Elisabeth Kaufmann, age 16
Began diary in Paris, France
February 1940

Excerpted from Salvaged Pages: Young Writers’ Diaries of the Holocaust, pages 31 - 41.

“Elisabeth Kaufmann (later Elizabeth Koenig) began writing in her diary in her native German in February 1940 in France, just before her sixteenth birthday. She and her family had arrived in France one and a half years earlier as one of the thousands of refugee families fleeing Austria after the Anschluss or its annexation by the Germans in March 1938. Born to a well-established family on March 7, 1924, Elisabeth spent her early childhood years in Vienna with her parents and her older brother, Peter. Her family was cultured, sophisticated, and well-read. Her father held a doctoral degree in international relations and was a prominent journalist.

“In 1933, the family moved to Berlin, where they remained until 1936, when Elisabeth’s father was blacklisted by the Nazis and forced to leave the country.

“By the time she began to write in her diary, Elisabeth had already been a refugee for two years. Although much of the diary reflects the struggles, hardships, and complexities of life as a refugee, it also shows the mark of the writer’s hand, suggesting the particular educational, social, and cultural milieu in which Elisabeth had been raised.

“With the onset of war in September 1939, the tide of fear and suspicion of foreigners that had been gaining ground in France throughout the 1930s came fully to the fore. Thousands of refugees who fled to France to escape Nazi oppression were now considered ‘enemy aliens’ because of their German or Austrian nationality.

“In early May 1940, the sudden and swift German attack on the Western countries began. Holland, Belgium, and Luxembourg were occupied almost immediately. The invasion of France was imminent.

“Elisabeth’s diary captures the rising tension in Paris, the accompanying ‘Parisian migration’, as she referred to the panicked columns of those fleeing the capitol, and her own struggles as she joined them, becoming a refugee for the second time in her life.

“After much confusion, Elisabeth . . . found her parents and they settled in Saint Sauveur par Bellac, which was in the southern zone of France, and consequently not under German occupation. In the summer of 1941, Elisabeth was contacted by Hilde Höfert, her former Latin teacher . . . who invited her to come to Le Chambon sur Lignon, to be an au pair for the family of Pastor André Trocmé. In November 1941, after spending the summer and fall with the Trocmé family, Elisabeth received a letter from her father telling her to go directly to Lyons.
because the family had obtained visas to travel to America. The family arrived in Virginia Beach in early 1942.

“In 1947, Elisabeth and Ernst Koenig were married and have remained so for more than fifty years. The three volumes of Elisabeth’s diary remained in her own possession until she donated them to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. in 1990.”
Excerpted from *Salvaged Pages: Young Writers’ Diaries of the Holocaust*, pages 271-276.

“The first of Dawid Rubinowicz’s five notebooks opens on March 21, 1940, seven months after the German invasion and occupation of Poland. Born in the Polish city of Kielce on July 27, 1927, Dawid and his family, including his parents Josek and Tauba, younger brother Herszel, and younger sister Malka, had moved to the provincial village of Krajno, where they were living at the time of the German attack on Poland in September 1939. . . .

“He began by reporting on the latest restrictions leveled against the Jews, among them a prohibition on traveling by vehicle. He also heard and noted the news of the deportation of Jews from the nearby district capital of Kielce and the establishment of a ghetto there. While Dawid lamented his own life and the state of the world in general, he also savored the small daily pleasures that time and freedom still allowed. . . .

“At twelve-years old, Dawid was one of the youngest diarists whose writings have surfaced thus far. Far from fulfilling the stereotypical image of an innocent little boy, however, Dawid emerges with all the true complexity of a young boy coming of age. . . . Dawid often seemed older than his years, fulfilling an important role at home as the eldest son of a farming family; it was he who drew up a list for the distribution of a flour ration, ground corn and rye at the neighbors’, and carried messages to people in various towns as needed. . . .

“. . .Dawid reported on all the major threats to the safety and security of the Jews in his town. What emerges most dramatically from his account, however, is the Germans’ systematic exploitation of the Jews, which exhausted their material resources, leaving them beleaguered and impoverished. Dawid reported time and again on the allegedly ‘legal’ fines, taxes, and expropriations levied against his own family and their neighbors and acquaintances. . . .

“. . . Another form of exploitation was the seizure of Jewish men and boys for forced manual labor. Dawid himself was caught several times and sent to do various tasks, including bricklaying and snow removal. . . .
“Like so many of his counterparts, Dawid reported all the details of his family’s move to the ghetto, as they dismantled their home, packed their belongings, and made arrangements for transport. . . .

“Dawid returned again and again to his worries about the family’s finances. . . . Most of all, however, the diary reflects the escalation in violence afforded by the concentration of many Jews in a small space. . . .

“On May 1, 1942, an argument erupted between Dawid and his father, prompting an outraged tirade that stands in contrast to the rest of the diary. . . .

“The fact of their argument might not have taken on such importance except that a few days later Dawid’s father was arrested and taken to the nearby Skarżysko Kamienna forced labor camp. . . .

“The last part of the diary is almost entirely taken up with the details of communicating with Josek Rubinowicz via the Krajno Jewish Council, trying to send him [his father] mail and provisions. . . . and endeavoring to secure his release through the usual corrupt channels. . . .

“Dawid’s last entry, written on June 1, 1942 begins, ‘A happy day.’ Josek was finally released due to an injured arm and returned to his family. . . .”

“Three and a half months after his last entry, from September 15 to 21, 1942, the Jews who had been gathered from various provincial towns and concentrated in the Bodzentyn ghetto. . . . were marched on foot to the nearby town of Suchedniow. On September 21, they were loaded into cattle cars and transported to the death camp of Treblinka. Although nothing specific is known about the fate of Dawid and his family, they were almost certainly murdered in the gas chambers in Treblinka.”