

MY FRIEND THE SINGER

The author came to this country with the Southampton group and was one of the Finchley Road (Freshwater) Hostel boys.

by Alec Ward
(formerly Abram
Warszaw)

The Editor does not normally comment on the degree of his acquaintance with various contributors to the Journal. In this instance, however, he feels almost compelled to reveal that, although he has known Alec since our simultaneous arrival in this country, and lived in the same Hostel, he had never before heard the story which Alec now tells (Ed.).

After having lived through the appalling life in two ghettos and ~~two~~ slave labour camps in Poland, I found myself in Buchenwald in January 1945. Four weeks later I was taken to Concentration Camp Flossberg near Leipzig. In Flössberg I worked in an ammunition factory, producing bazookas. The camp was built in a forest, was very swampy and we had to walk in deep mud on the way to and from work. The German Commandant was an absolute sadist. He derived great pleasure when he could beat us over our heads as we passed the gate to work. None of us believed that we would come out alive from that hell. By some miracle I made friends with a boy of my age, who helped me enormously to keep up my morale. My friend had a most wonderful voice. Very often he would sing to while away the very painful and hungry free time. Friendship in the camps was very vital and was a major factor in surviving the Holocaust.

As the Russians were approaching that part of Germany, the Germans put us on a cattle train which took us to Mauthausen in Austria. The journey took 15 days, most of the time without food or water. The reason why it took so long to get there was that the railway lines were being bombed constantly by the Allies. The majority of that transport perished on the way.

Our wagon included 30 young boys. After realising that we were unlikely to survive the journey we organised an escape party. I had already tried to escape once before when my father ordered me to take my younger brother Leib aged 9½ and escape from Ghetto Kozenice. I dutifully obeyed my father and when the guard was busy searching someone we both crawled under the barbed wire and escaped. For a few months we managed to hide in barns and haystacks in the fields. Occasionally the Poles would give us some food. It was not long before we were caught by the Germans and while being

taken to Skarzysko slave labour camp Werk C, I experienced the first selection when we stopped in Radom. They took my brother, Leib, and some elderly people to be shot.

Coming back to the original story, 16 boys had jumped the train and I was supposed to be the 18th. However, in order to deter further escapes the SS put a few dead bodies (those of boys who had just been caught and shot) into our wagon, together with a guard, for the rest of the journey. My friend the singer was one of the 16 who had jumped and had been shot at by the guards who were perched between the wagons. I saw him being hit by a bullet and fall to the ground. This was an almost unbearable blow to me which I was unable to get out of my mind for a long time, just like the earlier loss of my brother.

Only a small proportion of the original number of prisoners arrived in Mauthausen. Many died during the journey and others while marching up to the camp from the railway station. The camp was built in Alpine mountains with the purpose of exposing people to extremes of temperature. Undernourished people could not survive such conditions for long. How I envied my friend the singer. He was dead and did not have to suffer any more. Those of us who reached Mauthausen alive went through further degradation and torture. They took our clothes from us and we were left naked until we were liberated by the American forces on May 5th 1945.

In October of that year I came to England, a mere teenager, together with a group of young survivors. We were intoxicated with the freedom of this country, where everyone was so kind and helpful. How my friend the singer and my brother would have loved that freedom.

A few months later in a London street I noticed a boy who resembled my friend. When we got nearer we instinctively embraced, had tears in our eyes and for a while found it very difficult to talk. He had not been killed after he jumped from the train, and a woman found him wounded in a Czech forest and got him medical treatment. He arrived in England a few months before me with another group of survivors. He is an active member of our Society and his name is Arthur Poznanski.

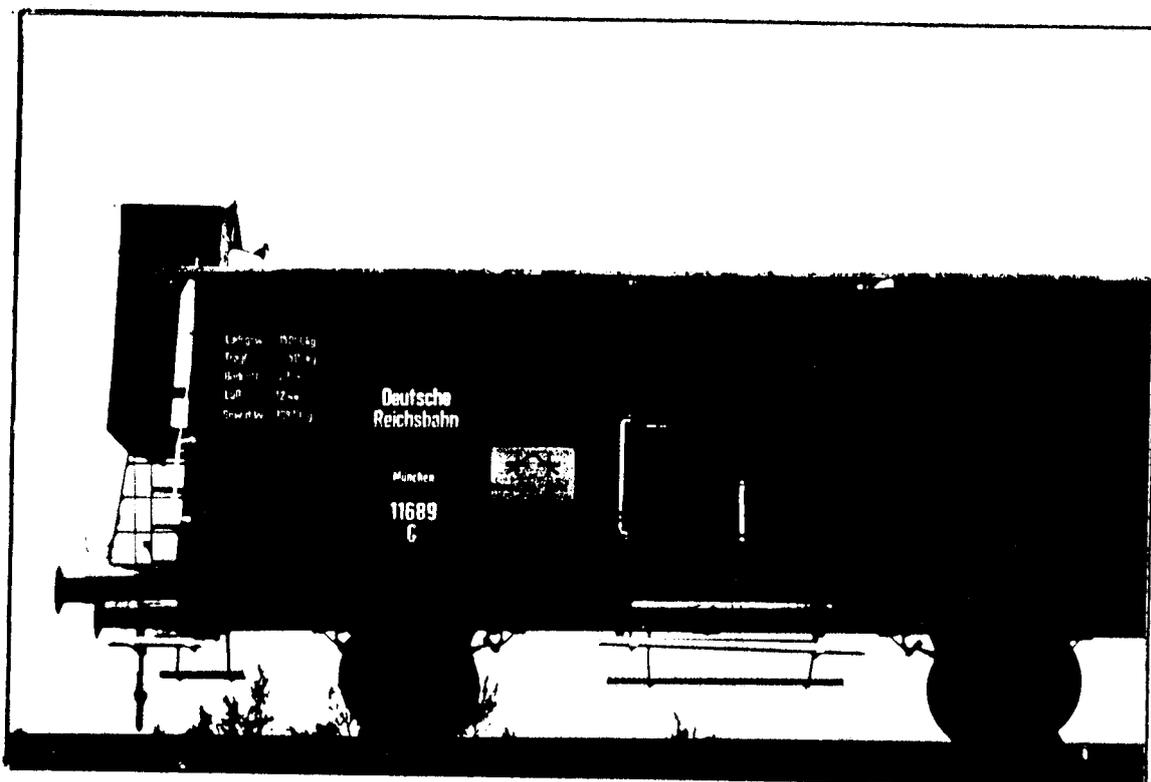
Arthur sang in many Synagogue Choirs
in London and is at present Choir Master
in Beehive Lane Synagogue London
England

Alec Ward.

MY STORY

by

ALEC WARD



My name is Alec Ward, formerly Abram Warszaw. I was born in Parysow, district Lublin, Poland. I also lived in Laskazew, district Lublin and in Magnuszew, district Radom.

When I was liberated from slave labour and concentration camps, I did not remember my date of birth. After arriving in England in 1945 the Red Cross traced my records from Buchenwald concentration camp which stated that I was born 1,3,1927.

My father's name was Szmul Mosze Warszaw, born in Laskazew, Poland in 1900 and my mother was Chaja Ester Dudkiewicz, born in Parysow. My mother died in childbirth when I was an infant and my father married Sara Bronstein, who was born in Miechow, Poland. I had one older beloved sister and three darling little brothers. My sister Lea and I were from our first mother and my three brothers, Laib, Herszel and the baby were half brothers. Our stepmother was wonderful and brought us up as if we were her own children. When I was a young boy I sang in the Synagogue. My parents were very proud of my singing voice. One day when I sang in our cellar my stepmother called our neighbours to hear my rendition of a Synagogue service. I was extremely embarrassed when I came up from the cellar and saw our neighbours clapping.

My recollections of the three shtetls where I lived are as follows:-

A very happy childhood - the Synagogue in Parysow was very beautiful, with a dome and a stone floor. The cantor's voice reverberated round the Synagogue which is still very vivid in my memory.

On Friday afternoon the Jewish town crier proclaimed the coming of the sabbath and announced it was time to go to the synagogue. On Saturday afternoon the whole Jewish community seemed to walk in the streets (Spatzerin). On Purim people were criss-crossing the streets with presents, consisting of freshly baked cakes and biscuits. Yom Kippur in the ladies part of the Synagogue one could hear a great amount of crying. On Simchat Torach, there was great rejoicing by the whole community in the Shtetl and on Pesach, in our new clothes, of which we were so very proud.

This was the same pattern, with some small variations in all three shtetls.

This was an extremely painful and unforgettable blow to me and was in a way more tragic to me than leaving my dear family. I somehow considered in my young mind, that parting from my family would be an adventure. My parents hearts must have been torn to pieces when they decided to send away their two sons, knowing that their chance of survival was so slim. I grew to love my little brother very much indeed during the time in our hiding and would have preferred him to survive instead of me.

Six people from that group miraculously survived the war. They are my friends - Menachem Silberstein who lives in Israel, David Turek, Mosze Nurtman, Alf Kirszberg and Sam Freiman who live in England and myself. Alf Kirszberg and I are the only two survivors from the original Jewish community of Magnuszew. We went to Cheder together and his brothers were friends of my father.

From Radom they took us to slave labour camps Skarzysko Kamienna in the centre of Radom district. There were three camps in Skarzysko called Werk A, Werk B and Werk C. The prisoners worked in ammunition factories. The camps were run by the German company Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft, Hasag, Leipzig.

On arrival to Werk A all the prisoners had to strip and were forced to give up all possessions. I spent about two months in Werk A working as a sweeper and general cleaner. My memory about the food situation there is rather hazy. I remember that we slept in large wooden huts on three tier bunks, on bare boards and without blankets.

I worked mainly in the open air and it was extremely cold. The atmosphere in Werk A was comparatively more relaxed than in the following camps. Everyone dreaded the thought of being transferred to Werk C as it was an indescribably horrendous and deadly camp.

It was my utter misfortune after about two months in Werk A to be sent with a group of other prisoners to Werk C where I spent about two most unforgettable and brutal years. There again we slept in the clothes that we worked in, on bare boards, on bunks without any covering. I used my clogs wrapped in brown paper as my pillow. When our clothes were worn out we wrapped ourselves in brown paper.

The first three months there I worked in the forest building a road side by side with my friend Sam Dresner who lives in London.

The winters there were 30 degrees of frost. When one touched anything made of metal one's hands stuck to it.

We received one slice of black bread and half a litre of black Erzatz coffee in the morning and a half litre of watery cabbage soup after work.

After about three months of building the dreaded road I was transferred to the ammunition factory where I worked producing mines. The mines were made from picric acid and the prisoners only lived for three months at that work, as the powder affected their lungs. It was a sheer miracle that I survived that length of time there. I put it down to being young, strong and extremely lucky. Before the war, workers carrying out this type of dangerous work drank a great amount of milk and worked short hours. We worked twelve hourly shifts with half an hour break. The hours between two and five in the morning were torturous. One could not keep one's eyes open but had to, otherwise the German Meister would beat you over the head. Our skin turned yellow at that work and it was six months after I left that camp for my skin to return to the normal colour. The yellow prisoners and the Muslemen were the Pariahs of the camp. I had a very good friend in Werk C who lives in Israel - his name is Chaim Ickowicz. When one of us was down in spirit or physically down, the other one would pick him up. We instinctively helped one another. Chaim was together with me for the rest of the war and for a few months in Regensburg, Germany after the war.

The most outstanding incidents in Werk C which are still very vivid in my memory are as follows:-

The hangings of prisoners, the selections, the dead bodies lying at the barbed wire fences early in the morning of Jewish prisoners who tried desperately to escape during the night and were shot. The painful hunger and malnutrition.

The beatings.

The man who cried every time he saw me as I reminded him of his young son who perished at the hands of the Nazis.

The time when I was so very weak and despondent and could not walk up the two steps leading into our hut and of a miracle that happened which saved my life.

I was queuing up for my ration of soup when a girl asked me who I was. When I told her, she informed me that she was my late Uncle Yidl's lover and that they were planning to marry when my uncle was shot by the invading German troops in Laskazew where they lived. That angel of a girl did some knitting for the Polish Christian women who came into the factories to work as paid workers and gave Henia some food occasionally, some of which she passed on to me.

It was not long after meeting Henia that I began to negotiate the two steps into the hut normally. As far as I know, she did not survive the war, but should I ever meet her again I would be prepared to give my all to her for saving my life.

The camp consisted of men and women prisoners and we lived in separate huts. The camp was constantly being replenished with new Jewish prisoners from Ghettos and concentration camps. They would march us occasionally to Werk A to be showered. The march there and back seemed endless as we were extremely weak. We were convinced that the distance between the two camps was 6 kilometers until my friend, Mark Goldfinger, visited the camps in Poland recently and found out that the distance was only half a kilometer between the two camps.

We had three main German bosses in the mine factory, Meister (Director) Schneider, Meister Walter and their senior who was a tall, elderly man and walked with a stooped back whose name I cannot remember.

They set us impossible norms to fulfill during every shift and threatened us with punishment should we not achieve their target.

Schneider never carried out his threats, Walter invariably did so, and their senior was an utter beast of a man who derived great pleasure from his bestiality, especially towards defenceless Jewish women and girls. Had I been asked after the war what punishment they should receive I would have recommended a lenient sentence for Schneider, a long prison sentence for Walter and that the brute of a beast - the senior - should be hung.

I thanked God a thousand times that I came out alive and reasonably well from that impoverished and deadly hell of a camp.

After that unspeakable place we were taken to slave labour camp Rakow, in Chestochowa where there were again three camps and were also run by the Hasag group of companies in Leibzig. The accommodation was the same as in Werk C, the only difference was that we were eaten alive by wood bugs and other vermin during the night and although we were very tired after such hard work, we could not sleep. The work was physically considerably harder than in the previous camp but less dangerous to my health. I worked in the iron foundry. When the molten steel was emerging from the furnace I guided it into sand made forms. Afterwards I cooled the steel with a water hose and when it was semi cool I threw the steel into wagons which were transported to the ammunition factory. The Polish Christian manager liked the way I was working and occasionally he would give me a corner of his sandwich and some white coffee. The danger of being shot, hung, beaten or selected to die did not prevail in Chestochowa slave labour camp.

After Chestochowa they took us to Buchenwald concentration camp in Germany. There we lived in gigantic huts with one thousand prisoners in them.

In my hut there were mainly Hungarian Jewish prisoners who did not understand my two languages, Polish and Yiddish and I did not understand theirs. The first words I learned in Hungarian were KITCHY KENIERE small bread which they repeated over and over again. Unfortunately they were not very resilient to any form of hardship, disease or malnutrition and many died every day. Every morning we carried out many dead bodies from our hut which were taken away on wooden carts.

Early every morning we were driven out from our huts to be counted on the appel platz. We were standing for hours in bitterly cold weather, thinly clad in our striped uniforms, without socks or underwear and with rain and snow falling onto our emaciated bodies. It was simply utter hell on earth. Prisoners who held power in previous camps and abused their power were put to death by other prisoners in Buchenwald.

From Buchenwald a group of us were marched every day to the nearby town of Weimar where we worked clearing up the town after constant bombing by the Allies.

On our arrival to Weimar every day, the local German population would pick out their allotted amount of slave labour prisoners. Occasionally we would find pieces of dirty and stale bread which we took back, at the risk of being shot at the gate, to the starving fellow prisoners in our huts.

After some time in Buchenwald I was taken to concentration camp Flossberg near Leibzig. In Flossberg I worked in an ammunition factory producing bazookas. That camp was also administered by the Hasag company in Leibzig. The camp was built in a forest, was very swampy and we had to walk in deep mud to and from work. The German Commandant was an absolute sadist. He derived great pleasure from beating us over our heads with a stick as we passed through the gates on the way to work.

None of us believed that we would come out alive from that place. By some miracle I made friends with a boy of similar age as I, who helped me enormously to keep up my morale there. My friend had a most wonderful voice and very often we would sing together to while away our painfully hungry free time.

As the Russian army was approaching that part of Germany the Nazis put us on a cattle train which took us to Mauthausen Concentration camp in Austria.

The journey took 15 days with hardly any food or water. Many prisoners perished on the way. The reason why it took so long to get there was that the railway lines were being bombed constantly by the allies. Our wagon included thirty young boys.

After realising that we were unlikely to survive the journey, we organised an escape party. A number had jumped the train and I was supposed to be the 18th. However, in order to deter further escapes the SS guards put a few bodies (those of boys who had just been shot) into our wagon, together with a German guard for the rest of the journey. My friend the singer was one of the boys who jumped the train and was shot by the guard who was perched between the wagons. This was an unbearable blow to me just as the earlier loss of my little brother.

Still many more prisoners died marching up to the camp which was built in Alpine mountains with the purpose of exposing prisoners to extremes of temperature. Undernourished people could not survive such conditions for long.

How I envied my little brother and my close friend the singer. They were dead and did not have to suffer any more.

Those of us who reached Mauthausen Concentration camp alive, went through further torture and degradation. They took our clothes away from us on arrival and we were left naked until we were liberated by the American forces on 5th May, 1945. If someone would ask me what were the major factors of my survival I would say:-

Friendship in the camps, meeting that angel of a girl called Henia and an innate will to survive to be able to tell the story. I had a feeling in the camps that my mother was watching over me "up there" in the form of a guardian angel.

It took some time to believe that I was free, and should God forbid a thousand times, there should ever be a similar Holocaust and I would have to choose between remaining Jewish and go through it again and not be Jewish and be spared such a fate, I would willingly choose the former.

The first item of food which I received after the liberation was a tin of peas from an American soldier from his tank. I drunk the liquid first and was going to leave the peas for later. The liquid turned out to be too rich for my shrunken stomach and I became ill from it. I gave the peas to a friend.

The American army took some of us to Regensburg in Bavaria where 12 of us, all survivors, lived as a family for some months.

I met a Canadian UNRRA officer in Regensburg who took me to Cloister Indersdorf near Dachau and from there I came to England in October 1945 under the auspices of the Central British Fund called CCCC (Committee for Children from Concentration Camps).

We arrived in Southampton and the staff of the RAF airport laid on a most wonderful tea for us, with cakes and oranges. We lived in Southampton for a while where I was intoxicated with the freedom in England. I could walk freely wherever I wanted, I could ride a bicycle and everyone was so extremely kind and helpful to me.

After realising that we were unlikely to survive the journey, we organised an escape party. 16 boys had jumped the train and I was supposed to be the 18th. However, in order to deter further escapes the SS guards put a few bodies (those of boys who had just been shot) into our wagon, together with a German guard for the rest of the journey. My friend the singer was one of the 16 boys who jumped the train and was shot by the guard who was perched between the wagons. This was an unbearable blow to me just as the earlier loss of my little brother.

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One of the girls of our closely knit family in Regensburg asked me before I left Germany to look up an uncle of hers in London, to inform him that she survived the war and was well. Her uncle was a very famous Jewish photographer in London by the name of Boris Bennett. After contacting her uncle, Mr. & Mrs. Bennett immediately came to visit me in Southampton and when Mrs. Bennett noticed that some of us were young children, tears came into her eyes. They there and then invited me for an unforgettable two week holiday in their house in London. They took me to many places including the theatre where I saw the Winslow Boy. They fitted me out with new clothes and when I arrived back in Southampton my friends could not recognise me. The group was very envious of me. During the two weeks holiday Boris took me to a restaurant for lunch every day. The first time in the restaurant the waiter put a basketful of sliced bread on the table. I instinctively took two slices. Boris realised the situation and informed me in Yiddish that there was enough bread in England. Psychologically I was still in the camps.

When sixteen of us were moved to a Hostel in N.W. London, Julia and Boris Bennett personally financed that Hostel. This fact came to light only a few years ago. Such were their good deeds anonymous.

They also worked on fund raising committees for the Central British Fund, who cared for us until we learned a trade or profession.

They were not satisfied just to invite me alone every Friday night for the Sabbath dinner, but asked me to bring some of my friends from the Hostel as well.

I shall never forget their very warm friendship, hospitality, generosity and above all their humanity, which they bestowed upon my friends, my family and me. Every member of the Bennett family played a vital role in my emergence into civilisation. We are still very close indeed. I tell the story of my God sent association with the Bennett family at every opportunity that I have. Tragically, Boris Bennett passed away on the 9th August 1985. We wish Julia Bennett very many more healthy and joyful years to come.

One Sunday morning Boris and his friend and neighbour by the name of Jack took eight of us from the Hostel to the East End of London and to our utter delight fitted us out with new navy blue chalk striped suits. We felt absolutely the cats whiskers walking down the road in North West London on the Sabbath. We were convinced that the whole neighbourhood was watching us and admiring our new suits.

Some of us were married in those beautiful outfits. That extremely kind and generous Jack was the late Jack Cohen, founder of Tesco Food Stores. My dear friend, Michael Perlmutter, who lives in America and who also lived in the Hostel asked me for some photographs of the Bennett family which he said he will treasure for the rest of his life.

A few months after my arrival in England I noticed a boy in a street in London who resembled my friend the singer. When we got nearer we instinctively embraced, had tears in our eyes and for a while found it very difficult to talk. He had not been killed after all when he was shot in his leg while jumping off the train. He managed to crawl into a forest in Czechoslovakia and somehow survived the rest of the war. His name is Arthur Poznanski. Arthur sang in Synagogues in London and is at present Choir Master in a synagogue in Essex.

I worked as a tailor and later as a quality controller in the ladies garment industry.

In 1952 I met a young girl, Hettie Cohen and we married a year later. She has always been very supportive to me in everything that I did. She has very deep feelings towards the Holocaust and is simply my best friend. I was delighted to come into her very warm and respectable family who welcomed me with open arms.

We had two lovely children, a boy and girl who with our encouragement, their skill and government grants, procured an excellent education.

One more tragedy was to befall our family in 1981 when we lost our darling son, Mark, who died of cancer at the tender age of 23. During the war I knew who my enemy was. In 1981 I did not know. The following is what Rabbi Chaitowitz of Stanmore, Middx. Synagogue wrote in his Obituary to Mark at the time of his death in the Jewish Chronicle.

"Mark Ward who died recently aged 23 was a very active and influential member of Stanmore Synagogue Youth Service, where he conducted services and was Baal Koreh on Shabbat and Yomtov. As a pupil of the Hasmonean Grammar School, he was actively engaged in youth leadership with Maccabi and the Association for Jewish Youth. He was a founder of the Stanmore Chapter of the B'nai Brith Youth Organisation. While at Exeter University, he became president of the Jewish Society. He was a sincere loyal Jew and showed great promise for the future. Anglo Jewry lost a potential leader."

Mark was a religious man and was an actor and musician. He was a member of the National Theatre.

My daughter, Lyla, is a Senior Probation Officer. She married Barend Velleman in 1994. They had a very beautiful baby son in 1995 and named him after my beloved little brother and our darling son - Liron Mark.

Barend is extremely kind and caring and they both give us the highest respect and love. I do not know of another couple who would go out of their way to help other people, irrespective of race, colour or creed. We have two more beautiful grandchildren. They are Barend's children and they live in Israel. We love them very much.

I have a dear friend in America, Henry Frankel, whom I first met in Werk C, coming off a night shift. We were also together in Flossberg, on the horrendous train journey, Mauthausen and after the war in Regensburg. Henry visits us regularly and I consider him a dear brother.

One terrible incident which happened in Werk C which I blotted out of my mind was brought back to me by my friend Chaim Ickowicz, when my wife and I visited him in Israel a few years ago.

He reminded me of the time when the Germans took both of us to the shooting place made us dig a communal grave. They lined up the prisoners taken from the sick bay and shot them and they fell into the grave. We were forced to cover the half dead bodies with earth. In most cases they shot the grave diggers as well. We were very lucky. My darling wife, Chaim's wife, Chaim and I cried uncontrollably on that occasion.

I am retired now and spend my time listening to classical, Klezmer and Cantorial music. I read mostly factual books such as biographies. I do gardening and attend U3A - University of the Third Age, JACS - Jewish Association of Cultural Societies and the Holocaust Survivors Centre where I derive a great amount of pleasure meeting people with similar experiences and I am very proud to be a volunteer there to help out with the running of the place.

I look forward to playing with my darling grandson. I am not able to watch any form of violence on the television. When I first acquired a certain amount of the English language I read many books by Pearl Buck. I identified myself with the hardship and struggle the Chinese people went through in her books.

My wife and I felt honoured and privileged to travel together with 200 members of the '45 Aid Society, of which I am a proud founder member, on the 2nd May 1995 to Israel to commemorate and celebrate the 50th Anniversary of our liberation from the camps. It was a very moving and emotional occasion for us all with also a great amount of laughter and joy. There I met many friends from various countries whom I had not seen since after the war. We visited Yad Vashem in Jerusalem several times and it was there at the Memorial Service that Ben Helfgott, Chairman of the '45 Aid Society, gave me the great honour of laying the wreath to the six million Jewish people, including one and a half million Jewish children who perished at the hands of the Nazis during 1939 - 1945. It was a very emotional task for me to perform but I am very grateful to have been chosen.

In 1981, at the time of losing Mark, our family and dear friends gave us a great amount of love and sympathy for which we are very grateful. Our very dear friends Rita and Jack Weinberg were constantly at our sides and another, who I must mention is Israel Rudzinski who with logical Talmudic wisdom helped to comfort us greatly.

I shall never forgive or forget what the Nazis did to six million Jewish people during 1939 - 1945 including almost my entire family. I decided after the war not to hate anyone. To have lived with hatred in my heart for the last fifty years would have been self destructive, which was what the Nazis would have wanted.

It was very painful for me to write this story but the fact that I succeeded in outwitting the ingenuity of the Nazi plan to destroy me is giving me a great amount of satisfaction.

Finally, this story would not have been written without the encouragement from my dear friend Ben Helfgott, my darling wife Hettie who typed while suffering from Repetitive Strain Injury and our baby grandson, Liron, for whom I primarily wrote this story. That he should be able to read about his heritage and man's inhumanity to man when he grows up and to our Israeli grandchildren.

Of the Jewish communities of the three shtetls, Alf Kirszberg and I are the only two survivors from Magnuszew. There are no survivors from Łaskarzew and there are a few people living in Israel from Parysow who lived in Russia during the war.

Alec Ward.
29.5.1995.

The photograph of the train on the front page is the exact type that we travelled in for 15 days from Concentration Camp Flossberg near Leipzig to Concentration Camp Mauthausen in Austria. One hundred prisoners were herded into our wagon, including 30 of us boys, with hardly any food or water.

A number of boys escaped from the wagon some of whom were shot and then put back into our wagon with a German SS guard as a deterrent.

Many prisoners died of starvation, thirst and suffocation. We sat on dead bodies. The situation was desperate but we did not panic.

The photograph was taken in Yad Vashem, Jerusalem on 8th May, 1995.

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Two weeks after the liberation the American army placed twelve of us with German families in Regensburg, Bavaria.

Some of us worked for the American forces in return for food which we shared with the German families.

I was the only one who had the wonderful chance of going to England and when I was leaving Germany the German lady of the house cried bitterly.

We walked back to Magnuszew and lived in the forest and fields for 3 months. Our former Christian neighbours gave us some food occasionally but begged us not to come back again as they were frightened that someone will betray them to the Germans. We avoided sleeping in the same barn or haystack for two nights running in case we were discovered by the farmers and given away to the Germans. This fear was with us constantly while roaming about for three months.

I instinctively took on a protective role towards my little brother, although I was only young myself. He was a very intelligent boy and co-operated with me one hundred per cent. During daytime we were always on the move in order to find a few potatoes here, or a few beets and some fruit there.

It was during such a walk in the fields near the village of Chmielow, district Radom that we came across a group of Jewish prisoners who were irrigating the land for Volk Deutsch farmers. We found out that they lived in a fire station in the village and we decided to join them in order to have companionship and some warmth at night, as it was autumn by then and it was extremely cold to sleep in the haystacks. The prisoners were wonderful to us. Some of them shared their meagre rations with us. It was soon after joining that group that the SS surrounded the fire station one morning and took us to Magnuszew where we stood for a few hours in the town square. The town looked absolutely dead, void of any life. Before the war there was a small but vibrant Jewish community, with Jewish shops, Jewish merchants and artisans. A synagogue which acted as a house of prayer and a place where to meet, Jewish children playing in the streets and a very good relationship with the non-Jewish population.

Although there was a certain amount of poverty in Magnuszew there was also a great amount of laughter and happiness.

I remember many Jewish weddings which lasted for two days with beautiful Klezmer music and Brit Milahs which we, as children, were very happy to attend as we received sweets and cakes.

After the break in Magnuszew they took us to Ghetto Kozenice where we spent the night. We found the Ghetto completely empty by then with feathers flying in the streets. The feathers were from the bedding which the Nazis ripped open to look for hidden gold. I found out later that all the Jewish people from the three shtetls including my entire family bar two cousins who live in Israel, and my family from Warsaw were annihilated by the Nazis in Treblinka extermination camp in Poland. Our next stop was in the town of Radom where I experienced the first Selection - one of many during my captivity. The Nazis took my little brother and some elderly men whom they considered unfit for slave labour and shot them.