

JOSEPH GREENBAUM



Chava Greenbaum was the mother of eight, a helpmate to her husband, Chaim Yakov Greenbaum, the butcher – and a fine cook. In fact, says her oldest son, Joseph, “She was exceptionally good. She could make a meal out of anything. No recipe. A little bit of this, a little bit of that.” Joseph’s favorite was her potato soup with meat.

The Greenbaums lived in Piotrkow, Poland, a town of 25,000 about 240 kilometers, or almost 150 miles, east of Warsaw. In their small apartment, the eight children slept in one bedroom, two to a bed. Joseph enjoyed summer picnics in the woods, soccer, basketball, outings with his Jewish youth organization, meeting girls in the park and American movies, especially westerns. He was also a promising artist.

Joseph went to *cheder*, Hebrew school, and became a bar mitzvah but did not grow up in a strictly observant Jewish home. The butcher store, which bought cattle from the villagers, sold non-kosher meat and stayed open on *Shabbat*, the Sabbath. On Friday night, Chava Greenbaum lit candles and served a kosher meal. For Passover, she bought matzos and new things for the children to wear.

Still, the gentile world remained largely closed to Joseph. Occasionally, he played soccer with non-Jewish boys, but even that could turn ugly. “We had to run away from the soccer field sometimes because they would attack us with rocks and throw things at us,” says Joseph.

He was 17 when the war broke out. The Greenbaums did not own a radio, and their only source of information was newspapers. Joseph did not know about *Kristallnacht*, the “night of broken glass,” in Germany.

Except for himself and one brother, his entire family was murdered at Treblinka.

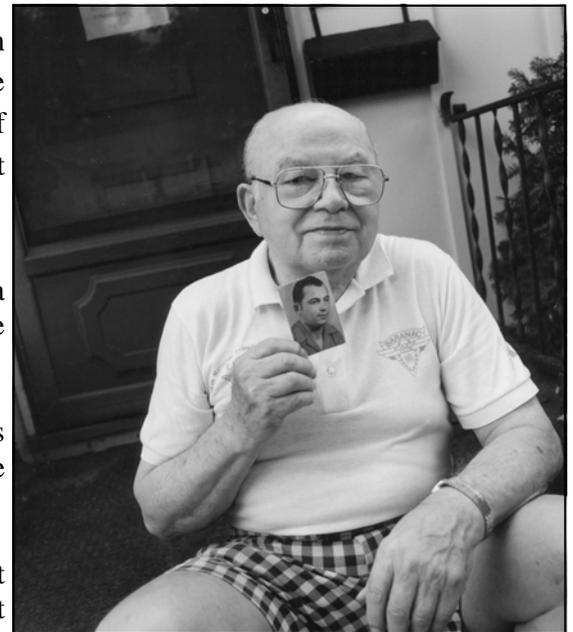
At the end of the war, Joseph was part of an 18,000-person death march from Buchenwald to Bavaria, a march that only 8,000 survived. He recalls when U.S. troops came up the road: “The German guards ran off in the woods. American tanks came from behind and threw out cigarettes and chocolates.”

After the war, Joseph lived in a private German home and worked in a U.S. Army kitchen. He came to Kansas City in 1949 and married five months later. A cousin fixed him up on a blind date.

“I fell in love with Sylvia the moment I saw her,” says Joseph. “She was patient. I couldn’t speak English and she couldn’t speak Yiddish. She bought me a dictionary and I learned to read the newspaper.”

Joseph landed his first job with Kansas City Custom Garment Company and later opened his own shop, Joe the Tailor, on 37th Street and Troost Avenue. After selling the shop, he worked 17 more years for Kansas City Fashionbilt Garment Company. Sylvia and Joseph had two children, Bruce and Evalinn. Sylvia passed away in 1996.

Joseph goes to health classes and paints landscapes and still-lives. He never stopped believing in God but has not tried to keep traditions from his youth alive. “I didn’t care to,” he says.



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

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

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