

THE HOLOCAUST IN UKRAINE

*Two families on the run
The farmer who took them in*

For Shelly Weiner and Raya Kizhnerman

*Thank you for tirelessly sharing your story
with thousands of teachers, students,
and everyone holding this book in their hands*



With thanks to:

Edward Serotta for the English script

Alexander Schneidmesser and Anna Domnich
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*Shelly: My name is Shelly Weiner,
I never had a childhood, I never
had a friend and I never had
a toy.*



*Raya: And, uhm,
my name is Raya Kizhnerman
and my childhood was as bad
as it could be. I never had
friends, I never had toys, I
didn't go to school before
the war.*



*The only person to play with
was my cousin Shelly.*

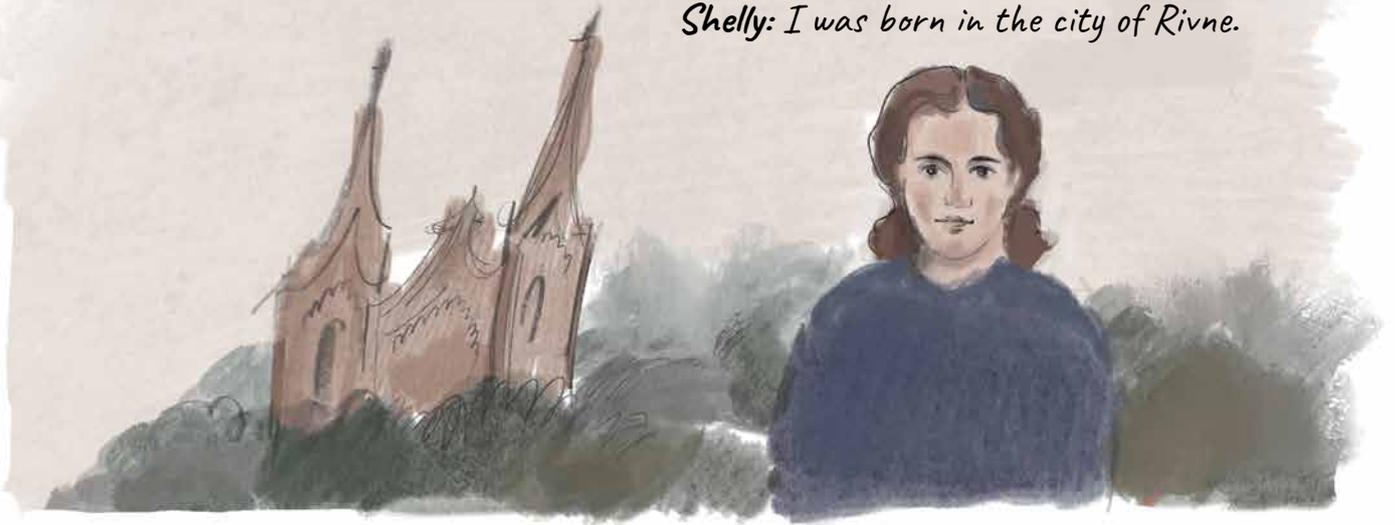


PART ONE:

OUR CHILDHOOD



Shelly: I was born in the city of Rivne.



My father was a businessman,

*my mother had a grocery store that she
ran from the bottom of our house,
she had set it up.*





*And I had a very happy
childhood before the war.
My grandfather spoiled
me terribly.*

*He would take me to his house
and put me on the table and I
could do whatever I wanted: kick
the dishes, dance...*

Raya: I was born in Rivne too, but I lived in a village called Miatyn,



•MIATYN



•RIVNE

which was, uh, five, six kilometers from Rivne.

My parents had a little business in that village,

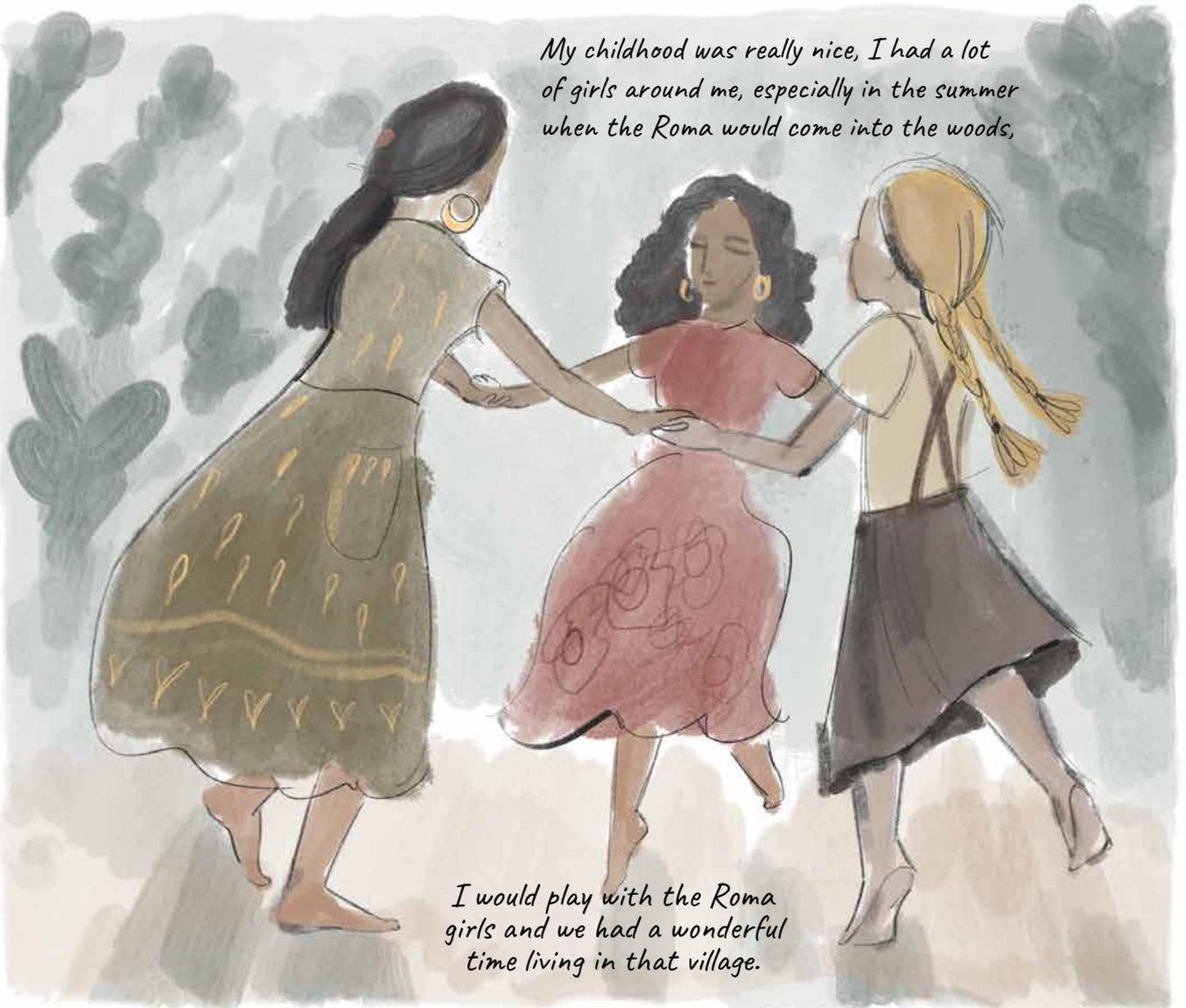
uhm, they were producing lime and selling it.



*They had livestock, which
my mother took care of.*



*My childhood was really nice, I had a lot
of girls around me, especially in the summer
when the Roma would come into the woods,*



*I would play with the Roma
girls and we had a wonderful
time living in that village.*

PART TWO:



ON 1ST SEPTEMBER NAZI GERMANY
INVADED POLAND FROM THE WEST



THREE WEEKS LATER THE SOVIET UNION
INVADED POLAND FROM THE EAST



WHEN HORROR CAME TO RIVNE



RIVNE WAS OCCUPIED BY THE SOVIET UNION



IN JUNE 1941,
GERMAN TROOPS INVADED
THE SOVIET UNION

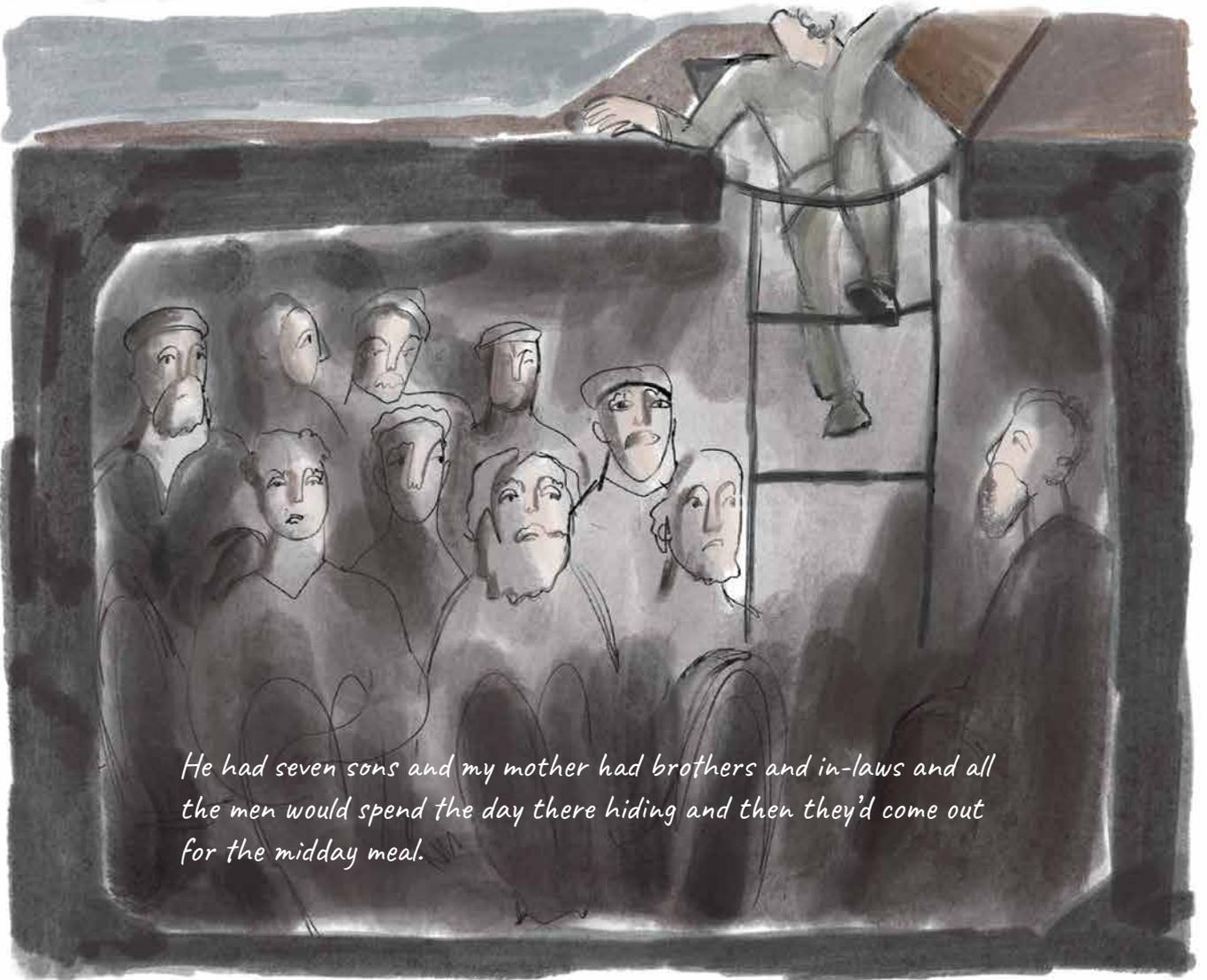
Shelly: The Germans came ..



*...and immediately they started passing laws
determining what Jews could and couldn't do.
And one of the laws that they passed is
that they wanted the men, all the men to
report for relocation work duty.*

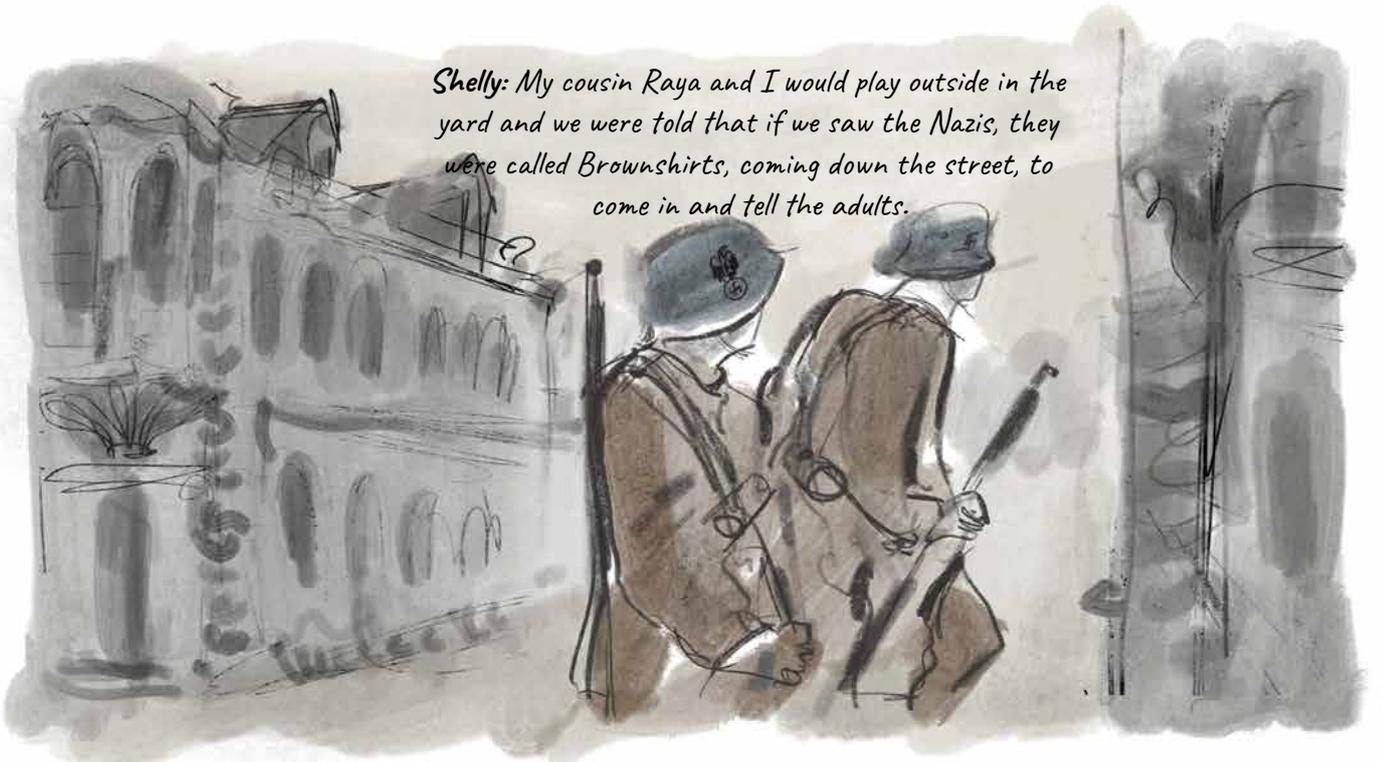


My grandfather had a suspicion that this was not really where they were taking the men. He lived next door and so uh, he created a hiding place at my mother's for all the men.



He had seven sons and my mother had brothers and in-laws and all the men would spend the day there hiding and then they'd come out for the midday meal.

Shelly: My cousin Raya and I would play outside in the yard and we were told that if we saw the Nazis, they were called Brownshirts, coming down the street, to come in and tell the adults.



Shelly: And one day we were playing out there and we saw a jeep with four of these men, in the Brownshirt uniforms, stopping at our neighbors



we ran in and told the adults.



All the men ran back to the hiding place,

the women cleaned up

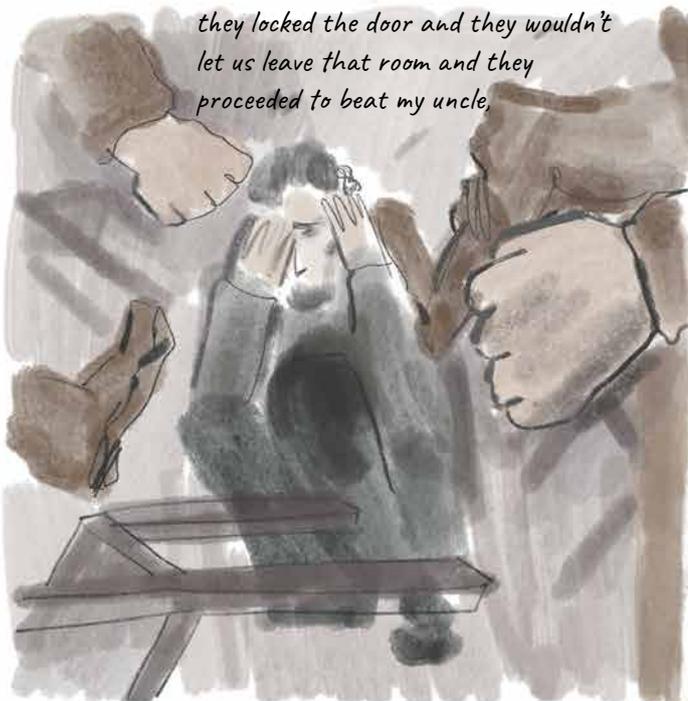


but my uncle, Raya's father, remained.



The next thing I remember is that these men burst in,

they locked the door and they wouldn't let us leave that room and they proceeded to beat my uncle,



Raya: And I was screaming seeing them beating my father.



So they threw us out of the room,



and uhm, they, uh, squeezed me in between a wall and a kitchen table.



Shelly: The next thing that happened is that my mother got us to the village of Miatyn



...this was after they had the massacre in Rivne and they killed 17,500 Jews in three days. My entire family was killed in that massacre: my grandfather, my uncles, my aunts and my cousins.

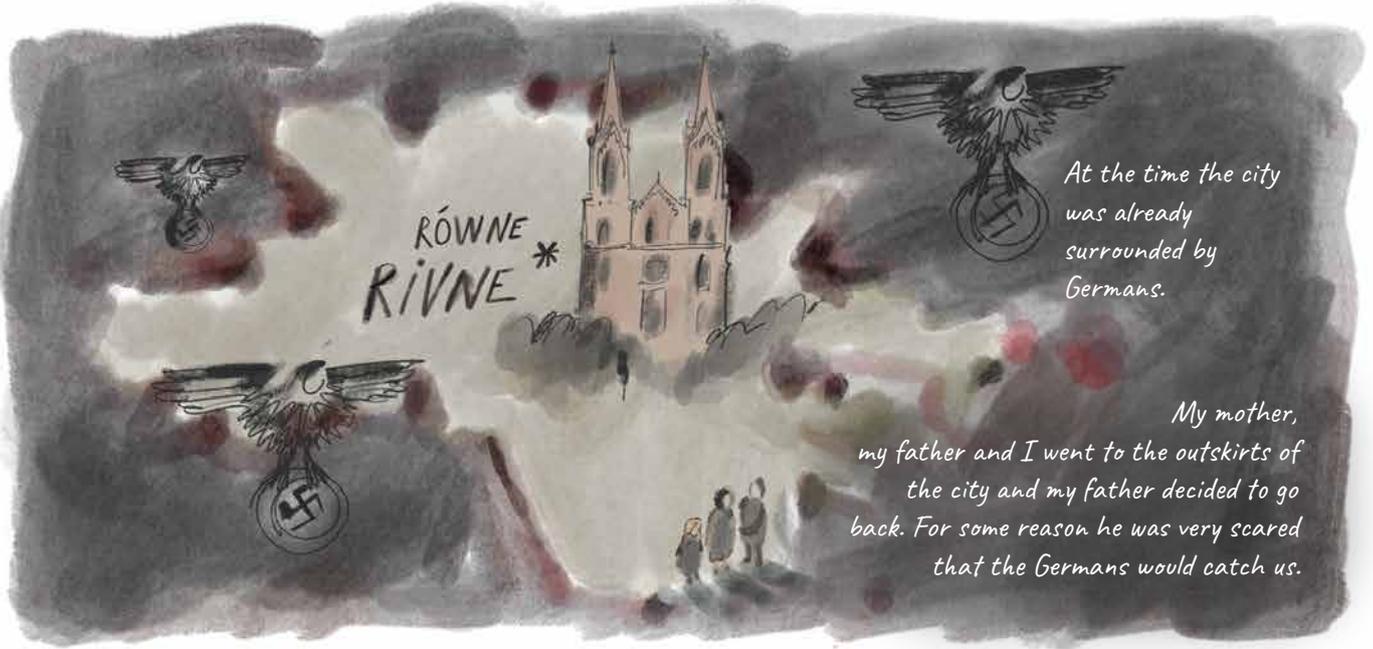


The only person that survived was my father, he was taken to Russia in the army.



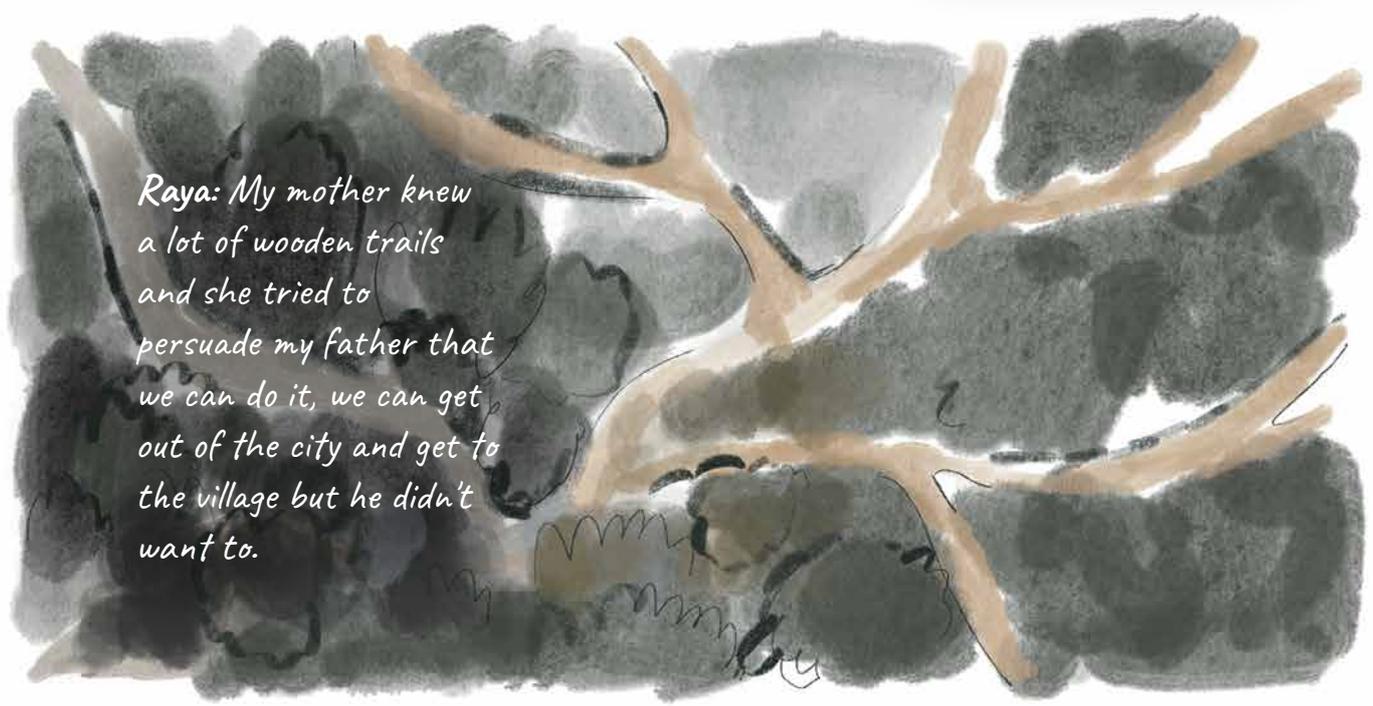
Raya: My mother had this premonition that something was going to happen in the city

and she wanted to go back to the village.



At the time the city was already surrounded by Germans.

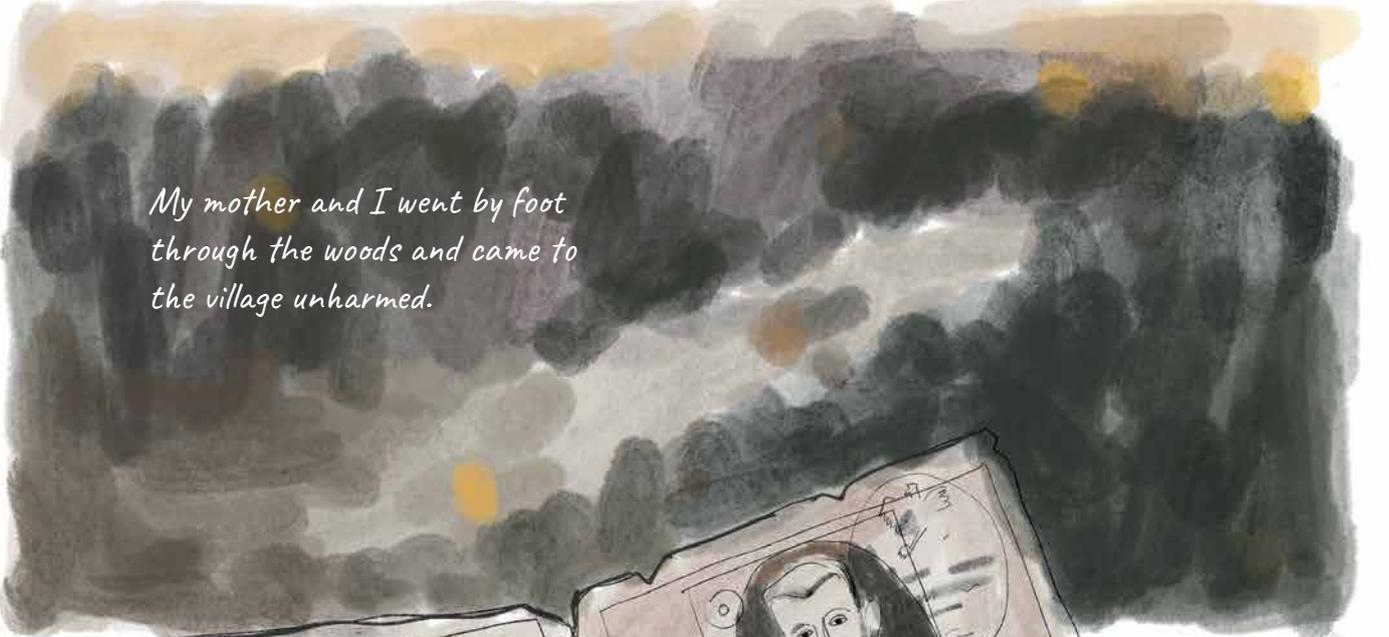
My mother, my father and I went to the outskirts of the city and my father decided to go back. For some reason he was very scared that the Germans would catch us.



Raya: My mother knew a lot of wooden trails and she tried to persuade my father that we can do it, we can get out of the city and get to the village but he didn't want to.



Raya: The only thing he had is his passport, he gave it to us and went back to the city.



My mother and I went by foot through the woods and came to the village unharmed.



The passport is the only thing that I have of my father and this is the only memory that I have.

Raya: The next day my mother decided to go to the city and see what's going on there.

Where's my father, where is the whole family? When she arrived, nobody was there.

And people were saying that all the Jews were taken out of the city to a little place called Sosenki and they were all killed.

So my mother went to that place of killing, of the massacre and she saw that the Ukrainian police were there, the Germans were there. And people, especially the police, they were taking all the pricey possessions that the people had brought over there, putting them on wagons and taking them home.

Raya: So then she knew that all our family had been killed.

And uh, she was horrified and with that she came back to the village and told us the whole story. Now nobody was left but the four of us: Shelly, her mother, my mother and I.



Shelly: Natalia and Nikinor Palashuk made a hiding place for us in the upper part of their barn, where they kept the straw and hay.



I remember standing there and watching them put straw on the um, space where they kept it. They filled it up and left a small space for the four of us to sit down, to lie down but we couldn't really stand up.



And as a little girl I would tell my mother "please, please, please let me go out and play with the chicken and uh the kitty cats.



They can walk around there but I can't."

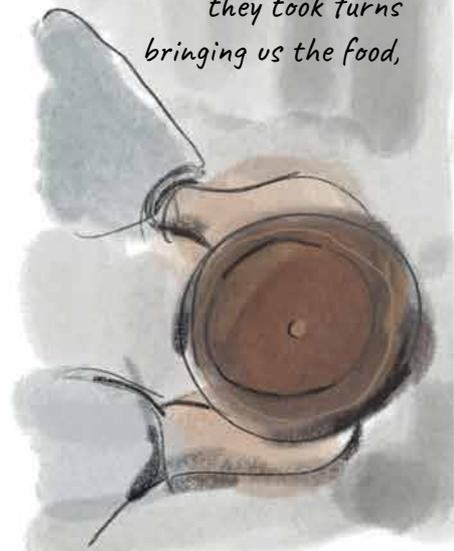
We were at the back of the barn where they have some eaves that you can look out from. That was the only light that we had and the only air that we had

Raya: The people that hid us, I was a little older than Shelly so I have more memories,



Natalia and her husband, this family, they had five children. They had one girl and four sons.

Shelly: The only thing I know about Natalia and Nikanor is that he would be the one, well they took turns bringing us the food,

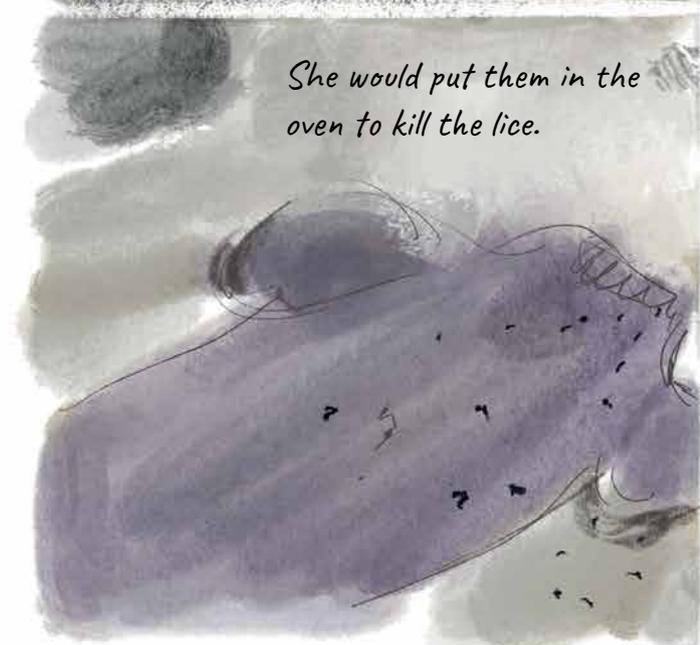


and our biggest problem were the rats and the mice and the lice.

Once a month she took our clothes and we wrapped ourselves in blankets. They were rough blankets.



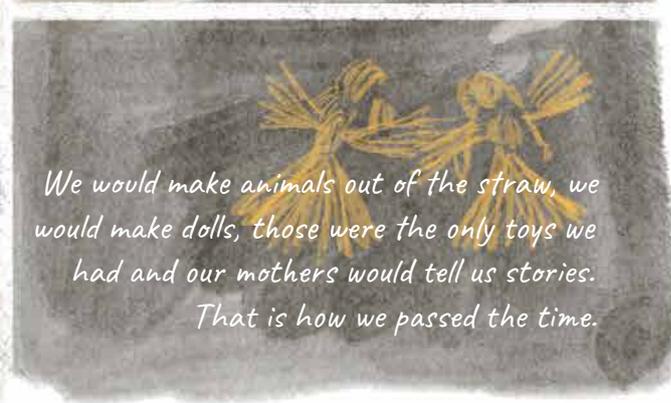
She would put them in the oven to kill the lice.



Shelly: The thing that I remember about hiding in the barn was that Raya and I would play with the straw.



We would make animals out of the straw, we would make dolls, those were the only toys we had and our mothers would tell us stories. That is how we passed the time.



SHELLY: ALL TOGETHER I THINK WE WERE IN THE BARN MAYBE 20 MONTHS.





Shelly: The scariest night of my life was when Nikanor came up

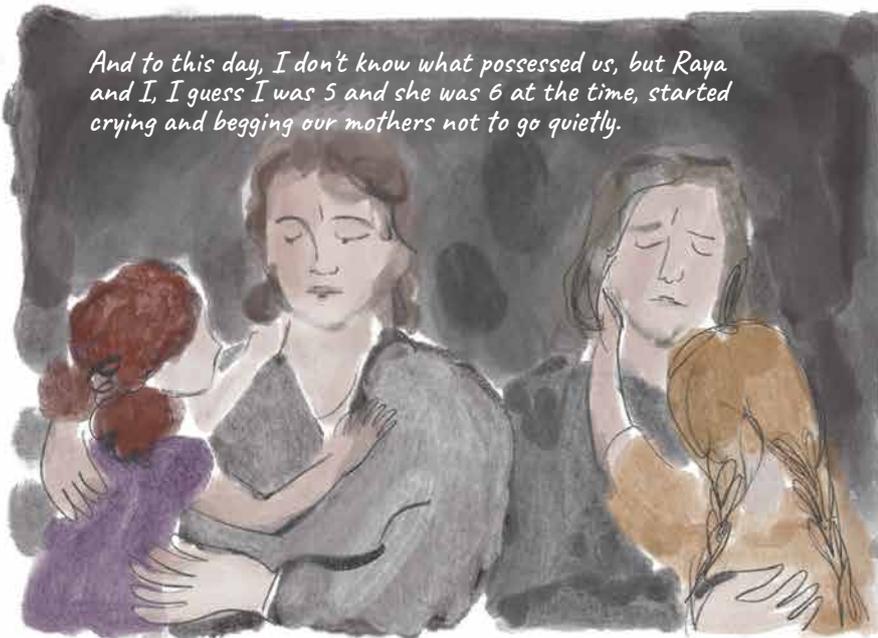


and told our mothers that they were coming for us.

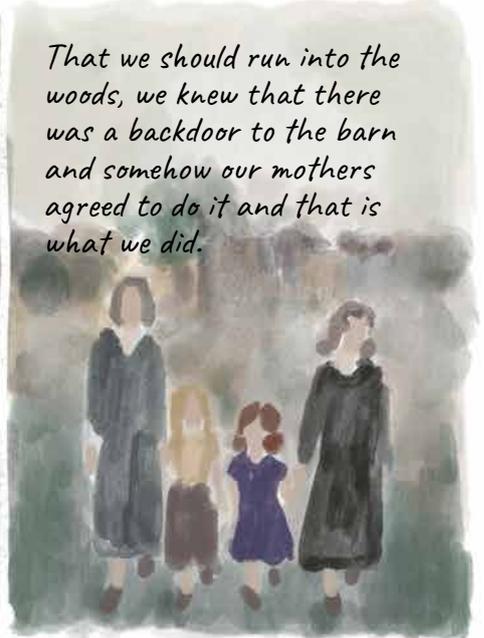


They knew we were there. And, uh, that we should come down.

Well, our mothers said, could we have a little time to say goodbye to each other.



And to this day, I don't know what possessed us, but Raya and I, I guess I was 5 and she was 6 at the time, started crying and begging our mothers not to go quietly.



That we should run into the woods, we knew that there was a backdoor to the barn and somehow our mothers agreed to do it and that is what we did.



Raya: From the woods, during the day, we hid in the fields. We had no food, no water, the sun was unbelievably hot and this is where we sat for three days. All we could eat, was, uh the raw grain from the rye.



And then, uh, Nikanor called for us. He actually didn't know where we were. But he called for us and we heard him and came back to the house, to a bunker actually.



Raya:

They built an underground bunker to hide their grain there and mainly to hide their daughter, who was a young girl.

The bunker was a dark, damp place. All they had there was the straw that we lay down on. Rats and mice were in the thousands running around. – We didn't have almost no food, just a little bit to uh, keep us alive.



*IN FEBRUARY 1944,
THE FIRST UKRAINIAN
FRONT OF THE SOVIET
ARMY LIBERATED RIVNE*



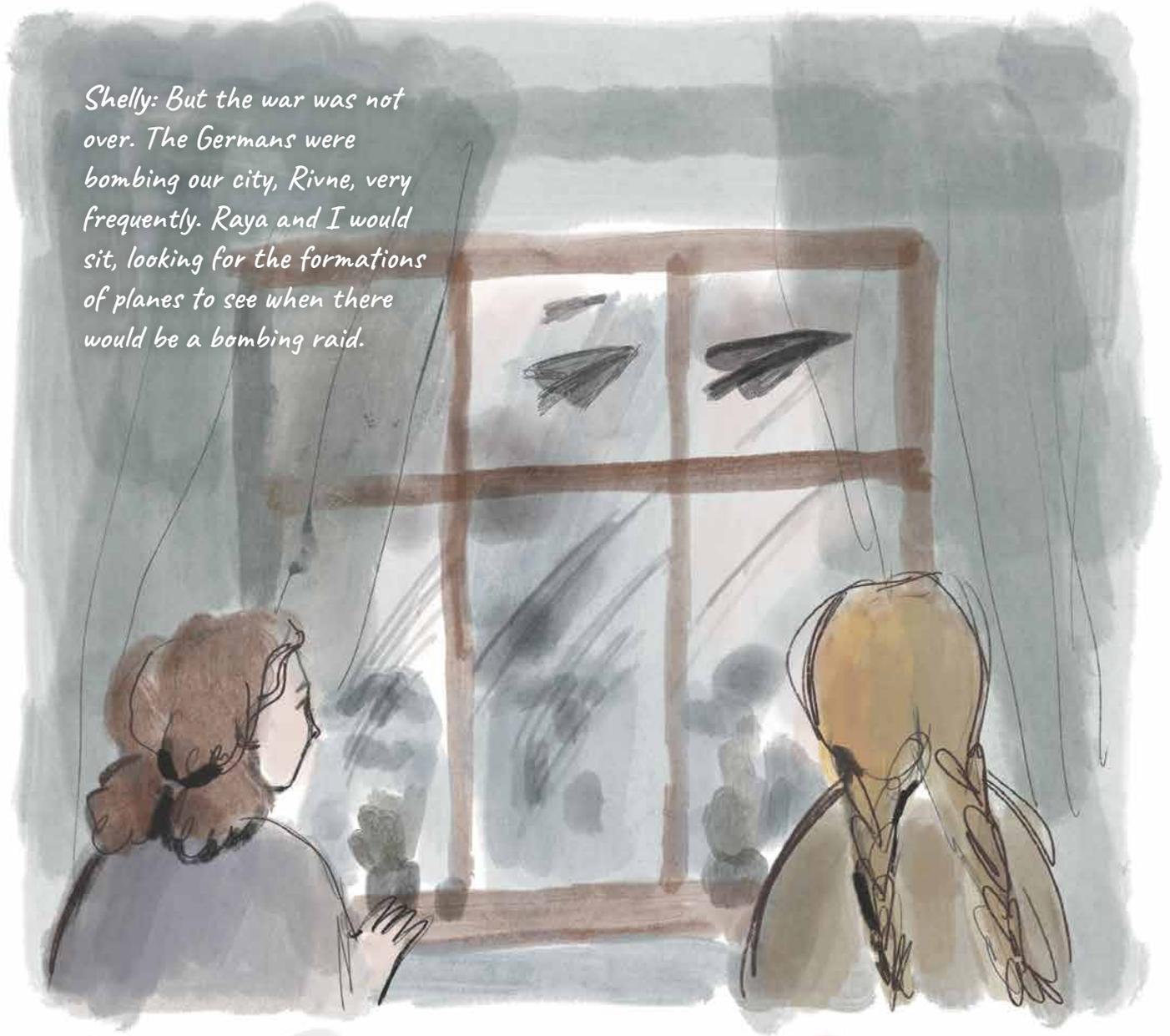


Raya: Nikanor put our mothers on a wagon and took them to Rivne. Shelly and I stayed in the village, still in that house, until our mothers knew whether it was safe to take us back to Rivne.

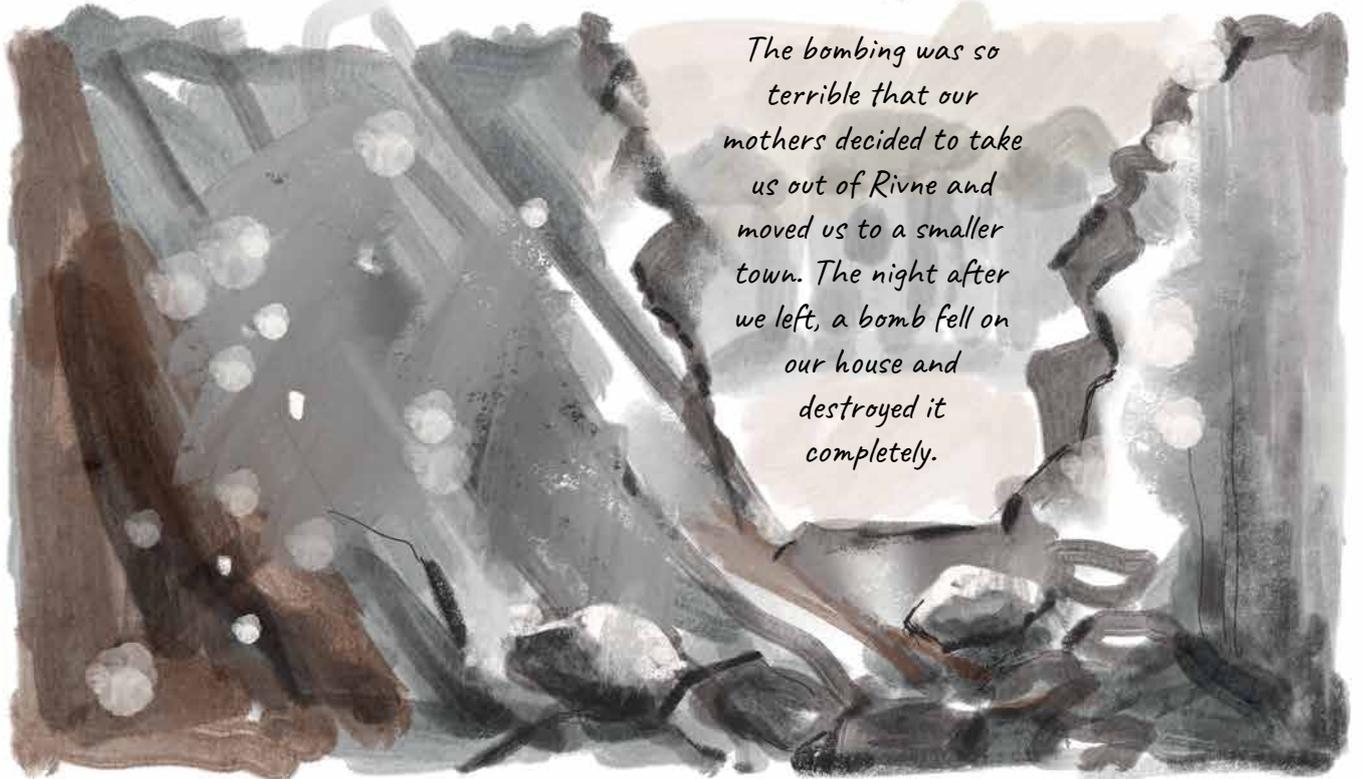
Shelly: Nikanor came and took us out of the home underground and put us on his wagon, covered us with straw and drove us to Rivne.

It was a sunny day, there was snow on the ground, and it was blinding. We couldn't see anything because we had been in the darkness for so long. And, um, that was our first day that I remember. Feeling the coldness, it was February I believe, and seeing the open space.

Shelly: But the war was not over. The Germans were bombing our city, Rivne, very frequently. Raya and I would sit, looking for the formations of planes to see when there would be a bombing raid.



The bombing was so terrible that our mothers decided to take us out of Rivne and moved us to a smaller town. The night after we left, a bomb fell on our house and destroyed it completely.

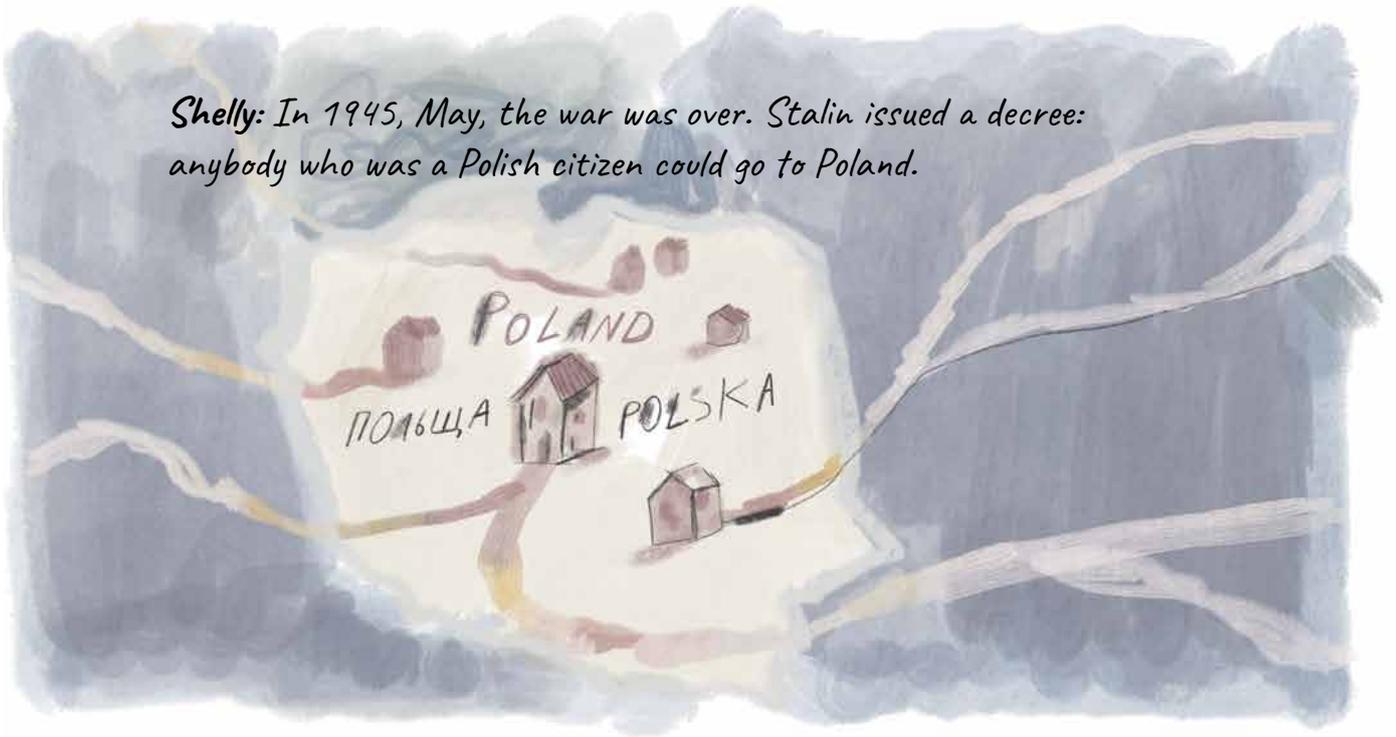




PART THREE:

STARTING OVER

Shelly: In 1945, May, the war was over. Stalin issued a decree: anybody who was a Polish citizen could go to Poland.



So we got to Poland and my mother and her brother opened up a restaurant



And I stayed with a gypsy lady.



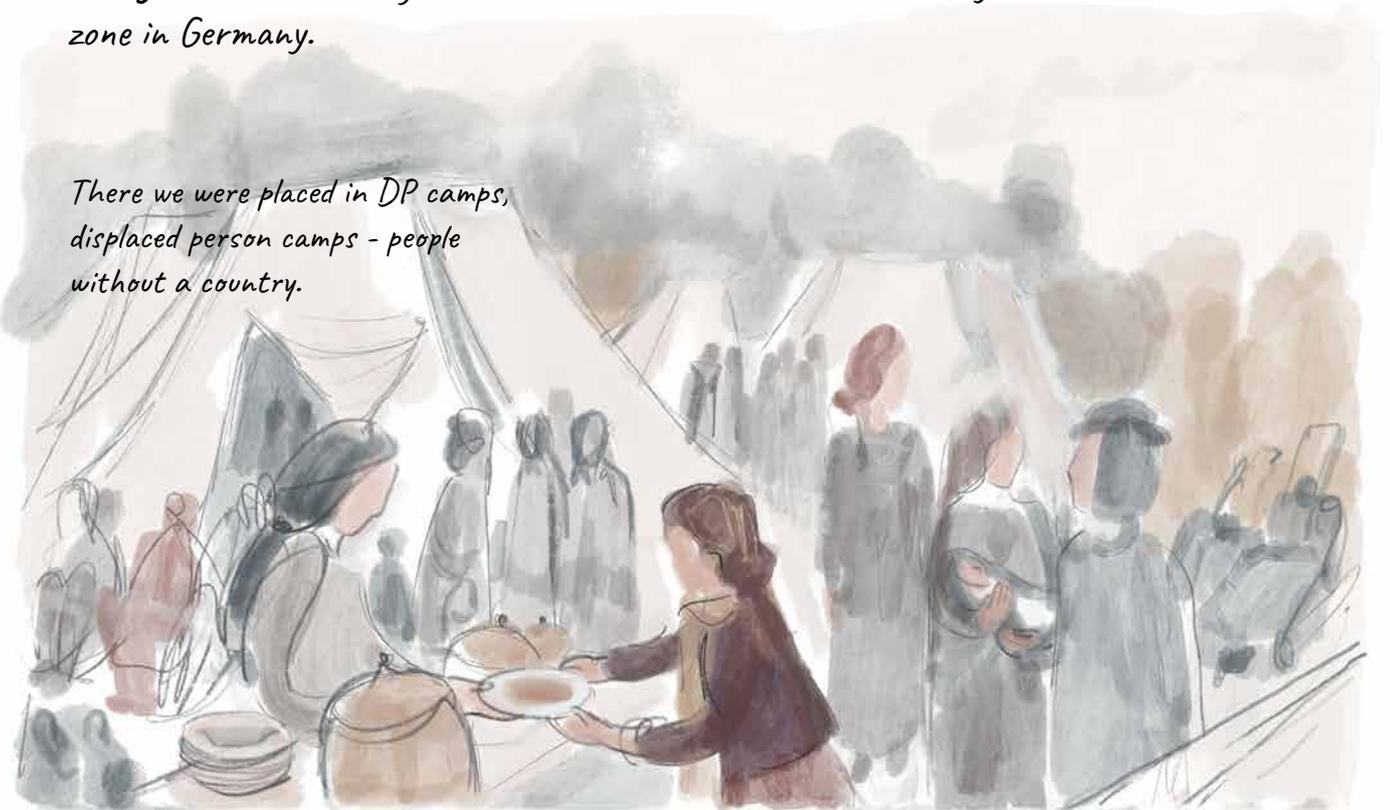
One day there was a knock on the door and it was my father. He had survived the war, gone back to Rivne, found out where we were and came to get us.





Shelly: From Poland, my mother and father and I made our way to the American zone in Germany.

There we were placed in DP camps, displaced person camps - people without a country.



We were there for three years and eventually my father's family brought us to the United States. I came here in 1949, on Columbus Day.



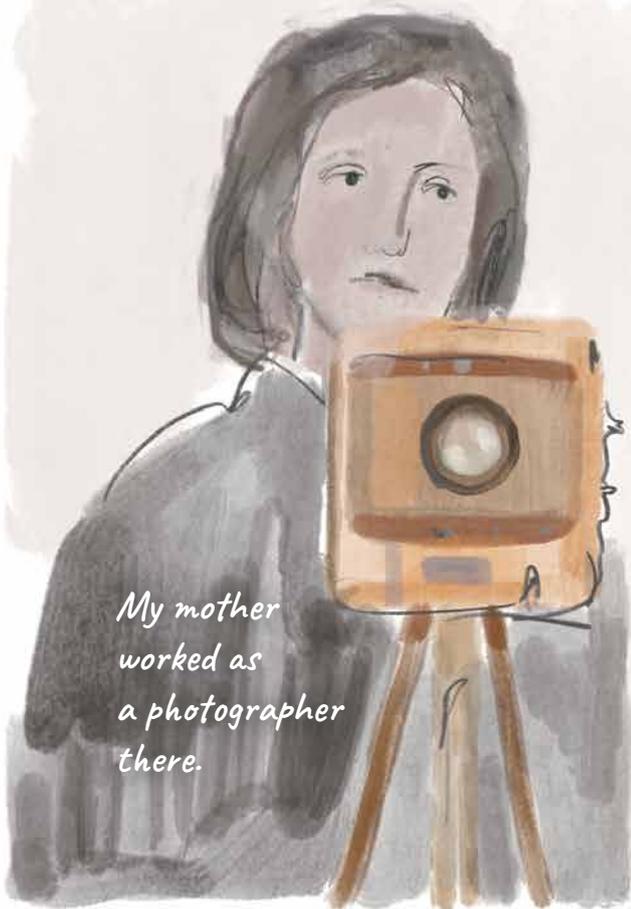
*Raya: In 1945 when Shelly and my aunt
Eva went to Poland, my mother and I
stayed in a little town called Korets.*



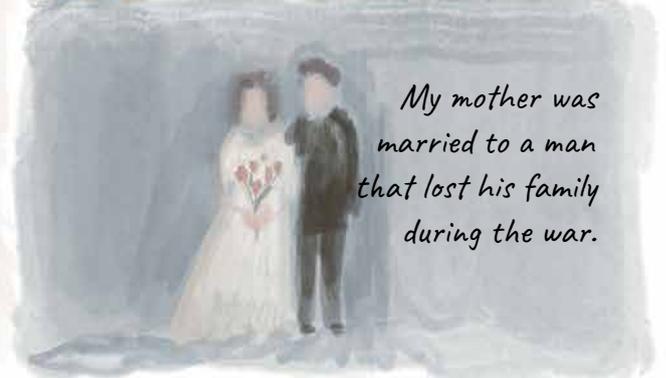
*We lived in that little town until
1956, I went to school there, had
some friends, life wasn't that bad.*



*My mother
worked as
a photographer
there.*



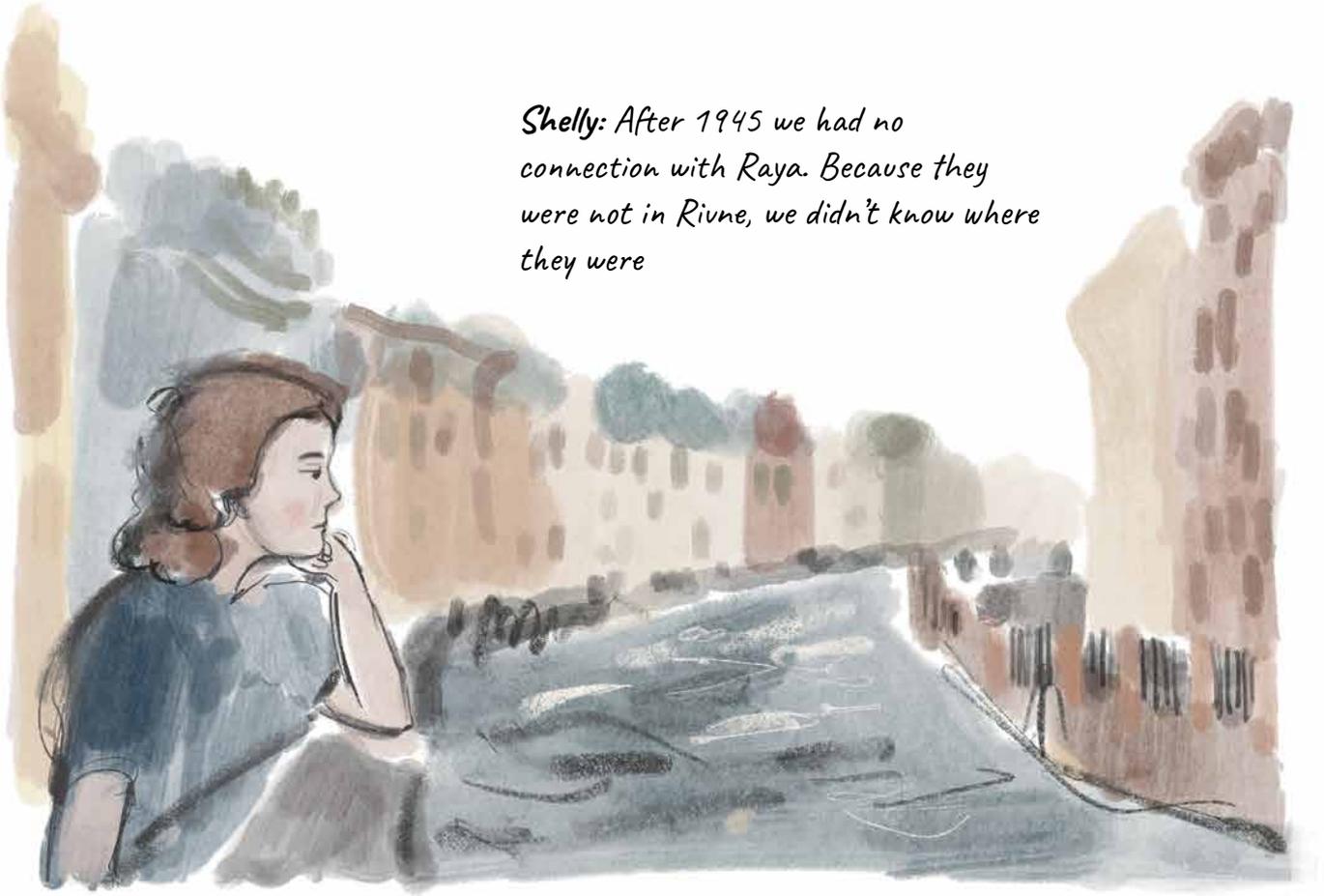
*My mother was
married to a man
that lost his family
during the war.*



*But he had a brother who was in
St. Petersburg and he decided that
we should move to St. Petersburg.
So we did.
That was in 1957 or 1958.*



Shelly: After 1945 we had no connection with Raya. Because they were not in Rivne, we didn't know where they were



until in the late 60s when my mother was walking on the streets in Tel Aviv.



A man recognized her and he came over to her and said: "I know where your sister is, I just saw her."



Shelly: In 1974 I went to St. Petersburg where Raya was living at the time with her husband Anatoly and her son Genia and aunt Sonia. It was the first time I saw them since we left in 1945.



I had no idea what to expect but immediately I recognized them as family. Memories came back to all of us.

We told them if they ever wanted to leave, we would help them get to the United States.



Raya: In 1974 when Shelly and her mother came to visit us, I just couldn't believe it was them.



That not everybody was killed. All the memories came back.

In 1980, Raya, her mother Eva, her husband Anatoly and her son Genia left the Soviet Union and emigrated to the United States and joined Shelly and her family in Greensboro, North Carolina.

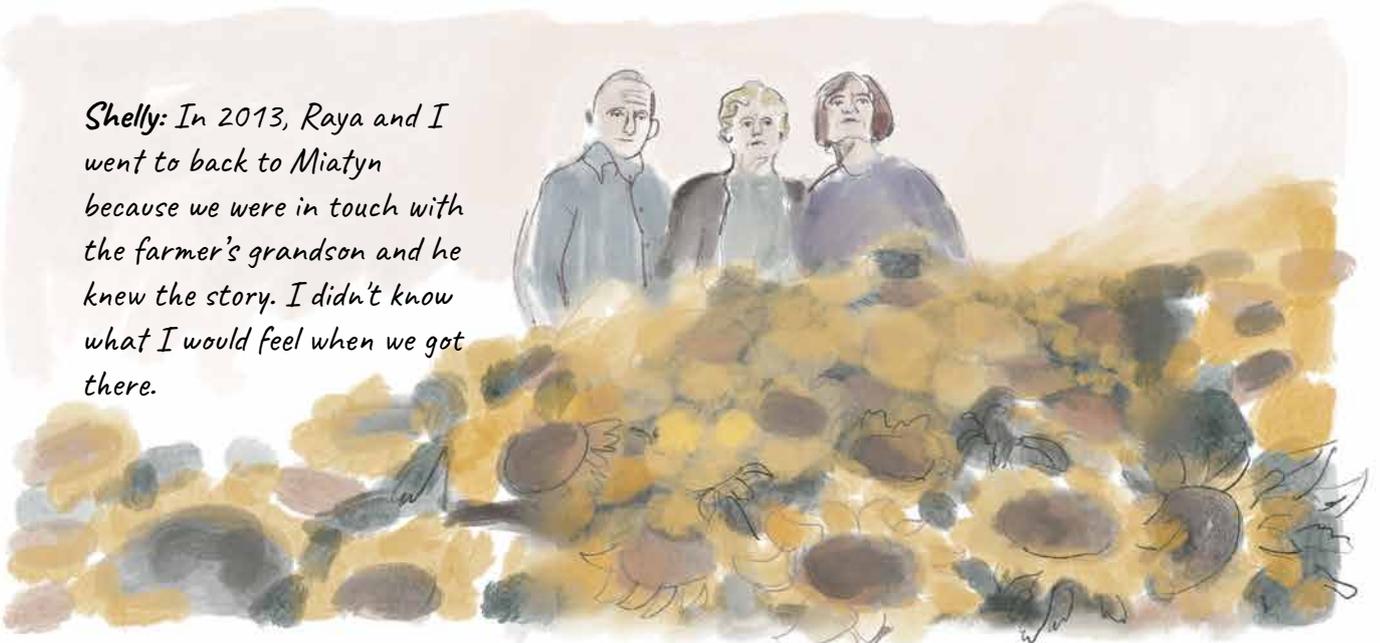


PART FOUR:

RETURN TO RIVNE



Shelly: In 2013, Raya and I went back to Miatyn because we were in touch with the farmer's grandson and he knew the story. I didn't know what I would feel when we got there.



But when we came to the farm and we saw the barn where we were hidden.

I was in total disbelief that this could really have happened in that space and that time, but I knew that it did.

I knew that, that's where we were. But it seemed so small and so, I just couldn't understand how two little girls could've



....survived in that place.

*Shelly: When we walked
in the house*



we recognized it immediately.



*Shelly:
The thing we talked about
right away, was what we
remembered from hiding.
And it wasn't that we were
hungry, it was that we were
hot and cold.
Winter and summer.*

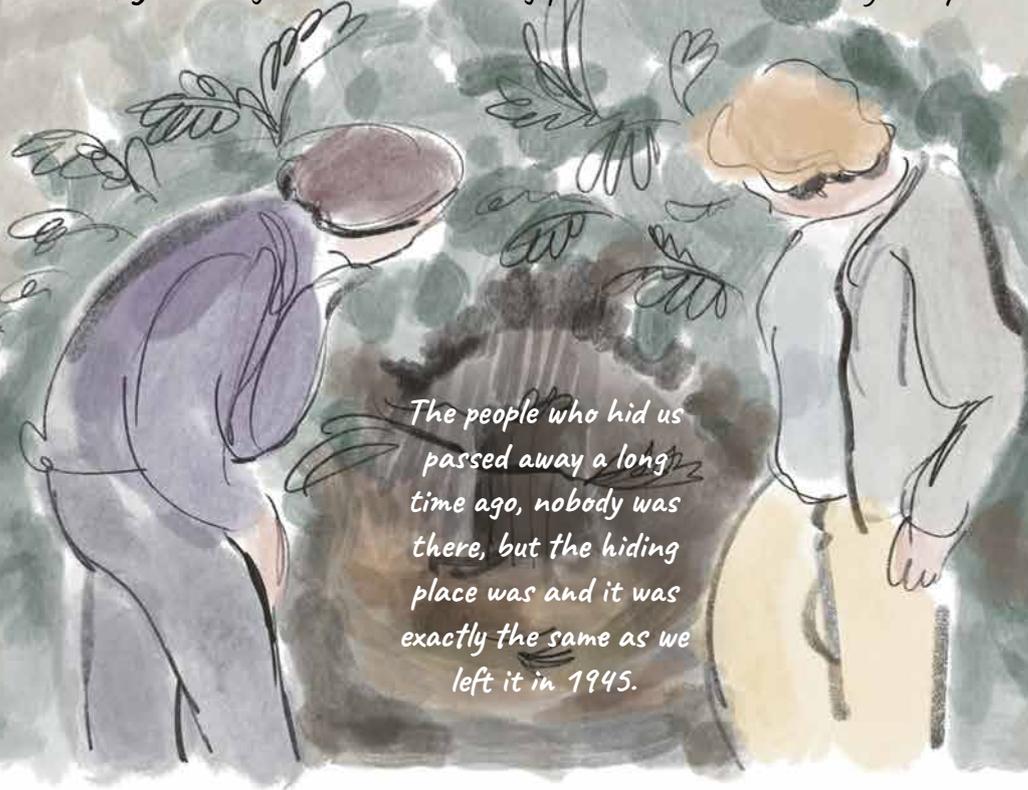


*For me, it was
a very good way
to kind of close
a part of my life*



*and to be there with Raya who experienced
the same exact thing as I did.*

Raya: Going back to the hiding place in 2013 was very, very emotional.



The people who hid us passed away a long time ago, nobody was there, but the hiding place was and it was exactly the same as we left it in 1945.

The only person who still lived there was the daughter-in-law of the people that hid us, when we were hiding there she didn't know anything about us. But she, her son and her grandchildren were very, very happy to see us.



Shelly: I have often wondered how the Palaschuk family had the strength and bravery to do what they did. To hide us, four people, when they knew that the punishment would be death for them and their children and all their property would be confiscated.

*Shelly: I am not sure how I would react in the same situation.
I don't think that many of us know how we would react.*

*But I do know that they were extremely
brave and caring to do what they did,*

to put up with the fear,

*the deprivation and everything
that was going on around them.*





Auswärtiges Amt



2022