

Stories My Father Told Me

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My father told these stories during the summer of 2008 in several telephone conversations between New York and Los Angeles. The words in quotes are the specific words my father used.

Chaim Asher Zelig Eisenberg Stein (HaKohen) was born in Zmigrod, Poland, in 1918. His father was Yidal Stein and his mother was Dvorah Eisenberg Stein. My father had three brothers, Leisha (the oldest), Pinchas, and Myer. He also had two sisters, Sarah and Lieba. My father remembered Sarah as "a strong person...she got things done". (Sarah's strength will be demonstrated in later stories.) Lieba was married to a man from the town of Gribov and it was considered a "big shidduch". They had two children, Shimola (about age 3) and Rochel Leah (about age 5).

Dvorah Eisenberg Stein was the daughter of Shimon Eisenberg. She had many siblings, including Yitzchak and Oscar. Oscar Eisenberg married Yocheved and had three children. They are Henny Buckman, Betty Kurzman, and Shimon Eisenberg. Dvorah's brother, Yitchak, had two children. Hirsch died in the War and Malka survived and lived in Brooklyn. Malka had three children, Ellen, Susan, and Chaim.

Yidal Stein had a sister who was married to Avraham Chaim Reinhold. The Reinholds lived in the town of Gorlitz and had three sons. One son, Mechiel Yidal, was a socialist and went to Russia. The second son, Chanina, was last seen by my father when Chanina was being transferred by the Germans from one train to another. The third son, Chaskel Reinhold, went to Israel after the

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Shimon
Betty
Henny

War. In the 1970s, my parents went to Israel to visit Chaskel Reinhold and his family.

Yidal Stein (my father's father) had a store in Zmigrod where he sold shoes and leather. In Zmigrod, the wives did not work. My father described his mother as one who "scrubbed potatoes and cooked Jemeka Grits" (potato soup with onions). On Shabbes, Dvorah (my father's mother) cooked cholent, fleish (meat), and keechan (cakes). Special clothes for Shabbes were always hanging in the closet. "Tata" (my father's name for his father) had a bekeshah (special coat) for Shabbes. I asked my father if his mother was pretty and had jewelry. My father's answer was "don't ask if my mother was pretty because I don't know. No, she did not have jewelry." Zelig went to Cheder (school) and when he came home, his mother gave him something to eat. (My father continues to cook Jemeka Grits in our home and it is delicious.)

My father learned in Sanz Yeshiva. At that time, the bochrin (male students) would go to different homes every day to eat and sleep. This practice was called "Gegesen Teg" (being in a different place every day). My father considered himself lucky because he ate at Dovid Shochet's house. Dovid Shochet was a "shochet" (slaughterer of animals) and it was known there would be plenty of food. At that time, there was a famous rabbi, Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin. Rabbi Shapiro planned to build a yeshiva where bochrin could eat, sleep, and learn in the same place instead of going to different homes every day. Rabbi Meir Shapiro traveled to different towns to collect money for his new yeshiva and Zmigrod was one of these towns. Rabbi Shapiro went to Sanz Yeshiva and had a "bechirah" (test) with the bochrin who were learning there. My father was 19 years old at the time and had a bechira with Rabbi Shapiro. Rabbi Shapiro later built the yeshiva, Chachma Lublin, which was the number #1 yeshiva at that time.

In the winter, there was plenty of snow in Zmigrod. My father's family would buy wood from a peasant and burn the wood in a stove to keep the house warm. In the summer, my father said "we didn't go to a special place. It was very plain".

My father explained that the contact between parents and children in Zmigrod was not like it is in America. My father could not remember any special games the children played. My father said his parents "just gave us food...we didn't know what a game was". My father explained that you can compare America to Warsaw, but you can't compare America to Zmigrod. In Zmigrod, "there was nothing".

However, my father recalled the following story. In those days, grandparents did not "play" with their grandchildren. One Sunday when the stores were closed, my father remembers seeing his father (Yidal) holding his grandson Shimola's hand as they walked and looked at the window displays.

Dvorah Eisenberg Stein died in 1941 at the beginning of the War. My father recalls that his mother became very sick but "we didn't know from what". There was a hospital in Krakov, and Zelig and Sarah took Dvorah to that hospital. Dvorah realized she was very sick and said in Yiddish "Zelig will say Kadish". Later, Zelig and Sarah traveled by train to Krakov to visit their mother but they didn't know she had already died. When they arrived, they dressed their mother in her clothes and paid a driver to take them all back to Zmigrod. This cost a lot of money. When they arrived in their house, Yidal placed straw on the floor and then placed Dvorah's body on top of the straw. Dvorah was buried in a cemetery in Zmigrod but that cemetery no longer exists.

In 1939, the Germans went into Zmigrod and gathered 1,500 people from the neighboring villages and brought them to the water. Yidal Stein was hiding under a bed, but then went to the

water because the Germans would kill all the Jews if one person was missing. The Germans set up a table near the water and started a selection. At that time, Yidal had a sister living in Heidelberg, Germany, and her name was Blima. Blima had daughters named Lola, Mary, Lilly and one other (my father could not remember her name). Lilly and another sister escaped to England where they lived until they passed away. Blima was sent back to Poland from Germany with her two daughters, Lola and Mary. Blima was considered "old" and sent to the left. One of her daughters said she wanted to go with her mother. Zelig approached the table and "it was very hot" and he lost his voice. The German sitting behind the table realized that Zelig could not speak and wanted to send him to the left. However, a Jewish girl who also worked behind the table said that Zelig was an important man because he checked if houses were clean of rats and worms. Because of this, Zelig was sent to the right. 250 people were sent to the left and put on a truck to the forest in Halbow. They were told to remove their clothes and they were shot. Yidal Stein was murdered in Halbow. People sent to the right were taken to Plashov, a working camp.

On July 20, 1993, Zelig went to the forest in Halbow with a group of men (Mr. Lax and Mr. Fiedling). There, they erected a tombstone in memory of the Jews of Zmigrod who were murdered by the Germans. My father gave a speech which is attached.

My father and his brother, Chanina, were taken to Plashov. My father's job was to dig ditches and Chanina's job was to sort through the clothing of dead people. This clothing would later be sent to Germany. One day, a "Polak" came to the gate of Plashov and said he wanted to see Zelig. The Polak told my father that Lieba, Shimola, and Rochel Leah were hiding in the forest and could barely speak. In the meantime, Chanina had found 1,500 zlotys in a hat and Zelig and Chanina bribed a German soldier named Yannis to take them to the forest by car. In the forest, they

found Lieba and her two children crying and hiding in a hole covered with straw. They were all taken by car to Plashov. The next day, Lieba and her two children were taken to the Ghetto in Krakow where Lieba worked in a house and became a "slave". The Germans gave the two children candy but the children were saying in Yiddish "Zelig, take me home". They were never seen again and my father said they all "went to heaven".

My father's oldest brother, Leisha, was in hiding but jumped off a bridge when he saw the Germans coming.

Myer and Pinchus both went to Belzhitz and died there.

The Germans came to Zmigrod in 1941 and looked in the basements of houses for Jews. My father was wearing his bekeshah and the Germans told him to walk down the stairs to the basement. As he walked down 2-3 steps, a German shot him between the ribs. My father was bleeding and the Germans put him on a truck with 7 other people to be taken to Halbow to be shot. (One of those seven was Yankele Bronfeld who was the Baal Koreh in the shul. His son, Naftali Bronfeld, survived the War and is in a picture with other survivors in Landsberg, Germany. Many survivors lived in Landsberg after the War.)

However, a German officer approached the truck and asked where the man was who had just been shot. My father said "I am the man". The German officer took my father off the truck and brought him to Dr. Zavisza (a non-Jew), who was renting a room from the president of the synagogue in Zmigrod. They laid my father on a couch and the president of the synagogue asked the doctor how Zelig was doing. The doctor replied "very slim". The German soldier was still standing by the door and Zelig said "why did you shoot me....my blood will never be quiet". The president told Zelig to be quiet because these comments would upset the Germans and they could kill all the Jews. A little German officer

(who my father later called "The Angel"), coincidentally came to the doctor's office with a car. Zelig's sister, Sarah, ran after the car and asked for a ride to the city of Yaslaw, where there was a hospital. The driver brought Sarah and Zelig to Yaslaw for treatment.

Zelig was liberated with his brother, Chanina, in 1945 but they didn't know where to go. My father said that "everyone went to the left and I went to the right". A German officer came over to Zelig and Chanina and told them not to go to the right. He explained that forty Russians had just been killed (on the right) and the Russian Army would think that Zelig and Chanina were spies. This was the same German officer "who saved my life three times". (The first time he took Zelig out of the basement, the second time he took Zelig off the truck, and the third time he put Zelig in a car to the hospital in Yaslaw.)

Chanina and Zelig had been liberated and were in the forest. Zelig had to go to the bathroom and walked off to the side. A German Officer was in the vicinity and also walked off to the side to go to the bathroom. Zelig saw the German officer and pretended he was dying by moaning. The officer said in German, "It is too expensive to kill the dog...the bullet is more expensive and he'll die anyway". The German officer left and my father survived.

To be continued...

1845

Malka ←
Chania ←



The Survivors from Zmigrod

שלום עליך נשמות הקדושים: ארץ אל תכסי דמם

We are here standing in Halbow, seven kilometers from Zmigrod. This is the place where the German devils killed 1250 people from Zmigrod. We are here, some of the survivors of Zmigrod -myself, Zelig Eisenberg (Stein), Max Findling, Leo Rosner, Naftali Lax and his children. Today is July 20, 1993. It happened 51 years ago in July of 1942 -

כב תמוז תשנב. This is the Kever where the German monsters killed the Jews from Zmigrod. 1250 innocent people. You German animals not only killed them, but took away their pride and their dignity, you forced them to take off their clothes -naked. Old men and old women, young boys and girls, and little children. This is a heavenly cry. In the time when my people were screaming you were drinking and singing. Someday you will pay for your crimes. There will be a day. Some of your helpers that joined the SS and joined you in the killing are now paying the price, and you know who I mean.

.....נשמת הקדושים. You are not dead. Your body is dead but your soul is in heaven. Let me tell you that Hitler did not kill all the Jews. There is a Jewish life all around the world. We have our own country called Israel, not Palestine. We have the strongest army in the world, the strongest Navy , and the strongest Air Force for the size of our country which has 4 million people.

נשמת הקדושים I am sure you hear me and you must know that your blood has not been shed in vain.