Survivor Edi Weinstein on Obtaining Help from the Local Population

After the war, I discovered that there had been organizations that helped Jews, but they operated only in Warsaw and not in our vicinity. I never heard of a single case in which the Catholic Church helped a Jew. At that time there were no organized underground resistance groups in our area. Farther away, in the forests around the River Bug, Russian prisoners of war had managed to escape from the camps, but defenseless people like us were easy prey for bandits.

Villagers who agreed to shelter Jews demanded huge sums of money, less for their personal needs than in compensation for the risk involved. Their peril was real. No one doubted the severity of the punishment that would be visited on peasants and their families should the Germans discover that they were harboring Jews. They had to be even warier of their neighbors than of the occupiers. In the circumstances, everyone was a potential enemy. The price of a hideout varied from place to place but was usually denominated in gold rubles or dollars. Few could afford it. When we left Treblinka with the gold-filled belts, my share came to 140 gold dollars and 220 gold rubles. I saved as much of this money as I could for my eventual safe haven.

Anyone who looked “Aryan” and could speak Polish without an accent tried to buy Polish identity documents. In addition to the price—3,000 zlotys—acquiring them required connections with somebody reliable in the town hall. To the best of my knowledge, only women availed themselves of this route. Several people survived by posing as Poles and getting themselves shipped off to Germany as laborers. Others headed for Warsaw, where they soon perished. Not a single male of my acquaintance acquired Polish papers. They were pretty much useless for men anyway, since they could not conceal the evidence of their circumcision.