Remembering the Jewish Community of

Warkaw, Poland

Remembered by Fran Litner

Fran Litner’s father, David Zysman, was born in Poland in 1913. He was born in a town called Warkaw, one of the oldest towns in Poland. It is 33 miles southeast of Warsaw, the capital of Poland. The earliest record of the Jewish community of Warkaw dates back to 1564. This was the home of the well known Hassidic Rabbi, Yitzhak Kalish of Warkaw. At the time of the Holocaust, approximately 3,000 Jews lived here. The Jewish people were mostly small business owners or farmers. They were extremely observant and there were only orthodox shuls or shtiebels. There is a photograph on the Internet of a beautiful and ornate wooden synagogue that once existed there.

Fran's father had three older brothers and a sister. His mother was widowed at a very young age when her father was a year old. They lived an extremely poor life but he managed to go to a cheder and receive an education and also become a shoemaker apprentice right after his bar mitzvah.

On erev Shabbat on September 8, 1939, the Nazis invaded Warkaw. There was always much anti-semitism in Warkaw, but after the Nazis arrived, life was made impossible. Her father was 26 years old and married to his childhood sweetheart. Jews were being rounded up, homes were robbed, and people beaten.

On Sunday, February 20, 1941, the Jewish Quarter of Warkaw was surrounded by a large number of military police from surrounding towns. Each person was permitted to come with 25 kilograms of baggage. The assembled Jewish population of men, women, and children were beaten up badly and ordered to march towards the railroad depot. They began to go at a normal pace but the police began to drive them faster and faster.
The ones who could not keep up were badly beaten. Soon most people dropped their baggage so they could get away faster. They were chased into closed freight cars and sent to Warsaw.

In Warsaw, the remaining packages were seized. The Jews were put into the ghetto.

Fran's father, his young wife, and their baby Hannah managed to live in the Warsaw Ghetto for two years. Her father was taken away for a few zlotys and placed in several concentration and slave labor camps, including Buchenwald, for the remainder of the war. In the end, he was liberated by the Russians and was a sole survivor. He had lost everyone and everything. Fran has often heard stories of his mother, his brothers, his life in Warkaw, and the atrocities of the war. Fran is proud to pay tribute to her father and the place from which he came.