



The LivingStones Project is supported by
The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

www.heritagefund.org.uk

IVAN CYBULA

I was born Ichrok Cybula in Warsaw, Poland, in 1920, the eldest of three children. My father was a butcher: we were ordinary people living in a Jewish neighbourhood with our grandparents and relations around us. We observed all the Jewish holidays.

Life was not easy for my parents: they could not let us go far from home because of anti-semitism. In the early 1930's my father left Poland to better our standard of living and settled in Paris, France, as he had a brother living there. My mother had to struggle to bring us up, but managed with the help of the rest of the family until my father was settled in work and found somewhere to live. To be able to join my father we had to sell all our possessions to raise enough money for the journey to Paris as it was impossible to obtain visas legally to enter France. My mother had to find an agent who was prepared to obtain forged documents for us, which took all our money and just left us with whatever we could carry by hand.

I remember leaving Warsaw, saying "Goodbye" to the rest of our family, never to see them again. We travelled towards Germany and arrived in Danzig which was an open city between Poland and Germany. We met another agent we did not know, a complete stranger, who smuggled us through the Polish frontier into Germany. It was very traumatic for my mother, with three children, but we finally joined my father in Paris hoping to build a new and peaceful life. However, this was not to be, as my brother and sister who were younger were able to attend school, but I was too old so I went to evening classes and, when Hitler came to power in 1935, things became difficult ♦ there was the war in Spain, the occupation of Czechoslovakia, and the whole of Europe preparing for war. France had a socialist government under Leon Blum and the fascist party started to spread its wings.

Being an illegal immigrant I could not obtain work for very long and eventually the French police caught up with me ♦ they raided our house in the middle of the night and arrested me for illegal entry into France. I was interrogated and searched and on release had to report to the police every month until I was eighteen years old. I was arrested again in the middle of the night and told I



The LivingStones Project is supported by
The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

www.heritagefund.org.uk

would be deported back to Poland. My only option was to join the French Foreign Legion to become a French citizen and allow my mother to remain in France. So, I joined the French Foreign Legion and to had sign on for five years. It was a very hard decision to make, but the only choice. I knew I would not see my dear parents for a long time ❖ sadly I did not see them again, or my elder sister Germaine, as they were deported in 1942 and perished in the Holocaust.

I travelled to Marseilles where I was taken by Military Police to "Fort St John" and spent several weeks being interrogated in case I had committed a crime or was a spy. After three months I sailed for French North Africa, after some very hard and difficult training we moved into the Sahara desert where I worked on road construction while having to wait and be ready for any assignment at home or abroad. I came across people of many different nationalities in similar situations to my own, plus refugees and political prisoners, but not criminals. In 1939 I took part in the Norwegian Campaign with the French Expeditionary Forces in the Arctic Circle. I was wounded in the Battle of Narvic and evacuated on the hospital ship "Atlantis" to Ormskirk in England and then spent a few weeks convalescence at Eden Hall on the Duke of Westminster's estate in Chester. Finally I was billeted at the White City Stadium in London.

In the meantime France was under German occupation and the White City was the assembly point for all the French troops and we had to decide whether to return to France or volunteer again and sign on for the duration of the war plus six months, so I joined General De Gaulle's Free French Forces. At this time I had very little knowledge or news of my parents. As I was not fit for active service I remained in the French Medical Corps in Camberley until D Day. I returned to Paris after it was liberated and learned of all the tragedies that had happened. I began making enquiries, asking the neighbours and the caretaker questions, and found out that my dear parents, brother, sister, uncle, aunt and three cousins were taken away by the French police in 1942 and handed over to the Germans.

My mother gave birth to another child, Therese, in 1939 but at the time that my parents, brother and sister were deported my young sister, Therese, was ill in the Rothschild Hospital in Paris. I only became aware of these facts when I searched for my family and I found she had been removed from the hospital and hidden during the war, then put into a Jewish orphanage with many other



The LivingStones Project is supported by
The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

www.heritagefund.org.uk

children. I found her but we were complete strangers ♡ she only remembered my younger brother, Simon, because he was at home when she was born and I had been away. I had to prove to all concerned that I was her brother. By this time I was married to Evelyn and had settled in England after the war, with a daughter of our own. With great difficulty, after three years I was given permission for my eight year old sister to come to England. We brought her up until she married and settled in the U.S.A. and now has a family of her own ♡ two daughters and four grandchildren.

In 1946 I was still in Paris ♡ it took me eighteen months to obtain permission to live permanently in England ♡ me working on the French side and Evelyn appealing to the Home Office in London. Meanwhile survivors of the Holocaust began to return from Germany, so every day I went to the hotel Lutetia to check the names listed and came across my brother Simon's name! It was with great joy we met but emotional and very sad when we spoke about the loss of our parents, sister Germaine, the other members of our family and our many friends. My brother went to Israel, during the War of Independence, and married there. He now has three children and fourteen grandchildren. My sister and brother did not meet again (after 1947) until we all met up in Israel in 1982, and it was as though they had never parted, because he remembered her as a baby.

During one visit to Israel I found a cousin, Abraham, that I had grown up with in Poland (our mothers were sisters). He is the only survivor of his whole family of six brothers. He married Lola in a Displaced Persons camp in Germany, as he had contracted T.B. while held in Germany. They have settled in Trondheim, Norway and have one son living in Norway, a daughter in Sweden and five grandchildren. We used to meet in Israel but now he is not able to travel we visit them in Norway. The happiest holidays for us is to visit my brother and family in Israel, my sister and family in the U.S.A. and cousin in Norway.

We feel fortunate to have been able to keep close contact over the years and have been able to see all the children grow up and enjoy their simchas.

We moved to Reading in 1957 as I was then working for Burberry (part of GALS.) and we also had a business which Evelyn managed. We were very



**The LivingStones Project is supported by
The National Lottery Heritage Fund.**

www.heritagefund.org.uk

involved with the Reading Hebrew Congregation and made a lot of friends. We were also founder members of the Thames Valley Progressive congregation. I was a member of Reading AJEX for fifteen years and served on the committee. We enjoyed many 'days out' with the members. We retired in 1985, moved to the Bournemouth area, joined the B.R.S. and have made many friends in the community. We enjoy the services and social life and are very happy here.