

MY EXPERIENCE IN THE CAMPS

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... The Jewish population in Kutno was given only a few hours to leave the former villages and be relocated to the ghetto *Konstancja* – the half-destroyed sugar factory with some old buildings, where so many Jews needed to be housed. From that day on, my life of pain and wanderings began, like the life of an entire community of Jews from my hometown.

The small area of the ghetto soon created serious problems of order and hygiene. Every nook and cranny was occupied, but hundreds were left outside, under the open sky.

The ghetto was surrounded by barbed wire and was strictly guarded by police. No one was allowed to leave the fenced area. Due to the difficult sanitary conditions, diseases and epidemics broke out in the ghetto and the constant famine increased demoralization.

However, even in those dark days, people did not completely let go. In particular, the youths have done

everything possible to renew a certain cultural activity. In the evenings, songs were sung, mainly of their own composition, that portrayed the sad day and promised a better tomorrow. Much has been done to counteract the prevailing mood. The Kirszbaum brothers did much to change the situation.

To this day, it is difficult for me to understand how I left the ghetto. I only remember that an old man, who looked like a beggar, once gave me the address of a Ukrainian family, Chuszko, in the village of Gnojno¹, 3 km from *Konstancja*. I took advantage of a moment when the policeman at the ghetto gate met a girl – and I was already on the other side.

The Chuszko family treated me very well. In the course of six weeks, I sewed them clothes. True, they did not pay me - and I would not take any money even when they suggested it. I was assured of a home, a good bed, food to satiety and a humane treatment. Compared to the

¹ TN: 3.4km south-west of *Konstancja*.

ghetto I had left, the refuge looked to me like paradise. Unfortunately, the case had to end there. The frequent controls and searches for Jews terrorized the Chuczkos – and I had to get away from them.

I arrived in the town of Kłodawa, where my uncle W. Balzamowicz lived, my father's brother. The night before, I had met in Krośniewice with the Milosierny family. There was still no ghetto in Kłodawa, Jews could move freely throughout the city, only had to wear yellow badges. It did not take long again – and during a commotion in the town, I was caught and taken by a large transport to the town of Koło. After a medical examination, we were sent to Buchwälder-Fors[?], near Nowy-Tomyśl, in Germany. Before I arrived, I still heard the last news of the Kutno ghetto: the Jews are starving, filthy, and sick. And this image accompanied me all the way during my journey to Wiesenburg, as a captured slave laborer.

Our work was based on the motorways in and around Wiesenburg. Although it was a horrible, the relatively good food and the not-so-bad treatment of civilian Germans, our overseers, created the illusion that if things went on like this, they would survive the war... When the freeway was completed, we were sent to Kostrzyn², where we met thousands of prisoners from other nations as well. The food there was very bad and someday, the Jews were selected and sent to Auschwitz.

Arriving in hell, we realized that until now we had been privileged prisoners, contrary to what we had seen and tried to hear about the atrocities in Auschwitz. Instead of civilian Germans SS murderers with sadistic and brutal

tendencies, our private clothes were replaced by the camp uniform; a number was placed on each arm. Our names have been changed to numbers.

In Auschwitz, I met with Kutno compatriots: Ajzyk Rosenblum, Dawicki, and Zerach Kirszbaum³. I do not know what happened to them.

In Auschwitz, in addition to the terror and the prospect of perishing in the gas chamber, there was also a constant famine. I was picked up and assigned to one of the tailor workshops. The work was not too difficult – only the joy did not last long. One day, during a selection, 300 men were selected and transferred to block 2, from where the road led directly to the crematorium. I was among the condemned and none of us believed that we would remain among the living. Nevertheless, we were sent back to the workshop after a few days. We had a feeling, as if we came back to this world...

I had a similar case later, when I was sent to the hospital due to weakness, during a selection of the sick, I was the last in line. It seems that the murderers have already had a full "count" for the gas chamber – and several sick of the last row remained alive.

When the first bombs fell on Auschwitz and the Germans felt their defeat, we were taken to Buchenwald and from there to Rehmsdorf. The place was badly damaged by the Anglo-American aviation. Thousands of prisoners were ordered to continue their march on foot to Theresienstadt, where we awaited the day of the liberation. The SS men suddenly disappeared – and in their places appeared our liberators...

² TN: 20km east of Poznań.

³ TN: elder brother of the Kirszbaum brothers (Herman, Kopel and Josef). He died in Dachau on the 10th of April 1945. His wife and son survived and immigrated to Israel.