

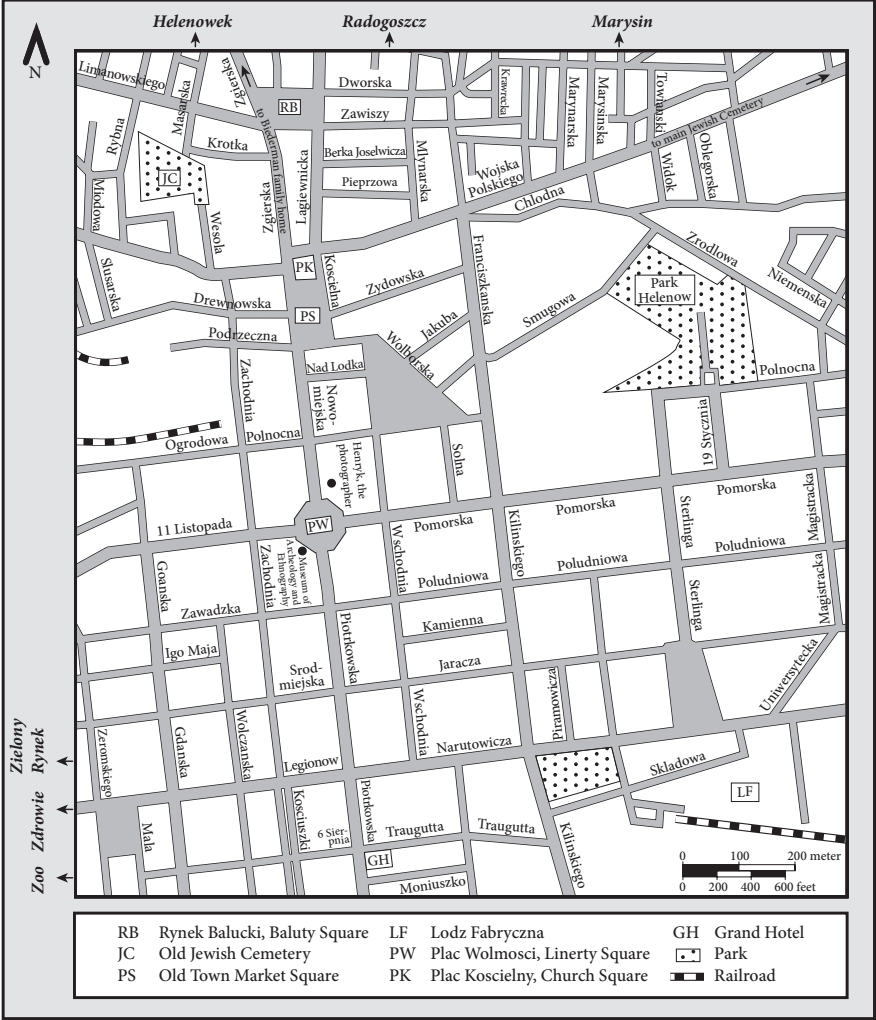
Dedicated to my father, my mother, all of their family members who were murdered by the Nazis, and my wife Randi who in lieu of Hawaii traveled with me to concentration camps and ghettos across Europe.

Contents

Introduction	1
The Quest Begins	8
1993–1996: Relocating to Windsor	10
1996: Travel to Poland	12
Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland: July 1944	15
Auschwitz-Birkenau: 1996	17
Krosno Airbase, Poland: August 27, 1941	27
Fate of My Father’s Family	30
I Receive Unexpected News	33
Maidstone, Ontario: Spring 2001	36
New Information Changes Our Course	38
December 4, 1939: Zeglarska 7, Lodz, Poland	39
Europe: 2001	42
Majdanek	46
Lodz	47
Postwar Europe	50
Maidstone, Ontario: 2001 through 2003	54
Yaron Svoray	60
New York: July 2003	66
Maidstone, Ontario: 2003	69
Wednesday April 21, 2004: Maidstone, Ontario	72
Poland: April 2004	74
Jedwabne	84

Wolf's Lair	87
Berlin 1946	92
Warsaw: 2004	95
Windsor: Spring/Summer 2004	97
Lodz: October 2004	112
Wroclaw	132
Gross-Rosen	135
The Trip Home	142
April 1949 and Beyond: The American Journey	149
Back Home: Ontario, 2004	156
Late 2004–Present: Epilogue	161
Index	170

Postwar Midtown Lodz



Lodz and Environs during World War II



Europe : 1939–1945



--- Harry Biederman's movements
through Europe 1939–1945

- 1 Lodz
- 2 Krosno Airbase
- 3 Plaszow
- 4 Gross-Rosen
- 5 Schindler's Factory: Brunnlitz
- 6 Mauthausen

Introduction

The most significant event of my life happened well before I was born.

I was born on July 23, 1961 in Detroit, Michigan the son of two Polish-Jewish Holocaust survivors: Harry and Sally (Lipschutz) Biederman. My father was the third person on Schindler's now famous List and my mother came face to face with Dr. Josef Mengele, the infamous Angel of Death at Auschwitz. My parents were deeply scarred by their Holocaust experiences. Consequently, growing up with two parents suffering from post-traumatic stress disorders definitely impacted on me. Neither of my parents slept normally. My mother woke up almost every night screaming, which was audible from my bedroom. My father was a complete insomniac. He would stay up all night and watch television until the networks went off the air and the test patterns came on. For me, it was a boon during the summer school break because I was able to stay up with him through the night and watch TV. World War II movies were our favorite genre. I guess it was somewhat cathartic for him to watch re-enactments of Germans getting killed. On the outside, we may have appeared to have been a normal suburban family, but we were anything but that. Both of my parents suffered from substance abuse. My dad drank heavily, and my mom abused prescription drugs. Somehow, despite his heavy drinking and lack of sleep, my father managed to run a very successful electrical contracting business. Oddly enough, it was a skilled trade that he began acquiring while a concentration camp prisoner.

One of my most vivid memories of my childhood, growing up in the 1960s in Oak Park Michigan, a predominately Jewish suburb of Detroit, was my first neighborhood birthday party. My parents, taking a cue from all the other parents in the neighborhood, hosted a party for my sixth birthday. Right from the start, I noticed that my party was somewhat different from all of my friends' parties. They all had grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins in attendance at their party. At my party, the only family members in attendance were my mom, dad, and brother. Naturally, my first question to my parents was: "Where are all MY grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins?"

Don't they like me?" I remember being shocked by the answer: "You don't have any of those relatives. They were all killed by the Germans."

"What?" I enquired. "Why would anyone do that?" What or who are these awful Germans? I was really ticked off. Grandparents were really nice people and they always gave the best presents! Who would want to kill them? And why?

Shortly thereafter, I was on a trip to the grocery store with my mother when a fateful event occurred: we had finished our purchases and my mother received her change; a few bills and a dime. I had always kept the coins, while my mother kept the bills. On this day, I received a strange dime. It was a 1916 Mercury Head dime. The Mercury Head dime went out of production in 1945 and was replaced by the President Franklin D. Roosevelt Head dime, which was minted shortly after his unexpected death. Occasionally, however, the odd Mercury Head dime could still be found in circulation in the 1960s. I was extremely excited and could not wait for my dad to get home from work to show him my new treasure. After he arrived home, I showed him my new Mercury Head dime and told him I wanted to start a coin collection. I was surprised by his response: "My family had a coin collection once. We buried it in the backyard when the Germans came and threw us out of our home."

Those Germans... again! How can they do that?! Were we at risk of being thrown out of our home? How can that happen?! I needed to find out!

My life's quest had begun. From that day forward, I started reading every book and magazine and watched every movie that I could find related to the Holocaust. I was hoping to find the answers to my questions. Even now, as an adult who has spent his entire life researching the Holocaust, my life in Laguna Beach California is still filled with many unanswered questions. After years of study and travel, I still do not have the all the answers.



My Father's mother and his two eldest sisters.



My father and his youngest sister.



My father's three sisters.

In January 1981, my father died after a protracted struggle with pancreatic cancer. I had just finished my freshman year at Michigan State University. Following my father's death, my mother went into a tailspin. She suffered major bouts of severe depression which led to her being hospitalized. She never fully recovered and over the final thirty-one years of her life she experienced multiple recurrences of depression and was hospitalized repeatedly.

In 1984, my mother was no longer able to take care of the family home



My father and his youngest sister.



My mother's family in downtown Krakow circa 1936; my mother is at the far right with a bow in her hair.

and moved to a condo. While I was helping to empty the house for the move, I began cleaning out my father's nightstand and found three old and faded black and white photos of a boy and three girls. I asked my mother who these people were and why did my dad have these strange pictures in his night stand? She replied that the boy was my father and the three girls were his sisters. I was stunned: I did not know that my father had sisters. What kid doesn't know that his father had three sisters? All these years of Holocaust study and I'd never asked my dad about his own history. I never even knew that he had sisters and I never knew what had happened to them. These three little girls were my aunts, my

own family. I was very curious and needed to find out their fate, but was my ability now lost forever?

My first action was to sit my mother down to relate her history before it was also too late. Surprisingly, she produced a similarly old faded photo of her family that I had also never seen before. It is important to note that after the war, neither of my parents had any possessions whatsoever, including family photographs. Fortunately, both of them had relatives overseas to whom family photos were sent prior to the war. My parents were able to retrieve these after settling in the United States. My mother had a first cousin who went to Palestine in 1934 and my father had an uncle who went to Argentina during the 1930s.



Randi and I in the same location in Krakow;
August 1996.

My mother was born in Krakow, Poland on November 16, 1924, the middle child of Edward and Felicja Lipschutz. Her older sibling was brother Henryk and she had a much loved little sister, Rena. The family lived in the Jewish quarter of Krakow, named Kazmierz. Shortly after the Nazis invaded Poland, the family was forced to relocate to the newly formed Jewish Ghetto in the run-down section of Krakow known as Podgorze. It was there that Henryk was beaten to death by an SS officer after he stopped during mandatory labor to assist a fallen worker. In March 1942 the Ghetto was liquidated and my mother's family was

sent to the Plaszow Concentration Camp on the outskirts of Krakow. My mother and grandmother were selected to work at an electrical factory called Kabelwerke. It was an offsite factory, much like Oscar Schindler's enamelware factory. Her father and sister remained in Plaszow. Her father, Edward had many pre-existing health issues from his service in the Polish Army during the World War I and consequently was in and out of the camp infirmary. During one of Edward's infirmary admissions in 1944, Commandant Amon Goeth, who was portrayed in the movie *Schindler's List*, went through on a routine inspection and ordered all of the patients, including Edward, killed. He was killed by lethal injection of phenol, injected directly into his heart. This was not an uncommon, albeit little known, method of killing prisoners in the concentration camps. After the war, my mother was informed of the details of her father's death by a former neighbor who had been a nurse

at the infirmary and witnessed the event. Younger sister Rena, also in 1944, was sent to Auschwitz and was gassed along with all the other children of Plaszow. This was witnessed by another previous Krakow acquaintance who was a *sonderkommando* at Auschwitz. *Sonderkommando* was the term given to Jewish inmates who were selected to work in the gas chambers, removing the dead bodies and transporting them to the incineration pits. They were kept isolated from the general camp population and usually replaced every three months. A select few survived the war. My mother and grandmother went on to survive Plaszow and three other concentration camps.

After interviewing my mother and finding out everything I could about her family, I asked her what she knew about my father's family. She responded that she only knew that they were from Krosno, Poland and had all been killed by the Germans. I told her that I needed to know more. I was determined to find out their stories and what happened to them: including their names, birth dates, and *yahrzeit* (memorial) dates. I felt that it was important for me to know this information, because there was no one else left to remember them. I also asked her if my father had ever mentioned anything about buried coins. She said that my father once told her that he and a friend had gone back to his boyhood home after the war to retrieve some coins buried in their backyard. She said that the house had been occupied by a Polish family and that "the Polak had a gun and shot at them. The friend was killed, and your dad ran away and never went back." Incidences of anti-Jewish pogroms in Poland were rampant after the war. The most notable was the Kielce Pogrom where forty-two Jews returning home from the concentration camps were killed by Polish policemen.

"So the coins are still there?" I asked.

"No way," she responded, and then added: "the Poles dug up every inch of ground when the Jews left. There is nothing there."

"I wouldn't be so sure," I said. "I can't even find my wallet in the drawer where I left it. How are they going to randomly dig up their yards to find something that they don't know is there? Impossible! The coins are still there and I am going to find them, and I'm also going to find out what happened to my dad's entire family."

"How are you going to do that?" she asked.

"Records," I said. "They were from Krosno; certainly I can find an address and birth certificates and go from there."

"Records, shmecords. There are no records...the Germans destroyed everything," she said.

"Nonsense," I said. I knew that in 1942, the Germans decreed at the Wannsee Conference that they were going to find every Jew in Europe and

kill them. They kept the minutes of this conference and also intended to document the entire process as proof of their accomplishment for posterity. In order to do this, they needed all the records they could get. Quite the contrary to destroying records, they manically saved them. “The records are there; the coins are there, and I am going to find them,” I told my mother.

The Quest Begins

My first step was trying to find a town in Poland called Krosno, which was, according to my mother, my father's hometown and the likely resting place of the coins. This was, by the way, 1984 which was prior to the advent of the internet. There were not a lot of research tools available. In those days, the main resource was the local library. It was there, that I was able to find information about a small town in the southeastern corner of Poland called Krosno, near the Ukraine border. I obtained an address for the city hall and Vital Records Office. I thought this is way too easy! I envisioned simply writing to the clerk, getting my father's birth certificate which, I believed, would include an address for his family's pre-war home. I would then get birth certificates for all his sisters. Being provided with a home address would allow me to just show up in Krosno, dig up the coins, and be on my way.

When I returned home from the library, I enlisted the help of my mother and wrote a letter in Polish to send to the Krosno Vital Records office asking for records of a Biederman family. Three months later, after no response, I sent another pleading for information; I told them that I was doing a genealogy project and I need it completed to graduate from university. After another three months and still no response, I sent another letter and included a ten-dollar bill stating that I hoped it would cover any expenses for the records. After a third three months and again receiving no response, I sent a fourth letter. This time, against my mother's pleading wishes (don't you send those Polaks a dime!) I included a twenty-dollar bill, begging for information. I included a note offering to send more money, if necessary, to secure the records I was seeking. We were now at a year of one-way correspondence. This turned out to not be so easy. Being chastised by my mother was even worse: "I told you—the Germans destroyed all the records. They don't have them and even if they did... they wouldn't give them to you. They HATE you. You are a Jew."

"Mom, how would they know I was Jewish from the letters?" I asked.

“They know! They know a Jewish surname and they have a sixth sense to detect a Jew.” She replied.

Finally, I convinced her to write a final letter. This one I sent to the Polish Embassy in Washington DC stating that I needed critical information about my father’s family from Krosno, Poland and asked if they could help. At the bottom I said: PS, although my surname is not a Polish name, I am Polish and not a Jew.

I waited for six months and heard nothing back from the Polish Embassy. By now I was a second-year veterinary student at Michigan State University in East Lansing. I decided to take one final shot with the Polish officials. I was in Chicago to attend an MSU vs Northwestern University football game and I was aware that there was a Polish consulate in Chicago. Keep in mind that this was 1985, before the fall of communism. Poland was a tightly controlled communist state. Travel to Poland was not easy. I came up with an idea: I made an appointment to speak to a representative to enquire about getting a visa to travel to Poland. I told the representative that I wanted to visit my father’s birthplace but was not sure exactly where it was located in Krosno. I asked if they could help me locate the family’s former home. The woman asked me if I still had family in Poland. I responded that I did not. She then asked, “What happened to them?” I told her that my father emigrated from Poland and died in the United States and that the rest of the family had been killed by the Germans during the World War II. Her response was: “Were they Jewish?” At this point, I knew, I was doomed. Needless to say, my visa request was denied and, therefore, my need to obtain information about Krosno was unnecessary, according to the representative. I was told that if I had no living family in Poland, I had no reason to go there.

For the next several years, my research was done in libraries and the Detroit Holocaust Museum. I researched everything about the Holocaust, Krosno, and Polish Jewry trying to find some records of Harry Biederman and family. For the most part, I came up empty although I did learn a lot about the Holocaust and World War II.

Finally, in 1993, five years after graduating from veterinary school, I decided to travel to Poland because I thought if I showed up in person in Krosno, I had a much greater chance of successfully obtaining the information necessary to locate the coins. By this time, communism had collapsed and it was much easier to travel there. After speaking with my mother and many of her survivor friends from Poland, I decided to put the trip on hold. As I recall the advice was something like: “Are you crazy? They will kill you there!” My mother’s response was: “You can go after I die because it will kill me if you go there.”

1993–1996: Relocating to Windsor

I have never lived a traditional life. Unlike most Jewish boys from Oak Park, I decided to become a veterinarian instead of a doctor, much to the chagrin of my mother. And not just any veterinarian... I went on to become a horse doctor. My father loved to bet on the horses. I assumed it helped him cope with his post-traumatic stress disorders. I grew up around the racetrack and became a racetrack veterinarian. In 1993, the racehorse industry in Michigan collapsed due to the poor economy, so I relocated my veterinary practice to Windsor, Ontario, Canada. I had decided to focus on equine surgery, and since the equine industry was still thriving in Ontario, it seemed like a logical move. Windsor was right across the river from Detroit, so I was still very close to home.

I had kind of reached an impasse on my research. Not that I'd abandoned the quest, I was just focused on launching my new surgical clinic and in those pre-internet days, research was so arduous and time consuming. Since very few of the records were computerized, one had to do an in person search at the site where the archives were stored. Specific searches were conducted by painstaking page by page reading. What, at that time, took several hours or days (and possibly required travel) now is done in milliseconds on a Google search.

I rented a condo in Windsor on Riverside Drive West, across the street from the Holiday Inn, which, interestingly, housed a movie theatre called the Odeon. In early spring 1994, the movie *Schindler's List* opened there. I went to see it multiple times. Little did I know that it would have great significance to me in regards to my father's history. I was drawn to it because it mainly took place in Krakow, Poland which was my mother's birthplace and home town. From what I knew at the time, I saw it as her history and that of her family.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Приобрести книгу можно

в интернет-магазине

«Электронный универс»

e-Univers.ru