David Blitzer bio

David Blitzer was born in 1922 in the Polish town of Oswiecim, better known by its German name Auschwitz. He however called it by its Yiddish name, Oshpitzin. He was the third child of a family of 3 brothers and 3 sisters. The family was pious; they were Bobover chasids and David was yeshiva-educated.

When the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, the Jews were moved to a town 30 kilometers way, called Sosnowiec.. Ultimately David & his brother Joshua worked in a series of slave labor camps but interestingly never in Auschwitz. His brother died on a forced march just weeks before liberation. David later learned that his two sisters were shot in the marketplace & his parents and baby brother were gassed at Auschwitz. Only his sister Rachel, Irv Stein’s mother, survived.

After the war, while searching for his sister, he met a young woman on a train named Cesia Zylberfuden. They decided 3 days later to get married. Immediately after being married, they found a guide who smuggled them over the border from Poland to the American sector of Germany. Their goal was to emigrate to America. In Germany they lived in Augsburg, which is about a half hour from Munich. David quickly became a successful businessman with his own dry goods firm employing some 24 people. Their two children, Helena and Wolf, were both born there.

One day David saw a long line & got on it because in those days if you saw people in a line, you figured they were getting something you would want too. It turned out to be a line for visas to America. David got visas for the whole family including his and Cesia’s siblings. The US didn’t want all the refugees to settle in one place so they arranged for them to settle in various cities. David’s visa was for Buffalo, New York, which pleased him because he had heard of New York. Little did he know that Buffalo was more than 400 miles from New York City!

The Blitzers came to America in 1949. They knew not a word of English nor did they have any family or friends. With the help of HIAS (the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society), David got an apartment on William Street and a job at Bethlehem Steel but it was a far cry from the comfortable life he had in Germany with a maid and a nanny for the children. He and his brother-in-law Sam Friedman decided to open a kosher restaurant and delicatessen on Hertel Avenue. Blitzer’s became a fixture in Buffalo.

Sam Friedman stayed in the deli business but Dave had a friend in New Jersey who had become a successful home builder. He decided to give that a try, first building a home for his own family on Parkwood in Kenmore. He knew nothing about construction but the tradesmen taught him what he needed to know. He would write down their instructions in Hebrew characters (as Yiddish is written). Ultimately the firm he built became Forbes Homes, at one time the largest home builder in western New York.
Both David & Cesia became active leaders in the Jewish Community. David was president of Ahavas Achim Lubavitch synagogue on Tacoma and Cesia became president of the city-wide Hadassah organization.

David was a proud and generous Jew and Zionist, a patriotic and grateful American, but he was also a quiet and gentle man who never had a mean thing to say about anybody. If someone was nasty, he said that person had “no common sense” so why should he get upset? He was always upbeat despite his terrible losses. He adored his wife and family but he had serious misgivings about his son becoming a journalist (he wanted him to go to law school). In the end, however, he became Wolf’s his second-biggest fan (the first was Wolf’s mother).

He died in 2002, a happy man beloved by his wife and children and 5 grandchildren and all who knew him.