

Can't Have One Without the Other

by Sol Awend

If it wasn't for my family, the Holocaust would probably never have happened, except for one glaring fact: My family was Jewish.

100%, going back generations.

They spoke Yiddish, observed the Sabbath, performed circumcisions on newborn baby boys and celebrated Bar Mitzvahs and weddings according to ancient Jewish laws. It was for this reason alone they were marked for destruction - being Jewish.

My name is Sol Awend and I am the proud son of Dina Aport and Berek Awend - both Jewish, both Holocaust Survivors.

My father Berek came from the town of Oswiecim (Osh ven chem), Poland; later to be renamed Auschwitz, the infamous German concentration camp. He was one of four brothers and one sister. World War II came in a hurry to Berek and his family. By September, 1941 he'd been imprisoned in the former military compound where his three brothers were killed, after being told that they were to be working for the new Reich bakery sending bread "throughout the Reich". Sadly, the brothers wound up being killed in gas chambers and cooked in the crematoriums of the newly expanding camp know as Auschwitz-Birkenau. The only sister, Frieda, struggled and managed to live through the war and was liberated from Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Wholesale mass murder began in earnest, and my father was tattooed with a number on his left wrist. During the ordeal Berek would be taken to three other camps suffering physical abuse, starvation and sorrow. At war's end he was in Dachau, another camp, not far from Munich, Germany. Barely alive, his family lost

and destroyed, Berek contemplated what to do with himself at the age of 27.

After slow and steady recuperation he felt human again, winding up in a DP (displaced persons) camp, in Feldafing, not far from Munich. There, he met my mom, Dina Aport. They married on November 29, 1945; one of six couples celebrating that morning. Little did Berek and Dina know of the impending doom that awaited them only four years away.

Dina came from the town of Skarzysko (Shkar ziss ko) Poland, some sixty miles from Warsaw. She was one of nine children, none of whom made it, except for her, a brother and a sister. Everyone else was deported to Treblinka, an infamous killing center, and slaughtered--except for Dina's mother who refused to go. She was shot in the street in front of their house. Dina was a prisoner in a local ammunition plant, and heard of her family's demise from Christian neighbors who came to work there during the day. During the course of the war, she was in three other camps and finally liberated on a death march that left Dachau shortly before the war's end. At the end of her rope, she collapsed and waited to be shot. A shadow fell across her face. Her eyes fluttered open and she was looking at the face of an American soldier: She had lived to see Liberation!

Slowly she regained her strength and realized she was penniless and all alone. She was eventually introduced to Berek, who was a barber, and they married. I was born in July, 1947. But alas, doom and gloom was only two years away - and had nothing to do with being Jewish.

It seems Berek developed a terrible form of colon cancer that devoured his lower bowels into a painful and unforgiving mess. He suffered for six months and died on what would have been his second wedding anniversary.

Widowed, broken-hearted and left with a two-year old little boy, Dina contemplated her future. She reported to the UNRRAA

(The United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration)office; which was the refugee agency responsible for her relocation. The woman told her that as a single mother, going to Israel was too rough and out of the question, so then, she was going to America. Dina and Solomon left Bremerhaven, Germany on January 10, 1951 bound for New Orleans, Louisiana; arriving there ten days later. Her ultimate destination was St. Louis, Missouri. It was there her American chapter unfolded.

After settling into a three room apartment, provided by the Jewish Family Service, a refugee agency, Dina began to find her way around her new world, even though she could not speak one word of English.

One fateful day, she was introduced to a fellow who was also a Survivor and also newly arrived to St. Louis.

His name was Josef Kupferminz, originally from Lodz (Lodge), Poland. Not only did he suffer the horrors of German death and destruction, but he lost his wife and two-year-old son in Auschwitz. Standing in line at the selection point, all he could offer his wife, Roisa, was a comb. Mother and child went one way, he another. Ultimately Josef was transported from Auschwitz, winding up in Dachau in the spring of 1945. There he was loaded onto a transport heading to Garmisch-Patenkierchen, a German ski resort, along with some thousand other people. The Germans handed out Red Cross packets, as the war's end was near. Josef unknowingly hung his, on the trains' emergency brake. The train could not move for two days, until someone spotted the jammed brake handle and blamed Josef. A German soldier dragged Josef off the train and beat him badly. Afterwards, Josef barely crawled back onto the train. Ultimately the train load of passengers arrived in the mountains amid the sound of gunfire--and then stillness--the war had ended. If they had arrived two days earlier, everyone on board would have been shot.

At war's end, Josef was taken back to the DP camp in Feldafing. There, he recuperated and five years later wound up in St. Louis looking to reform his life.

Josef was a skilled craftsman, and could create beautiful furniture creations from scratch. His craft was honorable, as were his intentions and he married my mother. A year later my brother Abe was born. My parents worked hard in their newly adopted land and realized the goodness of the American Dream.

A generation and a half later, the family tree has grown back and is blooming.

Much has been written about the Holocaust and the aftermath. In most cases, being Jewish was the number one reason for the awful onslaught.

The disaster could not have happened without us.



My parents at Villa Waldberta
in Feldafing, adjacent to the
DP compound



My mother, me, and stepfather Josef Kupferminz after their
wedding, St. Louis, July, 1951



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