

FOCUS: Late New Bedford author's Holocaust story one of survival

Abraham Landau operated a tailoring business in New Bedford later in his life. The late author recalls his experience as a Holocaust survivor in a memoir planned for publication in September.

By Staff reports

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NEW BEDFORD —

Abe Landau's Holocaust journey is a bittersweet story of survival, a study of the strength of the human spirit and a graphic portrayal of man's inhumanity to man. His story is captured in a new book being released today at a special day of remembrance and celebration to mark the launching of Spinner Publications' new book, "Branded on My Arm and in My Soul: A Holocaust Memoir," by the late Abraham Landau, a New Bedford resident and activist.

Landau's near-idyllic life growing up in Wilczyn, Poland, in the 1920s and '30s was filled with all the joys of youth — attending cheder school, playing and picnicking with friends, working with his father and spending holidays with his loving family. Little did he know that his world would soon crumble around him.

In 1940, soon after the Nazi invasion of Poland, the town's Jewish families were rounded up and transported to a ghetto in Zagorow. The following year, an SS man burst into Abe's home, grabbed him and threw him into the back of a truck bound for a labor camp in Inowroclaw. The sight of his mother chasing the truck and falling beneath the spray of machine-gun fire would be his final image of her or of anyone in his immediate family.

Abe spent the next five years in 13 labor and concentration camps throughout the Reich — a slave for the Nazi machine committed to exterminating him and millions of other Jews. He built railroads in Poznan, mined coal in Gleiwitz, paved roads at Buchenwald and ran errands for death doctors at Auschwitz-Birkenau. He made the "Death March" from Auschwitz to Gleiwitz in 1945, and rode the death train from Dora to Bergen-Belsen before the Allied liberation in April 1945. Yet he emerged from the nightmare a man of faith and endurance, his spirit still alive after surviving starvation, beatings and brutal transports in cattle cars crisscrossing Europe.

Starting anew in the United States, Abe rebuilt his life — as a tailor, cantor, activist and the founder of the Holocaust Memorial in New Bedford. He frequently spoke about his horrific experience to civic groups and school children throughout the region. Abe died in 2000 and left behind this stirring memoir and survival story, warning that we must be ever vigilant to the dark

side of human nature. His is also a story of faith and renewal, celebrating the triumph of the human spirit.

Readers will discover how the author kept his faith in the face of unspeakable atrocities and later fought to create the Holocaust Memorial in New Bedford.

“Branded on My Arm and in My Soul” is a collaboration between Spinner Publications and the Jewish Federation of Greater New Bedford. Spinner Publications is a nonprofit small press located in New Bedford. During its 30 years in business, the organization has published more than 50 titles, including “Cranberry Harvest: A History of Cranberry Growing in Massachusetts,” “Portuguese Spinner: An American Story,” “Lincoln Park Remembered,” “Bom Dia!” (two secondary-level textbooks and curriculum materials for Portuguese language learning), and an award-winning five-volume series of anthologies on the people and culture of southeastern New England.

Edited by Joseph D. Thomas, Marsha L. McCabe and Jay Avila, the book is printed in crown quarto format and illustrated with more than 140 photographs drawn from repositories such as Yad Vashem Archives, United States Holocaust Museum, Aushwitz-Birkenau State Museum, German Federal Archives, Ghetto Fighters House Archives, National Archives of Poland and the Landau Family Collection. Endnotes, captions, sidebars, maps, an index and bibliography give the reader valuable contextual information about the Holocaust, World War II, Nazism, Poland and Europe.

The book launching event will be held at Tifereth Israel Synagogue, 145 Brownell Ave., New Bedford, on Sunday from 2 to 5 p.m. It includes a book signing, jazz and traditional music, a photography display, guest speakers, Polish food, kosher desserts and refreshments.

For more information, contact Spinner Publications at 508-994-4564 or visit <http://spinnerpub.com/branded-home.html>.

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