

My name is Kopel Kandelcukier (now Kendall). I was born on 7th March 1928 in Bialobzgi Poland. It was a pretty little market town with a population taking in the neighbouring villages of roughly 9000 people, of which 2500 were Jewish. I lived with my Father, Mother, two sisters and a much older adopted brother in a three roomed flat behind my Fathers ironmongery business which was on the main street. From the age of 6 till 7 I went to a school for young Jewish children and then went on to a catholic run state school which was the only one in our town where you were expected to go 6 days a week but Jewish children were exempt on Saturday. In order to not fall behind with my work a gentile friend, the son of the local magistrate helped me out as the most important subjects such as Maths, Chemistry and Polish etc were taught on a Saturday.

I attended school from 8am to 2pm and then I went to chader in the late afternoon. I was quite a good scholar and enjoyed learning very much. I also had a very good high standard of Jewish Education. On a Saturday my Father was very proud of me when I recited the weekly parsha by heart with the trop (notes). My father was a chasid and spent a lot of time studying the Talmud, and of course expected me to at least become a Rabbi.

My mother although was wearing a scheitel (wig) and run a strictly Kosher home was a modern type of woman, highly educated and from the Koper family who owned the local complex (power station, flour mill, saw mill) and only wanted me to do well and be happy. From an early age I was very good at drawing. How I envied my eldest sister, she was very beautiful and very clever, top of her class and left her school with honours. As there wasn't any higher education in our town she was sent to Holland to further her education. Unfortunately she came home in July for the summer holidays and couldn't get out again. My younger sister was just a happy normal little girl.

My adopted brother was left with the Koper family when his mother died and when my parents married he came to live with us. In later years he worked for my Father as a book-keeper. He was a hot Zionest and was hoping to get to Israel, he and his friends

used to go to Hachszero in preparation to emigrate to Israel like his Uncle in 1936. He was also a great chess champion and I looked up to him. He got married to a local girl in 1938.

I had a lot of friends but we did not mix with the gentiles, among ourselves we played football and all kinds of games.

Although small in numbers it was a vibrant Jewish community, we had a large synagogue and three shtibles. My Father would go to synagogue twice a day and sometimes took me with him. We had a very good Chasen and the Choir practice was held in our flat as we could accommodate them all. I was in the choir from the age of ten.

There was a large forest which stretched for miles about 20 minutes walk from our town, and a few Jewish families would go on a Sunday for picnics and we kids would play games and pick mushrooms and berries.

Wednesday was market day in our town, where all the neighbouring farmers came to sell their produce including live cattle chickens and geese etc. It was the busiest day for our business as my father's business supplied the farmers with their needs and we all had to help out. It was a very colourful scene buzzing with excitement.

In the late 1930s I noticed young men with black armbands in the town (like the national front in England) with placards saying don't buy from Jews.

Around Christmas and Easter was the worst time for us Jewish people. They walked the streets in procession following the cross and we had to stay indoors to avoid unnecessary trouble, although there was some friction between Jews and Christians we held our own.

My father was a very prominent member of the Jewish community and we enjoyed a good standard of living for those times, but alas that all came to an end in 1939 towards the outbreak of

war. We listened to Hitlers speeches on how he was going to destroy the Jews. It put fear into our livces although we didn't realise to what extent.

War broke out on Friday 1st September 1939 and in a matter of hours the newly built bridge in our town was destroyed by bombers. A caravan of Gypsies was passing through the town, I will never forget the day the planes machine gunned the column. There were dead bodies and horses strewn about the road, that was a fortaste of what was to come.

A couple of days later with our next door neighbours with horse and cart we went about 10km to a distant relative who had a small farm in Wiszmiczice. My father stayed behind to mind the business. After two weeks things had quietened down so we returned home.

Lots of German transports went through our town, we even did some business with them selling cookies and hard boiled eggs my mother had made. They were quite impressed with us boys as they thought we were speaking German, little did they know it was Yiddish. The Gentile boys were envious as they got beatings for not understanding, that caused more anti-semitism. For a little while life seemed not to be too bad as business still continued although school for Jewish children stopped. SS groups on passing through the village would round up some Jews and they would disappear. They demanded money and jewellery, and we had to give it to them as their was no one to complain to.

In the early 1940s Gendarmeris (German Authority) set up office in the village. That is when the trouble really started. All the Jews regardless of age had to wear the yellow armband the star of David. Ghetto was made and Jewish people put in half of the town, although some Poles still remained. The other half was completely free of Jews. We lost our business and nearly all our home as we all had to accomodate the other families who's homes had been taken away. Terrible demands were made on the Jewish people such as money, more jewellery

pots and pans all to help the German war effort. There was also a curfew from 8pm. Food by now was very scarce. Food was on ration but only for people who worked for the Germans such as in the forest and electric company and state farms run by the Germans. The young strong men in the town were singled out taken away and never seen again. My father disappeared in late 1940. The only way we could survive was to keep selling things to our Polish neighbours for food. The overcrowding and starvation caused sickness and Typhus. With lack of medication many died. There was also a Polish Police Station where the commandant had two sons who befriended me and lived quite close and helped my family and I to survive. The only way to get food was to creep out of the Ghetto and get to the nearest village and barter for food. A few of us young boys risked our lives to do this, coming back some Poles would point us out to Germans that we were Jews in return for a bottle of Whisky and cigarettes. I was always extremely lucky as my appearance was like an Aryan. By the end of 1941 a proper Ghetto was made and more and more Jews from outlying villages were brought in. More sickness and starvation was at its peak and it was only a matter of time before the deportations began. Summer 1942 brought in the armoured cars and hundreds of Germans surrounded our little town and gave us 5 minutes to run to the cattle market and shooting indiscriminately into the running Jews. We were stumbling over dead or dying bodies to get to the cattle market. On arriving we were amazed that my Mother and sisters were alive. There was pandemonium there, no one knew what was going to happen. Suddenly I was hit over the head by my friendly local policeman who knew me and pulled me away from my Mother and Sisters and pushed me into a marching column picked to work. For the next two weeks I worked with a group of about 60 men for the German electric company electrifying the power lines. The policeman came and took me back to our Police station where I could work for them. Also in the town were Jewish craftsmen selected for working for the Germans. I was told that my Mother and Sisters were marched to the nearest station and on to Treblinka. (I didn't have the slightest idea what Treblinka was then) Late 1942 all the remaining Jewish workers were put on trucks and told we were going to be given work and

food and as a young boy of 14 I was looking forward to it. We arrived at SKARZYSKO KAMIENNA camp with the big gates saying in German "work makes you free". We noticed the sentrys with search lights sweeping round the barbed wire fencing and observation posts. As we got out of our trucks we saw men in peculiar clothing and shaved heads and a KL painted on their backs and were quickly told "you are 16 and a carpenter". Skarzysko Kamienna was a concentration camp and labour camp. The living conditions were atrocious as the camp was not really ready for the amount of inmates they were bringing in. I was billeted in a huge building with bunk beds at least 14 high. Thousands of us crowded in without any form of bedding and no sanitation. I noticed straight away it was better to be on the top bunks as the stench in the lower bunks were full of excrement and urine. The conditions in the camp were intolerable and we were given very little food. I was detailed to work in an ammunitions factory Hasag. The apel platz was 6am, counted numerous times and marched to work a few km away. We were given a soup twice a day with really nothing substantial in it. In the camp we were watched over by Kapo's who were as bad as the Nazis and sometimes even worse. I then realised that we all lost our right to life as human beings and we had nobody to complain to. By winter 1943 the barracks were completed and thousands more came in, some even from the Warsaw Ghetto. Conditions even worsened, then a new commandant took over the running by the name of Killisman (the hunch back). He was a brutal killer, he had 2 alsation dogs that he let out to kill Jews. He himself would shoot people at very close range with his revolver for no reason. We heard rumours in the camp of people being gassed and put in crematoriums. I myself could not understand why or believe. Every so often there were selections where we would be lined up and then have to pass by tables with SS sitting looking at us partially clothed and the finger would point in either direction. I got away with it twice but on the third time my number came up. The following morning when my number was called out I didn't respond and lucky for me I got away with it. The rest were taken away and never seen again.

Typhoid was rampant in the camp by now and thousands were dying every day. I contracted it, 12 days high fever and on the 13 you either lived or died. The lady who looked after the so called hospital barrack hid me away every time they came to take the sick and dead away to be disposed of. I lost all my hair and had to learn to walk again. (I feel in my second life I came back like a Gorilla smothered in hair.) The longer I stayed in the camp the more street wise I became. I was promoted to a sweeper, a higher status and that gave me time to help deliver the soup and therefore scrounge round the kitchen where I found a few ^cstraps. ~~///~~

By then I had met some of the boys who came with me to England after the war. I became quite well known in the camp as being the dirtiest black as I launched a fire company comprising of 4 bricks and a bit of wire netting and wood I smuggled in everyday. To use my fire they had to give me a little something of what they were cooking. In the camp we started putting on shows to pass the time and I became part of it.

Things changed yet again at the beginning of 1944. Life was becoming even harder, it was a bitter winter with poor clothing and a poor diet many couldn't take the cold and starvation ^{almost} and gave up the will to live. Being young I was still optimistic to survive and this kept me going. The early summer of 1944 I was put on a transport to Buckenwald concentration camp with 2 other boys I knew, Benny Newton and S Liberman now Rabbi Liberman. After waiting for 8 or 9 hours with thousands more inmates the gates opened with the usual words "Arbeit Macht Frei" a scene that will stay with me for the rest of my life. As we marched in about 8 abreast a Gypsy band about 80 strong dressed in white playing beautiful music on violins. We thought we were walking into paradise.

We were showered and disinfected (this we thought would kill us especially the hissing noise of the shower). Needless to say it didn't. We were issued with the stripe uniform and wooden cloggs which killed your feet. We were then marched to our barrack. The camp was run initially by the communists, the

leader was called Giner Myer. He asked us to point out the bad Kapo's from the previous camp then told us to take revenge and beat them to death. I personally couldn't do it. We learned that Buckenwald was bombed earlier that year and inmates had to clear up the place. It was an enormous camp with its own factories, torture chamber and crematorium.

Inmates in the Know told us that the Germans were losing the war and that really gave me hope of surviving. Food was a little more plentiful for me, I was detailed with others from our camp to work in the Quarry. I couldn't understand this as there was no end product as men were lined up against each other carrying rocks up and down racing against each other and being beaten by Kapo's and SS men. I was lucky as I only looked after tools. I learnt that we were billeted in the punishment camp. After a few weeks I was transferred to the Yugends block. There life was much better for me, food was better and we were allowed to even play games such as football.

In September 1944 I was selected to go to Schlieben. We were put onto transports to go to Schlieben in Germany. Schlieben was a subsidiary of Hiasag, an armament factory. Here yet again I was asked how old I was and I said I was 16½ years old and a carpenter. The camp again wasn't ready. We were billeted in make shift barracks without any form of bedding etc. then later transferred to the main camp where conditions were much better. Two inmates per bed, given blankets and fresh striped uniforms. There were two twelve hour shifts and all the time whilst I was there I only met up with my bed partner once. The food was a little better, soup twice a day and a bit of bread with margarine and jam every second day. I was detailed to work in the factory where we produced the Pantzerfaust anti tank gun. To my misfortune I was detailed to the worst department (giseria) where the chemicals were put through various procedures which resembled a liquid mustard then funnelled through to the war head of the shell to solidify. My job was to knock off the funnel when this process had hardened so that the remains could be used again. Unfortunately being exposed to these poisonous gasses and not wearing protective clothing

we turned yellow and everything tasted bitter. It affected a lot of inmates. On night shift we were quite often called out to put out forest fires. We were marched everyday a few KM's from our camp after appel 6am to the factory. On the way we had to sing German songs that they made us learn in the barracks after we had done night shift by the Kopols which happened to be German with the green triangle some were convicted killers. Having a good voice I marched in the front, for that I got a little extra food. Later that year a group of new inmates arrived from Pietsdokow via Buchenwald to our camp among them being our own Ben Helfgott, to our amagement we discovered that there were still other Jews alive as by then we thought we were the only ones still alive. Ben tells me he was shocked when he saw the condition I was in, but of course you dont see this in yourself. Also when he saw inmates fighting over a little bit of soup that had been spilled onto the floor he could not believe it.

I was getting a lot weaker by now and my will to survive not so strong. One morning at the appel platzx, covered in boils I refused to stand up. The Lager Furer happened to be a brutal young blond SS leader, he asked me when he was about to kill me "why didnt I stand up" I said I had had enough, I was a young boy working with the older men in the Gishera and I should be with the young ones in the Kinder-Pack room. On hearing this he nearly killed the Kapol and told him to immediately transfer me to work with the young inmates.

The Kinder-Pack room was situated in a big warm barrack working with German women doing voluntary war work. We worked along side them putting detonators in little boxes. Some of the women showed kindness to us and when possible gave us a little food. My job was to take the filled boxes away in a wheelbarrow to another storx room. Also twice a day it was my duty to fetch the hot coffee from the kitchen quite a walk away. Whilst waiting to fill the containers with coffee I had a chance to see what I could find edible, like carrots, potatoes, onions anything. I'm sure the ladies knew what I was doing but said nothing. I would bring it back and share it with some of my

friends. I was gaining back my strength again and becoming more optimistic of surviving, hearing occasionally that the war was not going at all well for Germany as we saw hundreds of Allied planes flying over and hearing the sirens making the Germans go to the shelters. The air raids brought joy to our ears and that become quite frequent we cheered and our spirits were lifted.

Late December 1944 there was sabotage and the whole factory was blown up and many inmates were killed. The factory was in a forest~~so~~ that even the forest was on fire. We ran away and it took the Germans sometime to round us up, unfortunately we had nowhere really safe to run to.

In order to rebuild the factory they brought a few hundred Hitler Ugend to speed up the work. They were cruel and inhuman, our daily life became more of a misery because of the harassment by these young thugs.

There was a new Jewish group of Hungarians, strong men brought in who served with the German transport command. At first they were showing how well they could work while we were dodging work. They got extra food for it but after a few weeks with us they started weakening but were expected to still do the same amount of work for less food. As they couldn't keep this up some were even beaten to death. I had developed a sixth sense to be in the right place at the right time and one day was rewarded with a packet of tobacco for being a good worker, which later saved my life and some of my friends later on.

Not all of us helped to rebuild the factory, some were detailed to work in the forest near the plant chopping down trees for wood etc., which wasn't very hard work. We had time to look around, one day I found a store room filled with dried mashed instant potatoes. Word got around very quickly, we went in and managed to get some out. As it was winter there were some fires for the guards so we made potato cakes and even the German guards were not too shy to have some.

There was a lot of compassion and comradeship among us boys, we tried to be cheerful and have aspirations of being free once more.

Late February 1945 again selection we were put on wagon trains, destination unknown. There were 2 very old guards in one half of our wagon and about 35-40 inmates shared the other half. There was barely enough room to stand up. There was a fire with a pipe to the top in the middle which was kept going day and night. We were 3 young friends; Yan Goldburger now Rabbi Liberman and myself and we commanded a little corner which we made our own and at night I made sure that we took our tops off and killed all our lice, then snuggled up as best we could to sleep under our blankets which we had taken with us. The journey should have taken approx 8 hours but it took about 18 to 20 days instead. I can only give a brief account of it as it could be a book on its own. There was no official food, we were constantly bombed by the allies, any train movement of course the allies would bomb not knowing what our train contained. Each time the lines and engine were knocked out the engine was replaced and rerouted to be bombed again. This is where tobacco came in and helped to save our three lives as the old Germans needed a smoke (I would not have parted with it, they would have to have killed my first). I bargained with them for some food each time the train stopped etc. The old German would take me with him to try and find some food from a village and wherever we would, we had a bucket and water so we would manage to cook a little food when ever we could. When the tobacco ran out I still had the empty packet so dried some leaves and put them back into the packet for more bargaining, they didn't even know the difference but that managed to keep us alive. One day when the train was stopped we got potatoes with water we cooked on the fire but with no salt one of the old Germans had saccharin so exchanged again and had sweet potatoes.

On one bombing raid we pulled into Kemnitz railway sidings for a day and a night we were stuck there. An unforgettable night

the allied planes bombed continuously, the skies were lit up for miles around it seemed to last forever but it gave us hope.

We started our journey again into the unknown but this time we put our stripped uniforms on top of the train to show the allies what it contained, only prisoners. The guards were quite willing to trade these uniforms for ours.

Against all odds we arrived in Theresienstadt. I do not know how many really survived this journey. On entering the camp the first thing I noticed were men and women who resembled human beings. We were billeted in the old Czech army barracks. I was picked for work, first in the green houses where there were plenty of vegetables and then to the milk dairy. The red cross came and brought food parcels and for me food became more plentiful.

I struck up a good friendship with Abby Wartman who lives in Canada now, he was in the bunk next to me. On the morning of the 8th May 1945 we heard a big commotion early in the morning. We ran to the gates, the guards had gone, we ran outside and met our Russian liberators. I jumped on a jeep, an officer of the Russian Army greeted me with the words "Shalom" and gave me chocolate and cigarettes and some food. Then he said he must move on. The Russians were really good to us, they gave us three days to do what we liked, they told us they were leading through some hundred thousand prisoners of war a few KM from our camp and if we wanted to take some revenge we could, some did.

After this the whole camp was put into quarantine as typhoid was rampant in the camp. The Russians brought in many Doctors and Nurses to deal with the outbreak and many of them died as well.

Abby and myself managed to get out of the camp, we found a horse and cart, as many of the German inhabitants fled from there homes leaving everything behind. We went in and helped ourselves, we got back to camp and shared all the food we had found.

Suddenly we had everything, there was great jubilation about our survival but tinged with great sadness as the realisation that we had all lost our families, and what was to become of us.

With a few people from my home town that I had met briefly in Theresienstadt we went back to Poland just in case there were any survivors from our families. The Poles were very hostile to us and I was glad to get back to the safety of Theresienstadt. After the repatriation of the survivors to their own countries they found that there were a number of young boys and girls without parents with nowhere to go. A Jewish agency told us we were going to go to England. We were taken to Prague and put into a large house and well looked after for a few weeks.

On the 14th August 1945 we arrived in Carlisle and on to Windermere. There were a few hundred of us. We were well looked

after by German speaking refugees as we couldn't speak any English. After a crash course of basic English we were more able to mix with the local people around us. Although food in England was still on rations, for us there were special provisions. Soon the press and media started taking an interest in us. I remember the Polish airforce whose base was near also paid us a visit. We were taken on many outings round the beautiful country side of the Lake District. We had free bus rides into town and the local cinema was also free for us. We were taken into Kendal to be fitted out with clothes from Burtons (who later became my competitors). I think I took my surname from here. We had a marvellous time here, we played football, table tennis and all other sports.

After a few months we were separated into different hostels. Until my hostel was ready I was sent to a Kibutz in Newport Pagnell for a few months.

The Habonim Hostel in Loughton under the leadership of *Harry Harry* Goldberg a great Zionest whos idea was for us to go to Israel. There were about 35 boys and a few girls and teachers were brought in to help us with our education. Young English Jewish boys and girls from the Habonim movement came most friday nights and we had a lot of fun learning hebrew songs talking about palastine and life in general.

I went to Walthamstow Poly to learn engineering for a while but it wasn't the right engineering for me.

From Loughton I moved to Belsize Park where Primrose Jewish Young club was started under Yogi Mayer, he had a great influence and guidance over me. He encouraged all sports including ballroom dancing which I loved. We had the finest instructors for everything, we also had a current affairs, music and drama. I fancied myself as a great actor.

In 1948 I left the hostel with two other boys found private lodgings helped by the committee I tried various jobs which I did not take to, then I was recommended to try tailoring. I was lucky to be sent to a well known tailoring establishment called Spiro Brothers in Baker Street. They were most generous and helpful to me, they gave me one day off a week to go to college to learn cutting and design. Later I went to evening classes to Regent Poly and St Martins School of Art.

I was a great lover of all sports and played football at Primose Club and later on other Jewish clubs. By then Primrose Club moved to Finchley Road where we all continued to go when ever possible.

In 1955 I met a young lady called Vivienne and we married in January 1956, we had three children, 2 boys and a girl. *And at the moment 3 grandchildren also 2 boys and a girl* I started my own business in August 1956 called Zenith Tailors on Finchley Road making clothes for the rich and famous. It's 40 years next year and I will retire next September.

I was a member of the 45 aid society from its beginning and

was one of its chairpersons for 2 years. I am involved in passing on my experiences of the holocaust to schools and universities and whenever required elsewhere.

I belong to Belsize Square Synagogue and have been on the board for many years. I was a youth coordinator for our synagogue running 3 youth clubs for 8 years.

I also joined the Council for Christians & Jews and am on the committee for the Hampstead branch and in June 1995 I was presented to his Majesty the Duke of Edinburgh at St James for my work for the CCJ.

Many things have happened to me in the last few years and I feel somebody up there must like me. I have enclosed an article by Tim Sebastien that was in the Mail on Sunday a few months ago.

After I have retired next year I have many things I would love to do such as social work and more time to paint.