

ARON WARREN



When Aron Warszawski was in the displaced persons camp at Bergen-Belsen with his sisters, Ann and Gutcha, he didn't care much where he went from there. "I just wanted to get out of Germany," he recalls. And so, in December 1945, when President Harry S. Truman announced that the United States was opening its doors to displaced persons, Aron registered to come.

Before the Holocaust, more than 21,000 Jews lived in Aron's hometown of Bedzin, Poland. After he was liberated from Buchenwald and returned to Bedzin, much of his family was gone, including his father and five of nine siblings. His mother, Miriam Warszawski, had died in 1935.

Before the war Aron's father, Abraham Warszawski, was a shoemaker and sold real estate. Aron's mother cared for the family in a two-room apartment. In one room, parents and children slept two to a bed. The other room was the kitchen. Almost everyone in the Warszawski family sang. Abraham was a cantor in the synagogue. The boys played instruments. Brother Moishe was an accomplished violinist.

Most teenagers in Bedzin belonged to one of several Zionist youth groups, which, in addition to nurturing a love for Israel, organized meetings, dances and hikes and sometimes provided ice cream.

Bedzin's Jews built their own school, partly funded by the city. Relations between Christians and Jews were, at best, civil. Says Aron: "There were some pretty good fights. The beauty about it was people didn't have guns."

Aron was 14 in 1936 when he finished school and began commuting to a job selling electrical parts in nearby town.

"No way could you get a job working for a Christian outfit," says Aron. "The antisemitism started strong in the late 1930s. Customers used to say to you: 'You just wait. Hitler is coming.'"

When he was liberated, Aron was 24 years old. He weighed 90 pounds. He believes he survived because he was lucky enough to work with civilians – "Christians and even some Germans," he says – who brought him food. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee paid Aron's \$60 fare for the trip to the United States on a Navy boat.

A week after being sent to Kansas City, Aron landed a job making cotton for furniture at Comfort Felt Co. His biggest challenge was learning English. "I went to school and I read," he says. "You had to learn. That's all there was to it."

Aron – who changed his last name to Warren – was in Kansas City barely a year when he married Lottie. With \$9 in the bank, the couple couldn't afford a honeymoon. Still, the next year, he started a furniture business with this sister Ann's husband, Isak Federman, followed by a felt business in 1952 and later a foam and rubber business.

Aron has remained close to the 11 Holocaust survivors who arrived with him in Kansas City. He and his wife have two children, Karen and Eddie, and five grandchildren.

"The lesson we should learn from the Holocaust," Aron says, "is to keep your eyes open, to vote, and to support Israel."



Portrait by Gloria Baker Feinstein

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