

William Frohlinger's Hidden Story

by Flo Giltman

My father's name is William (Vilmos in Hungarian) Frohlinger. He was born in 1906 in the tiny village of Ladmovce, located in Southeast Slovakia. My father loved his childhood home, where he lived with his huge Orthodox Jewish family. Vilmos was one of ten children, the son of Yitzhak Aron and Fani Frohlinger. My father had hundreds of cousins who lived in nearby villages. His cousins visited regularly, transported by horseback and wagons, and they shared the joy of celebrating Shabbat (the Jewish holy day of the week).

My father was trained at an early age to help the family with their limestone business. The women would routinely gather and cook delicious Hungarian meals. Children were taught how to bake "challah" and "rugelach". Yitzhak Aron blessed his grandchildren by reciting prayers and touching his children's heads. My grandmother, Fani, was always present with hugs and kisses for everyone. These were cherished traditions and my father would be tearful when he thought about those childhood memories. In those days, there were no antibiotics, and very limited access to medical services, so many children died young. Although these were difficult times, the Frohlinger family helped each other by drawing on their love, hard working spirit, and most of all, their faith in God.

My father said that discrimination against Jews was always present in the background. He learned to trust his family and close friends. He said that his neighbors, (both Jews and non-Jews) got along well. Children from diverse backgrounds attended the same schools. They played together and became friends. During times of financial need, neighbors came to each other's aid.

In the late 1930's, the political climate started to change. The German government enacted laws restricting Jews from participating in many activities. Neighbors started to get frightened and kept their distance. They were scared for their own family's safety. My father was harassed and bullied by other groups. He fought back, and escaped arrest several times. My father was smart and knew how to get out of difficult situations. In fact, he prided himself in defending his family. He was a courageous man, building a life for himself and helping his family. He fell in love with Elsa Grunberger, from Zapson. They married in 1935 in Som, Hungary and they had two beautiful children, Adele (born 1937) and Aron (born 1940). Vilmos, Elsa and family enjoyed a beautiful family life in Ladmovce and had every intention to stay there.

When Germany invaded Poland in 1939, my father started fearing for his family's safety. Four of my father's siblings had emigrated to America earlier and urged him to follow suit. With their help, he was able to attain a visa and came up with a "grand plan" to save his family from Nazi terror. He tried valiantly to secure visas for his wife and children, using his family's connections, but was unable to get them in time. When he had the chance to leave, he

embarked on the boat "Rex" and arrived in NY in 1940. Elsa and the children never received their visas. My father completely lost touch with his family, and never saw them again. His wife and children were murdered in Auschwitz Concentration Camp in 1944.

My father learned of this tragedy through the Jewish newspaper, "The Forward", as well as the HIAS organization (Hebrew International Aid Society). He was devastated! He struggled with severe depression and required shock treatments to help him function again. He was indeed a tortured man, and never forgave himself for leaving his family.

He married my mother, Gertie, in 1946 and had two children. He could not discuss his family history at all with any of us. I learned most of this information from my genealogical research and from family members, who recalled some of these events. Some of these cousins are Auschwitz survivors themselves.

Needless to say, my own life has been defined by the events of the Holocaust. I believe that I have a responsibility to educate future generations on what happened during these times.

I thought the best place to begin is to tell the story of my own family, and to honor their memory and deeds. I thank the Holocaust Museum of Southwest Florida for giving me this opportunity to do so.



William (Vilmos) Frohlinger

Elsa Grunberger Frohlinger
and the children



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