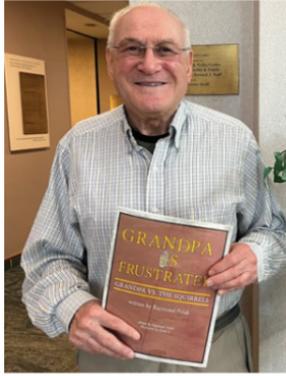


Holocaust Survivor Biography: Raymond Polak



Raymond Polak is a child Holocaust Survivor who was born in France in 1943, in the middle of WWII, the most destructive and deadly of all wars. His mother was a German Jew born in Mannheim, Germany, who was deported to a concentration camp in the South of France in October 1941, along with 6,500-7,000 fellow Jews from the same region. It was the largest mass deportation of Jews from Nazi Germany since the start of WWII.

His mother, Henni Elter, and his grandmother were transported to Gurs, a concentration camp, in the south of France near the Spanish border. In Gurs, Raymond's mother met his father, Arthur "Turl" Schnierer, an Austrian Jew who had been captured in Belgium by the Nazis. Turl was involved in the fight against Fascism, Nazism and was active in the French Resistance against the Nazis. He was in charge of food distribution in Gurs. Turl instructed Henni to wait after everyone had eaten in order to get the most nutritious food at the bottom of the pot. He saved her life and many others in Gurs

Gurs was not a death camp, and one of 40- 50,000 concentration camps set up by the Nazis to hold and eventually exterminate people who were not Aryans or who resisted them but mostly Jews. Turl and Henni were taken out of Gurs to join a work program for young Jews, but were re-arrested and sent to another concentration camp, Les Milles. Les Milles like Gurs, was not a death camp. But if you were not able to escape or leave Gurs or other concentration camps, you were sent to your death in one of the extermination camps set up by the Nazis as part of their final solution to murder all the Jews in Europe.

Because of Polak's father's connection with the French Resistance, he was alerted that he and Henni would soon be sent to Auschwitz. They were able to climb over the barbed wire surrounding the camp and escaped, fled, destroying their identity papers. But Turl and Henni obtained new forged identity and ration cards, which enabled them to escape capture by the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police and the French Police. Jews who were captured by the Gestapo or the French Police were sent to their death in Auschwitz.

Polak was born after his mother escaped from Les Milles, in Limoges, France. He and his mother survived with the help of his father, who provided them with needed clothing, food, and shelter. Many persons in this area of France were against the Nazis and often provided shelter and safety to Raymond's mother and her baby son. His mother's bravery, alertness, and presence of mind were also factors in his and his mother's survival during these dark times.