

SAM P. WALTERS



Before his family was forced into the ghetto, Shlomo Wolf Posmantier lived with his parents, his two older brothers, and a live-in nanny in a second-floor apartment in Bedzin, Poland, a community of 21,000 Jews a few miles from the German border. The language spoken among the family members was Yiddish.

Shlomo's father, Chaim David, owned a kosher butcher shop. He also exported non-kosher meat. Shlomo often joined his father on the 15-minute walk to the synagogue of 5,000 families. There his father sat in the front.

Shlomo's mother, Gitel Posmantier, sat upstairs with the women. She was never surprised when her husband brought home guests for Shabbat. The oldest of seven children, Gitel Posmantier came from a small village of few Jews. Shlomo loved to take the train there to visit his grandparents.

Until 1939, when Shlomo was 10 years old, he attended a public school for boys under Jewish supervision. Walking home, however, was scary. He never knew when he might get called a "dirty Jew" or when a rock might be thrown at him. Shlomo went to cheder, Hebrew school, every day after public school. For fun, he enjoyed soccer and playing at the town lake.

When the Nazis forbade Jewish children to go to school, Chaim Posmantier secretly hired a tutor and a rabbi to teach Shlomo.

"Son, the only thing I can leave you is education," his son remembers his father's saying. "Nobody can take this away from you."

Just before Chaim Posmantier died in the concentration camp, he also told his son, "Go forward. Don't look back... And say *Kaddish* for me." *Kaddish* is the mourner's prayer.

When Shlomo was liberated by Russians from the Waldenburg concentration camp, he was one of the youngest survivors from Bedzin. Shlomo walked to his hometown, where he learned that his mother died in Auschwitz. He also learned that Jews still were not welcome in Poland.

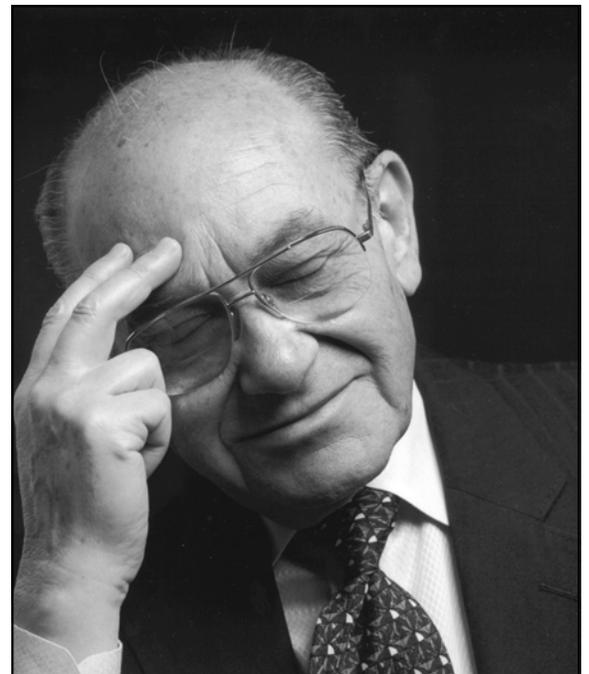
After four years in a displaced persons camp, Shlomo arrived in Kansas City with a suitcase full of books. Upon becoming a citizen, he changed his name to Sam P. Walters. Unable to afford college, Sam worked as a welder for Koch Refrigeration and later as a sales representative for a jewelry company.

In 1957, yearning to see his brothers again, he traveled to France and Israel. In Israel he met and married Ann (Chana) Finkelsztajn, who survived the Holocaust by hiding. Two years later, their daughter, Tobah, now Dr. Giselle H. Wildman, was born in Kansas City.

Sam believes he survived to help people. He's an active member of B'nai B'rith and established a fund for children at Congregation Beth Shalom. For recreation, he goes to lectures and concerts.

"I'm involved in humanity," he says.

As for many of his fellow Americans, he says, "People born here don't realize that to be a citizen in a country you can love and treasure and do more from than any other country is a very important thing."



Portrait by David Sosland
Excerpt from *From the Heart: Life Before and After the Holocaust ~ A Mosaic of Memories*

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