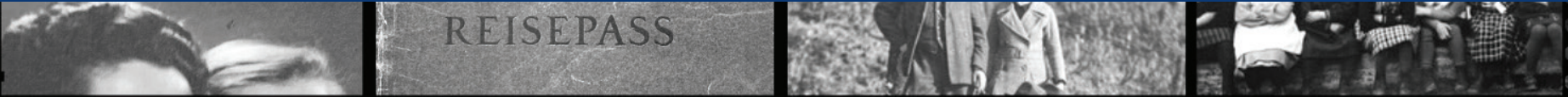


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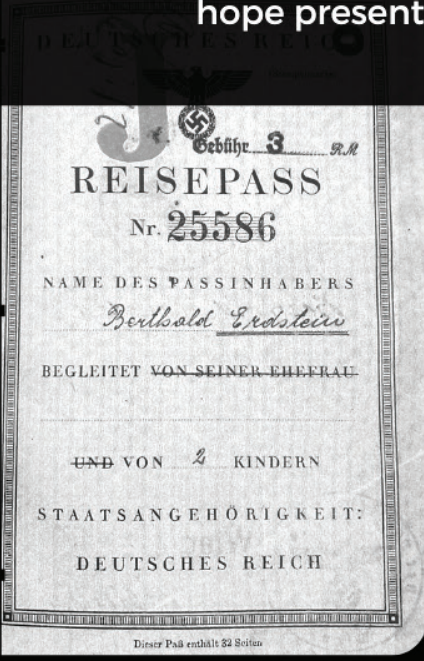
Friday, January 27, 2023



BEARING WITNESS

HOLOCAUST EDUCATION & AWARENESS

Here in Sarasota County, heroes live on our streets, in our neighborhoods, and throughout our towns. They have suffered unimaginable losses and now serve as testaments to the strength, resilience, and hope present in humankind. They are Holocaust survivors, and these are their stories.

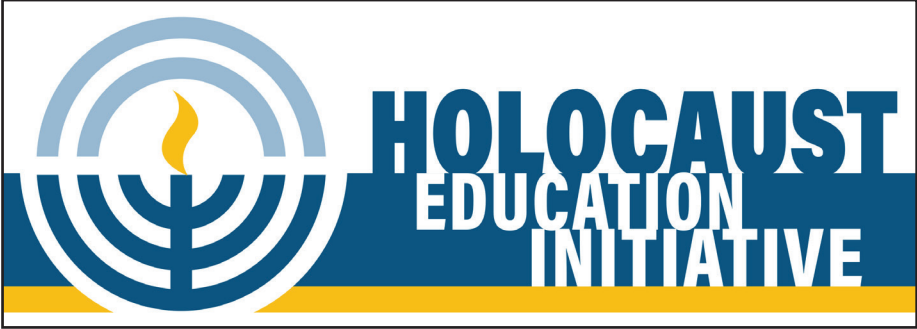


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An Introduction

by Alyson Mizanin
Editor-in-Chief

When journalism adviser Chris Lenerz first mentioned interview opportunities he had received from Bette Zaret of the Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee (JFSM) to our Torch staff last year, I remember our classroom going silent before over half of us raised our hands, wondering how best we could contribute.

This issue really started then, even though at the time, we didn't know it.

Over a year, ten Holocaust survivor stories, and a fair share of logistics later, we present to you an extension of the JFSM's Holocaust Education Initiative. In this issue, you'll find all ten of the survivors' stories, alongside stories highlighting Pine View projects carried out in the name of Holocaust education.

As someone who watched this project develop throughout a handful of stages, I mean it when I say that this is the most important piece of work

The Torch has ever crafted. Beyond the hours poured into the interviewing, writing, and designing processes, you'll find incomprehensible feats of strength within these stories of survival. I hope you are as inspired by their testimonies as all our staffers were.

None of this would've been possible without the constant support of Bette Zaret and the JFSM. We thank you for your dedication to Holocaust education.

To the survivors, there are no words that fully encapsulate our appreciation and gratitude. We hope that, through this issue, your stories are spread far and wide, and that your strength is known and recognized by many.

As antisemitism rises throughout our country and world, take from these stories the truth: that the Holocaust happened, that we as a society are lucky enough to hear and learn from these survivors even in 2023, and that there exist countless opportunities for growth, resilience, and determination in our lives today.

Beyond the Canvas

by Sofia Giannattasio
Asst. News Editor

Portraiture is considered one of the most intimate art forms; when depicting someone through art, you are obviously tasked with depicting their physical features, but the piece would be nothing without a soul lingering behind the eyes. In art teacher Louis Miller's 2D-2 Art class, students were trusted with the project of drawing some of the strongest souls on the planet: Holocaust survivors.

The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee approached Miller with the idea for the portraits to be used in a moving exhibit to highlight survivors of the Holocaust.

"[The Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee] approached us to see if we wanted to integrate portraiture of these survivors, so we did," Miller said.



Over the course of a month, tenth-graders Alexandra Kahl, Ava Wasilewski, and Kalyn Wiggins along with eleventh-grader Tanner Isaacs used various pencil values to draw six sur-

vivors and later learn their stories.

While practicing anatomy and the basics of portraits, they used charcoal. Later they moved into more complex detail with pencil. After several weeks of drawing, the students met and presented their pieces to the survivors.

The students got to meet the very same survivors that they drew January 12, present their portraits to them, and hear their stories.

Miller has been anticipating the conclusion and presentation of this project for quite some time.

"I think everybody enjoyed it," Miller said. "It was just nice to see it put things in perspective, I think, for your age, students here — when you see someone who's lived through something that was really, really intense and be able to survive it and live another whole life after that."

All four participating students commented on the immeasurable impact they felt from the project.

"It was really strange to think of how these people have lived through so much, and now they're standing here in front of us today," Wasilewski said.

PHOTO BY FELICITY CHANG

It was really strange to think of how these people have lived through so much, and now they're standing here in front of us today,"
Ava Wasilewski,
tenth-grader

Behind the Camera

by Terry Shen
Asst. Match Editor-in-Chief

While the Torch was busy writing stories, Pine View's TV production class was working on a documentary known as the Holocaust Survivors Film Project (HSFP).

The HSFP was an effort to share the stories of survivors and the Holocaust itself. It was a combined effort between The Torch, TV production, and the Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee (JFSM), who made it possible for survivors to volunteer their time to share their stories.

According to tenth-grader Veronika Startseva, who worked with filming, "This film will not allow us to forget... the fight against antisemitism."

Contact with Pine View first came from JFSM, who contacted administration about potential interest. For TV production students like Startseva, it started with a sign-up sheet. Though most students joined to gain experience, it turned into something

much more.

Not only was the documentary a rewarding experience for students like Startseva and eleventh-grader Mark Schroeter, but also it was unique. Hearing the stories firsthand, the horrors and the difficulties that many had to go through during the Holocaust, was heartbreaking.

Schroeter, the HSFP director and producer, said that in school, "we see the Holocaust in the textbook, as a very 'it happened' view. It doesn't go... in depth about specifics or anything like that, which is a bit of a shame."

Startseva agreed, saying, "I am extremely grateful for having the opportunity to be able to hear someone's experiences by sitting directly across from them."

Schroeter said that the documentary will provide students with a more in-depth perspective on the Holocaust.

"All students need to see at least part of the articles or documentary," he said.



Scan this QR code to watch the Holocaust Survivors Film Project, put together through the efforts of Pine View's TV Production class.



Bette Zaret of the Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee speaks to participating Holocaust survivors and Pine View art students. The students drew portraits of the survivors prior to meeting and presenting them with their respective pieces. PHOTO COURTESY OF TRICIA ALLEN



Pictured left to right, tenth-grader Kalyn Wiggins, tenth-grader Ava Wasilewski, eleventh-grader Tanner Isaacs, and tenth-grader Alexandra Kahl pose with their portraits. Each of the four students shared the immense impact participating in the project had on them. PHOTO COURTESY OF TRICIA ALLEN

Making an impact

Students teach and learn within Impact Theatre program



Located at the corner of Central Avenue and 5th Street in Sarasota, the Impact Theatre mural highlights the project's message of connecting Holocaust survivors and those who experienced segregation with Sarasota students. Tenth-grader EllaRose Sherman contributed to the painting process. PHOTO COURTESY OF BETTE ZARET

by Emmy Li
Webmaster

Standing on the stage with a painting of a golden eagle, tenth-grader EllaRose Sherman faces a crowd of African-American and Jewish elders and fellow students.

"To represent a whole life, and especially a life so rich and complex as James Brown's, is a difficult task," Sherman said. "The bird used in this painting is a golden eagle, which commonly represents power, respect, and nobility. While speaking with Mr. Brown, the detail and power with which he told his stories commanded respect, making the golden eagle an appropriate symbol for him."

This speech by Sherman was part of a community event known as the Impact Theatre, where Jewish students in Sarasota interviewed African-American elders and African-American students interviewed Jewish elders. Among the participants were Sherman, eleventh-grader Spencer Cohen, and twelfth-grader Clementine Silver Schwartz.



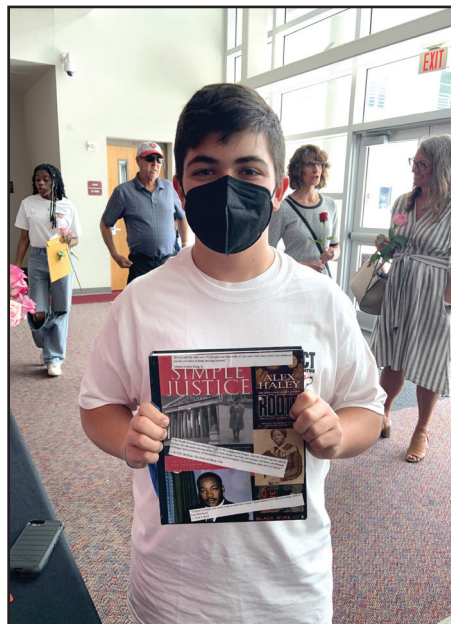
During the Impact Theatre town hall, twelfth-grader Clementine Silver Schwartz poses with the elder she interviewed, Mary Mack. Silver Schwartz hopes the Impact Theatre can further connect the Sarasota community. PHOTO BY FELICITY CHANG

"Impact Theatre is a project that was started last year to connect the Jewish and Black communities of Sarasota. It's based on the ideas of Rabbi Heschel and Martin Luther King Jr., what they did together in the sixties," Silver Schwartz said. "They marched and they connected the communities and tried to promote peace overall. That's what Impact Theatre is doing through education opportunities and interviewing."

The students who went through the program hope that this information can be spread throughout the Sarasota community.

"It's definitely an education that you can't gain at school, connecting Sarasota a little bit more because we are a very segregated community, unfortunately," Silver Schwartz said.

"I've definitely gained a lot more insight into the struggles that certain people have faced," Cohen said. "Just keep an open mind because everybody's going through a different situation that you could be completely oblivious to or you could heavily relate to... Every situation is unique."



Eleventh-grader Spencer Cohen holds the Lois Wilkens Project, a book detailing firsthand accounts of racism. He created it in honor of the elder he interviewed and hopes that it will be placed in the Newtown library. PHOTO BY FELICITY CHANG



With paint in hand, tenth-grader EllaRose Sherman works on the Impact Theatre mural. An artist, Sherman utilized her talents through her work with the program. PHOTO COURTESY OF BETTE ZARET

Growing a garden

by Shelby Brann

Former Torch Staffer

On Nov. 18, 2021, fifth-grade classes joined a Zoom call led by Marlies Gluck, a Holocaust survivor who told her story prior to the dedication ceremony of the Daffodil Project Holocaust Memorial Garden. Placed by the elementary playground, the garden was made as part of a worldwide initiative, The Daffodil Project, that's working to plant 1.5 million daffodils, which corresponds with the number of children who died in the Holocaust.

Elementary teachers Melissa Bennett and Rachel Lenerz played a large part in the creation of the garden. Lenerz first learned about The Daffodil Project through an article about a Florida teacher who had participated, before contacting Bennett and organizing the creation.

At the end of the 2020-2021 school year, the idea began to take shape, and Pine View's own garden was born. The garden prompted Bennett and Lenerz to teach about the Holocaust in their classrooms, such as by having their students read "Prisoner B-3087" by Alan Gratz.

The Pine View Association (PVA) and the Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee (JFSM) provided funding for Pine View's garden. Numerous elementary classes brought it to life for Holocaust Remembrance Week, painting bricks with thoughtful messages.

While waiting for the flowers to grow, classes added their own unique twist to the garden by "planting" yellow pinwheels. The colorfulness of the garden is a memorial to all those who perished in the Holocaust.



Because of the hard work of teachers and students alike, the garden was completed in 2021 and remains as a constant near the playground. PHOTO BY SHELBY BRANN

Violins of Hope program educates through melodies

As published in the Dec. 2022 issue of The Torch



As Matthew Graybil (left) and Niv Ashkenazi (right) perform, their music gives voice to those who were silenced during the Holocaust. The Violins of Hope album was named by Chicago Tribune as one of the 10 best classical recordings of 2020.

PHOTO BY FELICITY CHANG

by Jiayi Zhu and Robyn Schoenberg

Asst. Match Editor-in-Chief and Multimedia Editor

During World War II, the Nazis confiscated instruments from Jews across Europe. Now, the global Violins of Hope program changes the narrative for these historical instruments from World War II. Rather than bearing the scars of hate, violins, violas, and cellos are reconstructed to reclaim a message of resilience and to give voice to the stories of Jewish people in the Holocaust.

This message was shared with Pine View Nov. 17, when musician Niv Ashkenazi and pianist Matthew Graybil played in the auditorium.

The Violins of Hope program began with violin-maker Amnon Weinstein, who dedicates invaluable time and expertise to locating and restoring violins once owned by Jewish musicians during the Holocaust. Dedicated to his own lost heritage of 400 relatives in the Holocaust, Weinstein meticulously restores the violins to be revived in acclaimed performances around the world.

Author and photographer Daniel Levin was the first to capture Weinstein's workshop in Tel Aviv and his processes for restoration, later dedicating his book "Violins and Hope" to Weinstein's work.

"It's a creative epiphany that Amnon came up with to be able to restore these violins that shouldn't be touched... He changes them to have creativity come from it, so that we... can hear the voices, in a way, of those who passed," Levin said.

Weinstein has already restored 86 violins to be played and heard all around the world, including places like Jerusalem, London, and Paris. Ashkenazi is the only person to have one of the Violins of Hope on long-term loan from Weinstein. Through the restored violin, Ashkenazi breathes life into silenced stories through music, which can contrast from a typical verbal retelling of the Holocaust.

"It's a lot of work on how to represent other people's stories. These are stories that we have a privilege to tell, but how to tell them in a way that works for the audience and doesn't take advantage of the stories," Ashkenazi said. "It's not about creating the biggest emotional impact where I feel like normally... We want to connect with our audience and make them feel things as big as possi-

ble when it comes to Holocaust-related work. There's a lot of times that we're mitigating it and softening it and making sure that it fits the audience and that the shock value doesn't take away from the stories and the people."

Ashkenazi was introduced to Graybil, both as Perlman Music Program alumni and in partnership with the Jewish Federation, to tour schools and play around the Suncoast area. Their work is sponsored by the Jewish Federation of Sarasota-Manatee and the Perlman Music Program.

The two created a Violins of Hope album, much of the selected repertoire influenced by composers affected by the Holocaust. There's importance to allowing the voice of the instrument come through; the emotions that come with playing such meaningful music are communicated in their performances.

"We're in a sense actors. We're affected by our emotions, what we're going through, and that's part of the performance and, therefore, part of the history of the instrument, too. So feeling that sort of intangible thing... adds something that informs how [the musician] feels and it can affect the performance, I think, in a profound way," Graybil said.

It's through these performances that stories are able to be told and people are remembered. With every violin, viola, and cello, there's a story. It's with Violins of Hope that these stories are able to be heard.



Giving background to Violins of Hope, Daniel Levin speaks to Pine View students Nov. 17. As an author and photographer, Levin is deeply involved with the program and its message.

PHOTO BY FELICITY CHANG

Q&A with Bette Zaret

Meet the woman who has helped make Pine View's Holocaust education initiatives possible

by Lily Quartermaine

Asst. Editor-in-Chief

LQ: In terms of Judaism, how do you identify... Or if that's too big of a question, what does Judaism mean to you?

BZ: I identify culturally as a Jew. I grew up in New York state and my family and all of us celebrated Jewish holidays and my brother was a Bar Mitzvah... And both of my parents grew up in religious orthodox homes. But because of what happened during the Holocaust, both of my parents felt that it was very difficult to accept a spiritual force given the heinous and horrendous activities of the Nazis.

And this is an age-old question: if you were in the Holocaust, do you believe more in God or do you not believe in God at all? Because how, if there was a god, how could a god let this happen? And yet many who survived said that because of God, they were able to survive. I understand that that's a dilemma, but my parents made the decision to actually disassociate from the religion, but we still identified culturally, which meant certain foods and traditions and getting the family together.

LQ: I think we saw that in a lot of the survivors, where they were either super religious or they didn't identify with it at all. Like you were saying, did it make you believe more in God or less in God? In many of the interviews I was involved in, I noticed that [none of the survivors] were casual about [religion].

BZ: And you can understand that. It's a hard question. I mean, how could, and even today, you look at what's happening around the world. How could there be a god to let all of this happen? All this hatred, how is that possible? But on the other hand, people who are believers say that this is sort of putting us to a test.

If you are asking me how I identify now religiously, I'm not an atheist because an atheist is sure that a god does not exist. And just as I'm not sure that a god does exist, I don't feel like I'm capable of saying that a god does not exist. I think that's my human condition. I don't have the right to say "yes" or "no" or "I don't have the knowledge." So, I'm an agnostic. And having listened to all these Holocaust survivors, the one thing that helped them, in addition to inner strength and courage and sometimes luck, the one thing that helped them get through to survive was hope. And so I have hope. I have hope in mankind. I have hope in nature as long as we can take care of nature. And I have hope that there might be something that I don't know about.

LQ: What has it been like working and talking with so many survivors on such a regular basis?

BZ: It has been an extraordinary experi-

ence... I just love them. I love them to the very depths of my heart because they demonstrate the best of humankind. They have been through the worst of the worst. And yet they have hope. They want to love. They don't want to hate; I can't say they forgive — some do — but they will never forget. But, they all want to live the best lives they possibly can. All of them want revenge, and when I say revenge, it's in a good way. They have children and they have grandchildren. And this is sort of their revenge, if you will, that they perpetuate their legacy. Imagine the human spirit that enables them to survive the atrocities that they survived... These folks lived through the worst of the worst, and yet they really accept their fate and they accept that they are human and they accept that they are lucky that they're here to live every day.

LQ: What do you think people can take away from this project? Especially those who aren't that familiar with Jewish culture?

The one thing that helped [the Holocaust survivors] get through to survive was hope. And so I have hope. I have hope in mankind,"
Bette Zaret,
Holocaust educator

BZ: I don't want to sound like a wise old lady, but we're all human beings. [In] Impact Theatre, we're working with a lot of African-Americans. One of the elders who lived through segregation said... "If we all cut ourselves, we all bleed red." There's obviously something that unites us. We

come from the same cells, you know?

LQ: Is there anything else you would like to say?

BZ: I am so grateful to the Jewish Federation, for recognizing the critical importance of Holocaust education and that it's not only about the Holocaust, it's about antisemitism and it's about humanism and it's about learning how to stand up, not only as an individual to combat every expression of hatred, but also to join together. Because together with one voice we can, we may have a chance to fight for civil rights, to fight for democracy... I'm so grateful to the schools to enable us to help use the lessons of the Holocaust as a way to demonstrate how important it is for all of us to stand up and resist.

LQ: I hope that this project has the effect on the student body that we hope it does.

BZ: I think it will. I do. It takes a village and I am so grateful to you and to Mr. Lerner and Mr. Goebel and all of you students who have so openly embraced this project. I can just see the evolution of knowledge and your learning and the growth and the understanding and the desire to want to make a difference... So I'm grateful to all of you. I really am. I think it's a wonderful thing... So at my age, I'm like, I can die and feel good. Maybe I've done something that's meaningful. So I'm grateful to all of you. I really am. And I'm hopeful that all of you will carry on.

Carrying it forward

Former Torch staffers reflect on the experience of interviewing Holocaust survivors

Pieter Kohnstam

by Joanna Malvas
Class of 2022

The interview happened around 9 a.m. I walked into the College and Career Resource room and saw a man wearing a comfy beige, monochrome outfit, with a brown coat and patterned accents. Pieter Kohnstam stood before me — a stylish man with slicked back, gray hair.

With that being said, I'm proud of the fact that Pieter also recognized my fashion sense, as he complimented my matching pink coat and pink water bottle. Pieter was a confident man who lit up the room as he greeted me and other students. He talked with smooth gestures and told me, "Ah, so you're the student journalist. You're the big boss."

As we sat down before

the interview, I tried kicking off our conversation with some casual talk and a bright smile. Pieter has a sharp sense of humor. I told him what a pleasure it was to get to speak with him, and he said, "Well, just wait 'til you spend some time with me."

Overall, Pieter was a captivating storyteller, leaving me at the edge of my seat with his stories. I wish I had more time with him, as an hour doesn't fully encapsulate his narrative. Nevertheless, he made the most of his time, and I was in awe of what he had to say.

His flight was treacherous, walking for over 10-months on foot to escape the Nazi regime. He told me that he had no dreams as a child. Growing up, I had hundreds of dreams. I thought childlike wonder could

be universal, but I realized that possessing childlike wonder is a luxury and a privilege. Hearing Pieter's words made me realize how blessed I am to have my mother's warm embrace or to hear my father's voice.

Pieter's attitude towards life, in spite of everything he has endured, is what resonated with me the most. As he told me about the tragic instances within his life, Pieter still had hope. He urged for change, advocating for Holocaust education and truth. Pieter's hope was for young people. He looked me straight in the eyes and said, "You're the future."

Pieter placed his hope and optimism in the education of young people. Despite only knowing us for an hour, Pieter was so firm in his message that he pulled us aside after the interview to encourage us once more. Moving forward, I want to fulfill his hope, being the part of the future that spreads solidarity and love over hate.

Helga Melmed

by Grace Johnson
Class of 2022

It was freezing outside when Helga Melmed and her daughter arrived. Helga was wearing a sweater, patterned black and white except for a few splotches of bright pink.

As she got set up with a microphone, I complimented the sweater, internally noting that the 94-year-old and I have similar fashion senses. We were getting along well, laughing, as our interview started.

"I'm very proud of my family. Out of the ashes of Auschwitz and all the problems came a very lovely family," Helga said, smiling.

The discussion shifted to her own childhood.

"Considering everything, I had a very good childhood," she said, showing a picture of her in her mother's arms. "I was very happy to start school [in Berlin]. I was five years old, and my teacher beat my hands with a ruler until they were bloody, and she told the kids to call me a dirty Jew. I went home to my mama, and asked her, 'Why do they call me dirty Jew? I just had a bath, and you washed my hair.'"

The tone shift was so abrupt. We both didn't realize, at first, that this conversation had taken a turn. We were still smiling as she told me her teacher beat her; her smile suddenly sagged, her eyes widened. Understanding

passed between us. We weren't here to laugh and remember happy times. She was here to recount the most horrific experiences of her life, and I was here to listen.

Helga shared the guilt she felt for her mother's death.

"She [Helga's mother] wouldn't eat her rations... She would say 'I can't eat, Helga-lein. I can't eat,'" Helga said. "She would give it to me: 'You eat it, you eat it.'"

"The question is still in my mind: couldn't she really eat?" she said, expressing how she's never quite forgiven her naivety. "She was giving the food to me so I would survive."

Helga kept repeating, "I should have known."

A choke rose up into my throat as tears fell down my cheeks. How could she have held that guilt all her life? I tried to assure Helga that her mother's death was the farthest thing from her fault. She deflected my words as if she'd heard them a hundred times, never once lightening

the weight of her unfounded shame.

We only had that hour, but she could've continued for several more. We'd already exceeded our time limit when I asked her for her reflections, and this might've been the most important part of our interview.

"Don't fall in the trap of hating people. Respect each other. You don't have to love each other, but you can respect each other. Don't ever be violent. Violence is a bad thing, and hate leads to violence," Helga said. "[The Holocaust] could happen again... People become so very divided, it's frightening... Be careful, we may wind up not being free people, not having a democracy."

As Americans, we often take democracy for granted. Authoritarianism thrives with hate, and it's strengthening around the world. In targeting groups of people, without regard to individuality, hate comes easily. We forget that hate is easy, that violence is cowardly, and that love is what's difficult.

'Not everyone will accept me for who I am'

Discussing recent antisemitism



Standing alongside her family, ninth-grader Ava Lenerz prepares to begin her Bat Mitzvah service. Lenerz was Bat Mitzvahed May 1, 2021; attendance was limited 30 in-person guests due to the pandemic, but others watched virtually. PHOTO BY FELICITY CHANG

by Ava Lenerz
Match Layout Artist

One average Sunday morning many years ago, I had my first lockdown drill at Hebrew school. I was used to doing drills in normal school, but not at religious school. I was confused why we were doing it because my teacher proceeded to explain what to do and how to escape if an active shooter ever came to our temple.

Afterwards, I realized that we needed to know what to do because a shooting at a different synagogue had happened, and one happening again was a very real possibility.

That day taught me that not everybody will accept me for who I am because I am Jewish.

In recent years, antisemitic hate crimes have occurred across the country, even here in Sarasota. Two popular synagogues, one being where I attend, were defaced with swastikas in 2020. Four shootings have occurred in the last five years at synagogues in the United States.

One shooting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at the Tree of Life Synagogue killed 11 people and wounded six in 2018, the deadliest attack on Jewish people in the United States. These innocent lives lost because of hate show the physical antisemitism that still exists.

My family and I went to a service at my temple after that massacre, and it was packed more than usual. I later found out it was because people of other faiths came to show their support. This experience showed me that we can support and respect others, no matter what we believe in.

Ever since that shooting, my father, a teacher, has made sure to wear his kippah to

school to show he is proud of his faith and show to younger generations it's okay to be different.

My religion isn't something I'm ashamed of. However, I do worry about being discriminated against as a Jew. I wish our society accepted people no matter what, but I know that isn't the case. I know I will need to be cautious as I grow up, but that won't stop me from being who I am.

I am proud of being Jewish. I am proud to be a Bat Mitzvah. I am proud of who I am. I hope others will accept me for that as I accept and respect them for whatever they believe in.

But antisemitism is spreading, especially on social media and from celebrities like Kanye West. It's important to learn about the Holocaust to

disband these false messages. We all learn from an early age the importance of history class is so we can stop history from repeating itself. That's why it's paramount we learn about the Holocaust. It's a hard topic to discuss, but one that we must remember. Millions of Jews were murdered out of hatred. We must recall all those who survived and all those who didn't in order to stop such a horrific event from ever happening again.

All those people didn't deserve to die. They were kids, like us, and adults, like our parents, just wanting to live their lives. I'm inspired by every survivor who shares their story and the bravery it took to survive.

To stop a reoccurrence, we must remember the struggles they went through; we must learn to respect others for who they are; we must end antisemitism. We must work together as a society, and it all starts with remembrance.

I know I will need to be cautious as I grow up, but that won't stop me from being who I am. I am proud of being Jewish.

Don't fall in the trap of hating people. Respect each other. You don't have to love each other, but you can respect each other,"
Helga Melmed,
Holocaust survivor



Pictured left to right, George Erdstein, Peyton Harris, and Chris Lenerz pose for a picture together following George’s interview. George hopes his story can be shared to inspire youth and further spread Holocaust education. PHOTO PROVIDED BY BETTE ZARET

George Erdstein

by Peyton Harris

Class of 2022

In a series of chain reactions, George Erdstein believes his life — and his family’s — has been dominated by a cascading effect of luck, both good and bad.

“I was too young. I don’t have numbers on my arms. You could say I was lucky, but I experienced a certain aspect of the Holocaust being in New York with German speaking parents while the war was still going on. And that was, uh, embarrassing,” Erdstein said. “All I wanted to do was to fit in and be an American kid, on my birth certificate [too]. My name is G E O R G without the E at the end — that’s the German interpretation of George,” George said.

When George got his American citizenship papers at the age of seven, he insisted that his name was spelled with an E at the end.

“I’m sorry to this day, because I denied, you know, who I was at the time,” George said.

George was born in 1938, in Vienna, Austria, immigrating with his family as refugees to Washington Heights in New York.

“My story really is not so much about me, but it’s my family and I’m a part of it. How they reacted to the Holocaust had a lot to do with when I was born, which was halfway between the takeover of Austria,” he said.

He was talking about an event called Kristallnacht, or “The Night of Broken Glass.” Nazis in Germany torched synagogues, vandalized Jewish homes, schools, and businesses and killed close to 100 Jews.

“That night, my father had been arrested and they [Nazis] tried to get a confes-

sion that he had consorted with a non-Jewish woman at any time in his life. But even before he married, and he denied it, they beat him,” George said, musing over the luck that has defined his life.

“There’s a story of luck there as they were beating him and harassing him. An affidavit came from an uncle of his in New York, just like I’d say from heaven,” George said. “And it came to our apartment. My mother received this thing and she walked it over to the Gestapo headquarters, which is where my father was being held. The affidavit really was telling the United States that this uncle would make sure that my father was not a burden on the state going on welfare. And so the Nazis, he said, ‘Okay, we’ll let him out, but

he had no choice. I would consider that kind of lucky that this affidavit arrived just when it did. Eventually, I think they would’ve killed him.”

George grew up knowing he was a refugee, but not of the horror his parents and older sibling had endured in Austria.

“I felt actually growing up as a teenager, I didn’t want to know anything about it... But as I got older, it meant more and more, more a part of me. Now I’m 83 years old and it means so much more to me now than it did then. So a lot of it, I found out for myself and even after he [George’s father] passed. And it was really after that I got involved with this Holocaust museum. I was a docent for a while and talked about my parents, but I had documents and I was putting pieces together and trying to patch things together,” he said.

George was asked to speak as a survivor of the Holocaust, a role he was initially hesitant to accept because he didn’t always feel that he was of the same position as many other survivors. He felt that he was essentially a football, something that bounced around and affected his parents’ cautious movements during the time.

“If I weren’t born just when I was, my parents probably wouldn’t have gone into hiding. Who knows, they would’ve tried to escape. They tell me I saved their lives. I don’t believe it,” he said, smiling as he shakes his head.

He pauses. “Can I tell you a story about luck?”

George taps his fingers against the armrest of the chair, thoughtfully contemplating the story he’s about to tell:

“Hitler took control of Austria in March of 1938. June

1 was my father’s birthday. He turned 39, and Jews of Austria were very stressed, but it was his birthday. And it was a beautiful day. And my parents were invited to friends’ in a suburb of Vienna. My mother was very pregnant with me at the time. So they went, typical of all Viennese, to like their pastries,” he chuckles.

“I love pastries very much this day. They go to this beautiful suburb filled with hills, and my father had always been athletic. He loved sports. He said, ‘Oh, it’s so beautiful. It’s my birthday. I would love to walk in the hills. I’ll be back at a certain time. And then we’ll have our coffee and cake.’ My mother couldn’t accommodate him as she was pregnant. So he went on his own. And while he was gone, SS officers, Nazi officers came to the door, looking for the men. And they see the man of the house. And they look at my mother, say,

“‘Where’s your husband?’

“‘He’s not here.’

“‘Well, we’ll wait for him,’ they said, they waited and waited.

“‘It was time for my father to get back. But he said to him-

self, ‘It’s my birthday. I’m gonna walk one more.’ And that saved his life because the SS officers, they got impatient. They said they can’t wait any longer.

And they took the man of the house. As they walked out the front door, my father walked in the back door, just like this. Stage right, stage left. They never saw their friend again. They heard he had been taken to Bachenwald concentration camp, not to be seen again. But my father’s love of nature

saved his life that day. That was luck. Good luck.”

In his story of the most horrific genocide in history, George weaves his family’s ideas of luck into his own life, insisting that optimism is necessary. George is an author of several books relating to the Holocaust, including a fictional novel from 2007 relating to his own account of the Holocaust.

“I was asked when I was interviewed on it, ‘What do I want people to take away from the book?’ And I think it’s an appreciation of life in a post-Holocaust world,” he said.

George has three children, one of whom is a rabbi, one who lives in Israel, and one who lives in Michigan. He said they feel the Holocaust is integrated into their lives as well. He feels that the history of the Holocaust, ugly as it is, must be preserved to move forward.

“Unfortunately, the Holocaust is more relevant than ever. We’re going through some very rough times right now,” George said. “Antisemitism has cycled, you know, through history. And we’re at a point right now. So I think the

If I weren’t born just when I was, my parents probably wouldn’t have gone into hiding,”

George Erdstein, Holocaust survivor

ing Our Differences posters] I think is meant to support that, you know, breaking differences among everybody. And, you know, I mean, Jews are just one group of people. You’ve got Muslims who are being harassed, other people and, you know, we have to deal with [it],” he said.

Rifka Glatz

by Felicity Chang
Director of Digital Media

Clutching her mother's hand, a little girl — six and a half years old — watched as a woman cried in the bathroom. Although, the row of outdoor toilets, with no doors, no privacy, no way to flush, as it was practically an open ditch, could hardly be called a bathroom.

"Why are you crying?" her mother asked.

"I looked down, and my glasses fell into the toilet," the woman answered.

That moment stuck with the little girl, Rifka Glatz, as she realized just how difficult life would be for the woman who lost her only means of sight at Bergen-Belsen, a Nazi concentration camp.

Rifka was too young to truly think about it, to comprehend the concept of life or death, but she knew that she and her family were in a dangerous situation.

She knew it as she stared at the crying woman, and she knew it back in their modest apartment in Kolozsvár, Hungary — modern-day Cluj-Napoca, Romania. After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, igniting the onset of World War II, the Nazi regime would begin to systemically segregate European Jews from their communities. At the age of five, Rifka's mother would not let her leave the door without wearing a yellow star.

"We were not ashamed to be Jewish, but that was a hateful symbol to put on us, so that everybody who sees you in the street, if they don't like you, they can spit on you. They can curse you. They can kick you," Rifka said.

In the summer of 1944,

her mother, who was — according to Rifka — a smart woman, knew instinctively that the Nazis would come for her family. Her mother instructed Rifka's brother, who was around 13 years old at the time, to dress his younger sister in layered clothing, regardless of the scorching summer heat.

Without Rifka's knowledge, her mother also retrieved the scroll from the mezuzah case affixed to their doorpost. Upon the parchment scroll were Hebrew words of the Shema, or a daily declaration of faith, reminding those in the home of their connection to God. Her mother sewed the parchment into the lining of her own jacket — it was undiscovered by Nazi soldiers and, much later, given to Rifka as a gift on her wedding day.

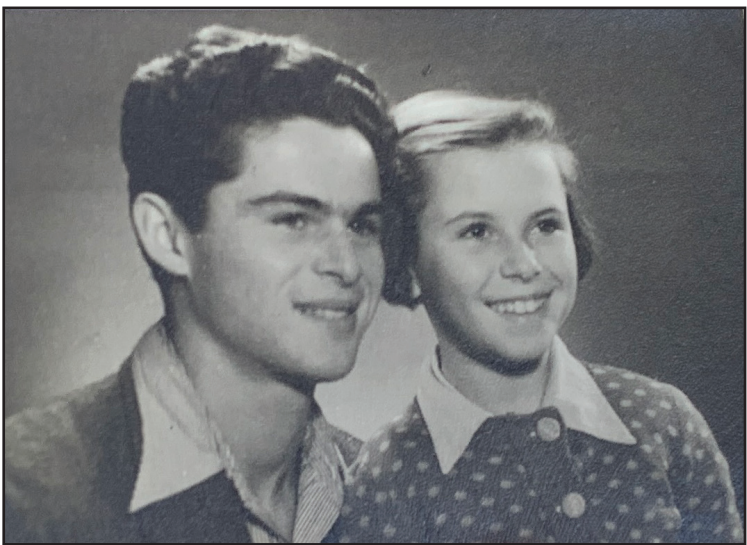
"I was so touched, and I thought to myself, 'How could she even think about it?' Here she is with two children. She worries about us. She worries about her husband who hasn't returned from forced labor camp," Rifka said. "She doesn't know what's happening with him — she doesn't know what will happen to us, and she is thinking of something like this. That's real faith."

Bundled in layers of warm clothing, Rifka was shuffled onto a truck with her mother and brother. The truck arrived in a Kolozsvár brickyard factory — the bricks were stacked on a table to dry, with all four walls open to the outside air, and there, Rifka and her family stayed for several weeks.

On a day that seemed like any other, yet proved to be anything but, they were brought to Budapest and shoved into a cat-



Rifka Glatz, pictured above during her childhood. PHOTO COURTESY OF RIFKA GLATZ



Rifka and her brother pose for a photo together. The siblings were sent to kibbutz, or communal Israeli settlements, after seeking refuge in Switzerland. PHOTO COURTESY OF RIFKA GLATZ



Rifka poses with a photo of a mezuzah case containing the scroll her mother sewed into the lining of a jacket to prevent discovery by Nazi soldiers. The original parchment has been passed down from generation to generation as a gift during weddings. PHOTO BY FELICITY CHANG

tle car, or train wagon typically used to transport livestock. The cattle cars — used by Nazi Germany to transport large groups of Jewish people, regardless of age — each had a single window and not much else. There were no seats and no bathroom, as a bucket was used instead. People took off their jackets and shielded themselves the best they could.

"It was horrendous. A lot of people cried. I was just taking it all in as a child," Rifka said.

The cattle cars eventually arrived in Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp in northwest Germany. When Rifka and her family got off the cattle cars and went through the gate to the camp, her mother wrapped her in a blanket and held her like a baby.

"They asked her, 'Is the child sick?' and she said, 'No, the child is sleeping,' and they let me through. She was afraid of them taking me away from her, but I stayed with her all along," Rifka said.

While Bergen-Belsen had no gas chambers, the Jewish Virtual Library estimates that 50,000 people died of starvation, overwork, disease, brutality and sadistic medical experiments.

When asked about the significance of sharing her life experiences, Rifka said, "I feel a great obligation to tell my story — not because I love my story, but because people have to



Showing an album of family photos, Rifka recalls her experiences through the Holocaust during the interview. Torch reporter Felicity Chang sits across from her. PHOTO BY BETTE ZARET

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A Hidden Child: Marlies Gluck

by Kai Sprunger

Match Editor-in-Chief

A mother's soft hands delicately held a needle, plunging it gently through the garment before effortlessly making a knot. Soon one knot turned to many, and an elegant design began to form from the soft thread, spelling out the name of two-year-old Marlies Gluck, who stood to the side, watching. Piles of clothing filled the floor as her mother sewed the names of each family member onto their clothes with both determination and uncertainty.

The family lived with constant fear and unease as Hitler and the Nazis had taken power in the Netherlands. Earlier that day, a summons had come in the mail, stating that the family must leave for a work camp. It seemed that they had no choice but to leave, so Marlies' mother was sewing with determination.

A knock at the door rang out throughout the house, echoing in the halls, causing Marlies' mother to stop. The door flew open, revealing a member of the Dutch Underground with an intention to change the family's fate. Soon, the night fell into loud commotion as the member argued with Marlies' father against his decision to leave for the work camp, trying to convince him not to go, but rather hide despite the risks.

"[The Dutch Underground member] said, 'Come on, we'll hide you. We will find a place for you. Don't go.' And my father said, 'Well yeah, but it is also useless. I might as well go now,'" Marlies said, remembering that very night so clearly.

The words of both the Dutch Underground member and Marlies' mother sunk in, and Marlies' family decided that they wouldn't listen to the summons, but instead, hide. Names that Marlies' mother had so intricately stitched into their garments were torn out, and the family packed every single item they would need. They bid farewell to their home, not knowing when they would ever see it again. Their life would instead continue at a small village and now their new home, Oldebrook.

During their stay at Oldebrook, Marlies' family lived on a farm with a family of five children, soon to be a family of eight after the war ended. Goats wandered all around the farm, doing as they pleased while members of the household would

have to walk outside to use the bathroom. The house was what Marlies called home for a short period of time.

In the dining room of the house, there was a closet that, when opened, would reveal a double bed. This bed was where Marlies' parents not only slept but would hide during raids when Nazi soldiers tore apart villages, trying to take away Jews.

One day, while two-year-old Marlies was playing with other children outside, Nazi soldiers began to raid the village. They found Marlies and took her away due to her dark brown hair, which stood out amongst the other blonde-haired children.

However, while they were walking, Marlies would frequently stop to slide her shoes back on because they kept slipping off her feet.

"I had on new wooden shoes, which were painted blue and

Marlies said.

After Funchal convince the Nazi soldiers to leave, several adults gathered around, discussing Marlies' fate, wanting her to be safe. They all agreed that it would be best for her to live with another family, as it was very hard to safely hide a lively two-year-old in the village.

"You can't keep a two-year-old in a box," Marlies said.

She left the

middle child.

During childbirth, the Hoekman children's mother had died. Their mother's sister decided to stay with Mr. Hoekman to help care for the children. Mr. Hoekman later married his sister-in-law because they felt that it was odd for unmarried adults to live together. Marlies, along with his two other children, had the honor of attending their wedding.

While staying with the Hoekman family, Marlies would play and spend a lot of time with her new siblings. One game they played often was school, where Marlies and the other children would act as if they were in a classroom setting with teachers and students.

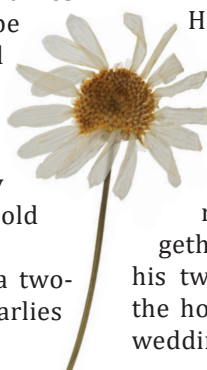
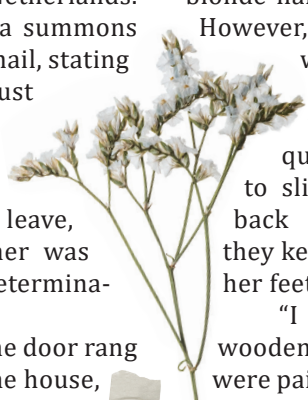
Yet, however much she liked the Hoekman family, Marlies missed her mother and father greatly and was very homesick. This homesickness was so great that it soon led to Gluck being sent back home to her family for a few weeks.

"I think I always knew I would be reunited with my family because they knew where I was, and I knew where they were. And even though I didn't want to be away from them, and in fact, when

I first was left with [the Hoekmans], I was very homesick and I still remember myself, even as a two-and-a-half or three-year-old, staring out the window and missing my parents, really wanting to be with them," she said.

After a short visit with her parents that convinced her she couldn't stay, Marlies was sent back to live with the Hoekman family. Even though she was safe living with the family, sometimes it was dangerous, and for around two weeks, Marlies was sent to live on a houseboat.

Marlies doesn't have many memories from this time but remembers the people who took care of her on the houseboat, attempting to



said, 'Netherlands my Fatherland,' and I was so proud of them," she said.

Eventually, the soldiers got tired of Marlies' shoes constantly slipping off her feet, and they left to look for her parents. Instead of finding her parents, who were safely hidden away, they found a brave lady who saved Marlies' family.

"I cannot think of a more heroic person than Mrs. Funchal, who said, 'I don't have any Jews,' and [the Nazi soldiers] said, 'But there was a star that was removed from your coat.' She said, 'Oh no, I bought that at the market at Zwolle' and completely denied it and got away with it because if they had found my parents or other evidence, she would have been shot,"

village and was brought to the Hoekman family, where she was hidden as one of their children. The family had two children: a boy who was around the same age as Marlies and a girl who was older than her.

To make it seem like Marlies was one of the Hoekman family's children, the age of the boy was changed to be younger than her so that she would appear to be the

bleach her dark brown hair. However, instead of her hair turning blonde, it turned a green hue, which stopped them from trying to bleach her hair again. After a while, it was soon safe again for Marlies to live with the Hoekman family, so she returned.

When Kampen, where Marlies lived with the Hoekmans, was finally liberated from the Nazis, she was able to go back home to her family. Although Oldebrook, where her father and mother lived, was liberated before Kampen, it was too dangerous for Marlies to go back home until Kampen was freed as well.

"The happiest [memory] is the day my parents picked me up, and my father had my dog carriage on the back of his bike, and my mother had me on the back of her bike," Marlies said, reminiscing. "...My father was nervous because with a German accent, he was afraid the local people might tear him to pieces."

After reuniting with her parents, Marlies and her family continued to live in the Netherlands together. A few years passed, and when Marlies turned seven, they decided to move to New York, where Marlies grew up, later moving to Florida.

In Florida, she worked as a geriatric care manager. For a few years, she also worked as the Chair of the National Association of Social Workers (Sarasota/Manatee Unit), as well as the President of Women's American ORT (Sarasota Area Council). Gluck wants future generations to know about the Holocaust and feels that it's important for everyone to hear the stories of Holocaust survivors. She often feels dismayed when people say that the Holocaust never happened.

"It's like saying, 'You're not sitting there,'" she said. "...It flies in the face of reality."

Photos from top to bottom, left to right:

Marlies Gluck sits for a photograph decades after the Holocaust. PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF SARASOTA-MANATEE (JFSM)

Marlies and her family stand alongside a family from Oldebrook, where they hid for a large part of the Holocaust. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARLIES GLUCK

Mrs. Funchal, who saved Marlies and her family during a Nazi raid, smiles in a photograph. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARLIES GLUCK

Gluck, two years old, poses for a photograph. PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE JFSM

Gluck and her family stand together; prior to her brother's birth, they lived through the Holocaust by hiding. PHOTO COURTESY OF MARLIES GLUCK

A Story of Survival: Ginette Hersh

by **Zoe Merritt**
Class of 2022

Ginette Hersh was born four years shy of a century ago in 1927. For myself, that number is purely conceptual and incredibly distant. For Ginette, however, she remembers as if it was yesterday.

Sitting down with Ginette, one of the first things that struck me was that she was French, sharp, and to the point — warm and witty, matter of fact. When you’ve been through hell and live to tell the tale, things might need to be handled that way.

As we began introductions, the pit of anxiety in my stomach grew smaller as she told me about the cotton in her mouth from a broken tooth, concerned with whether or not it would show up in the video. There was nothing to worry about; she looked great.

Just before the cameras started rolling, Bette Zaret, one of the key coordinators of the interviews, leaned down by my seat: “Don’t forget to ask her how she met her husband at the end,” Zaret whispered in my ear.

It’s incredibly romantic in the way that coincidences can work. On the way to Lyon, a boy helped her grandmother, who had an infant and Ginette’s cousin with her, to go south to be with the rest of the family. Years later, Ginette would meet this boy again around the very end of the war. They got married July 28, 1950. She told the story of meeting him closer to the end of our interview, ending with a note of hope.

Reaching into her purse, Hersh pulled out the first of many photos: a class picture. Both she and Bette challenged me to pick 12-year-old Ginette out among the crowd.

“June 14, 1940 is the day that picture that I showed you of the class [was taken],” Ginette said a little while later. “Yes, it was the day before we left. It was taken because it was the beginning of vacation.”

Though she never continued her education after the war, Ginette was able to get some schooling, where she learned English.

“I was hiding in school, so I was lucky,” she said.

Both she and her brother were “Hidden Children,” as they’re known today.

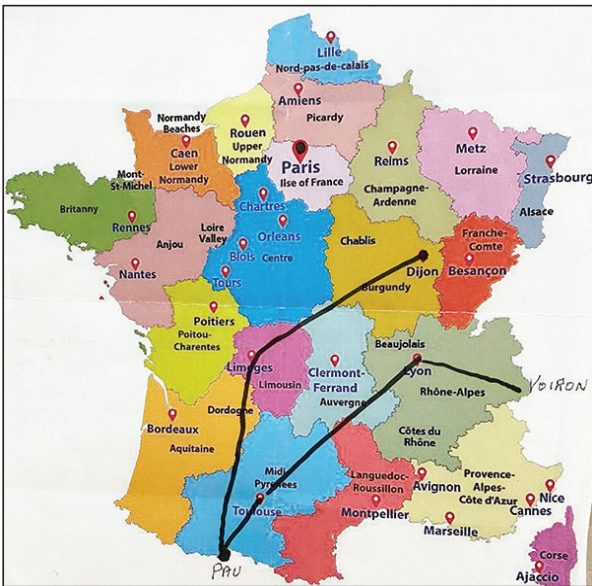
Ginette was hidden in boarding schools, her younger brother either with their parents or in monasteries. When we began talking about the

journey her family made from their home in Dijon at the start of the war, Ginette pulled out a piece of paper. It was a map of France in color, carefully labeled and marked. There was a star over Dijon. Her finger retraced the escape her family made to Lyon 80 years ago.

It was after this part of the interview that she talked about reuniting with her uncle and cousins, how her grandmother was able to join them, and her aunt Rochelle’s sacrifice.

“I am going to tell you the story of my aunt Rochelle,” Ginette said, stating the shift in conversation as decidedly as she always did that day.

I had no idea what was coming next, except that Hersh needed to share it with me. Rochelle was taken by the police from her store.



Shown above is a map that details Ginette Hersh’s escape with her family across France. PHOTO PROVIDED BY BETTE ZARET

“He said, ‘We are taking all the Jews to the police station.’ She understood what was going on. So she said to the policeman, ‘Look, I will go with you quietly. Let my mother and my children go,’” Ginette said.

Hearing her talk about her aunt felt like I was listening to a woman fulfill a duty. In their stories, Holocaust survivors keep family, friends, co-workers, and strangers alive. In tragedy, the stories of the living keep safe within them innumerable dead.

I noticed that throughout the interview she would lead a story with “I have to tell you a story,” phrasing that I found stuck with me in its honesty. She was here to tell me the many stories that make up her singular story.

More than anything, it was one word that gave this phrase weight: “Have.” With fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors left today, the need for their stories of survival has never been so strong. Underneath every chance or decision to tell her story is a drive to do so.

Today we know a lot about the Holocaust and both World Wars. Mountains of information are at our fingertips if we choose to learn — names, places, dates, battles, leaders, numbers, and story upon story upon story. Eighty years later and a continent away, Holocaust history is condensed for students in class. To understand this tragedy through hearing the first-person account of a survivor is a privilege.

“We were under the false impression that women were not in danger even though they were Jewish. We thought only the men were in danger,” Ginette said about her aunt. “But we were wrong.”

At a cafe with her father to sell diamonds from a piece of jewelry, a man ran in, telling everyone that he had jumped off a train taking people to a concentration camp to be gassed.

“And you know what? Nobody believed him because we didn’t think such an inhuman thing was happening, but we knew nothing,” she said. “We didn’t have a leader, we didn’t have a newspaper, we didn’t have a book. We didn’t have anything.”

This is why Holocaust history matters, as obvious as that may seem to many today. There’s a phrase that says history is written by the victors. Realistically, history is written by those who have the resources and power to do so. That power has been in our hands for a long time, and we must continue to use it. They survive; they are here; they are sharing the most traumatic events of their lives.

At the end of the interview, I asked Ginette why she tells her story. Her words are going to stick with me for as long as I live.

“I’m telling my story because I want the world to know that there was such a thing as a Holocaust. My granddaughter is a teacher in a school that their curriculum is not to talk about Jewish history of the Holocaust or black history of the horrible things that happened to the black people years ago. And I think that it should be taught everywhere, and whenever I’m asked to speak in a school, I’m always there. No matter what I have to do, I will come to the school first. I am a survivor... My aim in life and in my old age is to tell the children that there was such a thing as the Holocaust, and I survived it.”



As Holocaust survivor Ginette Hersh recounts her story to Class of 2022 alum Zoe Merritt and tenth-grader Veronika Startseva, she shares valuable pieces of history to be remembered by future generations. An avid Holocaust educator, Ginette has visited numerous schools to stress the importance of remembrance and to give a myriad of students the privilege to hear a survivor’s history. PHOTOS BY BETTE ZARET AND VERONIKA STARTSEVA

Marcel Infeld

by Lucy Collins
Class of 2022

Marcel Infeld plays pickleball every day. He walks two miles daily and is a member of the finance committee of his neighborhood, Pelican Cove. He is a charming, well-dressed and well-spoken man in his eighties with a slight European accent. Together with his wife, they adopted a baby girl from China who is now 26 years old, living in the Bay Area and working for one of Mark Zuckerberg’s philanthropic initiatives. He describes himself as an optimist, which is evident when you speak with him. His life, however, was forever impacted by the events of the Holocaust.

Nazi soldiers captured Antwerp, Belgium in 1940, the year after Marcel was born. The town was non-segregated, but Jewish people tended to live in certain neighborhoods together. The family stayed in Antwerp as long as they could, but when the Nazis began rounding up Jewish people, they fled to Lyon, France, which was still partly under French control. One day on a bus with his parents and younger sister when he was around three, they were not wearing the Jewish star the law required them to and someone called the police.

“I really don’t know [how they knew we were Jewish]. There’s a lot of material I’m not familiar with. My mother did not like to talk about it; it’s painful for survivors to talk about their history. All the information I have is gathered from personal documents, from an aunt who was with us at the time. I assumed we looked Jewish, the reason we were pointed out.”

His father was arrested and taken to a sports arena outside of Paris in Darcey to await deportation to Auschwitz. The conditions were atrocious, with many men falling ill in the crowded space. After a few weeks, they were transported.

“He was gassed the same day he arrived. I know this because someone who was with him and survived the transport lived in Israel and moved there after the war. My sister, who lives in Israel now, interviewed him about ten years ago,” Marcel said.

The rest of the family left France after Marcel’s father was arrested. They went to Switzerland, which was neutral in the war. Those who passed into the country illegally would be turned over

to German border guards and faced with certain death. But since the Swiss government was housing the exiled Dutch government at the time, Dutch citizens were allowed to cross and would be supported. Marcel’s mother obtained forged Dutch citizen identification and given they spoke Flemish; they were granted passage into Switzerland.

“[My earliest memory] was 1945 in Switzerland. I was looking up at the sky. I saw the



moon during the day, and I said to myself, ‘What’s the moon doing there? It’s only seen at night,’” he said.

The family remained in Switzerland until after the war and decided they needed a fresh start. The British controlled Palestine at the time and were limiting the number of people who could immigrate into the country to 5,000 per year out of the hundreds of thousands of Jews in displaced persons camps, and his mother received a spot.

“[Life was] really hard. We were in a kibbutz for the first six months, and they supported us. My uncle and aunt were with us at the time in Switzerland, as well, and they found an apartment, started working, but mother was not employable because it was not a time when women worked so she could not support us. She placed my sister with my aunt, and she placed me in an orphanage,” he said.

In 1946, his mother returned to Antwerp to find a husband

to support the family. She met a Hungarian Jew whose wife and five children perished in Auschwitz. After they married, they had two

more children and reunited with Marcel and his sister. He lived in the orphanage for three years. French was his mother tongue and he learned Hebrew while living in Palestine, but his stepfather only spoke Yiddish and in Antwerp, Flemish was the primary language. By age 11, Marcel spoke four languages.

The next few years brought about more change. In 1951 they moved to New York City. Since his stepfather was born in a country with a communist government, the United States suspected him to be a communist and didn’t allow him into the country. He lived in Canada for two years before joining the family.

“I was placed in religious school again, there was a French Jewish student who had lived in the United States for a while. I remember asking him ‘How do you say wi et nob,’” Marcel said.

He picked up English quickly but has since forgotten Flemish. All the other languages, though, he still remembers.

Marcel’s mother passed away when he was 15, and he was once again separated from his siblings.

“After high school, I no longer felt comfortable being orthodox, so I became secular. That was difficult because it was a closed community, the orthodox community, and anyone who left it was frowned upon and excluded from the community,” Marcel said. “My parents died when I was young, so I was left without parents and without community. I had to make my way on my own and I had no guidance. Beyond the age of 15 I was making my own life decisions. I was making the best decisions I could, but they were not always the best decisions.”

After high school, he taught at an orthodox religious school during the day and attended Brooklyn College at night where he majored in math and physics. He received his degree after six years and decided to join

the Peace Corps and moved to Ethiopia where he spent two years as a schoolteacher.

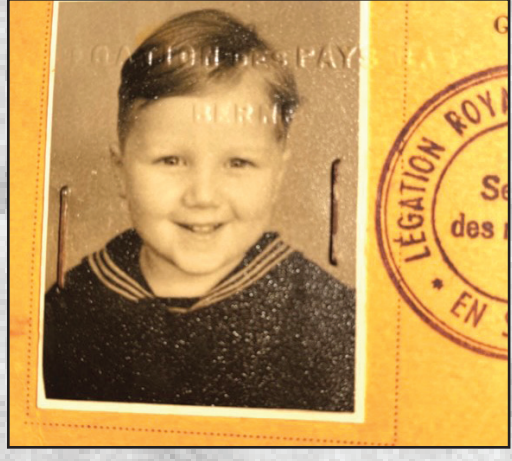
When he returned, he attended UNC Chapel Hill for a master’s in public health. He began working with the Office of Economic Opportunity, an anti-poverty government program focused on establishing health centers and resources for low-income individuals. After working in the government, Marcel worked at various times as an HMO director, a healthcare consultant, a high school teacher, and a real estate broker.

“My biggest struggle was survival, maintaining both mental and physical health,” he said. “Under normal circumstances, I think to myself, what would I have done? I would have probably gone into finance because I’m good with numbers.”

Marcel and his wife moved to Sarasota, Florida two years ago and joined the congregation Kol Haneshma (KH), which

means “all souls” in Hebrew. Here and at his previous congregations, he teaches classes such as American Jewish Thought Since the 1930s, Hebrew Bible classes, and Hebrew reading classes.

“I feel like I need to share my knowledge. It’s a drive within me to share what I know,” he said. “I feel an obligation to the 6 million. I survived for a purpose. For me it means to maintain Jewish humanistic values that the Nazis tried to destroy; to live a life of normalcy despite upheavals; and to promote Jewish culture to the best of my ability.”



Marcel Infeld’s false papers as a four-year-old “Dutch” refugee in Switzerland. PHOTO PROVIDED BY THE JEWISH FEDERATION OF SARASOTA-MANATEE



PHOTO PROVIDED BY BETTE ZARET

GRAPHICS BY ROBYN SCHOENBERG

Pieter Kohnstam

by Joanna Malvas
Class of 2022

Witnessing the manifestation of the Nazi regime in the Netherlands — from Nuremberg Race Laws to Nazi razzias (raids) — Pieter Kohnstam expressed that he never had the opportunity to dream as a young child.

Pieter was born in 1936, and by the time he was six, his parents were left with two options: to stand by their beloved Merwedeplein 17 home, or to flee the country. Seeing how pervasive and intolerable the Nazi forces had become, Pieter’s parents fled, initially setting their hopes towards Amsterdam. However, this decision spiraled into a 10-month long, on-foot flight through Amsterdam, Belgium, France and Spain. Pieter now lives on to tell the story of his escape from the Holocaust.

In the early days of Pieter’s childhood in Merwedeplein Square, Pieter lived two apartment floors below his babysitter, Anne Frank. The Frank family had a strong connection with the Kohnstams, and Pieter’s mother had a very similar nature to that of Anne Frank, as described by Pieter.

“The Otto-Frank family and my parents became really good friends. My mother was a very outgoing, gregarious person... so [Anne Frank] and my mother hit it off immediately. [Anne] was also gregarious, outgoing, happy, spirited — oh, a little quirky — she was doing things that were fun and was so interested in many things like fashion cosmetics,” Pieter said.

Thus, Pieter and Anne also became close friends, spending their time together on walks to the park where Anne taught Pieter how to ride a scooter. Pieter would sit and behave, recalling that “I was the audience for her.”

Anne visited the Kohnstams daily. When the Franks decided to go into hiding, the two families exchanged an emotional parting on July 6, 1942. Had the Kohnstams stayed in the Netherlands, they would have gone into hiding with the Frank family in the annex.

In Pieter’s book, “A Chance to Live,” his father, Hans Kohnstam, details that a razzia was conducted upon the Merwedeplein neighborhood two days after their parting with the Franks. The soldiers stormed into the Kohnstams’ apartment complex, threatening to shoot any of them if they moved. While no one was harmed, the Nazi soldiers marked their SS insignia on all the Kohnstams’ clothes.

This was only one of the many razzias that Pieter lived through.

“It was a daily occurrence. Almost every hour, every minute, killings — the Germans hitting, picking people up and rushing them and moving them, beating them,” Pieter said. “Many times, they

killed you. All of them. Right there. Like they did to our neighbors. They came in, took everything, and killed everybody except one girl who somehow survived.”

Pieter witnessed how the Nazi enforcers turned the community against itself. In one instance, Pieter saw a teenager who was coerced into betraying a group of over 10 seniors standing in front of him. The teenager was forcibly held

robbed, betrayed, or killed. Fortunately, Ruth spoke 11 languages; she was key to figuring out who to trust. At one point along their flight, Ruth disappeared. She had been imprisoned but used her English abilities to smuggle herself out of an internment camp. Later on, Pieter found out that she was a resistance worker for Free France, a movement that countered the Nazi German force after the 1940 military collapse of metropolitan France.

Despite fleeing the Netherlands, Pieter and his parents consistently encountered Nazi forces everywhere.

“We crossed Belgium. One night, we stayed in an inn which was used by Nazi guards at the border as a torture place. We stayed in the bedroom. We didn’t find out what it was until the next morning when we left, because it was all soiled with blood,” Pieter said.

Throughout the time that Pieter worked, he was silent, never mentioning anything of his experiences growing up to his family. Yet, while Pieter and his family lived in Monmouth County, New Jersey, a triggering event on a Halloween night about 35 years ago catalyzed Pieter’s motivation to tell his story: their home was desecrated.

“The rabbi of our synagogue was living in the same town, and [his home] was also desecrated. But he didn’t talk too much about it — I did,” Pieter said. “I really became active.”

Pieter asked his father to help him record elements of their flight. Despite reliving graphic memories, Pieter was driven to tell his story.

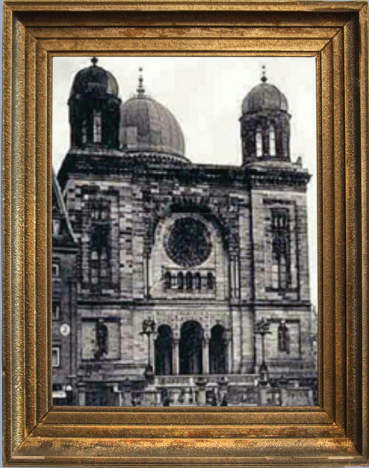
“It lives with me. And I would assume with all the other survivors, you don’t forget. It’s constant. I’m thinking about watching the machine gunning of the teenagers... These are not stories,” Pieter said.

Pieter expressed the value of recording his experience and retelling history, especially as trends of disbelief and skepticism of the Holocaust continue.

“We stand up, tell the story, educate. And at some point, it might come, that enough is enough,” Pieter said.

Pieter has been advocating on a bipartisan basis to teach students about the existence of the Holocaust in public K-12 schools. He has shared his story to a multitude of audiences, and as he shared his story to me once again, he encouraged me, as a young person, to adopt a mindset of activism over complacency.

“You’re the future. I’m old; I’m done!” Pieter said, pointing his finger towards me and inching a bit closer. “I want to encourage you, that if I leave something to you today that you think is worthwhile, you forward it and transmit it to others. So that it is not the end, but the beginning. That’s what education is all about.”



Grosse Synagogue in Nuremberg, where Pieter’s parents were married. It was destroyed during Kristallnacht in 1938. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY PIETER KOHNSTAM

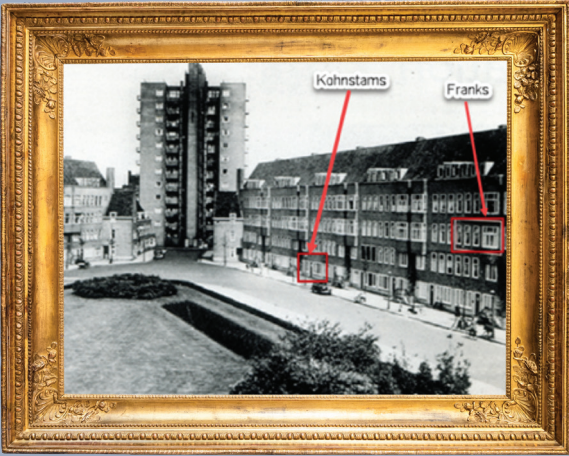


against a wall as the Nazis demanded for information on whether there were any Jews present or in hiding.

“We didn’t know who to trust anymore, and that was another thing. The enemy was not just the Nazis — it was betraying, the loss of trust and betrayal happening within families,” Pieter said.

After the razzia, the flight began. Hans left ahead of Pieter and Pieter’s mother, Ruth, and the family reconvened at a freight station in Westerborg.

Unfortunately, Pieter and his parents had to leave Clara, Pieter’s grandmother. As recorded by Hans, Pieter continuously questioned whether they would be able to see Clara ever again.



Merwedeplein, the street where the Kohnstams and the Franks lived from 1934 until 1942. PHOTO PROVIDED BY PIETER KOHNSTAM

The Kohnstams left behind friends, relatives, dreams, and success. Hans was a successful salesman and an artist.

“My father [owned] one of the biggest towing merchant companies in Germany... He was a salesman, but really an artist. His artistic life was cut short,” Pieter said.

The Kohnstams’ departure was treacherous. They relied on Ruth’s jewelry to pay for transportation. Otherwise, they advanced their trek on foot for the majority of the time. They went weeks without showers or hygienic necessities, disguising themselves as farmers just to do laundry safely.

For over 10 months, the Kohnstams lived in a constant state of fear of getting



Ship that took the Kohnstams in steerage to Argentina in 1943. PHOTO PROVIDED BY PIETER KOHNSTAM

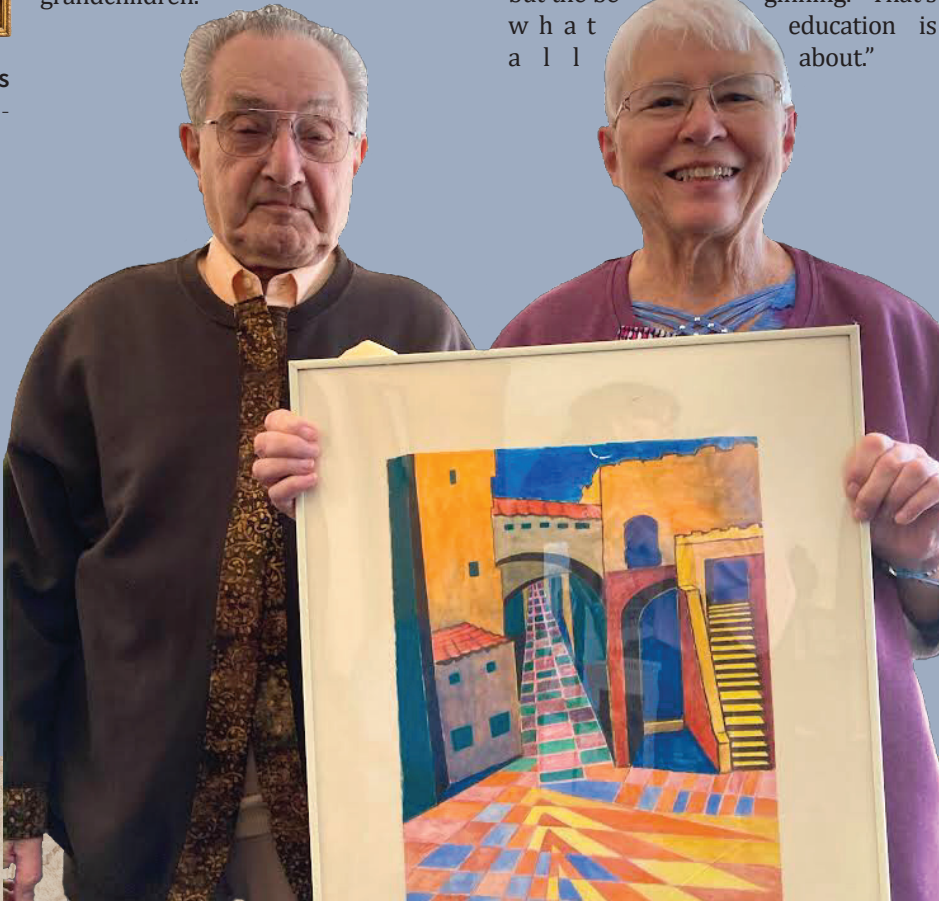


Gurs women’s internment camp in France, where Pieter’s mother was held. PHOTO PROVIDED BY PIETER KOHNSTAM

The Kohnstams’ flight finally ended with Pieter’s family fleeing to Argentina, where Pieter grasped a sense of normalcy outside of the Nazi regime and experienced his Bar Mitzvah.

By the age of 14, Pieter had the chance to dream. He realized that he wanted to immigrate to the United States, dreaming of marrying an American girl and starting a family.

Pieter succeeded in international banking, working in South America, Europe, and Switzerland. Eventually, Pieter fulfilled his dreams. He married his wife, Susan, in 1965, starting a family with two children and, later, three grandchildren.



Pieter Kohnstam (left) and his wife, Susan (right), hold one of Hans Kohnstam’s paintings. This painting features a colorful view of Florence, Italy. Today, over 1100 paintings, drawings and graphics by Hans sit in the Munchner Stadtmuseum in Munich, Germany. PHOTO BY JOANNA MALVAS

Felicia Liban



Felicia Liban (left) sits alongside the Sarasota Bay as Isabella Kulawik (right) asks her about her experiences during the Holocaust. Liban is a resident of Sarasota and a talented jewelry maker. PHOTO COURTESY OF BETTE ZARET

by Isabella Kulawik
News Editor

Krakow, Poland, a gilded city, cobblestones cover the uneven roads of the old town as the light green copper roofs reflect in the sunlight. Felicia Liban spent the beginning of her life in a lush apartment in the city. Her father was a dentist, while her mother remained at home, and her uncles often kept Felicia company when she was not too busy getting scolded by her nursemaid.

Then, Sept. 1, 1939, the Nazis invaded Poland.

"It changed immediately because the Germans marched into Krakow with tanks and there were bombs... You could hear them in the distance," Felicia said.

With their lives in danger, the Libans realized that they needed to leave the city. They began the long walk to Russia, where they would hopefully receive aid; however, the journey was too arduous for a child.

Returning home from their failed journey, the Libans decided it would be best for her father to leave for Russia and reunite when he was settled. This was the last time Felicia would see her father.

"It was sad. I remember seeing him walking down the

stairs. I do, I remember that very well," Felicia said.

After her father left for Russia, Felicia and her mother continued to struggle against Nazi aggression. Their belongings were stripped away from them, valuable objects were lost to the war.

"That was pretty much horrific to see everything, and also, one of the housemaids took my dog for a walk and one of the Nazis shot it in the street, killed it. It was horrible... But we lived in the apartment for a little while until they decided that this wasn't our apartment anymore," Felicia said.

With nothing left in the city, Felicia and her family moved out into the country. She spent her time enjoying the country with her uncle George. During this period, her grandfather died suddenly of a stroke. While they managed to escape the war for a short period, it soon followed them to their rural haven, and the Libans were forced into the Krakow ghetto.

"It was better for him because he never suffered through the rest of the war... It's sort of strange to say this, somebody I loved, but he was better off," Felicia said.

Returning to the city, the family dealt with the dismal conditions of the ghetto. During the day, her uncles and mother left to work in the city. Making bras for women, Felicia's mother met the family who would

save her daughter from concentration camps: the Warenicas.

A plan for escaping the ghetto began to form. Using the remaining valuables Felicia's mother had left, she rented a basement which had access to the city through a coal chute. As Nazis began liquidating the ghetto, the family escaped.

As they pushed themselves through the coal chute, they met an unfamiliar sight. The city was still, no cars on the road. Walking down the street, the Libans clutched the few belongings that remained with them, a photo album being one of them. When they reached the Warenicas' apartment, Felicia's mother left to try to get them papers; however, she didn't return. Something had gone wrong. Stasia and Joseph Warenica decided Felicia was to become a part of their family.

"It was terribly sad, but they made me feel so loved that I was quiet about it and I didn't cry. I didn't carry on," Liban said.

For the next few years of her life, Felicia learned to live in the shadows. Nonetheless, her life was still filled with love as Joseph and Stasia saw her as one of their own. However, no matter how safe Felicia was from the Germans, she began to suffer from lack of sunlight and fresh air. Unable to remain, she soon found herself on a farm in Ukraine.

Amongst the golden fields of wheat, Felicia enjoyed her summer, where she blended in with the family she stayed with. She went to church on Sunday with the others, pretending to be Christian. However, suspicions arose amongst some of the townspeople. The local priest believed that Felicia was Jewish and informed the police.

She was later questioned. Satisfied with her answers, the police left but informed her guardian that they needed to see her paperwork.

In a quick call to Warenica in Krakow, Joseph boarded a train to Ukraine to drop off the proper paperwork and take Felicia home. Reunited, Felicia and Joseph spent their weekend enjoying themselves.

At night, before Joseph came, there was a commotion which rocked the quiet village. Shots rang out, and disarray followed in the square. On Sunday morning, Felicia and Joseph went to church as usual. However, there was something different; in the center of the hall was a casket, there lay the priest. His ears cut off and haphazardly bandaged to his head.

"The Underground came and killed the priest. My uncle ordered it... Turns out he was an officer in the Polish Underground. That was the priest laid out in his coffin, and my uncle said, 'Just take a look at him,'" Felicia said.

Returning to Krakow, she was reunited with Joseph and Stasia and their child, Janusz. As things calmed down, Felicia was able to go to stores and parks. While it was still too dangerous for her to attend school, Joseph borrowed books from the library for her to read and a tutor continued her education. Felicia's life remained this way until the end of the war.

When war ended, the Nazis left Poland and Jews were freed as concentration camps were liberated. Felicia was soon reunited with her mother. She had been caught because of the yellow band in her wallet after she left Felicia with the Warenicas. The Nazis beat her, and she was sent to the camps. Felicia's mother was liberated from Theresienstadt, a camp in the Czech Republic, which was staged for the Red Cross.

"When my mother came back, I didn't really want to be with her right away because [the Warenicas] were my family but my mother just let it be, and slowly, I went back to her. But she gave me time," Felicia said.

Felicia and her mother didn't find out what happened to her father until years after the war. Eventually, the Red Cross informed them that he was imprisoned in a Russian gulag, but when fighting

broke out between Russia and Germany, he was released. After he was freed, he attempted to walk to Istanbul where he could find a way to reach his family again. However, he contracted typhus and died on the side of the road during his journey.

Once the war ended, Felicia and her mother fled Poland. As they made their way through Germany, Felicia contracted typhoid fever and became very ill. Her mother had to take her to a hospital, where they received some unexpected help.

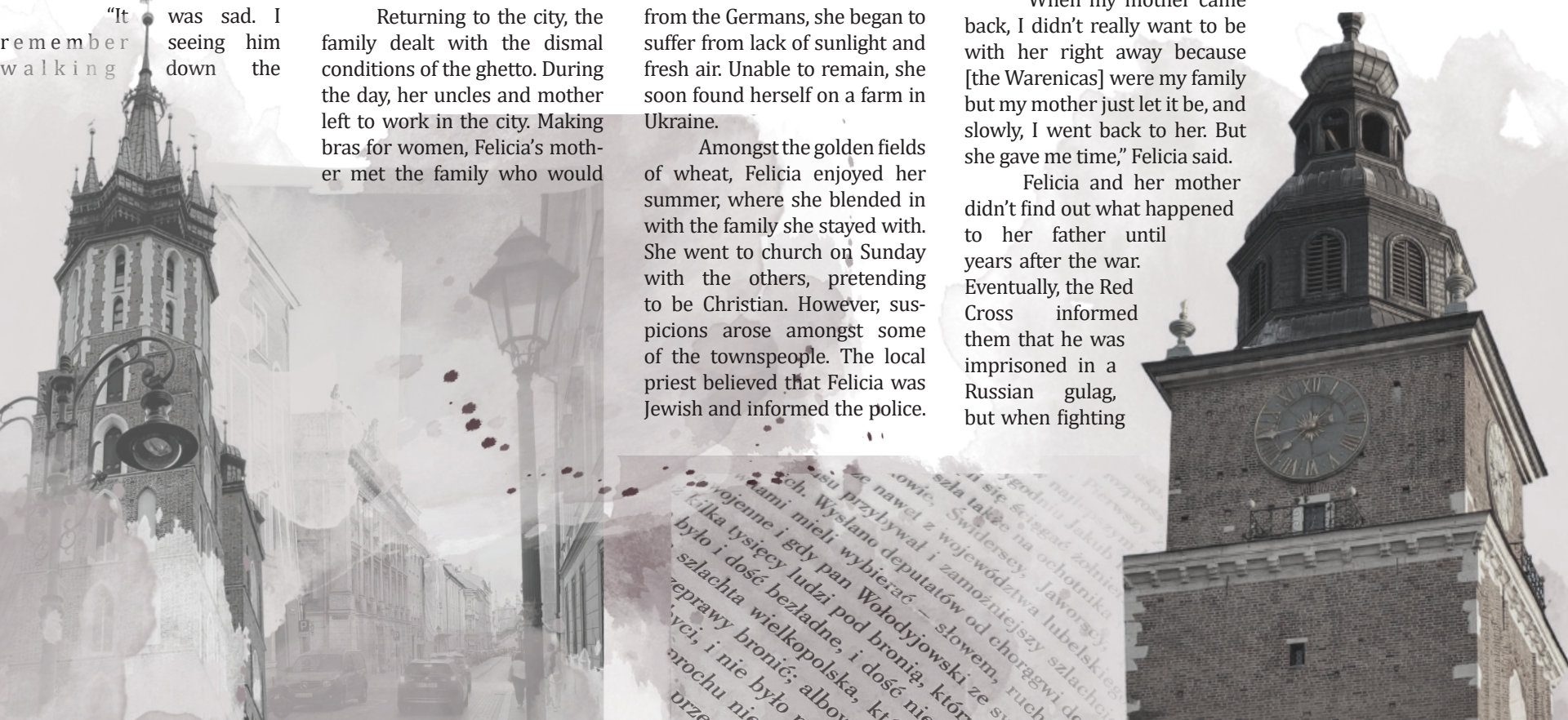
"As she did that, a German man came up, and he says, 'Let me help you carry her.' There's some good people no matter who — he was German, but he helped my mother. Isn't that something?" Felicia said.

Placed in isolation, it took months for Felicia to fully heal. Eventually, they were reunited with her uncle George and Bernard, who survived the camps by staying together. For the remainder of their time in Germany, they stayed in a displaced persons camp, where Felicia's mother, with the help of United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), set up a passage to New York.

As the years passed, Felicia formed a family of her own and remains in touch with the Warenicas. She shares her story to prevent these atrocities from happening again.

"I abhor antisemitism or any kind of inkling [of it]... It's just horrible and when the young people ever see this, they should say something about it, don't let it go by as if it didn't happen. Report it," Felicia said.

The city of Krakow's old fortresses and buildings remain even as the people and society changes around them. Many also remember the epic novels of Henryk de Sienkiewicz, whom Felicia Liban read when she was in hiding. PHOTOS BY ISABELLA KULAWIK



Helga Melmed

by Grace Johnson and Lindsay Luberecki
Class of 2022 and Opinion Editor

In 1928, Helga Melmed was born into a home that loved her, surrounded by a world that would hate her purely for existing as a Jewish girl.

She grew up as an only child in Berlin. Both of Helga's parents had established a name for themselves in their occupations but were forced underground.

"My father was in banking... My mother did sewing," Helga said proudly. "She was an excellent seamstress. I had every Shirley Temple dress that they showed. I used to be the envy in school."

Helga's parents sheltered her the best they could. She remains grateful for this and trusts it's why she has happy memories of Berlin.

"When I came home and the radio was gone, my mother wouldn't say that it was taken; she would say, 'Oh, something was wrong with it. I put it away,'" Helga said.

Helga dreamed of becoming a doctor, "but even that was never possible," she said. She was five years old when she first truly felt the impact of the surrounding political climate.

"My teacher beat my hands with a ruler until they were bloody, and she told the kids to call me a dirty Jew. I went home to my mama, and asked her, 'Why do they call me dirty Jew? I just had a bath, and you washed my hair,'" Helga said.

Although her mother urged her to not be ashamed of wearing the Star of David, Helga said she still felt singled out. The community had rejected her.

"The store, where I used to buy a banana or an apple, had big signs on it: 'Juden Verboten' ['Jews Forbidden' in German]. Every place I went in the community, I couldn't go," Helga said.

However, there was soon a place where she felt she had everything.

"I went to a private Jewish school. I was very safe and happy there," Helga said. "Until 1938. Kristallnacht."

Helga was just ten years old when she saw her school and temple burn.

"We had to stand around in a circle. The circle had fire in it, and they burned every one of our books and notebooks. The soldiers were standing around us, and we were hugging each other and crying. It was just a very tense, awful time," she said.

The haven of Helga's childhood was gone. In the night of Oct. 18, 1941, soldiers came to Helga's door and told her family to get ready.

"They said, 'We will take you to a better place,'" she said, pausing, before asking, "What could be better than home?"

The family was taken to a slaughterhouse, where Helga was met with horror.

"There were people hanging on the hooks of the slaughterhouse and they were bleeding and screaming," she said. Her parents tried to shelter her, but she said, "I could still hear the screams."

After some time, they were transported on cattle cars to Lodz, Poland. In the cars, there was nothing but water poured into cupped hands.

"It would run right through your

fingers," Helga said. "It wasn't even worth bothering."

In Lodz, they were taken to a ghetto. A typical dinner included patties made from coffee grounds and potato peels. Helga recalled wishing for an onion to accompany the patties.

Women worked in a factory, and the men — including her father — were taken outside to perform hard labor. One day, the Nazi soldiers forced the men to run in circles at the labor site.

"They used them for target practice. My father was shot," she said.

After Helga's father died, her mother grew so sick that she could not work.

"I had to go to work and I would come home and take care of her the best I could. But she wouldn't eat... She would say 'I can't eat, Helgalein. I can't eat,'" Helga said, strain accompanying her words. "And she would give it to me."

Helga's eyes filled with tears and her voice swelled.

"The question is still in my mind: couldn't she really eat?" she said, expressing she's never quite forgiven her child-like ignorance that could have led to her mother's death.

Her voice broke. "She was giving the food to me so I would survive," she said.

On Helga's fourteenth birthday, her mother gave her an onion: "the best onion I ever had," she said warmly. That night, her mother died. Helga was all alone.

At the factory, a Jewish leader adopted four boys and four girls including Helga. These three other girls were her "camp sisters for life": Ganya, who was Russian, Maja, Polish; and Miriam, Hungarian. They quickly formed a bond.

As the Russians drew closer, the Nazis emptied Lodz. Helga and her sisters were sent to Auschwitz.

"We were scared, but the four of us were clinging together. We arrived at Auschwitz," Helga said, holding a photo of the Auschwitz entrance. "It says, 'Work makes you free.' Well, not that kind of work."

Helga studied the image as she continued describing Auschwitz.

"People went straight to the gas chambers, and some went away. Our boys went to the other side, and they went straight to the gas chambers... We never saw them again," Helga said, her eyes full of the same anguish that laced her tone.

Helga and her camp sisters continued to cling together.

"We decided to lie about our ages," Helga said. "And they couldn't really tell because we were so undernourished."

Newly assigned numbers sewn to their clothing, the camp sisters were taken to a warehouse and joined rows and rows of girls sitting on the ground.

"Every few hours they would call us up for inspection... They would come by with their dogs. I got bit by one of them," Helga said, holding up her hand to show a long, faded scar.

The Nazis would call out numbers, sending them to the gas chambers. It was a terrifying waiting game.

"You can't imagine how frightened we were. We were shaking all the time, but we were clinging together. We didn't get called up for quite a while, but then one day we were called up," Helga said. "We were hugging and kissing each other goodbye."

But it wasn't enough for the Nazis to

reduce these young girls to numbers and petrify them as they awaited their deaths. Helga and her sisters were dehumanized even further.

"They shaved every bit of hair off us... Then," Helga said, her voice hastening in distress, "we had to get naked in front of these young soldiers... They told us to get into the showers. And we knew that was the end."

Bald, naked, certain they were about to die, and clinging to each other, the sisters walked into the showers.

"We knew we were not going to come out. But, as it turns out, it was water. It wasn't gas," Helga said. "Then they threw some clothes at us that belonged to people that had died in the gas chambers."

They were taken to a warehouse in Hamburg and then to Neuengamme, a concentration camp. There, Helga was forced to do hard labor.

"We were taken out of the camp on trucks to areas that were bombed," she said. "We had to take the rubble and the ruin, heavy stones from the buildings."

The girls then had to gather this rubble, carry it up a hill, and start again.

Helga still remained alongside her sisters. Resourceful and smart, the girls kept each other alive, sharing bread, mattresses, and blankets.

As the bombing got closer, the Nazis took the prisoners to the outskirts of Hamburg and made them walk.

"We walked all the way from that area of Hamburg to Bergen Belsen," she said. "You could not run away because the soldiers were driving right next to us... If you fell down, they would shoot you. If you started to veer away from the group, they would shoot you."

It was now that she was separated from her sisters and she began to fade.

"I was ready to die," she said. "I was so sick, I didn't even realize where my camp sisters went until after the war."

Despite being incredibly ill, Helga remained hyper-aware.

"You would have to make sure that you at least made a sound or moaned or wiggled your toes or did something because if you didn't move, even if you were breathing, they would take you out and throw you into this grave," she said.

One day in April 1945, Helga was carried out of a warehouse on a board.

"I thought, 'Oh my god. Now that's gonna be the end.' But it turned out that they took me to this hospital unit and they treated me very, very well there," Helga said, explaining that it wasn't Nazis who'd carried her out, but British and American troops — they were liberated.

Helga was then taken to a Swedish hospital. She was almost 18 years old when she arrived in Sweden, weighing just 46 pounds.

"Our legs were so thin that we could go around

like that with our fingers," Helga said, forming a very small circle with her pointer finger and thumb.

Helga was alone, with no family and no idea if her camp sisters survived. After three years, her aunt found her while searching for Helga's mother.

Helga went to live with her aunt in New York City and began high school at 19. This was a challenge because Helga didn't speak English.

She aspired to become a nurse and was hired by a Jewish hospital, where she met Liebe.

"She was my roommate, she was my best friend, she was my soul friend," Helga said.

She married Liebe's brother, Charles.

Helga discovered that her camp sisters all survived and reconnected with Maja and Ganya.

Today, Helga's 94. Her typical day includes books, puzzles, knitting, or picnics at Bayfront Park with her daughter, Lisa. She cherishes spending time with family.

Helga's immense strength is undeniable, and it was upheld during the Holocaust by just three things, she said.

"Hope, being young... and the companionship," Helga said, emphasizing the last. "That we held onto each other, actually held onto each other."

However, Helga always thought she was going to die, she said. She constantly questioned if she would survive, and she constantly questioned her faith, which she still does today.

"It made me question many things... I don't go to temple very often," she said, explaining that she belongs to the Chabad, a sect of Judaism focusing less on orthodoxy and more on humanitarian efforts.

The aims of Chabad align with why Helga began telling her story.

"I was hoping maybe the children could build a better world than the world that was given to us," Helga said urgently. "It could happen again. It could happen again. People become so very divided."

If just one child that hears Helga's story might stray from hatred, Helga said her time has been well-spent.

"Don't fall in the trap of hating people. Respect each other. You don't have to love each other, but you can respect each other. Don't ever be violent," Helga said. "Violence is a bad thing, and hate leads to violence."



Left: Helga on her wedding day. Above: Helga holds a photograph titled "Liberation" while describing her liberation in April 1945. Top: Helga pictured at 13 years old. PHOTOS BY LINDSAY LUBERECKI AND PROVIDED BY HELGA MELMED

Lora Tobias



Pictured left to right, Lora Rini, Sigmund Tobias, Alyson Mizanin, Chris Lenerz, and Lora Tobias pose for a picture after the Tobias' interviews. After the Holocaust, the couple met and married in their thirties. PHOTO BY BETTE ZARET

by Alyson Mizanin
Editor-in-Chief

Amidst a flurry of Sarasota parkgoers sits 92-year-old Lora Tobias. Shaded from the afternoon sun, she keeps her hands busy, flicking through photographs and historical records that lie in her lap. Among them are black and white pictures of weddings, first days at school, and secret meetings in the woods — all carry stories she shares with excitement.

Her eyes light up when she picks a book out of the pile. It's the 2018 edition of the Schriesheimer Jahrbuch, which roughly translates to "Schriesheim Annual." A castle adorns its front cover.

"This is where I resided: Schriesheim," she said. "I was the last Jewish child born to the village, before the Nazis."

Born in 1929, Lora lived her first nine years in Schriesheim before she, her parents, and her maternal grandfather fled Germany in 1938 to escape Nazi rule. Now 93, Lora and her experiences bespeak resilience, determination, and a zest for life and all it has to offer.

Schriesheim was home to Lora's family for close to three centuries. Her first recorded ancestor was a Jewish man named Baruch, who moved to the village with his family in 1652. When Lora was born, twelve Jewish families lived among the village's four thousand residents. They had a synagogue; the only evidence that it existed is a picture of Lora standing in front of it.

Lora notes that there was little discrimination in Schriesheim when she was young. She recalls friends and neighbors joining her family's Passover festivities, and because her family maid was Christian, Lora left her shoes out to receive Christmas presents.

Things began changing when Lora started attending Lutheran kindergarten.

"Every morning when we attended school, instead of saluting the German flag, we saluted a swastika," Lora said. "Then we'd all say a prayer to God, asking to safeguard Hitler and keep him safe from enemies and give him a long life. That's how we started the day."

The Hitlerjugend — Hitler Youth — often came into Lora's kindergarten classroom, encouraging the students to "be good German boys and girls and swear allegiance to Hitler," she said.

Lora remembers kneeling bedside

one night and reciting prayers for Hitler after finishing her Hebrew ones.

"My parents had to explain to me that I couldn't pray for Hitler anymore — that I was to say my Hebrew prayers, and that I was a Jewish child, but I had to try not to call attention to myself," she said.

Lora grew lonely as she moved up through the grades. Her former friends began either avoiding or harassing her.

"I wondered, 'Why? Why am I different? Do I look differently, just because I go to a different place to pray?'" she said. "I just wanted to belong. Why couldn't I belong?"

Second grade "was a horror," Lora said. Her teacher hated Jewish people. He forced her to sit in the corner of the classroom, surrounded only by empty desks.

"He treated me as though I'd contaminate the rest of the students," she said. "I'd raised my hand and wanted to answer a question, and he shouted at me and told me, 'You sit down, you dirty Jewish pig.' He encouraged the other children to abuse me at recess time... I had to hand in my homework, and I'll never forget — he's standing there over a garbage pail, ripping up my homework, as if my paper was contaminating his hand."

Avoiding physical and mental torment was impossible. Children threw stones at Lora during recess. She would hide behind a woman who sold cookies; years later, Lora discovered that her protector was the grandmother of Schriesheim's former mayor, Hansjorg Hoeffer.

Lora went to a private school in Heidelberg for third grade. She rode the train to get to school in fear, hoping that nobody else from the town was on it — if she was caught, she would be beaten up.

All the while, her parents' business dried up, as nobody wanted to associate themselves with the family. Brownshirts stood outside their front door, recording the names of anyone who dared support the business. Such names were announced by the town crier and displayed in the heart of Schriesheim alongside signs that read "No Jews Allowed."

"I remember the Nazis coming in and ripping our telephone out of the

wall," Lora said. "The radio was confiscated. All our letters that we got from family in the United States were censored. Lines were blacked out. I couldn't understand this. How could I be a threat to the country? I'm just seven years old. How do I threaten them? What do I possess? What did I do? Why am I a danger?"

The family housekeeper, Sancha, was forced to leave because of the passage of the Nuremberg Laws. Still, Sancha would sneak into the house in the middle of the night to sit next to Lora's bed. Lora last saw Sancha in 1936, when she met the family in the woods one final time.

Having already escaped Germany with his wife, Lora's maternal uncle found strangers to sponsor the family and give them affidavits. In the meantime, Lora's family started selling their belongings, including their 21-room house, which her great-grandfather purchased in 1840, and the nearby vineyard.

Lora, her parents, and her maternal grandfather later got visas from the American government. Her passport — issued June 2, 1938 — is unique; a law went into effect June 1 that all Jewish passports needed to be inscribed with the letter "J," but Lora's doesn't have one.

Before receiving visas, all people needed to undergo mental and physical exams. Because Lora's other maternal uncle, Uncle Ludwig Oppenheimer, suffered from spinal meningitis as a child, he was unable to receive one. The family was forced to send him to a nursing home with the hopes of bringing him to the United States in 1939, but Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia prevented that. Lora later discovered that Ludwig died in the Gurs concentration camp in 1940.

Lora's family was escorted to the Heidelberg train station with torches on their last night in Germany. Before taking the train to Berlin, Lora and her father visited her paternal grandmother to say goodbye. She gave them her prayer book, which Lora later donated to the Holocaust Museum.

"I wish I could tell [my deceased family members], 'We survived. I'm still here. They didn't destroy us,'" she said.

Lora and her family arrived in the United States Oct. 6, 1938. They lived by the beach in Belle Harbor, New York, before moving to Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

When World War II broke out, Lora's family had to register themselves as enemy aliens because they were German nationals. Lora was growing accustomed to the United States. With Franklin and Marshall College nearby in Lancaster, she visited the college's library to borrow books and learned how to swim at its pool.

Lora was 16 years old when World War II ended. She went on to earn bachelor's and master's degrees, teaching fourth grade in the Bronx before becoming a reading specialist and teacher trainer. She and Sigmund Tobias married when she was in her early thirties.

Lora has since visited Schriesheim many times. The Jewish cemetery in the village is maintained to this day. In Germany, little square blocks called tipping stones serve as reminders of those who've died. Each one carries a different name; they're in the pile of pictures Lora keeps with her.

"The names are for my family, for the deceased people — my mother, my father, my grandfather, my uncle, and me. I said, 'I'm still very much alive!'" Lora said, laughing. "They put them in front of homes that were owned by Jews; we may be gone, but we're not forgotten."

During one visit, Lora and Sigmund went back to her former Lutheran school.

"I walk up the steps and I'm speechless... I spread my arms and in my best Italian, I yelled 'Ritorna Vincitor!' That's from Aida, and that's the way I felt — 'I have returned victorious!'" Lora said.

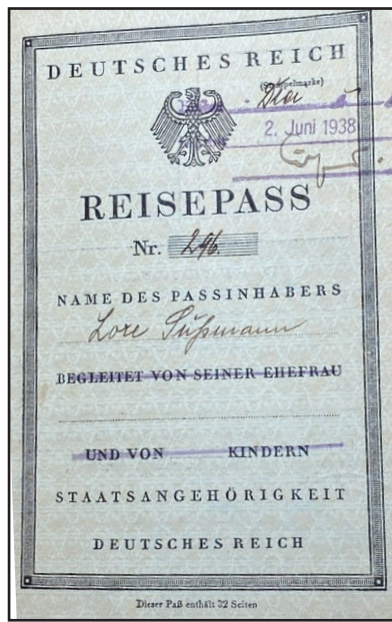
She notes that she has always been open to sharing her story; doing so is important to her "because it's true," she said.

Lora beams as she talks about her children and grandchildren. When considering their futures, she envisions a world that

will treat them and their peers indiscriminately; the fact that this has yet to happen "sickens me," she said.

"I hope the generation of my granddaughter will do something to save this world, to care about it. It's for them that we need a positive future — not a destructive outlook on life where you hate other people," Lora said. "We're all in this world together, and if we don't preserve it, it's not going to last. I want my grandchildren to have

good lives and a wonderful world without hatred."



Pictured above is Lora's passport without the mandated "J." PHOTO PROVIDED BY LORA TOBIAS



Lora Tobias holds her copy of the Schriesheimer Jahrbuch. Following her experiences with the Holocaust, Lora has since visited Schriesheim many times. PHOTO BY BETTE ZARET

Sigmund Tobias

by Lora Rini
Asst. Editor-in-Chief

Raised during the Holocaust, Sigmund Tobias was only three or four years old when his regular life in Berlin shattered.

"There was a tree lined street with benches in the center. One day a gang of guys appeared, and they put signs up on the benches. The signs said, 'Jews forbidden.' And that was my first real sense that something awful was about to happen," Sigmund said.

Another early childhood memory he has is of a demon-

stration in Berlin, where he lived with his parents.

"Everybody was shouting, 'Heil Hitler,' and my parents urged me to do the same thing. I was shocked. But they said, 'You better do it,' because the crowd would have beaten us up otherwise," he said.

When he was five years old, Sigmund lived through Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass.

"I remember cowering in our apartment and hearing the sounds of smashing glass as Jewish businesses and residences were being vandalized," he said.

After that, Sigmund's father decided their family needed to leave Germany for a safer location — they decided on Belgium.

"My father tried to get smuggled into Belgium, was caught by the Belgians, and was imprisoned in Dachau concentration camp for two weeks. And my mother found that he could be released if he left the country immediately," he said. "Of course, if he could leave the country immediately, he wouldn't need to be smuggled into Belgium. So that's when we found out that the Japanese occupied portion of Shanghai was the only place in the world at that time which was open to Jewish refugees."

With passage secured to Shanghai, Sigmund's father left Dachau and Germany behind the next day. Tobias and his mother followed soon afterward to what would be their home for the next decade.

Although their living situation in Shanghai was nowhere close to ideal, Japanese policies about the Jewish refugees were much better than those of the

Germans.

"We didn't know this until after the war, but a German Gestapo Colonel tried to induce the Japanese to impose the Final Solution to the Jewish problem on us. He says, 'Look, it's very simple. Put all these twenty-odd-thousand Jewish refugees on a [boat] and tow them out to the Yellow Sea and sink them. No one will ever miss them.' To their credit, the Japanese could not see themselves doing that," Sigmund said.

Instead of participating in the genocide of Jews, the Japanese confined all the Jewish refugees to small sections of Shanghai.

"Malnutrition was rampant during the war, but we didn't suffer any real loss of life until July 17, 1945 when American bombardment of the ghetto killed 31 refugee Jews and many, many, many Chinese," Sigmund said.

Even in the ghetto, Sigmund was able to continue his education. A dedicated scholar, he attended a British public school for a few years, and when he was 10 years old, he switched to a yeshiva, an Orthodox Jewish school.

"The yeshiva from the city of Mir, which was a very famous academy, also found their way to Shanghai, and I ended up studying with them for about five years. I studied only sacred subjects and no school subjects," he recalled.

After living in Shanghai for over ten years, the residents of the ghetto observed some changes in leadership.

"What happened was in Shanghai, from one day to the next, the Japanese disappeared," Sigmund said. "We didn't know what happened — they just disappeared. And then after a few days, we heard rumors that an airplane had landed in the Shanghai airport and a tank had driven out of it. The tank was an American jeep — no one had ever seen a tank before. A few days later, it became clear that the war was over. We never really heard formally."

In the weeks leading up to this, Sigmund was not com-

pletely unaware of the new developments in the war.

"About two weeks before, there was a German language newspaper published by Jewish refugees, which had one tiny paragraph saying that a bomb had been exploded using atomic fuel," he said. "I didn't know what that meant, [but] physicists in our community who understood what was going on said, 'If they did that, the war cannot last much longer.'"

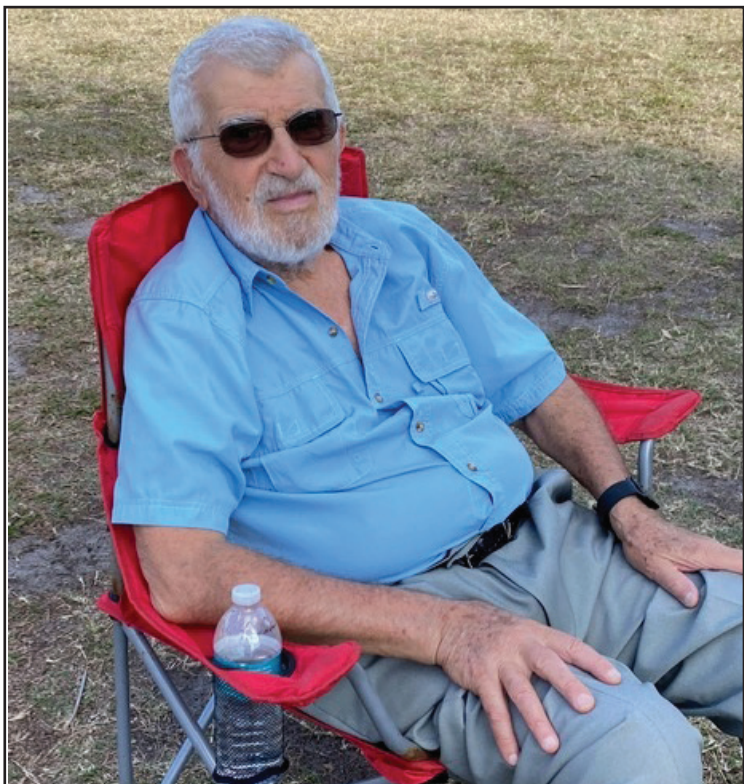
While Sigmund and his family were very aware of the war during their time in Shanghai, they did not hear about the horrors that occurred in Europe until World War II was over.

"We knew nothing about the Holocaust until we heard about it after the war in Shanghai," he said. "The first camp we heard about was Treblinka. Then, of course, Auschwitz, et cetera. And horror rattled through the ghetto because virtually every family lost somebody. Fourteen aunts, uncles and cousins of mine were killed in the Holocaust in Europe. And these were not just names to me. These are people with whom I had lived and laughed and cried and never would again."

The Tobias family decided to move to New York after the war — American immigration laws were a barrier, but eventually they all made it over. In New York, Sigmund had a successful career and a happy life with his wife and two daughters. The Atlantic Ocean provided a necessary barrier between Sigmund and the horrors of his childhood — it took many years until he felt prepared to publicly speak about his life.

"I wrote a book about growing up in Shanghai called 'Strange Haven,' and I published it in 2000. Beginning with that, I was invited to do a lot of speaking, and I've been glad to do so," he said. "I'm particularly glad to speak to young people because I think it's important for [them] to know something of this history. When we go to some classes, they've never even heard the word 'Holocaust,' and it's very upsetting. Not because it happened to me — it's upsetting because if people can't remember the horror of the Holocaust, there's grave danger that it may happen again. The only defense is to know, to be aware, and to fight the tendencies within us to hate other people."

In February of 2022, Lora Rini interviewed Holocaust survivor Sigmund Tobias. On the same day, Alyson Mizanin interviewed Sigmund's wife, fellow Holocaust survivor Lora Tobias. Journalism teacher Chris Lenerz also attended the interviews to film and to provide guidance. PHOTOS PROVIDED BY BETTE ZARET



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OF SARASOTA-MANATEE

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All survivor stories are appearing, one at a time, in each monthly issue of the Federation's Jewish News, which can be accessed at <https://www.jfedsrq.org/jewish-news> or by scanning the following QR code.



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