

Leopold and Miriam Lowy

Leopold and Miriam Lowy were born on June 4, 1928 in Carpathia (now Ukraine), in the city of Berehovo, which was known for its rabbis. They came from a close family of six children and many uncles, aunts and cousins. Leo attended cheder (Jewish school) as well as public school.



Leo and Miriam's kindergarten class. Leo is in the front row on the left. Miriam is directly behind him (courtesy of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre).

Life began to change for the Lowy family in 1938, when the Czech government ceded the region to Hungary. Children were taught Hungarian in school. Some members of the Hungarian regime were anti-Semitic and adopted the swastika as their symbol. They began harassing Jewish families and robbing them of their belongings. In 1944 some prominent Jews from Berehovo were taken and never seen again. Soon afterward, all the Jewish families in the town were rounded up and sent to a brick factory. From there they were transported to Auschwitz by train, with a hundred or more people crowded into a cattle car.

At Auschwitz-Birkenau, Miriam and Leo were identified as twins and separated from the rest of their family. For about nine months, Dr. Mengele, whom Leo referred to as "Dr. Death," and many other doctors examined Leo and Miriam, sometimes alone and sometimes together. They injected them with fluids and took blood samples. Day after day, they measured different parts of their bodies; they checked their hands, bone structure, and eyes for color comparisons. They also took samples of their hair. Leo described the process as "... very scary, because the rooms we were taken to did not look like laboratories. They were grey and dingy."

Leo and his friend Kalman Bar-On slept in the same bunk and were inseparable. Kalman and his twin sister Judith were also part of Dr. Mengele's experiments. Every day Kalman and Leo had to go

to the guardhouse and clean the floors and shine the guards' boots. If they did not complete their jobs satisfactorily, the guards beat them.



Leo (on the right) with his friend Kalman Bar-On and Kalman's twin sister, Miriam (Kalman and Miriam's story was featured last week.)

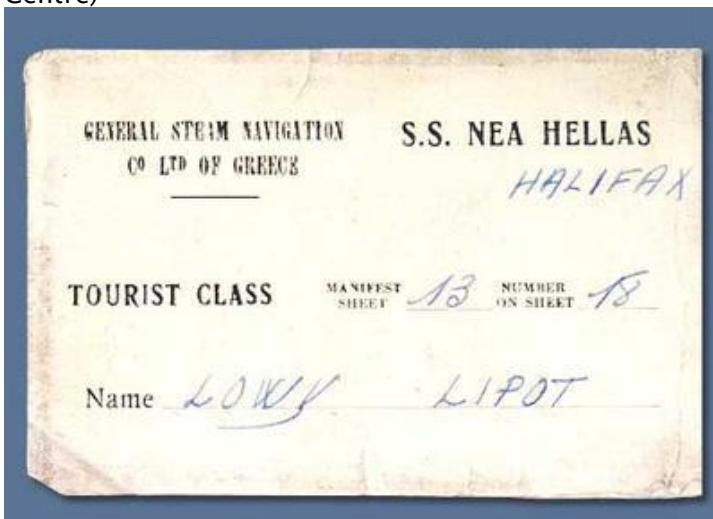
In January 1945, some of the prisoners were marched a couple miles from Birkenau to Auschwitz-I in the heavy snow and bitter cold. Leo escaped and hid in a basement until the next morning. When he emerged from his hiding place, he thought the camp had been deserted, but other prisoners began to emerge. A few days later, they were all liberated by the Russians.

Later Leo learned that Miriam, by some miracle, had met up with three of their sisters on the death march from Auschwitz. They were liberated by the Americans about four months later. Miriam survived, but tragically the three sisters were so weak that they died within a week of liberation. Everyone else in their family, and all the other children from their hometown, were killed in Auschwitz. If it weren't for the fact that Miriam and Leo were twins, they would not have survived either.

On March 10, 1948, Leo and Miriam sailed on the Greek ocean liner *Nea Hellas* from Genoa, Italy, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, with a group of about 115 orphans. They had to change their birth dates to make themselves younger, because the cut-off age was 18. The trip took two-and-a-half weeks. The orphans were each given five American dollars in spending money. Leo bought cigarettes and chocolate bars because, as he explained, "I had never had such things. I really pigged out."



Miriam and Leo before they left Europe, 1948 (courtesy of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre)



Leo's ship ID card (courtesy of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre)

When the ship landed in Halifax, a group of Jewish people from the community met them and gave them a beautiful reception. Leo and Miriam travelled on to Vancouver, British Columbia. When they arrived, they were separated and sent to live in different homes. Miriam lived with the Chernov family, and Leo lived with the Fox family. After Leo finished school, the Fox family helped him purchase Horne's Mens Wear (which later became Leo's Men's Wear). In 1954 he married Jocy Kalensky, and they raised three sons.



Leo and Jocy Lowy (courtesy of the Vancouver Holocaust Education Centre)

In 2000, Leo and his family travelled to Auschwitz-Birkenau to film a documentary about his life story, called *Leo's Journey*. About a year later, Kalman Bar-On, Leo's friend from Auschwitz-Birkenau who was living in Israel, saw the film and contacted him. They reunited in 2002 at Vancouver International Airport after 60 years apart. In Leo's words, "Reconnecting with him was very important to me. It helped me complete my journey."

Leo died on December 11, 2002. Miriam died in 1999, never having fully recovered from the trauma of Auschwitz.

Leo Lowy's tattoo number: A 1295

Miriam's: unknown