

Immigrant lauds the American way

By SUSAN FELDMAN ROLLINGER

"didn't get around to it," he is nonetheless anxious to see his story in print. So anxious that he is paying Vintage Press 75 per cent of the publication costs and receiving only 40 per cent of the profits.

According to Rohbart, the book deals with his relationships with family, friends and foe. In a time when no one could be trusted, a naive boy of 18 escaped from a concentration camp only to meet an old friend of his father's. Excited by the security in this chance meeting, young Rohbart ran up to acknowledge himself.

Instead of the anticipated acceptance, this friend—now a German SS agent, turned Rohbart in to the Nazi officials.

Rohbart discussed the anticipation, disbelief and realization liberation by the Russians brought. "For three days and nights, everything, by law, was open to us in Poland, including the banks. We took suitcases of money and played poker."

As though a single warm memory permeated the stale oneness of his recollections, Rohbart says "I raise you one million... raise you three million. I was so smart: I thought since Hitler devalued money whenever he wanted, this money would also be worth nothing. So after the game, we burned all the money. I was a millionaire for one night."

Justification for these horrendous acts is difficult for Rohbart to conceive. "You didn't need an excuse. You were patted on the back for killing prisoners," he explained of the Nazis.

Rationalization for his own will to live is equally difficult to understand.

To write this story, Rohbart says, "pulled me through. I told a friend (during a seemingly endless trek from one camp to another to escape the approaching Russians), 'I give up.' I weighed 80 pounds. My friend carried me the last four miles, saying 'If you give up, you die.'"

Whatever the reason for writing the book, his story will be told. If his book proves to be as interesting or educational as the author himself, many believe that it will be a tribute not only to Markus Rohbart, but to the survivors of that great WW II tragedy.

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Reflecting calmly on and speaking softly about these nightmarish years to a group of West Bloomfield High School journalists recently, Rohbart, 52, now a successful meat wholesaler and father of three, stood as a tribute to Horatio Alger.

A native of Poland, Rohbart still speaks with a thick accent, although his English is almost perfect despite only a fourth grade education.

Yet Rohbart is a man of many contradictions.

The most obvious is in his dedication to citing "good Nazis. It is important that we judge individuals and not countries."

It is a dubious point indeed that there even were good Nazis, and especially difficult one to reconcile from a man whose Bar Mitzvah was on the day World War II broke out and who spent three years in near constant jeopardy of death, separated from his family in different concentration camps, including the dreaded Auschwitz.

Rohbart says that the Nazis "made you an animal. You are numb. You are not a human being. You're a plain animal in a cage... in camp."

Many Gestapo guards "killed for lunch." Others beat prisoners regularly and banged them at whim.

"In a 13-month period in one camp, no one died of starvation and no one was murdered. It simply was not necessary to kill anyone."

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