

The Children

Between the autumn of 1940 and July 1942, approximately 230 children were born in the Warsaw Ghetto on average per month (at the same time, the death rate was estimated at around 2,535 people per month).

According to data from the Department of Jewish Population Records for 1940, 3,676 children were born in Warsaw; in 1941, approximately 3,000 were born, and a further 500 or so by July 1942. Towards the end of October 1941, **Mary Berg**, an observer of life in the ghetto, wrote thus about the marriages concluded in the enclave: “The number of marriages has recently decreased in comparison with the first months of the war. The main reason for this state of affairs is the lack of housing – a serious problem in the ghetto”.

Children living in the district faced a particularly difficult fate. Due to the conditions which prevailed there, they were malnourished, skinny, and regularly succumbed to the diseases that spread in individual quarters; in consequence, mortality among this group was high. Many went about begging on the streets of the ghetto for food, while others tried to cross onto the so-called Aryan side to get food for themselves and their loved ones. **Henryka Łazowertówna**, a poet of the Warsaw Ghetto, wrote a poem about their exploits, entitled **“The Little Smuggler”**:

Through walls, through holes, through sentry points,
Through wires, through rubble, through fences:
Hungry, daring, stubborn
I flee, dart like a cat.

At noon, at night, in dawning hours,
In blizzards, in the heat,
A hundred times I risk my life,

I risk my childish neck.

Under my arm a burlap sack,
On my back a tattered rag;
Running on my swift young legs
With fear ever in my heart.

Yet everything must be suffered;
And all must be endured,
So that tomorrow you can all
Eat your fill of bread.

Through walls, through holes, through brickwork,
At night, at dawn, at day,
Hungry, daring, cunning,
Quiet as a shadow I move.

And if the hand of sudden fate
Seizes me at some point in this game,
It's only the common snare of life.
Mama, don't wait for me.
I won't return to you,
Your far-off voice won't reach.
The dust of the street will bury
The lost youngster's fate.

And only one grim thought,
A grimace on your lips:
Who, my dear Mama, who
Will bring you bread tomorrow?

Translated by Patricia Heberer

More than once, the children paid for their efforts with their lives.

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