

Mojsze Sztajman¹

My Years in Częstochowa

When we were chased out of our home-*shtetl* Bodzanów by the Germans, we were brought to Działdowo, which was a kind of transit camp. I thought that it was very bad there. At the time, I did not imagine - or did not want to believe - that it could be worse.

Leaving home, I had taken a small pack of things with me, but in Działdowo they took them away from us. During the three days which we spent in Działdowo, we were under horrible conditions, in constant terror. From there, on 6th March 1941, all the Bodzanów Jews - about 1,200 souls - were brought to Częstochowa. I was among them, along with my parents, my sister and a sister-in-law with two children aged seven and ten.

They led us out to a square, formerly the location of a metal factory. Everyone was made to empty his pockets, and the Germans and their Polish helpers took everything from us. A couple of days later, we were divided into small groups and led off to different places in the ghetto. My family and I, with another group of Jews, were brought to a *shul*², which was located at №1 on the first part of the Aleja. The name of the family, to which we were allotted was, Szlezinger. The residents of the large courtyard aided us with what they could.

My late father and I arrived there already beaten up and bloodied from back at home. Among the people, there were doctors and nurses. They cleaned our wounds, bandaged my head, which was bruised, and assisted all those who were in need of medical aid.

My family was fortunate, because we were taken into a house. It is my belief, that this was thanks to my late father and mother. I was very grateful to these people for their aid. Among the residents of the building, who helped the people in need, was a girl, who upon seeing my bandaged head, took an interest in me. Three months later, we were happily wed.

My parents travelled away to Warsaw, to a sister of mine. Both of them died a couple of months later, and were still fortunate enough to come to a Jewish grave. My sister-in-law, with her two children, also travelled off to another city, to her sister. She hoped things would be better there. We never heard of her again.

Throughout the all years in the Częstochowa camp, we, my late wife and I, were among the few fortunate people who, thank God, were together the entire time and were liberated together.

¹ [TN: The author, Moszek-Aron Sztajman, was born in Bodzanów on 5th July 1918 to Dawid and Rywka-Lea née Kon, and was a tailor by trade. (Source: https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person_view.php?PersonId=8233804.)

² [TN: The Yiddish word "shul" can mean either a school or a synagogue; in this case, we believe the latter is correct. The book "Sefer Częstochowa", Vol. I, in the chapter "Zionist Organisation Events in Our City", brings the following excerpt from the Zionist newspaper "Ha'Tzfira" of 1918: "A synagogue for the Zionist Union has now been established in our city, on the First Aleja, №1. The building is very beautiful. All who worship regularly in this building take it upon themselves to donate a shekel and also to join our union as a member. Every Saturday, lectures on Zionist matters will be read."]

Sometime later, we arrived in America and, thank God, raised a very fine daughter.

During all those years of slavery in the camps, there were times, as it is said in the *Tocheichah*³, that in the day we wished it was night, and in the night, we wished it was day. This is nothing new for all those who lived through that nightmare.

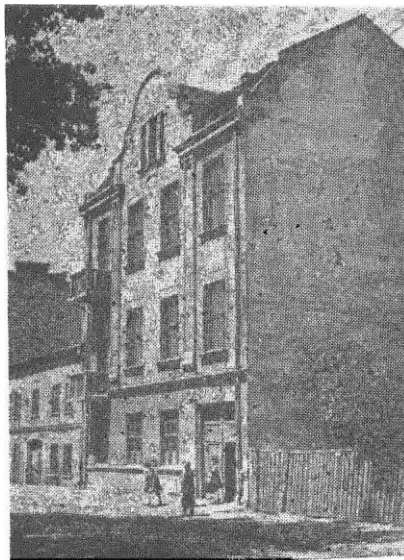
Through the course of our years of suffering, many times it seemed to us that the end was nigh. Nevertheless, in a little corner of our minds, there smouldered a spark of hope, that maybe – [just] maybe – a miracle would happen and we would live to see freedom.

15th of January 1945 was the day of our liberation. We started searching for family and friends, and we then realised what misfortune had happened to the Jewish people.

At the end of November 1945, my wife and I and another family left Częstochowa, and Poland also. We travelled to America, where I had a sister in Philadelphia. We left Poland with the idea to never again return to the accursed Polish soil.

Living in freedom, we began to build a new life, with the hope for a better future.

Submitted by Mojsze Sztajman, who was liberated in Częstochowa, on 15th January 1945.



*The I.L. Peretz School building
on ul Krótka 23*

³ [TN: Heb., "Admonition"; reference to the two passages in the Pentateuch that contain curses, in this case particularly those of Deuteronomy 28:15-68, where it says, in verse 67, "In the morning thou shalt say, Would God it was even! and at even thou shalt say, Would God it was morning! for the fear of thine heart wherewith thou shalt fear, and for the sight of thine eyes which thou shalt see."]