

## HELEN AND JOE FARKAS

Helen was sent first to a ghetto, then to several concentration camps and finally on a death march. Her husband, Joe survived in a forced labor camp.

*“Our struggle to survive was not just from day to day, but from hour to hour, minute to minute.”*

Helen Farkas (née Safar) was born in 1920 in Satu-Mare, Romania, which became part of Hungary in 1940. She lived there with her parents and eight siblings until May 1944 when they were arrested and deported to Auschwitz. Helen and her sisters were immediately separated from the rest of their family and sent to forced labor. Most of the older adults, as well as the younger children were sent straight to the gas chambers. From Auschwitz, Helen was sent to Silesia, where with 2,000 others, she was sent on a death march to Bergen-Belsen. Those who could not march were shot to death and left unburied along the way. After enduring desperate conditions, months of starving and freezing, less than one hundred survived. One very cold night, Helen and her sister Ethel escaped and remained hidden for about two weeks when the war ended.

Joe Farkas, was also born in Satu-Mare, Romania and lived there with his parents and five siblings. As a child he was obsessed with soccer and was an excellent player. During the war he was placed in a forced labor camp where he had the chance to play soccer and also worked as a cook for the battalion. This kept him from being sent to the front lines where many Jewish men were used as human mine detectors or died of starvation and beatings. Joe was liberated after the arrival of the Russian troops in 1944 and walked two hundred miles to get home.

Joe and Helen had been engaged before the war. They were reunited in Sztatmar and married in August 1945. Each had survived the Nazi atrocities but were still prisoners in the Communist regime. They escaped the Communist controlled area in 1948. It was very hazardous and many people who tried to cross the border were shot, yet they preferred to risk their lives rather than live as prisoners in our own hometown. They spent eight months in a Displaced Persons camp in Austria and immigrated to the United States where Joe was recruited by a Hungarian/American soccer team. They eventually moved to California where they worked with other relatives in family-owned shoe stores and started their family. Helen often spoke to school students and other groups about her wartime experiences. With her daughter's help, she wrote a book “Remember the Holocaust.”

Helen lost many family members including her parents, two brothers and a sister. Joe's parents died in Auschwitz. His brothers and sisters survived the camps.