

~ An Autobiography with Emphasis on the Holocaust Period ~
by Paul Gottesman - Buchenwald Prisoner No.: 58710

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I, Paul Gottesman, was born on November 8, 1927 in the town of Užhorod then in Czechoslovakia in the regional capital of the province of Podkarpatska Russ. My father Dr. Samuel Gottesman (born in Mezökaszony in 1882 which was then a part of Austro-Hungaria) was a lawyer by profession and my mother Margit [Born in 1887 Sept. 2 as Fried Margit was from Eger, Austro-Hungaria], and was a homemaker. I should have had two brothers and a sister but they were stillborn or passed away shortly after birth.

We considered ourselves as members of the Hungarian minority, but like most Jewish middle class families my parents wanted me to speak German and so employed a German 'Fraulein' and sent me to a German Kindergarten. Later on I attended the Czech elementary school.

In November 1939, after the Vienna Pact, our city became part of Hungary and was renamed Ungvár. I just started to attend the Boy's Gymnasium (Boy's High School), where Czech was spoken. Now (post Vienna Pact), we had to study in Hungarian and were forbidden from speaking Czech. I finished the third grade gymnasium (7th grade in the U.S.), when all Jewish students where forced to transfer out of the non-Jewish schools. I started my 4th grade in the local Hebrew High where I had to study the Hebrew language. I continued to study at this school for the next three grades until the German occupation of Hungary (March 19, 1944). The last school year was terminated two months prematurely because of the German occupation.

We lived in Ungvár at Kosuth Tér 10 in the largest apartment building in the city of that time. The building was built by my maternal grandfather Ignac Fried and it was named after him, the 'Fried Palace' (SEE picture).



After my grandfather died the house was inherited by my Mother and her sister Irén. At the time when we were taken to Aushwitz my aunt Irén was in a mental institution in Sátoraljaujhely. The 'Fried Palace' had 24 apartments and eighteen stores. 22 apartments

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were occupied by Jews and only the manager and one of the occupants was not Jewish. The importance of these facts became apparent after the Germans occupation of Hungary.

Two weeks into the Germans occupation, we were assigned 6 German soldiers to our house whom we had to provide with food and shelter. I remember when one of them approached my mother one day and apologized for the lousy treatment of the Jews by the Germans. One day my father wanted to take our family jewelry and hide it with a priest. We the Jews could not move freely since we had to wear the yellow star and had a curfew enforced against us after five o'clock in the evening. My father hired a horse-drawn carriage for the purpose, but he was intercepted and the jewelry was confiscated.

Three weeks into the occupation the authorities forced all Jewish occupants of the 'Fried Palace' building to vacate the premisses. We were allowed only to take our clothes with us. The Germans set up Gestapo Headquarters in the building and converted the attic and the cellar into a prison. My father, mother and me moved in with my uncle, Gottesman Bertalan (Berti) at the other end of the town. During our one week stay there we celebrated my cousin Gottesman, Laszlo's Bar Mitzvah. During the night before we were taken to the ghetto my uncle woke us up and told my father that he is leaving and taking his wife and his son to a prearranged hiding place with one of the Ruthenian peasants. My father begged him to take me too, but my uncle said that the place is very crowded and that there are additional people involved and he is not entitled to take anybody else with him. So we separated. They luckily survived the war because many who hid and were discovered were Killed.

Four weeks into the German occupation the Jews of the city and the vicinity (county) were collected into two ghettos. They were taken into the larger one the 'Téglagyár', a Jewish owned brick factory. There were close to 10,000 jews in the city and about the same number in the vicinity. We slept on the floor which was covered with white clay powder. My mother had an especially difficult time because she was overweight and she had acute diabetes. Sleeping on the floor and then to get up was very difficult for her.

After three weeks in the ghetto they selected people for the cattle-car trains. We were in the third group and on May 26, 1944 we were put on the train. We were told that we were being relocated to southern Hungary where we would set up special settlements for ourselves. We were seventy people in the wagon without any sanitary facilities, men, women and children together. After a short while it became clear that we weren't going to southern Hungary but crossed the Carpathian Mountains to the north into what was before part of Poland. The trip took 3 ½ days during that time only once, after 2 ½ days, was the door opened and we were allowed to go out into an open field for a few minutes. On May 29, 1944 we arrived at our destination. We didn't know at first where we were. We weren't aware of the existence of Auschwitz. There, our last meager possessions were taken away from us. We had to form a line at the end of which there was a German officer who was waving people to his left and to his right. We saw the smoking chimneys but didn't understand their purpose. As we arrived to the selection point, the

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German soldiers separated my mother from my father and me. It was the last time that I saw my mother. We continued from here to one of the showers where they separated us from our clothes, shaved our heads and gave us prison clothes. They left only our shoes for us.

I spent one week in Auschwitz with my father. During that time, everyday, we went through several selections and we succeeded to stay together. One day when they took us to the showers we had to keep quiet all the time. Apparently I spoke to somebody and one of the KAPOs saw me talking, he hit me with a big stick on my back. I thought that he broke it. It hurt me for several days. On June 6, 1944 they put us on a train to Buchenwald.

We arrived at Buchenwald on the 7th of June and I received prison number 58710 and my father received 58711. There we learned about the allied invasion of Europe. After two weeks I was sent to the Buna artificial gasoline factory near Magdeburg. This factory belonged to I.G.Farben. My father remained in Buchenwald.

In Magdeburg, the first we had to do was clean up after an air raid on the factory. The output of the factory, which was huge like a city, was reduced to 10% of the original production. After the clean-up we were building huge concrete bunkers. The work consisted of digging the holes for the foundation (2 meters deep carrying the cement from the trains to the site, mixing and pouring the cement. The walls of the bunkers were 1.5 meters thick and they had a foundation of 2 meters of thick concrete. One day, a half ton bomb exploded on top of one of the bunkers. It barely left a scratch on it. After 100 days in Magdeburg, reinforcement came from Buchenwald and for each new person one weak or sick one had to be sent back. From the newcomers I found out that my father was still in Buchenwald. Since they were short on people to send back they asked for volunteers. I was naive enough to volunteer. On September 28, 1944 I was sent back to Buchenwald.

On my arrival to Buchenwald they put us into the camp's separate quarantine (here we were photographed by one of the Danish police prisoners - who had privileges and had an internal newspaper - See attached photo) Here I got in touch with my father who had connections with the internal leadership of the camp and they pulled me out from the group that I returned with from Magdeburg. Most of the others were sent after two days probably to Auschwitz. I was put in a group which was being assembled to be sent out and my father this time joined me. On October 7, 1944 we were sent to a small makeshift plant in a small town called Niederorshel near Halberstadt. The plant was a converted furniture plant where in a very primitive way Messerschmitt military airplane wings were assembled. I worked on assembling the outside panels of the wing from aluminum sheets. After some three months we, the 'professionals', were assembled for a transport to another camp Malachite Concentration Camp in Langenstein-Zwieberge near Halberstadt.

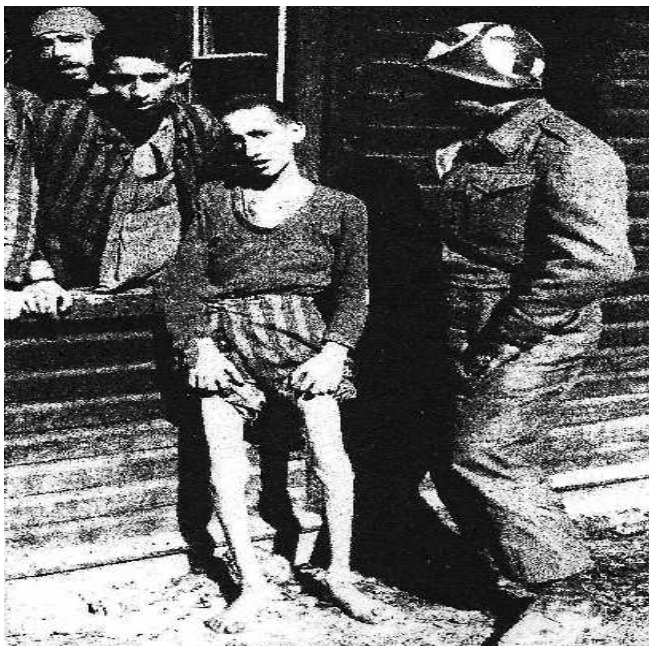
Malachite camp was nearby an underground factory built under a mountain where V1 rockets were to be built. Upon arrival they notified us the Jews that we can not work in

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the factory, we can only perform non-professional tasks like carrying material and equipment from the arriving trains. The rations which had been reduced were further reduced and the living conditions were much worse than in the previous camps. The condition of my father deteriorated rapidly and on March 1, 1945 he was allowed to remain in the camp and perform maintenance jobs there. We had to walk close to an hour in each direction just to get to work and back. At night on March 15, 1945, I was awoken by other inmates telling me that my father collapsed in the latrine. We brought him back the barrack. He barely was able to talk and after an hour he was dead. I continued working for two more weeks when I myself was unable to join the work detail. They put me in a special barrack where sick people were waiting to die. Here the rations were even further reduced. We received one 'meal' a day which consisted of a very small and lean portion of potato peel soup. We were full of lice and on one side of my body I had huge wounds.

On April 11, 1945 early in the morning there was a lot of activity in the camp and they told us that instead of going to work as usual, the able prisoners have to go on a march. They told us the sick will remain. From far away we heard artillery fire. After all the able bodied people left people noticed that only old guards remained in the guard towers. The next day when we woke up some of us noticed that the guards were gone. Some of the people who were still able to walk went out from the camp which had one exit and was surrounded by mountains. Not far from the exit there was a road. Around noon on April 12, an American patrol passed by and the prisoners flagged him down. The patrol called in the medics. The U.S. army's 8th Armored Division took me in an ambulance to the military field hospital in Halberstadt.



Liberation: On 19 April 1945, a U.S. Soldier speaks with a malnourished prisoner of the Langenstein-Zweiberge concentration camp, a sub camp of Buchenwald. Most internees were here for the secret project "Malachite," toiling underground. On 11 April, the U.S. Army liberated the camp, although thousands of prisoners were recently sent on a Death March-2,500 people did not survive it. Second from the left is Paul GOTTESMAN.

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After two weeks in the hospital the army put me in a German labor camp previously intended for foreigners, where they fed us and let us recuperate. The area in the meantime was transferred to the British who warned us that it would come under Soviet rule. I joined two other Hungarian prisoners and we decided to return home together. We traveled to the city of Passau on the border with Austria. There I contacted the Czech mission and asked them to repatriate me to Užhorod. They promised me they would but they warned me that the city would belong to the Soviet Union.

After arriving in my hometown I discovered that our house was now occupied by the Soviet secret police. I couldn't even enter the building. I found my uncle and his family. They were already packed to leave for Hungary. I inquired about my mother and my aunt Irén. Nobody heard from or about them then or any time later. The old borders were still open and we could move freely to Hungary and back. My uncle Berti registered me to continue my high school education in Nyiregyháza in Hungary. Then my uncle separated from his wife and moved to Budapest and called me to come to him. On my way I was injured at the train and spent a month in the Jewish Hospital in Budapest. My uncle tried to send me through the 'Joint' organization to America - unsuccessfully. Then I joined the Zionist organization 'Hanoar Hazioni' and with them I left Europe in November 1946 through Yugoslavia to Palestine. We left with two ships. The smaller one carried all the youth and a bigger ship, renamed 'Knesset Israel', carried the elderly and families with small children. The intent was to smuggle us in while the British were busy with the big ship. Unfortunately our small ship called 'Anastasia' ran aground and we had to transfer to the big ship. After a whole month on the sea we were intercepted by the British and after a brief skirmish in port Haifa I was transferred with the rest to the Summer Detention camp in Cyprus.

After one year in Cyprus, out of which 6 months I spent as a volunteer in the Jewish wing of the British military hospital in Nicosia, I finally arrived in Palestine in November 1947 the day when the U.N. declared the partition of Palestine. After a month in Atlit, the British transit camp, and one more month in Kiriath Shmonah, the Jewish transit camp, I was released then drafted into the Israeli Army. First I served two years in the infantry as a medic and got discharged as a sergeant. I wanted to learn a trade and conscripted for three more years to the Israeli Air Force. I received training as a radio technician. Eventually after the radio technician course I continued and trained as a radar technician which a year after my discharge landed me a position in the Weizmann Institute of Science.

In the Institute where I worked as an electronic technician, I met my wife Ruth Gottesman née Pardo and we got married on November 8, 1956. On August 17, 1961 our daughter Ronit Margalit was born. The Institute sent me to the United States to learn the Tandem Van de Graf particle accelerator which I had to maintain. While in the U.S. I discovered that I could stay in the States and complete my studies which were interrupted by the WWII. After our arrival on June 26, 1964 I registered at Los Angeles City

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College and worked full time first as an electronics technician and after a recession in the electronics field, I became a computer programmer. After completing my AA degree in Mathematics I transferred to California State University in Los Angeles where I graduated with a B.S. degree in Mathematics. During this time our second child Gil Samuel was born on January 20, 1969. In 1971 I was accepted to the University of Southern California. I graduated with an M.S. degree in Computer Science. During all this time I was working full time as System Development Officer in Security Pacific Bank. After graduating from U.S.C. in February 1974, we decided to settle here permanently. We applied for citizenship and bought our home in which we still live.

After that I worked at Informatics, Inc., then First Interstate Bank and Health Affiliated Services, Inc. as a computer programmer. At age 65 I retired and I still live with my children in our home in North Hollywood, California U.S.A.