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Abstract for Henry Greenbaum

Henry Greenbaum was born in Poland on April 1, 1928; he was one of nine children, six girls and three boys. (He was also known as Chuna Grynbaum; nickname, Hanyek [ph, sp?].) His family were tailors, and they lived in the small town of Wierzbnik (Starachowice, Starakhovits, Strachovitza, Verzhbnik, Vierzhbinik, Vyerzbnik, Vyerzhbanik, Wierzbnik Starachow, Wierzbnik Starachowice). Before the war they had to move to an apartment in Starachowice when their house was destroyed because it was sticking out too far into the street. They lived there until the German occupation. His family was very religious. In Wierzbnik they lived about five doors from the synagogue. His father was the caretaker there, going twice a day to the synagogue; Henry only went on the Sabbath or holidays.

Before the war, there was no problem in the town with their non-Jewish neighbors. Henry went to public school, Hebrew school, and played with both Jewish and non-Jewish children. After the German occupation, things changed; the non-Jews stayed away from their Jewish neighbors. There were visitors in his house only on Fridays when his mother would prepare for the Sabbath, and the house smelled like a bakery. If a Polish person came in to do business with them at this time, his mom would offer them a cookie. Because they kept kosher, they could not eat in the homes of the Poles, and they could not cook on the Sabbath. They would cook Friday before sundown and take it to a Jewish bakery to slowly cook in the bakery. After services on the Sabbath, the youngest would go pick up the pot. The whole family, including his married sisters, would come for dinner in the afternoon. His family was not rich; they didn't have any maids — they were just normal people.

Henry's family tried to emigrate, but the immigration laws were very tough in America. Henry's father had two brothers and a sister in New York. They had come to America in 1904. These three were able to bring one sister to America in 1937. His mother and father wouldn't have come to America, but the kids would have loved to come; they thought they would all wind up in America someday. Before the Germans occupied the city, they heard rumors that if you worked in the factory, it might be very beneficial for you. The family's tailor shop had mostly Catholic customers; Henry's father had asked one of his customers, who worked in the munitions factory, if the man could give his kids a job at the factory. His father asked for four jobs — three for his sisters and one for Henry. Henry's father died two months before the war started. When the war broke out, they were all stuck.

Before the war, one brother (Zachary?) was drafted to fight in the Polish army. Henry's oldest brother escaped before the Germans came in to occupy their city. They had hired a neighbor to take them 10 miles to a farmer they knew so they could avoid the bombing while the Germans were occupying the city. They stayed at the farm for three days. On the second day, while eating breakfast, Henry's brother, David, saw a Polish soldier with a torn uniform and a lot of medals on him. His brother knew the soldier's first name and stopped him to ask where he was running from. The soldier told them that he was running from the German army which was three kilometers away and heading in this direction. His brother asked if he could run away with him. Henry didn't think it was right for his brother to leave him with the girls and his mom. Henry chased after his brother for a mile or two, hiding behind bushes. Every time he stuck his head out, his brother would yell at him to go back to his mother. Henry didn't listen; but when the Polish soldier told him to go back to his mother, he ran back.

The oldest brother, David, made it to America by escaping with the Polish soldier. He wound up in Vilno (Vilnius, Vilna, Vilnia, Vilnyus, Wilna, Wilho), Lithuania. There was a Japanese ambassador there who was helping ultra-Hasidic Jews with false passports. His brother was very religious —maybe more religious than his father; he did not have the beard. This ambassador helped him with a false passport to Manchuria. From Manchuria his brother got with his sister and the HIAS. They were able to get him out. He wound up in America in 1941, two months before Pearl Harbor.

With his father gone, his brother David was the bread winner in the family; he was still doing a little tailoring. Henry didn't do tailoring; his job was to keep the iron hot so they could do the pressing. His mother cried; with David gone she didn't know how they were going to make a living — how they were going to survive. They got the farmer to take them back to their home.

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After the German occupation, the first thing they were made to do was put on the yellow Star of David. They were put into a ghetto in 1940 and stayed two years. Since the ghetto was mostly in Wierzbnik, they had to move back to Wierzbnik; they moved in with cousins there. Polish people lived in the same ghetto, but they were able to go in and out anytime. The Jews could only go in and out if they had a pass, an ID that showed that they worked in the munitions factory. Since Henry worked in the munitions factory, he was able to go in and out of the ghetto. The Poles and the Jews worked together in the factory, but the two groups did not talk or socialize much.

There was no fence around the ghetto; they just roped around the area with barbed wire so that you couldn't get out. To go to work, you had to come through the guards and show an ID; the guards were SS guys and Ukrainians who joined the Nazi regime. Life in the ghetto was very tough — they couldn't get any Jewish food; Jewish places were all closed up; grocery stores were not in that area. The stores that were there ran out of supplies, and people ran out of money. The ghetto was very dirty and filthy because you were in close quarters with other people; they slept on the floor; slept on the chairs; slept on the tables — slept wherever they could. They had to depend on rations that came in with the army every week —bread, potatoes. In October 1942 the food rations stopped, and there was a selection; extra guards were brought in. They were chased out of the ghetto into a rynek — an open field where the farmers were coming once a week to sell things — and the selections started. You walked up as a family, and if you showed them the ID, you went to one side; if you didn't have an ID, you went to the opposite side. They were all separated that day. His two sisters with children, who did not have any ID, went to the opposite side; so did his mother. Henry remembers his mom running over to give him a little hug because he was the baby in the family, 14 years old; the soldiers pushed her back with their gun butts. All she was able to do was wave goodbye. She also told his sisters to '*Take care of your little brother*.' That was the last he saw of his mother; Henry thought they were being taken to another camp where they didn't have to work because they took kids, handicapped people, pregnant women, women who had just given birth. One of his married sisters, Faige, sent along her little girl with grandma because she had a factory ID. After the war, he learned that all had been taken to Treblinka, ordered into the shower room after undressing, and gassed to death with Zyklon gas.

After the selection, Henry and his sisters were chased six kilometers uphill with whips and a dog; they had to run. At the top of the hill was a stone quarry and a slave labor camp with six foot fences — one with barbed wire and one with a wooden frame. There were towers, dogs, guards, and floodlights. The loudspeakers came on telling them to empty all their pockets, all their valuables, all their belongings. They were warned that nothing — no valuables, no money — could come through the gate other than '*Your clothing and yourself* ', or you would be killed. In the ghetto a lot of people, mostly women, were able to get extra food if you gave the Ukrainians a little necklace, a bracelet; the Germans wouldn't do that. On the other side of the gate they were given a little three foot rolled up blanket. There was another guy near the barracks counting how many people to the barracks; the men were separated from the women. The barracks consisted of nothing but shelves — no mattress, no straw. They put three guys together in a bunk that was about 75 inches wide. If one turned, the next one had to turn; you could never sleep on your back. They were in this slave labor camp for almost a year. At 13 years old [NOTE: age discrepancy; he previously stated that he was 14 years old], Henry was by himself with other people in the barrack; nobody protected him — everybody was for themselves. He was able to see his sisters in the factory during the day.

In the munitions factory only the non-Jews got soup at a lunch hour. The Jews had to pick the soup up from the kitchen in three big containers, and take them over to the factory. When lunch was over, they would fight over washing those containers; they would grab the containers and scrape them with their hands or a piece of metal to make a meal for themselves. In the evening when they came back to the barracks, they would get their cabbage-water soup. The factory had three shifts: seven to three, three to eleven; eleven to seven in the morning. The shifts changed every week. They were in this slave labor camp for almost a whole year.

Since the inmates worked and slept in the same clothes they had on from the first day that they went into the ghetto, and they never washed, they were lice infested. In the summer they could take their shirt off, use the dirt from the ground as a mud bath and use the cold water from a pump to clean themselves off a little bit; they were not given

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any soap. This could not be done in the winter; so they all got lice infested. For three years they did not get their hair cut; the long hair was a haven for lice. This lice infestation lead to a typhoid [NOTE: typhoid is a food-borne disease; typhus is flea-borne; this was most likely typhus] epidemic in the camp. Those who had a high fever were unable to work. If you didn't line up for work, the Nazis used the Einsatzgruppen to carry these sick people in trucks to the outskirts of the town. They were taken to ditches, made to undress, and shot in the back of the head. The people back at the camp thought that they were being taken to a hospital to be treated. People learned about this after the war when they were searching for family members. Henry's youngest sister died from the disease; she was taken from her barrack and brought to a small barrack where she was all by herself. When Henry had the night shift at the factory, he would go to visit her. She begged him for rags to put on her bunk because it had no straw, and she had sores. Henry smuggled rags to her from the factory so she could lay on something soft. When he went to see her about a week later, after having seen her the day before, she was gone. He was told that she had died during the night and had been buried at the bottom of the stone quarry. The oldest sister, Faige, came down with the low fever, as did he; they both were able to continue to work.

Faige became a seamstress for the high ranking officers of the German army — either making new uniforms or repairing them. One day a high ranking German officer came into the tailor shop where 50 tailors worked and told them to hurry up and finish all the tailoring by a certain date because they were all going to be deported. The tailors assumed that this meant that they would be killed, so they organized an escape. Henry didn't learn about the escape until the night before. He had the three to eleven shift; Faige told him not to go back to the barrack but to stay outside for her. His sister came to him holding the hand of a Jewish policeman; she grabbed Henry's hand, and they all ran. They had to break through a wire fence; it was not electric. When they broke through a wooden fence, it made a little too much noise; German shepherd dogs alerted the guards on the tower who flipped on the lights. The guard started shooting at the hole where people were running out; some he wounded, some escaped, some were killed. A bullet struck Henry in the back of his head — it grazed him; it did not go inside. He had a two or three inch gash in the back of his head; he dropped. When he woke up a few seconds later, he did not see Faige or the policeman. He didn't know how badly he was injured; blood was running down. He lowered his head to avoid the floodlight and made his way to the women's barrack thinking his sister might be there. A woman from his city opened the door to the women's barrack and told him that he couldn't stay; he would get them all killed — he was full of blood. He told her that he was looking for his sister Faige. Instead of giving him comfort, the woman pushed him out. Henry was a little bit stronger; he sat down in the doorway — she couldn't close the door. The two guards were very angry and started shooting into the barracks. He ran across a first cousin, Ida, who was not aware of the escape attempt; she cleaned him off, gave him a dry rag to put on top of his wound, and a beret to put on top of the rag. He couldn't stay in the women's barracks; he would be killed. By judging the spacing of the floodlights, he was able to return to his barrack.

In about 20-30 minutes the loudspeaker announced that they must empty out the barracks; they wanted to count them to get an idea of how many had escaped. After the counting, they were turned toward the hole that had been cut through for the escape. There were a lot of wounded people there, one was the policeman; the guard started shooting all the wounded ones. After the wounded policeman was shot, Henry saw his sister Faige behind him — dead. At 15 years old, Henry was now by himself; he didn't have any more sisters and he didn't have any brothers.

After the attempted escape they were all deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The train journey took three days; 75 people to a wagon — no water, no bathroom — it was a hot oven. They stopped at different stations because their train was not a priority. As they unloaded, the doors opened up; there was screaming: '*rasch, rasch, rasch*'. As one came off the train, the soldiers were directing traffic; another selection was started. This time there were no ID's to show; '*left, right, left, right*'. Henry doesn't know what they were looking for. Half of his transport were gassed the same night they arrived. The first thing they gave him was a number, A18991, tattooed on his arm. After that, they had a haircut and a shower; they were so thirsty that they drank a lot of the water. Their clothes with lice were taken away. His head wound was still there, and the barber questioned it. Henry told him the story about the escape attempt. After the shower, they were given a three foot little blanket with a striped uniform — cap, jacket, pants, wooden bottom

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shoes with canvas tops, no socks or underwear. Then they were assigned to the barracks. They smelled something different in the camp, like flesh burning, but they didn't know for sure; they knew about hangings and shootings. When they learned the truth, he was heartbroken. The only thing that kept him alive was saying to himself: '*With G-d's help I'll someday be in America with my sister.*' He missed his mother terribly; they did a lot of praying if they could — not out loud, quietly. He doesn't remember the verses; he used to say *Shema Israel*. They took his education away from him — the Hebrew education and the regular education you need to make a living. He was in camps between the ages of 12 and 17; he didn't know anything else.

He was in Auschwitz for about 6 months; there was no work for them. Then a German civilian came looking for free labor. He ordered Henry's barrack to line up outside. He took 50 of them out of the barrack and brought them to Buna-Monowitz, a sub-camp of Auschwitz, where they worked in the IG Farben plant. Their job was to build a road in the compound. They also had to unload the cement that came on freight cars; if you didn't finish in the allotted time, you got a beating. One day, at the end of 1944, the American Air Force bombed the IG factory and the rail line leading into it so no supplies could go in or out. They happened to run into eight or ten British war prisoners who told them to lie flat on the ground until the bombing was over. The bombers came back more aggressively and knocked out the whole IG factory. Since there was now no work for the prisoners, they were loaded onto trains — 75 people to a car; it was hot — no water and no bathroom. Henry came to Sachsenhausen for a short time and then went to Flossenbürg. He was at Flossenbürg for a few months, but again, there was no work; it was 1945. They were told to bundle up clothing from people who had been murdered so they could be sent to Germany for recycling.

One day they heard artillery pieces coming closer and closer; the American army was coming toward Flossenbürg. The prisoners thought they were going to be liberated, but the blockälteste, who was a kapo, told them that before the army gets to Flossenbürg, they would all be killed. When the American army came into Flossenbürg, all they found was a cleaning unit and sick people who couldn't travel. Two days before the camp was liberated, the rest of the prisoners had been evacuated and were already on trains again. This time Henry was in an open wagon, and as his part of the wagon passed under a bridge, people were dropping bags of food to them. The guards starting shooting in the air for the people to stop tossing the bags of food. They were traveling from Austria, through Czechoslovakia, toward Bavaria, Germany. The railroad wagons were strafed by the bombarding Air Force. The train was abandoned near a wooded area called Schwarzenfeld; the SS were in a car by themselves with lots of food. When the American bombs came down and knocked out the locomotive, the prisoners were told to run into the woods. However, they couldn't run away too far because the dogs were right there; they had to drop or you would be shot. Henry thinks that it was from that point that they started marching to Neunburg vorm Wald with two guards and two dogs; they marched by day and slept in the woods at night. There were no supplies; even the guards and dogs were hungry. When a farm was located, the farmer was ordered to give one potato per prisoner and some water. This continued until April 24, 1945 when they saw low-flying planes and heard artillery pieces. The prisoners were ordered into a silo; here they were able to remove their rain-soaked clothes and lay them on the hay to dry. When they awoke the next morning, they were marched for two hours before being told to sit and stay in wooded area; the guards and the dogs disappeared — the prisoners were left by themselves.

All of a sudden a tank came towards them; they thought that they would be killed. It was an American tank; a soldier opened the hatch and said: *'We are Americans and all of you are free.'* That was the happiest time of Henry's life. When rations were dumped out of the tank, they began fighting amongst themselves to grab the rations; to stop anybody from getting hurt, the survivors were lined up behind the tank and marched across the field to a farm. Outside the farmhouse were three big pails with potato peelings and flour — which they ate up; and then they were very thirsty. They entered the farmhouse, and there was a table with food. They all became sick from eating this food because they either overate and their stomachs couldn't hold it all, or their stomachs couldn't digest good food. The two American soldiers called for medics to come to the farmhouse to help the sick men. It took three hours before the medics arrived; they treated all the men. Henry showed the medics his head wound; they shaved the area. Although it

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had been a long time and a scab had formed, it was infected inside. The medics cleaned it and put a bandage with medication on it; it took about three months for it to heal.

Henry was now 17 years old and weighed about 75 pounds; he wound up in a displaced persons camp, Zeilsheim, near Frankfurt am Main. It took a year to get his weight back; he then started going around to different camps looking for family. He located his first cousin, Ida, in Bergen-Belsen in the British Zone. She was going to Poland; Henry did not want to go with her. When he traveled, he met German people with whom he was sort of friendly. Henry would ask them if they knew what the Germans were doing to the Jews; most of them claimed that they did not know what had been going on — they were unaware of it. Henry's plan was to come to America — to see his sister (Dina?) in America; and perhaps go back to school. After his brother (Zachary?) came from Łódź, Poland, to Zeilsheim, they went to America. Henry's brother knew their sister was in the Washington area. She had married a first cousin and had maintained the same last name … but with a different spelling; so it wasn't too hard to find her. When they got to New York, their brother David, who had run away with a Polish soldier, picked them up. They all lived with Dina until they married and moved out.

Henry and his wife lived with her parents for three months; he worked in a sheet metal shop. He couldn't make a living in this line or work; and it was very hard and dirty. He asked his sister to find him work in a department store, Lansburgh's, selling men's clothing. Later, Henry joined his bother-in-law and brother Zachary in the dry cleaning business where he spent 44 years. Henry had three sons (two of them became dentists) and a daughter, 12 grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren (as of 2018). He made sure that his children had the education that he did not have. His oldest son joined him in the dry cleaning business.

Henry cannot forgive the older Germans who lived during the Holocaust years — they murdered many members of his family. He does not hate all Germans; he has nothing against the younger generations — they didn't do anything. He cannot get out of his mind, *'How do you kill innocent little children? Why do you want to kill somebody just because he's a Jew?'* He notes that nobody spoke up — Hitler went and attacked them country by country; nobody spoke up for Rawanda either. Henry sees America as a free country where you can say what you want without being put in jail. He hopes that his family can live out their normal lives the way G-d wants them to live. The survivors have to tell their stories to as many people as possible — never let it happen again to any human being. Henry's great desire is that people live in peace with each other and don't hate anybody — no more wars; respect everyone's religion.