



# Video Story Transcript

## A Twist of Fate: My Jewish Father in World War II

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**Link to YouTube Video:**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k2p1L6FEvZg>

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Note: The following is a transcription of a spoken story performance and may not reflect textbook perfect English. It will guide you as you listen (or read) along.

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Hi, I'm Heather Forrest. My father was a... gentle giant. He was six foot seven and had soft blue eyes. He was a formidable basketball player for Weequahic High School in Newark, New Jersey back in 1942. He hoped that someday he would get a scholarship to go to college because his family was very, very poor.

He lived on Schuyler Avenue with his mother, my grandma Sadie, who had come to the United States as an immigrant in the early 1900s to escape the pogroms in Eastern Europe. These were organized violent riots against the Jews. She came to join her husband, Jacob Israel, who had come to the United States a few years earlier to seek his fortune. And when they were reunited, they had several children. And then Jacob Israel died in a construction accident. And Sadie was forced to support the family alone, which she did with her weekly winnings from a weekly poker game she held in the parlor.

She worried all the time about her son Emmanuel. "Manny," she would say, "Basketball is not a job. Perhaps you should learn a trade. Think about it. Maybe, maybe you could take up typing."

My father listened to his mother and the next day joined the secretarial program at Weequahic High School. He liked typing because he was the only boy in the class. And because he was competitive by nature, in a very short amount of time, he could type 120 words a minute. And, of course, he was eager to show off his skill to any girl who would watch.

You know, he did get that basketball scholarship, a full scholarship, but he didn't take it... because of the letters. The letters that were coming from relatives in Europe to people in the neighborhood. Letters, desperate pleas, for sponsorship so they could escape the Nazi horror that was unfolding around them.

It was the spring of 1942, and although it was not being reported in the American newspapers, everybody in the neighborhood knew what was happening in Europe. Jews were being forced to wear yellow stars on their jackets when they walked in the streets. Jews were being forced from their businesses and from their homes. They were being herded into ghettos, locked ghettos. They were being rounded up from rural villages, and put on trains, and sent off to what they thought were work camps. Every Jewish boy in the neighborhood, including my father, set aside their life's goals and joined the army to go fight Hitler.

And so, my father found himself at Fort Dix in southern New Jersey for basic training. He was in an infantry platoon when he said the "muckety muck" came. He told me about the visitor. He was a straight-backed, high military official. And so, all the men in his platoon lined up in front of the barracks.

And the "muckety muck," as my dad called him, addressed the group. He said, "There's a war goin' on over there. Everybody needs to do their part. Any of you jokers know how to type?"

Well, only my father stepped forward, and he went off with that man who turned out to be the commander of an Army hospital ship. My father became his personal secretary and spent the rest of the war with the 200<sup>th</sup> Hospital Complement serving in the North Atlantic. Every other man in my father's infantry platoon was killed in battle. My father survived because he knew how to type.

When a young man is killed in battle, it's not just his life that's lost, it's his family line that disappears. And so, you see, if it wasn't for typing, I wouldn't be here to tell you this story.