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-CONTENTS-

This the story of Henrik Leman from about 1939 to 1945. He was a remarkable man who did not let the new system destroy him. He was always looking for something better for those around him. Mr. Leman saved a few lives and with a little luck his own.

09:04:00 H.L. wants to give credit to Dr. Samuel Getz for helping him to be able to tell this story. It is important to H.L. that this reach the children and the future.

09:05:00 It is unusual for a man like me (H.L. will be referred to in the first person) to go back into history when I can now enjoy life. But this tragedy should never be repeated, so I will do my best.

09:06:00 I have told this story to my son, what happened to our family. In '39, I was 20 years old, just about to go to the university.

09:07:00 But in '39, Poland was invaded from the East and the West. Like two thieves coming into a bank. The Nazis and the Russians.

09:08:00 "Did your family know there was something about to happen. Did they make any preparations?" (Quotes contain interviewer's questions and statements) No, people didn't think about getting out. War is dangerous, but people accept that. Nobody was prepared for this.

09:09:00 Begins to introduce family.

09:10:00 We were a typical middle family. My father was a shoe repairman. My mother was from Warsaw. Both were from prominent families. There were 3 sons.

09:11:00 The oldest son lived in Germany until '34 or '35, then he emigrated to the U.S.A. He was a scientist, an assistant to Einstein. Very prominent.

09:12:00 My other brother, Otto, was drafted the night the war broke out. He was sent to the Hungarian border. He was in Hungary for 5 years. A Jewish soldier in a Polish Army.

09:13:00 We were all 10 years apart. I was in Warsaw, and because of my driver's license was drafted as well.

09:14:00 I was on my way to the Russian border. It was night because of the German Airplanes. I saw the Red Army march in and overtake us. They let everyone who wanted to go go. Others could go to the POW camp.

09:15:00 The soldiers were the epitome of propaganda. They really believed that they were coming to liberate us. They liberated us from food and goods.

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09:17:00 My friends and I wanted to register in Levouffe(?) University. We stayed there for days. There was no food. But a lot of propaganda - - everything would be better later. This nothing new, they still have their 5 year plans.

09:18:00 "At this point did you know something was wrong?" No, we were just observing how disorganized everything was. I wasn't even worried about my family.

09:19:00 We heard that Warsaw was fighting, but in the end they had to give up. Russia was always an open option. Our lives would have been different had we gone, most of them survived the war.

09:20:00 I wanted to go back home, to what was no called Germany. It was "occupied Poland." I wanted to see my parents and my girlfriend.

09:21:00 I was relieved upon my return home that my house was not destroyed. However, my mother and father were ill. A cousin off mine was there and was taking care of the house.

09:22:00 The next day my mother made a huge breakfast. There was a knock at the door, the German soldiers wanted rugs. I couldn't remember the words that they were using even though I had learned German in grade two.

09:23:00 This was my first contact with the Nazis.

09:24:00 I realized right then that I must resist as much as possible. My mother gave me an bracelet and told me I must register. I did not. I was a typical Pole in both language and appearance.

09:25:00 This is one of the things that helped me to survive.

09:26:00 The Ghetto was then proclaimed in Warsaw. The Jews outside were supposed to move in 1,500 blocks. 1000 acres of land. 500,000 Jews.

09:27:00 "Did you want to go?" We had to go, it was official. Everyone had to go.

09:28:00 "Was it hard to decide what to take?" Na, all the Jewish books. I had two friends who helped us. I did it for mother, I wouldn't have taken any. She was doing it for my older brother, the scientist.

09:29:00 He used to be a Yashiva Bukka (?). We were in the Ghetto. To talk about life in the ghetto is like talking about life in a horror movie.

09:30:00 Like in Ben-Hur -- the isolation of the wife and daughter -- was the Ghetto. 300 people a day would die. "How did this effect your father?" My father died. He just couldn't get with it.

09:31:00 I was the lucky one. To take him out, to bury him. I was lucky to bury my mother too. I had them at their last moment, before the cattle train.

09:32:00 Life in the Ghetto is unbelievable. What can happen to people. An example is in any book. The stories are true.

09:33:00 Each of us has a built in character, a will. You are this kind of person. In The Dairy of Anne Frank the uncle steals bread.

09:34:00 The nice man in normal times was a good man. He could talk about the morals of life during a party. This is the uncle who steals bread. "You mentioned saving your niece." I was hoping not to talk about myself.

00:35:00 I had a niece. Everyday I was outside the Ghetto. The 8ft. wall meant nothing to me. I could jump. The things that would happen if I got caught I just didn't think about.

00:36:00 So, I could do things. I took her out. She was nine. The police caught us.

00:37:00 Well, he wanted money. This was just before the big action in '43 to liquidate the rest of us.

00:38:00 It was cold. I jumped in a horse and buggy and went to take her to an apartment. I had organized, for money, a place for her to stay with her mother.

00:39:00 On the way we were stopped again, this time by German guards.

00:40:00 She looked Jewish, so I hid her under a blanket. I then pretended like I was very drunk. I told them to get away, like I was crazy.

00:41:00 They left and we succeeded. I got her to the house at five in the morning.

00:42:00 "You had good relations with all your Polish friends? Any anti-semitism?" No, I had a strong reputation. The Poles treated me as one of theirs.

00:43:00 Many connections came through business. They gave me a hand.

09:44:00 A man would help me to get false papers.

09:45:00 Through these friends I got very involved with the underground. It was now that I lost my dearest friend and love: the girl who I had come back for.

09:46:00 I used to take her out, through the sewers. This is before the uprising.

09:47:00 We had a hiding place, the attic in his business.

09:48:00 I berried her. I wandered around the streets after this, I guess looking for Germans, to end it.

09:49:00 I remember finding myself in a house. The wife gave me some soup. It let me go on living.

09:50:00 "What was a day like in the Ghetto?" I never really thought of myself, mostly of friends and my family.

09:51:00 I brought a lot of food in so many people liked me. I was caught several times by the police and the Germans. It was a miracle.

09:52:00 One time I was caught by the SS and placed in a room. There were others in this room and we knew we were going to die. I gave a fake name, the name Berenbaum (honest) to the SS. I don't know why I used this name.

09:53:00 The SS-man came in and called out Berenbaum and another name. We went out and met the leader of the detachment. He was very drunk.

09:54:00 You two are free he said. Go and save people. They really let us go. The others were killed.

09:55:00 The one man ran off in one direction, and I in mine. I went back to my friends and there was already a candle lit in my memory.

09:56:00 Who is Berenbaum? Why am I here? I have no idea. But if you believe in a spirit...

09:57:00 I am alive by a miracle. My mother's spirit was always with me. I was always being stopped, even after the liquidation when there were no Jews around I would be stopped.

09:58:00 I had the guts and hutzpah of youth.

Tape Change.

10:06:00 "On the other side (of the wall) you were always on the run. Some Poles made their living from turning in people they knew. Someone must have recognized you and asked for a bribe."

10:07:00 One time my girl and I were stopped coming out of our hiding place.

10:08:00 But I was a fighter. I would scare the other person. People want to pick on the weak.

10:09:00 I was also very built. In fact, I worked out in a Polish gym, one of only two Jews. And I was young.

10:10:00 "How long before you joined with the Polish Partisan Group?" I had a friend who was in touch with a few people. I made a lot of friends in the lumber business.

10:11:00 One of them gave me his attic.

10:13:00 One day I was found out and taken as a POW to Germany for six months.

10:14:00 My papers said that I was Polish, and I was a good actor. They never suspected that I was Jewish. I played the tough common guy.

10:15:00 I could get food for everyone. Including stuff for the guards, so we had a good relationship. Like in Hogan's Heroes.

10:16:00 "What about prayer?" I would pray like a Pole. One day, though, a Polish priest came to our block. I just couldn't take communion.

10:17:00 "Did you ever dream about being found out?" No.

10:18:00 Everyone liked to go out with me. One day I was asked to go to a Nazi's house to bring a store of food up from his basement.

10:19:00 I went right to the kitchen and asked a little girl for food. She gave us food. Then I asked the Nazi for some cigarettes.

10:20:00 When he reached out with one cigarette I took the whole pack. This is what I was famous for -- hutzpah.

10:21:00 Now it was time to bring up the heavy stuff. "When did you tell your friends you were a Jew?" It was a few weeks before the liberation. I was organizing an escape.

10:22:00 I had to tell my best friend who I was. Near us was a camp of Polish girls.

10:23:00 There was a rumor that the men were getting sick with an STD. So the doctors were going to check everyone. This, of course, would be the end for me.

10:24:00 I wanted to leave something behind, to let everyone know that I had made it this far. So I told my friend to tell my brother in America that I made it this far.

10:25:00 It was natural to want to leave something behind. My name. But nothing happened, I had gone to the bathroom when the doctor paid their visit.

10:26:00 This man eventually met my sister and married her. He is now my brother.

10:27:00 After the liberation I and another man organized a camp for the newly released Poles.

10:28:00 "There are only two minutes left." I have told this story because it happened in normal times. It can happen again. Fortunately there are survivors to tell the story of what we accomplished.

10:29:00 We must learn to live together and do something for your neighbor, and your next one.  
.END.