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CANADA

The Holocaust remembered on the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Europe

Thu., May 7, 2020 | 5 min. read

May 8 marks the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Europe — and many thousands of Holocaust survivors — from the brutal terror of Nazi Germany.

Today there are approximately 350,000 Holocaust survivors still alive around the world. Many of these survivors overcame their trauma, and began their lives again — starting new families, launching careers and founding businesses, becoming active contributors to their communities and their societies as a whole. Many continue to share their stories with young people. Yet, as any survivor will readily acknowledge, they live constantly with their tragic memories.

In the twilight of their lives, many survivors have taken to recording their life stories, so that the memory of their family members is preserved, and so that the record of their extraordinary experiences — and the lessons to be learned from them — is not lost to future generations.

Here are excerpts and photos of some of their stories taken from *Witness: Passing the Torch of Holocaust Memory to New Generations*, compiled by Eli Rubenstein:

Prisoner 157615



“My father, Icek (Irving) Cymbler from Zawiercie, Poland, was prisoner number 157615. That number was tattooed on his arm. He was 15 when he arrived in Auschwitz, but he lied about his age. As a result, he was not gassed, as his parents and three sisters eventually were. Instead, he was sent to a slave labour camp in Warsaw. In August 1944, he was sent on a Death March to Dachau. On April 30, 1945, the U.S. army liberated him as he rode a train headed to the Tyrolean mountains. The Nazis were waiting there to execute him and his fellow prisoners.

“In 2008, my father returned with me to Auschwitz-Birkenau on the March of the Living. He had a photo of himself in his Dachau prisoner uniform taken a year after the liberation. I had an enlargement made and he held it proudly as we marched in Auschwitz. He had survived. “My father passed away in 2011, two days shy of his 84th birthday. I miss him.” – Jeffrey Cymbler

Do Not Create the Same Hatred That Was Done to Us



Max Glauhen was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1928. During the war, he survived the Warsaw Ghetto and several camps including Majdanek (where much of his family perished), Budzyn, and Flossenburg, before he was liberated on April 23, 1945. He has returned to Poland on the March of the Living eight times, sharing his difficult story with young students in a way that he hopes will encourage them to build a better world for all humanity. As he says, “I am a strong believer that we must tell the stories to the youngsters — they are going to be our witnesses. But please present them in a way, with the kind of emotions, that will not create the same hatred that was done to us.”

The 2012 March of the Living was especially significant to Max, when he saw the group of blind participants with their guide dogs. “When I saw the dogs, I wanted to honour the courage these blind people had to come on a trip like this. It so touched my heart to see that the same animals used by the Nazis to maim us are now helping us, here in this very spot.”

Drop By Drop By Drop



“I always tell the young that I am carrying a torch of well-being and goodness. Despite the fact that it could have been a bitter one, I believe that my torch should be like the Olympic torch, a torch that brings goodwill on Earth,” says Holocaust survivor Pinchas Gutter.

“We had a person named Moses on our trip, a survivor of the genocide in Rwanda. It was incredible how he bonded with me, by my being able to tell my stories. He wrote a letter about how it’s much easier for him to accept, to live in the future because I have given him another Weltanschauung, another world view. It’s very important for Holocaust survivors — or anybody else — to spread togetherness and goodwill and I think it’s the young people specifically who can create this. Because drop by drop by drop, like water on a stone, the world can become a better place.”

What Drew Him Back



Ernest Ehrmann was deported to Auschwitz when he was only 16 years of age. When he returned home after liberation, he discovered his beloved parents had been murdered in Auschwitz. Angry at God, about being a Jew, he vowed never to enter synagogue ever again.

“I felt like I lost a big part of my youth...I didn’t have the life of a young man — it was robbed from me. It was taken because I was a Jew.”

But his love and respect for his parents drew him back. One night he had a dream...his parents — who he loved dearly — appeared and pleaded with him, “Is this the way we brought you up? Without any regard for our tradition, for how we raised you?” He woke up in a cold sweat and began crying. “I loved and respected my parents so much, I decided, that for their sake, I’d return to Judaism.”

Since that fateful dream, Ernest has led an Orthodox Jewish life. But when asked if he still believes in God after the Shoah, he shakes his head sadly, and says he is simply unable to answer that question.

Under This Same Sky

Frank Lowy related his story to participants on a March of the Living, standing in front of a cattle car used to transport Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

“A few months after my Bar Mitzvah, my father disappeared. I waited for almost 50 years (to find out what happened to him). In all that time, I never forgot him. Even in my dreams. So here I am, with you all in Birkenau. I know he was also here, under this same sky. Just like almost half a million Hungarian Jews, he came to this place in a wagon, and almost immediately after arriving, disappeared as smoke into this sky. I was 13 when I lost my father and now I am 82 — and you know, I still miss him...I still feel the loss of my father. But there is something I have gained. I never realized that he had strength — the spiritual strength — to take on the brutal guards here. No matter how hard they hit him, he protected the sanctity of his tallit and tefillin (religious objects). They could break his body but they could not break his spirit. The tallit and tefillin were part of him, part of his personal relationship with God. He was ready to die for them. And he did.”

A True Love’s Kiss

Halina Birenbaum tells students about how she survived the Warsaw ghetto, Majdanek, and Auschwitz.

“I remember there was this roll call. And I had this fleeting thought. Maybe one day I will burn in this crematoria — and I will never have experienced a true love’s kiss...When you are 14, you have different thoughts before you die.”

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