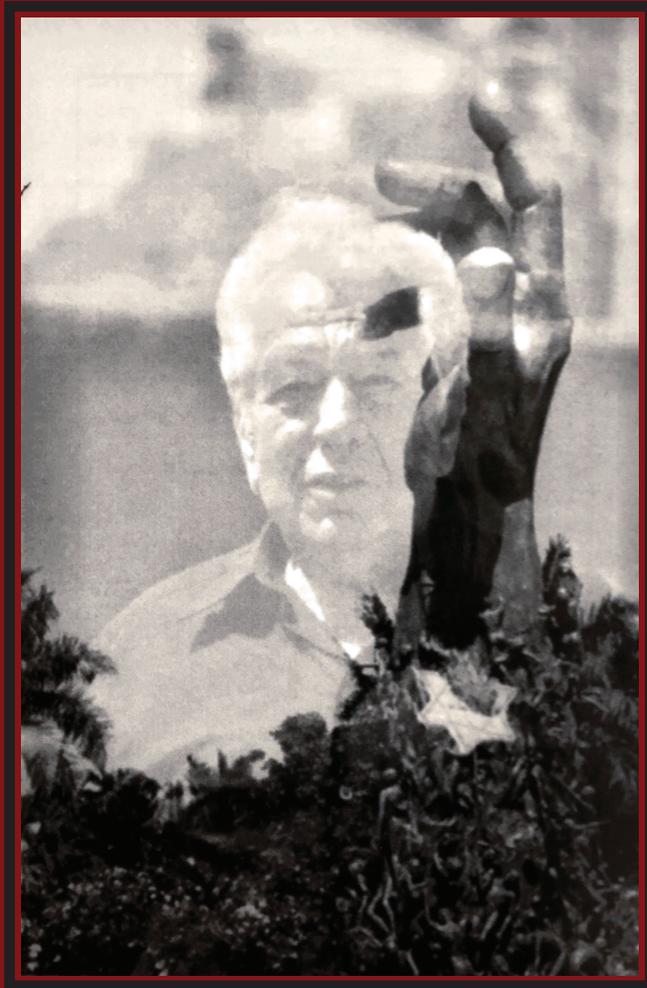


Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors Residing in South Florida

A TEENAGER IN THE LODZ GHETTO

Holocaust Survivor Leo Martin's Memoir



As told to Bobbi Kaufman

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Republished by
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and The George Feldenkreis Program in Judaic Studies



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The information in this book is presented in good faith. The words in this book are the words of Leo Martin as he recalled his personal experience in the Holocaust. This is his story and his truth.

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On the cover: A picture of Leo Martin wearing his Yellow Star of David superimposed on a picture of the sculpture at the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach.

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FOREWARD

“For the survivor who chooses to testify, it is clear: his duty is to bear witness for the dead and for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time....”

“... I have tried to keep memory alive...I have tried to fight those who would forget. Because if we forget we are guilty, we are accomplices.”

- Elie Wiesel

As time goes on, the number of Holocaust survivors alive today is rapidly dwindling. With their passing, the incomprehensible cataclysm known as The Holocaust, or Shoah, is fast morphing from a ‘lived memory’ into a ‘historical memory’; from a personal experience of ‘those who were there’ into impersonal commemorative monuments and museums.

All too soon, there will be no one left to offer first hand testimony of what it was like to actually be there when all hell broke loose; all too soon, even those who knew and heard directly from the victims of the Nazis and their collaborators, will be gone.

It is, therefore, a matter of great urgency that we gather and preserve for future generations as much primary documentation and testimony as possible about the lives and experiences of those heroes who survived the Holocaust, managed to build new lives, and were willing to tell their stories.

Memoirs serve as a very important means of preserving these testimonies. Several years ago, Holocaust survivors began approaching Bobbi Kaufman, asking for help writing their memoirs, describing their lives before, during, and since the Holocaust. She began working with the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach (HMMB), writing the memoirs of Holocaust survivors who were docents and contributors to the memorial. This collaboration was instrumental in her developing a series of in-depth, book-length memoirs. Six books were completed and uploaded onto the HMMB website and the HMMB created lesson plans for each book to be used in teaching about the Holocaust.

Now, in collaboration with the HMMB, the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies, and the George Feldenkreis Program in Judaic Studies of the University of Miami, the series has been named *Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors Residing in Florida*. The existing books were graphically redesigned and several new books have been added to the collection, with the objective of continuing to expand the series. The complete series will be freely available to the public in digital form on the HMMB and Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program websites.

Our hope is that this series will make a significant contribution to the growing literature of Holocaust survivors' memoirs and serve as a tribute to their ability to make new lives for themselves while never forgetting.

Dr. Haim Shaked
Director, The Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program
University of Miami

DEDICATION

To My Wife, Gloria

Thank you for helping me to overcome all of the painful memories, for your unconditional love for over fifty years, and for your support throughout the past twenty years of research and work that it took to complete this memoir.

— *Leo Martin*



*The home where I was born was a simple shed with
no running water.*

LIFE BEFORE THE WAR



I was born on December 27, 1925 in Lodz, Poland. My name at birth was Arieh Leib Mermelstein. I changed it to Leo Martin after the war when I got to Canada. My family's home from the time I was born until I was nine years old was a simple shed with a red roof at Wolczanska #65. At first the shed had no floor, but after a while my father put in a wood floor made from packing boxes. The shed was one room. My sister, Lodzia, who was four years older than me, my brother, Max, who was two years younger than me, and my parents all slept in the same room. I remember my bed was in the corner.

We bathed every Friday and put on clean clothes for Shabbas. Since there was no running water in the shed, I had to carry water from a pump two or three hundred feet away. I would pump the water into two buckets and carry them home to our kitchen. My mother would heat the water in a big copper pot on our coal and wood-burning stove and pour it into our tub. The tub was similar to a wooden barrel with metal bands around it. My father would take a bath first, then my mother, then my sister, then me, then my brother. I would carry the dirty water outside to dump it. I believe I have long arms today from carrying those heavy buckets when I was a kid. Our house did not have a toilet. There was an outhouse which was maybe thirty feet away. It was shared by whoever was in the neighborhood. The toilet was just a hole in the ground with two concrete pads to stand on.

Every Friday my mother would bake challah and make fish. She baked fantastic challahs! She would braid them and make them beautiful. In the morning she would go to the market and buy a live fish. She would grind the fish to make gefilte fish. She made it with a lot of sugar. She would take a carp and hollow out the tummy and stuff it with the cooked gefilte fish. We ate it with a lot of horseradish. Grating the horseradish was my job. I would rub the horseradish root back and forth on a metal grater called a *reebisen*. I didn't like to do it because it made me cry.

Also on Friday my mother would start preparing my favorite food, *cholent*, which was like a stew. *Cholent* was a very common, traditional meal for Jewish families to eat on Saturdays. Beans and potatoes were the main ingredients. There was also barley and sometimes a little beef. My mother would fill up this cast iron pot that had big ears (handles). Then she would take a towel and run it over the lid and through the handles and then pack it with paper on the top. Then my brother and I would carry it to the baker. The baker would put it into the oven with all the other pots of *cholent* the other families had brought there. The oven was turned off because using fire on Shabbas was forbidden, but it was still warm from the day's baking. The *cholent* would simmer overnight. We would pick it up on Saturday morning and have our meal when my father got home.

When I was a child, rolls and rye bread were easily available. Sometimes my mother would put butter on a roll then put some scraping of chocolate on top of the butter. That was the most delicious thing for me, a delicacy. I never had a whole chocolate bar — it was too expensive — just a little scraping of chocolate. Before the war we always had enough food, but nothing fancy. The farmers would bring in fresh fruit and vegetables and my mother would go to the market once or twice a week to buy food. My job was to carry the food home. We had a rope bag to carry the groceries. Goose was inexpensive and was a favorite. In our house we had a credenza, like an armoire, where we kept our winter clothes on hangers. On top of it was a place my mother would clean and put the fruit to ripen. The only time we ate an orange or a grapefruit was when we were sick — citrus was very expensive. We had beef once in a while. Our family ate a lot of chicken. When my mother would buy a chicken she would take it to the *shochet* and pay him to kill the chicken in the kosher way. I had to pick up the chickens and sometimes they would still be moving — like they were alive.

My father, Samuel Eiseman, was a powerful man. Before the war he worked for a moving company. He was so strong he could carry home 100 kilos of potatoes on his shoulders. Because he would buy 100 kilos of flour at a time, we were considered the richest in our family. My cousins and uncles would come with pots and my father and mother would give them some of the flour. Under our shed we had a hole in the ground that my father covered

with wood and we stored the potatoes there. My father's friend had a dairy where I would go with a bucket to get milk. It was just plain milk straight from the cow.

This friend with the dairy became very famous because he was able to pick up a heavy bull. What happened was, when this bull was born and his family wanted to kill it for meat, he begged his father not to. He said he would raise it and take care of it. Every time he fed the bull he would go underneath and pick him up to see if he was gaining weight. This bull became a huge bull and picking him up became a circus act. There would be a stage and music and my father's friend would challenge anybody to come on the stage and pick up the bull. No one could ever get under him to pick him up except my father's friend. The secret was that the bull only trusted the man who raised him.

My father had little education, but he could read and write Polish and he could read the Yiddish newspapers. My father wanted me to learn a trade because he had no trade and as a laborer he could only make a living with his brute strength — carrying weight on his shoulders, loading and unloading trucks. He wanted to make sure I had a trade because he felt I deserved better than being a laborer. I am grateful to him that I learned to be a tool and die maker which helped me in my future business. It was important to my father that all his children learn a trade. Before the war, my older sister, Lodzia, went to school to become a registered nurse specializing in children. She finished school and got the proper education, but she died in the ghetto.

My father always respected my mother; he was a real gentleman. He was very tall and my mother was very short. I remember my parents used to talk Yiddish when they didn't want us children to understand. My mother, Sarah Mermelstein Eiseman, was born in a little town in the country. She was one of many children. She never really knew her parents. As a girl she was sent to the city to work as a maid. She met my father when he delivered coal to the place where she worked. When she got married she did not know how to read or write. Her many nieces and nephews would come from the country and stay with my family. The boys would sleep in the bed with my brother and me — head to foot, foot to head. I would have feet in my face; the smell was bad. Years later, when I heard that people in America bathed every day, I was shocked!

When I was nine years old we moved to an apartment at Zamenhofa Street #13. Our apartment was around the corner from the Koscuizsko Synagogue that the Nazis burned down on November 14, 1939. The apartment was in a big building with a courtyard. This apartment also had no running water, but there was a big bedroom and a big kitchen. I was very happy there playing soccer and hide-and-seek in the streets with the kids. We were the poorest of all the families in the building. One of the rich kids, Luteck Feldman, was my buddy. I would always protect him because I was big and strong. His mother would give him a banana every morning and he would give me half. Another friend, Sigmund Gruchkowsky, whose father had a very good job, would bring me a roll with butter and

shaved chocolate. He was tall like me, so we sat together on the same bench at school. The tall kids had to sit in the back. We got along reasonably well with the Polish kids, but they liked to beat up the Jewish kids. My cousin and I were both big and strong so we weren't bothered very much. Actually, we would beat them up.

The poor Jews in our town went to public school that was for Jews only. That is where I went. We did not learn Jewish subjects, only secular subjects. We learned geography, arithmetic, how to read and write, and how to draw. I always had a green thumb, so in school I became like an agronomist. I brought in all kinds of plants and seedlings. There were maybe fifty kids in the class, all boys. Our teacher was a hunchback. He taught us singing and arithmetic. I still use the method he taught us to figure percentages when I have to figure out how much to tip in a restaurant. I never liked homework, I always wanted to play outside with the kids. My mother would chase me around to come in and do my homework. Because she realized how important education was, she hired a tutor, an older boy who lived in the building, to teach me because I was bad at arithmetic. In all, I went to school for seven years. School ended when the war started.

I was always very mechanically inclined. As a young boy I worked as an apprentice to my cousin who repaired sewing machines and pressing irons. The Jews in Lodz were in the textile and clothing manufacturing business, so there was a need for mechanics to maintain the machines. After

school I would go to the textile plant to help my cousin. I would fix whatever was cracked. There was no welding in those days so we used to put in little plates with rivets. I would also clean the machines and paint them to look like new. When the ghetto started, I got a job in the maintenance department for the sewing machines being used by thousands of Jewish tailors.

Reading was always my hobby. I would walk for miles to go to the public library. I was fascinated by nature. I read about ants and bees. I learned the way animals think, especially about the wild rabbits that lived in our town. Later, when we were sent to the ghetto, my brother and I were able to catch them for food because of my understanding about how rabbits behaved. This helped us to survive.

Our town had a small, air-cooled movie theater. I saw American movies with Polish subtitles. I saw cowboy movies with Tom Mix. I loved Shirley Temple. I belonged to Zionist youth groups Ha-Shomer ha Za'ir, then Betar under Jabotinsky, our hero. I went to a Macaabe sport club where the older boys tried to brainwash us to be Zionists. They taught us Hebrew songs and how to count in Hebrew. I dreamed of a sovereign state of Israel even as a young boy.



My paternal grandparents. When the Nazis cleared out the old age homes in the ghetto, my grandparents were taken.



I am standing in front of the building at #13 Zamenhofa Street where I lived from the time I was nine years old until I went into the ghetto.



My cousin's wedding in the Lodz Ghetto in 1941.



1. Leo Martin 2. Max (Leo's brother)
3. Salek Rajcenstein (Leo's brother-in law)
4. Lodzia (Leo's sister) 5. Jack Meremelstein
6. Samuel (Leo's father) 7. Sarah (Leo's mother)

THE WAR BEGINS



My family was not very religious, but we kept the traditions as best we could. My father would go to temple on the High Holidays. He sat in the back because he could not afford to be a paying member. I would carry his *tallis* bag when I walked with him to the Reform Synagogue on Kosciuszko Boulevard. I actually, with my own eyes, saw the Nazis burn that synagogue when I was thirteen years old. I was outside walking when I saw clouds of smoke. I went to look and saw Nazis surrounding the synagogue. There were not many people around. No one was running or yelling. There was no panic. There was no resistance. The area was cordoned off as though there was going to be an ordinary demolition of a building. The Lodz fire department was there because they didn't want any surrounding buildings to be burned. I do not know if there were any people in the synagogue. The Nazis closed the doors and they burned it down. When I saw what was happening, I started to cry and I ran home. It was a terrible, traumatic feeling. I was old enough to know right then and there that it was the beginning of the end of the Jewish people.

I never had a Jewish education. My father paid a tutor for a short time to teach me a little bit for my Bar Mitzvah. My Bar Mitzvah took place in the time between the German invasion of Poland and the establishment of the ghetto. By then, Bar Mitzvahs were illegal. My Bar Mitzvah was very small and very secretive. We went to my grandfather's *shteeble* in Lodz. The *shteeble* was a small apartment

turned into a synagogue. My father's father was a tailor. He was a religious man. Nobody came to my Bar Mitzvah except the Hassidim in the *shteeble*. We could not have a party, nothing. I did not get a new suit for my Bar Mitzvah — all my clothes were handed down from my mother's brother, Jack. He would fix them for me because he was a tailor.

It was unfortunate that when I was growing up I did not get new shoes often enough. My feet are disfigured because I did not have proper shoes. My mother's older brother, Bencyon, was a shoemaker. Before the war he would measure our feet and make our shoes. It was a big project. Shoes were very expensive and we were very poor. The shoes would have to last a long time. Uncle Bencyon survived the war in Russia with his daughter.

My first contact with the Nazis came before we went to the ghetto. I was thirteen years old. The Germans entered Poland and within weeks there was chaos. There was no food. We were told there was a bakery where we could get food, a loaf of bread for each person. So I went and lined up in this long line and waited for my turn to get my one loaf. At the door of the bakery there was a Nazi SS soldier and a regular Polish policeman. They were throwing Jews out of the line. All of a sudden, I saw the Nazi and the policeman coming toward me, and a boy pointing at me and hollering in Polish, "This is a Jude. Jude!" He was a Polish kid I played soccer with weeks before, a neighbor. You think your neighbors are your friends, but they turned

against you. The Nazi and the policeman kicked me out of the line and beat the hell out of me. They hit me on the head with a stick. I was down, thinking there was no way out. I was just a kid. My skull was badly damaged; there is still a bump behind my left ear. I was angry with my father and the rest of the adults: Why didn't we run to Palestine? I talked to my father about leaving, but he was a poor man who needed to feed his family. Plus, he was not a Zionist.

Right after the war started, the Nazis started issuing orders for the Jews. Posters were put up all over town and notices were put in newspapers. They made a decree that Jews must wear a Star of David on their outer garments when they were outside. The Nazis didn't mind if we took a simple piece of yellow cloth and made a star out of it. We could also buy stars from some entrepreneurs. I had a few stars. I wore the star on a jacket or shirt. Some of the stars were sewn on, but some were just pinned on. I wore the star in the house, too. The only time I didn't wear it was when I slept. Later, in the ghetto I got a very special star. I traded with a German Jew, a kid who was deported from Germany to the Lodz Ghetto. I traded him something because I liked the way his star had Jude printed on it. I wanted this fancy star because my mother taught me to be proud I was a Jew. When I got that star, my mother folded it, cut it out, and lined it. Then she put it on me and said, "Wear it and be proud of it because you are a Jew." The Nazis thought we were going to feel degraded, but my mother encouraged us to be proud to wear it. This was our way of resisting.

MOVING TO THE GHETTO



In the winter of 1940 the Nazis put up notices that said all Jews must leave their homes and go to the area of the city that would become the ghetto. There were signs, cards, and newspapers that said we had forty-eight hours to move to the ghetto. We could take our personal belongings and whatever we could carry. The Polish people moved out and we moved into the old beat-up part of the city that was eventually surrounded by barbed wire and guardhouses with guards patrolling. We had no choice but to go or die.

I'll never forget this: a Nazi came into our house and ordered us to leave. My father begged him to give us some time. While the Nazi waited, my father took big sheets and put everything in the sheets and bundled them up. Each one of us had to carry something on our shoulders. We made only one trip. That was all we had when we got to the ghetto. Some Jews had makeshift wagons and some rich Jews hired Polish people to carry their stuff. We did not have enough money to pay anyone to help.

The Polish people wanted to take over the Jews' homes. Our apartment was considered a good apartment, even though it did not have running water or a toilet, but the Polish people made sure that we got out so they could take it over. The credenza we had, the sofa, our table — they got it all. Not all Polish people collaborated with the Nazis, but many did.

My family was assigned to a loft in a textile factory at Lotnizza #15 in the Lodz Ghetto, the oldest part of the city. This was the beginning of 1940. We were in that loft for about two years. The textile factory building was three stories high with big windows. The windows were divided into many smaller windows with only very small openings. It was cold as hell! We slept on the wood floor. There were columns reaching from the floor to the ceiling for support. Several families were assigned to each floor. There was wire on the ceiling and families hung sheets from it to mark their family's area. Life was miserable; there was no space, no privacy. There were babies crying. We were on the second floor and the one big latrine was downstairs.

We took some food with us from home, but that ran out very fast. We had to line up for food. The Jewish police force tried to keep order, but it was turmoil. People were pushing in front of each other in the lines. Whoever was bigger and stronger would get food. I would always manage to get behind a big guy and make my way.

Soon, we learned that the Nazis appointed Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski to be Elder of the Jews, head of the Judenrat, the Jewish government in the ghetto. His job was to administer Nazi policy in the ghetto. Rumkowski was controversial. He had to select the people to be deported to the camps. Rumkowski had to choose who would be the Nazi victims. Sometimes the Nazis would ask Rumkowski for 1,000 or 2,000 people to be deported. It is easy to point fingers today at Rumkowski saying he was a tyrant, but

some people feel that Rumkowski saved many lives. Rumkowski felt that it was better to appease the Nazis and to work for them. He felt that as long as we made clothing for the armies in exchange for food, we might survive. The Lodz Ghetto became a labor camp, not a death camp. We resisted by working, not uprising.

LIFE IN THE GHETTO



In the beginning, we produced clothes and shoes for the German army and they gave us food in return. But we were starving because they never gave us enough food. For a week they would give us a loaf of bread, some clear brown soup, and red beets. Lots of beets; more beets than anything else.

Rumkowski started many programs in the ghetto. He printed ghetto money that had his picture on it. We called this money *Rumkies*. In the factory where I worked we made ghetto money out of aluminum. I worked on the machines stamping the money. Rumkowski also created a post office with stamps that had his picture on them. We would send letters out of the ghetto and we got letters from our relatives delivered by our own Jewish postman. I had a lot of problems with my teeth and I was able to go to a Jewish dentist in the ghetto. We also had hospitals. We had a fire department, streetcar operators, and barbershops. People were assigned to clean the streets. There was religious practice in the ghetto.

We could walk around freely within the ghetto — the Nazis just guarded the perimeter. We had a central marketplace where we could buy things with ghetto money or by bartering. We got things to trade by stealing them from the places where we worked. For example, a man who worked in the bakery would steal flour and trade it for food. People also traded their jewelry, household things, and clothes.

People wrote songs, political songs that made fun of the system. We were starving to death, but we kept singing in the ghetto. Singing gave us strength and moral support. Babies were being born. People were getting married. There would be singing and a flute or a fiddle at the wedding. Our way to resist was to keep singing Jewish songs with each other.

Hans Biebow was the Nazi Gestapo commander of the ghetto. He ordered what Jews could do and not do. The rumor was that Dr. Daniel Weiscopef, a Jewish radiologist, was trying to organize the young people in the ghetto to rise up against the Nazis. But, someone must have informed Commander Biebow about Weiscopef's plan. When Biebow heard about the plan he went to find Weiscopef. As Biebow was approaching, Weiscopef picked up a brick and hit Biebow over the head. Right on the spot Biebow's aid shot and killed Dr. Weiscopef. He died a hero; he showed resistance.

With almost 300,000 people in the ghetto, we needed an arm of the law. People were killing each other for a piece of bread. We had our own judges and courts and even a prison. The prison was just for Jews. The Nazis had a little precinct in the ghetto where Jews could go to inform on other Jews. They would report if someone had some hidden money or gold, and be rewarded with a loaf of bread. People were starving, it was a matter of survival. We had our own police force. My brother-in-law was a policeman. I wanted to be a policeman, too, but my father insisted that I work in a trade. There must have been an employment department in the ghetto where I must have told them what I could do because they attached me to a maintenance department. I was assigned to the machine shop where they made spare parts for sewing machines. That's where I learned my trade. My *meister*, teacher, was Gedalia Rosen. He was famous in Lodz. He taught me, and I was very good at it. They wouldn't let you keep your job if you didn't learn quickly. Being a mechanic, I was favored and given extra food. I brought the food home to my family.

My father worked as a guard. My mother worked in a shoe factory as a cleaning woman. The Germans would bring in big rolls of felt and the factory workers would cut it and sew it, and my mother would clean up. At work she was entitled to get a container of soup.

My sister, Lodzia, worked as a nurse in the ghetto hospital taking care of children. The word was that she donated so much blood for the children that her blood turned to water. I had to give her blood — not that it helped because she died at age 19. She was beautiful. I had pictures of her, but Hurricane Andrew blew them away. Lodzia had gotten married in the ghetto. Her husband, Salek Rajcenstein, was an industrialist. They didn't have a real wedding, just a justice of the peace. She was married for ten months when she died. At the time she died, my family was not living all together so we all didn't know she died. When we all eventually met and learned she had died, it was terrible. Lodzia is buried in the Lodz Cemetery which was attached to the ghetto. Today the cemetery is all grown over, like a jungle. I cannot find her grave now.

Salek Rajcenstein had a lot of sewing machine heads hidden under the bed in the loft where they lived. There were police in the ghetto who were assigned to extract valuables from the Jews: gold, jewelry, and machinery they had hidden. A Jewish informant, in exchange for food, must have told the Nazis that my brother-in-law had machines hidden. The Nazis came and confiscated the machines and arrested him. They beat him in front of my sister, but didn't kill him. They made her watch, which is sometimes worse. He survived the war and lived in Israel until his death.



My sister Lodzia and Salek Rajcenstein were married in the ghetto. She died ten months later at age nineteen.

After we were in the ghetto for almost two years, about 30,000 Jews were brought in from other countries. The new people did not adapt quickly to the conditions in the ghetto. They were not used to hunger like we were. Many of them were the intelligencia — the educated Jews. They had news of the war and thought the Germans were going to win, so they gave up trying to survive in the ghetto. Many of them volunteered to be deported thinking they were going someplace better than the ghetto. Actually, they were going to their deaths.

At the end of 1941 the Nazis started deporting people to Chelmo Death Camp. Rumkowski had to draw up lists of people to be deported. He was helpless. Whenever there was an *aktion*, a roundup, the Nazis would surround a city block and anyone who looked unproductive would be put on wagons and trucks and sent to Auschwitz/Birkenau or to Chelmo and the gas chambers. The Jews were told they were going to work, but that was not true. The Nazis did not have lists of names, they just surrounded a block, went through every apartment, and grabbed people. Ukrainian soldiers who defected from the Russian army and joined the Germans, did a lot of the dirty work during the *aktions*.

My parents worried that I would be picked up in one of the *aktions*, so they would hide me in holes, under the bed, outside under the toilet, wherever they could. They didn't want the Nazis to think I wasn't strong enough to work. I was thin, very thin, but not exactly like a skeleton.

The first time I saw dead bodies was after an aktion. There were wagons and barking dogs. The Nazis shot some people to make the rest of the people move faster. It was terrible seeing dead people lying in the street with open eyes and blood seeping out from their bodies and mouths. We picked them up and buried them.

In September 1942 the order came that all people who could not work would be deported. Before the war my grandparents had lived in an apartment in a poor neighborhood, but when the ghetto was formed they were assigned to an old age home. When the Nazis cleared out the old age homes, my grandparents were taken. We had no warning that my grandparents were being taken away. There were no telephones, no radios, no newspapers. We could not say goodbye to them.

During the September 1942 roundups all children under the age of ten had to be brought to the selection area. If parents did not bring their children to the assigned transport area, the Nazis would come and take the children. The Nazis would throw the children down from the windows into the trucks that would take them to the trains. Because my brother looked older and more mature than his age, he was not selected for deportation. He was very young, but he was able to work and get a little food.

Rumkowski made an appeal to the remaining Jews to adopt the children left in the orphanages before the Germans could grab them. This was just after my sister Lodzia died. My mother wanted a girl because she had just lost her

daughter. So she went to the orphanage to pick a little girl. There was this pretty little girl, Sonia. She had big, beautiful blue eyes, and brown hair. Sonia became my adopted sister. It was not a legal adoption like those done today; my mother just brought her home and she became part of our family.

In the beginning I worked as a service mechanic in factories where they had sewing machines. We would line up at lunch time and they would give us some soup. I had a spoon and my own can (bowl) my friend made for me. We called our cans Menashko. It had a handle, like a can for paint. I wore mine on my belt so I wouldn't lose it. I had my eye on that can all the time; if I didn't have my can I couldn't get any soup and I could starve. I had things stolen from me all the time. If you put down a piece of bread and weren't watching, somebody would steal it. It was a matter of survival.

One day, I got caught stealing a piece of leather from a shoe factory. Someone told the foreman that I stole the leather and put it in my shoe. The foreman brought me to the boss who beat the hell out of me. Normally, he would give me over to the police and I would be put in jail, or I would be deported, but for some reason he beat me up himself instead. Apparently he had to account for every piece of leather the Nazis delivered. I think he overdid the beating he gave me — I was fifteen or sixteen years old. After the war, when I was in the Polish militia, I found him and took my revenge. Once, the Nazis accused some

Jews of stealing some leather. They hanged them and made many people go and watch. I actually saw it. The hangmen were Jews. It was done as a threat to scare everybody so we would not steal anything. I was lucky I wasn't killed.

Whenever the Nazis came into the factories it was very scary because most of the time they were SS Gestapo, not civilian Germans. The foreman would yell, "*Actung*," (attention), and everybody had to stand up. The Nazis would walk in and look around at the work we were doing. Then the foreman would yell, "*Weitermachen*," (continue working) and we would go back to work.

Life is cruel. Once, when I was working as a sewing machine mechanic in a shoe factory, I went to the men's room and there I saw a man with a razor cutting his throat. I remember he was tall and very thin. He stood there holding onto the wall. He was cutting his throat and blood was running down. I didn't try to stop him. He didn't want to live. I couldn't stop him or convince him. I was happy that I was alive, that I wasn't the one killing myself. I just lived minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, hoping to survive. I was dehumanized.

The Polish winter was very cold. In the ghetto people searched desperately for something to burn in the ovens to keep warm. People would dig in the fields for a piece of wood or coal. People would go at night into houses that were abandoned and in the morning the house would be gone because they took it apart for firewood. People burned their furniture.

I remember something unusual I am never going to forget. The Germans would bring in mountains of straw to make snow boots they would need when they attacked Russia. There was a lot of snow in Russia, so they needed snow boots. Hundreds of women worked in this factory making hand-woven boots. There was a lot of straw and we had fun having sex in these straw mountains. That's how life was in the ghetto! At night there was a certain amount of social life in the ghetto. We were a bunch of friends; we were teenagers. We would visit each other's apartments and we would sing and dance and kid around. I used to know how to do different dances like the foxtrot. I used to be great at the tango. There was one girl, Krisha, a good friend of mine. I wasn't in love with her, but she was kind and she taught me how to dance. She survived the war. Sometimes we played games like cards, but mostly we would sing and neck. A lot of the time we wound up in a corner somewhere with a girl and we would play around a little. There was a lot of sex in the beginning. Subconsciously, we all knew that eventually some of us were going to die, so sex was not a big thing. Before the war if you kissed a girl it was a big night. But in the ghetto the girls just didn't care. We would socialize together until it was time to go home to get some sleep before having to go to work. There was no curfew in the ghetto, but it was illegal to have lights on.

Nobody was allowed to leave the ghetto except for specialists in tannery who were allowed to leave for work. They were picked up each day by buses and taken to the

tannery in Lodz and then they came back to the ghetto at night. They were fed in Lodz and had a good life. One tanner was a friend of my father. When my father broke the bridge of his artificial teeth, this tanner took the bridge to Lodz and had it repaired by a Polish dentist.

Everything in the ghetto was operated by the Judenrat. If you knew somebody, or could pay somebody, you could get what we called protection. It meant you were favored and the person in charge would help you. Maybe my parents knew someone, because after a while we moved to a little house on Nemajewskiego Street in the Marysin area of the ghetto not far from the Lodz Cemetery. We lived in that little house with a few families until the Lodz Ghetto was liquidated and we were taken to Jakuba 16 Street Camp. The house was just a wooden shack, but it had running water so I was able to bathe there. There was no toilet, just an outhouse.

Outside the house was a water tower — a reservoir, a tank. Near the house was a tall barn. I would go up in the barn and look out. One day I saw people being chased by foot toward the railway that was not far from Marysin. The Nazis were ordering them into the cattle cars that would take them to Auschwitz. I also saw the Nazis execute Polish Freedom Fighters in the cemetery.

PREPARING TO GO INTO HIDING



Over the years, I prepared a place to hide in case the Nazis came to select us. My brother and I dug a hiding hole under the toilet in the outhouse. We camouflaged it and built it up with some lumber, but we never had to use it. Marysin where we lived was not very populated; it was mostly old warehouses. The Nazis never came there.

The cemetery near our house was grown over with tall weeds which made very good places for rabbits to live. From my reading before the war I learned how to understand how animals think, especially rabbits. I knew how to chase them and find them and dig into their holes to catch them lying under the snow. I was able to kill them for food. My enemy was a big tomcat who would sometimes get to the rabbits before I could and he would kill and eat them. My brother, uncle, and I were very successful catching rabbits. We would go out at three o'clock in the morning and catch the rabbits with slings we made out of copper wire. Some nights, after a fresh snow, we were able to catch four or five rabbits. The rabbits were a commodity. I could trade them for favors or for shoes or clothing. A man named Bernard Bycky was the head of the shoe factory. I gave him rabbits in exchange for giving my mother and sister easy jobs in the factory. My mother would cook the rabbits and we would eat them. This helped us survive. Finally, one day I was able to catch that big tomcat in a trap I had made. My

brother and I skinned the cat, cooked it, and ate it. We gave half the cat to Bycky, but we told him it was a rabbit. Years later when I met him in Germany I told him the truth.

In the Marysin area of the ghetto it was possible to grow some food because there were few people and a lot of land. The ghetto outside of Marysin was all concrete so it was not possible to grow food. In front of my house there was a cobblestone street. My uncle, brother, father, and I removed the stones and we raised cauliflower and tomatoes in the dirt that was underneath. We were somehow able to get seedlings.

People were desperate for food, so in some families when there was a death the family would bury the body in the house. They would make a hole in the floor and bury him there. They didn't want the officials to know that the person had died because they wanted to keep getting his food rations. If the Jewish police found a person buried in a house, they would turn the family into headquarters. I have a picture of the notice that says that if there is a dead body in your family you must be present when they come to pick it up. You would go outside and watch for the wagon. When the wagon drove by you would call out, "Come over here, there's a dead body."

One time, a friend sent me to pick up a package of food from his Polish wife who lived in Lodz, in the city. He

showed me where the barbed wire surrounding the ghetto was above the ground a little bit so I could fit underneath. I crawled under the barbed wire into an open field, like a soccer field. Nobody was there. I got to the wife's house and she handed me a package of food and a goose. When I got back to the field, I saw a bunch of Hitler Youth playing soccer. I said to myself, "I'm dead now; this is the end of me." I started saying to myself, "Shema Yisrael" (the Jewish declaration of faith). All of a sudden, before I knew it, rain came down from the sky; like somebody was pouring buckets of water. The Hitler Youth ran away. I ran across the field, back under the barbed wire, and I lived. That is when I thought a miracle happened and there was a God who looked after me.



I am kneeling at the entrance to the hiding hole in the Lodz Cemetery where I hid with 16 others until liberation.

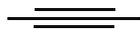


The entrance to the hiding hole I made under the funeral building in the Lodz cemetery.



I am standing by the graves I was forced to dig for myself and the remaining Jews of the Lodz Ghetto. Photo 2000.

THE FINAL DAYS OF THE GHETTO



In 1944 when the Germans knew they were losing the war, they began retreating as fast as they could. That's when the Russians stopped their westward movement at the Vistula River. The Jews were victims of this. If the Russians had come in then, the Germans would not have had the chance to kill more Jews. At the time there were approximately 150,000 Jews still alive in the Lodz Ghetto.

In the spring of 1944 the Nazis decided to liquidate the Lodz Ghetto. Rumkowski and the Judenrat were ordered to organize massive transports again. Rumkowski put up notices assigning the Jews to assembly places from where they were going to be taken away. The notices said people had to be unconditionally punctual at the place they were assigned. Many people were glad to be leaving; they didn't know they were going to their death. They thought nothing could be worse than the ghetto. In 1944 Rumkowski and his family were taken to Auschwitz. Unlike the Warsaw Ghetto that resisted by uprising, the Lodz Ghetto resisted by working and hiding.

After the last transport left the Lodz Ghetto on August 30, 1944, approximately 880 Jews were left in the ghetto. Those of us who remained were told to report to Number 16 Jakuba Street in the center of the ghetto. The Nazis made a camp for us there in two huge, four or five story factory buildings. The factories had held knitting machines, but the Nazis had sent them to Germany. The buildings were

adjoining; one was to house men and the other was to house women. We slept in big lofts in beds made of wood with straw mattresses. There were maybe fifty beds in one room. We each had our own bed. There was no shower or way to bathe. My mother, sister, and I got to see each other but it was illegal to be in the women's quarters after hours. There was a curfew. The Jewish commander of the camp was Herr Hertzberg. He had been in charge of the prison in the ghetto. His son was my friend. He was a barber; he would cut my hair.

We had to be downstairs in a lineup for roll call before going to work every morning. Each day the Nazis would come with their guns and dispatch us to work. Every day Jews from Jakuba 16 were sent to abandoned apartments to gather furniture and personal belongings left behind by the Jews who had been deported. The belongings were put in boxcars and sent to Germany. They also had to report when and where they found dead bodies. A man named Yumo Marchinski had been in the funeral business before the war. He had a horse and wagon, so he was assigned to pick up the dead bodies. I worked with him. The Germans were very afraid disease would spread from the dead bodies so they wanted them buried right away. We would put the bodies on the wagon and bring them to the cemetery to bury them.

Toward the end of the war when I was working as a grave digger I had to bury freedom fighters the Gestapo killed. We would be told to dig a grave and how big it should be.

If the fighters were brought alive into the cemetery they would have to kneel down in front of the grave and the Nazis would shoot them. My job was to cover them with dirt. The Nazis committed these murders in the Jewish cemetery because there were no Poles around to see what they were doing. They wanted no witnesses. Only Yumo Marchinski and I knew what they were doing.

Sometimes the Gestapo would kill people by gassing them in small trucks, like vans. We had to stand by the graves we had prepared and wait for the vans to arrive. Once, when the van arrived, I pulled a woman out of the back. She was beautiful — blond, a little chubby. I remember she was wearing a blue dress. I put her in the grave and I buried her. She was still warm. To this day, I do not know if she was alive or dead. I still have nightmares.

The Nazis planned to kill all the Jews in Jakuba 16 Camp so they made us dig eight big graves, each big enough for one hundred people. Eight graves — eight hundred people. The Nazis laid out the graves and showed us how to dig them so they wouldn't cave in. Our supervisor was an SS man named Miller. He came every morning to inspect. He told us the graves were for us. He said, "You are never going to get out of here alive. You are going to go into these graves." My adopted sister, Sonia, would look into the grave and say, "I want to lay here." There may have been some nice sand, some nice grain of sand. She thought it would be a good place to lie. She was a teenager. The graves are still there today next to the wall of the Lodz Cemetery.

Marchinski, my brother-in-law Salek, and I decided to prepare a hiding place under the funeral building in the cemetery. It was a beautiful building built before the war for the Jewish community to observe the Jewish burial rituals. There was no refrigeration, so they devised a way to keep the bodies cool before burial. They dug a hole into the dirt beneath the terrazzo floor. Trucks, or a horse and wagon, would dump ice into the hole. The coffin would be placed on the floor that was kept cool by the ice below it. I found this hole under the floor. Along with other gravediggers, we cleaned it out and shored it up with wood. We were all going to hide there.

Around that time, my friend, Juzek, made a radio from a telephone receiver and a piece of sugar that acted as a crystal. Secret radios were the only source of information in the ghetto. Anyone found with a radio would be killed. Juzek, my brother, and I were the only ones who knew about our radio. On top of a building in the cemetery there was a water tower. I kept the radio in the tower because I needed a place up high to get reception. I would go up to the water tower with my brother to listen to the radio for just a few minutes. Just the two of us. I think it was Radio Free Europe or Radio London we were hearing. They broadcasted in several languages.

At this time in 1944 the Germans were saying, "Come with us. Pack up and take everything you can. You are going to go to work. There is work and food in Germany." Like so

many others, my mother and father wanted to go. My father said, "We're starving to death anyway. We should go to Germany on the train and there will be work." He took a big bedspread and put our stuff in it getting ready to leave. I said, "Dad, they're killing us. Nobody goes to work!" He replied, "How can they take people, thousands and thousands of people and kill them?" My father didn't believe I knew what I was talking about. He didn't know I was listening to the radio. I couldn't tell him because if the Nazis tortured him he would tell and they would beat him to death. I did not think the Nazis would torture women, so I told my mother about the radio hoping she would convince my father not to go. I said to her, "We are not going to go. We are going to die here together with my sister." So my mother cried to my father that we were going to die here in the ghetto where Lodzia is buried. My mother also convinced her brother, Jack, not to leave the ghetto. I feel like I helped save their lives.

LIBERATION



Every day we listened to the radio and we also heard gossip. The Poles who came into the ghetto to deliver food would whisper to us in Polish and tell us that the Nazis were losing the war. Then, one day we heard on the radio that the Russians were crossing the Vistula River. The offensive was starting. We knew we had a chance. Now was the time to run and hide. That night, sixteen of us ran and hid in the hole we had prepared in the cemetery. While we were in the hole we did not know what was going on outside. After about six hours I decided to take a chance and go to the water tower to listen to my radio. As I was walking to the tower I realized there were no guards and that a Polish woman was yelling, "The Germans are gone. The Russians are here. We are liberated! Come out." It was January 13, 1945.

I looked over the cemetery wall to where there was a hill and a highway. I saw tanks and cannons. I ran back to our hole and told the others to come out. We all ran to the wall and looked out at the Russian tanks and trucks. I climbed the wall and ran out into the road. Then my brother ran out with me, and then Marchinski. One of the trucks came toward us. This officer was wearing a black fur hat. He waved the other tanks to follow behind him. He

had already encountered camps on the way, so he knew who we were. He stood on the tank and yelled, "Come out. I give you freedom."

I couldn't believe it. I fell on his boots, kissing his boots. Then, he bent down to me, and with his finger, he tore off my Star of David. It fell to the ground, but I picked it up and put it in my pocket. I've got that star in a safe now. I am keeping it for my granddaughter. Then the Russian took his tank and knocked down the brick wall of the cemetery as a memento that we were free. Eight hundred seventy-seven Jews survived the Lodz Ghetto.

My uncle, Jack, found us while we were talking to the Russians. He told them that he knew where some Nazis were hiding in the cemetery. It was like a jungle. My uncle, his friend, and the Russians went looking for the Nazis. We followed them. My uncle and the Russians found four Nazis not far from the graves that were waiting for the Jews from Jakuba 16. My uncle and the Russians shot the SS men. The killings took place on the day of January 19, just hours after liberation. Somebody at Jakuba 16 took a picture of the Nazis lying dead. On January 20 we buried them deep in the grave we were supposed to go into.

I went wild! We celebrated our liberation. The Russians brought cases of wine they had found somewhere. I was twenty years old. It didn't take long for me to get drunk — and I got very drunk for maybe twenty-four hours.



From the left: Vladek, the man who helped us travel from Lodz to Berlin. In the center is my brother, Max. I am on the right in my Polish Militia uniform. Photo: Berlin 1946.



Max, Sonia, and I in Berlin in 1950. Sonia and Max were later married in the United States and had three sons.



In 1947 I am in Berlin planning to leave for Palestine.

LIFE IN POLAND AFTER THE WAR



The Poles did not welcome us with open arms. They had been living in our homes for five years, and did not like the idea of moving out. Even my shed with no running water was occupied by Poles. So, we went back to the camp at Jakuba 16 because we had no place else to go. After a few days, more and more people came back to the camp. People were looking for each other. The Red Cross was there with books listing the names of people who had survived. I learned that my teacher Gedalia Rosen died the day after liberation.

Before the war my grandfather had hired a scribe to write a Torah scroll. The Torah had all our family members' names in it. We took it with us to the ghetto. When we lived in the ghetto in the little house by the cemetery we knew we had to bury the Torah to hide it. I made a box out of wood and covered it with sheet metal to protect the Torah from moisture. Then I made a hole under a tree in front of the house and buried it there. After liberation I went back to the house to get the Torah. Someone called the police and reported that I was trying to dig up a box like a treasure chest. The police came and watched me open the box. When they saw it was a Torah and not jewels and gold, they let me take it. I gave it to my brother-in-law, Salek Rajcenstein. He carried it to Israel. Now my brother-in-law is dead and I don't know where the Torah is — the Torah with all my family's names in it. I cannot forgive myself for not bringing it to America.

After a while, I went to the apartment that belonged to my father's boss when he worked at the moving company before the war. I found that the owners were dead and the janitor was living in the apartment. I went and got a Russian officer I was friendly with, and together with Uncle Jack, went back to the apartment and got the Polish janitor out. My parents, brother, adopted sister, and I lived in this five-room apartment for about one year. It was a huge apartment on the second floor. It had a big kitchen. There was running water, a toilet, and a big bathtub with lion's claws legs. Oh! It was beautiful!

Relatives in America sent money and the Swiss Red Cross brought big truck-loads of food. The Joint Distribution Committee was also there to help us. There was a market economy until the Communists took over. My mother even opened a little grocery store. She also catered weddings. We had this big apartment, so my mother made weddings. She would bake and there would be musicians and dancing and food. We were happy the war was over, but we looked forward to getting away from Poland and going to Palestine — to our own country.

I joined the Polish police, the People's Militia. They sent me to school and I graduated and became an officer of Polish intelligence. I joined the militia because I wanted to get even with Polish collaborators and Nazis who were hiding in Poland. The militia's job was to find them. I later left the police force because my mind was sent on going

to help liberate Palestine. My plan was to make my way through Europe and get to Palestine. I was going to go west to Berlin and then to Italy where ships were leaving for Palestine.

MOVING TO BERLIN



At separate times, my whole family left Lodz to go to Berlin in 1946. A man named Vladek, a sergeant in the Polish army, prepared false papers for us and drove us to Berlin in his car. Nobody stopped us at the borders because Vladek always wore his uniform. Nobody suspected he was Jewish. In Berlin we were called Displaced Persons. In the Displaced Person's camps (DP camps) we could get as much food as we wanted. I lived for a short time in a DP camp in Schlachtensee. It was wonderful to live in Berlin as a free man with all the food I wanted. It was a wonderful year. We were in the British sector of Berlin.

While I was with my family in Berlin, the Haganah, a Zionist paramilitary organization, was soliciting young boys and girls to go to Palestine to help fight the British. My father would only let one of his sons go. Since I was the oldest, I was to go. The Haganah gave me a Greek passport and papers saying I was Greek from way back. The Haganah did not give me money or any way to get to Palestine. They did give me the names of people to contact as I traveled. But I was mostly on my own. First I went to Hamburg where my friend, Bernard Bycky was living. (This was when I told him that the rabbit I had given him

to eat in the ghetto was really a cat.) Mr. Bycky made me a phony passport that I used to travel to Rome. I made my way to Rome traveling by train and bus. I had a little money that I had earned in Berlin to pay my fares. I went to a DP camp in Rome called Castle Gandollo. I never liked living in the DP camps — they were too regimented. In Rome my contact was an ORT school where I was supposed to wait until my turn came to go on a ship. At the ORT school I met survivors from all over. They were teaching us trades so we could work in Palestine or other countries. I worked in a machine shop there. I got a diploma when I graduated.

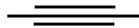
While I waited for a ship to go to Palestine I met a friend called Geyler Meyer. When I told him I was going to Palestine to fight the British he told me that fighting was over and we had our independence. I never got to Israel to liberate it because it was liberated before I got the chance. Geyler Meyer told me he would make me papers to go with him to Canada.

While living in the British sector of Berlin, my parents, brother, and adopted sister got papers to go to America. At that time I was not interested in going to America. I was still hoping to go to Palestine. In Berlin my mother raised a big, black German Shepard dog that she refused to leave with the Germans when it came time for them to go to America. My mother was very stubborn. It was harder to bring the dog to America than it was to bring people. Special papers had to be made for the dog and a

special cage had to be made for her. The dog did get to America and eventually I got one of her puppies.

Sonia could have gone to America earlier because she had relatives who had sent her papers. But, she didn't want to go by herself because she was in love with my brother. They were always in love with each other. They got married in New York and had three sons. Once Max and Sonia got to America they sent me papers to join them. But there was a long wait to get to America. The Canadian government was looking for young, skilled laborers, so I got a visa to go to Canada. Since I was a displaced person, the United Nations Refugee Committee (UNRA) arranged for my passage to Canada.

IMMIGRATING TO CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES



Now I had a way to go to Canada, but I needed a document showing that I would have a job. My childhood friend, Henry Rothberg, who lived in Canada, got me a job with Rubenstein Brothers, a company that repaired sewing machines. When I got my approval to go to Canada, I took an army ship from Le Havre. When I got to Canada I took a train to Toronto. Henry was there to greet me.

I went to night school to improve my very poor English. I only went for two or three nights then I decided to learn on my own. Today I speak English, Polish, Yiddish, German,

Spanish, and Italian. I count in Polish. A friend got me a room in a boarding house owned by a lady named Mrs. Silverman. Several European boys lived there. We had a lot of fun together. Mrs. Silverman had a daughter named Annie. Annie's best friend, Gloria, used to come visit her. I took one look at beautiful, tall, blue-eyed, blond Gloria and I fell in love with her. I even wrote a letter to my father and mother saying I met this beautiful Jewish girl and I was going to marry her. We weren't even friendly yet, but I already knew I was going to marry her. Before I knew it, I was asking her for a date. Being with a girl in Canada was very different from being with a girl in the ghetto. I could not go as far as kiss her!

I was tall, I had a mustache, and I had a job. Gloria told me that in Canada the name Leon did not sound right. She suggested that I change it to Leo, so I changed it. Then she didn't like my mustache, so I took it off.

I was working at the time in a sewing machine factory for a company called Flexis. They made ladies' bras and underwear. I brought some as a gift to Gloria. Her father thought I was some kind of crazy bringing such an inappropriate gift. He was very suspicious of me for two reasons: I had an accent, and he could not get any background on me. He wasn't even sure I was Jewish. Her father suggested that in order for me to get a job as a tool and die maker I should call myself Leo Martin, not Mermelstein, because most people didn't really like Jews. As soon as I applied for my next job and told them I was

Leo Martin, I got the job. The company was Corcoran Tool and Die. I was an apprentice. I had to get used to measuring in inches, not centimeters. When I learned a little more English I got a job at John Engles. I left there and went to DeHaviland Air Craft where I was very instrumental in developing jigs and fixtures that were tools to manufacture the first passenger jet, the Comet.

What finally made Gloria's father happy was meeting my parents when they arrived for the wedding. Gloria's family finally believed I was Jewish. I bought a little old house for \$8,000 and fixed it up and made it a real gem. I sold it for \$21,000. That was my beginning in investing in real estate.

Gloria and I left Canada for two reasons. One was that the warm weather was better for Gloria's arthritis. The other was that I thought it was better for me to be a tool and die maker in the United States. It proved to be true. I became very successful in Miami manufacturing furniture and investing in real estate. Together Gloria and I raised our three children: Sherry, Perry, and Lisa.

My first job in Miami was with the Lawnlite Company, manufactures of beautiful aluminum furniture. Pretty soon I ran the tool and die shop there. Gloria wanted to buy a house like her friends were doing. I said "No, we are going to invest in a piece of real estate and that's where we are going to live." I bought a little five-unit motel on Flagler Street and we lived there. We rented out rooms and took care of the motel ourselves. (Gloria would even mowed

the lawn.) I could afford this because I was still working at Lawnlite plus I was making little grommet machines I was selling on the side. I was also making edgers from old vacuum cleaners. Plus, Gloria worked as a bookkeeper. Every time I paid down a mortgage, I took out another mortgage. I believe that the best investment in the world is land.

While I was working at Lawnlite I was making fishing chairs after hours. I invented a folding aluminum fishing chair that did not corrode, tip over, or collapse when you caught a big fish. My friend, Neil Batellie, helped me assemble the chairs in the parking lot of my little motel. We called our company Marba, made up from our two last names. I sold the chairs to fishing stores and boat manufacturers. Gloria answered the phones. Pretty soon the city of Miami told me I needed an occupational license, so I quit my job at Lawnlite and rented an abandoned restaurant and moved my fishing chair business there.

In 1956 I gave up fishing chairs and began making chairs for homes, hotels, and the hospitality industry. I began making wrought iron furniture under the brand name Pompeii Casual Furniture. I thought of the name Pompeii because when I was living in a DP camp near Naples, Italy, while making my way to Palestine, I worked as an illegal tour guide to make money. I showed American soldiers around Pompeii. My favorite sight to show them was the brothel. The name Pompeii stuck in my mind. I created a lot of furniture because I thought furniture, I slept furniture,

and I walked furniture. Today you can see my products all over the world. When I sold Pompeii in the late 1990's almost five hundred people worked there. I loved what I was doing. I made myself a good name.



I am with Gloria and Sonia in New York City in the early 1960's.

The people of Pompeii

Project: MARINO MARCISIO
Palm Beach, Florida
Designer: Directors in
Design, Inc.



Project: ICT SOCIAL
CAMPING
Designer: ICT

Project: CASUAL CRUISE LINE
Designer:
Jenssen
Furni
Bentzen/Beck



Project: PIZZERI CONDO
Lammemburg,
Indiana
Designer:
Directors in
Design, Inc.

These four custom seating designs were created in collaboration with some of the world's top architects and designers working with Pompeii's design team.



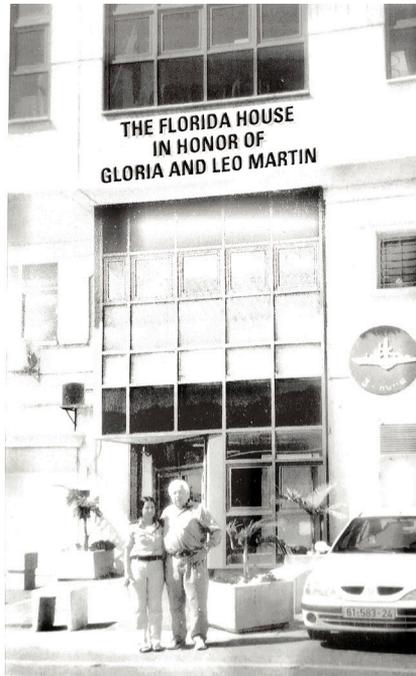
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Come See the Light! Visit us at Booth #1666, World Gaming Congress & Expo, October 14-16, 1997

When I sold my company almost 500 people worked for me.



It is my honor to be able to help strengthen Israel.



Gloria and I were named “The Couple of the Century” for our support of the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces.



Our three children with their spouses and our seven grandchildren.



At home in 2003.



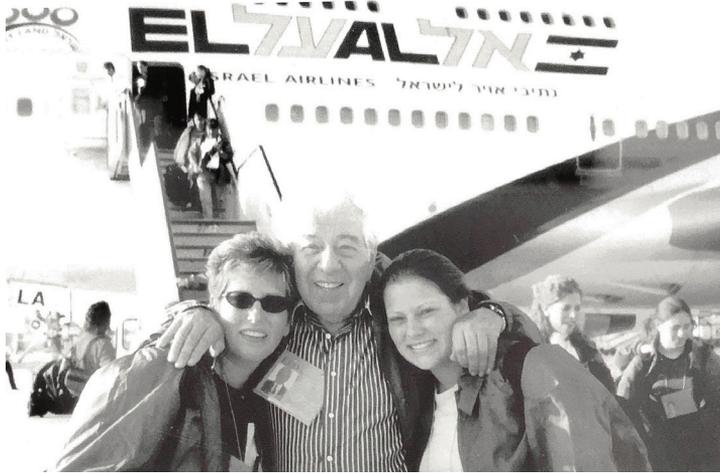
At the infamous Arbeit Macht Frei gate of Auschwitz where we begin the March of the Living.



*I am with survivors Joe Sachs and Martin Baranek at Majdanek
on the March of the Living.*



*With my daughter and granddaughter at Auschwitz on the March
of the Living.*



*With my daughter and granddaughter in Israel on the
March of the Living.*



*Teaching children about the Holocaust in the memorial garden I
created at Bet Shira Congregation in Miami.*

SUPPORTING ISRAEL



All my life I wanted to help build Israel. Now I could finally do something. Early in the 1960's Gloria and I made our first trip to Israel. The first thing we did was raise money to help bring Jews over from Russia. Ever since then it has been my honor to be able to help strengthen Israel. My name and Gloria's name are on two buildings in Israel. One is the Florida House in Honor of Gloria and Leo Martin which is an active naval base in Haifa. In the Florida House there is a synagogue, a movie theater, classrooms, a dining room, a library, recreation rooms, and sports rooms. Ohr Somayach is Gloria's favorite project. It is a center for educational programs around the world. Gloria and I help people around the world by supporting organizations that share our beliefs. It is important to me to take care of people who need help. No one helped us when we needed help. I have to show the world that the Jews take care of others.

THE MARCH OF THE LIVING



Now, as Honorary Chairman of The Friends of the March of the Living, I am giving all my energy to teaching the next generations of Jewish children to support Israel and the Jewish people. The March of the Living is an international program that takes Jewish high school students to Poland and Israel to study the lessons of the Holocaust. Telling my story to the children on the March of the Living tore at the wounds on my heart. Sometimes the pain was almost too much to bear. But, when they promise to carry my story and the stories of other survivors into the future, to never forget us, and to never again allow another Holocaust to happen to the Jewish people, I know I am doing the right thing.

ABOUT THE WRITER

I began writing for Holocaust survivors in the 1990's when survivors I met on The March of the Living asked me for help writing about their feelings on returning to Poland for the first time. Later, survivors I interviewed for Steven Spielberg's Shoah Foundation asked me for help writing down all the things they did not speak about in their interview. Soon, other survivors began approaching me seeking help writing a book about their experiences in the Holocaust. I met with the survivors, recorded our numerous conversations, organized and wrote the stories in the survivors' own words, printed the books, and then handed the books to the survivors as my gift to them. The books were written solely for the survivors and their families; they were never intended for publication. They are being published now because my friends, Carol and Jaime Suchlicki, recognizing their historical value as first-person testimony, introduced me to Dr. Haim Shaked to discuss finding a wider audience for the books.

Thank you to Dr. Haim Shaked director of the Sue and Leonard Miller Center for Contemporary Judaic Studies at the University of Miami for agreeing to publish the books and for your guidance and patience as we worked together on this project.

I am grateful to the March of the Living for introducing me to the world of Holocaust education and finding a role for me in it.

Thank you to the Shoah Foundation for choosing me to be an interviewer and for mentoring me through more than thirty interviews of Holocaust survivors. Your training led me to do the work I do today.

Thank you to the Holocaust Memorial Miami Beach for encouraging the docents at the memorial to work with me to write their memoirs. I appreciate your confidence in me and your respect for my work.

Thank you to the my dear Holocaust survivors for sharing your most painful as well as your most joyful memories with me. Thank you for answering questions that no one should ever have to ask or answer. Thank you for trusting me to write your memoirs accurately and respectfully. It has been my honor and pleasure to work with you.

—Bobbi Kaufman



“Then she put the Star of David on me and said, ‘Wear it and be proud of it because you are a Jew.’ The Nazis thought we were going to feel degraded, but my mother encouraged us to be proud to wear it. This was our way of resisting.”

— *Leo Martin*

Leo Martin was fifteen years old when his family was locked into the Lodz Ghetto. For the next four years Leo and his family would barely survive starvation and deportation by working as slave laborers in factories producing textiles for the Nazi war machine.

Following the liquidation of the ghetto Leo and his family were among the handful of Jews still alive. Leo was first assigned to gather the personal belongings of those Jews who had been killed or deported. Then he became a grave digger, digging the eight big graves intended for the remaining Jews in the ghetto; including himself and his young sister. When Leo got word that the Russians were crossing the Vistula River, he and his family went into hiding in a hole he had prepared under the morgue in the Lodz cemetery. On January 19, 1945 the family was liberated by the Russians.

Following liberation, while waiting to go to Palestine, Leo learned that Canada was looking for skilled laborers. He emigrated to Canada where he met and married Gloria Kaufman. They raised a son and two daughters. Leo built a very successful international furniture company.

There is a concept in Judaism of a positive commandment, something that is time dependent, something that must be done *now*. One must, accordingly, applaud this important effort by the Miller Center and Feldenkreis Program of the University of Miami to collect and publish Holocaust survivors’ memoirs as there will soon—too soon—come a time when the last survivors will be no longer. Sadly, tragically, this testimony is not only urgent but timely because the world in which we live echoes their world and the quality of their witness. The very nature of their survival has much to teach today’s generations. One must express gratitude for this project and in the sagacious words of Hillel say: “If not now, when?”

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