

Eugene Revitch 1909-1996

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My father was born in 1909 in Latvia. During the Russian revolution, the family fled to the Ukraine and then, later, returned to Riga, Latvia's capital. There was quite a bit of antisemitism in Latvia, and the Jews interacted mostly with their own community. My father, for instance, did not speak Latvian well because Jews spoke Russian or Yiddish.

When he finished high school, he went to the University in Montpellier, France and then to medical school in Paris. He went back to Riga, and as the train went through Germany, he heard Hitler speak. When he got to Riga, he was drafted into the Latvian army. They asked the recruits (in Latvian) to raise their hands if they finished elementary school, then asked them to raise their hands if they finished high school, and then asked something my father didn't understand because he did not understand Latvian well. He assumed that they asked if he finished college, so he raised his hand. Unfortunately, the question asked was whether he knew how to ski. When he raised his hand, they assigned him to the ski troops! He had never skied before and found himself in a strange part of the country where he struggled to stand up on skis.

Since Jews had difficulty in being accepted to professions, my father decided to come to the U.S. where he hoped he could practice medicine. His father had siblings who had migrated to Philadelphia. He did not speak any English, so the only way he could support himself was as a delivery boy for his uncle's pharmacy. He sold Christmas trees outside of a supermarket. A woman called and asked for medication for her young son, so he delivered

the medicine. She realized he was an immigrant, and since they both spoke Yiddish, he told her about himself. She arranged a job for him at a laboratory at the University of Pennsylvania and introduced him to her sister (my mom), whom he later married.

My mother wrote to 200 hospitals asking them whether they would accept him as a resident (a post-graduate internship), which was required for foreign doctors by the U.S. government. Only one hospital was willing to give him a residency, St. Peter's Hospital in New Brunswick, N.J., which was run by a French order of nuns. My dad was fluent in French, which is why they accepted him.

He knew that something terrible was happening in Europe but he was unable to contact his family. In 1941, he joined the U.S. army, hoping to go to Europe and see if he could find his family. My grandfather (my mom's father) prayed that he would not be sent to Europe. The night before his unit left, he had a terrible infection in his ear, the result of a perforated eardrum he had as a child. It had never bothered him before, but because of his infection, he was not allowed to accompany his unit.

He stayed in the U.S. for the remainder of World War two, working as a doctor in Veteran's Administration hospitals all over the U.S. The war ended when he (and me and my mom) were in Montana where he was working at the V.A. hospital there.

He still did not know what happened to his family, until he received a letter from his sister, that had been sent to St. Peter's Hospital, where the nuns forwarded it to the army that forwarded it to my father. She told him that on Dec. 7, 1941, the older Jews in Riga-including his parents- were rounded up,

marched to a forest, and were shot and killed by the Nazis. One brother was killed fighting the Germans as a soldier in the Russian army, and his other brother had disappeared, also almost definitely killed. At the end of WWII, his sister was liberated from Belsen Bergen concentration camp, one of the largest death camps. She was almost dead from typhus, weighing only 65 pounds. My parents worked with the Red Cross to bring my aunt to the U.S., where she recovered and lived for many years in New York. My father was permanently emotionally scarred by what happened to his family, and he impressed upon me that **this should never happen again** and it was my responsibility to oppose genocide.

After the war was over, my father worked in a hospital in New Jersey. His specialty was psychiatry. He eventually opened a private psychiatric practice in New Jersey and was affiliated with Menlo Park Diagnostic Center, where prisoners (both adults and kids) who were mentally ill were sent for evaluation. He wrote two well- received books on the psychopathology of murders, based on his work at the center.

He had a long and successful life. He spoke several languages fluently (English, Yiddish, Hebrew, French, Russian) and taught himself Greek. He loved to read Russian literature, play the violin, and take care of his patients. If someone had a mental breakdown and the police were called, my father used to go into the house by himself and calm the patient. He was not particularly interested in finances; my mother handled all the business aspects of his practice. He was a terrible driver and had no sense of direction. However, everyone he met enjoyed talking with him and he with them.

In his 80's, he developed Alzheimer's disease and he also lost part of his vision to macular degeneration of the eyes. He and my mother retired to a senior community residence. He died there in 1996 on the first night of Rosh Hashanah.

At his memorial service, someone said to me that even with Alzheimer's, he was more interesting than most of the other residents..