

MARC RATNER PAPERS

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Marc Ratner Biography

Marjan Ratner (later Marc Ratner) was born on November 29, 1920 in Łódź, Poland to Julian (Chaim) Ratner and Gustava Szrajzer Ratner. His father was born in Sluck on November 12, 1889. His mother was born on February 17, 1894 in Wilczyn, Poland. Marc's younger sister, Alicja Ratner was born on November 1, 1923. His father was a prosperous textile industrialist in Łódź. Marc graduated from a private gymnasium in Łódź, and in 1938 began attending the University of Manchester in England. He returned to Poland in June 1939 to visit his family and was there when World War II began on September 1.

Marc received an order to report for service in the Polish Army, and his father decided to accompany him. They headed towards Warsaw, Poland but were ordered east to Rovno (Rivne), Ukraine, to escape the German advance. When the Russians entered Poland on September 18, they found themselves on the Soviet side, and in November they moved to Lvov (Lviv), Ukraine, where they lived with a customer of Julian's. In December, Julian illegally crossed to the German side and returned to Warsaw. There, he bribed a German with a truck so that he could return to Łódź to retrieve his wife and daughter, as well as some merchandise from his factory. They returned to Lvov and were reunited with Marc.

In March 1940, the family decided to try to escape to Vilna, Poland (Vilnius, Lithuania). They went to Lida, Belarus and hired a passeur. However, they were caught by the Russians and everyone but Marc was arrested and held overnight. Marc escaped into the woods and hid in the snow. In the morning, he found a house where a Polish peasant hid him in his hay wagon. Marc was reunited with his family and they returned to Lvov. On June 25, 1940, at 2:00 am, the Soviet police arrested the Ratner family and deported them to a forced labor camp in the forest of the Ural Mountains. Marc and Julian worked in the forests. Alicja attended school. Julian, who was multi-lingual, was appointed camp manager. However, he suddenly died of food poisoning on May 26, 1941.

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Jewish deportees received permission to leave the camps. The Soviet Union also granted permission for the newly-formed Polish Anders Army to bring Polish refugees to Iran to join the Allies in battle. Marc and his family remained in the Urals for a few months, and Marc worked as a fireman. In March 1942, the family traveled with a group of other refugees to Samarkand and Uzbekistan. When they learned that the Anders Army was stationed in Kiermine, they went there in hopes of going with them to Iran. The Ratners were ready to board a train for Teheran, Iran when a Polish special services officer asked Marc's mother what was their religion. When she replied "Mojrzeszoew" they were taken off the train and forced to remain in Uzbekistan. They remained in Kiermine and then after a few months returned to Samarkand. Marc's mother sold jewelry

and clothing on the black market to support the family. Marc enrolled in a branch of the University of Leningrad in Samarkand and studied economics and statistics.

At this point the Polish Government-in-Exile in London, England was sending food and clothing to Polish refugees in the Soviet Union. By coincidence, Piotr Nowacki, the Polish delegate overseeing the distribution in Samarkand, graduated from the same gymnasium as Marc, and he appointed him to be in charge of this distribution to prevent the goods being sold on the black market. However, when the Soviet Union advanced towards Poland, it broke off its relationship with the Polish Government-in-Exile and instead created a Soviet-Polish puppet government. They dissolved the delegation in Samarkand, closed the distribution center, and arrested Piotr Nowacki. Marc found work as a cashier and bookkeeper in a textile cooperative.

World War II ended in May 1945, and the Soviets allowed Polish refugees to return to Poland. Because of Marc's connection with Piotr Nowacki, the Ratners were kept in Samarkand after others departed, and they finally left by their own means at the end of June 1946. They returned to Łódź to find their apartment and belongings gone. They went to live with relatives who survived the Łódź ghetto. Seeing no future in Poland, they traveled by train to Czechoslovakia and eventually came to a DP camp in Ebensee, Austria. Marc found work as a translator, and he met an American Jewish chaplain who offered to help. The refugees were transferred to another DP Camp in Cham, Germany. After one week, Marc was told to proceed to Munich, Germany to pick up Venezuelan visas for him and his family. The American rabbi arranged with a Jewish organization in New York to secure fictitious visas to Venezuela and sent them to the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Munich. Marc, his mother, and sister picked up their travel documents as well as a French transit visa. On September 26, 1946, the family arrived in Paris, France. Marc managed to obtain work as the assistant head of the transportation department of the Joint Distribution Committee in Paris. Thus he was able to help thousands of survivors obtain transport to the United States, Canada, Australia, and Brazil. He also worked for the World ORT organization and the United Jewish Appeal. Marc married a French-Jewish employee of the Joint and they had a son, Pierre, in 1948. In February 1954, they immigrated to the United States.