



Val's Story, Chapter 4

In August and September 3000 more Jewish prisoners, ghetto prisoners were killed. On the 4th of October the Nazis, the SS and the local collaborators marched into the ghetto, they surrounded our little wooden ghetto hospital and they set it on fire. Everybody who tried to escape was shot. So the choice was to burn alive or die in a hail of bullets. On that day the doctors, the nurses, the patients which were in the hospital met their death. The other atrocity took place 3 weeks later. They selected again, the Nazis, the SS and helped by local Lithuanian collaborators, they all marched into the ghetto, they selected 10,000. By that time the ghetto population was reduced to about 26,000 so they selected 10,000, they took them away to the notorious execution place not far from Kaunas and they were all murdered. This was a shock for the whole ghetto. Everyone lost some of their loved ones, in fact we lost seven members of our 14-member family who decided to stay put. And to increase our agony we had to face the fact that our killers were our Lithuanian neighbours, young Lithuanian men who had volunteered, who had succumbed to Nazi propaganda and who had volunteered to join the Nazis. And they were used to do the dirty work for the Nazis. Now I must say for my family and for me this so-called 'Big Action' was a defining event. That's when we lost our faith in humanity. Seeing all the facts, seeing all the evil unhinged us, we couldn't cope with it, we were completely derailed, we don't know what to do, we don't know where to go, we don't know what's happening to us. The fact that ordinary normal people could be turned into killers like our Lithuanian neighbours were was a shocking realisation for us. We had to take on board that the line between good and evil was a very flimsy one, a very thin one and it was all too easy to indoctrinate ordinary people – not sadists, not criminals – ordinary, to indoctrinate ordinary people to turn from good into evil. So that was our lesson.

The other – the other atrocity took place in 1944, spring 1944, and that was the so-called Children's Action. Now let me explain. In our ghetto we had a number of children and they were our darlings. They were well looked after despite the hunger and the conditions. They had their fill, they were never hungry and we sheltered them as much as we could. I mean for us they were the symbol of our future, of our future life. Well, we were anxious, of course we didn't show our anxiety. We knew the Nazis are determined to exterminate every single Jew in their power. However the religious people were convinced

that when it came to harm the innocent, when it came to harm the children there would be divine intervention and that was of some comfort to them. We were not so sure, the secular Jews like us were not so sure about it. Anyway orders came from Germany that anybody who is not employed gainfully by work should be eliminated. Anybody unable to work was not allowed to live. On the 18th of March a detachment of SS and Ukrainian militia marched into the ghetto and they removed forcibly all the children all the disabled, all the sick people, all the old people, anybody who couldn't, wasn't fit for work. They were killed the next day. A lot of religious people became disillusioned and they lost their faith, quite a number of them. It was a bloodbath. It's one of my most stressful memories and I get nightmares and I wonder when I wake up I wonder that if God is a master of the universe, why is it that he allowed the ghetto children to be massacred. I wonder when I wake up from my nightmare. So that was my worst experience, the so-called children's ghetto.