“They All Scattered But She Never Moved: Lejzor’s mother”

2016. Mixed media. 23.5" w x 34" h x 5.5” d.

David Feinberg, Beth Andrews, and storyteller Lejzor*, with contributions from artists Michelle Englund, Kimchi Hoang, Jennifer Barnett Hansel, Paula Leiter Pergament, and students Kristin Anton, Olivia Novotny, Jane Bollweg, and Izaak Davison-Kerwood

Lejzor, a holocaust survivor, told us he began life twice; once when he was born in Poland in 1932, and then again in September of 1939, when World War II marched into his town. He recalls many soldiers, dressed in plain clothes to disguise who they were. They came rolling in with heavy guns and equipment covered with green tarps. His father knew these were the Germans, as the horses they were riding looked like German horses, not the polish workhorses he was used to seeing. His father was a tailor, and helped make the Germans’ uniforms in his shop. This bought Lejzor’s family some time.

Lejzor said his memories run together due to all the chaos and fear he had to process at the young age of seven years old. He remembers the Germans occupying his small town (“Shtetl” in Yiddish) opening fire on the young men in the town. There were many dead in the streets lying there. The town’s folk began clearing the bodies out of the street as if nothing had occurred. Lejzor was so distraught he began running around, terrified. He recalls running into the woods to get away.

In the woods, he ate grass and other makeshift food to survive. He remembers seeing a German soldier sitting in a tree, with a big rifle and a sandwich. The solider looked at Lejzor, did not shoot, and kept eating his sandwich. For half an hour Lejzor watched this German eat… then the soldier walked away. Lejzor saw that a bullet had fallen to the ground from a soldier’s belt. Being an innocent boy, he picked up the bullet and ran after the soldier to give it back. He remembers the solider taking the bullet, looking him in the eye, placing the bullet his belt, and walking away.

After three weeks in the woods, Polish resistance fighters who were also hiding in the woods saved him. The resistance placed him with other survivors on a flat-car train heading for Russia. He miraculously found his mother on one of the flat-cars.

The train was bombed in attack by the Luftwaffe; people on the flat-cars dove under the train and into ditches, except for Lejzor's mother. She sat stoic on one of the flat-cars throughout the entire bombing, not moving despite Lejzor and others telling her to move off the train. Although dead bodies lay all around the train, she survived without a scratch. Lejzor chose to reference this story with a miniature flat car. This was attached to the bottom of the wood. Positioned sitting on this flat car is woman representing Lejzor’s mother and her choice to stay on the train.
In preparation for Lejzor’s artwork, a piece of wood with existing nails was used. When creating the artwork, Lejzor picked a forest green color. He wrote his name and painted trees in this color, as it reminded him of his memories in the woods. The pictures used of Lejzor and his mother were taken many years later and found in a recent video documentary created by the family.

1. Last name withheld by request