

Leon Merrick (Lajb Kusmirek)



Born January 8, 1926, Zgierz, Poland

Leon was the oldest of two boys born to a Jewish family in Zgierz, Poland, a city well known for its textiles. In 1939, after Germany invaded Poland, Leon's family left Zgierz for Lodz, Poland. They were forced into a ghetto in 1940. The ghetto was in the city of Lodz. Four years later the ghetto was closed and Leon was taken to a forced labor camp in Kielce, Poland. He worked in an ammunition factory for 3 months. In 1944, as Soviet forces began an offensive, Leon was taken to a forced labor camp in Czestochowa, Poland.

**First Person
Today at 1:00pm**

Doors open at 12:45pm

At the end of December 1944, the Germans evacuated the camp and took its prisoners to Buchenwald, a concentration camp near the city of Weimar, Germany. Three months after entering Buchenwald, Leon was taken to Flossenburg, another concentration camp. He was there for three weeks until, as the war came to a close, the Germans herded the camp's survivors on a death march. The death march lasted three to four days.

**Realtime Captioning
Available**

On April 23, 1945, U.S. forces liberated the survivors near Chan, Germany. Leon immigrated to the United States in 1949 and was drafted into the American army in March 1952. He reached the rank of sergeant. Leon met his wife Nina in Washington, D.C.; she is also a Holocaust survivor.