

MEIR REICHERT SHARES A PART OF HIS LIFE:

Jerusalem, October, 2014

I was asked to write a page, one page, about my life in the time of the Holocaust, when I really would need dozens to share about my life with you. So I chose to focus on an eleven-and-a-half-year-old child who remained totally alone in a hostile world, without a family, and without any documents.

I was born in the city of Proshkovov, 18 km west of Warsaw on 6.12.1930. My parents had 5 children and I was the oldest. In 1940 they made a Ghetto in our town, where all my family was, including my grandmother. After a number of months this ghetto was liquidated and all the Jews were banished to the Warsaw Ghetto. I won't tell you a lot about the Warsaw Ghetto, since much has been written about it: the crowdedness and the disease and the starvation, and the dead bodies lying in the streets like flies.

I was lucky, and was smuggled out of the ghetto, and was accepted to work in one of the farms in a nearby village as a shepherd and cowherd. When the situation deteriorated, the farm owner was so afraid to keep me as a Jew, and said, that I had to return to the ghetto, to my parents and my family. Suddenly I, such a small boy being forced into 'life and death decisions'! I understood that I had nothing to return to, because I had heard bursts of gunfire from the direction of the ghetto. So I decided to leave Warsaw, toward more remote villages. I wandered from one village to another, asking for food and to sleep only one night under a roof. My possessions were only short trousers and a shirt, no shoes! Finally I settled in a beet field, hungry and alone. Only then did I realize, deep in my heart, my situation and burst into bitter tears. Every woman I saw passing in the field I imagined to be my mother and I cried out "Mother, Mother," but no one answered. So the crying of the child continued, until the tear sacs were completely empty.

So I wandered around until 1943, dressed in clothes that good people gave to me. Naturally they were all too big for me. In short: I looked like a scarecrow in a field. In April I reached a village by the name of Ostervok, which was a farm run by two Lifke families. After they asked me who and what I was, they decided to accept me as a worker. I had presented myself as a Christian child to them, and the same evening they gave me clean clothes and a glass of water. Later they gave me instructions to bathe and I became very afraid that they would discover that I was circumcised and a Jew, and not a Christian. But they gave me privacy and the bath passed uneventfully. In addition to the clean clothes I received also a bed with clean sheets, which made an indescribable impression on me. I had not slept in a bed since about 1941. I felt as if I had been born again.

I stayed with the Lifke family until the end of 1946, forgetting my Jewishness and roots, becoming a 'Christian', going with them to church and learning the prayers, and praying to Jesus Christ. It was a remote village and no media or news reached us. So I thought, that no Jews had managed to survive in the whole world, except me. Of course, I had no education and so I traveled under the advice of the Lifke family to Warsaw, and there I applied to a Christian orphanage; and from there I was sent to a monastery. But it turned out that Jews had survived and were alive, and some of them had even organized to search for Jewish children in monasteries throughout Poland and bring them back to their Jewish roots! They found me, but at first I didn't want to return to Judaism, because I saw myself as a Christian. But after hard work, they convinced me and managed to bring me back to my roots, and to my homeland Israel. The rest is history. Meir Reichert

„When I realized deep in my heart my situation, I bursted into bitter tears: Every woman I saw passing by, I imagined it to be my mother and cried out „Mother, Mother,“ but no one answered me. So the crying of the child continued, until the tear sacs were completely empty!“



Meir + Sara