

Henry Friedman

As a boy, Henry Friedman lived in a large and vibrant Jewish community in Poland. The Nazi invasion of Brody, as Henry came into his teen years, changed everything. Despite great danger to themselves, two Ukrainian families risked their lives to save the Friedman family.



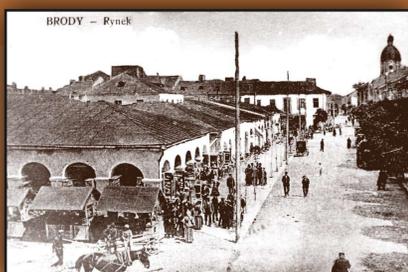
Henry at age 17, 1945.
Collection of Henry Friedman

Brody

Brody, 19th century.
Collection of Henry Friedman

Brody was one of Poland's most vibrant Jewish communities. In 1935, the Jewish population numbered nearly 10,000.

Henry Friedman was born in Brody in 1928. He spent his childhood with his brother and parents, Jacob and Dora, celebrating the traditions of his Jewish ancestors: "I remember proudly carrying my father's prayer shawl in a blue bag with its embroidered Star of David to the great synagogue."



Nazi Occupation

One day in the schoolyard a boy taunted Henry, saying, "Wait 'til Hitler comes. He will take care of you." These words foreshadowed the coming Nazi invasion.

In 1939, Stalin signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with Hitler, ceding the eastern part of Poland to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in exchange for peace between the USSR and Germany. In June of 1941, the non-aggression pact fell apart as Hitler invaded the Soviet Union. On July 1, 1941, the Germans occupied the city of Brody.

The Nazis began their destruction of Jewish life, issuing discriminatory legislation, such as prohibiting education for Jewish children and requiring all Jews over age six to wear a white armband with a six-pointed blue star.

Adults and children wearing the star were humiliated, but the consequences of not wearing the star were severe and inhumane. Henry recalls, "My mother and cousin were caught not wearing the armband. My mother was severely beaten. My cousin, who was fourteen, was forced by the Ukrainian police to empty the waste from an outhouse with her bare hands. She couldn't eat for weeks and was never the same."

On July 15, 1941, one of the first of many roundups of Jews occurred in Brody. Two hundred and fifty intellectuals were tortured and murdered in ditches next to the Jewish cemetery.

Deportations and the Ghetto

Children from Brody climbing onto trucks bound for Belzec death camp, c. 1943.
Courtesy of Yad Vashem

In February of 1942, a 17-year old neighbor, Julia Szmuchuk, who worked as a maid at the police headquarters, ran from the police station to Henry's father, Jacob, to warn him of the Gestapo's plans to arrest him. As Jacob ran out of the back door, the Nazis were pounding on the front door. The Nazis searched the family farm but did not find Jacob, who was hiding in the cramped loft of the barn.

Jews in Brody were in constant fear of arrest by the Gestapo or deportation. Henry remembers, "People were suddenly gone, taken away, and never seen again. I don't remember ever seeing a smiling Jewish face in 1942."

Beginning in the fall, Jews were brought into Brody from the surrounding areas. On September 19, 1942, an *Aktion* took place—*Aktions* took many forms, from roundups to military engagements. German and Ukrainian police arrested Jews on the streets and dragged them out of their homes and hiding places. Two thousand people were taken to the Belzec death camp, followed in November by the deportation of another 2,500 Jews. While the Nazis were establishing the Brody ghetto, Henry's father, Jacob, made arrangements for the Friedman family to disappear.



Hiding

In October of 1942, Jacob arranged for Henry, now 13, his brother, their mother Dora, who was pregnant, and a Jewish teacher, to hide in the loft of a barn owned by Julia Szmuchuk's parents, Jacob Bazalchik, an acquaintance of the Szmuchuks. Maria did not tell her husband and two sons she was hiding a Jew. Neither the Szmuchuks nor Maria knew each other was hiding a part of the Friedman family.

Henry, his brother, their mother, and the teacher squeezed into a loft, the size of a queen bed. They ate one meager meal a day, living with constant hunger. Each day of their 18 months of confinement, Henry inhaled the stench of animal waste, witnessed the constant despair of his mother, and struggled with lice and fleas. The short ceiling prevented him from standing and no one could speak above a whisper for fear of being caught.

Henry watched birds landing on the nearby rooftops from a small hole in the corner of the loft, envying their freedom of flight. "I wished that I was a stork with those strong wings—I could fly away to a place where I could fill my stomach ... I wondered what I had done to deserve this punishment."

In March and April 1943, there were numerous *Aktions* in Brody. Thousands of Jewish people were rounded up from the forests. The Brody ghetto was liquidated in May of 1943, but the hunt for Jews in hiding continued. Homes suspected of hiding Jews were set ablaze.

As a lesson to anyone hiding a Jew, the people of the village were required to witness the execution of a family. Henry overheard a conversation following this incident between Julia's parents. Mr. Szmuchuk wanted the Friedman family out of the barn immediately. Knowing it was dangerous to leave but more dangerous to stay, Henry's mother decided to lead her children and the teacher to Henry's father's hiding place in the barn of Maria Bazalchik. For two days, the reunited family held on together in the dark loft, sharing one small meal each night.

Henry's mother and the teacher returned to the Szmuchuk's barn. For three months, Henry and his brother stayed with their father for "the worst months of my life." Henry could no longer walk. Because of the lack of food, Jacob decided to carry Henry back to the Szmuchuk's loft, in the hopes he would survive.



Julia Szmuchuk after the war.
Collection of Henry Friedman



Julia's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Szmuchuk, and their granddaughter after the war.
Collection of Henry Friedman



The barn of Maria Bazalchik, where Henry's father hid in the loft for almost two years.
Collection of Henry Friedman

Liberation and Recovery

Henry and his family finally emerged in March 1944, after the Soviet Army had driven back the Nazi occupation. Henry, unable to walk on his own, was covered in sores and looked more like a skeleton than a boy of 15.

Of the 10,000 Jews that once called Brody their home, only 88 survived. Of the more than one million Jewish children who lived in Poland during the war, only 5,000 Jewish children lived to see the end of the war.

After the war ended, the Friedman family lived for three years in a United Nations Displaced Persons camp in Austria while they waited to immigrate to the United States. In 1949, Henry and his family traveled to Seattle.

Making a Difference

Because of the courage of Julia Szmuchuk, her parents, and Maria Bazalchik, Henry, his brother, teacher, and parents survived. Dora's baby, Henry's sister, did not survive. Julia and Maria were two of the less than one-half-of-one percent of individuals in Nazi-occupied areas who risked their lives to help Jews survive.

In 1989, Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Authority, recognized Julia as "Righteous Among the Nations." After Yad Vashem's honor, Henry arranged for Julia to come to Seattle to spend time with him and his family.

A founder of the Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center and a member of its Speakers Bureau, Henry Friedman tells his story to keep the Holocaust and its atrocities in public memory. Henry is dedicated to teaching children the dangers of intolerance and is committed to encouraging young people to recognize and combat hatred: "Each of us can make a difference in someone else's life."

Henry and his wife Sandra have three children and six grandchildren.



Henry and his wife Sandra.
Collection of Henry Friedman



Henry Friedman with winners of the Jacob Friedman Holocaust Writing and Art Contest.
Collection of Henry Friedman

"I wished that I was a stork with those strong wings—I could fly away to a place where I could fill my stomach."

— From the book "I'm No Hero" by Henry Friedman

IN HIDING



Funding for this exhibit provided by **CULTURE**
KING COUNTY LODGING TAX

Washington State Holocaust Education Resource Center • www.wsherc.org