

Irving Zale

Wartime Experience: Camp Survivor

I was born in 1926 in Cologne, Germany to Franciszka and Jacob Zahler who had moved from Poland to Germany to seek improved economic conditions. My name was Erwin Zahler. Already at age eight, I was urged by my German schoolmates to move to Palestine. In 1935 I witnessed goose-stepping soldiers cross the Hohenzollern Bridge over the Rhine. That year I transferred to the Yavne School, a Jewish Jr. High school.

My Bar Mitzvah occurred in January 1938 at the Glockengasse Synagogue. It was completely gutted Kristallnacht in late 1938, subsequently bombed out in 1944, and is now the site of the Cologne Opera House. My parents were linked with family ties to Poland, and my father was active in the short-lived Polish-German Friendship Society. Early in 1938 my father was tipped off by Poland's Consul General on the impending roundup by the Nazis of all Polish Jews and their deportation to Poland. Financially ill prepared to purchase a passport from a 'banana republic' country to leave Germany, my parents could only pack up their possessions and return to Krakow where my mother's relatives resided. True to the Consul's predictions. The remaining relatives arrived in Poland in October 1938 with only meager possessions.

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, my parents attempted to flee to the East, only to be overtaken by German troops and forced to return to Krakow. We all remained in the Krakow area until January 1943 when we were "resettled" at the Plaszow Concentration Camp. This camp under the command of Amon Goeth (later chronicled in the film "Schindler's List") was turned into a killing field. In retrospect, I was fortunate to have left the Plaszow Camp in the fall of 1943 and transferred to HASAG Labor Camp in Czenstochowa, Polish Silesia. HASAG was an acronym for a German Industrial cartel producing war material for the Wehrmacht under civilian and military supervision. Living conditions at this camp were more tolerable, and out of the reach of the dreaded SS Officers. My parents who remained in Plaszow were subsequently sent to Concentration Camps in the Reich where both perished.

The HASAG Camp was liberated by the Red Army in January 1945. I returned to Krakow, and found some relatives who survived in hiding with a Polish family. My mother's brother left Poland three days prior to the start of World War II in order to visit the New York World's Fair. He served in the US Army, and in 1946 assisted in my emigration to the USA.

In the summer of 1946, I resumed my education, graduating in 1956 from the Bernard Baruch School of Business Administration. Upon obtaining my US Citizenship in 1951, I also changed my name to Irving Zale. I served in the US Army from 1953 to 1955 at Ft. Bliss, Texas, and Metz, France. I married my Yankee sweetheart, Phyllis June Kellermann in the summer of 1958. A year later our daughter, Beverly Fern was born. Our son, Jonathan Seth was born in 1966.

My association as accountant with Stauffer Chemical Co. began in 1960 and lasted until 1987 when a corporate take-over occurred. In the Interim a corporate relocation brought us to the

West Coast where we settled in San Rafael, California, in the year 1971. Our family enjoyed the Western environment. We became active in Jewish community affairs and enjoyed exploring the West Coast. Having moved to a suburban location we began to appreciate the outdoor life and natural beauty of Marin County. Gardening became my newly discovered hobby. I selected the inspiring backdrop between two birch trees in my garden for my photograph. After a bout with cancer I lost my sweetheart in 1987. Shortly thereafter I retired from my professional activities, joining the ranks of volunteers for civic organizations.

Beverly married in 1991 and now resides in Los Angeles area. She recently gave birth to twins, a boy and a girl. In one shot I acquired two grandchildren. Jonathan has started a career in Sports Management, currently living in Houston, Texas.