

Poland became Europe's furnace in December of 1942 when Auschwitz was opened. Dr. Adam Brish, a neurosurgeon at Marquette General Hospital, felt Auschwitz's ash as a young man behind barbed wire in Poland. He is a survivor of the Lodz ghetto.

The legacy of Dr. Brish's generation is their collective memory of the Nazi furnaces. Recalling and, luckily, recording these difficult memories is his dark gift to another generation. The hurt resonating from these memories diminishes, ironically, with the passing of Dr. Brish's generation.

Luck is finding a Holocaust witness willing to share their grief with a stranger. Primo Levi said in **The Awakening**, "**The moment of consciousness is the harshest awakening.**" The following is Dr. Brish's gift to the post- Holocaust generation.

Brish: I was born June 26, 1925. I was 13 years when the Nazis came to Poland, invaded Poland. Well, how did I know that I was Jewish. I mean I was born and raised a Jew. No doubts in anybody's mind that I was a Jew.

Where were you in Poland?

Brish: I was in Lodz, Poland. Lodz is a big industrial city. It's the second biggest after Warsaw. That's where I was when the Nazi's invaded Poland.

How did I encounter anti-semitism? Anti-semitism has been a chronic, very unfortunate occurrence in Europe, certainly in Poland. There was a big Jewish minority, and, of course, if anything goes wrong, and at that time there was depression, it is very easy to blame a minority for everything. Of course, it would be a very long story to describe the atrocities which started right away when the Nazi's invaded Poland.

Part of the Jewish population escaped to Soviet Russia, but we were naive enough to stay. Because even though we heard about the official government anti-semitism introduced by Hitler in Germany, we were absolutely unable to believe in this kind of thing. It is eventually difficult to believe it even now.

When we look back at it, even after I been subjected to all that and most of my family died by the Nazi's during the occupation, it's very easy to convince people. Now, in particular, people want to believe that all this Holocaust is a big hoax. It is very easy to say that. Because things which happened are so unhuman, that young people who didn't see the camps or the ghettos are either not interested in it or have very superficial knowledge of it and are very easily convinced this didn't happen.

What was your family doing at this time? Their professional background?

Brish: My father was bookkeeper. My mother was not working. Women, not very frequently is the word, before the war were working.

What were you doing?

Brish: I was going to school. So, after the Nazi's came in, of course, there was almost daily proclamations by the Nazi regime restricting and taking away completely any human rights from Jews. Eventually at the beginning of 1940, we were crowded in a large ghetto. The Germans called it Lippmanstaat.

It was in Lodz and it was in the poorest part of town. We were crowded in an unbelievable way, so that the whole family would have a room or two. Depends on the size. Eventually they surrounded the ghetto by barbed wire and we were not to leave the ghetto. It was like a big prison except that we were not in cells.

The rations of food were so meager that the population kept dying out from hunger due to disease and literally hunger too. It was a combination. The conditions were very primitive. It was, you know, impossible to keep the basic hygiene. So people were dying from disease, TB, typhus.

What was life like in the ghetto?

Brish: Everyone was suppose to work. So I was working as a mechanic and part of my family died while in the ghetto from disease. Part of my family was transported out from the ghetto, specifically my grandmother who was sick and my 10 year old only sister. They were, as I assume now, taken to a nearby extermination place.

As I found out later on, these people were put in big trucks and were gassed during transportation by the exhaust. Some of these older and very

young people were not even gassed but they just shot them at the edge of the grave. Because they didn't expect very much resistance from them.

Where the roundups daily?

Brish: It wasn't daily. It was in spurts. Of course this was a constant, even though we didn't know exactly what happens to these people. We just had a bad premonition. They did it in spurts to maintain the terror of this very sick population. This way it was absolutely impossible to think even about any resistance because they were starved. Very many dying from hunger or disease.

Now, eventually in September(?), oh by the way, this ghetto was a collection point for Jews from all over Europe which were periodically transported there. These were people who were not use to these terrible conditions. They were crowded sometimes in common schools, in cold, hunger. They just died at an unbelievable rate. Eventually who ever survived all this was supposed to be transported out from the ghetto. I think in September of 1944.

I was left just with my father. At that time, I decided we were not, actually it was I who decided, my father wanted to go, and we decided

that we were not going to go. I was 18 at the time.

Was the ghetto liquidated at this time?

Brish: Yes. We were supposed to move to the railway station. Everything was done on the railway station. The ghetto was divided into two parts. Connected by over the street bridges. Everything was hermetically sealed off. Guards shot, not only, anybody who tried to escape but occasionally they would shoot because they were in good mood or bad mood. Anybody that was close to the wall. As I say there were no human rights. They were the absolute rulers. Even, such policeman, he was an absolute ruler.

Any rate we decided to stay. We hid in an old dilapidated house previously owned by a gardener. Now, of course, the ghetto continued to be surrounded by wire and there was a contingent of Jews, 800 or 600 of them, left behind to liquidate the contents of the apartments and transport them to Germany. We didn't have any connection with these people. It was extremely easy at that time, I mean if anybody would see us, they would go and tell on us. Other words, they were also shot.

We didn't have any connection with these people whatsoever. We survived on some, there were huge storage places of potatoes which were distributed to the population before they were liquidated. We found under piles of rotting potatoes some good potatoes. So we had about two sacks of potatoes.

Then we found a kitchen, in a communal kitchen there, which was preparing soups for the population, some oil. Maybe two liters of oil. So we lived on that. And we lived as good as we have never lived for four years. Because we have never had anything good like that. Not only that, but we also eventually started to have some things which people were planting in the gardens and hadn't grown yet. It started to grow up in a month or two. We had, in addition, some beets or cabbage. We lived like kings. I mean because we never anything like that.

I also built a radio. A crystal radio. So that I had some information from the radio what's going on.

Did you have any information before you built this radio?

Brish: Nothing.

There was no contact with the outside world?

Brish: No, I didn't have anything. I was at the very bottom of the population with no contact.

Your father was in the same condition?

Brish: Same condition.

What is your estimate of Lodz's population?

Brish: Well, there are official estimates. If I recollect, the number of people which actually were exterminated at this ghetto, was about 200,000.

How many months were you in hiding?

Brish: It was, the Russians came January the 19th of '45. Until then the ghetto was surrounded hermetically and they were transporting gradually things from the ghetto. About five months.

How did you and father preoccupy yourself in hiding?

Brish: Read. We read. Funny enough, I studied English from old books which were available of course. We went out during the night and look around in the surrounding buildings which were empty. To find something useful for us.

That's how we built the radio. I found a book on how to build it. I took some earphones (stethoscope?) from a pharmacy. Because there wasn't anything like that.

(Unintelligible). We masked this building in such a way that nobody actually suspected that it was livable.

Where were you in the building?

Brish: In the middle of a field. On the second story. The third floor was all ruined. It was a falling apart building. So the windows were boarded by us. So that it was, absolutely, looking, even for a ghetto, nobody would live there.

What was the worst thing about being in the house?

Brish: There was a threat every day that somebody was going to discover us. We just lived from day to day counting that eventually the Russians are going to come.

Were you afraid of the Russians?

Brish: No. Why should I be afraid of the Russians. They didn't have an agenda to exterminate a certain nation like the Germans. I mean there couldn't be anything worse. I mean it could only be better because if

they would catch us they would probably would have shot us on the spot. Or tortured us and then shot us.

So, there couldn't be anything worse. Of course, we couldn't escape because the Polish population would give us away. Right away. We were very easy to spot. Because we have, you know, quite different features than the Poles. So, it was very easy to spot, very easy.

What did you do after liberation?

Brish: Well, we secured a place to live. A small apartment. And my father got a job with a bookkeeper. I went back to school. The rest is not very interesting from a Holocaust point of view.

Of course we realized later on that the Communist regime is not a fun regime to live with. But, you know, there is no comparison for us with the Nazis. Nothing can compare to it. Absolutely. The Communists were beneficiaries compared to the Nazis. They were angels.

Did you go to Israel?

Brish: I went to Israel in 1956 and stayed there until 1963. Then emigrated to the United States.

How did you tell your children you were a survivor of the Holocaust?

Brish: You see the Holocaust, the event of the Holocaust is crucial in Jewish life and Jewish history. This is being lived through by everybody all the time and probably the next generation or two. It's like the event of, you know, the historical event of Passover escaping Egypt slavery. Except the Holocaust was much worse. This is the central event of our life. It is difficult to say when and how I told my children about it. We don't talk about it everyday.

Every Jew and in particular the survivor and his family is very acutely aware of all this which has happened. But most of the American population, of course, is very acutely aware of it. To a certain extent that they feel guilty that they didn't do enough, in retrospect, to save the six million Jews. Which were actually not even allowed to come to any other place. Even those that were successful to leave, some of them were sent back to this horror. Obviously, this is a terrible thing for American Jews to talk about.

How do you think this will be remembered? How would you like to see it remembered?

Brish: Well, you know, I think that in view of the fact that it

happened in a country that was considered the most civilized in the world. Germany with its history of poetry, music, high culture, high civilization, suddenly became the center of evil. Therefore, we have to realize that this may happen again. In any place. This includes the United States. I have no doubt about it that it may happen. I don't say that it will happen, but that it may happen.

People should be made aware, of that, in particular young people. Therefore dispensing, so to say, the information about the Holocaust periodically or on an official basis, you know, in the form of lectures at the university should be a consideration.

Fortunately enough, which is surprising to me to a certain extent, the young people, some of them, are very interested in it. I am not necessarily talking about Jews. They (young people) are very interested in it.