

Michal Warzager At Work



This picture of me was taken in 1939, shortly before the war started. It was while I was working in a small concrete factory. They took this machine outdoor especially to have this picture taken.

I wound up working for some distant relatives - I don't remember whether they were from Mother's or Father's side of the family. They had a concrete factory. Father arranged it all somehow with the oldest of them - Abram, his name was - and they took me on. That was in a village on the way to Chelm called Udalec, and there were two factories there: one Jew who made bricks, and these relatives of ours with the concrete factory. There were four of them: Abram, Motl, Acze and Pejrec. And their mother was still alive, and a daughter, their sister. I think her name was Jenta, but I don't remember the mother's. The concrete factory made sections of piping, pavement, slabs for bedding sewers, and roof tiles. I made roof tiles. It was all in one room - I had a machine for making the tiles, and the other stuff was cast in molds in the courtyard.

Three Poles worked there - one older guy and two younger ones, around 20 years old. The young ones were roughnecks - they used to hassle me, saying 'Oh, a Polish Jew' - but that's about all. The older one taught me how to make the roof tiles. Lay it down, sprinkle it with cement, splash a bit of water on it, run it twice through the machine, and it was ready. Sometimes when someone wanted some colored tiles, we made red ones. My quota was 100 tiles a week, working one eight-hour shift. I knocked off at three, and then spent about an hour cleaning the machine and the workplace, and then I was free. We worked Monday through Friday; the Poles didn't come to work on Saturdays or Sundays, but on Sundays we had to glaze the tiles, and that girl Jente would help us a

bit.

The owners of the concrete factory were good people. I lived with them; I slept in the kitchen, where there were two beds. The older Polish guy - the one who taught me to operate the machine - slept in the other. Sometimes I stayed there for Sabbath. There was a shul right in their house: a big room where other Jews I didn't know came. I only knew the one who made bricks by sight, because he came there sometimes. The Sabbath preparations were like ours at home - cholent in the oven. Later on Saturday, if I wanted to, I was welcome to sit at the table with the owner and his brothers, and their mother served up the meal.

If I wanted to see my parents, I went home by bicycle - they had three bicycles and let me use one. I had to learn how to ride it first, and while I was learning I fell and hurt myself a few times. The road was about 300 meters from the factory, and they let me ride a bit there for practice. And I'm riding along faster and faster and the next thing I know I'm in a ditch - luckily it wasn't full of water. But once I'd learned how, I'd ride a bicycle home for all the holidays, and sometimes for the Sabbath. I worked there almost right up to the start of the war. About a month before the war broke out, Abram said to me: 'Don't come in tomorrow - we're leaving.' That was in August 1939, and in September it all started.