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Biebow from Bremen

" Sally, come quick to the Anatomy Building!"

The excited voices of my friends reached me at chemistry class. Here I was, a first year medical student absorbed in my studies of inorganic chemistry. Anatomy was far away, scheduled for next year, but there was an urgency in the voices, and I asked impatiently.

" What's going on? "

"Come and see for yourself" Sarah, a girl I knew well from the years spent together in Lodz- Ghetto, answered. Reluctantly I left the lab and went to the Anatomy Building.

The smell of formaldehyde hit my nostrils and caused a coughing spell, through my tears I saw a naked body on the table. The skin was leather- like, yellowish, covering a rather small body of a middle aged man. Brown hair covered the skull; thin, purple lips formed a straight line on this rather unremarkable face.

" Sally, take the scalpel and start the dissection on Hans Biebow!"

HANS BIEBOW!

I looked at the exposed body again. The narrow forehead and shape of the jaw were the sole reminders of Hans Biebow, the man who liquidated the Jews of Lodz.

Is it the same Biebow? The tall, blond beast straight from Nietzsche's description of a German Ubermensch?

Is it Biebow, the six feet tall man in shiny, black boots with a whip in his hand?

What happened to the golden hair and cold blue eyes I remember, as he stood on the

podium during the eradication of Lodz Ghetto in the summer of 1944?

"Meine Juden," (my Jews) he had called, as the July sun emphasized the blondness of his hair," leave the Ghetto voluntarily. At the railroad station, in Marysin trains are waiting for you. I shall relocate you to the West where there are better living conditions for you, good work and more food. Take with you all your personal belongings and don't forget the pots and pans. "

"The pots and pans," a simple and deceiving phrase for if pots are needed then there must be food in the West.

Where did Biebow learn the psychological trick of mentioning small, homely details that gave the deportation an air of normalcy? He had a vast experience in liquidating smaller Jewish ghettos around Lodz and the deception always worked. But only the naive at heart believed the blond giant who put himself on a pedestal to tower over a crowd of Jews in rags, their bodies swollen from hunger. He was a Siegfried in the Beggar's Opera.

I was among the crowd of listeners and when the sun caressed the blond head of Biebow I felt that God had abandoned us and joined the company of Biebows.

The Russian troops stopped their advance on the east bank of the Vistula river, seventy five miles from Lodz. The forces of war played against us, during the two summer months Biebow sent the remaining eighty thousand Jews from Lodz straight to the ovens of Auschwitz. The pots and pans were neatly collected in Auschwitz and sent to German *Housefraus*.

"Mama," I pleaded with my mother "let's go to the railroad station. The Gestapo already started their 'actions' and they will remove us by force."

My mother, barely five feet tall, didn't agree with me nor did she believe in Biebow's "pots and pans."

"I prefer to stay and die in Lodz. I don't know where they are sending us." was my mother's answer, and in the summer of 1944 she took me and my father for a

selection in Baluter Ring. Here Biebow was choosing a cleaning commando of about six hundred Jews to remove what was left of his kingdom, called Litzmannstadt Ghetto, the new name given Lodz. The ghetto was for Biebow a gold mine, a Klondike as well as a shelter from the dreaded Eastern front.

Now Biebow made his final selection and with a jerky movement of his whip he sent people to the right and left side. His ice-cold, sky-blue eyes looked at my emaciated mother and father, and without glancing at me, he pushed us with the end of his whip to the left where children, older, and sick looking people were waiting. We went obediently to the left but when Biebow turned to the next line, my mother quickly pushed us back to the right.

I was assigned to work in a stable, helping to clean the horses that were needed for transportation of what was left of the Ghetto. Biebow was a frequent visitor, he came to the stables with his eight-year old son.

"Papa," cried the little boy "the horse is dirty." I knew that Biebow would call the manager of the stable and beat him till his back would turn into a bloody pulp. No matter how we cleaned the horses, the little boy always found a dirty spot. I hated the horses, the blondness of father and son, and wondered why we called the lowest human instincts of hatred and violence "dark forces." They should be called "blond forces."

Biebow was an attentive and loving father, and he taught the little boy to shoot the few birds flying over the ghetto with the utmost patience. It was the first time I saw him as a father, a loving and caring father, which was a revelation to me. For me he was a death-machine.

Sometimes I wonder what happened to the little boy. Does he carry the sadistic genes of his father? Does he remember the bloody massacres performed by his father in Lodz Ghetto?

I asked my friend Esther, who was invited as a former inmate of Bergen -Belsen to Bremen by its present Mayor.

"Did you inquire about Biebow? He was a well known businessman in his native city. Do you remember his little shopping bags distributed in the ghetto on which were printed 'Hans Biebow, Coffee Export, Bremen'? There must be somebody in Bremen who remembers the family."

"I asked many times"- Esther said " but nobody heard of Biebow. "

And so the name disappeared from the annals of the city, a small name in the history of Nazi Germany, not a Hitler, a Mengele or a Himmler, but for us, the former inhabitants of Lodz Ghetto, the name has become a noun synonymous with the destruction of the Jews of Lodz.

Selections continued in camp and always a group of Jews was taken from the morning appeals and sent to death camps.

On the other hand almost every day a group of people was found in hiding places and joined us in the camp. There was no need to waste bullets on those Jews, sooner or later the cleaning of the Ghetto would be over and the final solution for the tiny remnants of Lodz Jews would take place as a mass execution by the prepared grave in the Jewish cemetery.

However, in one of the hiding places, in a cellar, Biebow encountered resistance. Dr. Daniel Weiskopf a ghetto doctor who didn't have medications for his patients and looked with despair on how they died of starvation and galloping tuberculosis, wounded Biebow with the only weapon he had in his hand, a knife. Before he was killed he told Biebow, "Murderer, blood of innocent people is on your hands. Your days are numbered."

Daniel Weiskopf's last hour was his finest , he died a free man. His death shook the camp, and the white dressing on Biebow's blond head was for us like a flag of

freedom, a monument for the brave doctor.

Biebow was not the same man after Weiskopf's death. Maybe he was haunted by the murdered doctor's prophecy as well as horrified by the thunder of Russian cannons. He was now often drunk and would appear suddenly in the middle of the night and order some young girls to undress, observing them in a drunken stupor. He didn't rape them, but took a perverse pleasure in looking at the naked bodies and the fear in the girls' eyes. Here he was, in the middle of the night, the hangman of Lodz Ghetto finding his life pleasures in the thin, naked bodies of Jewish girls.

We greeted the New Year of 1945 with hope and joy seeing masses of Germans running west with their belongings. They fled in cars, on foot, on bicycles pushing each other into the gutter in their "Drang nach Western." The air of superiority was gone as well as the blondness; an odor of defeat emanated from their bodies. Panic changed their Aryan faces to a sweaty, fear-stricken physiognomy, gone was also the proverbial German law and order.

The Russians were "ante portas" but our camp was still guarded and the mass grave was waiting for us.

The thunder of war was music to my ears, a modern, powerful "1812 Overture," it was also a belated celebration of Christmas with all the lights in the black sky resembling a giant, cosmic Christmas tree.

"Te Deum Laudamus"

The sky was crisscrossed with arcs of fire, we heard the roar of Russian Katyushas; violent explosions shook the earth, an eerie display of light and sound took place, but our camp was still heavily guarded.

We survived, because Biebow was not in Lodz at that time and his deputy didn't have time to carry out the mass execution. He was busy running for his own life.

Biebow would have had much better timing.

But the spirit of Daniel Weiskopf dominated the camp, for his heroic death opened for

us a new dimension in life. We realized that in the absence of guns, a knife, a bat, a piece of heavy iron might be a weapon too. We knew, that everyone of us could defend himself and nobody but nobody was too young or too old to do so.

Biebow was caught in Germany and brought for trial to Lodz. I went for one session and saw a pitiful figure alone on the bench, claiming "Not guilty." Daniel Weiskopf, I thought, your murderer has been brought to justice, but my pain remains. Forever, Daniel, forever?

"I don't want the knife, Sarah. I am starting anatomy next year."
I returned the scalpel to my friend and without taking a second look at the corpse of Biebow I left the building.