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My Memories of the

Holocaust

David Brand

Life Before The Germans

The year 1938 was of great importance to me. I was attending a private Hebrew high school – it was hard for Jews to attend public Polish high schools. We lived on the west side of Przemyśl, a city in southern Poland with a population of 50,000. The river Sam divides the city. The eastern part was the main part and held the Hebrew high school. Every day I crossed the bridge and walked three miles to my high school. Classes were held from 8 AM to 2 PM. In the morning, I walked straight to school. On the way back I walked with my friends Milek and Pinek through a marketplace called Zydowskie Miasto, which in English means Jewish town. The marketplace had many small shuls and a large 400-year-old synagogue. The walk through that market was very exciting. Many farmers and peasants brought fruits and vegetables on horse drawn wagons to sell to the city people. There was constant yelling and haggling punctuated with occasional attempts at shoplifting.

I wasn't a very good student, yet I was interested in history and astronomy. At home I had some Jewish friends, Isaac and Lusi. I had other friends Stephan, Olga, and Slawek – all three of whom were Ukrainians, and Mietek who was Polish. Mietek's father was a volksdeutsche, a German living outside Germany. We were all very good friends even though Mietek's father objected to our friendship because I was a Jew. But Mietek didn't obey his father.

In 1939 I stopped going to high school and went to work in a tool factory.

There were many rumors of war. Hitler had already occupied part of Czechoslovakia. Poland tried to prevent his invasion. They invited Goering to hunt buffalos. Goering enjoyed it very much. When he returned to Germany, he demanded to annex Danzing – a Polish city in the Baltic sea.

I joined a Zionist organization named Hanoar whose dreams were to go to Palestine despite a British blockade. We wanted to go because of the war, and the British put up the blockade because of the war.

Our house had a carpentry shop in the basement where we made beds and cots. I was hired for two hours each day to carry the lumber from the street to the basement, for which I was paid about 10 cents. I was allowed to stay in the shop where I learned how to use a plane to smooth the boards. We called one carpenter Hunchback. He always told me how important it was to keep the streets clean. He told me I should go on the streets, pick up the cigarette butts, and bring them to him to dispose of. Later I found out that he collected the tobacco from the cigarette butts and rolled them into new cigarettes, which he smoked. I was not mad at him but I thought it was funny.

I cleaned the streets with my best friend Slovik. As I write this, I remember that he asked me to teach him Yiddish. He would teach me Ukrainian.

Two events affected me greatly. The first was when Mussolini invaded Abisinia, now Etheopia. Heile Selaseie, their king asked the league of nations for help which the league largely ignored. The other event was the Spanish civil war between Franco fascism supported by Hitler, and the leftists

supported by the Soviet Union and volunteers from many nations including the United States. I didn't have a good feeling about either of these events. The Fascists were invading all over the world and I knew that fascism was bad.

Despite my feelings on the war, I spent my free time playing soccer and going to the river with my friends. In the winter I went sleigh riding from the hill Lipowice, which was very close to where I lived.

Then came September 3.