



“The Last Man Standing”

- Yakov M. Hirschson



The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising stands as one of the most fascinating aspects of Holocaust and even World War II history. It was the first time during the war that Jews in an area under Nazi control mounted an organized armed resistance.

From behind brick walls topped with barbed wire and patrolled by armed guards, from which no Jews were allowed in or out, there rose a group of up to 1,000 tenacious fighters. Equipped with only a small cache of guns and home-made explosives, they held out against the mightiest and most ruthless army in the world longer than anyone imagined, creating a legacy for bravery that far outlived them.

How did they do it, and what propelled them to mount a revolt doomed to failure?

Zman was privileged to meet with and interview Leon Weinstein, the only fighter of the uprising still alive today. Even at his advanced age (ke'h), Weinstein still speaks passionately and with a youthful zest about his experiences. We also spoke with his daughter, Natalie Gold Lumer, who was hidden in a convent during the war, and whom Leon miraculously managed to locate after the war through hashgacha pratis and an almost superhuman effort.



The cold November winds cut viciously as the man struggled to open the envelope. Just as he unfolded the paper within, a gust of wind caught the envelope and carried it away. He clutched the paper more tightly between his frozen fingers. After reading the short note scrawled in Polish, his heart sank. The cold was no longer noticeable as he stood rooted to the spot.

"Well, what do you want me to tell them?" the messenger of the envelope demanded impatiently. The man hesitated for only a moment as his eyes scanned the succinct note one more time: "You *must* pick up the child within 24 hours or we will throw her to the wolves."

The man knew that the threat was

Jews hiding from Nazis.

The Germans had been tightening their iron grip on Poland. They instituted new regulations that prohibited Poles from sheltering Jews, upon penalty of death. This effectively discouraged even Poles who might have otherwise accepted a Jewish child into their home for handsome monetary compensation.

Leon knew what the Germans were capable of. He had witnessed it firsthand when he fought on the front lines as part of the Polish army. Captured, he spent time in a grueling German POW camp before escaping. The images of rampaging German tanks and hordes of Nazi soldiers marching, shouting and committing atrocities were branded in his memory forever.

On one hand, he understood why the Poles were terrified of getting caught

The forlorn parents covered their daughter with kisses as the final moment of separation arrived.

literal. Indeed, fierce wolves populated the Polish woods.

The man turned to the messenger and emphatically but quietly said, "Bring the baby back to me." He pressed a large number of bills into the messenger's hand.

The year was 1942, the location Warsaw. The man was Leon Weinstein and the child was his infant daughter Natasha Leah.

Leon set out on that November evening to inform his wife, who was herself in hiding, that their daughter no longer had a safe haven. He would have to devise a new plan.

Leon possessed valuable documents that identified him as a gentile Pole and he had a little freedom to move about Warsaw. His wife Sima had no forged papers and just being seen on the streets was a grave danger. She could be shot on the spot, or worse, captured and tortured for information on other

harboring a Jewish child. On the other hand, what was he going to do now? Emotionally torn, Leon told himself to be strong.

Beginnings

Leon (Chaim Lazer) Weinstein was born on May 13, 1910, in the *shtetl* of Radzymin, about 20 miles from Warsaw. He was the fourth of seven children. Chassidic Jews, his parents and family had been in Radzymin for many generations. He also had many aunts, uncles and cousins in the *shtetl*. His parents struggled financially with the little money his mother brought in from supplying farmers' milk to stores in Warsaw.

Though their existence was humble, they were spiritually rich. His father earned a small income as an assistant to the illustrious Radzyminer Rebbe, while his father's father was actually the rebbe's *gabbai* and close confidante.

The rebbe of Radzymin, R' Aharon Menachem Mendel Gutterman, was the



Leon's grandfather, Reb Avraham Yitzchak Weinstein *zt'l*, with the Rebbe of Radzymin, R' Aharon Menachem Mendel Gutterman *zt'l*. Right: Leon passionately sharing his story with *Zman*.

scion of a distinguished rabbinical family renowned throughout Poland. Chassidim from all over Europe flocked to the small town to seek blessings and advice from the great *tzaddik*. Among his accomplishments was the establishment of the women's section at the Western Wall; before then, women were unable to visit the site. He also founded the *Shomrei Shabbos* society and *Tomchei Asurim* to benefit Jewish prisoners. Furthermore, he was the president of the Rabbi Meir Baal Haness Fund. Indeed, the rebbe himself was known as a miracle worker.

When the rebbe passed away childless in 1934, his nephew Reb Yaakov Aryeh Morgenstern took his place, infusing Radzymin with new spiritual energy. The new rebbe faithfully led his community for the next seven years.

Early Life

Leon enjoyed a warm family life and had many friends, both Jewish and Gentile. "One of my best friends was a non-Jew who spent so much time in my home that he eventually learned to speak Yiddish!" he recalled.

He developed into an active, energetic young man who acquired a reputation as the "wild" son. By the young age of 12, he decided that the time had come for him to do his part in helping his parents support their large family, and he went off to apprentice by a local tailor.

Talented and ambitious, Leon quickly realized that the position of apprentice tailor in the *shtetl* was not a very lucrative one. After carefully weighing his options, he decided that he had to run away to Warsaw, the center of commerce in Eastern Europe.

Leaving under the cover of darkness, he spent the next day walking to Warsaw. He finally arrived at night, penniless but with a fierce will to succeed. He went from door to door seeking any starting position, but most of those who answered scoffed at the idea of hiring one so young for any type of useful employment. Eventually, he was taken in by a kind family in exchange for tailoring work. Applying himself diligently, he soon began to make money and advance to better jobs.

Leon saved up his money, bought himself some better clothing and carried a respectable sum with him back to Radzymin to present to his family. His parents were