

Ladislav Porjes' Proof Of Identity



I got this identification in Krakow in February of 1945 after my escape from Birkenau. On this document you can make out my name, date and place of birth, that I'm escaped prisoner B-14219 from a concentration camp. In Krakow I served wearing the uniform of Svoboda's Army at the Allied American-Soviet-British military mission. I worked as a translator and interpreter during interrogations of captured German officers or disoriented, liberated prisoners for the following few months.

At the Allied Military Command in Krakow, in March of 1945, I had an interesting thing happen to me. Major Abramov asked me, 'Bist a Jid?' [German for 'Are you a Jew?']. There were several of us sitting around a table, I was taking my time in admitting it, deep down in me the news of atrocities

in Stalinist Gulags and Ukrainian ghettos were still resonating. I wasn't sure what Major Abramov was like, nevertheless I risked it and admitted that I'm a Jew. He laughed, and pulled a full bottle and a half a cake out of a drawer. He said, 'One more. Don't worry, I'm also a Jew.' And passed me a glass of vodka.

The major and I sat and talked late into the evening, whereupon he left with his colleagues for their barracks, taken over from the Germans. I was however a bit wobbly after such a quantity of alcohol, to which I had grown unused during the war years. I aimed for the former Polish branch of the international women's organization YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association], where I lived. I've always had a terrible sense of direction, so after an hour of weaving through the badly-lit streets of Krakow I found that I was definitely lost. But hope gleaned, I glimpsed a strip of light blinking through a window cranny of some basement dwelling. I knocked on the badly sealed, dirty window.

Underground a commotion broke out, after a long while I heard shuffling footsteps and the basement door opened a crack. By the light of a candle appeared a wrinkled, bearded face. The old man heard me out and gestured for me to come on in. Inside the basement confusion ensued, there were about a half dozen women there, young and old, emaciated and dressed in ragged remnants of prison garb. The old man introduced himself as Smul, and told me that I should stay overnight at his place, as my lodgings were at the opposite end of town. The women were his daughters and friends that had by miracle survived the Holocaust in several scattered camps. I got the best straw mattress, they fed me bread and garlic, I told the story of my own journey through the camps, and went to sleep. In the morning something moist on my left hand woke me up. Sleepily I turned around and saw my host kneeling beside my mattress and kissing my hand. I tied into him, 'What the hell are you up to, I'm not a woman?!' Smul refused to let go of my hand and whispered, 'Don't drive me away, sir, you're God's person, and I plead with you to bless me and my family and friends!' I scolded him, why was he blaspheming so. 'Yes, yes, it was the hand of God. While you were sleeping at my place, terrorists blew up your dormitory. Everyone who was sleeping there is dead. Only you alone remained alive!'