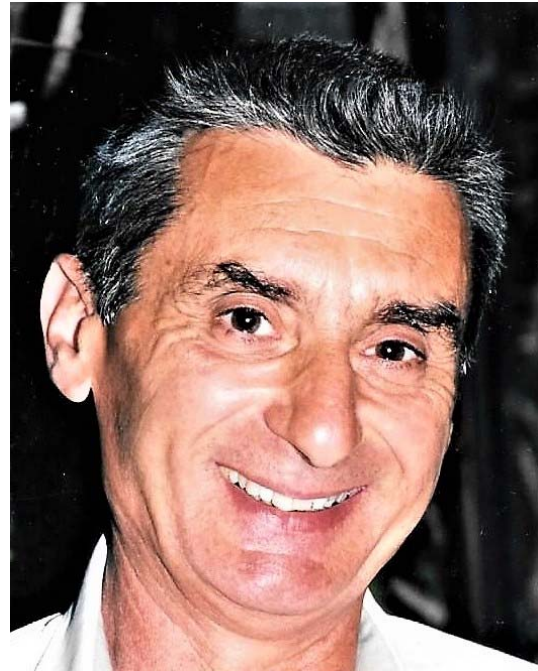
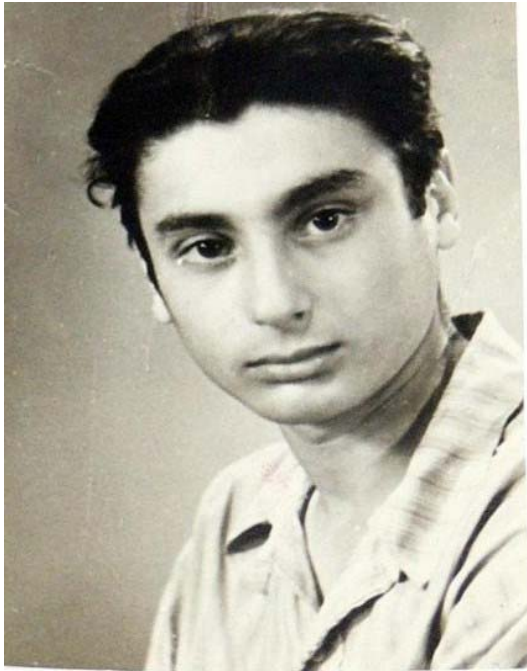


נסטודובוה'צ בהאסאג חיי ניצלו כד

How my life was saved in HASAG Częstochowa

Jurek Kirszenbaums' Story - קירשנבאום יורק סיפורו -



Jurek's miniature Tools

Dimensions: approximately 2 cm. in height and 1/2 cm. in width

Jurek (Yirmiyahu) Kirshenbaum was born in Czestochowa, Poland, in 1929. His parents were Mordecai (Max) and Leah (Lonia) (nee Zajfman), who made their living as wholesale merchants in haberdashery, cosmetics and stationery supplies.

Jurek had two sisters: Edith (Edga) and Hanka (who married Emil Brig, an Israeli hero of the 1948 War of Independence).

Jurek had a happy childhood. His parents were secular Jews and he was sent to a state Jewish school. In those days, the Jewish community of Czestochowa enjoyed cordial relations with the Christian population in the city, although anti-Semitism did exist.

The city of Czestochowa numbered 200,000 residents of whom 35,000 were Jews.

On the outskirts of the city was the Jasna Gora, a Christian monastery and church in which is located the "Black Madonna", one of the revered sites of the Poles and of Christianity in general, and it was a shrine to which people made pilgrimages.

Jurek's father, Mordecai, passed away when Jurek was but 8 years old and the burden of providing for the family and raising the family fell on the shoulders of the widow, Leah.

Jurek was 10 years old when the Second World War began. The Germans invaded Poland and bombed the cities, causing damage to the civilian population and capturing extensive parts of Polish territory.

German Army units entered a shocked Czestochowa on September 3, 1939 and began to pursue Jews, to murder them and to expropriate their property.

On April 9, 1941, the Germans created a ghetto on the east side of the city, adjacent to the train station. The Germans drove the Jews of the city into this area and assembled here also Jews from other cities in Poland. The number of Jews in the ghetto reached 48,000. Until October 1942, 39,000 Jews were sent to the gas chambers of Treblinka in a number of aktzias. Among those sent were Jurek's mother Leah and the entire extensive Kirshenbaum family, except for one first-cousin, Eliezer.

After the mass expulsion of Jews from the ghetto, there remained in what was now the "Small Ghetto" about 5,000 Jews, amongst whom were Jurek and his two sisters, as well as their aunt Golda (Godza), a sister to Leah, who looked after the 3 children. Only these five and some of the Zajfman family (the family of the mother Leah, who resided in another city), were left remaining. A few family members immigrated to Canada and the U.S. before the War and one aunt immigrated to Israel.

After the Kirshenbaum family were forced to move to the ghetto, a Polish family took over the Kirshenbaum apartment which had been evacuated.

Golda was married in the middle of the Second World War, but her husband was sent from the Small Ghetto of Czestochowa to Treblinka in one of the aktzias, when the Germans decided to annihilate the Jewish intelligentsia. Part of the ghetto residents worked in forced labor in German factories. Others, amongst them the Kirshenbaum family, were employed in the evacuation and sorting of Jewish property from homes that had been evacuated, all this for the purpose of transferring ownership of the property to the Germans.

In the Big Ghetto, for a period of time, clandestine school sessions were held with small groups led by Jewish teachers.

In September 1942, Jews were transferred from the Small Ghetto to a forced labor camp where munitions and other metal products were manufactured. The camp was created by the Germans in private hands..."Hugo Schneider Aktiengesellschaft"...HASAG. This camp also employed salaried non-Jewish Poles who arrived from the neighboring homes in the area.

Aunt Golda and the two sisters Hanka and Edga worked in the factory and resided separately from Jurek in large barracks with rows of "3-story" bunkbeds. Later on, Hanka, who was proficient in German, was transferred to office work.

Jurek worked as a messenger boy and lived in one of the men's barracks. He was then a lad of 13 and when an epidemic of typhus struck the camp, Jurek became ill. His medical situation fared badly on account of undernourishment, his physical condition was poor and there was no possibility of obtaining proper food. His aunt Golda sold a little gold that she had managed to hide, and with the proceeds she purchased chicken from Poles who were visiting the camp and she succeeded in cooking soup from it and feeding it to Jurek. Jurek recuperated as a result of Golda's dedicated treatment. In this way she effectively saved his life.

On one of the days, Jurek snuck into one of the workshops in the camp and found there pieces of brass metal. Using implements of a sort, he succeeded in designing, cutting, filing and chiseling miniature work tools. He created 4 designs of work tools: hammer, chisel, axe and pliers. His precision was perfect. The dimensions of the tools were each 2 cm. in height and about half a cm. in width. As he was completing his work, he sensed suddenly that someone was standing behind him and observing him. It was Paschold, a German officer, one of the foremen known for his brutality.

Jurek was sure that his fate had been determined, and accepted the fact that for his "crime" there was but one punishment--- death.

Paschold inquired as to what Jurek was working on and Jurek responded, "I am a messenger boy." Paschold: "Do you know what punishment you

deserve for doing what you are doing now?" Jurek: "Yes. I will get sent to the very place where my parents are." Paschold looked with curiosity at the miniatures and said, "If this is what you know to do, you should be working in a workshop that manufactures screwdrivers." To this Jurek responded, "I don't know how to do that." Paschold: "I will teach you." So Jurek began working in one of the workshops in the camp.

Meanwhile, in the camp the selections continued. Jews were sent to death and were victims of local murders. One day, the SS officers took young men to one of the buildings and ordered them to undress. They stood there naked. Paschold was present. He then pointed in Jurek's direction and ordered, "Remove him from the line. I want him alive because he is a good worker."

Jurek received his clothes back and returned to his barracks, to the amazement and joy of his friends and small family. The rest of the young men were taken from there and none ever returned. Jurek remained the only survivor of this aktzia.

The German officer Paschold was tried as a war criminal at the end of the Second World War and was sentenced to imprisonment for many years. At the end of the 1970's, upon his release, Paschold sued the Government of Germany for damages for the years he had spent in prison, citing the fact that he had been serving his country as a German officer, had carried out what he had been ordered to do and had had no knowledge of any annihilation taking place. His suit would have been successful and he would have won his case had the prosecuting attorneys of Germany not known that there were in fact survivors from the HASAG forced labor camp still alive, mostly in Israel, who could testify about Paschold's involvement in cruel acts.

Jurek was a key witness in the trial because he was the only one who could testify that in this same "aktzia" Paschold knew very well that all the rest of the lads were sent to their deaths. Jurek was subpoenaed to testify before the court in Germany, but he refused. In 1980, the German court...including judges, the prosecution and the defense ...came to Israel.

The German court assembled in the Police Headquarters in Tel-Aviv, where Jurek described the murder of the young men in the forced labor camp during World War Two. His testimony determined the fate of the prosecution and Paschold's suit to obtain monetary damages was dismissed.

The HASAG camp was liberated on January 16, 1945, by the Russian Red Army and the prisoners went out to freedom, exhausted and lost. Some of them died after receiving their freedom. Others lost their sanity and others committed suicide.

Out of 5,000 Jews who were put to work in the HASAG, only 1,500 were liberated, including Jurek, his two sisters, his aunt Golda, his cousin Eliezer and a handful of boyhood acquaintances and friends.

One of the head commanders of the camp committed suicide in his office by shooting himself upon hearing the Red Army artillery approaching. Other officers began to flee, and in so doing they rounded up prisoners and threatened them as they took them on a "death march" in the freezing snow of January 1945.

Two children---Jurek and Menyusha---dug into the snow and used it as a hiding place until things blew over. They emerged only when they could not hear the screams of the German officers.

Jurek began to march and met up with the remnants of his family. The gate was open. They continued toward Czestochowa and, together with one of their friends, they reached her home. The house was abandoned and they settled in there. They subsisted with difficulty on help they received from UNWRA and even found a way to temporarily return to studies.

Aunt Golda succeeded in selling the Kirshenbaum residence to the Polish family that had squatted in it. Golda remained in Czestochowa for a period and after that immigrated to France. Here she re-married, built her life and died childless in 1984. At her request she was buried in Israel.

Jurek, Edga and Hanka heard about a "kibbutz" that had been established in Warsaw by emissaries from Israel and joined it in April 1945 together with other young Jews from all over Poland who had survived the Hell of the Holocaust. In spite of what they had gone through, they were able to gather their strength to help those whose fate was less fortunate than theirs and needed

assistance or who were hospitalized.

From Warsaw they travelled to Czechoslovakia by train. They passed themselves off as Greeks (the Russians did not want to leave their country) and spoke Yiddish amongst themselves in order that their true identities would not be discovered. After a short stay in Prague, they were smuggled into Germany and reached the town of Biberach (next to Stuttgart) where they were put up temporarily in a monastery called Jordenbad. Here they received training by emissaries of the Shomer Hatzema. They looked after their needs in co-operation with Jewish welfare organizations. They absorbed a bit of Zionism and learned Hebrew. They looked after their needs in co-operation with Jewish welfare organizations. They absorbed a bit of Zionism and learned Hebrew and prepared themselves for immigration to Israel.

Hanka moved from Biberach to Switzerland where she was trained as a laboratory technician and she immigrated to Israel in 1949.

Jurek, his sister Edga and their group travelled with the aliyah emissaries to the port of Brindisi in Italy and boarded an immigration ship "Hatikva" on their way to Palestine. Near the shores of Haifa they were intercepted by a ship of the British Navy that had done a lockdown on the marine border of Israel. The "Hatikva" was sent to Cyprus. Jurek and Edga were detained in an internment camp on Cyprus by the British. Jurek reached Mandatory Palestine in December 1947 at a short period on kibbutz he joined the Israel Defense Forces and fought in the War of Independence in the 8th Brigade Armored Corps under the command of Yitzhak Sadeh. After his release from the IDF he began to work for the Ege Company in which he was a member until 1974, when he retired.

Jurek continued to work in the Ministry of Transport in the "Authority for Commuters in a State of Emergency", which he and others founded.

Jurek met his wife Martha at the first Abu Gosh Music Festival of which he was one of the organizers. Martha appeared as a singer in a choir and the two met each other while travelling on a bus at night from Jerusalem to Tel-Aviv. They were married in 1962 and they became the parents of three children: Neta (working in the field of biotechnology), Ilan (computers) and Yehonatan (alternative medicine).

Jurek did not live to see his grandchildren but was privileged to enjoy a happy and rich family and social life filled with culture. He fell ill with heart disease in February 1974 and he passed away in December 1995 at the age of 66.

מקור: עדותה של מרתה קירשנבאום - Source
תרגום לאנגלית: סטיבן גלייזר - English translation
Stephen Glazer

