

Adam Szymel

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Summary

Adam Szymel was born January 21, 1928 in the settlement of Berezowice, 27 kilometers from Novagrodek, the Capitol of that area in northeast Poland. It was a settlement of soldiers who were given land for fighting for Polish freedom after World War I. Adam's parents were Helena and Stanislaw Szymel and they had a daughter, Zofia, older than Adam, a daughter, Bugaslava, younger than Adam, and a son, Zbaniew born in 1932. His father had been drafted into the Austrian Army, fought with the Polish Army in Kiev and was wounded several times. For this, he was given 424 hectares of farming land but since he was not a farmer, they moved to Korelice which was five kilometers away. There Adam completed three grades of school and his father was the Mayor and practiced as a veterinarian as he obtained a certificate though never completed his degree. Adam helped his grandmother, who lived with them, walk to church where he served as an Altar Boy. Adam's family moved to Novagrodek where he completed 4th and 5th grade before the war started and his father had a wholesale butcher shop which his mother ran. His father warned him that if he was absent, Adam would have responsibility for the family. They spoke Polish, had contact with the Belorussia who spoke a Russian dialect and Adam studied German. Their house was built of logs and had no electricity, they had a barn for the horses as traveled using a horse-drawn carriage, and they employed three helpers. They obtained news from escaped Russians, from their radio and newspapers and from the father's travels. They knew about Hitler's actions but not Kristallnacht or actions to Jews. On September 2, 1939 his father was ordered to report to Zhest, the fortress on the river and returned ten days later as was put on standby due to his age. The Russians marched in on September 17th and some of the Jews greeted them and assisted in arresting priests, teachers and police. Their butcher shop was taken from them and his mother had to work there for the Russians. Immediately there were shortages of everything as the Russians sent the food to Russia and the Poles had to line up for available supplies. The Jews were hated by the Poles as they owned the businesses. Later they were deported to Siberia. His father was arrested and came home and Adam's mother suggested he go to the German side but he refused and was arrested that night and was never seen or heard from again. On February 10, 1941 the family were told to pack for deportation. Adam shows a photo from 1929 of his father, mother, grandmother, older sister and himself. The family walked with their neighbors to the cattle cars where they had to lay on platforms and traveled one week east to Moscow and two weeks north to Baranowice. Then they walked three days or sat on horse-drawn sleds and slept at a school at night. During the trip they had some bread and hot water. They arrived at Rzhavka, a logging camp which had five barracks for 30 to 40 workers in each. His mother worked in the logging camp by bringing water from the river and used her salary to buy food in the restaurant. When his sister turned sixteen, she worked in the nursery. Later parcels from Poland were a help. The one KGB spoke to them and there was school for those up to age sixteen. They picked mushrooms and berries in the summer. They could get a

pass to barter their belongings for food in the Russian village 20 kilometers away. They used a steam bath for cleansing themselves and their clothes as they had no soap. They had garden plots the second summer. When his mother hurt herself, Adam built a sled and went to the next village for potatoes. In June 1941 they got amnesty to travel through Russia. In January 1942, they took a cattle train towards the Polish Army in Kazakhstan and traveled for three months with many other Poles. They could not wash during this time. A priest gave them hope. They arrived in Bechistan, Kazakhstan and were placed in a Kolkhoz, a government farm which raised cotton. They lived with an Uzbek family for four months and left when they heard the Polish Army was 100 miles away in Karmena. They went with another family in an open truck and were happy to see the Quartermaster who they knew from home. They were fed and divided into camps according to sex and age. In August 1942 they took a train to a port on the Caspian Sea and felt free when they arrived in Port Bachlevi, Persia. Adam was assigned to play clarinet and violin in a military band with his brother and sent to Camp Kanakee in Iraq with orders to go to Palestine to attend the Polish military school there at Camp Kasteena near the Gaza strip. He completed high school at 18 in 1945 and left in May as volunteered for the Polish Merchant Marine School in England. His mother, grandmother and two sisters had been sent to a refugee camp in India. In 1944 his older sister went to England to join the Polish Air Force and later his mother and younger sister came and had a reunion. The grandmother went to live with her three sisters in Poland. In November 1947, Adam went to sea as a sailor in the British Marines and traveled all over the world for two years. His two sisters got married in England and the family obtained visas and arrived in NY June 26, 1954. They took a train to Chicago which had an organized Polish community. In 1958 he married Wanda Karnishinska, a Polish girl his mother met at the Indian refugee camp. They had two children, three grandchildren and one great-grandchild. His wife passed away 12 years ago.