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Summary

Abram Bursztyn was born in Kielce, Poland on January 23, 1920, the second oldest of six children. His father, Leib, was a self-employed shoemaker; his mother was Sprinza. His family was traditional, neither orthodox nor secular. His family was not well-off, but were adequately fed and clothed. Abram finished his schooling at age 14.5 at a Christian school, and attended no Jewish schools. He could read/write Hebrew, but spoke Yiddish at home. The family moved to Łódź when Abram was 11. Abram did not often mix with non-Jewish children and had occasional schoolboy fights, frequently feeling anti-Semitism from the teachers. In Łódź, there was a larger Jewish community, and “did not mix much” with Poles. After leaving school, Abram worked in a factory, a Jewish owner and workforce.

He wasn’t much aware of the plight of Jews in Germany. When the war started, Germany bombed Łódź for a week, then invaded on Sept. 7, 1941; the factories all closed. The Wehrmacht initially was polite, but some street beatings and conscriptions for minor work details began, conducted mostly by Volk-Deutsche. After two months, Abram and his brother escaped to the Soviet zone via Bialystok. Conditions were crowded with refugees; they and “thousands” slept in the temple. Many Jews served with the Soviet authorities, treating the Polish Jews normally, but often abused the Poles.

After 4-5 months without work, he went to Sverdlosk, but was unable to work in the coal mines due to inadequate clothing. Ultimately, he returned to Bialystok meeting up with his family, and his brother. After a few months, the Russians sent them and many others by truck and train for months to the “other side of Siberia”, an area that never turned dark in the summer. They were treated as well as other Russians. On arrival, everyone worked in a brickworks living a harsh but normal life. They remained there until Russia and Germany went to war. His family was then allowed to go wherever they wished; they chose Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan, SSR, taking months to get there. Abram’s father went back to shoemaking (“In Russia, a shoemaker is more important than a doctor”.) with all living in a small hut, but life was not harsh. The town had about 1000 Jews.

He and his brother were mobilized and conscripted without notice into the Army in 1945, acting as support, not front-line troops. After 6-7 months, they were allowed to return to his parents until they were repatriated to Łódź in 1946. There a Zionist helped his family go to Israel via Germany. Abram stayed behind until 1957 marrying a non-Jewish Polish girl. Then, Abram went to Israel, but he and his wife did not do well there and were divorced. Abram then joined his brother in Australia, where he remarried and remained.