

Jozef Seweryn And Friends



This is me with my second wife Henia and with two friends of ours. I don't remember their names. The photo was taken in the 1980s in Warsaw, in front of the Memorial of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

I survived, because the SS men needed me - I fixed their fountain pens. After several months of my stay in Auschwitz, the Germans wanted to find someone who could repair fountain pens and typewriters. I volunteered and was accepted. I worked for SS Unterscharführer Artur Breitwieser, he came from Lvov; before he became an SS man he had served in the 3rd Podhale Riflemen's Regiment in Biala, at the same time as I did. Perhaps that's why he chose me. I became his 'Füllfederhaltermechaniker,' that is his fountain-pen-fixer. The Germans had a lot of good fountain pens, Pelikans, Watermanns, Parkers, which they had got by looting the possessions of the Jews, but the ink they used was poor. Their pens needed to be rinsed and fixed every two months. And I knew how to repair pens, because I'd had that section in my wife's bookstore. I worked for Breitwieser and for the other SS men, commandants, German physicians. They thought I was useful, so they even gave me a watch, so I wouldn't be late when I came to see them. Besides, I didn't just fix their pens; I would also shave them and give them haircuts. They addressed me 'Sie' and the others they called 'Du verfluchter Hund' - 'You damned dog.' And they killed them. I got the tools I needed for cutting hair and shaving - they used to be Jewish. I had more luck than sense.

I used to write letters to my wife; writing to your wife was permitted. She'd answer them. But my letters and her answers were so official. You couldn't do it otherwise, and you had to write in German. And you couldn't say anything more than, 'I'm here - I am waiting - good bye.' I couldn't even write that I was hungry because they controlled all the letters.

One time at the camp, some time in 1943, an SS man came to see me, he had a higher rank than Breitwieser, and he told me, 'Make me a barber's wig and a beard - red.' I said I would and that it would be ready in several days. When he came to pick it up he told me to get on his motorcycle and he took me to the commando, so I'd put the wig and the beard on him there. And then he told

me to drive him to the theater, which was nearby, but it was on the other side of the fence. We got there and he said, 'Now go to the camp.' I answered, 'I can't go, there's no one to guard me, if anyone sees me on this side of the fence, I'll get shot.' But he made me go, so I did. I was in prison clothes; wearing those stripes. I had a huge row at the fence; the guard took out his gun and shouted. I was so scared I almost shat in my pants, but he finally let me go. There were such stories.