

Wacek Kornblum At The Inaugural Ceremony Of The Monument To Warsaw Ghetto Uprising



This is me on the inaugural ceremony of the Monument to Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It was 1948.

At the beginning of the existence of the ghetto, when there were the first blockades, Dad was involved in some backyard self-defense. Every house had a self-government. People helped one another, it was done both for social reasons and for the sake of maintaining order. And I remember that people came and demanded money, supposedly for the underground, but we all knew it was a plain robbery and theft, and Dad, somehow, for his money, bought knives, and gave it to some of the young people in the backyard, and the self-defense was created. People imagined some things could be arranged for this way.

Then the typhus epidemics broke out. In the ghetto we had a Judenrat decree and a so called '13' kept a close eye that anyone who came down with typhus was taken to a hospital, it was banned to be sick at home. They were afraid the epidemics would spread. Those taken to the hospital usually never came back. And Uncle Lajbisz Gefen's brother, Szmelke, who lived in the same back premises got sick with typhus first. Lajbisz lived on the second floor, and his brother on the first. He didn't have children, had a significant hump, lived with his wife. And as Uncle Lajbisz was a good man, his brother and brother's wife were considered to be bad people. They never helped anyone, they were withdrawn, sullen, he was a co-owner of the bakery. He was always sickly, pale, because of that hump probably too, and they knew that if they took him to the hospital that would be the end of him, but they had to call a doctor when he got sick. They brought a doctor in, and I remember they tried to bribe him with golden dollars, or so called 'piglets', that's what we used to call Russian rubles, but the doctor refused and reported and they took to the hospital where he died.

It was getting worse and worse, raids began. They were making so-called blockades. They would come to the building, to the backyard, gathered people and took them to Umschlagplatz. They did the blockade on 35 Niska, we were at home, everything went quiet as if there was not a soul anywhere. They, the Jewish police, started going from apartment to apartment, banging at the doors, pulling people out, unbelievable screams. And they started pounding on our front door. I know that Dad opened the door just a little and said something, and they shut the door and it lasted for a long while, but nobody banged on the door any more, and then everything went quiet and we understood they all left. Then a policeman came and Parents gave him money. It turned out that Mom, without Dad's knowledge, kept putting some money aside in the wardrobe, under the linens, and she managed to collect some. And when that moment came, she took it out and we bought ourselves out this way.

People 'belonged' to bunkers. There were huge bunkers in the ghetto, hooked up to sewers even on the Aryan side, electricity, there were bunkers with a telephone. We belonged to Uncle Lajbisz's bunker. In the bakery, where the shelves with bread were, they built a temporary bunker. One of the walls with shelves could be moved to the side and you could go behind that shelf and there was a small room.

Once a German came to the bakery and asked for a loaf of bread and we all froze, because that shelf was moved to the side, you could see the passageway. And he looked - he was somehow dumb or from the Wehrmacht - and took that loaf and left. Whenever there was a raid in the ghetto we sat there behind that wall with bread. The bakery workers had another bunker. Under the stoves, there was a deeply dug huge bunker for 40 people, that you entered from the room with a shower. A part of the wall moved to the side there.

From the Aryan side Jehuda Feld used to come visit Dad. He had something to do with the Bund underground, he used to talk to Anka and Poldek, Uncle Gefen's son. They were involved, because I also remember how armed Jews came to Uncle's bakery and took money for the underground. I witnessed such a robbery once, Uncle wasn't there then, Aunt was sitting there, she opened the drawer and gave them all the money. I think she even took her necklace off and gave it to them, too.

I escaped from the ghetto, just before the uprising started. I was hiding in a village Kowalewsczyzna near Bialystok. I was dazed, depressed, I knew there had been the uprising in the ghetto. People would say: 'Jews are fighting, they're being liquidated...'