

Habermann Family Story

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The Habermann family were watchmakers for generations and had three jewelry stores - in Drohobycz, Boryslaw and Truskawiec. The Habermanns were one of the well-to-do the families in town.

The Germans occupied Drohobycz in the middle of September 1939. Some Ukrainians informed the Germans on the whereabouts of Jonah Habermann. The house was raided by the Germans who did much property damage, but Jonah was in hiding and was not found.

Two years later, following the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, the Soviets occupied Drohobycz. All private property was immediately nationalized under Article 11 (prohibition to hold private property).

Wealthy families could no longer live in big cities. Judith and Jonah Habermann were forced to live outside of Drohobycz and moved to Truskawiec. Alex Habermann, who was 12 years old, stayed with his maternal grandparents Joseph and Ethel Hershmann in Drohobycz.

Alex remembered a Jew who fled from Kraków saying: "When will the Germans come to free us from these Bolsheviks".

The Habermann family received a deportation order for Siberia for June 27th, 1941. They were preparing for the journey by hiding assets and packing belongings. On June 22nd, 1941, 5 days before the planned deportation, the Germans breaking the non-aggression pact, invaded the area that was under Russian rule.

Judith and Jonah Habermann returned to Drohobycz. After about a week the Germans entered Drohobycz. Following the German invasion, a pogrom carried out by the Ukrainians took place. 900 Jews were murdered.

The pogrom was followed by humiliations and degrading jobs such as cleaning the streets, as well as looting and killing by the Ukrainians for 6 months.

When the SS entered the city, there was an attempt to blackmail Jonah Habermann, apparently by Jewish informers, who alleged that he gave bribes to the Germans. The Gestapo arrested him and his father-in-law, Joseph Hershmann in May 1942.

The Jews were not allowed to leave the town. All Jews were forced to wear a band with the Star of David on their sleeve and had to take off their hats when passing any German on the street.

All efforts to free Jonah Habermann and his father in law Joseph Hershmann were unsuccessful and they were sent to the Bełżec extermination camp during the August 1942 Aktion.

During the November 1942 Aktion, the family escaped to a nearby village. They walked many hours in the snow in temperatures well below freezing. In the village they hid in a house of a Ukrainian. Later, when they returned to Drohobycz they found out that this Ukrainian person was a Nazi collaborator. It is not clear why he did not give them up or extorted them.

The family returned to the Drohobycz ghetto and lived there under very difficult conditions suffering starvation and poverty until June 1943 when the ghetto was liquidated. Bribing the right people, the family moved then to the work camp Beskiden. Alex worked as a watchmaker and a repairman of precision measuring instruments. His grandmother Ethel hid during the day in a large closet and came out when everyone returned from work. The daily routine included marching 2 -3 kilometers to work in the refinery. "Selections" and executions in the Bronica forest were daily occurrences. Alex was fortunate not be "selected" on two occasions. In spite of the prohibition there was a radio and they knew that the Russians were getting closer.

In March 1944 the remaining family – Alex, his mother Judith, his aunt Adela and his grandmother Ethel escaped on the way from the refinery to the camp and hid in a bunker that was built under a house at 59 Boryslawska street. The bunker was built from February to June of 1943 and was originally intended for 18 Jews. The first group entered the bunker in June 1943 when the ghetto was liquidated. Eventually 46 persons were hiding in the bunker. Whenever there was a shortage of money, additional people entered the bunker.

They had to pay in order to go into hiding in the bunker and the money was used for buying food for all of them.

The bunker measured 10x3x1.8 meters (33 ft. length x 10 ft. wide x 6 ft. high).

The food was mainly potatoes and seeds/grains.

There was a connection to electricity and gas as well as a radio and a clock.

The conditions were very difficult: overcrowding, lack of fresh air, starvation, flees, illnesses and quarrels/fighting among the occupants.

As a result of information by the neighbors, the gestapo decided to search the house. Ivan, the Ukrainian who owned the house warned the occupants by ringing a bell, so that everyone was quiet. The Nazis inserted long metal poles into the ground and the walls trying to find spaces. Luckily, the bunker was surrounded by 1.5 meters (5 ft.) of soil on the sides and above and they were not discovered.

They only left the bunker to go to the cellar when food was brought in. They always whispered while talking. During the days they did the needed maintenance, listened to the radio, cooked and stayed in bed.

The Russians took over Drohobycz on August 8th, 1944 at which time all left the bunker and went to the city center.

The repatriation program (basically population transfer) went into effect in June 1945 and they moved to Gliwice until their immigration to Israel on May 16th, 1950.

24 people of the Habermann family perished in the holocaust:

Meir and Hanna Habermann (June 1943 during the liquidation of the Sambor ghetto)

Their son Jonah Habermann (May 12th, 1896 – August 1942, Bełżec)

Their son Joseph Habermann, his wife and their two sons (1894 – June 1943, unknown)

Their son Shlomo Habermann, his wife and their two sons (1898 – June 1943, unknown)

Their daughter Sara Habermann and her husband (1904 – June 1943, unknown)

Their daughter Haya-Klara and her husband (1906 – June 1943, unknown)

Joseph Hershmann (February 5th, 1875 – August 1942, unknown)

His daughter Feiga Glasberg, her husband and their 6 years old son Lutek (April 10th, 1908 – July 1943)

His daughter Golda Wang (1901 – end of 1942, Drohobycz)

Her husband Shmuel Wang (1900 – June 1943 during the liquidation of the Drohobycz ghetto)

Their children: Shlomo (18), Julek (17) and Cyla (14) Wang