

Cesare Ugranskis

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Summary

Cesare Ugranskis was born November 18, 1929 in Pinerelo, Italy as his parents lived there while his father attended Cavalry School as a Lithuanian Army Officer. Cesare was the eldest of six children though two died young. His brother, Roma, was born two years after him in Lithuania as was Joseph who was born 10 years later and Grazina, born a year after him. His parents, Krasaukas and Joseph lived in Italy from 1928 to 1930 and then returned to Lithuania and lived in Alytus until 1939 when they moved to Kaunas. There Cesare sometimes played with his grandmother's Jewish neighbors. The Ugranskis were a Catholic family but not church-going. When Russia occupied Lithuania in 1940, his father became a Colonel in the Red Army stationed in Vilnius and an officer lived with them. He never got involved in politics so kept his life. The following year Germany occupied Lithuania and his father deserted the Red Army. He obtained a position as Director of the Vilnius Prison where Jews were shot which he did not want to be a participant. His request to be relieved of his position was granted and he returned to his family in Kaunas where he became a Director of a saw mill. He remained at that position until the family left in August 1944. Jews had to wear the Jewish star in Kaunas and move into a ghetto. Thirty percent of the populace in Kaunas was Jewish. There were 12 forts surrounding the city which were built by Catherine the Great. Numbers 4, 5 and 9 were used for storage and as prisons. Some Jews were killed in Number 4 and even more in Number 9. The family lived close to Number 5 so Cesare played there with his friends. He saw over a thousand men, women and children, wearing a Star of David, march toward Number 9 and throw their belongings in a pile. Then they walked into the Fort and he heard shots but Cesare and his friends did not see the people being shot nor heard their cries. Soon a guard ran after Cesare and his friends so they fled and he told his parents about the event. The Guards wore uniforms from the Lithuanian and Ukrainian Armies. When it was windy, there was a strong smell coming from that area. Maps are shown of the forts of the city. His mother obtained food for them through the black market. In February 1944 in Number Four the Germans had a group of Russian POWs dig up bodies, put them in piles and set them on fire and this also brought a strong smell to their home. In summer 1944 the family heard cannons so knew the Russians were advancing so they left as Cesare's father had deserted the Russian Army. They took a train to Dresden where Cesare and his father worked in a military factory which made machines for submarines. When Dresden was bombed, Cesare and his father survived in the factory's basement but his mother was home with the children. She got injured and they found her in a hospital with a gangrenous leg. She survived and they walked into Czechoslovakia carrying their belongings in a cart. The Americans withdrew and the Russians occupied Czechoslovakia. The family traveled from Sel to Hof to Wurzburg, Germany, where they remained in a DP camp until 1949. His father worked for the Americans as commander of a Lithuanian guard company and later helped build bridges across the Rhine. Cesare had attended grammar school in Lithuania and completed high school there.

The family immigrated to the US in 1949 and his father worked in a furniture factory until he was 78. Cesare made brass plates for the kitchen and then went to work for Hughes Aircraft for 29 years as an electrical engineer. He married a girl from Chicago and after 37 years, she left him. They had a daughter who became a radiologist and got married. Cesare learned there was a Jew in his mother's family ancestry, he got interested but researched it unsuccessfully. The Lithuanians were antisemitic as felt the Jews were different as they were organized and successful businessmen so were jealous of their success. Cesare continues to read about Lithuania's actions in the Holocaust. He feels you should give such information to teenagers who are interested.