

Holocaust Survivor Biography: Harry Scherzer

Harry Scherzer was born in January 1942 in the Czernowitz Ghetto, Romania. In August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact, which guaranteed that both countries would not go to war with each other and it also divided Eastern European countries between the two powers. Romania fell under Russian influence but the Romanian government remained in control. In May 1940 the Romanian army retreated under an ultimatum from the Russians under the pretext that Russians were being persecuted in Romania. When his parents married in May 1941, Czernowitz was under Russian control. One month after they married, the Germans broke the non-aggression pact and attacked the Soviet Union but not Romania as it was allied with Germany. The Russian army quickly retreated and Czernowitz fell under German control.

As the Russian army retreated, Harry's father was drafted into that army and left Harry's mother behind, not knowing that she was pregnant with Harry. The family was forced to move into Harry's grandmother's apartment that was located within the confines of the Czernowitz Ghetto that had been established in August 1941.

Life in the Czernowitz Ghetto was extremely difficult. There was very little food, medicine, or heat in the wintertime and the majority of Jews confined in the ghetto died from starvation, deportation to the concentration camps or to Transnistria. A strict curfew confined bartering for food to during the day. At all times, Harry and his grandmother had to wear the Yellow Star.

The small family survived because of his mother's and grandmother's seamstress skills and having found jobs making uniforms for the Romanian and German armies. All this time there was no word about whether Harry's father was alive.

In the fall of 1944, Harry's father returned from the Soviet army, where he was amazed to find his entire family alive plus Harry, his 3-year-old son that he never knew he had. In 1946 the family moved to Romania, which 2 years later became Communist and under Soviet control.

Harry graduated High School and a 2-year Technical College and in 1963 he and his family moved to New York City and settled in Brooklyn. During their emigration, his mother died of cancer in Vienna, Austria. In 1964 he enrolled in the CCNY School of Engineering and took classes at night while he worked full time. Six years later he graduated with a B.S. in Electrical Engineering and in 1966 was drafted into the US army. In 1968 he married and had 2 children and then 1 grandchild. He then owned his own company for 20 years. In 2000 he moved to Philadelphia and continues to work part-time at as a Chief Electrical Engineer.

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Witness to History Project:

The Witness To History Project is designed to further the message and lessons of the Holocaust by direct interaction between students or interested adults and Holocaust survivors. Participants "adopt" a survivor by learning his or her unique account of via listening to the survivor tell his/her story, asking questions, writing a biography, reviewing a videotape, and memorizing and re-telling the story to others. Ultimately, the participant will have the lifelong job of educating others about the Holocaust by sharing this personal narrative. Contact the Holocaust Awareness Museum to participate.

Holocaust Awareness Museum and Education Center

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