

# MILTON BELFER

## BIOGRAPHICAL PROFILE



Milton Belfer was born Meier Belfer to Sarah and Jacob Belfer on August 24, 1922, in Lodz, Poland. Milton grew up as the youngest of five children in a traditional Orthodox family. His sister Zelda married by the time he

was four years old, so Milton spent his youth looking up to his three older brothers: Mordechai, Israel, and Shulom. Milton's father managed the building where the family lived while Milton's mother ran a textile store that the family owned.

Growing up, Milton went to public school but also attended *heder* (private Jewish elementary school) and later, a *yeshiva* (orthodox Jewish school of higher learning) as part of his Jewish education. Although he remembers many incidents of antisemitism before the war, Milton enjoyed a busy social and cultural life centered around his hope of becoming a rabbi.

However, when the Germans invaded Poland in September 1939, Milton's life changed dramatically. Because the Belfer family lived in the section of Lodz that became part of the ghetto, they were able to stay in their home but had to give up all but one room. While there, Milton worked in the food distribution office and often obtained extra rations for his family. Despite having access to additional food, Milton lost his father and brother, Mordechai, in 1943, to starvation. That same year, Milton's brother, Shulom, died after becoming ill doing forced labor. One year later, Milton's sister and her family were selected for deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau where they were murdered.

In August 1944, the Lodz ghetto was liquidated, and Milton and his remaining family were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Upon arrival, Milton and his brother, Israel, were separated from their mother, who perished in the gas chambers. The two brothers remained at Auschwitz-Birkenau for a few weeks until they were transferred to Siegmarschönau, a satellite labor camp of Flossenbürg. After Siegmarschönau was bombed by Allied forces in early 1945, Milton and the other prisoners were taken to Hohenstein-Ernstthal — another Flossenbürg satellite camp. In mid-April, Milton and approximately 400 prisoners were forced on a death march but were liberated in Zlutice, Czechoslovakia, by the United States Army in May 1945.

After liberation, Milton and Israel returned to Lodz. A short time later, Milton left for Bad Wörishofen, a displaced persons' camp in Germany, where he met his future wife, Sally Collier. Milton and Sally married on September 26, 1946, and had their first daughter, Syma, in 1949. Soon after, with the help of Sally's family, the Belfers immigrated to the United States and settled in New York. Milton and Sally's second daughter, Marcia, was born in 1955 and a short time later, they joined Milton's brother, Israel, in São Paulo, Brazil, where Milton opened a sportswear business. Some time later, Milton and Sally left their family in Brazil to retire in the United States. At the time of his interview in 1996, Milton and Sally were living in Aventura, Florida, and had six grandchildren: Melissa, Jessica, Lisa, Michelle, Michael, and Raymond. ■



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