women lost control of their sphincters, leaving five rows of feces. The slaves cleaned up after each group.

Those Jews left at Treblinka waited for three hours, without water and standing in their own excrement, in the steel cars baking in the late morning sun. At eleven they were pushed up to the camp, and by one o’clock on the 23rd, when I was waking again at my father’s call from the top of the stairs, all six thousand of the first consignment from the Warsaw ghetto were dead.

Late the night before, still uncertain about what had happened to those deported but afraid the messages from the underground about gas chambers in the camps might be true, Janusz Korczak thought about his birthday and about death. He fulminated against the woman who had given in to the demand to shift the fifty “bad cases” to his orphanage—“the shameless demand, detrimental in the highest degree, harmful to their children and ours”—and again considered suicide:

To spit on the floor and clear out. I have long been contemplating it.
More—a noose, or lead on the feet. (It has come out incomprehensibly again. But I am too tired to write more.)

. . . . Oh, how hard it is to live, how easy to die!

During the night he got up twice to empty the ten large chamber pots used by the children.

The next day his friend Czerniakow, the head of the Judenrat who had refused to sign the deportation order, wrote his last entry in his diary: “The orders are that there must be nine thousand by four o’clock.” He fulfilled the order, but that evening, after being told by two SS officers that there would be no exceptions for the orphans, he took a potassium-cyanide tablet. For three years he had tried to save the Warsaw Jews by making them indispensable to the Nazi war effort and had compromised much, but this was the end of hope and of bad conscience. He wrote a note asking his wife for forgiveness and the last diary entry: “They want me to kill the children with my own hands.” Early the next morning he was hastily buried, only his wife and a few friends present. Korczak, who also kept a poison tablet, gave the eulogy. But Korczak did not commit suicide. He took into the orphanage a boy named Julek Jakubowicz, nine years old, whose mother, terminally ill, refused to die until he was accepted. The boy did not want to leave her and, when he finally had to, developed symptoms like hers, shortness of breath and constant groaning. Korczak took him into his room in place of the dead tailor and got little sleep until the boy finally quieted down on July 31.

Korczak writes nothing in his diary of the hysteria as the ghetto was cleared block by block, little about his efforts to prepare the orphanage with food and

supplies for winter. He fears the children will be deported and need clothing and provisions for that journey—and knows they might simply be exterminated. He keeps up his regimen of weighing and measuring the children, completing a set of growth profiles of school-age children he had begun twenty-five years before, and he keeps everyone writing in their diaries: “The seriousness of their diaries hurts. In response to their confidences I share mine with them as equal.” He seems to keep sane with rituals and with long, detailed entries on those rituals:

WHY DO I CLEAR THE TABLE?

I know that many are dissatisfied at my clearing the table after meals. Even the orderlies seem to dislike it How can anyone understand why I do it when right now I am writing that I know, see and understand that instead of being helpful I make a nuisance of myself

My aim is that in the Children’s Home there should be no soft work or crude work, no clever or stupid work, no clean or dirty work. No work for nice young ladies or for the mob. In the Children’s Home, there should be no purely physical and no purely mental workers.

On July 27 he exclaims, “Yesterday’s rainbow. A marvelous big moon over the camp of the homeless pilgrims. Why can’t I calm this unfortunate, insane quarter.” By August 1 it is getting darker at his usual rising time of 5:30, and he wants just to stay in his soft, warm bed, but it is Saturday and he has to get up and weigh the children. That night he writes, “It’s been a long time since I have blessed the world. I tried to tonight. It didn’t work.” On August 4, in his last entry, he writes, “Our Father who art in heaven This prayer was carved out of hunger and misery. Our daily bread. Bread.” He ends the diary telling of watering the flowers that morning, his bald head in the window providing a splendid target, and wondering why the German soldier watching him didn’t shoot him, like many did shoot Jews, on a whim: “Perhaps he was a village teacher in civilian life, or a notary, a street sweep in Leipzig, a waiter in Cologne. What would he do if I nodded to him? . . . Perhaps he doesn’t even know that things are—as they are?”

BY AUGUST 6 we had filled the second of the two smaller bins with wheat, and I spent most of the day, wearing my black rubber mask, shoveling the wheat out from the cone under the spout until it built up level to the top. The shaft of sunlight from the hole in the roof moved across and by four o’clock burned on my back as I finished. That morning in Warsaw, just as Korczak got up to clear the breakfast tables, he suddenly heard the shout he had been dreading: “*Alle Juden raus!*” He immediately began working with Stefa Pinchonson, his chief aid, to calm the children’s fears. He asked for time to let the children pack up and was given fifteen minutes, during which the teachers helped them gather their water flasks, favorite books and toys, some clothing—and their diaries. They lined up outside,

192 children and 10 adults. Then they began the two-mile walk, down Sliska street, through Grzybowska Square, over the Chlodna Street Bridge to Karmelicka street, then along the northern wall of the ghetto. Korczak led the way, carrying five-year-old Romcia and holding nine-year-old Julek by the hand. As word spread ahead of them, people lined the streets to watch. If Korczak and the orphanage had to go, they realized, they would all go.

When the children reached the Umschlagplatz, SS squadrons and Ukranian squads, with whips and dogs, pushed them through the gate, across tracks on the Aryan side, and through another gate into the huge field, white in the noon sun. There thousands were already gathered, tossing back and forth, waiting, crying, praying, many of them children from the other orphanages and hospitals.

Nahum Remba, of the Judenrat, put Korczak's group at the far end, against a wall. Then he tried to get Korczak to go with him to ask for one last reprieve, but the Old Doctor would not leave the children in such a terrifying place. After seven hours in the heat, loading of all orphanage children began, and Korczak led his group forward. At that moment a German officer approached him with a paper offering permission for him to return home—but not the children. Korczak refused, and holding Romcia and leading Julek, he took the first section, Stefa waiting with the second. In rows of four, without hysteria or need for the usual pushing and whipping, they marched into a cattle car.

At this point the record ends. None of the diaries of the children survived and none of the children, no one to bear witness to that last ride and the walk into the last chamber. I feel I must try to speak for them, to imagine a voice for at least one, and so have chosen nine-year-old Julek to take us all the way into that chamber.

My name is Julek Jakubowicz. When the old doctor led us onto the train, holding my hand, we had to stand close to all fit in. He said to me, "I will have to help others now, but hold on to my pocket." When the train started we all fell to the side, but he helped us up. When our legs started to hurt, the teachers led us in a marching song and we stamped up and down. Later I asked where the bucket was. He said, "You must let down your pants right here and try not to mess on them." The train stopped sometimes in the night, and each time we fell back and some slipped down into the mess. The doctor tried to hold them up but some stayed there, and after a while some others sat on them. When it was morning the train slowed down. The doctor held some of us up to the window to see we were coming out of a forest. While he was holding me we could see a boy working in a field. The doctor waved to the boy and asked where we were, but he only drew his hand across his throat and turned away. When we stopped some people were working by the platform and the doctor asked for some water. They looked down the platform and then all made that same sign across their throats. We asked the doctor what it meant, and he said, "I think it means we will be killed, so we must now be brave and help each other."

After a while an engine pushed our cars back and then forward again through the woods to another platform. Then there was a smell like the dead bodies in the ghetto but much worse, and some of the children vomited. The doctor pointed to the tower and said, "See, the clock is fake. This is not a real station." Just then the doors opened and men with whips pulled us out and started yelling and pushing us up a hill. The doctor told them to stop pushing, we would go. They made the girls and Stefa go to the side and wait, so Stefa took Romcia. Then we had to take off our clothes and wait in front of a big door. The smell was getting worse. I could see between the door and the fence that dead people were piled up on the other side. Men were putting belts around them and dragging them away. Some of the teachers saw that too, and some began to cry and made a mess right there. Then the door opened and they pushed us inside one big room. Some fell down but the doctor still held my hand. He tried to keep us standing against the wall, but when they closed the doors everyone began crying and pushing back to get out the door.

Then I heard a loud engine start up at the back. We screamed and started climbing up away from the sound and the smell of the engine, trying to get air, to get back out. The doctor yelled at us to stand still and breathe quietly and soon it would end. He called to the teachers to help keep us calm but no one would listen. We all tried to climb. We fought each other to climb up and get air. Someone vomited on me, and everywhere was blood coming out of noses and shit and we were fighting to go up. I could feel the doctor under me, and he pushed me up and held me until there was no breath to breathe.

As I awoke in the dark on August 7, 1942, about the time Julek Jacobowicz died, I realized my father was standing by the bed, his hand still on my shoulder. "We need to get going," he said quietly. "Your grandpa wants to go with us today, so let's go help with his chores." We ate and got down to Grandpa's by 5, in time for Dad to milk the last big black and white Holstein. Grandpa shoveled the manure from the floor and the little trench behind the four cows—out the window onto the pile west of the milking shed, and I carried the six two-gallon buckets up to the milk porch, walking very slowly so I spilled only a little. Then, while Grandpa fixed his breakfast, Dad poured one of the buckets into the top basin of the mechanical cream-separator as I turned the crank, and the skim milk and cream came out into pans from two separate jets. Dad poured the other buckets into a big ten-gallon can and set it out by the driveway to be picked up by the dairy truck, and then we had another bowl of cereal with Grandpa, using the fresh cream. He liked to soak whole grains of wheat and then cook them slowly overnight so the cereal had a soft rubbery texture and a nutty flavor very different from the cracked wheat Dad fixed.

When we got to the ranch and Grandpa got up on the harvester platform to ride standing next to Dad, I asked if I could stand on the ladder during those first rounds before I took the first load down. Grandpa had never ridden a self-propelled harvester before and held on grimly for the first round, but during the second he

relaxed, and I could see him watching carefully as Dad maneuvered through the swales, skillfully moving the fourteen-foot cutter bar in front of us up and down to get all the heads without hitting the ground as the harvester wheels lifted and dropped us at difficult angles. On the level stretches he would watch the thick stand of stalks being pulled over by the turning reel slats into the triangular blades slashing back and forth at the front of the bar, cutting the stalks so they lay down in thick waves onto two opposite threaded worms that rushed them from both ends to the center and onto a turning belt just below us. The belt took them up into the body of the harvester to be pounded by whirling metal cylinders and shook and blown and sieved until the chaff was whirled out and spread by a huge fan at the back; and the wheat was brought up by a little elevator from where it had settled to the very bottom of the harvester and dumped in a steady stream into the bin just behind us. Sometimes Grandpa would reach back and take a handful, checking to see how free of chaff it was and then chewing a few kernels. As we moved down the long flat ridge on the south side of the field we could see southwest across the valley, past the town and the juniper hills along Marsh Creek to where the sunlight from behind us was just touching the bench under Oxford Peak, where Grandpa had first homesteaded, with his brothers from Hyrum, Utah, in 1898.

Recently the granddaughter of Niels Hartvigsen, one of Grandpa's brothers, gave me a copy of a photograph kept in her family. On the back is written: "Vernon and Jacob L., harvesting at Cherry Creek in the early 1930s, with one of the first mechanical harvesters in Marsh Valley." Vernon is her father, the young man in the picture busy tying sacks of wheat on the platform of a small machine with what looks like a five-foot cutter bar. My grandfather, still smooth-faced the way I first remember him, is seated, holding the reins of the pair of standing horses and looking straight into the camera. In the background the wheatfield slopes up to the sagebrush hills below Oxford Peak. The picture may have been taken the summer before I was born, 1932, right after Roosevelt began to campaign for president in the depth of the Great Depression, and hunger strikes in Germany prepared the way for Hitler to be appointed chancellor.

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