

# From Poland to Parliament Hill

## Israel Unger's story begins in hiding and ends with renown



Israel Unger meeting Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Nov. 5, 2013.

By Darren Thompson

Early in November, Israel Unger travelled to Parliament Hill to introduce his memoir, *The Unwritten Diary of Israel Unger*. After being shown the Peace Tower, the Parliamentary Library, and Sir John A. Macdonald's original office, Israel was told that someone had requested a short meeting. "Who?" Israel asked. He was told only that the meeting would be brief.

Israel Unger wasn't planning on meeting Stephen Harper that day, but he did.

The meeting can be read as a culmination of two events: The promotional tour for his book, co-written with Carolyn Gammon. And a lifetime of extraordinary achievement in Canada—one born of incredible adversity.

Israel and his family were in Tarnow, Poland, when the Nazis came. At the time there were 25,000 Jewish people living there. By the end of the Second World War there were nine, hiding in an attic crawlspace above the Dagnan flour mill.

Augustyn Dagnan, like Oskar Schindler, had a list of Jewish workers he was permitted to use for labour in his factory, as it was deemed "essential to the war effort." The list—and the work—kept those on it from being shipped away to the concentration camps.

Israel's father, Markus, is the first name on Dagnan's list. Being on the list gave Markus and his family enough time to create a hideout behind the a wall in the attic above the factory. The Ungers hid there for two years.

In 1951, after moving to Montreal, Israel's new life began.

That Israel Unger survived the Holocaust and, with the help of Carolyn Gammon, was able to write about the experience is a tremendous feat. But that isn't the bulk of Israel's story. *The Unwritten Diary of Israel Unger* is as much a story of an immigrant in Canada taking advantage of what resources were available to build a rewarding and accomplished life. As a child Israel hid behind a wall in a flour mill in Poland, his life in constant jeopardy. Today, he is the Dean Emeritus of Science at the University of New Brunswick, a talented writer, a public figure, and much more than a survivor.



Israel Unger and Stephen Harper pictured with the book.

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