

THE CHILDREN

Roman Witoński

Roman Witoński

Roman Witoński, whose family nickname was Romek, was born on 8 June 1938 in Radom, Poland, where his father, Seweryn Witoński, worked as a paediatrician.

From 1941, the family was forced to live in one of the two Radom ghettos. On 21 March 1943, on the Jewish holiday of Purim, Roman, his younger sister Eleonora and his parents were taken to the old Jewish cemetery in Szydłowiec, 30 kilometres south of Radom along with 150 other people. There, the SS started a mass execution, during which Seweryn Witoński was murdered.

His wife Rucza and the children Roman and Eleonora hid behind some grave stones, but were discovered by the SS and taken back to the ghetto. In late July 1944, Rucza Witońska and her children were deported to the Pionki labour camp near Radom and from there on to Auschwitz, where they were initially imprisoned in the women's camp. In Auschwitz, Rucza Witońska was separated from her children and taken to the Georgenthal satellite camp of the Groß-Rosen concentration camp. Roman Witoński was taken to Neuengamme on 28 November 1944 and he was murdered here on Bullenhuser Damm on 20 April 1945 aged 6.

After her liberation, Rucza Witońska looked for her children in Auschwitz, Radom and other places. Her brother had probably learned of the children's fate earlier from the reports on the Curio-Haus trials, but had not told her about it in order to protect her. Rucza Witońska contacted various offices and organisations which offered support in the search for missing relatives. She also filed search requests for other children she had known in the family camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau. As early as 1946, a Belgian tracing service put her in touch with doctor Paulina Trocki, who told her that she had accompanied 20 children from Auschwitz to the Neuengamme concentration camp when she was a prisoner at Auschwitz.

Rucza Witońska went to France, where she married and took the name of Rose Grumelin. Her son Marc-Alain was born in 1951. In 1981, she learned what had happened to her children in Hamburg from Günther Schwarberg. In 1982, she visited the Bullenhuser Damm memorial.

A street in the Hamburg district of Burgwedel is named after Roman and his sister.

Roman Witoński

Rucza and Seweryn Witoński on their honeymoon
circa 1937.

Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, 1995-1183



Roman Witoński

Roman with his mother Rucza Witońska in the summer of 1940.

In 1990, Rose Grumelin-Witońska remembered the occasion on which the picture was taken:

“The photograph was taken in the summer of 1940 in Rajec, twelve kilometres from Radom. My youngest brother Zelig Zajedenweber had gone into hiding there after escaping from a train transport of POWs. The train didn’t stop in Radom, but he jumped off. A railway worker gave him his uniform under cover of darkness. I went to visit him with Roman in Rajec and he took the photo.”

*Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial,
Günther Schwarberg Collection, 2000-2359*



Roman Witoński

Letter to Rucza Witońska from an aid agency dated 3 April 1946.

Rucza Witońska had contacted the tracing service at the French charity *Help for Israelite Victims of the War* for information about her children. The organisation's director replied four months later, writing that they had been in touch with the doctor Paulina Trocki who had accompanied the 20 children from Auschwitz to Neuengamme. The letter reports that Trocki only remembered details about two of the children from Paris. Trocki was told at the time that all of the children were orphans, and the children confirmed that their parents had been deported. The letter closes with the promise that the organisation will continue to do everything in their power to find out more and notify Ms Witońska of any results.

*Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial,
Günther Schwarberg Collection, 3.18*

AIDE AUX ISRAÉLITES VICTIMES DE LA GUERRE

Association sans but lucratif

SECTION :

Recherches et Rapatriement

AFFILIÉE AU

S. E. R.

(Service d'Evacuation et de Regroupement
des Enfants et Familles Juifs)

DÉPARTEMENT : DIRECTION.

RÉFÉRENCE : LO/SW/I807.

8, Rue Combacatis
11/12 20-30

SER, 8, av de Verzy
Gal 88-60

OSE, Pas 18-76

62 Rue Spontani
mi

Wigo
24 Rue Spontani

OPEJ

Pas 25-76
Mme Spenberg-

14 rue d'Artois
M. les Roubert
des Quers-Elles

BRUXELLES, LE 3. April. 1946.
111, RUE DE LA SOURCE
TÉLÉPHONE : 37.90.46

Madame Ruoza WITONSKA
Jüdische Sammelstelle
über
Committee of the Political Ex-Prisoners
Bismarckstr. 138 - 140
STUTT GART

Wir entschuldigen uns, erst so spät auf Ihr Schreiben vom 14.11.45 zu antworten, das uns allerdings auch mit sehr grosser Verspätung zugestellt wurde.

Wir haben uns mit Mme TROCKI in Verbindung setzen können und von dieser dann folgende Auskunft erhalten:

Mme Trocki ist am 13.12.44 von Auschwitz nach Neuen-gamme gefahren in Begleitung von 10 Knaben und 10 Mädchen von 6 - 12 Jahren, von den verschiedensten Nationalitäten: Italiener, Slowaken, Holländer, Polen, Franzosen. Den einzigen Namen, an den Mme Trocki sich noch erinnert ist:

Roger KOHN, 12 Jahre, aus Paris

Sein Vater war Arzt an einem jüdischen Krankenhaus während des Krieges. Er sprach französisch, wurde 2 Stunden vor der Befreiung von Paris als Gaullist evakuiert. Seine Tante und Mutter waren auch in Auschwitz, sein Vater in Buchenwald.

Ausserdem besinnt sich Mme Trocki nur noch auf ein kleines, blondes, 12 jähriges Mädchen aus Paris, welches Tochter eines Friseurs war.

Angeblich hatten diese Kinder alle keine Eltern mehr und auch die Kinder bestätigten, dass ihre Eltern ebenfalls deportiert waren.

Das ist alles, was wir bisher erfahren konnten. Wir bleiben weiterhin bemüht, alle erdenklichen Auskünfte in Erfahrung zu bringen, und sollten wir in unseren Nachforschungen Erfolg haben, werden wir Sie umgehend von dem Resultat derselben verständigen.

...../.....

In der Hoffnung, dass wir Ihnen bereits mit dieser
Auskunft nützlich sein können, begrüßen wir Sie.

hochachtungsvoll

DIE DIREKTORIN


L. OLBRECHTS.

Roman Witoński

Letter from Rucza Witońska to the Joint Committee in Prague dated June 1946.

After her liberation, Rucza Witońska requested information on her children and Marek James, Marek Sztajnbaum, Mania Altman, Adina Zylberberg and Lola Kligerman, with whom she had been imprisoned in the women's camp at Auschwitz. She knew that they had been deported to Neuengamme together and knew some of the children already from her husband's medical practice in Radom.

*Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial,
Günther Schwarberg Collection, 3.18*

Roman Witoński

Marc A. Grumelin: Nazi killer of 20 Jewish children still free in Germany

In 1982, Marc-Alain Grumelin travelled to the United States to meet with relatives of other Bullenhusen Damm victims. That same year, he published this article in the periodical *Voice of Radom*, an important source of information for former members of the Radom Jewish community. In the article, Grumelin describes the fate of his half-siblings Eleonora and Roman and calls on readers to supply any further information they might have. He also discussed the efforts undertaken to bring Arnold Strippel to justice.

Voice of Radom, March/April 1982

NAZI KILLER OF 20 JEWISH CHILDREN STILL FREE IN GERMANY

SEVERAL VICTIMS WERE FROM RADOM

By Marc A. Grumelin (Paris)

One of the most heinous crimes of the Holocaust was committed by the SS in Hamburg. Twenty Jewish children, ages 5 to 12, at least five of them from Radom, were transferred from Auschwitz to Neuengamme at the request of an SS "doctor". The boys and girls were then subjected to cruel "medical" experiments and were hanged shortly before the British forces entered the site. The SS camp Kommandant responsible for the crime escaped punishment by hiding out for years. He is now a wealthy merchant in Frankfurt.

My little brother, 7 years old, and sister, 6, were among the victims.

I am the son of Mrs. Rucza Zajdenweber, born in Radom in 1915. Before World War II, my mother lived in Radom and was married to Dr. Seweryn Witonski. They had two children, a boy named Roman (born 1938) and a girl, named Eleonora (Lenka, born 1939). As Poland was occupied by the Germans, persecutions against Jews started and Dr. Witonski was shot by the Nazis in Szydlowiec during the Purim massacre on March 21, 1943. My mother and the children escaped death by miracle on that day. But their fate was not to be any better.

After surviving some time in the Radom ghetto, my mother and the children were deported to Pionki and then to Auschwitz, where they arrived in August 1944. Soon the children were taken away from their mother, and disappeared. My mother was sent to a labor camp in Czechoslovakia and was liberated in 1945. She then looked for her children in many places, but it seemed hopeless. She came to France to meet what was left of the Zajdenweber family and sent inquiries to all existing relief organizations. In 1946 she finally was informed that Roman and Lenka, together with 18 other children of several nationalities, aged from 6 to 12, had been sent from Auschwitz to the camp of Neuengamme near Hamburg, Germany. The rest of her inquiries, including to the Hamburg authorities, were in vain. My mother married again, and I was born in 1951.

It took 36 more years for her to learn the truth about the Witonski children. A German journalist of the Stern magazine has recently revealed the whole dreadful story in a book called: **Der SS-Arzt und die Kinder**. Used as guinea pigs by a so-called doctor, they suffered all kinds of tortures, and were finally massacred in the night of April 20 to 21, 1945, in a school basement in the city of Hamburg, a couple of hours before they could have been rescued by the Allies.

Most of their murderers have been tried and executed in 1946, the SS-"doctor" died in prison in 1967 but the officer who organized the children's

massacre is still alive and free: Obersturmführer Arnold Strippel, who lives in the suburbs of Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, and who has never been charged with this crime in spite of unanimous witnesses against him at the trial of his accomplices in 1946. A first attempt to open an investigation has failed in 1967, turned down by a German judge who argued that "except for the taking of their lives, no additional harm was done to the children!"

We, the surviving relatives of several children, have founded an association in order to obtain justice through the trial of Strippel. But, the Hamburg officials obviously take their time, hoping that the murderer, who is now 71, will pass away soon enough to avoid trial.

Our objectives at the moment are to:

- find more relatives of the tortured children, if any;
- demand justice in Hamburg - the arrest and conviction of the Nazi murderer.

A complaint has been filed in 1979 by Mrs. Barbara Husing, an attorney in Hamburg, on behalf of all surviving families, but the Hamburg prosecutor's office uses a very dilatory procedure, for the reasons given above.

To date, eleven families of the hanged children have been found, nine have not been located as yet.

Marek James and Marek Steinbaum (six and ten years old at the time of their death), both from Radom, have families in the USA; Roman and Lenka Witonski from Radom (family is in France); Lola Klygerman from Ostrowiec and Riwka Herszberg from Zdunska Wola, ages 8 and 7 (families in Israel); Alexander and Eduard Hornemann, ages 8 and 12 (Netherlands); Georges Kohn and Jacqueline Morgenstern, both 12 (France). R. Zylberberg, age 10, is listed as German, but there is still some doubt: this girl, who was 11 years old in 1945, could actually have been Adina Zylberberg from Czesochowa, in which case the real family is still to be found.

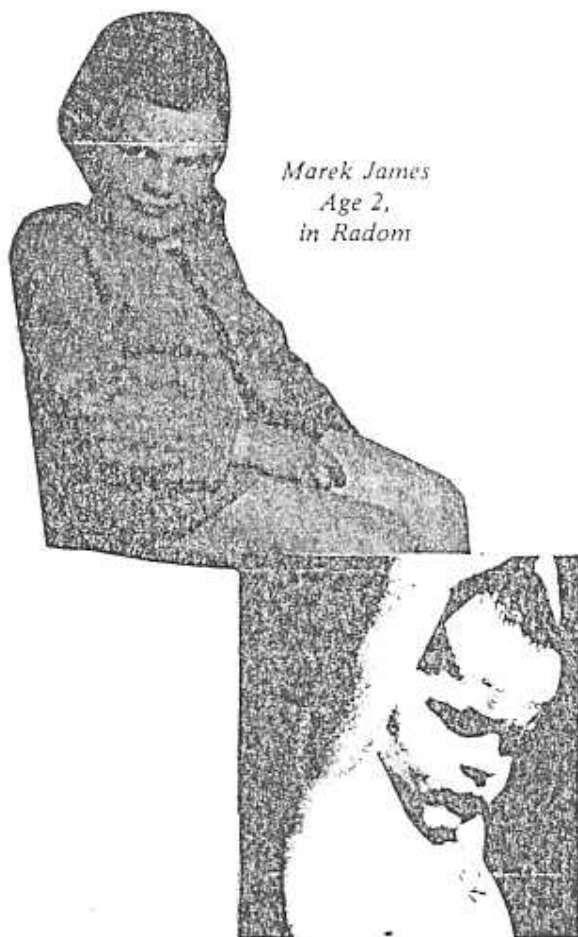
We still seek the families of the following victims of the 1945 massacre:

- Mania Altman, 5 years old, from Radom;
- R. Zeller, boy of 12, from Poland;
- E. Reichenbaum, boy of 10, Poland;
- S. Goldfinger, girl of 11, Poland;
- Lelka Birnbaum, girl of 12, Poland;
- H. Wasserman, girl of 8, Poland;
- B. Mekler, girl of 11, Poland;
- W. Junglieb, boy, 12, Yugoslavia;
- Sergio de Simone, boy, 7, Italy.

(Continued on page 7)

GERMAN COURTS COMPENSATE SS CRIMINAL, NOT VICTIMS

In his account of the murder by the SS of twenty children (opposite page), Marc Grumelin had listed Marek James among those whose relatives have not been located. I have corrected this, because their whereabouts are well known to us. Having been their neighbors in Radom, we still remember that sweet little boy with tenderness. Marek's mother, Zela, now widowed, lives in the U.S.A. Her son, Mark James, born after the war, now lives in California with his wife and two sons.



*Marek James
Age 2,
in Radom*

Picture of Marek, 6, taken by the Germans in 1945, during "medical" experiments.

(Continued from page 6)

I understand that it could be very hard for parents to learn about their children's death, even 37 years later. It was so, indeed, for my mother who had always kept a secret hope that her son and daughter might be alive. But we believe it is important to know the truth, and to gather all our strength to obtain justice.

On April 20th a ceremony will take place in Hamburg in the children's memory and we shall be there. We hope that some Americans will join us.

Mr. Grumelin was good enough to send us Guenther Schwarberg's book "Der SS Arzt und die Kinder", a well-documented account of the gruesome murder, first published in several installments by the Stern magazine in Hamburg, in 1979. The inscription under Obersturmfuehrer Strippel's picture in the magazine read, "One of those responsible for the death of the children lives in our midst". The former SS officer sued Stern for libel and was awarded by the Frankfurt court the payment of 100,000 German marks. The magazine later won a reversal from the higher court by submitting documentary proof of Strippel's personal involvement in the murder. Ironically, this did not lead to Strippel's arrest - his crime was not in the jurisdiction of this court.

Strippel began his career in 1934 as a guard in the Sachsenburg concentration camp. His notoriety as a killer earned him advancement as an officer in Buchenwald, followed by a meteoric rise up the SS ladder in the camps of Natzweiler, Majdanek, Ravensbruck, and finally as Kommandaut of all Neuengamme branch camps in the Hamburg area. He went into hiding before the British occupied Hamburg.

In December of 1948 he was recognized on a Frankfurt street by a former Buchenwald prisoner who survived a brutal beating by Strippel. In June of 1949 Strippel was tried in a Frankfurt court and sentenced by the jury to 21 life terms for the proven complicity of shooting to death 21 Jewish prisoners in Buchenwald.

With the help of a shrewd attorney, Strippel was released from prison in 1969 and awarded a compensation of DM 150,000 for "undue punishment".

There were, at the time, some isolated protests in the German Bundestag, calling this miscarriage of justice a "farce" and "scandal", but the fact remains that the brutal murderer is a free man, living in prosperity, despite his well-documented complicity in the case of 20 children, of which the British court has said: "Of all the brutal events in the history of concentration camps, the death of the children in the school basement is one of the most shocking".

—The Editor

Our heartfelt condolences
to our friend Betty on the loss
of her beloved husband
GEORGE ABRAMOWITZ
May the memory of his wonderful
deeds be a consolation to you.
Martha and Max Macher
Myra and Ralph Macher

IN MEMORY
of our unforgettable
DR. NUSYN HUBERMAN
on his first Yahrzeit.
The Family

Roman Witoński

Rose Grumelin-Witońska and Marc-Alain Grumelin
in June 1982.

In 1982, Rose Grumelin-Witońska and her
son travelled to Hamburg from Paris to visit
the Bullenhuser Damm memorial.

*Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial,
Günther Schwarberg Collection, 2010-2413*



Roman Witoński

Rose Grumelin-Witońska in June 1982.

During her visit to Hamburg in 1982, Rose Grumelin-Witońska also visited the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial and commemorated her children Eleonora and Roman at the former site of the crematorium.

*Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial,
Günther Schwarberg Collection*



Roman Witoński

Rose Grumelin-Witońska in 2009.

In 2010, 98-year-old Rose Grumelin-Witońska was interviewed about her life by staff members of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial. Marc Grumelin provided this photograph of his mother, which he had taken one year earlier.

From a private collection



