



## A BOOK THAT WILL BE NEW BEDFORD'S WITNESS TO THE HOLOCAUST

BY JACK SPILLANE, APRIL 17, 2011

There was once, and not so long ago, a Jewish man who came of age in the hell of the Nazi concentration camps.

Abraham Landau's personal story was as harrowing as anything out of the most gruesome Holocaust documentary. Even movies like *Schindler's List* pale before parts of what happened to the teenaged Landau after he was snatched from his family in one of the Polish Jewish ghettos organized by the Germans in 1940.

Landau survived the terror of the Nazi underworld. And he eventually triumphed over it — living for more than half a century as a respected New Bedford tailor.

In his senior years, after a life of trauma, Landau quite literally became the city's personal teacher and witness to the 20th century's seminal event of man's inhumanity to man: The Holocaust.

It would not be an understatement to say that without Landau, the very powerful Holocaust memorial at Buttonwood Park would not exist.

Spinner Publications, the city's well-respected publisher of local history and culture, hopes to tell Landau's story in a new book, "Branded on My Arm and in My Soul," scheduled for publication in September.

The Jewish Federation of Greater New Bedford, along with Spinner and the Landau family, then plan to use the book to teach New Bedford's own Holocaust story to the city's middle and high schoolers.

It will be a tale that acquaints a new generation of New Bedford to the devastating power of racism and prejudice and the connection of that kind of prejudice to the descent into unspeakable and animalistic cruelty that was brazenly performed by one of the most technologically-advanced nations in world history.

Landau's story is based on interviews he originally did with UMass Dartmouth professors in the 1980s. But you can't read the very fine story about him being written for Spinner by local author Marsha McCabe without being moved to renewed horror, no matter how many Holocaust stories you have read or films you have seen.

It's the shattering of hope implicit in this systematic enslavement and torture of a young man, and his will, in spite of the abuse, to survive. It reaches into your own soul.

Landau was transferred between no fewer than 14 separate concentration camps as the Germans attempted to work what had been a vital, multi-lingual young man to death.

Here's a glimpse of some of his experiences in McCabe's draft of "Branded on My Arm."

In the Zagarow Ghetto, Landau said German guards ordered his own father to lash his naked body 16 times with a leather whip. His crime? After months of slave labor, he had been afraid to report to work one day at a dangerous construction job.

By the time Landau arrived at Auschwitz in 1943 — four years after being finally separated from his parents, two sisters and brother — his life had become a surreal series of traumas.

At Auschwitz, Landau, because he spoke good German, recalled running messages and medications to doctors as they performed torturous experiments on young boys and pregnant girls.

It was a world that left Landau with no illusions about what human beings are capable of, including himself.



Abraham Landau sits in his tailor shop in New Bedford. A survivor of the Holocaust, his story will be told in a new book by Spinner Publications, "Branded on My Arm and in My Soul."

In parts of the memoir, he talks of starving prisoners fighting each other for scraps of cheese and acknowledges his own fight with other prisoners for the best place in a filthy, over-crowded boxcar so he could get air.

"I learned something about human nature in the camps," he said. "You fight your friend for that extra bit of food and he fights you. You no longer have any dignity — dignity is for people who are safe and eat regularly."

Landau is New Bedford's personal link to the devastating events of the Holocaust and his story needs to be published and taught, for both his history and New Bedford's.

But the publishers and friends of Landau need your help. We're not talking about an Amazon.com blockbuster here, but a specialty book designed to provide a local testament and a permanent resource for this community.

Spinner, working with Marsha Onufrak and Cindy Yoken of the Jewish Federation and others, set a minimum goal of \$25,000 for publication and still has almost \$15,000 to go. An anonymous matching donor will match half that amount if Spinner and the federation can raise the first \$7,500.

You can make a donation by going to the Spinner website and using the "kickstarter" link, which is a fundraising site. You can also mail a check to Spinner at 164 William St., New Bedford, MA 02740, or even take cash to that address.

McCabe recalled from the UMass interviews that Landau originally felt he was a misfit for New Bedford after the local Jewish community sponsored him to come here because of his experience in the clothing industry. He was a cosmopolitan man and thought he might have been better off in New York.

But, because New Bedford was a small place, Landau had a chance to tell his story here that he might not have had in the big city.

"I always felt this was the city that gave him his voice," said McCabe. "I don't think he could ever quite have bloomed in New York the way he had here."

Abraham Landau gave a testimony to New Bedford that is forever. There's no doubt that the community will now rise up and give that tribute back to him. — Contact Jack Spillane at [jspillane@s-t.com](mailto:jspillane@s-t.com)