



## Stephen Lerman Z"L

When Stephen Lerman was born in 1927 in Zambrov, Poland, he was the youngest of six siblings, including two married sisters with children. He grew up in a two-room house with a dirt floor, and the family lived in one room. Stephen's father, a WWI prisoner of war in France, was a wood turner, and his workshop was in the second room.

Stephen remembers many anti-Semitic incidents, fights with Polish boys, and the town's gentiles, urging boycotts of Jewish stores. In 1941 Germany, breaking its pact with Russia, invaded Poland. Nazis ordered all Jews to assemble in the marketplace, but Stephen, 14, refused, remaining home with his paternal grandmother, in her 90s. His parents and a brother were among the 1500 Jews murdered that day.

Stephen, the grandmother, and several siblings remained in the wire-surrounded Zambrov ghetto until a freezing January 1943 when the Nazis had farmers with wagons bring ghetto survivors to cattle trains bound for Auschwitz. Although sixteen, Steven was small, skinny, and 'selected' to die in the crematorium along with his family, but he remarkably saved himself by sneaking into the younger, able-bodied group that was marched to Birkenau. There his arm was tattooed with number 88,647.

As a slave-prisoner, his first job was sweeping the barracks, inside work that enabled him to survive the bitter cold winter. Later, Nazis had him dynamite houses to prevent people from hiding. Once, when Stephen was sick, a kind SS officer gave him pills and later reassigned him to less heavy work.

After Auschwitz was liquidated in summer 1944, prisoners were sent to Orandenburg near Berlin, then to Sachsenhausen, Dachau, and finally to Kaufering, a camp deep in the woods. There Germans had a camouflaged factory huge enough for trains to go through, especially those filled with deported Jews.

By late April 1945 the Germans, losing the war, closed the camp, forcing prisoners on a death march while fearful SS guards disappeared nightly. On the main highway, Stephen witnessed surrendering Germans in trucks and tanks walking one way and Americans in green uniforms walking the other way, so he slipped in among the American liberators.

Not finding any family survivors, Stephen eventually connected with a Philadelphia uncle. At twenty-two, he arrived in America in August 1949 without a penny in his pocket, only three years of grammar school, and barely any English. He stayed with the uncle and aunt, owners of a meat and grocery store. Stephen—skilled with his hands—became a butcher.

The Lermans married in 1952 and moved to Arizona in 1987. Stephen passed away in June of 2010. He has four children and

numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.  
Stephen was the sole survivor of his family  
and spoke to various organizations about his  
Holocaust experiences.