From the Testimony of Inge Deutschkron about Hiding in Berlin Throughout the War

Reproduced by the kind permission of the Wiener Library, London. [Inge Deutschkron was born in Berlin to Jewish parents. Her father was persecuted both as a Socialist and as a Jew. He managed to flee to England in April 1939. His wife and daughter remained in Germany and could not join him once the war broke out.]

My mother worked at the [Jewish] Aid Organization at Muenchner Street until it was closed, and then had to become a worker at a munitions factory. I too had to take a job in the ACETA factory in Lichtenberg – a silk spinning mill that belonged to I. G. Farben. The salary was lamentable. The highest a Jew could get was 60 Pfennigs per hour and in addition a 15% tax was deducted from this hard-earned money (from Gypsies' salaries too)… Moreover, the rations for Jews – in spite of their hard labor – became smaller and smaller and in the end consisted only of potatoes, bread, a small amount of fat, turnips, sugar and some low-fat milk. One had to buy these rations between 4 and 5 in the afternoon, a time when most of us were still at work… To get to work, I had to travel 1 ½ hours in each direction, so that in total I had to travel for 3 hours every day, standing all the way, and then work for 10 hours, standing on my feet as well. The working conditions for Jews at I. G. Farben were exceptionally bad, not to be compared with those at Siemens for example, where they were relatively bearable. We had to wear the Jewish star at the factory as early as 1940. The law was introduced only in 1941… I was introduced to a Herr Weidt [a non-Jew] who had a workshop for blind people at Rosenthaler Street, where he employed exclusively blind and deaf-mute Jews. They produced brushes and brooms for the army's use … I was longing to leave this degrading environment [in the factory]…Mr. Weidt with whom I maintained contact ever since, supported my attempt to leave ACETA as soon as possible and encouraged me to find an illness which would enable me to do so. I found that my knee became tired very quickly. From that day on I went to work with high heels and after 3 days of standing for 13 hours, my knee gave way and could not move any longer…. The Nazi factory physician

had no choice but to attest that I could not do any work standing on my feet and that I had to be dismissed. I now had to look for another job and turned to Mr. Weidt for advice. Weidt was an Aryan and a true Christian. He had a bad heart and kept his business open only for the sake of "his" Jews, who were all neurotic and turned his life into a living hell…. He went with me…to the Jewish Labor Service to explain to the people there that although I was of little use, he could employ me at his workshop with the blind people. He was given permission to employ me…. The first transports left from normal railway stations. Later they would go from railway stations in the suburbs (such as Grunewald) in the middle of the night, because the deportations were to proceed without witnesses…. I remember transports in the icy winter of 1942 when people were deported in open railway cars. The Jews left behind lived in constant fear that their turn would arrive in one of the next transports, and at the same time, with hope that perhaps the Allies would win the war before it would happen. In the winter of 1942/1943 Brunner and his Gestapo staff from Vienna were brought to Berlin to act more harshly and to accelerate the eradication of the Jews. The Viennese Gestapo was much more brutal than its German counterpart. Brunner acted swiftly and simply caught Jews who had crossed the road on the wrong side or who, in his opinion, did not have the star sewn to their clothes according to regulations. His cars would stop somewhere and he would catch whoever was there, with no consideration as to whether he had taken the entire family…. Our landlady, who had opened all the gas faucets, was forcibly dragged out of the apartment by the Gestapo. Several days later there was wild knocking at the door: open up! Gestapo! My mother happened to be at home because she was working night shifts at the factory. She opened the door for the men who had come to take our landlady's belongings. One of the Gestapo officials appeared at the door of my mother's room and said: What are you doing here? Actually I should take you along right away.' My mother, showing an enormous presence of mind, did not respond to the man's threats, but continued to do her work…. The driver, apparently not a member of the Gestapo, made signs indicating that she should not be afraid. Nevertheless, my mother went through an agonizing hour. I believe it was her composure that saved her from the worst. We had

reached the end of our strength. This event confronted us with the need to make a decision. We spoke like one person we have to finally make up our minds. This cannot go on like this.' To go into hiding or let them deport us – these were our only alternatives. We discussed it with our Aryan friends and I consulted Weidt. They all urged us to take the risk and offered help. No one at the time knew exactly what happened to the deportees, but there were rumors that trickled through, so that one assumed the worst. But where should we turn? We had made friends with a family by the name of Gumz, the owners of a small laundry, who were doing the washing for Jews in secret. They were Jehovah's Witnesses, who hated Hitler. When they found out that my mother was not only a Socialist, but also from Pomerania, their region of origin, their willingness to help was unlimited. These friends invited us to come to them. They had a free room. I was determined not to leave any of our belongings to the Nazis. Weidt was happy to help and have the workshop car take our two sofas and all our other luggage one morning when no one was home. Thus my mother and I left our home on 15 January 1943, and by removing our Jewish star, we also left behind our former life as Jews. As promised, our friends from the laundry took us in, and I continued my work at Weidt's workshop. Mr. Weidt managed to buy the labor certificate of a girl who had decided to become a prostitute and to dodge the mandatory labor service. So I worked legally under the name Gertrud Dereszewsky as a secretary at the Weidt workshop. But once the real Gertrud Dereszewsky was caught by the police and admitted that her papers were with the Weidt workshop...the documents became worthless… Meanwhile, the deportations increased steadily, and one day the Vienese Gestapo ordered that all the blind and deaf-mutes in Weidt's employ were to be deported. Weidt put on his badge indicating he was blind and went to the Gestapo to free his people. I do not know how he really managed to do it. Did he argue that he was producing for the army (he actually never completed their orders in full in order to keep the workshop going) or did he merely bribe them. At any rate he got his staff released one more time. He personally went to the assembly camp at Grosse Hamburger Street, where his people had been brought, to take them back. Then he, half blind himself, marched at the head of the group of about 50

blind people and deaf-mutes, all with their Jewish stars, back to the workshop on Rosenthaler Street. It was like a scene from an ancient tragedy. The people stood still in the street watching and making room for the group to pass. Even the police did not intervene. This was the last time Weidt managed to get all his people released. On 28 February [1943], when the last Jews of Berlin were to be deported, he was helpless and could do nothing to save them.… Meanwhile, the Gestapo learned of our disappearance and came one day to our friends, a Socialist couple by the name of Rieck. They were told by Rieck that they hadn't heard from us in a long time, and they had assumed we had either been deported or had committed suicide. The police therefore declared us dead.… I soon found work in an art dealership with a stationary shop belonging to Socialist friends of ours, Dr. Ostrowsky. He had urged us to go into hiding and was happy to offer us help. However, the problem of accommodation became difficult. We soon found that we could not stay with the people from the laundry for an extended period of time. There was danger that the woman doing the ironing, who suspected nothing, would discover that we were living there. Then there was the increasing number of air raids. We could not register as visitors at the air raid shelter because we had no papers, and therefore had to stay in the apartment during the attacks. This could have led to the worst problems for our hosts, had we been found wounded or dead in their apartment. Thus we began leading the life of vagabonds, totally defenseless.… As our friends Ostrowsky had only a one room apartment and could not accommodate us in their home, my mother and I stayed for some time at the back room of the shop, sleeping on the ground.… We spent one week in Schildhorn, in a shack belonging to friends. But even there we could not stay for too long because of the danger that someone might notice us. We moved to friends, a simple dear worker family, in the northern part of the city…and slept on a sofa in their kitchen. It was always the air raid problem that prevented a longer stay anywhere. In addition, my mother had no work and during the day she had to sit secretly at friends' homes until we could meet somewhere in the evenings.… After a long search, we finally found accommodations in Potsdam-Eigenheim. It was an empty goat pen, which normally would not have been fit for human habitation. It was built of cement,

had one tiny window and a wooden door, opening directly into the open field. It was beautiful in summer, damp in fall and icy in the winter…. We furnished it as best we could, and the neighbors, who heard that we had lost our home in Berlin because of the bombing, helped…. We used every free minute to search for wood in the forest. I also would gather coal in the cellars of houses destroyed by bombs…. The barter business at the stationary shop was blooming. I was conducting exchange of butter for coffee or alcohol or some coal from the bombed houses… My mother and I lived from one day to the next and began to eventually adjust to this life of adventure, deceit and falsehood. In addition to the problems of finding food and accommodation, we were aware every single minute of the fragility of our existence. There were frequent police raids in the streets in search of deserters and political opponents. I was most afraid of falling into the hands of a Gestapo informant by the name of Stella Kuebler-Goldschlag…. She had a reputation for being able to "smell" hiding Jews and deserters. Once, while we were sitting in the tram, two officials boarded the car at Zoologischer Garten station and called out: please present identification cards. Thank God they had started their check at the other end of the car and when the tram arrived at the next station we ran outside. Another time an acquaintance in army uniform sat across me, looked at me and said: aren't you Miss Deutschkron.' – you must be mistaking me for someone else' I said quietly. Of course I got off at the next station. One had to be an excellent actor in such situations. A new catastrophe befell us: I lost my job at the Ostrowsky shop…. What could we do? We had to walk around for hours on end, kill time in order to keep the pretence that we were going to the city to work…. February 1945 came and the Russians were advancing toward Berlin. Chaos increased daily and Berlin was swamped with refugees from the East who had lost everything. The situation was no longer under control…. Earlier, in Ostrowsky's shop, I had found a ration card for clothing and food belonging to a certain Amanda Heubaum…. The loss of food ration cards was not so bad for their owners, since they could usually have a new one issued after a long and complicated procedure. It was different with a clothing ration card, which could not be replaced. We therefore hesitated to use it…. These ration cards were an enormous help to us,

especially the one for clothing, because as Jews, even before we had gone underground, we had no right to buy clothes. So for the first time in almost 5 years we could buy a new pair of stockings, sewing material and other items… I will probably never forget the sound of the Russian tanks. What happened later, however, did not correspond to my dream of liberation….

Source: Yad Vashem Archive 02/38.