

Samuel Rosen - Phoenix

I was born in Czespochowa, Poland, in March 19, 1924; my father's name was David, my mother was Rosa; I had a brother two years older; my sister was 4 years younger. My brother died in the U.S.; my sister lives in the U.S. My father died at the age of 92 in the U.S.; my mother was killed in a cemetery in Poland.

In Czespochowa there were 150,000 people of which about 30,000 were Jews. 85% of the Jews lived in a certain area. We lived outside of that area. I went to a Jewish public school run by the Polish Government. The walk to school was past a Polish school which was not easy. Scholastically the school for the Jews were good but of course the newer buildings were available to Polish children. It was only in the larger cities that they had Jewish public schools.

In 1935 I witnessed a pogrom. It was triggered by an argument between a Jew and a Pole. Knives were used and the Pole was killed. That started the pogrom. Jewish apartments were stoned, Jews were beaten and killed. Police did not interfere. On the third day they had to import some police from Warsaw and they brought it under control.

In September 1939 Hitler marched in, there was no opposition. Some young people went East. My uncle went on a bicycle to the East and later returned for his wife and child but they had been killed and he escaped to the underground and survived. There was no way to escape and no money or physical means to escape.

At first they confused the population. That lasted two days. Then they set up machineguns in the Jewish area aimed towards the Jews. Jews did not allow themselves to see the reality of what they were doing. All of a sudden they started to shoot up the town. Truckloads of German soldiers were pushing people into the churches and the synagogues. Then the struggle to survive started. The Gestapo chased Jews out of their homes. They established the Judenrat, the Jewish Council, to administer the Jews according to their orders. Sometimes not very reputable Jews were given the leadership thinking they could save themselves by cooperating with the Germans. In our city the leadership did their best. They tried to urge the Germans to ease certain burdens.

The Gestapo told the Judenrat to round up electricians, plumbers, etc to the steel mill or munition factory. My family went to the Jewish section to my uncle who owned a small plant. My uncle cleared out a small space and we hid there. It was near the Big Ghetto.

All towns in the vicinity were Judenrein. All Jews would have to leave for the ghettos. 75,000 were in the ghetto. Jews went out to work in the gentile section and barter work or valuables for food in the ghetto. The ghetto had gates, there were no telephones, newspapers, mail.

In 1941 the Big Ghetto started and it lasted till September 1942. In June 1943 the small ghetto had a population of Jews of 6000 or 5500. 70,000 were transported to Treblinka to die. Those who were left were in the small ghetto. The Germans were building a camp adjacent to the major factories. Eventually they liquidated the small ghetto in June 1943 and until the liberation we were in the concentration camp which was adjacent to the munition factories. Private firms had contracts with the Gestapo to receive Jewish workers. They

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paid to the Gestapo 40 marks per week for each of us. We were bartered and sold for money in that particular salverly agreement. The Germans were getting the money.

Going back to the transportation of the population to Treblinka in September 1942, the date was at Rosh Hashona, they deliberately chose that date. People were called to the market square and there the selection would take place. To the right, to the left. 6000 or 5500 to the left, 70,000 to the right to go to Treblinka. In September 1942 they did not know where they were going. We heard from the grapevine and they were killing people and gassing them in a truck, executions of rabbis, but nothing about the magnitude of what was happening. We heard from the Germans there were to be resettlement. I was then 15 or 16 years old and it was very difficult not to know what was happening without any choices. It was impossible to communicate with anyone. There was no place to escape to, there was no place to go. We were locked in, to escape to the woods without weapons was unthinkable. The Poles were awarded 2 kilograms of sugar to deliver Jews. Nothing was open. It was impossible to resist. Anyone who attempted to escape would be killed and everyone around him would be killed.

I was personally responsible for my family not going to the square. We hid underground behind a door. It was a small place, a cellar, a hole in the ground to keep potatoes. We could not stand; my mother, father, cousin, sister, another older person. I felt going to the transport was the end. I happened to be right. We had nothing to eat. I scavenged around the empty houses and looked for potato peelings, bread and we would bring it back and try to survive.

My brother decided to go out. He was taken to the small ghetto and he was the only one who knew where we were. The Gestapo picked him up. He somehow ran back to where we were hiding and told us to be ready and that he would be back and it worked. I was underground two weeks. The drive to live is so strong - there were no sanitary facilities, just to relieve oneself, you took your life in your hands going outside, no food. There were dogs above us running around, how they did not detect us was a mystery. They were finding hidden people, if they didn't have a transport, they shot them. 90-90% of the people who were found were taken to their transports.

Fortunately they didn't turn the water system off. We each had our duties; to be on the lookout constantly to see who entered the gate. We were 120 feet from the lookout point of the gate which directly opened to the street. No one complained, we existed. We allowed 2 people to go out to stretch for short periods. Basically we hoped we could get into the small ghetto.

We went out and we started to work in a railroad company repairing railroad equipment. I worked in a small shop. I was a mechanic working on the lathe. There was a German in the shop from Berlin who had been a socialist. He was not a Nazi. He helped me and brought me food. We planned to bribe the guards to get our family out. One guard was not a Nazi. With the help of the guards we first took 1/2 of them out of the underground and then the second group. That morning at 6 o'clock we were supposed to get up and we overslept. That was the first time that ever happened and that fact helped us to survive, the guards helped us.

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It worked and we survived, my father who lived with us for 26 years and died at age 92 in Detroit; my sister who settled in Israel, my brother who lived in New York. ~y mother was killed.

In the small ghetto there were young people older than I who knew a little bit about weapons and were daring and desperate. We had a connection with the Warsaw Ghetto uprising. We started to prepare for an armed resistance. Some sneaked out of the ghetto to the outside, killed a German with a knife, took his weapon and went back to the ghetto. They made handgrenades, Molotov cocktails. In the amunition factory we had access to explosives. They didn't tell me about it because I had a a mother and father and sister and brother. My brother was not allowed to join eigther. Only people who had noone I was allowed to start making handgrenades on a lathe. There was a rotten apple among the Jews who apparently told the Germans about our preparations. That was a dark momentand a fatal blow to us. Some of the people were executed on the spot. They called eveyryone to the square. one young man tried to shoot a Nazi. The revolver got stuck he was gunned down. They took 25 out and shot them.

Degenhart, the Gestapo, was looking over the people who were left and stopped by my father who was 50. He was working in the shoe department and they did a lot of work for the Germans so he let him go. He asked me what I was doing. I had a good answer, I was a mechanic and toolmaker. He selected children and carried them to the cemetary and liuquidated them.

We were settled in the camp adjacent to the ammunition factory. Two weeks later orders were issued to liquidate 10~ as a retribution for the attempt on the German soldier. They took 500 out and took them to the basement and carted them away in the morning killing them with wooden hammers, pushing people to the cemetary. They dug a long ditc killed off the people and pushed them in the ditch with a bulldozer. There were not more than 3 families intact at that time. The camp was in our town.

There was a technical high school and ghe Germans allowed it to continue to train mechanics. I had started in that school before the war and I was allowed to continue in 1940/41to learn toolmaking. It existed until the transports were carried away and then it was closed. This was very helpful to me because my skills were needed. They did not put numbers on us but gave us identification cards (he showe the card). We wore our own clothing, civilian clothing. I had a choice job in the mechanical department. I taught the mechanics who only said they were mechanics to save themselves. We were in the maintenance phase of the production lines

I would make lamps, cigarette lighters, certain hardware that was desired by the farmers. Poles would smuggle it out and smuggle in food in exchange for these items. We were doing this at work. It wasthe night shift and someone was always on the lookout so that we would not be caught. We never got caughtand lots of people were able to eat.

on January 17, 1945 the Russians liberated us. When we saw Germans running away and pl planes coming over us, we were on the roof watching and enjoying watching.

on the last day the German guards spoke to the Jews and asked them to come with them to Germany. 350 people went with them. Some of the young people were rounding up ammunition. The Germans escaped before the Russians came. The Germans were afraid to force evacuation. Some Jews escaped in the woods and many were killed by the Poles. Of those who went with the Germans, some survived and some could not make the marches. My best friend died on the last day of the war. We left the camp before the Russians came. We knew the city and we knew where to go.

Some went into a deep depression because they had no one who survived and they had nothing to live for. It was more difficult for the young girls than for the boys. I went to school for 6 more weeks to finish up and then went to rejoin my brother and father. I went to engineering school in Germany. In 1950 I came to the U.S. through the Jewish Family Service. I settled in Ohio. My father and brother were there. They left in 1949. We moved in with my family and I got a job. I have 3 children, two boys and a girl, two are married and I have 5 grandchildren.

I want to say that during the war there was not one encouraging message given or transmitted through any media or packages or messages from the Red Cross. I could not believe that they did not know what was going on. It was impossible for them not to know. If the Gestapo had been told they would be responsible after the war for the atrocities, they would not have been so brave. It was a feeling of total abandonment. I could not believe they did not know what was going on. I think the survivors and the historians have an obligation to tell the meaning of the Holocaust. If we get careless, conditions will be created to have another Holocaust. It is very difficult for Americans to understand that terror and terrorism can terrorize totally.

It is not easy to tell the story. I was designated to go to Treblinka and was somehow released. We were spared. I can understand why people cannot talk about it for 40 years.

We have a Holocaust educational process in Ohio. Americans are taking it over and doing a tremendous job.