Biography of Hugo Gutfreund

Hugo Gutfreund was born in 1906, in Bielsko (today Bielsko-Biala, Poland). He married in 1935 and had a daughter. He owned an electrical business until the outbreak of the war. In 1939 he and his family moved to Zloczow (Zolochiv) to flee antisemitic attacks in their hometown.

Hugo worked in a coal mine until he was drafted into the Red Army in June 1941. Soon after the German occupation of the town, he was interned in a German forced labor camp in Lackie Wielkie; he was then transferred to Zloczow, where he was assigned to a labor unit doing road construction. Labor conditions were cruel with 12-hour workdays, strict regulations, extreme surveillance, and harsh punishment.

With the establishment of the Zloczow ghetto in December 1942, conditions worsened for the Jewish population and in April 1943, the ghetto was liquidated and several thousand people – among them almost all of Hugo's family, including his wife and child – were murdered and buried in a mass grave.

In June 1943, Hugo, his brother and three other inmates of the camp, escaped and hid in the surrounding woods. They had paid a Polish man to set up an underground hiding place, a hole equipped with bunks and an air vent, and supplied with meagre food rations. They were in hiding until their liberation by the Red Army in July 1944.

Hugo and his brother returned to Zloczow, where Hugo met his second wife. He rejoined the Soviet Army, working as an engineer. Following the army's movement, they arrived in Bielsko in the spring of 1945.

Hugo and his wife immigrated and settled in Halifax, with the help of his brother-in-law who lived in Canada. He worked as a grocer. He died in 2002.