

ZIGI SHIPPER



I was born in Lodz, Poland on 18th January 1930. This story is for my children and grandchildren so that they will know where they come from.

My first memories are from when I was around five years old. I lived with my father and my paternal grandparents as my parents were divorced. The apartment we lived in had a yard where I used to play with other children. I had no brothers or sisters but I had older cousins. I went to a Jewish school, which was in the same building as we lived. As far as I can remember it was a happy childhood.

In 1939 my father told me that the Germans were coming and that he had to go away. That was the first time I realized that I wouldn't have a mother or father. A lot of the young Jewish young men in the town thought that they could escape the Germans believing they would not harm the women and children. How wrong we were! I had news that my father had managed to get to Russia. After a while, he tried to get back to Lodz to be with me, but unfortunately, he was only able to get to Warsaw and that was the last time I had any news of him.

School had closed for the summer and never re-started. Within a short time the Germans came into our town and life as I knew it had changed completely. We were frightened to leave our homes, naturally we couldn't attend synagogue. Food was becoming very scarce. Within a short time, a decree was issued stating that all Jews had to leave their homes and go to live in a designated area, which was part of Lodz (Baluty). Any non-Jews living in the area were ordered to leave in order to make room for the Jews. After having a nice apartment, my Grandfather, Grandmother and myself found ourselves in one room, no toilet, no bathroom – just one room. We were on the second floor. The toilet was in the

yard – water was also fetched from the yard. That was when hardship really started. I was ten years old.

Between the months of November 1939 and April 1940, the whole Jewish population of Lodz, approximately 150,000 people, had to be settled into the ghetto. As the ghetto was closed nobody was allowed in or out. Within a very short space of time, my grandfather passed away. As food was very scarce and as he was extremely orthodox, there was very little food he could eat and consequently, he became weak and ill and died.

The Germans ordered all Jews to wear a yellow star back and front at all times. Everyone living in the ghetto had to find work. Everyone who worked received a ration book, which enabled them to obtain a small amount of food – such as bread, rice, flour and sugar. The rations got smaller and smaller as time went on and people were dying of malnutrition due to lack of food.

In July 1944 the Germans liquidated the Lodz ghetto. Each week transports were sent to unknown destinations. We were allowed to take one suitcase and were put on cattle trucks. We were terribly overcrowded with hardly any place to sit. We had no water to drink and it was incredibly hot. Eventually the guards opened the doors and we were ordered to get out, leaving our belongings on the train. We had arrived at Auschwitz concentration camp.

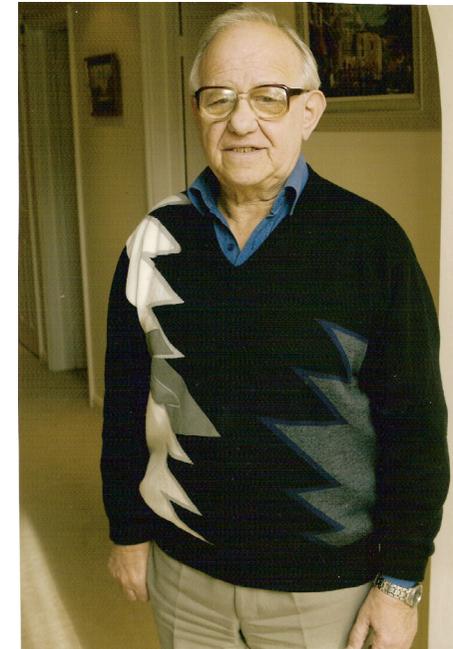
The sky was hazy and there was a terrible smell. From a distance we saw chimneys with smoke coming out. At that time we didn't realize what it was but rumours started spreading that it was a crematorium. I still didn't know what that meant. We had to line up in front of the Germans for 'selection'. Men and women were separated and taken to showers where we were made to undress, hand over our possessions such as spectacles and jewellery. Then we were shaved everywhere, disinfected and put in communal showers. We were given striped suits with numbers on to wear. We did no work at all and were given black coffee and a slice of bread morning and evening. We slept three in a bunk, three bunks high. The smell was unbearable.

I was transported to another smaller camp called Stuthoff, near Danzig, where the conditions were just as bad, if not worse. It was November 1944, and with bitterly cold weather, we were made to stay outdoors all day long. The only way to keep warm was by making human ovens, this was a few hundred people all huddling together, as those in the middle got warmer they went to the outside of the group and so on. I managed to sneak into the middle, as I was very small.

The Germans sent us on a death march for 15km. I was very ill and had it not been for my friends, who helped me to walk, I would have been shot. Anyone who fell was immediately killed. On 3 May 1945, after much suffering and witnessing many horrors the British Army eventually liberated us.



ZIGI SHIPPER'S STORY



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