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Summary

Larry Hersh, born in 1925 in Khoust, Czechoslovakia (now Khust, Ukraine), remembers an “ideal” childhood with four sisters and extended family; enjoying sports, reading, movies, mountain vacations and Jewish/gentile friendships; being well off from father’s lumber and wine-making businesses; leading local Betar (Zionist) youth group; being unaffected by war until Nuremburg laws (1941); being selected (fall 1942) by Zionist group to make Aliyah to Palestine, but mother objecting; 1943, being sent to ghetto with Carpathian-area Jews; being detained by Gestapo for sneaking supplies to ghetto; avoiding repercussions with Gestapo by joining Hungarian army in Budapest; in Budapest, organizing smuggling of Jewish soldiers’ rations to ghetto; evading punishment when Hungarian general (“righteous gentile”) turned blind eye, but being caught by police (friend Leonard Fox badly beaten) and sent to ghetto; being transported from ghetto to Auschwitz, arriving May 26, 1943, after five days; at Auschwitz (Mengele conducted selection), encountering friends, learning sister also there and father at Warsaw camp; being taken on third day to Warsaw camp, made to clean and load used bricks for transport to Russian front; realizing from place names/signs that camp was former Warsaw ghetto (Yiddish writing on wall, in blood, read “we were betrayed, remember us”); witnessing/experiencing acts of inhumanity, e.g. deaths from medical treatment denied; being made to care for, and clean cages of, killer dogs; immolation naked, gagged and bound prisoners, stacked in a pyramid (“the horror of being stripped of the ability to even scream at one’s own pain”); August 1944, being evacuated from Warsaw and marched to Dachau (via Kudno, at Polish/Czech border), SS brutalizing marchers, feeding them “salt herring” (dehydrated human flesh), and crushing the necks of those who stooped at water to drink; laying in mud for two days after rain; arriving Kudno (day 10) and boarding transport to Dachau; with father and uncle, being among the 2,000 (of 10,000 Warsaw prisoners) to survive removal to Dachau; being transferred (with father/uncle) from Dachau to Landsberg labor camp (Lager 7) and, when typhus broke out, to Kaufering labor camp (Lager 4); being deployed from Kaufering to the Baustiller Holzmann construction company; returning from work, finding father/uncle gone (likely to Dachau); early spring 1945, returning to Lager 4, contracting typhus, laying unfed/untreated for 28 days; May 1945, being dragged from sickbed for rail evacuation of camp; escaping when US Air Force shelled/disabled train; running with three friends through forest to American-occupied Schwabhausen; remaining a month in army hospital where American doctor helped locate an uncle (surname Yanowicz) in Cleveland; June 1945, returning to Prague, finding Khoust friends, travelling with them in vain search of Jewish life; learning youngest sister liberated from Bergen-Belsen; traveling to find her in German DP camp (Yanowicz helped her emigrate, 1947); being recruited to Irgun by Zionist Joel Brand and interpreting for the Brihah (1945-47); early 1947, sailing (10 days) to Palestine to continue with Irgun; May 1947, being pursued by British for Brihah activities, escaping via Cypress to France, arriving Germany February 1948; returning to Israel (on Altalena) after statehood; serving Israeli army through the 1956 war; moving to U.S. assisted by sister and Yanowicz; meeting wife; joining Hungarian Jewish congregation of B’nai Jeshurun.

(summary by Eva Kleederman)