

## Joe Farkas

Photographed with his wife Helen

Wartime Experience: Camp Survivor

I was born in Satu-Mare (Szatmar), during the Hungarian occupation. My parents

were Hana and Lajos Farkas. My father's occupations were traveling sales, and my mother was a busy housewife with six children. My siblings were four boys and two younger girls. As I grew up I apprenticed and learned the trade of shoe sales, which I pursued until I retired. I owned shoe stores in partnership with my family in Szatmar after the war, as well as in California after we emigrated there in 1949.

As a child I was obsessed with playing soccer, and I turned out to be very good at it. This turned out to be very beneficial for me. It opened many doors for me and I was given opportunities due to my talent both before World War II and also during and after the Holocaust.

During the war I was placed in a "Forced Labor Camp", where I had the chance to play soccer, and I was a cook for the battalion. This kept me from being sent to the front lines where many Jewish men were used as human mine detectors. The Jews were expendable for this job. In the early 1940's the Nazis were advancing into Russia and into the harsh winter weather. Many Jews perished from this job, as well as from malnutrition and harsh treatment. I was lucky compared to most because the main hardship that I suffered was the pain of insecurity and not knowing what was happening to my family. They simply had disappeared from the Ghetto without being able to let me know what was happening to them. Of course they also had no idea that they were being taken to extermination camps. My parents were murdered in Auschwitz, but my brothers and sisters survived the camps.

After the war I returned to Szatmar, and later found that my fiancée Helen also managed to survive Auschwitz. We married and lived in Szatmar under communist rule, since the Russians had occupied our county of Transylvania. We were locked behind the "Iron Curtain". We found ourselves free from the Nazi atrocities, yet still prisoners in the Communist regime. With no freedom in this situation, in 1948 we decided to seek freedom by escaping. It was very hazardous to escape and many people who tried to illegally cross the border were shot. Yet we felt that we would rather risk our lives than live as prisoners in our own home town.

In the coldest December night in 1948, we escaped over the border to Hungary and then to Austria. We were nearly caught as the guard dogs at the border heard us and were barking, but we were lucky that it was cold and late and the guards were too tired or cold to investigate the dogs' barking.

Once we were safely across the border we were put into a D.P. (Displaced Persons) Camp by the Jewish Joint Distribution Organization. We were there for eight months while we tried to

arrange passage to the United States, where, thanks to my soccer talent, I was wanted on the Jewish soccer team. We were sponsored by a chapter in Milwaukee where we lived and worked in factories for one year.

After that we went to California where we had family that had emigrated before the war. My wife and I have been married for 55 years. We have lived happily in California for the last fifty years, and our family grew as we had a daughter, and later a granddaughter.