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ABRAHAM ZWIREK

My first recollection was at the age of 4 years in 1930 when my father and I waved goodbye to my Aunt and her baby daughter at the embarkation platform on the banks of the River Vistula (Wislaw) in Plock Poland, approximately 60 miles North West of Warsaw, they were emigrating to England to join my Uncle who had emigrated a year earlier to escape the poverty and anti-semitism in the hope of a brighter future. On the 1st September 1939 the German Army invaded Poland, and in a short time the town of Plock was integrated into the Third Reich, text books for the schools, currency and police uniforms were all now in German. The population of the town was 30,000 persons, a third of who were Jews. In November 1940 a ghetto was formed around the area of the Synagogue and all the Jews were herded together into this ghetto, until they were transported the following year elsewhere. My family were sent to another ghetto in Suchedniow, and on the 22nd September 1942 this ghetto was closed, my sister had disappeared in April, she did not return from a work detail, my mother was taken on a truck somewhere, and my father and I were sent to Skarsysko concentration camp as slave labourers. I was forced to work at producing bullets for the German war effort. In December 1942 a friend who had been taken with my mother had escaped and eventually found us in Skarsysko, he told us that they had been taken to an extermination camp in Treblinka and he was made to work as a sander-kommando burning the bodies of the Jews who had been gassed, his mother and mine had been murdered in this manner, on the 23rd September 1942, the day after Yom Kippur. In 1943 I was sent to Shleiben in Germany from the transit camp of Buchenwald and I was put to work making panzer-faus, a weapon fired at enemy tanks. In March 1945 I was transported to Terezin in Czechoslovakia, on arrival I collapsed with Typhus fever, and began my recovery on the 9th May 1945 when the Russian Army liberated us and their doctors administered to our needs. I returned to Poland in June 1945 to find my father and my siser. Only my father was there and he urged me to go back to Terezin, where a contingent of Jewish children were gathered and registered to go to England, he wanted me to contact his sister and family who had gone there in 1930.

I arrived in England on 14th August 1945 (VJ Day) under the auspices of the Central British Fund, they contacted my Aunt and her family, (In 1951 I married my cousin who had left Poland in 1930 at the age of one year.)

In 1946, while I was in England, I received a letter from Germany telling me that my sister was alive, and had been ~~liberated~~ in Dachua by the American Army, she was living in Germany with my father and waiting to emigrate to the U.S.A with her husband. Unfortunately my father was killed in a car crash in 1948 in Munich, he was waiting to come to England.

Besides the starvation, degradation, disease and humiliation I was subjected to from the age of 13 to 19 years, the most horrendous part of these years in my young life - was the Fear - the minute by minute anticipation of not knowing if you were going to be next, that is, to be killed!!

I am now retired and have no regrets about coming to England. I was given the opportunity to have a family and make a successful contribution to this country. My son and daughter received a good English education with my son graduating from Oxford University in 1981..

1994

(Of the 10,000 Jews in Plock, Poland in 1939, -300-survived the war.)

1994.

ABRAHAM ZWIREK

POLAND

In my hometown of Plock, the population was approximately 30,000, one third being of the Jewish religion. In 1945 only 300 Jews were known to have survived. These survivors are mainly now in the U.S.A. and Israel, as far as I know, I am the only holocaust survivor of Plock now residing in England. (PLOTZK)

The majority of Jews lived in the area around the Synagogue which was surrounded by about 8 to 10 streets consisting of apartments, each block had three floors. This area was later made into the Ghetto (6/M FOR MONTHS) in ~~September~~ 1940. Our family lived outside this area in 1939 in Nowy Rynek (New Market) opposite the market square in Plock, in a Catholic part near the church. My father and one of his brothers were partners in a work-shop which had been previously owned by my paternal Grandfather, producing hardware and galvanised roofing for farmhouses. I would often go to the workshop, which was in the same street in which we lived, and watch my father at work. This experience helped to save me in the camps during the war, as I would pretend I was a skilled worker in hardware and roofing.

On Tuesdays and Fridays the Market place would open with stalls selling clothing, hardware, toys, fruit, vegetables, etc. On Fridays the farmers would come to the suburbs of Plock to sell their dairy produce, cattle, and chickens from the outlying farms. Some of the Jewish people had shops in the Jewish and non-Jewish areas. Most of the stallholders in the market square were Jewish.

On Saturdays all the Jewish shops were closed and in the mornings they men would attend Synagogue, I would go with my Grandfather, who was 81 years old, he lived with my parents, my sister, who was 16 years old and I. My paternal Grandmother died in 1922. My Grandfather died in 1943 in Suchedniow from malnutrition.

On Saturday afternoons many of the Jewish men and women with their families would walk by the banks of the River Vistula, and the mothers of young babies would often sit on the benches breast-feeding them. I attended the local Jewish school from Monday to Friday mornings, all the lessons taken from Polish text-books, and in the afternoons I would go to Hebrew classes and learn about Judaism for three hours per day. At our home the conversation was always in the Yiddish language, my mother and grandfather were very religious. My father was not very orthodox. He was a councillor on the local borough council, and also a representative of the Jewish Community regarding welfare and trade. On the outskirts of Plock there were two barracks housing two battalions of the Polish Army, the 4th Cavalry and the 8th Artillery.

(I have a picture of these soldiers (Jewish) in a book of PLOTZK) PRINTED 1967

Among these military soldiers were 200 Jewish men - my father would negotiate with the military authorities each year before Passover to allow these men to have leave so that they may have their meals for eight days in the local Jewish Community Hall. On the second Seder night I would go along with my father to join in, and then I would go each day on my own, I was the only child there, and I thoroughly enjoyed myself with the soldiers.

I would play each day after classes with my Jewish and non-Jewish friends who lived nearby, either in the yard or street outside our apartment, or football by the banks of the River about 10 minutes away. Not far from my school was a Catholic school, and very often on my way home, the boys from that school would abuse us verbally and shout out "Dirty Jews go to Palestine" and would either throw stones at us, if we were in the minority, when we would run home or back to the safe area of our own school. ^{or} If ~~were~~ walked home and there were quite a few of us; the Catholic boys would lie in wait in groups, and we would try to defend ourselves by fighting it out, ~~and were~~ ^{as} were most often the losers, ~~and~~ there were many of them. The average age at that time would be between nine and 13 year olds. When I came home, cut and bruised, my father would be upset, but encouraged me to come home in large groups of my friends, and to stand and defend ourselves, If this was not possible he would sometimes come to meet me. Up until 1939 our family got on quite well with our non-Jewish neighbours and they respected our family. After the war began I cannot truthfully say that this was always the case.

NAMES: Father - David Zwirek (Died 1948)
Mother - Helena (Krotoszynski) (Died 1942)
Sister - Gerdi Smiga (Zwirek) U.S.A.
Wife - Ida Zwirek (Selner) England
^{MOTHER-IN-LAW} Aunt - Esther Selner (Zwirek) England (Died 1994)
Grandfather- Chaim Zwirek (Died 1942)
Grandmother -Ida Zwirek (Cypel)(Died 1922)

MY CHILDREN: David Zwirek (Born 1960)
Helen Zwirek (Born 1953)

ENGLAND

I arrived in England on 14th August 1945 (VJ DAY) from Prague, Czechoslovakia, the RAF Stirling Bomber had to stopover in Holland as we had engine trouble, the repairs took a few hours, we were therefore the last plane to land (with a contingent of 301 child survivors from Terezin) There were about 30 children with me, and we landed in Carlisle about 1 a.m. We were put into Army lorries and escorted by military cyclists to Windermere and housed in previous officer quarters of the British Army. When I woke in the morning and looked around, I thought I was in Heaven, there were white sheets on the bed and there was white bread to eat. The scenery was magnificent and all the people were so kind. I found it difficult to learn to eat with a knife and fork we were used only to spoons in the camps, or with our fingers. We were quite wild and needed taming, the staff were very patient with us and we learned that food which was so important to us would always be available.

The authorities began searching for my Aunt Esther and her family and found her through the British Army, her husband was serving in Belgium and made contact through them to authorities in London, where she had been living. In November 1945 I arrived at Euston Station with some of my friends who were going on to Ashford in Kent and I was to meet my Aunt at Euston Station. I cannot to this day speak about my emotions - when I saw my Aunt running towards me on the platform, -but I will never forget it. After staying with my relatives a couple of months, I began to miss my friends and wanted to be with them. I could not speak English and was desperate to learn the language, I persuaded the Jewish Refugee Committee to move me to Nightingale Road Hostel to be with my friends and to have tuition in English, and also to be able to visit my Aunt. I always felt very relaxed in England and was not always looking over my shoulder for fear of either verbal or physical abuse as I did in Poland as a child, or fear of death or beatings as a teenager in the camps of Poland or Germany. For the first time I felt free and unafraid. I had two obsessions - Food - and to learn English. I needed a future. Later I became unsettled as I could not adapt myself to a job that I cared for, until I became apprenticed to the Fur trade, which I enjoyed. I became a Furrier with a survivor friend and we had our own business for 32 years until we retired.

I married in December 1951, and have been very happy and successful in England, I had thought at one time before I married that I would emigrate to the U.S.A. to be with my sister, but I have many Jewish and non-Jewish friends here, and am content. I see my sister and her family quite often . She has four married sons.

A. ZWIREK

12/2/96

SCHLIEBEN AUGUST 1944 TO MARCH 1945
(not 1943).

(SKARZYSKO)

I was sent to Buchenwald from Skarżysko, I think, in June/July 1944 and then transferred to SCHLIEBEN in Germany in August 1944 until March 1945 when I went to Terezin, Czechoslovakia, so I think I was in Schlieben for approximately 8 months, so I must have been in the camp of SKARZYSKO about 20 to 21 months.

The day after I arrived at Schlieben, at the Appel (Roll call), the Commandant addressed us stating that if we tried to escape we would be executed, and at the same time he announced that workers were required for certain trades. There were about half a dozen German contractors standing by the side of him, and one of them required a qualified roofer especially for TARPAULIN roofing and repairs. I volunteered as I had watched my father doing this with his workers when I was young, also he had made roofs from sheet metal, although I had only been a bystander, I felt I could do this and work outside the camp with a civilian, German, rather than under the German guards. The contractor thought I was lying and said if I was unable to do the job properly I could be shot. He took me outside the camp and took me to the S.S. accommodation's, and left me to repair their roofs. I had to make the tar pitch and cut the tarpaulin to fit the holes. When he returned, he patted

me on the back and said in German
 "Very good, little one". He took a liking to
 me, and now and then would bring me a
 sandwich. One day a German guard tried
 to whip me, as he accused me of not running
 fast enough with a roll of tarpaulin on my
 shoulder, the contractor saw it and came
 rushing down a ladder to stop the whipping.
 I worked for him for 4 months.

I was then sent to work to help lay a
 concrete foundation approximately 10 feet deep
 below ground level in the camp. There were
 4 men, I was the smallest and youngest,
 pushing a metal skip, with 4 wheels along
 a track, for holding the wet concrete to be
 tipped onto the foundations. When we had to
 tip the wet mixture, we had to lever the
 skip half way over with a long pole, part
 of which was inserted underneath the skip
 and the remainder of the pole was lifted
 up onto our shoulders and gripping the
 pole firmly ^{down}, we would stand behind each
 other levering the skip over to empty the
 mixture, while the pole was, at ~~the~~ ^{the} bend, (I was
 raised high, with me gripping it firmly.
 Unfortunately as it was extremely heavy the
 3 men in front lost their grip, I was left
 holding on, the pole shot up rapidly like a
 large spring with me still hanging on, I was
 flung high in the air and then down into the
 wet concrete foundations about 3 feet thick
 The German civilian director who was always
 immaculately dressed and obviously important

lost)

became furious and ordered the men to get down a ladder to haul me out. I was shocked and badly bruised, and the director gave orders that I was to have 2 days off work, and given an extra helping of soup that evening.

I was then transferred to the factory to produce panzer-fous. One night there was a big explosion and it was rumoured that the Italian prisoners had sabotaged the ammunition factory.

In my opinion Schlieben was not as notorious as Skarzynko, there were no selections, or executions or crematoriums, but there was still fear from whippings, disease and starvation. There was no medication, and I had to have my thumb nail pulled off by an inmate who was a Dutch doctor, as it was infected and my arm was getting poisonous. He used ordinary pliers.

