

## FRED WILDAUER

Born 8/18/14 in Riga, Latvia. Father Aaron, and mother Sophie (Shifrah) Feitelsohn were shopkeepers. Orthodox, but often failed to keep Shabbos for business reasons. German spoken at home but knew Latvian. He went to German school until age 14 but no Jewish education. Latvia had a parliament with 2 Jewish parties led by Rabbis Neurock and Dubin respectively. Forty thousand Jews in Riga, 90,000 in Latvia. After age 14 he went to work in a needle factory. Recalls some antisemitism and says Latvians "quietly antisemitic." Wildauer served 11 months in the army running the laundry. His commander defied orders not to let Jews off for the High Holidays after a complaint to Rabbi Dubin. After 1936 military takeover, Latvia became more of a dictatorship putting more pressure on the Jews. Russia occupied Latvia and Estonia in 1940 and father's business nationalized. Jews had had trouble getting factory jobs before Russians and they thought the occupation would help. While it became a crime to call someone a Jew, the Russians relocated people, including many Jews away from the borders and sent some to Russia in cattle cars in which many died. His sister married a stateless Pole (Nansen passport) who opened a furrier shop in Berlin. After Kristallnacht, Wildauer's younger sister went to Berlin to get other sister's 2 children and took them back to Riga. Other sister followed, but her husband was not allowed to exit. Eventually, he got to France via Belgium where he was interned by Vichy. He later tried to get to the US but disappeared. Father thought that the Germans would be better occupiers than the Russians, as the Germans were "cultured."

As the Germans came in, the Russian secret police (GPU) herded Jews out of their building and tortured many. On 7/2/41, the Germans made Jews clean up the yard where they had been collected. Wildauer and his 2 brothers walked away and went to the factory where he had been working. A German officer ordered the workers to work on a 24-hour schedule producing stockings and underwear. He was told many Jews had been let go. At first, the officer ordered them rehired but reversed himself and arrested his supervisor and fired the remaining Jews. Wildauer got a protective pass to remain working at the factory. Had to wear a star and walk on the curb rather than on the sidewalk. Ghetto set up and fenced off and Wildauer, his sisters, 2 children and brother lived in a small milk store. His girlfriend, not Jewish and future wife, brought food as she was not in the ghetto. Ghetto closed off fall 1941. He and others were allowed out only under guard to go to work. Later he was billeted in a university building where he helped build bunks for occupants. He and one brother fixed mechanical things, cars etc. They were treated "nicely" by overseer—"My Jews are good Jews." On 11/29/41 Jews told to pick up and be prepared to move from the ghetto. The next day he heard shots as Jews taken to Bikernieki Forest where they were killed, including his 2 sisters, the children and his grandmother. The Germans sent false notes back to the ghetto saying things were OK. Twenty thousand out of 24,000 Jews were killed. Wildauer had to pick up bodies who were shot in columns. The ghetto was emptied to allow German Jews to be sent there. They thought things would be alright, but half were eventually killed. Wildauer recalls a Latvian aviation hero, Herbert Serkas killing many, throwing babies out of windows. Israelis found him later in Montevideo and killed him. Wildauer was put in a small compound in the ghetto with 2500 others. Another 1500 were taken away in buses. A man named Roschmann, who had killed

100's of Jews came to the camp and beat the inmates. SS Commander Obersturmbannfuehrer Bloedow did treat the Jews a bit better, but took many for medical experimentation for a typhus serum. A "Jekyll/Hyde" kind of man. Wildauer eventually sent to Kaiserwald, a concentration camp outside of Riga where he helped build concrete walls around gas storage tanks along with German Communists and criminals. In the camp he and brother were still able to get food from his future wife. His older brother was in another camp, Ballastdam working as an electrician. Women in camp next to Kaiserwald threw clothes over fence and male prisoners picked them up. Germans ordered them to give up the clothes and when not enough did so, they were clubbed. Wildauer called it the Battle of Maisonite after an event in Spain in 1492. There were 3 barracks built for 700. Men lined up in the AM and anyone missing was found and beaten. Commandant (?) Sauer tried to keep prisoners alive as he was getting kickbacks from the concrete wall contractor. There was a Himmelfahrts-Commando, a prisoner, who had to select 30 prisoners for "work." Instead, they were killed.

As Russians approached, half the camp was sent to Stutthof near Danzig. They were put in barracks built for 300 but holding 1500. In the interim his older brother was gassed in a truck. Wildauer traded tobacco for food and gave some to younger brother. In 8/44 they decided to escape and were able to get on a ship to Danzig but ended up on a barge with 30 others. Got to another camp in 9/44 where there was a small crematorium. A Man named Karpen was made overseer of 2000 Jews because Germans thought he was "tough." Wildauer was selected to work in an ammunition plant and was taken to Magdeburg, Germany with brother. In 1/45, the plant was bombed and damaged and he was assigned to build antitank traps. April 12, 1945 American tanks nearby and Germans fled but later returned and shot some men hiding in a cellar and dumped bodies in the river. One, Max Schneider, survived and was rescued by the Americans. Wildauer and brother also hid in a bombed out cellar and were found by an American Jewish soldier who later sponsored him to go to the US. Recalls that a man, Kolbe, once told him that he shot 70 Jews, including babies, because they were "enemies of the state." Also says during the last months of the war he saw many prisoners wasting away and dying. He also recalls taking scraps of dog food out of garbage cans to eat. In Magdeburg he was badly beaten for stepping out of line to pick up a frozen potato.

After liberation, he and brother walked across Germany to the Rhine area to find his wife, Tamara Lilget. She was located a few blocks away from where he ended up and they were reunited. They were sponsored by the aforementioned soldier and his mother through JFS to go to St. Louis where they lived for 3 ½ years running a grocery. They moved to Minneapolis where he sells insurance. He does not belong to a synagogue (mixed marriage issue) and is no longer religious. He still does not understand how God could let this tragedy happen. He feels that luck was the major factor in his survival as 40 members of his family died. He feels the Germans might have won the war if they hadn't ejected/killed educated Jews like Einstein and Ilse Meitner. His brother lives in St. Louis and his sister's brother in law got to NYC by marrying a Polish woman.