

MOSHYNISKI, Eugene

Former prisoner of war

# Moshynski 'didn't think I'd live to see age of 70'

By Tom Gavey

The Intelligencer

All of us have milestones.

It's the road we travel in reaching them that is the story.

Eugene Moshynski celebrated his 70th birthday Aug. 21.

It was a birthday the Rednersville Road man doubted he'd live to enjoy 53 years ago.

You see, Eugene Moshynski spent his 17th birthday in a Nazi concentration camp — the infamous Dachau, just 26 kilometres from picturesque Munich but a lifetime of woe away from the life he had known.

Like many in his native Poland, Moshynski was literally snatched from his home by German storm troopers in 1940 and hauled away to a life of not enough food, warmth or medicine.

Today, Moshynski has letters and photographs he retrieved from his parents' home in Lodz, Poland, including a letter he penned to them from Dachau on his 17th birthday.

Fifty-three years later he's written an unpublished novel he has illustrated himself, both to put on paper his thoughts and feelings and to leave a permanent record of what he and others went through — for his children.

"We were arrested because the Germans wanted to terrorize the people. They used to literally walk down the street and round people up," says Moshynski.

He would spend the next five years at Dachau, watching others around him suffer and die from illnesses that weren't treated.

In the Moshynski family, Eugene's suffering was nothing new. His grandfather and father were both prisoners before him. His grandfather was exiled to Siberia while his father was a forced laborer during the First World War.

His book is entitled "Will My Son Be A P.O.W.?"

"When we were taken I was dressed for summer and it got cold in the winter. We were never given warm clothing and we were always hungry," he says.

In fact, the desire to have a roof under his head and decent food led Moshynski to volunteer to have his appendix removed — just so young German doctors could practice their craft.

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"It got me away from the cold. There were about 30,000 people in the camp and it was just pure luck to get into the hospital," he says.

Luckily, Moshynski's talent as an artist (on display today in his Rednersville home) made him popular at the hospital and he was kept longer than necessary so the staff could enjoy his cartoons.

During his stay at Dachau, Moshynski saw examples of terrible cruelty. He still remembers a man with badly diseased legs being kicked by an S.S. trooper and left to die on a cold street.

In 1945 Moshynski and thousands of others were freed by American troops and in 1948 he emigrated with his wife to Canada. He started working at a hotel in Midland, Ontario and then moved to Toronto.

From there, Moshynski met a family that ran a pants factory in Trenton and later he moved on to work for Bata Shoes in Batawa.

"I started designing and then became a commercial artist. Soon, I was making a living at that," he says.

Today, he's retired but still finds himself drawn to paint and craft by persistent customers.

"Seventeen is a special time, and when I look back on the letter I wrote my parents it all comes back to me that I didn't think I would ever live to see 70," he says.

Canadians, Moshynski says, should count their blessings. They've never been subjected to the horrors of war and occupation.

And, he says he has a special feeling for those in war torn Bosnia.

"I know I was living a normal life as a student and had it taken away. I think those people are now going through the same thing," Moshynski sighs.



Intelligencer photo by Tom Gavey

Eugene Moshynski has a letter he sent to his parents from a German concentration camp.

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