

Allen Kupfer

Wartime Experience: Forced labor in Poland

I was born in Warsaw, Poland on July 8, 1923 to a middle-class family. My sister, Rita was born 7 years later. Our family escaped the Warsaw Ghetto in the Fall of 1940 and lived with relatives in a small community in Central Poland until November 1942. The Jewish population of that town was forcefully transported to the extermination camp of Belzycz where my parents and family perished.

Rita and I were fortunate enough to escape from the transport. We traveled day and night through the fields and forest returning to Nowy Korczyn, where we joined a small labor group, which liquidated Jewish belongings for shipment to Germany. After several months, I was sent on to a S.S. Outpost as a house servant. These were the most tormenting parts of my life. I always felt in danger serving those vicious killers, witnessing the constant flow of Jews discovered in hiding. They were brought to the Post for interrogation, torture and execution. The most traumatic episode in my memory was the time when two wagonloads (comprised of 23 men women and children) were brought by the Polish Police from a discovered bunker. Awaiting their verdict, these people questioned me about their fate. I hesitated to reveal it to them. Hans the Sudaten German executioner and habitual killer came with his constant companions (a German Shepard dog and a machine gun) and took the people to the cemetery for execution. The fear in their faces tormented me in my dreams for a long time. The following day I was given the victims' clothing with orders from Hans to "sell and bring back the money."

During the next year I worked in a German munitions factory. With the advance of the Russian Armies in July 1944 and movement of the munitions plant and labor camp to Germany, I chose to escape. With good fortune and perseverance I survived as a farmhand. As the severe winter approached, the Russian Armies were advancing and the German Army Forces were stationed in the immediate area. I hid in the forest and traveled at night to a family friend and farmer, Juzef Macugowski in the town of Nowy Korczyn. I knew he was trustworthy.

I approached his stable and waited for him to come to feed his cattle. When he came, I dropped to my knees and begged him for mercy and to give me shelter, as he was the only source for my survival. He led me to his barn and brought me food at midnight. I dug deeply into the hay. This was the first warmth I had felt in weeks.

Several nights later he led me to his house and took me to a bunker under his house where eight more Jews had been hidden for two years. I spent five weeks there unable to stand upright, with little food and in great fear. Above us on the main floor a German Command Post was stationed necessitating silence and limited movement. As we lay in the bunker on New Year's Eve of 1945 in constant fear of our lives, the Germans upstairs were celebrating New Year's with Strauss music and great festivities. As a young man, I was enveloped in melancholy and bemoaned my fate.

We were liberated by the Russian Army on January 12, 1945. Miraculously, I was again reunited with my sister after a two-year absence. She had also escaped from the Hasag labor camp. The heroism of the Macugowski family is indescribable. They gave me another chance for life.

Mr. And Mrs. Macugowski were brought to the United States and honored as Righteous Gentiles. They were given a special Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City by the then Cardinal Cook. My family and myself are forever grateful for their sacrifice and heroism. I came to the United States in 1949 and was reunited with the remnants of my family who had previously immigrated to the U.S. I settled in Chicago, married and raised a family.

I originally worked as a shipping clerk in a wholesale clothing enterprise. After a year, I assumed the position of manager in the men's department in a department store. In 1955 I started my own business in wholesale distribution of children's clothing and later branched out to imports from the orient. I retired from business in 1988. I am an avid hiker traveling and exploring the wonders of nature at its best. Since my retirement I frequently visit California and spend winter months hiking in the mountains.

Being fortunate to survive from a family of 140, I vowed to educate and relate my story to the younger generation to help prevent injustice and prejudice. It disappoints me that humanity has not learned from the dark history of the Holocaust. Crimes of genocide are being committed in Yugoslavia and Africa as the world silently watches.