

The David Hirschfeld Story

I'm writing this story about my life, but for a great extent this is also the story of my brother Moniek with whom I shared most of my pre- and post war days before I immigrated to Israel.

I was born in Bruznick, a little village in the vicinity of Gorlice and Bobov in Poland on August, 20st, 1929. I was the youngest child with two older brothers, Abraham and Moniek, and one sister, Sabina, between them. I can hardly remember anything from my early childhood. Later we moved to a village nearer to Gorlice where we lived until the Second World War started.

My father was injured during the First World War and was disabled and sick throughout my childhood and he passed away during the early days of the Second World War. My mother Rivka took care of my father, the house and the rest of the family. My eldest brother, Abraham, worked in a petrol factory to support the family. The family had a little house in Gorlice that was let for rent which was another major source of income. I attended a school in Gorlice for a little before the war broke. My grandfather, Haim Hirschfeld was religious, but the rest of the family never followed him along this line. I don't remember the issue of Israel being raised in our conversations.

We had an uncle with a big farm in another village, Luzna, that was located between Bobov and Gorlice, and we moved to live with him shortly after. We lived and worked in farming and livestock of his farm. After a period of 2-3 years the Germans decided to evacuate all the Jewish farms and villages and we were

transported to Bobov where a relatively large Jewish community lived. From my early childhood I remember very hostile antisemitistic attitude from the Polish people. I remember one day being chased by Polish children who threw stone at the wheels of my bicycle and which led to a fall and I almost ended up with a broken nose.

One day, all the Jews in Bobov were forced to congregate in the market place. There the notorious selection process took place. My two brothers and I were sent to Plaszow Camp and the rest of the family (my mother, sister and the rest of the extended family) remained In Bobov. In Plaszow we were sent to work on the railroad tracks. Every morning we would walk a long distance to work outside of the camp and walk back to the camp at the end of a long and brutal labor day. Since the guards were not very attentive during the entire day it was possible to escape the working force with the serious treat of dead penalty if one got captured. My brother, Abraham, decided to take the risk and he ran away one day. Later, I heard that he got caught and died. I never heard any more details on his tragic end.

I had a cousin, named David Lichtman from Gorlice with whom I used to work together outside of the camp. One day we decided to run away and take the train that goes to the Gorlice, were we used to live earlier. We wanted to find out what had happened to our families, and I also wanted to trace some valuables that were our family hid near our house and bring it back to the camp. I realize it sounds strange that we were planning to return to the camp under the circumstances, but our strong belief was that there was no other place to run away to, and there is no one else to trust for help. We made our way successfully, and I visited my house according to the plan and return with a bag with some clothing and some valuables.

We met again in Taranow train station with a plan to take the train to Krakow and from there to return to the camp in Plaszow. There, in the train station, some guy recognized us or suspected that we were Jews and he reported to the police and some policemen arrested me and walked me to the direction of the police station. I realized I got nothing to loose and I started to run away, taking advantage of the darkness, crawling under the train and on the railway tracks, until the tracks ended and I fell into a swamp. The policemen who chased me, followed me and screamed that if I wasn't coming out of there they would shoot me right there and I had no choice but to surrender again. They took me to the police station and put me in a room with a guard watching while they returned to chase my cousin.

The policeman that was on guard was very sleepy. The door was not locked but the knob was removed so there was no way to open it from inside the room. When the policeman was asleep, I noticed that there was a piece of wood that was normally used to keep the door open or to prevent it from moving. I took the tiny knife I kept hidden in my cloths and carved it into the shape of the door knob and unlocked the door and ran away again. I found a shelter under a bridge where I cleaned myself from all the dirt I accumulated and then I started a 50 kilometer walk to a little town call Cheritosovienka. I stayed there for a night with some Jews who lived in the ghetto and they treated me kindly. After a day or two I decided to take the train and returned to the camp in Plaszow. My cousin that had seen me being taken away by the policemen reported to my brother Moniek, and they suspected that I was no longer alive. Needless to say, they were trilled and happy to see me joining them again to the walk back to the camp at the end of another labor day.

Death was a daily matter in the Plaszow camp. Many prisoners died from Typhus, and many others were exhausted to death by the hard labor and long marches to and back from work. Still others got shot by the guards. Many of those who tried to escape got killed by the Polish people.

From Plaszow we were sent to Jerusolinska. The plan was to concentrate all the Jews of Krakow in Jerusolinska and to eliminate the ghetto of Krakow. We stayed there for a short period and moved again to Skazikokmiena a center of war industry of weapons and ammunition. My brother Moniek and I worked in a factory that produced electric current. Our job was to add coal to the ovens. Since our factory produced a lot of heat, we add a constant supply of hot water and other prisoners, working in other plants, would come to take warm showers. Their skin was very yellow as a result of some explosive powder they were working with in the ammunition factory.

Our next move was to Chechnoskow, where we worked for a few weeks in a large arm storage building. From there we were sent to Buchenwald. These rapid moves were a result of the fact that the Russian army was approaching, and the Germans in search for a safer place for them and their prisoners. In Buchenwald we stayed for a month and then we moved again to Northhousen. That was the place where the Germans were manufacturing the missiles they launched to England. The entire factory was hidden deep under heavy rocks of a mountain and was highly shielded from air attacks. From Northhousen, on a daily basis, thousands of prisoners were sent by trains to their final destination where they were murdered as part of the final solution. As we reached the place, we were lucky enough to be a part of a group of 10-15 youngsters selected to work in the kitchen. Besides being

spared from extermination our situation was relatively good as we could supplement our diet at work. During our stay there many prisoners from Romania, Hungary and other countries in Eastern Europe. For many of them it was the first encounter with concentration camps and they could not tolerate it and died from exhaustion and various diseases.

As the Americans were approaching Northhousen we started a long march, that lasted a few weeks, to Therisenstadt, Czechoslovakia. I believe that the German plan was that this death camp would be our final destiny. Many of us died on this unbearable march and some escaped. Only a small group lasted the entire journey and ended in Therisenstadt. There, in the final stop of our forced odyssey, we were finally saved by the Russian troops. Our lives were saved only because the Germans did not have enough time to exterminate us as they planned. However, many prisoners died after the liberation due to their prolonged starvation, exhaustion and other diseases.

Our next trip was to London. A Jewish Organization arranged British airplanes that carried us to Windermere in England. It felt like heaven. Those who were sick were sent to hospital and received proper care. We had enough time to recover physically and somewhat mentally and different groups were sent to different parts of England. Monienk and I were sent to Lauton. I attend the "Ort" High School and learned metalwork. Moniek studied to become a sailor.

Later we moved on the Belzak Park Club. There we were hosted by Jewish families for a while. It was 1948. Many of the Jews volunteered to immigrate to Israel and to help the Jewish people in Israel in their struggle for independence. It

might be difficult to understand why people like us who were just barely saved from extermination would volunteer to go to a country they have never seen before that is in a state of war, and risk their lives again. But, for many of us, the sense that it is essential for the Jewish people to have a place of their own, where they can protect themselves and have their own armed forces. I volunteered without telling my brother Moniek about my plan. It was an illegal activity and in addition I didn't want to influence him to take a similar risk. I was sent with other volunteers to France and from there on the ship "Kedma" we cruised to Israel. When I arrived to Israel I joined the forces and due to my training in metalwork I was assigned to work in a mechanic workshop for armed vehicles. Our job was to fix the vehicles that participated in the fierce fighting during the War of Independence. When the war was over and we were discharged, some of the volunteers returned to England and the others settled in Israel.

When we were in London after the liberation from the camps, we had guides from Israel. One of them, Malka Tatenbaum, gave me the address of her relatives in Israel whom I could contact when I reached Israel. Indeed I contacted her family and they hosted me and treated me nicely, and there I met Pnina, with whom I got married in 1951 and had two sons, Yossi and Abraham. I joined "Eged", the largest bus company in Israel, where I worked until I retired. My first son, Yossi, followed my foot steps, and joined "Eged" as well, where he is currently employed. He got married to Ela and they have 2 sons. My youngest son Abraham, has become a clinical psychologist, a researcher and a senior lecturer at the Department of Psychology at Tel-Aviv University. He married Yael and they have two daughters and a son. Interestingly, one of the courses my son teaches his graduate students in clinical psychology is on stress and trauma in childhood. He still insists that he

cannot comprehend how I was able to recover from what I had to endure as a youngster and go on with my life. My brother Moniek worked for many years as a chef in Hotels and then worked as a technician for a phone company in Stratford-on-Avon, England. Since he retired he lives in Brighton, England.

My wife Pnina died from cancer at the age of 50 but the family continued prosper and I enjoy my 5 grandchildren whom I love dearly. I dedicate this story to my wife who died before she had the opportunity to enjoy any of her grandchildren and to all my family members which did not survive the atrocities embedded in history of our people.