

THE
HARRY BALSAM
STORY

My name is Harry Balsam and I would like to put down for posterity what I remember, today is the 8th of May 1995 and it is exactly 50 years since I was liberated in Therisenstadt Czechoslovakia.

Before the war broke out I lived in Gorlice, Poland, with my father Moses, my mother Adél, my three brothers Danny, Sanie and Joseph and my sister Getel. Joseph was the youngest born in 1930, I was born in 1929. Sanie in 1927, Guitel in 1925 and Danny the oldest in 1923. My father was very orthodox and was the warden of the synagogue. In the morning we used to go to the elementary school and in the afternoon to Cheder. We were brought up speaking two languages simultaneously. Polish and Yiddish. We were quite well off by local standards, my father was a miller and we had plenty of flour to bake our own bread, and for the Sabbath we used to bake chollahs, and if I remember correctly we used to take chollahs and give them to our relations living in the same town. I thought we were quite comfortable, but thinking about it today I don't suppose we were quite as comfortable as I really thought.

When the war broke out in 1939, there was panic, people started running away where to they didn't know, they just started running. We were fortunate enough to have an Uncle living in a village, they were farmers, and he brought us a pair of horses and a cart, we loaded all our belongings from the house onto the cart and we left, where we were going nobody knew. After traveling for about 30 kilometers I would say, we came to another town called Jaslow, the Germans were bombing the towns, people were just in chaos. When we arrived in Jaslow the horses were tired so we decided to go to the train station, as did many others, and jump onto a train. We drove the cart and horses onto the platform my father and eldest brother got onto the train and my mother, sister, my brothers and I started to throw our belongings onto the train, as we were doing this and before we had a chance to get off the cart the train started moving away with my father and brother on it and we were left stranded in the town. A few hours later the German army marched into the town and immediately confiscated our horses. We stayed a few days in Jaslow with some relations who lived there and after a few days we went back home to Gorlice. Once there we went to the mill, the Germans had given us permission to take as much flour as we could carry and we took home a lot of flour which enabled us to bake our own bread for quite sometime.

We were trying to find out what had happened to our father and brother, after a few weeks we heard from them, they had been captured by the Russian army who were on the other side of the river San, the river served as the dividing line between the Russian and German armies, and we were on the German side. The Russians told all the Jews they had captured that they had to register with them and they would be sent back to their families. They did this but instead of sending them back to their families they were sent to Siberia where they were put to work in the gold mines, and in forests cutting down trees, where they spent the rest of the war. They did not return to Germany until 1946, by which time I was already in England. After a while in Germany they found out through the Red Cross that I was living in England and had survived the war. I was the only one from the rest of my family to survive the Nazi murderers. When I say family I mean my uncles, aunties, cousins and so on, I could easily reckon well over 100 of my immediate family perished.

It was impossible still to earn money at this time and my brother and I tried to think how we could make some money. We were approached by people to smuggle goods from one town to another. Not everyone was allowed to go on trains, but as we were under 12 nobody actually said anything to us and we were smuggling saccharin from one town to another and got paid for doing this. We didn't realise how dangerous it was. My older brother and sister couldn't help with the smuggling because they were over 12 years of age and anyone over 12 had to wear the yellow Star of David and so it was difficult to get out of the town ghetto. Nevertheless things were very bad. One day I was walking with my older brother in the town, I am convinced that a Polish pupil from his class recognised him as a Jew and told the Gestapo that here was a Jew walking in the town. The Gestapo came over to us and put a hand on my brother's shoulder took out his gun and shot him in front of me and he told me to disappear. Well you can imagine that must have been the worst hour of my life, I didn't know where to turn, I knew I couldn't go home and tell my mother what had happened to her son, so I ran to our cousins house near Byand told them what had taken place. It was an agonising moment for all of us. Going back 50 years or rather 55 years it still remains in my mind that this was the first time that I saw the German Gestapo pull out a gun and shoot somebody. Up until then I had not seen it, I had heard about it, but hadn't seen it for myself, and especially as it was my brother you can't imagine how I felt. The worst was still to come because we

heard that the Gestapo, after shooting someone during the day, didn't want to leave any trace of anyone from that particular family, so they used to come at night and take the whole family out and shoot them as well so that there would not be anyone left to bear witness. Actually we were fortunate, because a friend of ~~mine's~~ ^{my} older brother was working for the Gestapo, as a liaison between them and the Jews, and he managed to persuade ^{us} the Gestapo to leave ^{us} alone. We were very lucky as we would have almost certainly been massacred. The year was 1940.

In 1940 the ghetto was formed in the town of Gorlice. We were forced to move from our house into the ghetto where we had to share one small house with four other families. I was still with my mother, sister and younger brother and I knew that I would now have to be the breadwinner for the family. Whilst in the ghetto they used to round us up and in the winter we would have to go and clear the snow from the roads. It wasn't like the snow we have here, it was very heavy snow and to shovel it away was very hard work. It was freezing cold and we weren't exactly dressed for that kind of ~~work~~ ^{work} & weather. We had to clear the roads and the pavements, where there was a pavement, although it was mostly roads. We worked for 10-12 hours a day and everyone had to do it. There were some people with trades and skills and they were used by Germans to work in factories for the war machine. I never got paid for this work, but I was happy to be working outside of the ghetto because I was able to bring back into the ghetto bread, butter or whatever I could get hold of. Life carried on like this for quite sometime until they started the deportations. ~~EARLY~~ morning we were rounded up and taken to a kiln (a brick factory), where we spent three days after which the Germans opened the gates and started screaming "everybody out". At the sametime we heard shooting, I saw it through a little window, I naturally thought that they were killing us all so I got hold of my mother, sister and brother and pushed us forward, as I couldn't bear to watch the shooting and thought that the sooner it would be over the better. Fortunately we weren't being shot, they were only shooting the people who they found in hiding and brought them back to this place. We were put in groups of 100 and dragged to the trains, but I was pulled out of the group to bury the dead ones, , I heard that my mother, sister and brother were taken to Belzec which was an extermination camp and I never heard from them again. Each group consisted of 90 Jews and 10 Gypsies.

I was then alone in the ghetto. People were being taken away everyday and at that time we did not know where they were being taken to. Killing and shooting became a normal everyday event, you constantly heard shots being fired, one here, two there, four somewhere else, it is very difficult to say, but that is how it was and you got used to the idea that killing meant nothing. You just got used to it, everyone had one thing in mind and that was to survive. The reason why I was pulled out of the group together with others was that there were still some Jews left in the town and many were being shot as they were being taken away either for trying to run away or were just not moving quickly enough. These people had to be collected and buried and we had to dig the graves for them. We knew that although we were digging graves for them, we were digging our own graves, but what worried us was who would bury us as there would be nobody left to do it.

One morning at 6 a.m. we were rounded up and told to go to the Appel Platz, which was the focal point, and they sorted out 300 of us and sent us towards the trains. They told us we were going to a labour camp, and that we were to leave all of our belongings behind which was very unfortunate for me. Once again I was lucky. Whilst we were being taken to the trains I asked someone from the Police if I could be left behind but he said that there was nothing he could do. I then asked if he could bring some of my belongings from the house where I lived. This he did and I took this stuff with me to the labour camp near Krakow called Plaszow where my camp life started.

We arrived in Plaszow after a nights journey in cattle trucks. When we arrived we had to give up everything we had brought with us. The S.S. guards were waiting for us and told us to throw any jewelry and money we had onto a pile, they said if anyone was trying to hide anything they would shoot them, but people don't give up their belongings so easily. Most people started throwing their money and jewelry onto a pile when suddenly they took one person and searched him. They found that he still had some money hidden on him and shot him on the spot. I happened to be very near and when I saw that, it frightened me and I pulled everything out of my pockets and slung it on the pile and passed by. On that particular day they must of shot 7 or 8 people. Then we were assembled for roll call and we were standing in line waiting for the Commandant to arrive, he had to decide what to do with us. We stood waiting for about 3 or 4 hours, it was fairly cold as I remember and we were told by the guards that we have to stand and wait until the Commandant

comes. After a while we saw him coming and everybody got scared including the Jewish Police who were already in the camp as even they didn't know what their fate would be. When he arrived he looked us up and down, there were 300 of us. He was marching backwards and forwards and suddenly he realised that there were quite a number of small boys in the group. He started screaming and shouting and said that when he asked for people to be sent to the camp he didn't ask for little boys but for men who could be put to work. He shouted that all the boys must separate from the men, we did this and stood in columns of five. Naturally we were all shivering and scared and were shuffling our feet, I was one of the smallest and got pushed to the side where the Commandant was standing. I turned round and said can you stop pushing me and as I said it he called me out and I thought oh yes this is my lot, my luck has run out now all because I opened my big mouth. As he called me over I started begging that I had done nothing and that I had only told them to stand still, he didn't listen and said will you please follow me, I thought to myself this is it I'm about to be shot.

I followed him into an office where two Jewish prisoners were working one a girl the other a boy. The girl I can remember now was a pretty young girl of about 18 and the boy must have also been 18 or 19, he was dictating something to the girl who was working on the typewriter. The Commandant took me into the office and said sit down here, I didn't know what it was all about but he said that I would become his shoeshine boy, and told me to stay where I was until he came back. To be honest I didn't understand a word he said but when he went back out to assemble the rest of the group, the girl and boy in the office explained to me that I was to become his shoeshine boy and he would not do anything to harm me. I was very relieved to hear this and a few minutes later he came back into the office and said that he didn't know what he was going to do with all the boys and asked whether I knew anyone amongst them. I said that some of the boys were my cousins and friends from school, he said that if I wanted to I could take 2 or 3 out to stay here with me. I immediately thought that would be their lot, but he suddenly changed his mind and said that no he wouldn't kill them but he would send them to another camp. He said that he didn't need boys but that I could keep two with me and I said thank you very much and he walked out again. By the time he came back in I was a little more relaxed after being told that I was to be his shoeshine boy. I ran up to him and said "Herr Commandant, will you please sit down and take your boots off and I will clean them for you". I removed his

boots and ran outside and realised that I had nothing with which to clean the boots, so I took off my jacket thinking that I would use it to polish the boots, I then wondered where I could get some polish or something with which to clean them. There was a Jewish policeman standing nearby and he told me to go over to the block where there was a boot repairer and they would give me some polish. I ran over to that block and when I got in there I said that I have the Commandants boots and I have to clean them. Of course they all jumped to attention took the boots and started to clean them. I recall them putting wood into the boot to stretch the leather and they polished them up so well that they looked like new boots. This of course took sometime and the Commandant started screaming and sent for his boots. They now looked like new. Muller began screaming at me for his own boots as he did not recognise the pair I handed him. When I took them away they were old and shabby and suddenly they had become new, especially with the hot irons and polish the shoe repairer used. Once he put them on he realised they were his boots, he turned round and said, "I thought I had picked the right boy for the job". He then walked out in a good mood and left me in the office. He came back again and told me to follow him. He took me down to have a shower and a haircut, and asked whether I had a change of clothes. I said no because whatever I had with me was taken away when we arrived at the camp, so I had nothing. He went to the storeroom while I was having a hair cut, and came back with clean clothes for me. He told me to get dressed. I was still trembling a little but I was a bit easier than I had been before.

Now my life started in the camp. I didn't know the fate of my father or brother nor did I know exactly what had happened to my mother, sister and brother, but I had been told that if they were sent to Belzec it was an extermination camp and nobody ever came back, but we didn't have facts. Now I was alone in the camp in Plaszow, except for the two friends who were left behind with me. The other boys were sent away to two other camps called Prokocim and Biezanuw about 5 or 6 miles away, they were both labour camps. The Commandant who's name was Joseph Muller would come to the office in the camp everyday. I would wait for him in the office and when he arrived. I would take his boots off and polish them although for a lot of the time he wasn't there he was in Krakow at the headquarters and he also lived in Krakow.

Outside the camp was a guard house where around 30 guards lived, he decided to extend the guard house and he built on four more

rooms, and a bathroom and toilet. When it was finished he told me to move into one of the rooms in the house, which was outside the camp. Up until then I had been living in the camp. I should mention that in the beginning I used to get up at 6 a.m. for the roll-call. I had nothing to do after this and used to go and sit in the office and wait for the Commandant. After a while I got up later at 9 a.m. because the Commandant never came to the camp before 10.30 a.m. so I wasn't too badly off. I was getting plenty of food from the kitchen and the office. The Jewish Police and all those who were in charge were also not short of food, I was looked after very well.

In the office I was like the errand boy, I remember one day the Commandant arrived and I wasn't in the office. He asked, "where is Balsam?" they told him that they had sent me somewhere. He told them that Balsam must not be sent anywhere, he has nothing to do but to wait for me, he gets his orders from me and he does only what I tell him and to follow me when I go on my rounds. When I came back he told me from now on do not take orders from anybody, you go nowhere you just sit here and watch what they are doing. It really didn't make any difference to me.

When the house was finished Muller moved in and as I said he told me to move into one of the rooms, he had his bedroom and dining room etc. and he had a lot of friends who used to come and visit him including Oskar Shindler, Amos Geth, Wilhelm Kunde and Herman Heinrich were amongst them and many others. His cocktail cabinet was filled by the Jewish Police and the President, we had a President and a Vice President in the camp, both of whom were Jewish. They were also not short of anything, they had plenty of everything and they filled up his cabinets with cigarettes, whiskey and all drinks and chocolates, everything of the very best could be found in his house. He used to bring his friends from the headquarters and they had parties. He told me to bring in a girl to help serve his friends so I took in a beautiful girl. She was the girl friend of the President of the camp, and she had platinum blond hair. Her name is Luta Friedlich (she is today living in Israel). This way of life went on for some time. I was getting used to living with him so much so that my fear completely disappeared, but the people in the camp, although they envied me, were frightened for me because at any time my life could have been in danger on the slightest whim he could have taken out his gun and shot me because shooting someone meant nothing to him, but I was all right and I wasn't really scared.

One day however, things did begin to change a little. Muller had a wife and two children one was about five years of age and the other four. His wife was driving him mad for him to get permission for her and the children to come and live with him in Plaszow. They were living in Heidelberg from where she used to telephone him and tell him she wanted to join him. As he had a house he got permission to bring his family to Poland, and it was then that his attitude towards me changed. He knew that she would shortly be coming to live here and he also knew that I knew what had been going on before, how he was carrying on with women and drink etc., and as I thought about it I was beginning to get worried. He told me that she would be coming in two weeks time and when he said it I looked into his eyes and well I just got scared. I had to think very quickly, should I run away, I could have done this because I had permission from him to go outside of the camp any time I wanted. I had a certificate which enabled me to go where ever I wanted, I was free to go all over Krakow and other places. I used to go to the Krakow ghetto, where I had lived before as well. When I had that fear I thought of something very quickly. I went over to him and said, you have just told me your wife is coming within the next two weeks, would you give me permission to take half a dozen labourers from the camp and paint the house, clean up and spring clean from top to bottom because I feel that when your wife comes I don't want her to find any evidence of other women being here. He looked at me and his eyes lit up and he started smiling and said, "I knew that you were the boy I can trust, the right one for me, go ahead and do as you like." I said thank you very much and out he went with a smile on his face, I can see it now. That is exactly what we had done. We cleaned and decorated the place from top to bottom. The two weeks passed by and his wife and children arrived and I was supposed to look after the children as well, clean their shoes etc. but as I told you before I had the two other boys to help me with that work, they were doing the work, they helped me with the children with the shoes and everything else, but the fact was that I didn't do anything, I was just giving orders. I became what they call a Hausputzer, there was the putzers, the cleaners, and I was the main one to observe. We were doing extremely well, I got on well with his wife, she liked me. I used to take the

boys out in the Winter, I used to ski with them as well and life was quite good, actually very good for me there because I had no fear.

From time to time Muller used to disappear, he told his wife that he was going to the headquarters, but in actual fact the only person who knew where he was going was me, he went to visit his girlfriends in Krakow. I knew exactly where he was in case there were any problems and he would be needed. I knew where to go and find him, and of course one day that is exactly what happened.

The headquarters telephoned his home and asked for him. His wife answered the phone and told them that she is sure that he went to the headquarters, but they said that he hadn't been seen there. She started going wild and came to me and asked whether I knew where the Chief was, and I said that he had gone to the headquarters. I then took the bike and went to find him at a girlfriends house and told him that he was wanted immediately at the headquarters, and he went there right away. I had to cover up for him all the time.

One day I was talking with him and his wife came in, we were wispering and she noticed this, she wanted to know what was going on, he told her nothing was going on, she then asked me and I said the same, but she still suspected something, but he knew I would not tell her anything, at that point she turned against me and was questioning my every move to her husband, and told him that I was lazy, and was not doing any work. She complained how I was eating and drinking the same food as herself and her children and given that I had 2 other boys from the camp working for me, that I was basically of no use, and therefore should be sent back into the camp with the others. Muller responded by telling her that I was liked by their children and a help to him.

I actually became a pawn between them, he knew however, that I would never divulge to her any of his secrets, for example. I used to take parcels with drinks and other things to his girlfriends in Krakow on my bike. I had to take these things out of the storeroom in the camp without her knowing, and then get them out of the camp itself. It was becoming increasingly difficult for me and I was beginning to get frightened because I began to think that after all she is his wife and she could turn him against me and he might take out his gun and shoot me. Fortunately for me this did not happen, in fact it was just the reverse. One day he came home drunk from his girlfriends and he had lipstick on his shirt. His wife started screaming and shouting and as I was only in the next room I ran in to see what was going on. They were practically fighting and he began to go for his gun and he was going to shoot her. You must realise that he was

very drunk and he didn't know what he was doing, for him, to kill someone didn't mean a thing, whether it was his wife or anyone else, they were so used to shooting people. I managed to stop him by taking away his gun and pushed him away, he was laying on the bed and I took his boots off and he fell asleep. She came out of the room and into my room and sat with me for about an hour talking. I then gave her my room for the night, and I went to sleep in the camp. The next morning nothing was mentioned of this incident but he knew that he had to be thankful to me because there was no question about it, he would have killed her.

Following this episode Mrs Muller's behaviour towards me changed considerably. Whatever I did or where ever I went she did not question. I was now her best friend and we got on very well.

A few weeks later I asked her to do me a favour for the first time ever. I saw a Jewish girl brought by two guards from Krakow where they had found her out in the streets. They brought her here for the Commandant to shoot her. I knew that he would have to shoot her because once anyone was caught in the streets whether it was Krakow or any other place and they were found to be Jewish, they were to be killed. When they arrived at the gates the Commandant was called out and she was taken around the back of the barracks which was the place that was normally used for shootings. I ran quickly and called his wife and said that she owed me a favour and could she try and stop her husband from killing this Jewish girl. She knocked on the window and gestured that he should leave her alone and not kill her. In the meantime, I ran out and he told me to tell the guards to go back to the gates, he took her to the back of the block and fired his pistol twice in the air and let her run into the block. This he had to do out of sight of the guards, otherwise it would have been seen as a weakness in his command.

When she saw me she was very very thankful, I could say she repaid me, she taught me the facts of life, you have to remember I was only 12 1/2 years old. She is still alive and living in America.

Although I was treated well there, my life was hanging on a fine string as anyone else's, but I never thought of that. On a few occasions I had very bad experiences but I also experienced good things. I don't think there is anyone else who got Barmitvahed in the concentration camp, me I got Baarmitvahed! I was taught my Barmitvah in the evenings and when I was 13 I got permission from

the commandant for four people not to go to work on Saturday, I told him the reason why and he said all right, and I was Barmitvahed. Problems I had on many occasions but I took care of them.

There was one particular time when I was extremely lucky not to have been shot. It was my luck that he didn't have his gun on him, because before I could explain to him he hit me very hard across the face and sent me reeling backwards. What happened was this: He was walking through the camp on his way to the stables. He was wearing his track suit and on the way he stopped at the kitchens. He happened to be in a very good mood and was joking with the girls, there were about 20 girls working in the kitchen. There was one who was in charge, her name was Lola Pomeranc, she was about 25 years old, she was married and her husband was in charge of the store room where all the provisions were kept. Mrs Pomeranc grasped the opportunity whilst Muller was in a good mood and asked him what Balsam does with all the bread, butter, worst and other things he keeps taking out from here, he must be selling it she implied. When Muller heard that I was selling the food he went mad and came running and looking for me and wanted to shoot me, but fortunately as I said he didn't have his gun on him. When he found me he started shouting and screaming and he hit me very hard across the face, it was the first time that he had hit me and he wanted to know to whom I was selling the food that I kept taking out from the kitchen. I was in a very nervous state, I could hardly talk, and began to tell him that I am not selling any food to anyone, but that I was giving it away to the tailors, shoemakers and to a few of my very good friends, but mostly I used it to make up the parcels to take to your girlfriends which you told me to do, including Miss Helga on the Pomorska Street in Krakow. Pomorska was the headquarters of the Gestapo all the orders concerning the Jews came out of there. I then said why would I need to sell food to make money when I had plenty of money under my bed. You know whenever you send me to Krakow to buy on the black market vodka, cigarettes and other things you told me to take the money from a suitcase under the bed. I should explain at this point that whenever transport arrived at the camp the people had to give up their belongings, and empty their pockets, then the Commandant should have taken all of this property to the headquarters, but he did not take it all. He always left himself half, there were about ten cases and five were under the bed in the room where I slept. The other five were under his bed. In these suitcases was plenty of money, gold rings, diamonds, watches, bracelets, a lot of 20 dollar gold

coins etc. I did help myself to some without his knowing, everytime I used to go to the cases for money I took out something that I liked and I used to bury it in a special place, I always thought that after the liberation I can go there and dig it all out but unfortunately I never got the chance.

Going back to the incident in the kitchen. After hearing my explanation Muller went to his room and took his revolver and he was going back into the kitchen to shoot Mrs Pomerance, and Luta the girl who was working with me. ~~BEFORE~~ after him to stop him and this I managed to do by about 1 second. After this Mrs Pomerance was very grateful and never forgot it. From then on she used to ask me to whom should she give food, I gave her plenty of orders and told her to give food to her own cousin named Itshuk Pomeranc, he and I were very good friends right through the war and were together in all the concentration camps from Plaszow to Skarzysko, Chenstochaw, Suleyiw, Buchenwald, Reinsdorf and finally Theresinstadt where we were liberated by the Russian Army.

Me To Go

One day without any warning a lorry load of stormtrappers with high ranking officers in cars arrived to Yulaki Plaszow amongst them was Amos Geth, who I knew very well. They stopped outside the gates of the camp and called out Obersharfurer Muller who was the Commandant of the camp. They have handed him some papers in which they must have taken away all of his authority and responsibility from him. He was not very happy about it but there was very little he could do. I immediately realised what was happening and I ran into the camp through the back gates, and surely enough Muller started looking for me, as he was afraid that I will be interrogated by Geth and give away some of his secrets, but by then the stormtroopers entered the camp and rounded us all up and marched us across to the main Plaszow concentration camp which was only 1 mile up the road.

The Commandant Geth stood by the gates and made his selection. He pulled out about 80 people mostly the very young ones and very old. He had them machine gunned down on the spot, he suddenly remembered my name and he called over to the head guard in charge of the killing and asked him to bring over Balsam, Muller's shoe shine boy and he immediately replied that he had shot me together with the others. Of course he knew he hadn't shot me and he came to visit me in the block during the night. I was hiding under the bunks. I was shivering like a fish when he called my name, he

said I know you are here don't be frightened I have brought some food for you. When I answered him he came over to where I was and gave me some food and told me that I mustn't be seen by Geth because he had told Geth that he had shot me. He said that I must stay where I was until we were deported to another camp. I was under the bunk for 7 days, my friend Pomerance was keeping an eye on me, he was bringing me the news every day, his bunk was on top of mine. The guard came to see me every night and brought me some food. He owed me a favour, as several months earlier he had been in trouble during the time that I was with Muller and I was not short of anything I used to give him plenty of vodka and other drinks for his girlfriends and for himself.

About 10 years ago one of my friends Marek Goldfinger came to see me and we got talking and he asked me whether I remembered what I did for his sister whilst we were in the camp in Plaszow. As it happens I couldn't remember, as I did so many good deeds there. He relayed the following story:

His sister was living in Krakow she had Ayrrian papers pretending not to be Jewish, one day she came near the camp wanting to get inside because she wanted to take a photograph of her brother in order to get a passport made for him and therefore to be able to get him out of the camp. Of course getting into the camp wasn't easy she needed someone to take her inside. The only person who could do this was me. A Jewish Policeman by the name of Romak Piltzer asked me to do him a favour and take her inside. I didn't mind, to me it didn't mean anything I just went out and brought her in. She spent a couple of hours with her brother Mark and then they came to look for me to take her out again. This wasn't as easy as bringing someone in, and as I was walking out of the camp with her who should confront us but the Commandant. He asked me where I was going and I said that I was only going out for a short while and he let us go. He didn't ask who the girl was as long as she was with me there was no questions asked. Her brother Mark was standing by the wire and saw this whole incident and nearly fainted when the Commandant stopped us. I didn't know at the time what the reason for her visit had been. Had I have been caught I would have been shot along with Goldfinger and his sister. Fortunately Muller didn't realise that she wasn't from the camp and he didn't chose to question me that day.

I remember a visit made to the camp by some very high ranking officers from headquarters, I am sure it must have been some sort

of official visit because Muller was extremely nervous. They went into the house and Muller didn't ask me to offer them any drinks or anything so I didn't go into the house. After about 10 minutes they came out and were going to inspect the camp. Muller was in full uniform with his revolver in front as usual, they walked round and then he called me and I knew that I had to stay behind them all the time incase he needed something. They were walking for quite sometime going from barrack to barrack and talking. They arrived at the bottom of the camp where there was a stable with a couple of horses and an alsation dog. I gave one of the boys who stayed behind with me the job of looking after the stables and the horses. It was one of the best jobs in the camp as no-one came there and he only had to clean the stable and horses and he had a good life there. As we approached the stable on this day both to the amazement of Muller and myself my friend was riding one of the horses, this of course was not allowed, Muller took his gun and shot him in front of the officers. I was so shocked but there was nothing I could have done. I could see that he was furious with me but he never said anything until after the officers had left the camp. He then asked me why did I let him ride the horse, and I answered that I hadn't given him permission to ride. He told me that he had no alternative but to shoot him he couldn't let him get away with riding the horse. The officers had already told him that he was much too lenient with the Jews in the camp. I was shocked but thinking about it now there were times when he was extremely lenient.

Whilst I was in Plazow an epidemic of Typhoid broke out about 80% of the inmates had it at the same time. The Commandant was very worried about it because he knew if the headquarters found out or the Gestapo they would, without any doubt for one second, shoot everyone of us, or bomb the entire camp. Their fear was that the Typhoid would spread as far as Krakow as we were only about 4 kilometers away. The Commandant Muller realised this so he started giving out false reports. I remember when about 300 inmates went out to work he reported that 1200 went. He knew that if they would finish us off he would loose his power and would be sent to the Russian front. He was taking money from the suitcases which he had under the bed to make up the difference in the pay that was being sent in every week by the firms for whom the inmates worked as slave labour. The only name I can remember are Siemans and Kluk-Hasack there were others but I don't remember the names. I was very fortunate not to have caught the disease I was walking through the camp giving those who were ill vodka to

drink to burn out the fever. I did not have enough for everyone but I did manage to see to most of my friends and the people from home town, especially the ones who taught me my Barmitvah.

There was one occasion when I went with Muller in a lorry to a town called Bochnia to bring back clothes for the inmates of Plaszow. As we got into the ghetto we reported to the Gestapo. The authorities of the town told him that he couldn't take anything out of the stores that day and he should come back the next day. He decided that I was too tired to go back to the camp with him and he took me back to the ghetto and handed me over to the Jewish police station (which was the Jewish Committee), and told them to look after me and give me a bed for the night and he would be back in the morning to pick me up. In the meantime at midnight there was a roll call and everyone was gathered together to board the trains for a mass deportation to Aushwitz. Many people were shot and killed before even boarding the train in order for the guards to keep control. I was caught in the middle. The police of the Judenrat couldn't help me as they were also being deported. Whilst we were being shoved and pushed onto the trains I kept on screaming that I don't belong here but nobody would take any notice. As I was on the ramp and being pushed into the wagon one of the Gestapo who was a friend of Muller, one of his friends that used to come and drink with him, recognized me and called Balsam, Balsam come here, he said you don't belong here and sent me back to Muller, and that was another bit of luck in my fight for survival at Plaszow.

Before Muller came to the camp as Commandant he was apparently supposed to have killed or evacuated a whole town and we were told that he was called the murderer, but I think that during the 18 months that he was in the camp he cooled off a bit. I am not saying that he was fantastic but he was better than some others. I then think that they realised how good he was to the Jews and they took away his authority and it was then that Amos Geth came and took over as Commandant. He was known for his extreme cruelty to Jews. I don't know what happened to Muller for the rest of the war, however, he called me as his defence witness at the Nuremburg trials after the war. I refused to attend. Where he had been good to me, he was still responsible for the death of hundreds of innocent people.

Whilst we were in Sulejow we worked in the fields digging trenches for anti-aircraft's. Again I was very lucky I told the guard that if they

wanted us to work quicker and harder they should supply us with water, I told him that not far in the village they have got plenty of water. He sent me to investigate. When I came back and told him there was a well and the farmer has got a big tank on wheels, we went back to the farm and brought the water, I then became the water boy. This was the best job in Sulejow. I recall one day when I went for the water they would not give me any and started shouting at me saying you dirty filthy Jew, we have no more water for you and get out of here before we break you neck. I went back without any water and told the head of the guards that they would not give water to the German bastards, and I told him that they called the Germans more dirty names. I knew that I could say anything I liked as the Poles did not understand any German and the Germans did not understand any Polish. We went back and he took with him a machine gun and started shouting and screaming at them to lay down on the floor. He pointed the machine gun at them and they started begging me to tell him that he can have anything he wants as long as he does not shoot them. I translated the Polish into German the way it suited me. After that I had no trouble from them, they gave me whatever I wanted as I had saved their lives. I was not short of food, I used to bring back something whenever I went for the water and had enough for my friends as well.

The farm had an orchard of apples, pears even grapes which I had not seen for many years, so to me this was luxury. After Sulejaw we were transported to Chenstochaw, again in cattle trucks, I worked in an ammunition factory, there I was lucky again. The Jewish police in the camp knew me from Plaszow so I had it very easy. One day I was standing and talking to one of the policeman when the chief engineer of the whole plant came over and told him that from now on I had to report to him every morning in his office at 8 am. That became another good job for me. So you can see luck was all you needed to survive the bad times.

After a few months we were again transported in cattle trucks to Buchenwald. As we arrived there my luck had changed, they had taken everything away from me, my clothes and my boots, they gave me a prison uniform (the striped ones). This was in January 1945 it was a very cold winter and we had to stand in the freezing cold in high snow for 3-4 hours and wait for the Commandant to come and count us and if he made a mistake or someone was missing because he had died during the night, we could have stood on the Apel-Platz for 6-7 hours, that lasted about 5 weeks. After I was

transported by lorries to another camp called Reimtsdorf. This was a very big refinery and it was bombed by the American's, English and Russians. We had to work very hard there with very little food, they wanted us to rebuild it as they needed the oil for the War Machines. Every time we repaired the factory and they lit the ovens the chimneys started smoking the following day it was smashed down again. One day we all ran for cover the bombs were falling and we were hiding in a very deep ditch, some of the bombs did not explode, so again I was lucky. The soft earth from the bombs came up and it covered me up to my neck. I could only move my head watching the planes throwing the bombs out of them. I would say on that particular raid there must have been at least 200 planes. When the raid was finished, some of the inmates dug me out then we found out that about 100 were missing which were buried alive in the sand.

About late March, again we were put in to little trucks, we traveled for about 2-3 days. We came to Marienbad station, our train was bombed and machine gunned by the Russian Air Force, about 1000 were killed. Amongst the dead I saw some German guards also dead. I ran into the station where the station master lived as there was a bunker built there. There was alot of food stored there. It was very dark as there was a black out, the Germans were frightened because they could hear the grenades. I was stuffing myself with food and was not taking any notice of the grenades or machine guns. I was more interested in stuffing myself up with tins of meat and beans and whatever else I could, but when I came out with food stuffed in my pockets the inmates noticed and they jumped me and threw me onto the ground. They cut my coat from the back as I was laying on the ground and took most of my food away. I was lucky they did not cut my body as well. the German guards had stopped them but by then I had very little left. Then they rounded us up again and started marching by foot with no food or water, all the time the inmates were being shot as they could not walk fast enough or had no more energy to walk, so they stopped and the guards shot them. We stopped most of the nights in barns in some villages. From Germany over the Sudetan land in to Checzosiavakia. On one occasion when we stopped over night they gave us bread. 1 loaf of bread to share out between 8 people. While they were cutting it into 8 pieces one of them took 2 pieces and I had none. I was not very happy about it, so I jumped on the back of the policeman and pinched a whole bread and immediately started eating the bread. I did not get a chance to swallow a piece when he came for me and started kicking and beating me with his

trucheon till it broke. Then the German guard came in and he started kicking me and beating me with his riffle butt (it wasn't until 1984 that I found out that my nose had been shattered in the attack, at which time I had it repaired). They left me unconscious in a pool of blood and they left me for dead. In the morning I woke up and I was soaked in blood and my friend Pomeranc helped to stand on my feet and I carried on marching. A few days later I was on my last legs, a man approached me and asked me if I want to ask the German guard to give me a piece of bread for his golden teeth. I had nothing to loose anymore, so I approached him and he said yes, I gave him the golden teeth and he gave me 4 slices of bread, so I had 2 and I gave him 2 pieces, he was very pleased with the transaction, and so was I.

On another occasion, I suddenly noticed a boy a little bigger than me run to the verge of the road, he picked up something. I went over to him and asked for a piece. It was a beetroot. He told me to buzz off, I told him if he does not give me a piece I will tell the others and they will take it all away from him, and cut him up to pieces, because we were all starving by then, so he gave me a small piece. When I ate it up in one second, I went back for more and he reluctantly gave me another piece. This boy is today my best friend. His name is Harry Spiro.

On another occasion on the "death march" as it became known, I ran over to the verge of the road as I saw something. I picked it up, it was a raw potato. The guard thought I was running away and he took a shot at me as I was bending down. He hit the back of my hand with a bullet. He only grazed the top of it, the mark on my hand is still visible.

We marched for about 3 weeks. We started in Rehnsdorf with about 3000, we arrived in Theresienstradt with only 600 survivors. According to the great historian Sir Martin Gilbert (with whom I cannot argue with !!!) I am sure that he knows better than me and according to him we left Rehinsdorf with 2775 and only 75 survived. After a few days in Theresienstradt I got ill with typhoid and I was in a very bad way, I remember they gave us a small piece of bread in the morning with a black coffee and I could not eat or drink it. I had a very high temperature, we were 10 in one room. In 3 days I accumulated 3 pieces of bread and kept it under my head. As I did not sleep I heard some of the boys saying let's steal the bread from Balsam, he will not need it anymore as he is going to die any minute.

But again I had a very good friend of mine who was laying next to me and he shouted out to them if anyone dares to come near me, he will cut them up with the knife he was holding in his hands, and of course it was Pomeranc to my rescue again. I was ill until the last day of the war, on the 8th May 1945. The Russian army walked into the camp and liberated us and it was also the end of World War 2. Ironically I probably would not have survived much longer from the typhoid.

About 4 weeks after the war my friend Pomeranc and I decided to go back to Poland to look for some living relatives and at the same time to find the treasure that I had hidden when I was in Plaszow camp. When we arrived in Prague we had a whole day to ^{enjoy} space because the train for Poland was not leaving till 10 p.m. and whilst we were there we met up with a lot of other survivors who were also looking around the town and waiting to go back to Poland. At about 7 o'clock my friend Pomeranc and I went to the station because we heard that the trains were getting packed with survivors wanting to return to Poland. While at the other station we met some Jews who had just returned from Poland. We told them that we were waiting to go back home. They said that we must be mad to want to go back as they were still killing the Jews in Poland. We could not believe it and asked who was killing the Jews now. They told us the Poles were doing what the Germans could not manage and that they were lucky to come out alive from Poland. We got frightened, we were only 15 years old at the time, so we returned to Theresinstradt and warned the other boys not to go back because it was dangerous in Poland.

I stayed in Theresinstradt till the 14th August when the British government gave permission for 300 children up to the age of 16 to leave to go to England. They sent planes for us, they were Lancaster Bombers, we had to sit on the floor. The captain and crew were very good to us they gave us chocolates. Also they took us in to the cockpit. I remember sitting in the nose of the plane, they showed me the instruments, it was very fascinating. When we arrived in Carlisle buses were waiting for us to take us to Windermere where we got a welcome reception. Everybody was very nice to us. They had prepared a single room for each of us. In the room was a bed, wardrobe, dressing table, pajamas, a tooth brush, soap, towel and some slippers. We were there for about 4 months and we had been looked after extremely well. Then we were made up into groups of 30 and sent to different hostels. Some of

the boys were religious so they were sent to Yeshivas. Most of us were not religious and I was sent to Loughton, Essex. Our hostel became the most popular from all the others, the housekeeper (the Madrachim) who looked after us became very proud to what they had achieved they wanted us to grow up to be good citizens. In 1947 most of us wanted to go to Palestine to fight for independence, most of my friends were accepted, they passed the medical, however I did not pass because I had a bad foot and had to have an operation which I had in the St Mary's Hospital, Paddington. Most of my friends came back after 9 months.

I had been living in England for 2 years when I discovered I had cousins living in London. They were very excited that I was the only cousin from their entire family that survived the Holocaust. They were very good to me and after a while they persuaded me to come and work for them in their trouser factory. I am happy to say I am still close with them today. After 2 years I went into business with two friends of mine, Harry Spiro and Johnny Fox. We were making suits to measure and selling ready made ones as well. After about 1 year Johnny got married and decided to go to live in America. So we paid him off his share. After a while Harry got married and then I got married and it was not enough for 2 families to live on, so we decided to go our separate ways. Harry paid me out and kept the business for himself, he is still there today. I opened a menswear shop in Watford, after a while I opened another one in Watford. Then I branched out and bought 2 more shops in the Edgware Road 1 shop in Hammersmith, 3 shops in Oxford Street, 1 shop in Regents Street, 1 shop in Thyer Street, 1 Shop in Kilburn and 1 in Kennsington. I had my sons with me in the business. To day as I am writing my life story I have only 1 shop left in Kilburn, which is enough for me. My sons now work in different businesses, Stephen in advertising and Colin in the music business.

I am happily married to Pauline. My sons are very happily married too, my oldest son Stephen to Rochelle and he has 3 lovely children, 1 girl and 2 boys, Natalie is 12 years old, Jason is 10 years old and Adam is 6 years old. Colin my youngest son, has been married to Amanda for 6 months and they are expecting their first child in January 1996.

This story is dedicated to my mother Adeal, my sister Fuitel and my brothers Sanie and Joseph who perished at the hands of the Natzis.