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Brief Story of Parents Experiences During WW II

Or

“How They Managed to Out Run the Holocaust.”

My father was born and raised in Galicia, Poland and my mother was born and raised in Ackerman, Romania (Moldavia.) My father had grandparents, aunts and two sisters and two brothers. My mother was an only child, but had her parents and uncles.

My father worked as a shoe salesman. His father was also in retail of some sort.

When the war broke out and the Blitzkrieg occurred, my father was a Polish Army Infantryman. He was on the East side of Poland. His family other than his younger brother Moshe was summarily executed and their house vacated.

My father was fortunate enough to run into the Soviet Union at that time. He ran into Odessa.

The Romanians and Messersmiths were threatening my mother and her parents. They had to leave their home and headed towards warm climate, and stopped in Odessa.

It was in Odessa that my parents met. My father was looking for a place to stay, when my mother's father, Samuel Feigenbaum, recognized my dad. It seemed that my grandfather worked with my dad's father in Zlutshiv, Poland. My grandfather invited my dad to stay and he accepted the invitation.

He then fell in love with my mother. I believe that was in 1942. It soon became apparent that their lives were in danger when the German fighter planes began strafing Odessa.

My parents decided to leave along with my grandparents. They decided to head towards Tashkent, Uzbekistan. They reasoned that it was warm and far enough away from the front.

When they made it to Tashkent, my mother was able to secure a job in a post-office, as she was able to speak seven languages. My father unfortunately was not as lucky.

When my father was discovered to be a healthy male with soldiering experiences, the Russian Military conscripted him into the service. He was sent to the Russian Front in Kiev. Twice snipers shot him there, as he was a gunnery sergeant. He had a bullet go through the skin of his left arm and then a few months later another bullet through the skin of his shoulder. I believe Hashem needed him to have children!

When the war was coming to an end, he was able to leave the front and search for his family. The year was 1944 and he went back to the last known location of his family, which was Tashkent.

He had not seen or heard from them for nearly 2 years and they too had not heard of his fate. My mother said, one day as she was working in the post office, she heard a commotion outside the window.

She heard people saying in Yiddish, “Yonkle, bist due, Yonkle bist due.” My mother was unsure as to what was going on, so she went outside to the courtyard square. It was there that she saw my father in Russian uniform for the first time since he left nearly 2 years prior.

She then took him home and out the door was my sister, whom was born without his knowledge.

With the Russians taking of Berlin, they soon declared that any and all Russian citizens may return to Poland. My father at that time, despised the communists and believed his life and that of his family would be better, if they went back to Poland. So, they left Tashkent and my dad took his family to the place where he grew up and lived.

He went back to the home that he had left when the Blitzkrieg occurred. He was greeted by a Polish family that refused to give back his home. He also found out the fate of his parents, brothers and sisters. He did know that one brother; Moshe did escape and was still in Russia somewhere.

My father then began working in Poland, and learned that he could escape Russia by paying off a truck driver and border guards. He worked hard and obtained enough money to buy clandestine passages to West Berlin for my mom, sister and my grandparents.

The night that they were supposed to go, another family came up short on the money needed and the truck was not going to go forward. My father was able to cut a deal with the driver and help pay for the other family's trip.

My parents were able to go across the border into Germany and into West Berlin. They remained in the Displaced Persons Camp from 1945 to 1949.

It was also at that time, that my dad began working in a jewelry store. He was able to purchase gold from the Russian soldiers. They got the gold from the teeth of dead Jews and Germans. He knew to make the ring from the gold in memorial of that time. The ring is now in the permanent exhibit at the Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg, Florida.

Anyway, my parents left Berlin in 1949 from Brementhofen aboard the ship the Marine Marlin.

My mother told me a story that they knew they made the right decision to come to the US when on the American bound boat, they threw out large garbage cans of food, that the passengers did not eat. She remembered smiling to herself and could not believe that somewhere in the world, they could be throwing food out no matter whose plate it was on.

My parents came into the Hudson River with the Statue of Liberty greeting them to the United States. Their story in America is also a miracle.

I miss them,

Henry Tenenbaum, Ph.D.

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