

A Life Changing Experience

by Avery Chen

As a child, I led a simple life. I was born in 1920, in Ulanow, Poland, to a family of four. At the age of 3, I began to attend a religious school, where I learned more about my Jewish religion and began following the different traditions, such as Yom Kippur. Once I reached the age of 7, my parents signed me up to attend secondary school.

When I was in my high school years, my parents brought news to me and my siblings. "Listen up, children. People have heard rumors about Germany's plans to invade Poland. In preparation for their arrival at our town, we must pack up our belongings," they pronounced. However, I never got to finish packing my possessions. Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and mandated every home to supply male laborers for their army. Consequently, I was forced into labor. It was extremely difficult to say goodbye to my family, knowing that I might never see them again.

"Farewell, family. Stay strong in the war," I sighed to my family.

"Farewell, Herschel, good luck," they replied hopefully.

Working in the army was arduous, but it was nothing compared to Janow Lubelski, a labor camp I was deported to later. I was forced to work long hours building nuclear weapons for the Germans. Every day, I would receive several unprovoked blows to the head for working too slow. At night, I would cry myself to sleep, as this seemed to be continuing indefinitely.

At the labor camp, food was scarce and we prisoners were treated brutally. However, my sister Sabina made a significant change to this ordeal by sneaking in bread and fruit through the fence for me. Additionally, I made a friend named Edek, and we connected through sharing our backgrounds.

One day, out of the blue, a German officer approached me with a stern face. At first, I was frightened because the presence of the Nazis usually meant bad news. I trembled as he spoke, "Your sister has freed you. You can leave the camp and go on your way." I was taken aback and it took me a moment to process what he said. I was allowed to leave and took my first step into the world I had forgotten was real. I couldn't help the tears that flowed.

Eventually I was back with my family, who had moved into a friend's house to stay. We reunited by sharing what we had gone through the last couple of years. As we recollected these terrible times, the whole family celebrated with a huge feast. I haven't eaten real food in so long that every bite seemed to revitalize my body.

With the war coming to an end, our family decided to move back to our house. We thanked our friends for letting us stay, and settled back at our home, picking up from where we left off. All the childhood memories came flooding back, and I couldn't be happier to be home again.