

# Rywek Żytnik

Rywek Żytnik was born Ruwen Żytnik on December 2, 1928, in Bukowa Mała, near Chełm, Poland. His father, Mosze Żytnik (b.1895), was a carpenter, and his mother, Brandl Ribajzen Żytnik (b. 1897), took care of the children. Rywek had six siblings: Ruchl Rózia, born in 1918; Herszl, born in 1920; Zalman, born in 1922; Idl, born in 1924; Malka Rajzl, born in 1926 and Gitl, born in 1930. In 1932, the Żytnik family moved to Sawin, Poland, where Mosze Żytnik had better job opportunities. In September 1939, the Soviet Army occupied Lublin, Chełm, and the surrounding area. In October 1939, the Soviets and Germans agreed to establish the Bug River as the border between the two occupying forces.

The Soviets warned the Jews in Sawin that great danger awaited them from the Germans; therefore, the Żytnik family and many other Jewish families moved eastwards. They spent three weeks in Lyubomil in Ukraine but were moved away from the German – Soviet border to Dashev (Dasiv), Ukraine, near Uman. In July 1941 the Germans occupied Dashev, and on a Friday in December 1941, they conducted the first “Aktion” in which Zalman Żytnik and Malka Rajzl Żytnik were shot, along with hundreds of other Jews. Four days later, on Tuesday night, Ukrainian auxiliary police surrounded the Jewish Quarter of Dashev, and in the morning German soldiers executed some 1,000 Jews.

After the second “Aktion,” the Germans established a ghetto in which some 120 Jewish families were left. A period of relative peace lasted until May 1942. During the third “Aktion,” Rywek lost his mother, Brandl Ribajzen Żytnik; his brother, Herszl, with his small daughter; his brother, Idl; and his youngest sister, Gitl. Ruchl Rózia, the donor’s oldest sister, obtained false identification papers and was able to pass as an Aryan. Rózia’s husband, Wigdor, was killed during his service in the Red Army. Mosze Żytnik, the donor’s father, was forced to build wooden crates for the Germans, who packed stolen property in them and shipped it to Germany. They killed him in January 1944. Rywek fled Dashev to a nearby forest, but at the end of the “Aktion,” he returned to the family house. He found out about the fate of his loved ones and saw that all of his family’s belongings had been stolen. When he met a young girl gathering his family photographs from the floor of his house, he asked her to give them to him, and she did.

Rywek asked two Russian women, Wiera and Nadia, who lived at the outskirts of town, to give him a job as a shepherd and to let him stay in their house. In September 1942 the Germans liquidated the Jewish population of Dashev. It became too dangerous for Rywek to hide in Wiera and Nadia’s house, and he had to leave. Rywek hid in the barn of Wasilij Rataj, a shoemaker and an acquaintance of his brother-in-law, Wigdor. Rywek was allowed to stay on condition that he could leave the barn only during the night. Rywek, 14 years old at that time, spent one year in the barn, always alone, training himself to urinate only at night and eating once a day. In October 1943 Rywek left Rataj’s barn and joined a partisan group in a nearby forest. The Soviet Army liberated Dashev on January 14, 1944, when Rywek Żytnik was fifteen years old. He settled in Kiev, Ukraine, and in 1949 he married Mura Fersztman, a fellow survivor. Their two sons, Boris and Michał, were born in Kiev. In 1959 the family moved to Wrocław, Poland, and in 1969 they left Poland for Denmark where they currently reside.