

Elsa Binder  
Stanislawow, Poland

Background Information:

When Elsa begins keeping a journal in 1942, she is approximately 21 years of age. She, along with her parents and younger sister, Dora, were imprisoned in the Stanislawow Ghetto in December, 1941. For the next six months, Elsa records the family's daily struggles against hunger, bitter cold, and the fear of deportation. She also describes in great detail her innermost frustrations, fears, dreams, and constant hope for liberation.

December 24, 1941

... I have to admit to myself that I personally don't believe in an early liberation. I want it and I fear it. From today's perspective a free tomorrow seems to be extremely bright. In my dreams I expect so much from it. But in reality? I am young, I have a right to fight and to demand everything from life. But desiring it so much, I fear it. I realize that under the circumstances such thoughts are irrational, but...Never mind. What really matters is liberation.

December 27, 1941

...And Mama? We've been fighting for a few days. About trivialities, as usual. Yet no matter what moods we're in, she's the dearest person in the world for me. Not because it's the right thing to say, but because I truly feel it. Especially right now I should be more understanding with her, more loving, and so forth...But I feel even more sorry for my dad. I look at his skinny features, at his silver hair, and my heart is breaking; I feel how dear my father is to me. And something unusual is happening. I'm grieving more over the autumn of my parents' life than over the spring of my own.

December 28, 1941

...Laughter has deserted us. One funny word is enough to feel guilty. When I forget myself for a second, when I hum or whistle, I immediately see a procession of my friends who will never play or cry with us...I cannot cry anymore.

December 31, 1941

Today is New Year's Eve. The last day of 1941. The end of my twenty-one years of life, so much at odds with the gods... All of us are facing death but I say I'm not afraid to die, although I long for life... Frost knocks at the door with its skinny fingers...A very long winter. Under these

conditions our dreams of going out into the streets to welcome the liberators are less and less realistic. What are you bringing me, long-awaited 1942?... So I welcome you, 1942, may you bring salvation and defeat. I welcome you my longed-for year... And one more thing. Whatever you are bringing for me, life or death, bring it fast.

Friday, [January] 30 [1942]

[...]When fear crawls out in the evenings from all four corners, when the winter storm raging outside tells you it is winter, and that it is difficult to live in the winter, when my soul trembles at the sight of distant fantasies, I shiver and say one word with every heartbeat, every pulse, every piece of my soul – liberation.

[In March or April 1942, Eliszewa's sister, Dora Binder, was 'selected' during a roundup and taken to the improvised prison at Rudolfsmuhle, from where she was most likely taken to the Jewish cemetery and murdered.]

April 26, 1942

Whether I stay at home, go to my auntie or wherever I go, I can see the walls of Rudolfsmuhle in front of me...I'm sure that the damned walls of Rudolfsmuhle appear for the sole purpose of showing me the windows in which I saw my only sister's face, pale as a wafer, for the last time. The windows in which she was desperately signaling us to go away because we were in danger...As she walked she made us a comforting gesture. [As if to say,] 'it doesn't matter, one shouldn't be sad.' And this forced and sad smile. How can you forgive and forget?

Stanislawow, May 14, 1942

...They are taking them to Rudolfsmuhle. Hopelessness. Will they select them or not?... During that period they were selecting others as well. We couldn't do anything. Forgive us, my sister. Forgive me that I didn't cheer your short life, that I was nasty and intolerant. I have realized it too late but it is so empty here without you...What did you feel when you passed by our house? I was in pain. I deliberately walked away from the window in order not to watch. They say you were surrounded by a pack of dogs and the Gestapo. Who is worse? They say you were sent to work. You have to come back one day. I don't want our lives to be broken forever.

June 9, 1942

Well, this whole scribbling doesn't make any sense. It is a fact we are not going to survive. The world will know about everything even without my wise notes... The situation is hopeless but some people say it is going to be better. Let us hope so! Is being alive after the war worth so much suffering and pain? I doubt it. But I don't want to die like an animal.

Elsa wrote her last journal entry on June 18, 1942; her text ended abruptly as she was recounting a close call with the Gestapo and Ukrainian police as she smuggled money and supplies into the ghetto. Over the course of the summer, there were shooting operations in the ghetto and another roundup that claimed the lives of another thousand people. This was followed by yet another transport of five thousand people to Belzec in September. The liquidation of the ghetto took place in late February 1943. It is certain that Eliszewa and her family perished, although the exact circumstances of their deaths are not known. Her diary was found in a ditch on the side of the road leading to the cemetery, which was the execution site for the Stanislawow Jews.