

## **RG-50.407.0189**

### **Summary**

Albert Shelling (changed from his birth name Abraham Schmelling when he moved to Australia and married) was born on June 10, 1930 in Kalisz, Poland. He had one older (Sol) and two (Harry and Mendel) younger brothers. His father was a tailor, his mother a housewife – Yitzhak and Gita, respectively. They spoke Yiddish at home, and he attended Jewish day school with few non-Jews, as well as Haida school. He rarely played with Christian boys, but sometimes attended church with the family maid. He often faced hostility from Polish Christian boys.

On Sept. 1, 1939, Albert, his younger brother (Harry) and father were to leave Kalisz for Łódź to improve his father's professional position. Despite news of the German invasion, they proceed on to Łódź. Once there, they went by foot to Warsaw ahead of German troops. With the pressure of hostilities, his father arranged to let his children go to a Catholic orphanage. The officials and children treated them badly.

A social worker arranged them to change orphanages to run by Janusz Korczak, whom Albert got to know well. Treatment and food were much better. The two brothers were taken from the orphanage back to their family in Kalisz by an unmarried paternal great aunt, who, through circumstances was living as a non-Jew and working as a nurse with the Wehrmacht. There, as the Kalisz ghetto was being formed and Harry and Albert joined the father in hiding, while her mother and older, youngest brothers went to the ghetto. His family, along with the families of some of his father's families, decided to flee to Russia, bribing Albert's mother and brothers out of the ghetto. In the winter, they traveled by train to Łódź, then to Praga near Warsaw, then by train to a border crossing. They crossed into no-man's land only by surrendering their valuables, and persuaded the Russians to let them in. They went on to a refugee camp in Bialystok. His parents received work permits and were sent with about 100 Jewish families by cattle train for six weeks to Petrovskaya ulitsa, an area east of Lake Baikal close to China and Mongolia. His father believed in the communist ideal, but his views were challenged by the frequent views of Russian poverty. Strangely, they were officially classified as White Russians, not Jews, and were greeted warmly, placed in barracks with access to special shops for a short while. His father's tailor skills were valued, and he was made a foreman; his mother also became a tailor.

On the same day in June, 1941, when Germany invaded Russia, Albert, Harry and his father traveled by train to visit some of their family in Alma-Aty. They had to return to Petrovskaya to make room for refugees and remained until the end of the war. While his father lived, their life went well. But, he contracted TB and died in November, 1943. Before his death, Albert's father was denounced as a Bundist (a Polish Socialist often considered political rivals to the Communists) and as bourgeois for owning a small factory. The family encountered little consequence to this accusation once their father died.

When the war ended, Albert's family focused on re-uniting with his father's family; few wanted to remain in Russia. By April/May, 1946, they were able to arrange the right to return to Poland since, by then, they carried a conditional Russian passport. They first went to Szczecin, intending to go on to Kalisz. At every station along the way in Poland, their carriages were attacked by antisemitic Poles. Albert jumped the train in order to find his uncle, which he did, before going on to Kalisz. Once re-united, Albert's extended family smuggled themselves out of Poland, eventually to a displaced persons camp in the American zone in Germany. Some of his extended family explored the opportunities in Australia, and Albert joined them in 1952.