ABRAM (known as Alfred) HUBERMAN

My contribution

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I was born in a town called Pulawy. It is a town on the east side of the River Wistula, between Radom and Lublin and some 40 or 50 km. south of Warsaw. I was the fifth child of a family of six. I was the only boy. My father was a shoe maker. He had his own house and employed some people to work for him.

He was very active in charity work, even though he, at times, could not manage to feed and clothe his own family.

My grandmother lived with us .

Being an only son, my father had great ambition for me. I was sent to Cheder at a very early age, where I learned the bible. By translating the weekly portion of the law into Yiddish, I learned to read and write in the Yiddish language, which we spoke, unless we were dealing with non Jewish people.

When I was seven, instead of going to a normal Polish school, it was decided to send me to a fee paying Hebrew school - it was called Tarbut, where everything was taught in Hebrew.

I think my father was a committed Zionist. Although he could neither read nor write, he always seemed to be hungry for news. As soon as any of his children could read, he bought newspapers and asked us to read to him. He also attended heated discussions, often returning home voiceless.

After two years at the Tarbut, I think that my parents could no longer afford the fees and I was sent to an ordinary school. I had to take an examination, which I passed and duly attended the school where Hendryk Adler was Head Master. The school had been at one time, entirely Jewish except for some of the teachers, by the time I got there non Jewish pupils were introduced but they were a small minority.

When the War broke out, I had had two or three years of schooling. There are two things I remember from my school (apart from the constant battles we had with the non Jewish pupils on the way to and from school). One was the parade we took part in when Marshal Pilsudski died. All the children wore black arm bands and very solemn music was played. The other was when my class was asked to write a letter to a school in Czechoslovakia, welcoming them to Poland. As you know, when Germany occupied Chechoslovakia they gave part of it to Poland and that was the part we wrote to. The idea was that whoever wrote the neatest letter, that was the one to be sent. I had the doubtful honour of having my letter chosen.

My mother, being one of eleven children and my father one of six, some of them went to live in Warsaw or Lublin. A few ended up in France. Letters used to arrive from various relatives, my mother always dictated the replies to one or other of my older sisters who then wrote them, always in Yiddish. When my sisters left Pulawy to go to work in Warsaw, it was my turn to do the letter writing. With so

many relatives to write to, I became quite proficient in the Yiddish language. All these years later, I can still make use of it.

I became known by the neighbourhood for my writing ability. Many poor woman asked my mother if I would be willing to write their letters for them and that became quite an experience. Most of the correspondence was to relatives abroad, all of them were begging letters and I used to get very tearful dictation from these people. I also had to read the replies.

As we lived near the river, where there was a newly built strategic bridge, the German Luftwaffe bombed the town. We then took whatever we could carry and walked to a smaller town called Konskawala, leaving Pulawy via the main road, called Ulica Lubelska. The whole street was alight, crowds of us walked in the middle of the road, because of the heat from the flames of burning houses on both sides of the road. We stayed in Konskawola until the Germans marched in, it did not take them too long. The short time we were there, the bombs were falling all over the place, there were fires everywhere and dozens of us were crowded in one room. I remember my grandparents were with us (my mother's parents) and I really got to know my grandfather for the first time and I thought him quite sweet, although he had the reputation of being a very strict tyrant, I suppose that is why so many of his children left home, some of them to France where many more survived than those who remained in Poland.

We also had my Auntie Tzirl and her family with us. She had four children, the youngest baby girl was only a few months old, the bombs were falling, the noise was terrific and she layed there smiling, that baby kept us going.

On returning to Pulawy, I remember walking down the street with my father, the street and the surrounding area was in ruins, just the brick chimneys were visible. It probably did not take more than a few incendiary bombs to set alight the whole area but still I walked towards our house, hoping against hope that by some miracle, ours would be the only one left standing, alas it was not.

We then squatted in a building near the Law Courts, for a few weeks. When a Ghetto was established, that part of town was out of bounds, so we moved in with my mother's parents who had two small basement rooms.

Whilst in the Ghetto, my grandfather's beard was ruthlessly shaven off, as was my great uncle', he was badly beaten because his beard was not as neat as my grandfather's.

A Judenrat was formed and my Head Master Adler became the leader. I saw him once in the street, after he had been badly beaten up for refusing to collect valuables from the Jews in the Ghetto. He apparently handed over his own watch to the Germans but refused to collect from other people. As a Head Master in my school, I was petrified of him but when I saw him so abused, I was extremely upset.

Three of my sisters lived in Warsaw, when the War broke out. As you know, after the whole of Poland was occupied, the Poles fought on for a further three weeks, refusing to surrender Warsaw to the Germans. During that battle, my sister Rivka who was one of twins, got killed by a piece of schrapnell. She was living with my Aunt Miriam and Uncle Mordechai. Their flat was hit, my Uncle got a direct hit and was killed. My older sister Idessa found my sister Rivka just hours before she died of her injuries, in a Warsaw Hospital. My sister Idessa did not tell the sad news to my parents until some time later, when she came home from Warsaw, by then we were living in a village. My Aunt and one of her children were also injured.

On the 29th December, 1939 (I made a mental note of that date) in the early hours of a very cold morning, the SS entered the Ghetto, shouting and banging with rifle butts on doors, ordering us to leave the town and go to a certain town, who's name I cannot remember. All I know is in order to get there, we had to go through the village of Parchatka, where a customer of my father lived, his name was Zygmunt Pawlowski. Instead of going where we were told to go, we stopped in Parchatka, Zyugmunt let us have a room in his small famrhouse. My grandparents, who were then in their seventies, went where they were told to go and we never heard or saw them again.

In Parchatka, life was not too bad, there were three other Jewish families. I am not sure if we were suposed to be there but we were tolerated by the Polish farmers and the Germans were not very visible. My father was making or repairing shoes and he was paid mostly in farm produce, so we had enough to eat. I remember noticing my mother looking well, because in the past, whenever there was a shortage of food, she would go without.

Whilst in the village, I helped on the farm. I used to love riding the horses and bathing in the river Vistula. One of my jobs was minding the cattle, for which I got paid by the farmer, in potatoes.

My father was a bit concerned because I started acting and talking like a peasant boy, he was worried that I would lose my Jewishness. One day I dressed up like a real peasant boy and went back to my home town, Pulawy, in order to retrieve some shoes my grandfather had left for safe keeping with a Polish neighbour. I got there in a horse drawn farmer's truck, it was Winter and I was well wrapped up. When I entered the town, it was eerie, not one Jew to be seen, the place was Judenrein, it was a ghost town. I made my way to my grandfather's neighbour and asked him for the shoes. He completely denied having them and pointed to a couple of Germans, who were coming down the street, as if to tell me that "if you don't get out, I will hand you over to them". Needless to say, I made a very quick retreat. That was a man who had lived next door to my grand parents for very many years.

Whilst in Parchatka, I would sometimes walk to Kazimiez Podolski, where there was a Ghetto and I would buy leather for my father and smuggle it back to the village. The leather was wrapped around my body, sometimes I got sores from the

friction of the hard leather. The last time I went there, I stood in the market place, watching the Jews being rounded up. I got away with being outside the Ghetto, because I did not look Jewish and was dressed like a peasant boy.

One day a group of Jews were lead through the village, under guard. We watched them coming and passing the place where we lived. After they had gone, a famer informed us that one man broke away, either to get a drink or attempted to escape. He was shot and left lying in the farm yard. The farmer asked us to bury him. I dug a hole at the entrance to a valley, quite near the road. After removing a photo' of his wife and children, I buried him and said Kaddish, as best I could. I kept that photo' until I got to Buchenwald, where everybody was stripped before showers.

We remained in Parchatka until June or July (I am not too sure) of 1942. One day the head of the village said we must leave and report at the railway station in Konskawola. We again disobeyed orders and hired a Polish boy with a rowing boat and went across the River in the middle of the night. Before we left Parchatka, mother got some food together. I remember eating hard boiled eggs at dawn. Mother, who was a far seeing person, told us all that if we were ever separated, we should all write to Zygmunt, who was sure to survive, being a small Polish farmer in a small village and he would then bring us together.

We made our way to a little town, I cannot remember the name. We somehow found a room, sharing with other people. It was very crowded. While there, my mother found a farmer who offered to take me to live on his farm in return for my doing work on his farm. I made my way on my own, through fields and found the farm. I was given a straw mattress and told to sleep in the barn, which I did not like. After a few days, I was given more and more work to do, which I did not consider fair and I was not treated like one of the family, so after a few days, I got up very early and without saying anything, I made my way back to where I hoped my family was. I arrived with a huge bunch of mauve lilac which I picked on the way. When my father spotted me, he burst into tears, it was the first time I saw my father cry.

Not long after, we were ordered out of that town and told to go to a place, I think was called Zwolen, where there was a larger Ghetto. Some friends put us up (I just do not know how my parents always managed to find somebody they knew or maybe people were generally helpful).

I only stayed in Zwolen for three days. On the morning of the fourth day the SS, with loud speakers, ordered all Jews, men as well as women between the ages of 15 and 50, to the Market Place. Although I was not yet 15, my mother encouraged me to go with my father. Her idea was that should I be taken to a Work Camp, I would have a better chance of survival. At the Market Place, men were separated from women, so I went with my father and my mother with two of my sisters, my youngest sister Pearl, who was only 12 wandered around the vicinity. We were then again separated, those between the ages of 15 and 30

were taken to one side and that was the last time I saw my father, my mother and two of my older sisters.

We spent the night in the grounds of a school. We did not sleep, wondering what the next day would bring. We sang songs in Hebrew and Yiddish. In the morning we were again selected, those of us who were rejected had to go through a kind of gauntlet between two lines of Germans, hit with sticks, spat at and taken back to the Ghetto. Some of us remained in the school grounds, obviously meant to go to a Work Camp. During that morning, my younger sister Pearl came to see me with a few belongings. She told me my parents had divided all their money equally between us, in case we should get separated. As I approached her to say goodbye, she turned round and ran off, very fast in tears and I never saw her again.

Soon we were loaded on to lorries and headed in the direction of Radom. A German guard was on the lorry. One happening sticks in my mind, as we drove along a man bribed the German to allow him to jump from the lorry, the guard accepted the bribe, allowed him to jump and then promptly shot him. That incident made me realize that the situation was serious and extremely dangerous. Until then, I looked at things as an adventure.

Radom looked very empty. My father used to buy leather there before the War, the town had been a leather centre.

We arrived at my first Concentration Camp - Skarzysko. It consisted of three separate camps, I was sent to Werk C. This was, I think in August or September of 1942. Werk C was still in the process of being built, I was one of the first arrivals to that place. Skarzysko was an ammunitions factory. After working in transport and pushing shells, in small waggons from place to place, for some time, I was then transferred to a big hall with rooms off it, with machines for boring holes for the detonators, in the TNT filled shells. The spray of yellow power which came out made my hands and face and any exposed parts of my body turn yellow, this ate into the skin and lungs. Washing facilities were minimal. Once a month we would go to Werk A for showers. We worked twelve hour shifts from six to six, day and night, on alternate weeks. Food for the day consisted of ersatz black coffee in the morning, the bread ration varied from one sixth of a loaf to half that amount and two soups, one at work and one in the barracks.

On day we were asked "does anyone wish to go home?" as I knew that I had no home to go to, I declined. Those who reported to the parade ground joined some others who were being deported to God knows where, never to be seen again.

Skarzysko was a ghastly camp. I have since learned from a book written by another of the inmates, that life expectancy particularly in Work C, was about four months. I survived there for nearly two years, I think due to the fact that a Polish woman who was in charge of the milk rations for Polish workers who came daily from the town to work four hour shifts (as it was considered dangerous for health

to work longer). They were also given a milk ration. This woman, whose name I never knew, gave me some sort of food whenever I managed to make my way under a window in the place where she worked. The work was long and hard, the living conditions terrible, selections every now and then. The inevitable illness hit me (Typhus) and I did not go to work. The Germans inspected the barracks after everybody went to work, if you said you were unable to go to work because of illness, you were placed in a special barrack, near the wire fence and periodically, the barracks were cleared out and those people were never seen again. Although far from recovered, by some premonition, I decided to get up and go to work, on that day there was such a clear out.

From Skarzysko I was sent to Czestochowa, where conditions were somewhat better. I worked in transport unloading coal, iron ore and scrap metal. Occasionally we came across a wagon load of potatoes, to which I promptly helped myself. This being a steel factory, there were pipes coming out of walls to release excess steam, these were ideal for steaming potatoes by pushing the container of potatoes onto end of the pipe.

Whilst in Czestochowa, I found a second cousin. He worked in the camp sewimg department. As my trousers needed replacing a got a voucher to go there and get a new pair. When I mentioned my name, he called out and asked me if I came from Pulawy. That was how I found Jacob Weinstock. We had been in that camp for a few weeks, yet did not know of each others existance. Probably because we were yellow from our previous work, there was a reluctance for the other inmates to mix with us, even under these circumstances it is remarkable that these feelings could exist.

From Czestochowa I went to Buchenwald, from there to Remsdorf, from Remsdorf by train and death march, to Terezin. Of those who left Buchenwald not many arrived to Terezin. I was liberated on May 8th 1945, by the Russians.

That August, I was among the 300 boys and girls to land at Carlisle, went on to Windemere, then to Papworth Sanatorium because of TB. Thus, I became separated from the Boys. After several weeks at Papworth, I was moved to the Grosvenor Sanatorium in Ashford, Kent where I joined a group of Boys and Girls who also suffered from TB. By the time I arrived in Ashford, my English had improved considerably because I had been sharing a room with an RAF Officer who could only speak English.

Whilst in Ashford, I came across a Yiddish newspaper, which was published in Paris. I noticed a column in which people were searching for lost relatives. Since I knew that I had had relatives in France before the War, I wrote to the Newspaper, mentioning the names of aunts, uncles and cousins. At this time my uncle was attending a funeral for a person who originated from my town in Poland. Another mourner casually mentioned "some people are lucky to find relatives in England". My uncle looked at the paper and realised the announcement had been written by me. He informed the surviving members of our family. Thus it was that, during

an English lesson, given by Mr. Englehart, I received a telegram from my eldest sister Irene - "Your sister is alive, living in Paris". This was how I first learnt that one of my sisters had managed to survive the camps and had entered France under an assumed name (she had lived in France for two years before the War and was able to speak French perfectly). She was married to a Frenchman six weeks before we found one and other.

As a result of this miraculous find, I discovered some distant relatives in Brighton. It was because of this that I ended up living in Brighton, My Brighton relatives were in tailoring and I became a tailor.

In 1955 I married Shirley. Apart from surviving the War, that must be the best thing I have done. Her loyalty and care are beyond words. Not only to me but also to our three children and two grand children, her own parents and other elderly relatives.

Our daughter Caroline, is married to Nigel and they have a son. She works as a Sisters Tutor at Guy's Hospital, Special Care Baby Unit and is well into a degree course.

Our son Maurice runs an electrical and security alarm systems business in London. He is married to Suzie and has a son. Maurice spent a year in Israel, where he trained as a Youth Leader, returning to England to run a Youth Movement for two years. During that time he visited Poland, Germany and many Concentration Camps.

Our youngest son Son Bryan spent seven years in the Royal Marine Band, travelling the World, including a tour of duty on board the Royal Yacht. He is now a Police Officer with the Royal Hampshire Constabulary (?a job for a Jewish Boy).

Shirley works as a Medical Secretary to a very busy Consultant Surgeon, at the Royal Sussex County Hospital in Brighton and me? I am still tailoring.

We always take our children and their partners to the Reunion dinners. We feel it gives them a good insight into what happened during the War. We are now joined by our grandson.

Following the 50th Anniversary celebrations, here and in Israel, Shirley, our son Bryan and I went to Prague. While there, we visited Terezin. Although I had been very apprehensive before, it was not such an ordeal as I had anticipated, the sun was shining, the place was clean and the cemetery beautifully kept and peaceful. The headstones of unknown inmates, with just the date, a Star of David at one end of the field and a cross at the other.

England has given us the opportunity to flourish and prosper. The children provide us with love, warmth and affection. Israel gives us a special glow, so does the 45 Aid Society.