

BERZA LECHOWITZ- PHOENIX

My name is Berza Buchwalt Lechowitz, my mothers name was Fanny Buchwalt, my father's name was Burger. I have a sister living in Israel, Adella. The rest of the family is dead.

I lived in Limburg, Poland, I had just finished gymnasium when the war started. I was married and had a small child, I was 18 years old. My husband was taken away and killed by the Germans.

I had a friend, a Volksdeutsch, who helped me to get a job working for the Germans, interpreting. I knew several languages and translated what the Germans wanted to say to the Polish and Slovaks and other local people. I lived with her as a non-Jew. She told the neighbors that I was a widow and a relative and needed some help with my little son about 3 or 4 years old. I went to work at 8 in the morning and worked till 8 at night. I saw my son in the morning and at night, the rest of the time he was in the streets, playing with the children, and on his own. He had been circumcized and of course that worried me about his being found out. He was taught not to discuss anything.

The first Aktion of the Germans was to announce on the radio that all Jews should congregate. The Gestapo surrounded them and shot them. They had no idea of what was coming. The local people were 100% helpful to the Germans. They sought out Jews hiding in the forests or in private homes . They delivered the Jews to the Germans with pleasure.

The second Aktion was to round up the Jews and take them in cattle cars to the ghetto. They included thousands of refugees who had come from the west to be closer to the Russians. They announced all Jews stand in line and wait to be transported to the west. Every day they transported Jewish people to the gas chambers. I do not think they knew what was in store for them. It was the biggest enjoyment for the Germans and the locals to put the Jews on the trains for the gas chambers.

I did not go because I was with the Gentiles, working for the Germans, interpreting because of my knowledge of languages.

The Jews wore the Jewish Star, there were beatings, no food. The Jews were told to congregate to receive more information about the new regime. The woman who helped me was Mrs. Zalinska. In the course of my job I saw a list, three pages, of names of Germans with high sounding titles who were shot by the Nazis as a warning of what would happen if they didnt do everyting Hitler wanted done.

The local people helped the Germans 100%. After the war I went to Germany in 1945. I worked for UNRRA registering refugees for 3 years. I came to the U.S,. in 1948 and married Mr. Leshowitz whom I knew from back home. Since I spoke English I was able to get a job in Kleins on 14th St and worked there until they moves to the Fifth Ave. when I worked for a jewelry store on Fifth Ave Mr. Leshowitz was a widower and after we married we moved to New Jersey and bought a farm. He took sick and we moved back to New York at 86th St and Broadway to an apartment. In a few years he died, I worked in a jewelry store on Fifth Ave. He had escaped with the Russians and was the only survivor in his family.

My son lives in New York, is married has 2 children, finished college and works in an office and occasionally comes to visit me. He only remembers playing with the children.

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I do not think the people who are telling their experiences can adequately describe them. It is almost fantasy, the hate they showed when they caught a Jew. It is indescribable.

When they rounded up the Jews, they took their money and belongs, there were personal searches, they took everything. To hell with the Poles and the Pope too.

Yes, I think it can happen again, we do not have many friends in the world. To know the history is the first thing and to know the background.