

Name: **Julius Blum**

Birthplace: **Munkacs, Czechoslovakia**

Birthdate: **March 30, 1925**

Parents: **Ignac and Serene Aronowits Blum**

Siblings: **Andrew**

Children: **Three**

Grandchildren: **Two**

Julius Blum was born in Munkacs, Czechoslovakia, a small town in the Carpathian Mountains. He recalls with affection the mountain terrain of his childhood and the neighborly relationships of those who lived close by. Then in 1938 when Czechoslovakia was divided by the Munich Conference, Hungary was given the rights to occupy the town. World War II followed and Hungary was occupied by the German Army in the early part of 1944. Hungary was one of the last countries that Hitler invaded. When the German army and Eichman took charge of the country the laws became extremely unbearable to the Jewish population. Immediately after occupation, the Jews were ordered to wear the yellow star on their garments and Julius with a few friends refused to be identified in that fashion. Rather than moving with his family to the designated ghetto, Julius and his friends took to the woods where they worked as farm laborers. By April, the farmer that they worked for turned them over to the Nazis. From there Julius was taken captive.

When he was captured he had a small scrap of paper in his pocket, a note from a school friend written in Hebrew. He and his friend had attended, before it was forced to close, a Hebrew high School or Gymnasium as it was called. His captors thought the note was a secret message and he was beaten so severely that he passed out. While still unconscious, Julius was loaded onto a transport where he found himself when he came to. Four days later the train arrived to Burkina where he came face to face with the infamous Nazi, Dr. Mengele, who noticed his youthful appearance but his face beaten black and blue, wondering whether to send him to the right or the left because of his bruises. With a puzzled note to his voice, he asked Julius, 'Can you run?' Julius replied, 'Yes!' and Mengele pointed to the left whereupon Julius started running and joined those to be saved from immediate death. He had escaped death twice, once after the severe beating at the hands of his captors and now again at the 'selection'. Julius was assigned to a slave labor camp next to Auschwitz where he worked at a drill press making parts for cannons for the Nazi army. A number, A4668, was tattooed on his arm which became his new identity.

Later in the fall of 1944, he dropped a piece of metal on his foot and his toe began to swell. He was put in the infirmary and while there he developed a high fever. Each night an inspector from Auschwitz came through and tagged the beds of all those too weak to work, assigning them

to be taken to the crematorium at Auschwitz the next morning. Julius¹ bed was tagged and when he awoke in the morning and saw the tag he asked the doctor for help. Just by chance, the doctor was a member of the same Zionist organization and a brother of a fellow inmate who had become close friends with Julius prior to his injury. The person in the bunk under Julius' bed had died unexpectedly during the night and the doctor removed the tag from Julius' bed and put it on the bed of the dead man underneath. Julius had escaped death again.

After he recovered, he returned to work. One day, the camp which was normally spotless was being especially spruced up and some type of stand was being built in the central area. There were two shifts at the camp from 7:00am to 7:00 pm, but on this day the day shift was lined up at 2:00PM and was marched back to the camp. They found the entire camp lined up for the *appel* [lineup] in front of a gallows that has been built that day. Three poor souls had been randomly chosen and were waiting to be hung. It was a demonstration, really more like a celebration, arranged in honor of the visitor who was whispered to be Adolph Eichman. Following the hanging of the three men, Eichman, stamping his feet in obvious pleasure, decided to have another hanging party. He went down the line of inmates and selected three more victims. He picked out the first one in the line and then walked three more steps and stood directly in front of Julius. He looked piercingly into Julius' eyes and cannot now remember his thoughts at that moment. Then suddenly, as Eichman reached out to grab him, for some reason that Julius does not understand, he grabbed the prisoner behind Julius and pulled him out of the line. Many times Julius thought of that moment and likened it to the story of Abraham in the Bible where the angel stayed his hand from the slaughter of his son, Isaac. After grabbing the fellow, he picked out one more and had them line up again in front of the gallows. The terrible scene was repeated once more, the noose, the kicking of the chair, the hanging and dangling, after which the camp was dismissed and the 'party' was over.

In late December, the noise of the advancing Russian soldiers was getting closer to the camp. The prisoners were loaded onto the train and taken to Matthausen, a concentration camp in Austria. It was a puzzle to Julius that the German army was denied the use of valuable transportation for the 8.8 cannons (best in the war) and the train given to a few hundred prisoners to be taken from Poland to Austria. When they arrived to Matthausen, it was January and the snow was knee deep. The prisoners were kept without any clothes in an unheated barn for three weeks where they huddled together day and night in sort of 'beehive' in order to keep from freezing. After this they were taken to Gusen to assemble machine guns. The camp was in a valley and the factory was at top of a hill which was reached by climbing 21 uneven stone steps. When anyone fell on these steps his tattoo number was recorded and he was excused from reporting to work the next day and instead scheduled to be killed and cremated. In early May, Julius fell on these steps and his number was recorded. He was told not to go to work the next day. For two days, he sat with a fellow prisoner in front of his barracks which happened to be the last barracks in the camp before the crematorium. Each of the two days the cart came by to fetch the two men, it was overly burdened with dead and dying bodies and there was no more room for any additional victims. The inmates pushing the cart announced that they would be back tomorrow to fetch them. As Julius explains, his mind was too numb and his body too weak from starvation to care anymore. That afternoon, May 5th, they joined the usual *appel* at exactly 5:00Pm as they always did. At 5:05, most unusually, the *appel* had still not begun. Suddenly, two men in green uniforms appeared at the gates- American soldiers. Some of the prisoners began to

shout, 'We are free!'. Remarkably, all the inmates stayed in the lineup and began to sing the national anthems --- one after another, from every nation in Europe. Then they surrounded the soldiers as if they were 'angles from heaven.' Julius looked at his liberators and wanting to say something with his limited knowledge of English, shouted out, 'God save the king!' Hearing this, the soldiers, laughing, answered him, 'We are Americans --- not British.' Ten days following his liberation, Julius received a certificate that allowed him to travel freely in Europe. As Julius felt, 'This piece of paper made me human being again.' He went to find his family. On returning home to Munkacs, he found that former neighbors had moved into his family home. The upper floor was changed to an apartment and the lower level was being used as a garage. In a rubbish pile in the rear he found family pictures including one of his himself, mother, father and brother taken shortly before war. For years this was the only photograph he had of his family before the war. His younger brother did not survive the death camps but his parents did. The rest of his family including grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins were victims as well.

Following his return home, the dilemma arose of where to start over. For two years, Julius worked undercover for the Haganah of Palestine. He was given an identity working with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) in the displaced persons (DP) camps. But his real task was to help returning survivors who were trying to make their way to the Italian shores to board boats leaving for Palestine. It was an illegal activity. At the time, the British had a blockade around Palestine and were blowing up any boats trying to run it through. Still, Julius kept a steady flow of refugees seeking shelter in what would soon become the nation of Israel. In 1947, Julius received a tuition scholarship from B'nai B'rith Hillel to attend the University of Georgia. He later transferred to Georgia Tech where a textile education was available and worked to support himself and to pay his tuition while attending school. Following graduation, he worked in several southern companies before moving his family to Ashville in 1966 to establish the first double-knit factory in the mountains, Blue Jay Knitting Mills.