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## The Real Story

*Editor's Note: The following is a memoir written a few years ago by local Holocaust survivor Sol Smith, who passed away last May. An electrician, Mr. Smith would have turned 81 this Monday, Nov. 3rd.*

### **Sol Smith**

*Special to the Jewish Times*

It was Mar.17, 1949, when my father, Moshe, my wife, Manya, and I arrived in New York City. Having traveled from Foehrenwald, a Displaced Persons camp in Bavaria, administered by the United Nations Refugee Relief Agency (U.N.R.R.A.), our dream to live in a free and wonderful country was now fulfilled.

Our post-war journey, however, had begun almost four years earlier when my family (my father, my mother Rachel, and I) came to this particular camp from Lodz, Poland, in Dec. 1945.

My father was born in Panevezius, Lithuania, in 1902. He was one of nine children: six older and two younger. His mother died when he was about seven years old. Two of his brothers also died during their childhood. His father was left a widower with seven young children. Unable to take care of them, he sent two of the older ones to his relatives in Baltimore. In 1910 or 1911, he came to Baltimore with two of his youngest children. A few years later, he brought over his son, Koppel, with his family. When the war broke out in June 1941, only my father and his brother, Leibl, were still in Lithuania.

When my grandfather left for the United States, my father was then about nine years old and on his own. He traveled to St. Petersburg, Russia. One day, hungry, alone and looking into a show window, my father happened to notice one of the Czar's chariots pulling up. A beautiful young lady emerged and asked him if he wanted to come with her to the palace.

Having no other options, he was naturally glad to say yes. Growing up in the palace, my father became fluent in aristocratic Russian. Until 1921, he only spoke Russian and forgot how to speak Yiddish. Thus, when he returned to Lithuania in 1921 and saw his brother, Koppel, they didn't recognize each other at first.

Koppel was not convinced that Moshe was his brother because he could not speak Yiddish. Later when they compared notes about their parents and siblings, Koppel realized that he was indeed his brother Moshe.

In 1924, my father met my mother, Rachel Shulman, whom he married in 1925. Born in Russia in 1900, she was a short woman with dark hair and blue eyes. She had two brothers, one older, Chaim, and one younger, Israel. To support the family, her parents

had a bakery where they baked and sold bagels. During her childhood, her family withstood many difficulties including: pogroms, hunger, and cold weather.

In the early 1920s, my mother's family moved to Rokiskis, Lithuania. Located near the Latvian border, Rokiskis (Rakshik in Yiddish) was a town of about 10,000 people. About 2,000 of them were Jews.

My parents married there in 1925. My brother, Boris, was born in 1926, and I was born a year-and-a-half later in 1927. To support our family, my parents opened a fairly sizable grocery store that was successful. Yet, they were not content. They still strived to move to Lithuania's capital, Kaunas (Kovno in Yiddish and Kauen in German).

In 1933, we sold the store and moved to Kaunas. There, we rented an apartment where we opened an ice cream parlor, which also sold fruits and candies. Due to the cold climate, ice cream was not selling well. Thus, we remodeled the apartment and made it into a little restaurant where we served hot dogs (an extremely popular item at the time).

In the summer, we continued to sell ice cream as well as chocolate and candy. In approximately a year, my father obtained a job in a cannery where they canned cucumbers, herring, and fish for domestic as well as foreign consumption. As part of this job, my father rode in a horse drawn truck delivering the merchandise to stores.

One day, the horse made a sharp and fast turn. The truck turned over and fell on my father's foot. A passerby came to our house and told us that the horse bit my father on the arm and my father was taken to the hospital. However, I knew this man was lying since the horse was very gentle. I had had the opportunity to ride the horse several times, even taking him swimming to the nearby Neris River.

My mother went to the hospital and soon found out what really happened to him. The doctors told her that his leg had to be amputated, and even then they were not sure about his chances of survival. They prescribed a medication, but were doubtful of its availability. In search of this medicine, my mother journeyed for a couple of days to many drugstores until she finally found it in a small store.

The medicine not only saved his life, but also his leg. Gangrene had infected his leg, but the medicine forced the gangrene into three of his toes. Thus, only those three toes had to be amputated. The doctors said it was a miracle.

My brother, Boris, was a very good-looking boy and quite popular among his friends (both boys and girls). I was very shy and withdrawn. At first, we attended a religious school (cheder), but later switched to a Hebrew secular school. This was like a public school, which was privately financed. They taught us everything in Hebrew but did not teach religion. We were both serious students.

We were mostly engulfed in Jewish newspapers, books, and Jewish literature. We spoke Yiddish at home and Hebrew at school. Learning Lithuanian was like studying a foreign

language in school. Yet, it was mandatory for us to study since we had to know the language of the country.

All my friends were Jewish, some were neighbors and some were schoolmates. Lithuanian kids wanted nothing to do with us. They called us names, threw stones at us and generally displayed a severe hatred of the Jews.

It was winter 1936 when Lithuanian youngsters came to attack the Jewish children that were attending the Hebrew school. On that day, they were shooting slingshots loaded with BB pellets. One of these pellets hit me in my right eye. The impact was so great that my whole body flew up in the air and I landed on the ground in excruciating pain.

My friends took me to the principal's wife, who bandaged my eye and took me to the bus going to downtown Kaunas to an eye clinic. After several stops, my father got on the bus to go to work. Seeing me injured, my father went along to the eye clinic with us.

My eye was operated on, but after about 10 days in the hospital my vision was still poor. I saw things as if they were in a green cloud. After a second operation, about a month later, my vision did not improve. Instead, it gradually got worse. I was eight years old at the time. Today, I am completely blind and have glaucoma in my right eye.

Even though I had many more traumatic experiences in my life, this event changed my life more than any other. To this day, I am constantly aware of it. In addition to the glaucoma and blindness in my right eye, I also have a nervous twitch beyond my control. People think I am winking at them and I feel embarrassed. Due to this my whole personality changed. Now, I hope for the better.

In June 1940, the Soviet Army occupied and annexed the three Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, thus adding three more republics to their country. Consequently, we became citizens of the Soviet Union. Ironically, with the occupation of Lithuania by the Soviets, anti-Semitism subsided even though Stalin himself was a big anti-Semite.

However, after the Soviet occupation, the Lithuanians resented us even more now due to the fact that a number of Jews had embraced the Soviet ideology. This action, they felt, showed support for the unlawful occupiers of Lithuania and therefore merited punishment. Consequently, in June 1941, when the Germans attacked the Soviet Union, the Lithuanians slaughtered with butcher knives as many Jews as they could get a hold of, even before the Germans arrived.

My family and I, along with many other Jews, made an attempt to flee alongside the retreating Soviet Army. Those who had some form of transportation were likely able to escape the German onslaught. However, my family was not so lucky. Lacking any transportation beside our own two feet, we were unsuccessful in fleeing from the Germans, only traveling 12 kilometers from our house.

During our flight, German planes constantly bombarded us. Every time a plane appeared, we would dive into the trenches along the highway. During one of these encounters and the confusion that followed, we were separated from my grandfather and his wife as well as my uncle and his family. We simply could not find each other.

We continued walking until it got dark. We stopped at a Lithuanian farmer's house. My father gave him some money and he agreed to let us stay in his nearby greenhouse. At this time, we were in between the Germans and the Russians, who were shooting at each other. Stuck in the line of fire, we withstood the shelling and survived.

The next night the shelling continued, but the shooting was less frequent. The following day the neighbors announced, "the Germans are here" and they urged our host to make us leave, or they would all be blamed for hiding Jews. Thus, we had no choice but to leave. Walking back to our house was an ordeal, because we were constantly taunted by the Lithuanian passersby. They were saying, "Now you'll get what you deserve." When we got to our house, we soon learned that most of our friends and neighbors who were unable or unwilling to attempt an escape, were brutally slaughtered by Lithuanian anti-Semites.

A couple days later, my grandfather and my cousin returned. They were the only survivors from the rest of the family. They told us that a bomb hit them. All of them were killed instantly, except for my Uncle Israel who bled to death in his father's arms when the bomb severed his arm. My grandfather and Hayele were also wounded, but not seriously. Orphaned by the bomb, Hayele came to live with us, becoming, in time, like my little sister.

In August 1941, the Nazis opened a ghetto in the suburb of Kaunas (Kovno) and ordered all the Jews from the surrounding areas to move into the newly established "Kovno Ghetto." barbed wire fence that was patrolled day and night by German and collaborating Lithuanian police fenced off the ghetto. Fortunately, we did not have to move because our house was within the designated ghetto borders.

However, we had to take in about ten other people as we were allotted two square meters of living space per person. Needless to say, it was quite overcrowded.

The Germans began to issue decrees everyday: Jews can not own any property; Jews can not walk on the sidewalk; Jewish children can not go to school; Jews must wear two yellow stars of David; and Jews must wear hats and remove them when approaching a German, etc. Every order was followed by a clause, "failure to obey will cause you to be shot."

At the time, I was only 13 and Boris was 15. Everyone of age had to register to go to work. Boris and I were not obligated to go to work due to our young age. However, Boris and I would go to work to either replace my father or to substitute for someone else who would pay us with food items for working in their stead. Later, when we became of age, we became obligated to work ourselves.

Most of the people, including us, worked at the Kaunas airport. The Germans were converting it into a military airport. The work consisted of manual labor such as digging holes, mixing cement, etc. Our shift was at night and we were not allowed to come to the bonfire to warm our hands. That was reserved for the supervisors. It was extremely cold and the work was very hard.

My father later went to work for Mizrach's Brigade as a foreman. They also did manual labor, but it was not as bad as at the airport. He was well liked by everyone. You might say he was the opposite of Will Rogers- "he never met a man that did not like him."

During our life in the ghetto we went through selections (actionen). During these actions, a section of the ghetto was surrounded by the Gestapo (secret police) and all the people were ordered to gather on a designated open field. There they would select a number of people for "resettlement" which in most cases meant death. Sometimes they would tell us the reason for resettlement was to alleviate overcrowding. However, sometimes they did not even bother.

Many times they would take away the entire population of a sectioned off part of the ghetto by removing that section from the ghetto geography.

One day, we heard rumors that they were going to have a selection on our side of the street. We talked to our friends and neighbors who lived across the street. They said they had heard those rumors too and we were welcome to join them in their hiding place. We went that evening to their hiding place, which was in the attic dormer. We spent a night in fear, because the Nazis were in the house, but luckily they could not find the hiding place.

Life in the ghetto was very hectic. We had to worry about getting food, firewood and not getting caught up in a selection. We also did not want to wind up as a statistic.

The lack of food was of a daily concern and, in order to survive, we had to somehow trade our valuables (which we were not allowed to have) for food. This was done at great risk to us, by having to sneak away from our work places and to find Lithuanians willing to trade with us. Then, we needed to return to our designated work place without being discovered.

Even if you were successful in a trade, difficulties still remained. You still had to hide the food on the job and, even more so, while bringing it into the ghetto. Many times the guards searched the returning workers at the ghetto gate. When they found something, they not only took it away, but also gave you a severe beating besides.

In October 1941 the Nazis had what they called "Die grosse action," or the big selection. The entire ghetto was ordered to appear on an open field. With that order followed by the usual clause "failure to obey will cause you to be shot," I do not think anyone stayed behind. All the people had to go before the selector, Rauka.

During the selection many families were separated when Rauka sent one parent and child to one side and the other parent and child to another side. One side meant death, the other side temporary life. My family came through the selection intact except for my Uncle Chaim and his wife. They were selected to die and we never saw them again.

After this selection, we continued to live and work in the ghetto. My brother and I continued at the airport until Boris got a job at the “ghetto warkstaten” (ghetto workshops). There he refurbished military uniforms, repaired shoes, washed clothing, etc.

Over time, the food situation became worse and we had to resort to eating horsemeat (if we could get it). The lack of heat in the winter was also a big problem, since the winters were very cold and we had very little firewood. We had to break up anything made of wood, such as wooden fences and even furniture, in order to have even a little firewood.

One day, we saw through our window, facing the “Apell Platz” and main ghetto gate, one of the guards go berserk. He gathered about a dozen men (my father among them) and lined them up in a straight row. Placing his rifle on the side of the first man, he said, “if any man is not in perfect line with the first man, he will get shot.” He fired a couple rounds, but nobody was hit. We could, however, see the fear in the men’s faces. To obtain a better look, Boris moved the curtain, and in the process, garnered the attention of another guard who fired a round in our direction. The shot shattered the window and the flying glass injured Boris.

Thinking her son had been shot, my mother started screaming, but we realized the bullet had not hit him.

A year and a half later, I was able to get a better job, working for a cable company. They were installing new telegraph cable from Kaunas to Mariampole, about thirty miles away. From the beginning all we had to do was dig a trench about one foot wide by two and a half feet deep and thirty-one feet long. Some people would finish their allotted norm in a couple hours so the Nazis gradually increased the norm to sixty-two feet long.

When we finished about half the project, we were relocated to a former synagogue in Marijampole, which was a smaller city than Kaunas. The next day on the job, as I was watching truckloads of people being transported from the ghetto to Marijampole, I noticed my parents on one of the trucks. They were afraid I would not be able to cope on my own and had therefore decided to come to Marijampole too. Boris, however, remained in the ghetto.

When the cable-laying project was finished, they brought us back to the ghetto. We had no place to stay as other people now occupied our house. To go house hunting would have been an impossible task. Thus, we decided to join the group who had volunteered for resettlement in a new camp. This camp was located in another suburb of Kaunas called “Sanciai.” The reports we heard about it were good.

My father went to find Boris and everyone else in the family, including Hayele, signed up to go to Sanciai. At the camp, the men were assigned to the male barracks and the women to the female barracks. Yet we all went to work in a "Tankholtz" factory. Since the Germans had very little gasoline, they converted their vehicles by adding a tank that looked like a hot water heater. That heater burned small pieces of wood, which propelled their vehicles. Our job was to unload logs from a train and chop them up to small pieces (about 3X5" in size).

One day we were unloading logs when I threw a log down from the platform. The log hit a girl walking by the platform. Upon seeing her hit, I immediately fainted and awoke in the supervisor's office. The Nazi supervisors were giving me water, assuring me that she was not badly hurt, and praising me for my concern.

After being in Sanciai for a relatively short time, the Nazis had a "kinderaktion" or child selection. They took away all the small children including my little "sister" Hayele. When they came into the women's barrack where my mother and Hayele lived, the Nazi officer hooked Hayele's neck with his walking cane. My mother tried to pull her away, but that Nazi hit my mother. Then, ten-year-old Hayele said to my mother, "Don't worry, if I can I will escape." We never saw her again and we learned later that all the children had been killed. They had been placed in a van that had had its exhaust pipe rerouted into its interior. After a few minutes, the children had suffocated from the fumes.

In July 1944, when the battlefield came closer to us, they evacuated the camp by marching us to the train station. While we were walking over a bridge, one of our fellow inmates jumped off it into the river. The guards immediately started shooting at him, but were unable to hit him for a long time. Finally, after swimming for a good distance, he was hit and disappeared underwater.

When we got to the train station we saw people who were brought there from the ghetto. At the station, we boarded a boxcar train, which was very overcrowded. There was not enough room to lie down or even to sit down. Forced to stand side by side, we only had a bucket placed in the corner for physiological functions. We were not given food or water. Each car was bolted shut on the outside to help prevent escape. The smell inside was horrible.

The next day we arrived at a station called "Tigenhoff" which was near Danzig. All the women were ordered to disembark. We kissed my mother and Sonia goodbye and said to each other that "if" we survive we should meet in our hometown of Kaunas. After a lot of tears, for the women and by the women, the men were ordered back on the train. We learned later that the women were taken to a concentration camp called "Stutthof."

We continued traveling on the train for a couple more days, until we came to a station called "Kaufering" near Landsberg, Bavaria. Forced to disembark, we were taken to one of the eleven satellite camps of Dachau, "Lager one Dachau Kaufering" (Camp number one). As we entered the camp, we were ordered to stand at attention while the

commandant delivered his “welcoming speech.” In this speech, he told us that he did not want to hear one Jew call another by title such as “Herr Doctor,” “Herr Advokat,” etc.

Asserting that Jews are not doctors or lawyers, he classified us as “subhuman devils, [that] will be referred to by the numbers you were issued, but not by name.” He also told us that we should not expect good treatment. He was right.

Some of us had brought along “Ostmarken” which was German currency that could only be used in the German occupied territories, but not in Germany. Some people felt that they had no use for the money and just threw it into the latrine. Outraged at seeing the money floating in the open pit, the Nazis selected a number of people at random and ordered them to undress. Then, these unlucky prisoners were ordered to enter the huge hole in the ground filled with human waste. According to the Nazi instructions, they were to retrieve all the paper bills, wash them and put them out to dry in the sun. We were also warned never again to destroy “German property.” My father, Boris and I were lucky not to be among the selectees.

At first we were assigned to live in round huts made of masonite with bare mud floors. I would estimate the diameter of the hut to have been about twenty feet. This small space held about twenty-five people, enough room for us to lie side by side like sardines in a can. In these huts, we laid on the bare ground and when it rained we laid in the mud.

Later the Nazis built permanent barracks for us. These basically consisted of a trench in the ground with a horizontal wooden platform on either side, vertical wood on either side of this horizontal platform, and a gabled roof that was at ground level on the outside. The door was parallel to the trench and when you opened the door, there were a few steps that led down into the trench. In the center of the trench stood a stove, placed there to provide heat. We slept side by side on the wooden platforms, so tight together that in order to turn from one side to the other the whole row would have to turn.

From the beginning the food we were getting was not too bad. We received a loaf of bread for three people and a good thick soup every day. Yet this did not last for long. After being there a short while, only about two months, we received starvation rations: a loaf of mildewed bread for sixteen people (little more than a bite). After eating your daily ration a green puff came out of your mouth. We also received daily what they classified as soup, a little plain warm water.

The company we worked for was called “Mohl” and they were building an underground jet plane (Messerschmidt) factory about two and a half miles from the camp. They constructed an arc and poured reinforced concrete on it, with the bottom being forty-five feet thick and gradually tapering off to sixteen feet on top. After this was to be completed, they were planning to dig out all the earth from the structure, constructing a factory in the process. It is a good thing they were unable to complete the project before the end of the war. It was such a big undertaking that, if completed, it could have prolonged the war.

Our work consisted of manual labor (unloading cement, mixing cement, digging ditches, etc.). I was assigned to stand on the reinforcement and push the concrete, pumped into the work site through large portable pipes, around the reinforcement with a long stick.

My father was later assigned to work at a cement mixing station. He was in charge of the cement that was blown in through large pipes to a tank above the mixing station. When the four mixing machines below needed cement, he would release a controlled amount to the proper machines. The gravel was released by an operator in another room above the mixing station.

The supervisor on this job was a man by the name Obermeier. When my father went there to work he immediately took a liking to my father. Obermeier had a reputation for being the meanest supervisor at the "Mohl" company and everyone tried to avoid being assigned to his department.

At my job, which involved standing at night in the open air, it was very cold. To make matters worse, the "pajamas" (striped prisoner clothing) we were issued when we arrived at the camp were literally eaten away by our lice infestations. Thankfully, my father arranged for me and Boris to come to work for Obermeier, a job which involved working inside where it was warm. All the other people working for Obermeier envied us, because we were singled out for better treatment. We were the "untouchables" and "meine juden" (my Jews).

My job there consisted of looking out of the window and watching to see if any of the four concrete pumping sites turned on their numbered light (1-4), indicating that it needed more concrete. I would then tell the operator to turn on the corresponding machine. When the light went off, I would have to tell him to stop.

Before I went to work for Obermeier, we had to walk about two-and-a-half miles to get to work. As part of our uniforms we were also issued wooden shoes. The shoes had on top of the wood (sides of shoes) hard masonite that rubbed blisters on my ankles which inhibited me from being able to walk. There was an infirmary in the camp, but the only qualification to be admitted was a high fever. Besides, people advised me not to go there under any circumstances because nobody came out alive. Through his connections, my father arranged to get a two-wheel wagon by which some friends would pull me to work.

When we got to the job site, my father bribed the supervisor and he in turn would lock me up in the tool shed for the twelve-hour duration of our shift (7 p.m.-7 a.m.). There was also a German co-worker who would give me and another young boy a piece of bread every other day. My father, brother, and I would split any additional food we could get besides our rations three ways. After my ankles healed I resumed my "nightly" routine.

One night we were ordered to unload a trainload of cement bags. Each car was in front of a warehouse door. We had to run with the heavy bags of cement. In front of each door stood an S.S. guard with a whip that he swung indiscriminately while yelling "Los, los" (faster, faster). The cold was unbearable so some of us, myself included, took some

empty cement bags, cut a hole in the center for the head and two corners for the arms and put it on like a vest. It helped protect us from the cold but also angered the Germans. When we arrived at the camp, everyone who had a vest got a severe beating for “destroying German property.”

Since we worked the twelve-hour nightshift, returning to the camp in the morning meant that, due to the Allied air raids, we were always faced with not being able to sleep. The Nazi guards would wake us up and order us to go to the foxholes until the planes left the area. Even though that was an inconvenience, we were glad to see the planes come almost everyday. Despite the fact that we could have been hurt or killed, we still wanted to see “Hitler’s might” destroyed. Under the circumstances, with so many of us dying from starvation, we did not think we would survive anyhow. Thus, we would have preferred to die by allied planes than by starvation. Death by starvation is a long, painful process.

About six weeks before the war ended, my father was sent to camp number three which was also a labor camp. Boris remained in camp number one and I was sent to camp number four, which was called “Tottenlager” (Death camp). There you did not work anymore. Two people shared a blanket, lied down and awaited death.

One evening when we went to sleep, my blanket mate died and I slept with a dead man for a whole night. In the morning they came in as “usual” to pick up the bodies and as usual there was more than one. To us death meant very little, because we knew that tomorrow or the next day it will be our turn. Besides, bodies were lying in the streets and the ones who could walk would step over them or walk around them as if they were just pieces of wood. We were so immune to death and starvation was so real to us that if we saw a pebble, we would pick it up and be very disappointed that it was not a potato.

One day, they gathered some of us who could still walk a little to “march” to the woods and bring some firewood back to the camp. The guards had German shepherd dogs that were trained to attack in case you did not march like a soldier. The fear of being attacked kept you marching whether you could or not. When we arrived at the forest, I saw my father working there from camp number three. We kissed each other and were crying. Even some of the Nazi guards who saw our emotions had tears in their eyes. I told my father where I was and he voluntarily asked to be transferred to my death camp.

The encounter saved my life, because I was so undernourished and weak, I could not have survived much longer without my father’s help. He was swollen from hunger and I was like a skeleton from hunger. Yet, he was still in better physical shape than me.

Before my father came to camp number four I was desperately searching for food. The only thing I could see was the grass on the gabled roof of our barracks. I was too weak to pull it out by hand, so I lied down on the roof and ate the grass like a cow.

A short time after my father came to our camp, they loaded us into boxcars. Traveling alongside our train, designated with a Red Cross sign, was a military train.

The allied planes probably realized that the Germans were using our train to protect the military train. Thus, they started bombarding the train and some were killed and wounded. The tracks were also damaged, so the Nazis took us back to the camp.

I am not sure if it was the same day or the next day that they took us back to the train. Nonetheless, we did not get very far before the train stopped and everything got quiet. We looked through the cracks and saw our fellow inmates in striped uniforms carrying rifles. We asked them what was going on and they told us that the guards abandoned their weapons and the train. Taking advantage of the predicament, we asked our fellow prisoners to break the locks on our train doors, which they gladly did.

We decided to walk away from the train. Upon nearing a village, we suddenly heard a command to “halt” (stop). In front of us was a civilian boy, only about sixteen years old, with a gun in his hand. He asked us where we were going and we told him that since our guard was no longer there, we were going to this village. He said that they formed a new guard and we had to return to the train. Then, he asked us if more inmates went to the village. My father said yes, many more. He got back on his bicycle and we pretended to walk back to the train. As soon as we lost sight of him we veered off to the side and went into the village. The walk was not a very long distance, but it took us a long time. I could hardly walk and, without my father’s help, I would not have been able to make it. It was April 27th 1945, and I was 17.

We went into a house where Ukrainian workers lived. They gave us some bread and milk and let us sleep over in the cellar. The next morning they came in and said that we had to leave because the Germans were nearby. They gave us directions to a village called Weil where they said we could go. We went to Weil and entered a large cow barn.

There were a lot of other inmates there. When we woke up the next morning, we heard a commotion in the yard. People were saying the Americans are here. It seemed like an impossible dream.

We started walking in a field when we met a group of American soldiers. One of them spoke German. When we told them who we were they gave us their daily rations plus cigarettes. They also told us about a new hospital opening up for survivors in the same village. The unforgettable date was April 29, 1945, when we were finally liberated from unbelievable suffering, torture, and death.

My father and I went to that hospital where we were admitted right away. The doctor was himself a Holocaust survivor from Kaunas whom my father knew.

We stayed there for about 10 days and recovered enough to be on our own. Upon leaving the hospital, we went to the “Burgermeister” (mayor) who assigned us to a German farm family who would give us quarter and treated us well. Now, the war was officially over.

We met other survivors and asked them if they knew anything about my brother Boris. One of them told me he saw Boris, after the war, in a convent not too far from our

village. I got a bicycle and went there the next day. Astonishingly, this was about three weeks after weighing fifty-six pounds.

When I arrived at the convent, I did not meet anybody who saw Boris there. However, I met a former neighbor of ours who told me that he saw Boris after the war in the main camp of "Dachau."

I returned home and took off the next day for "Dachau." When I got there, after a four-to-five hour bike ride, I saw American MPs (military police) now guarded the camp. They told me in order to get in, I had to go to the office and get a permit. I obtained the permit and went inside the camp. I started reading lists of inmates, but nowhere did I see Boris's name.

Disappointed, I started to head back home when I heard someone call my name. It was a friend of my father who was very happy to hear that my father had survived. I asked him about Boris and he said "come, I'll show you where he is." Apparently, the reason Boris was not on any lists was because he had signed up for a Soviet transport leaving the next day. He signed up for the transport because he wanted to fulfill our agreement to meet in Kaunas (our designated meeting place) if we survived the war.

The Soviets considered us Soviet citizens and thus the property of the Soviet Union. Therefore, he was not allowed to leave the camp. Thus, we decided that he would climb over the fence while I distracted the guard. I came to the gate and positioned myself in such a way that I was facing the fence and the guard was facing me. I prolonged finding my permit until I saw Boris climb over the fence safely. Once, I left the camp, Boris and I met on the other side of the fence. We started walking and pushing the bicycle. I was not strong enough yet for both of us to ride on the bicycle. Boris was also weak, just having survived a typhoid epidemic.

We walked until it started to get dark. Then, we knocked on a door and we asked the elderly couple if we could sleep over. They said yes and gave us something to eat. We told them our story and went to sleep.

Getting up early in the morning, we left without seeing our hosts. We walked most of the day before I saw, in the distance, the village and the house where my father and I were staying. I started running. Seeing me and sensing that I brought good news, my father started running towards me. Boris was walking slower, because he was now pushing the bicycle. Once Boris caught up, the three of us hugged and kissed each other, celebrating the reunification of our family after such a difficult ordeal.

After spending a few days in the village, we decided to go back to our designated meeting place, Kaunas (now again the Lithuanian Republic of the Soviet Union), to hopefully find my mother and cousin Sonia, if they also survived.

We went to the Funk Kaserne in Munich and signed up for a Soviet transport train that would take us to Kaunas. We were again in cattle cars, but this time we had food and water. In addition, we were also not as overcrowded as in the German boxcars.

The train took a long time to go from place to place. Every time we came to a city, the train would stay there for two to three days. We left the American zone of Germany and went into Soviet (East) zone. Finally, we came to a large city called Chemnitz, located near Dresden.

Ordered off the train, we were taken to an open field and told to completely undress. Soviet nurses examined us while we were standing naked in the field. It felt like we were again treated like cattle, even after the war was over.

My father had the mistaken notion that we would be put on a pedestal for having survived such an ordeal. However, the opposite was true. The Soviets treated anyone who was under German occupation as a traitor to the Soviet Union. We met Soviet soldiers who asked us "Why did you remain alive?" They checked our status and told us that Boris was of military age and therefore had to remain there. However, my father and I could continue our journey to Kaunas.

My father and I continued on through the rest of East Germany and then into Poland. When we came to Lodz, the second largest city in Poland, we got off the train and met some women from Kaunas who had survived "Stuthoff." They knew us and told us that both my mother and my cousin Sonia had survived. They also told us that Sonia had got married and now lived in Lodz. They gave us her address.

We took our meager belongings and went to Sonia's apartment in Lodz. There we found out that my mother indeed had survived and was awaiting us in case anyone of us happened to survive also. It was completely unheard of that five members of one family should survive concentration camps.

We met friends who had been to Kaunas, who warned us not to go, because things were not good especially for survivors. We decided to stay and contacted people who were going back and forth. Experts at smuggling people, they were able to get my mother to Lodz. This was the first reunion with my mother after the war. There would be others. We did not want to remain in Poland, so we had to make some money. We wanted to go back to Germany and from there to journey to the U.S.

We got a stand at the marketplace where we sold used clothing. We tried to save up enough money to smuggle ourselves over the German/Polish border back into Germany.

One day I was holding up a navy jacket. I was sure it was part of a German uniform. Military uniforms were not allowed to be sold, unless they were from outside of Poland. A Polish policeman asked me why I was selling a Polish navy jacket. I told him that it was German and not Polish. He said, "You are under arrest" and took me to the police station. On the way, my father saw what was happening and tried to bribe the policeman

with some money (a common occurrence). He was afraid to take it because too many people were looking at us. Later, before the judge and pointing to my father, the policemen said, "this man tried to bribe me, but I am not that kind of a man." My father replied, "I don't even know the boy, I just felt sorry for him."

In the meantime, while I was standing at the hearing holding the jacket, I discovered a little button under the collar with the word "Deutschland" on it. I showed it to the judge and he in turn reprimanded the policeman. He told me I was free to go. I felt like I was saved by a button.

My cousin Sonia and her husband left for a D.P. camp called Foehrenwald. A month or so later my parents and I arranged our trip by first going to Stetin and from there we went to Berlin. In Berlin, we stayed for a brief period of time in the Templehoff D.P. camp, which was near the Berlin airport. We then traveled to Foehrenwald and joined Sonia and her husband. That was December 1945.

We were assigned a room that was already occupied by five other people. To maintain a little privacy, we put up a curtain separating our small portion of the room from everyone else. The room was on the second floor. The bathroom was on the first floor, which also had two smaller apartments.

One of the guys living in our apartment was my now good friend Arnold who was in charge of the electric shop in the camp. He asked me if I wanted to come to work in the electric shop. I, being eighteen years old and having no desire to be idle, decided to go to work and learn as I go. It was a challenging trade but I picked it up pretty fast.

In 1946, we received a telegram from Boris addressed to the camp administration in care of us. Boris had heard rumors that we were in this camp. He was still trying to find out if our mother survived the war. He also wanted to know why we were not in Kaunas, but in a D.P. camp. We replied with a telegram. Using code words, we told him we had changed our minds and we now wanted to go to the U.S. or Israel (Palestine at the time). The correspondence was evidently intercepted and we later got another telegram (We learned later that it was not sent by Boris, but by his superiors in his name). The telegram said that it is very urgent and very important for my mother to come to see him.

When my mother arrived there, the Soviets arrested her and Boris. They put both of them "on trial" for treason. My mother had two charges against her. One charge accused her of not returning to her homeland after the war. The second charged her with wanting to help a Soviet citizen leave the homeland. Boris was charged with wanting to leave his homeland illegally. Found guilty, both Boris and my mother were sentenced to ten years in Siberia.<sup>2</sup>

In the meantime, while I lived in the D.P. camp, I met and fell in love with a beautiful young girl by the name of Manya. We dated for more than a year, enjoying going to movies and dances together.

In March 1948 in Foehrenwald, we finally got married. Manya was born in a small town in a part of Poland called Galicia. She was one of seven children. In addition to losing her entire family in the war, she experienced fear and depression by being in hiding and pretending to be a Polish girl. She was recruited along with other Polish girls to go to Germany to work. Recognized as a Jewish girl by a Polish boy, she was told to get off the train at the next station. Instead of obeying, she escaped from the train and started going from house to house looking for housekeeping or baby-sitting jobs. She was hired in a few places, but the fear of being recognized kept her moving from place to place.

One day she was serving dinner to the family she worked for as well as their guests. Among the guests was a man Manya recognized but he acted like he did not know her. A week or so later the Gestapo came and arrested her. They tried to persuade her to confess that she was Jewish, but she denied it. While imprisoned, they let her work in the garden.

She took the opportunity to climb over the fence and escape into the woods.

Again wandering from place to place, she finally wound up in a church in Dolina. There were three priests who lived there. A number of Polish girls worked on the farm and in the kitchen belonging to the church.

She would go to confession like the other girls did. The priests never knew she was Jewish. Even when she left she did not tell anyone she was Jewish.

After the war, she met some people from her hometown and together they traveled to camp Foehrenwald. In Foehrenwald she lived with her cousins Eva and Klara and Klara's husband, David. She went to work in the camp tailoring shop. Eva also worked in the same shop and Manya and her were very close. They even dressed alike. People thought they were twins.

My father sent a letter to his sister Tillie in Baltimore. Even though the address he remembered was not quite correct his sister still received it. We established a correspondence with the family in Baltimore. They in turn made out papers for us to come to the U.S.

In March 1949 we arrived (my father, Manya, and I) in New York City. My aunt Mitzi and cousin Morris came to pick us up. There were also Manya's aunt and uncle who lived in Coney Island. Manya's family and mine were arguing whether we should stay in New York or go to Baltimore. My family won and we went to the train station and traveled to Baltimore. We were warmly received by my aunt Tillie and her family. We were also greeted by a lot of other family, members of the oldest and largest family society in the U.S., the B'nai Abraham and Yehuda Laib Family Circle, who came to see us.

My father obtained a job in a dry cleaning store. Manya got a job doing alterations in a dress shop and I got a job for a construction company. We did not earn much, but at the time everything was inexpensive. We were trying to save up some money to pay for food

and household expenses. We were impressed with the freedom and availability of all products.

My father worked very hard and made very little money. He borrowed some money from my cousin and opened a little grocery store. With the financial success of the store, he soon repaid the loan to my cousin. Manya continued working in the dress shop where she was well liked by everyone.

My ambition was to work at my acquired trade in Germany, as an electrician. With the help of my Aunt Tillie, I was able to get a job for an electrical contractor as an electrician's helper. I was happy doing this work and at the same time learning the wiring methods of the U.S. They were quite different than the wiring methods in Germany.

After a short time, I was promoted to an electrician and also worked as a mechanic. I worked there until the end of 1956 when I started studying the electrical code. At the beginning of 1957, I took and passed the examination for master electrician. After receiving my license, I went into business for myself. I continued working in my own electrical contracting business until I retired in the 1990s.

Manya and I wanted to start a family in the United States. After getting established we began to have children. In 1954, our daughter Diane was born, in 1957 our daughter Cynthia was born, and in 1958 our daughter Beverly was born. Now, they are all mothers and have blessed us with six grandchildren.

When we first came to the U.S. we knew very little English, so we all went to night school to acquire the new language of the land. In school, my father met a woman from Germany. She agreed to help him in the store.

One day my father said, "I want to talk to you." I said "sure." He told me that "Hellen" wants to get married. I said, "How can you do that when we are pretty sure my mother is alive?" He said that Hellen knows about mom and if she ever turns up, she will step aside, but she wants more than just helping him in the store. I had no choice but to agree.

One day in 1960, my father received a letter from the Red Cross in Geneva. They wanted to know if we were identical with the people being sought by the Soviet Red Cross. I wrote a letter to them explaining that it is my mother and brother who are looking for us and we in turn would like to find them, too. They replied stating all they knew was that a request by the Soviets to identify us. That was all the information they had, but they could not undertake any searches in the Soviet Union.

A couple months later, a friend showed me an article in a New York Jewish newspaper "The Forverts" (the Forward) that we are being sought. I called the paper and they gave me the name and address of a man in Poland.

It turned out that he went through a similar ordeal as Boris. He was in Dachau and after the war was sentenced to ten years in Siberia on phony charges. When he was freed he married a girl from Poland and was “allowed” to go to Poland with his wife.

Boris asked him to put the announcement in the newspaper. That is how I came to contact him in Poland and to find out about my mother and Boris. He told me that they were now living in Vitebsk, Belarus, and he sent me their address. We established a correspondence and began sending them packages of food and clothing. We also filed an affidavit for my mother to come to the U.S. However, after six attempts to obtain an exit visa and each one being denied on the grounds that one parent and a son are there and one parent and a son are here, we became frustrated. I also went to the Soviet Embassy in Washington and asked for their help in obtaining an exit visa for my mother. Their reply was the same. “One parent and a son ... “

Seeing that there was no hope for my mother to get out of the god-forsaken country, we decided to go with our three daughters to see their only grandmother. Thus, in July 1964 we drove to New York’s Kennedy airport and left the car there on the long-term parking lot. We took “Sabena,” a Belgian airline, to Brussels, Belgium. This being our first air flight, we all got airsick. When we got to Brussels, they gave us some pills and we felt better. We then took a flight to Warsaw, Poland on the Polish airline “Lot.”

We were then taken to the train station in Warsaw, heading for the Lithuanian capital city of Vilnius. At the Soviet-Polish border, we had to change to a Soviet train, because each of these countries had a different size track.

We arrived in Vilnius and I spotted my cousin Shlomo and then my mother while the train was still moving. We were greeted by an agent of “Intourist,” a Soviet organization in charge of tourism, who was our guide and interpreter. He spoke perfect English. They took us to the “Vilnius Hotel” where we were given a large room for the five of us. The children were then five, six, and ten years old. We had a wonderful reunion with my mother, Boris, and his family.

We had prepaid coupons for food, but most of the time we ate with our relatives and friends. When the time was approaching to go home, we had about \$200 worth of coupons. Not wanting the coupons to go to waste, Boris decided to have a party at the hotel for all our relatives and friends. He ordered five bottles of vodka and plenty of food for everyone. When the party was over, everything was gone and I only had to add a few dollars to the coupons. Needless to say, my second reunion with my mother and Boris was wonderful. In addition being happy to see our numerous relatives and friends, we were especially glad to have met Boris’ wife Genia and his two sons, Ilya seven and Igor one and a half years old.

We enjoyed our stay and on August 11th 1964 we came back home. Upon arrival back in the U.S., I became more determined than ever to bring my mother to America. I went to lawyers, Congressmen, and Senators until finally in 1966 I found out that Maryland

Senator Joseph Tydings was going on a mission to the Soviet Union to study their judicial system.

I sent him my biography and asked him to help my mother obtain her Exit Visa. When he returned he called me and told me that since his grandfather was once a U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union and he knew some important people there who had promised to help get my mother out. Consequently, on August 11th 1967 (three years to the date from when we returned from the Soviet Union) my mother arrived at Kennedy airport for our third reunion. In the meantime, my father had his bigamous marriage annulled.

Our newly reunited family returned to Baltimore the next day following a restful night at our friends' house (David and Clara) in New York City. My father bought a house where they lived, since he was already retired. He tried to enjoy life with my mother. My mother on the other hand, was bitter at the world (and who could blame her?). She endured a very difficult childhood, went through and survived the Holocaust (which was a miracle in itself), and then, after being liberated from that hell on earth, had endured being reunited and separated again from her family. On top of that she had spent an unbelievable ten years in Siberia and, upon release, could not be reunited with her family for a number of years.

In 1969 my father became ill with liver cancer. After being in and out of the hospital for about half a year, he died peacefully March 1st 1970 in his hospital bed. My mother, Manya, and I were present.

I will never forgive the Soviets for not letting Boris journey to the U.S. to see his father on his deathbed and then return to the Soviet Union. Yet, that is exactly what transpired. I went to the Soviet Embassy once with my mother and once with Manya, both times pleading with them to let Boris come to see his dying father. They said no.

The last time my father saw Boris was in 1945 when he remained in Chemnitz, East Germany, even though my father lived for another twenty-five years. Disliking his life in the Soviet Union, Boris immigrated to Beersheva, Israel, in 1990.

In 1975, Boris was allowed to come for a visit to Baltimore, while the Soviets held his wife and his two sons hostage. Thus, when his time was up, he had to return home in order not to jeopardize the safety of his family. In the late '70s, he divorced his wife Genia and married his present wife, Sonia.

Manya and I visited Israel twice before Boris immigrated there and one time in 1992 after he had started his life there. In 1994, Boris and Sonia came for a visit to Baltimore. Although we write and speak on the phone, we have not seen each other since that date.

My mother died in 1980 and both my parents are buried in a Baltimore cemetery. This is a privilege I cherish. All other survivors envy me, since most of them do not know where the remains of their loved ones are.

I have been making speeches in schools and churches about the Holocaust. I want people to know the real story of the Holocaust and not what they hear from the Holocaust deniers.

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to my good friend Robert Dangio, my wife, Manya, my children, and my grandchildren for encouraging me to write my story down on paper. Special thanks are due to my grandson, Ben Miller, for editing and arranging this writing.

*Editor's Note: For comments about this essay, the family requests that you write to [mom3dds@yahoo.com](mailto:mom3dds@yahoo.com).*