

Simon Grubman History

May 2012

Dear Class:

I am so happy you are reading this letter, learning about my father and my family, and learning about the painful episode in world history called the Holocaust. Even though many of the pictures, ideas, and stories in this trunk describe events that are sad, I hope you will come to understand the lessons of love, family, and survival that grow from what happened during the Holocaust.

My Father's Story

My father, Simon Grubman, was born a long time ago in 1919 in Lodz¹, a big city in Poland which is a country in Europe. Perhaps you can look up where that is. Many, many Jews lived in Lodz among many more Polish citizens. Simon was an extremely intelligent person and was part of a loving family including his mother, father, sister Irina², grandparents, and cousins. Because he was very smart and worked hard, he got a good education and was about to start on a career in 1939 at the age of 20 when World War II began in Europe. Think for a moment about a 20 year old. Maybe you have an older brother or sister or cousin who is 20 years old and in the middle of college or working at a job. They may seem pretty grown up to you but they are just beginning as an adult. When you see pictures of my father as a young man, it may seem like he was a grown up a long time ago, but he really was still a very young man when the war came into his life.

Simon lived with his parents, his sister, and his grandfather in Poland as the war got worse and worse. The German Nazis herded the Jews in Lodz into one small section of the city where they could live, not out among the other Polish citizens. This was called the Lodz Ghetto. Life was extremely hard, with little food and danger everywhere. My mother, Sally, also was born and raised in

¹ Pronounced "lodjzh"

² Pronounced "ee-REE-nah"

Lodz. She knew my father a bit during the war as friends, though they were not destined to meet up again till later after the war had ended.

Over several years in the Ghetto, the Nazis killed or took away many mothers and fathers who were never seen again. Jews were deported to places where there was almost no food, people were beaten and made to work at backbreaking jobs, and many people were killed. These places were called concentration camps. Back in the Ghetto, young children were sometimes left behind who wandered the streets without parents. The other grownups in the Ghetto decided to create a special area where these children could be gathered and taken care of. It was a kind of combination orphanage and school. It was called the Marysin³ Camp. My father worked as a kind of counselor, like you might have had if you went away to camp in the summer time. He did the best he could, taking care of young children and teenagers who had lost their parents and were very lonely and sad. He tried to protect them, teach them, care for them when they were sad, and give them activities to do to take their minds off what was going on all around them. My mother also worked in the Marysin Camp as a kind of nurse in the health clinic.

As the war got worse and worse, the Nazis came for more and more people to take away to concentration camps. It was harder and harder to protect the children in Marysin. One day the Nazis came to take away all the children to concentration camps where most would never be heard from again. It was heartbreaking for both my father and my mother to lose all those children they had each cared for. They were very sad. We know now that a few children survived that day and are living around the world. Even though only a very few survived, they are alive and have grown up to have families of their own because of the kindness and caring of the grownups in the Ghetto like my father Simon and my mother Sally.

³ Pronounced "mah-REE-shin"

My Father's Survival during the Holocaust

After the Marysin camp was destroyed my parents continued to live under harsh conditions in the Ghetto until finally all the Jews there were taken away. Because Simon was a strong and intelligent young man, he was put to work by the Nazis in factories to help the Nazis with their war effort, like a slave. He survived by his wits, by luck, and by being careful as best he could. He spent time in several concentration camps (Auschwitz, Ravensbrück and most likely Woebbelin) doing very, very hard work or simply trying to survive. By the end of the war he was in a concentration camp where he had no food or water for many days, starving nearly to death. By that time, almost all the people in his family had died or been killed. What helped him stay alive was his deep desire to tell the world about what had happened to him and to others. He wanted to do what we call "bearing witness" which means to describe to other people the terrible events that had occurred.

Fortunately, at that point the concentration camp inmates were rescued by American troops. Along with many others, Simon was taken by very kind and caring people in the Swedish Red Cross to places in Sweden where they helped Holocaust survivors recover. That is where he and my mother met up again. She had also gone to several concentration camps and had struggled to survive the war. They fell in love and got married. Life began to rebuild.

Simon Comes to America

Simon and Sally Grubman came to America in the late 1940s. They lived in Canton, Ohio which is near Cleveland (can you find it on a map?). My father went to work in a business run by my mother's family. Simon and Sally raised two sons: my brother Stanley, and myself. Because of Simon's intelligence, hard work, perseverance, and talent, he became a very successful businessman over a period of many years. If you met him at that point later in his life you would never have known he had gone through terrible times as a young man during

the Holocaust. You would not be able to see in his face all those wartime experiences trying to care for the children at the Marysin camp, his many losses of friends and loved ones, and his struggles simply to stay alive and bear witness about what had happened. He was focused on caring for his family and being happy.

Although Simon had a good life in America, there was one more tragedy awaiting him. On Leap Year Day of 1980 (what day was that?) my father had a heart attack and died at the age of 60. That may seem old to you, but it really isn't that old since many people today live into their 80s and even 90s. He could have had many good years of life ahead if not for that heart attack.

Fortunately, only a few years before he died, my parents had been interviewed about the experiences they had gone through during their lives. That is why we can still read Simon's words and hear his voice talking about what happened to him during the Holocaust. You will read and hear some of those comments by him because they are in this trunk. It is a blessing that he had been interviewed and his memories captured for all of us to learn from, because of that interview before he died. In the end, he was able to tell his story, to bear witness to the world about what had happened to himself and to so many others.

My Own Family

I was 27 years old when my father died that day in 1980. I was just starting my own life with my wife and my career. Since that time I have had three children of my own, and now I have one granddaughter as well. In order to honor my father, his bravery, his caring, and his work taking care of children when they were very sad and lonely, my family has donated money to the Cohen Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. The money we give has contributed to the Center's having special books for children and about children

related to the Holocaust. It is very important in life to know stories of where your family comes from, what they have done, and what their values are. We have honored my father and his legacy in this way. I hope you will learn important new things about the value of life, of standing up to people who want to harm others, and of defending people who cannot always defend themselves.

A Request

You can help honor my father's memory - and help me and my family understand what you gain from these stories - if you or your teacher would write a letter to me describing what learning about the Holocaust means to you. You might learn something from just one thing in this trunk. You might learn something from the stories of survival and bravery that you hear. Whatever you learn in your heart, please share it with me and my family. And maybe my father, Simon Grubman, will be listening, too.

With warm regards to you all,

Please write to me through the following address:

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Keene, N.H. 03435-3201*