

BEN MULER

Born 1922, Vilna, Poland (now Vilnius, Lithuania). One sister. Family there for generations. Father a Newspaper printer and mother had an office supply store. Solid middle class. Not overtly religious. Spoke Yiddish at home and Polish in school where he went for 7 years. School set up by Polish Government for Jews. Some antisemitism as Polish students would come and break windows and beat up Jews. Muler recalls a pogrom where some Jews were killed. On that day his father was escorted to/from job by Polish friends for protection. He started working with father in 1934 and shortly thereafter was apprenticed to a commercial printer. He heard Hitler's speeches on the radio and heard about Jews in Germany being beaten and synagogues burned. On 9/1/39, he was on a printers' union picnic when he heard Vilna had been bombed. Russians took over Vilna based on nonaggression pact with Germany. Businesses were nationalized and all printing businesses combined into 1 large business. Mother shut down her business. Russians did not bother the Jews but when Lithuanians took over Vilna there were antisemitic riots. Russia and US intervened(?) and Russians reasserted control. Muler's sister and husband (later killed in the Russian army) in Minsk at the time. Many Jews round up by Russians and sent to Russia which saved their lives. Muler left Vilna with 11 others on 6/24/41, the second day of the German attack on Russia. They walked 100km into Russia to Minsk. They saw Jews killed on the road by Lithuanians. From Minsk, Muler went to work in Kopsk for ~2 months on a communal farm. As Germans approached area, he went by boat to Sverdlosk in the Urals. Worked in a steel mill with a friend and lived with a Russian family. After a month he was drafted into the Russian labor force and sent 40km away to cut timber for copper mines. Later he helped build a copper smelter and worked on the furnace. Met wife, Bernice, in 1943 but not married until after the war. At war's end, learned of repatriation to Vilna and he and Bernice's family headed that way, but were warned that Poles were killing Jews. Polish Army Karavioka, Vigilantes, pulling Jews off trains and shooting them. They went to Lodz for 3-4 weeks and then, with Jewish organizations helping, crossed the border into Czechoslovakia and then to Salzburg. Shortly thereafter they went to a DP camp in Hof, Germany where they were married and stayed ~2 ½ years. He worked as a billeting officer. In 1948, they moved to another DP camp, in Biedenkopf where son was born. He had the necessary papers to come to the US in 1949. In NYC he met 2 cousins who had survived the camps. Then they moved to Itta Bena, MS where an aunt lived. Worked briefly as a printer but after boss cheated on his pay they went to Jackson to work on the Courier-Ledger for a year. They moved to Dayton, OH (where daughter born) in 1951 and worked for the Daily News for 14 years. Then he started a scrap metal business. Family belongs to Beth Jacob Synagogue and he works with UJA, ORT and Federation and helps with Russian and Polish refugees.