

Sally Roisman (Zielinski)

LATKES OF LIFE

Sally Roisman was born in Sosnowiec, Poland on October 2, 1930. With ten brothers and sisters, Sally always had playmates. Her mother made time for each child and when Sally left for the first day of school, her mother wrote in her schoolbook: "Like a fish cannot live without water, so I cannot live without you." But even these happy days were marred by antisemitism, with gentile children sometimes throwing stones at Sally as she walked to school.

The outbreak of war on September 1, 1939 changed everything. Since German soldiers particularly targeted Orthodox Jewish males, publicly shearing off their beards, Sally's father chose to cut his own beard, a wrenching act for a man so devoutly religious. Her parents considered fleeing but had nowhere to go. They survived by bartering jewelry for food. Sally, too young to be required to wear the identifying badge of a Jew, was often sent to make the exchange.

In 1942, Sally's father was seized in a roundup and sent to Auschwitz. The family was moved to the Sroedula ghetto outside of Sosnowiec. In 1943, Sally's older sisters, Edzia and Mania, were deported, as was Sally herself two months later. Sent to Graeben, a sub-camp of Gross-Rosen, Sally, only 13, survived only because her two older sisters were there to support her. In January 1945, with the Soviets approaching, the Germans sent their prisoners on a death march west into Germany. Of the 250 women who started, only 150 arrived at Bergen-Belsen.

At the disease-ridden and overcrowded camp, Sally

became critically ill with typhus. Too weak themselves to carry her to the infirmary, her sisters gave their daily ration of bread to two men to take her on a stretcher. One night, Sally, suffering from a high fever, wandered into the infirmary yard where she fainted and fell into a pile of bodies to be cremated. Had she not regained consciousness and crawled back into the infirmary, she would have been burned alive.

Sally became too ill to eat. Desperate, her sisters asked her what might tempt her. Her answer was potato latkes, potato pancakes—a seemingly impossible request. Risking their lives, the sisters found a piece of metal, made a pan, and fried a small bit of potato. The precious gift brought Sally back to life, reminding her of home and renewing her desire to live.

On April 15, 1945, the British liberated Bergen-Belsen. The sisters learned that their brother Simon was at a nearby camp and brothers Itzhak and Nathan were at Buchenwald. Their parents, three brothers, and two sisters had been murdered in Auschwitz.

The six siblings moved first to a displaced persons camp and then to Munich. In 1951, they immigrated to Australia. On a vacation to New York Sally met her future husband Steve Roisman. Eventually, the couple settled in Los Angeles, near Sally's sister Edzia and brother Nathan.

After retirement, Sally began to paint, becoming an award-winning artist whose works are striking portrayals of Jewish life before the Holocaust, a legacy of beauty made possible by her sisters' latkes of love.

Sonja Rosenwald (Syskind)

A MAGICAL CHILDHOOD

Sonja Rosenwald was born Sura Syskind on October 11, 1927 in Piotrkow Trybunalski, located sixteen miles south of Lodz. Her parents, Shlomo and Rachella, owned a yardage store and kept an apartment above their business, but Sonja lived with her maternal grandparents. Sonja's grandfather owned several businesses, including the town's first gas station. His two-story home boasted one of the few telephones in Piotrkow Trybunalski. Sonja enjoyed a privileged childhood, including her own charge account at a local candy shop.

On September 5, 1939 the German army swept into Piotrkow Trybunalski. A ghetto was established and 25,000 Jews were crammed into a space where only 5,000 had lived previously. In 1941, Sonia's father and grandfather were seized and deported to their deaths.

Since Sonja was fair-haired and could pass as a gentile Pole, her mother arranged for her to hide with a Christian couple outside of the ghetto, but after a few months the couple grew fearful and Sonja was smuggled back into the ghetto, joining her mother and younger sister. But with no identity papers, Sonja was caught in a round up and sent to the Hasag Skarzysko-Kamienna ammunition plant. She worked there, inspecting rifle bullets, until the plant's closure in July 1944 when she was transferred to another Hasag factory, this time in Czestochowa.

As the war wound down, the SS made plans to transport their workers to Auschwitz. Instead, on January 16, 1945, the Germans disappeared without warning, and the prisoners saw

Soviet tanks moving past the factory. Sonja ran home to Piotrkow Trybunalski, but nothing was left of her life there. A gentile caretaker had taken up residence in her grandfather's house. Sonja and her friends stayed with him briefly, until bullets fired into the house at night drove them to seek shelter in the Jewish Community Center. There a kindly woman, Bluma Rosenwald, befriended Sonja and introduced her to her son, Srulek. Learning that a list of survivors was being prepared in Prague, Sonja decided she must go there. Srulek gallantly accompanied her, and the journey yielded the news for which Sonja had so desperately hoped—her mother and sister had been liberated at Bergen-Belsen. Srulek and Sonja rushed there immediately, finding them seriously ill but recovering.

Miraculously, guided by a vivid dream of her mother, Sonja was able to discover valuables hidden by her grandfather in the family home. It was as if her grandfather was still protecting her. This cache helped Sonja and Srulek to survive six years in a displaced persons camp in Germany. In 1946, Srulek and Sonja wed and two years later Sonja gave birth to their daughter Genia (Jeanie). In 1951, the Rosenwalds received their American visas and sailed for New York. At the urging of a friend who had bought a farm in California, the Rosenwalds journeyed west, with little money and no knowledge of farming. Through hard work, they prospered, giving their children, Jeanie and Sam, a wealth of opportunities of which not even Sonja's beloved grandfather could have dreamt.

" Somehow we survived for almost four long years. One morning we woke up to find our guards gone and the gates of the munitions factory wide open. Just the day before, the SS had wagons ready to take us to the gas chambers. But this day was different. We saw Russian tanks roaring past the factory, and we scattered like the wind. Running, running, running is what I remember."



" I still recall those memories as if they happened yesterday. I still think about the lost years of my youth, the lost dreams, wishes and hopes of a teenage girl, but most of all, I think about the last time with my family, my parents, brothers, aunts, uncles and cousins—the 75 members of my family who perished in the camps and all of whom had hopes and dreams of their own."



Ruth Fenton Sax (Krakowiak)

BROTHER AND SISTER

Ruth Fenton Sax was born Ruta Krakowiak in Tomaszow Maz., Poland. Her father was a manufacturer of men's clothing and the family was well-respected in the community, often welcoming the mayor and other dignitaries to their home. With loving parents and two protective older brothers, Ruth led a sheltered and happy childhood.

Ruth was a teenager when the war began on September 1, 1939. Three days of German bombardment left Ruth and others in the town temporarily deaf. A few weeks later the Germans established a ghetto with a strict curfew. Recognizing the town's manufacturing strengths, the Germans put the community to work making uniforms for the occupiers. Food shortages and arrests followed. The entire ghetto population, even babies and invalids, were required to watch the public executions by hanging. Then, in May 1942, the Germans closed the ghetto and moved the workers to the Lodz ghetto. Shortly afterwards, Ruth's father was deported to a camp. Both of her brothers had already fled to fight with the Russians. Mother and daughter survived the terrible conditions in Lodz until late August 1944 when all the ghetto's remaining population was sent to Auschwitz.

When they arrived, Ruth and her 49-year-old mother were separated. Ruth begged a German guard to allow her to join her mother's line, but he held his machine gun at her head and ordered her to stay. Ruth lived; her mother died in the gas chambers.

Ruth survived eight harrowing weeks in Auschwitz, including a bout with scarlet fever. But in the midst of evil and inhumanity she remembers acts of kindness—five women sharing equally a single thin blanket and a Jewish prisoner physician who helped her evade selection to the gas chambers.

In late October 1944, still weak from scarlet fever, she was sent by train with some 500 other women to Lenzing, a sub-camp of Mauthausen in Austria where she was assigned to a ditch-digging commando. Working in freezing weather, with only watery soup to sustain her, wearing the same sodden clothing day after day, Ruth somehow kept going. Then, on May 2, 1945, the prisoners awoke to find that their SS guards had quietly disappeared. With no food, fearing what might happen next, the women waited, locked behind the gates of the camp until on May 5, a tall, blond soldier appeared. He was an American GI. Overcome by what he saw, he fell to his knees, crossed himself, and wept. Soon American tanks broke down the camp's gates and the GIs rushed in to share their rations.

Taken to a former Hitler Youth resort, Ruth was slowly nursed back to health by the Red Cross. She met her future husband, a survivor of Ebensee, married, and after a four-year wait in Germany, the couple immigrated to the United States, settling in Los Angeles. Miraculously, Ruth was reunited with her brother Moniek who had fought with the Polish brigade. Of their entire family, only Ruth and her brother had survived. He would remain her best friend until his death in 1999.

Sam Steinberg

A NAME, NOT A NUMBER

Sam Steinberg buried his Holocaust memories for fifty years, until grief at his wife's death brought those memories flooding to the surface and compelled him to grapple with the inhumanity and loss he had experienced as a boy, symbolized by the number tattooed upon his arm.

Only 11 years old when the Germans invaded Poland, Symcho Schteinberg remembers the humiliation of wearing the Yellow Star and walking in the gutters, but this was only the beginning of what he would experience. In a few short years, young Sam would be alone in the world. While still living as a family in the Tomaszow ghetto, his mother and sister Sarah were seized and deported to the Treblinka death camp. Then, with the liquidation of the ghetto in 1943, Sam, his brother, and father were sent to the Blizin concentration camp, where his father died of starvation. The two boys were next ordered to Auschwitz where Sam's brother, showing symptoms of typhus, was sent to the gas chambers. In Auschwitz, Sam, alone at the age of 16, was stripped of his name and given a permanent reminder of his nightmare world, a tattoo identifying him as Häftling B 1840.

Initially given a favorable work assignment in the kitchens of Auschwitz, Sam's good fortune was short-lived and he was transferred to Auschwitz-Birkenau as a laborer. Working in the disinfection unit, Sam spent months beneath a pall of thick black smoke, nauseated by the scent of burning flesh. From Birkenau, Sam was sent to Flossenbürg concentration

camp in Upper Bavaria where he labored in the nearby stone quarry, breaking stones with a heavy sledgehammer. With the Russian army drawing ever closer, the Germans closed the camp on April 20, 1945, forcing Sam and his fellow prisoners on a brutal death march toward Dachau. Starving and overcome by fatigue when the march reached the village of Neunberg, Sam could no longer continue even though he knew he risked being shot. Instead, a guard chose simply to abandon him, perhaps as an act of compassion, perhaps because he didn't want to waste a bullet. Sam was liberated shortly afterwards by the American army.

Without family or friends, Sam, still a teenager, was sent a few months later to a Jewish orphanage in Los Angeles. He later moved in with an Austrian family, married their daughter Selma in 1946, and had four children of his own.

Deeply committed to remembrance and witness, Sam joined The "1939" Club and served two years as the organization's president. In June 2000, he accompanied his daughter, eldest granddaughter, and a group of her classmates on a tour of the Polish camps. By confronting his past in order to teach a new generation and by creating a legacy of compassion and love, Sam has reclaimed the emotions and the name the Nazis tried to take from him. He will never be a number; he is Sam Steinberg.

" Hours had passed since our arrival and selection on the platform of Auschwitz on December 10, 1944. With every passing moment another piece of my identity was taken from me. Finally, I extended my arm and with a few strokes the identity of a boy born Symcho Schteinberg ceased to exist. I was now identified as Häftling number B 1840."



*" I have fulfilled my childhood dream.
I have become a cantor. I am a survivor."*



Leopold Szneer

A VOICE OF FAITH

Leopold Szneer was born to Polish émigrés in 1921 in Munich, Germany. His father was a successful tailor with his own workshop. Life was good for the Szneers, their son Leopold and daughters Ester and Hanna. At the age of five, Leopold began his education at a Jewish elementary school. Even as a boy he knew he was meant to spend his life giving voice to his faith. He studied chazzanut, cantorial singing, with the best teachers in Munich and even performed as a soloist in his synagogue's choir.

Nazism's rise to power threatened to end his dream and silence his voice. His Jewish school was closed and only Nazi propaganda songs could be sung in the public school he attended. In 1935, Leopold left Munich to attend a theological seminary in Frankfurt-am-Main; however, under Nazi pressure, the seminary closed in 1938. Arrested shortly after Kristallnacht in November 1938, Leopold was sent to Dachau, but his parents gained his release and sent the 16-year-old on a Kindertransport to Belgium, where relatives took him in. Later he was joined by his parents and younger sister. But the family's safety was short-lived; Germany's invasion of Belgium endangered the family once again.

In 1942, the family received their deportation order. The resistance found a secure hiding place for Hanna, but Leopold refused to leave his parents. Desperate, the family hid in a dog shelter. Eventually they were discovered and arrested. Sent to

the transit camp Malines shortly before Rosh Hashanah 1942, Leopold dared even there to give voice to his faith. He gathered ten men, including his father, to form a minyan and, hiding in a bunk, led a short High Holiday service. Denounced by a fellow prisoner, Leopold and the entire camp were ordered to confess who had dared to pray. Leopold stepped forward. Perhaps it was his courage that impressed the SS officer who let him go with the warning, "Here we do not pray."

The next years, including a time of solitary confinement in Breendonck concentration camp, tested the young man's faith. Eventually, with help from the resistance, he escaped, joined the partisans, and returned to Brussels, hiding for nine months in a small attic until the city was liberated by the Allies shortly before Rosh Hashanah 1944. Only then did Leopold learn that his parents had been murdered at Auschwitz. Yet even this devastating blow could not shatter his faith or silence his voice. His fellow survivors in Brussels turned to Leopold to lead the first High Holiday service in freedom, attended by 700 survivors and liberators.

In 1946, Leopold met fellow survivor Isabelle Lubinewski whom he married a year later. In 1952 the couple came to the United States, and in 1953 Cantor Szneer led his first High Holiday services in his new home, fulfilling his childhood dream, inspiring decades of worshippers with his soaring voice of faith.

Leon Weinstein and Natalie Weinstein Gold

A BLESSING FULFILLED

The fourth of seven children, Leon Weinstein was born on May 13, 1911 in the shtetl of Radzymin, Poland. His extended family numbered almost 90 members. Hasidic Jews, the Weinsteins had lived in Radzymin for generations. Yet, at the age of 12, without telling his parents, Leon left his home to seek work in Warsaw. While his daring venture into a gentile world worried his parents, Leon's paternal grandfather, whose wisdom made him a trusted confidant of the Rabbi of Radzymin, supported him, saying that Leon represented the future of Jewish life. At the age of 99, he called Leon to his deathbed to receive his blessing. In the grim years that followed, Leon held fast to this blessing and to his grandfather's prophecy.

When Germany invaded Poland in September 1939, Leon fought on the front lines. Captured, he managed to escape, walking 500 miles back to Radzymin. In the Radzymin ghetto, he joined the underground, smuggling arms to the resistance. Alerted by a German soldier's offhand remark, Leon fled with his wife, Sima, and infant daughter, Natasha Leya (Natalie), born in 1940, just before the ghetto was liquidated and its Jews sent to the death camp Treblinka. Of his large family, only Leon survived.

The couple now focused all their efforts on saving their child. A gentile, paid handsomely to hide Natalie, refused to risk his own family's safety in the face of ominous Nazi threats. Homeless and with no money, Leon and Sima devised a bold

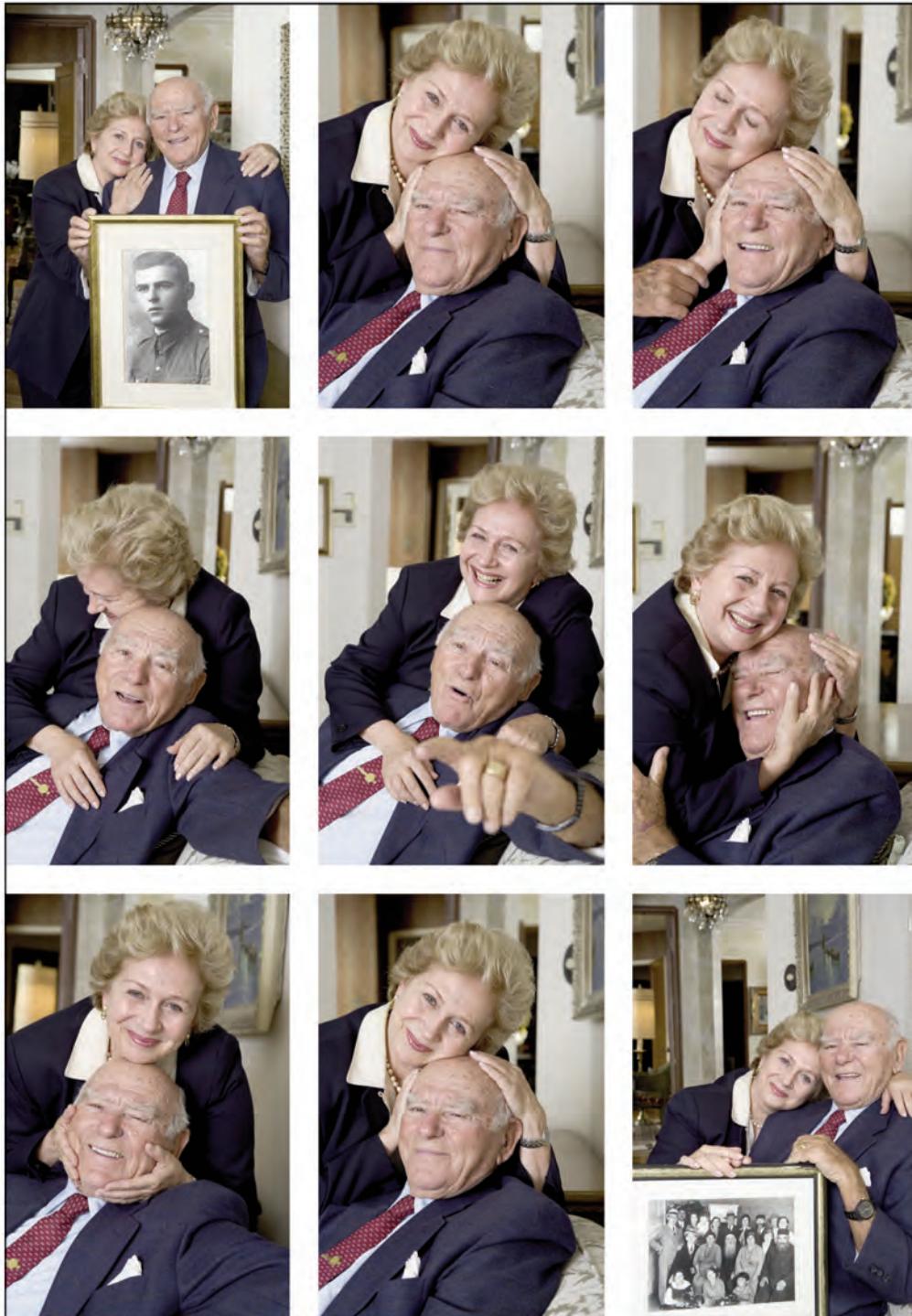
plan, abandoning their daughter to save her. They dressed Natalie warmly and placed around her neck a cross and a sign proclaiming her the daughter of a war widow unable to feed her. Then they left her on the steps of a police station, waiting nearby to make sure that she was discovered.

While Sima went into hiding, Leon returned to the Warsaw ghetto, fighting in the heroic uprising. He was among the few to escape through the rat-infested sewers. He would never learn what happened to his wife.

At war's end, his single hope was to find his child. For six months Leon traveled across Poland on his bicycle, searching one convent orphanage after another. He met hundreds of children, but none was his Natalie. And then at last, he saw a tiny, hollow-eyed little girl whom he immediately recognized.

Her father's presence brought Natalie, now 4 ½ years old, security and love, yet confusion and fear remained. Should food be hoarded for a day she might be hungry? Was she Jewish or Christian?

A few months later, Leon met Sophie, a survivor of Auschwitz, whose tenderness toward his daughter touched his heart. They married and in 1952 came to the United States. Natalie grew to adulthood, married, had children of her own and became a psychotherapist. In 1990, with six other child survivors, she celebrated her bat mitzvah, making her great-grandfather's prophetic words a reality.



" I criss-crossed Poland for six months, until I reached her destination. The nuns took me to a large room, where countless orphan girls pleaded to be taken, each claiming to be my daughter. I recognized none of them. Finally, leaving the room heartbroken, I noticed a nun holding a skinny, hollow-eyed little girl, whom I immediately recognized as my Natalie."

" One event is stuck forever in my memory. There was a guy, his name was Mancasz, he was from Warsaw, six feet tall. He came down from the 'music room' in great pain, and he said in Yiddish, 'This beating will not help them. They will lose and we will survive them.' For me this was a powerful statement of a Jew."



Michael Zelon

DETERMINED TO SURVIVE

Michael Zelon was born on April 6, 1922 in Plock, Poland, 65 miles northwest of Warsaw. He had two older sisters, Bronia and Nacia, and a younger brother, William. Life in the Zelon home revolved around religious tradition. On Shabbat and holidays, the house was always shining and spotless and the table was covered in a crisp white tablecloth with elegant silver candlesticks and beautiful dishes. The Friday evening meal began with prayer and ended with song.

An exceptional student, in 1935 Michael was one of forty from hundreds who applied to be admitted to the state high school (gymnasium) that prepared students for university study. Michael was the only Jew, but he felt accepted by his classmates and played on the soccer, hockey, and swim teams.

Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939 brought Michael's happy school years to an end. The Germans took over his family's store, and a few weeks later the family was ordered into the city's overcrowded ghetto.

In February 1941, the ghetto was closed and the family was sent to the Soldau concentration camp and then to Bodzentyn. The family struggled to survive—but they were still together and healthy.

Their life as a family was shattered in June 1942 when Michael and William were sent as slave laborers to Skarzysko-Kamienna. Laying railroad tracks was grueling physical labor, and when the SS came looking for mechanics, Michael and William volunteered. They were assigned to the Hasag factory as munitions workers. Even with the hard work and beatings in what the Germans sarcastically called the

"music room"—because of the screams of the prisoners being whipped—Michael remained determined to survive.

In May 1943, survivors of the Warsaw ghetto arrived at the factory. They brought horrifying news of the Treblinka death camp, unimaginable stories of the murder of thousands by gas. Only after liberation would Michael learn that his parents and one of his sisters had been killed there.

In August 1944, Michael and William were transferred to the Hasag factory in Czestochowa. One night their sleep was interrupted by a loud commotion; the Germans were loading the prisoners onto cattle cars. The brothers decided to escape through the German security building. They emerged undetected, feeling totally free, but their freedom ended abruptly when they were apprehended by a Russian soldier who accused them of being German spies. Taken to Russian headquarters, the boys were questioned by an officer who spoke Yiddish and believed the brothers' story.

When Michael and William returned to Plock, they learned that their family had not survived. With nowhere else to go, the brothers opened a small leather business to earn enough money to live. Michael graduated from the gymnasium and then continued his studies at the University of Munich, Germany, earning a B.S. and M.S. in electrical engineering. In 1952, Michael and his wife immigrated to the United States, settling in Los Angeles. He eventually joined the Space Division of North American Aviation where he contributed significantly to the development of the Apollo and Space Shuttle programs.

HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

The Indestructible Spirit

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL ARON

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In each of Bill Aron's remarkable photographs, you see the face of a person who embodies the indestructible spirit of humanity. Most of the photographs offer no hint that those portrayed are Holocaust survivors or that they continue to this day to grapple with memories of a world defined by inhumanity and indifference.

The faces in the photographs radiate kindness and joy in life. Their surroundings demonstrate that they have led successful and meaningful lives. Yet, these same individuals have known intense suffering and immense loss. In most cases, they lost their closest and dearest family members: mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. They lost their homes and friends; sometimes they lost their names and identities and became simply numbers. They refused, however, to allow their humanity to be destroyed.

Some of them were children while others were teenagers or young adults. They survived ghettos; labor, concentration, and death camps; and brutal death marches. Some survived in hiding due to the protection of righteous gentiles, who also represent the highest ideals of humanity and who remind us that during the Holocaust individuals were not helpless to intervene and save lives.

To retain one's humanity under such circumstances, to find the spiritual and physical strength to go on, to share what little one had with someone in even greater need is truly a testimony to the indestructible spirit of humanity. To relive these experiences in the hope that we can learn from them and join together to create a world free of hatred, racism, and genocide testifies to their belief in our indestructible humanity.

After liberation and the end of the war, the survivors tried to pick up the threads of their lives before the Holocaust. They returned to school; they began careers and businesses; they learned English; they immigrated to the United States. They married and began their own families. Most now have children and grandchildren, and some even have great-grandchildren. They rejoice in their families and their lifetimes of achievement; they celebrate life, but never do they forget what might have been or those whose futures were taken from them. For them, memory is not past but present.

Each summary you will read is unique, but these accounts share common themes of courage, faith, and hope. Each of these survivors would also emphasize that sheer luck played a crucial role in their survival. It would be a terrible mistake to think that the six million Jews who were murdered in the Holocaust somehow lacked the initiative or the will of those who survived.

I hope these summaries will encourage you to learn more about these and other members of The "1939" Club by accessing the oral histories on the Club's Web site, <http://www.1939club.com>. I also hope you will visit the Sala and Aron Samueli Holocaust Memorial Library on the fourth floor of the Leatherby Libraries at Chapman University.

These summaries and photographs are a "work in progress." The completed project will include close to 100 photographs and summaries—an extraordinary union of images and texts made possible by the generosity of Irv and Nancy Chase.

We thank the members of The "1939" Club for entrusting Chapman University with their histories and for believing that we will be the vigilant guardians of their memories, their witnesses to the future, and that we will seek to emulate in our own lives their indestructible spirit of humanity.

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Joseph Aleksander

LEARNING A TRADE

Joseph Aleksander was born in Warsaw on August 3, 1923 to Abraham and Paula Aleksander. His older brother Joel went to the United States in 1938 and was spared the suffering that Joseph endured.

In grade school, Joseph experienced antisemitism, including verbal and physical abuse. Although he was drawn to the liberal arts, his father insisted he learn a trade, so Joseph continued his education at a Jewish trade high school where he learned to become a machinist. Little did he know that his father's insistence would save his life.

In the 1930s, the family suffered financially, but kind-hearted Abraham never passed a beggar without giving him a coin. His mother Paula, beautiful and ingenuous, began to sell and later manufacture ladies' undergarments to help support the family.

Soon after Joseph graduated, the Germans invaded Poland. In the Warsaw ghetto, the family faced terrible hunger. His mother turned to her gentile customers for help, but none responded. One woman even turned her dogs on Paula. Meanwhile, Joseph's father grew weaker and more despondent at his inability to provide for his family. He was seized in a Aktion, round up, and murdered at the Treblinka death camp.

In May 1941, Joseph, at his cousin Maryla's urging, responded to a call for machinists for a "good" labor camp. Joseph worked at the Luftwaffe Mokotov camp until May 1942 when the camp was liquidated and the prisoners marched back to Warsaw where they were assembled for deportation. In the crowd, before he was shoved into a cattle car, Joseph glimpsed his mother. In the stifling, overcrowded conditions, half of the Jews in the car died, and Joseph became delirious. He dreamt of lying on green grass next to a cool stream. His dream of beauty in the midst of horror kept him alive.

When they reached Majdanek, Joseph had a moment's reunion with his mother. In August, he was shipped to Auschwitz where upon

arrival he had another fleeting glance of his mother, this, the last time.

At Auschwitz, Joseph was tattooed with number 127915 and assigned to Buna as a machinist. One day he was carrying a heavy resistor when his partner let go of his end. The resistor came crashing to the ground and broke into pieces. Knowing that there would be severe punishment, his companion blamed Joseph who was beaten and re-assigned to a brutal commando where he had to dig and shovel dirt onto lorries. It was a death sentence. Feeling his life slipping away, Joseph dared to go to the *Lager Älteste*, the prisoner in charge, telling him that he was a trained machinist and asking for a job. His risky maneuver paid off and he was re-assigned.

In winter 1944, as the Russian army neared, Joseph was sent on a death march to Gleiwitz. When the bread he carried on a string around his neck was stolen, a Slovakian Catholic prisoner shared his bread and helped to save Joseph's life. From Buchenwald he was taken Dora and then returned to Buchenwald. When the guards began to execute their prisoners, Joseph hid in the mud under the barracks for three days until he saw American tanks crash through the gates of the camp. He survived but became desperately ill with typhus and was hospitalized.

Sent to convalesce in the nearby town of Weimar, Joseph met a pretty dark-haired girl named Joanna, a fellow survivor. Although he was smitten, he never expected to see her again. When Weimar came under Soviet control, Joseph fled west illegally, crawling for hours on his stomach to avoid detection until he reached the American zone. In a displaced persons camp near Stuttgart, he once again saw the dark-haired girl who had made such an impression on him. They married on the first anniversary of Joseph's liberation and on June 15, 1946, left for the U.S., visiting his cousins in Denver before settling in Los Angeles.



" I wanted to study the liberal arts, but my father insisted that I learn a trade. He told me that if I did, I could always make a living. It turned out that being a machinist is what gave me a chance to survive."

"It was a miracle to survive when so many people did not.
Sometimes certain things you did could save you even
though you didn't know why you did what you did."



Sonia Berson (Konsens)

LIFE'S GREATEST TREASURE

Germany's invasion of Poland brought the life that Sonia Konsens had known to an end. Her family's home in Belchcow, a small town near Lodz, was hit by German bombs and destroyed. Sonia, her parents, and younger brother and sister were fortunate that they could move in with her maternal grandparents who owned a bakery which, as Jews, they were now prohibited from operating.

Soon more members of their extended family came to live in the bakery. Her father, a respected craftsman who dyed cotton for the area's large textile industry, was forced to sell the family's few possessions for food. Sonia, 17, helped support the family.

When the Germans set up a factory to manufacture army uniforms, Sonia's uncle, a tailor by profession, arranged for Sonia to work there. On August 8, 1942, Sonia was separated from her family and taken to the Lodz ghetto. A ghetto policeman assigned her to harvest vegetables and work in a factory that made mattresses. Sonia thought constantly of her family.

The Jewish policeman who was Sonia's boss became her protector. Sonia later learned that he had once been engaged to her cousin and had recognized Sonia's name. Since single people were deported before families, he would warn her of an impending Aktion, round up, and she would hide, but one day in August 1944 the Germans returned to the place they had searched previously and Sonia was captured and deported.

Upon arrival at Auschwitz she was stripped naked and her hair brutally sheared off before being assigned to an overcrowded, lice-filled barrack. In September, Sonia was sent to a women's concentration camp near Danzig (now Gdansk) where she was assigned to backbreaking work building a road. Sonia labored alongside a friend of her aunt who became her friend and surrogate

mother. When the woman became too weak to work and was shot before Sonia's eyes, it was almost too much for her to bear.

Sonia was sent next to the Stutthof concentration camp and then moved to a succession of camps as the Russian army approached. Ordered to march west toward Germany, Sonia knew she did not have the strength to continue and made the decision to hide, first in an outhouse and then in an underground bunker.

In late March 1945 Sonia was liberated. She made her way to Lodz where she stayed with a childhood friend as she searched for her family. One day, while standing in line, a man struck up a conversation with her. He told Sonia that she reminded him of his wife who had been killed. Sonia had little interest in him, but her friend reminded Sonia that she had nowhere to go and no family. On June 25, 1945, only a few weeks after returning to Lodz, she married Alter Symson. For Sonia, her wedding, attended by only a few friends, only reinforced her heartache at the loss of her family. None had survived the war.

Sonia's husband was a gifted chemist who before the war had worked in his family's soap factory. He began to make and sell soap, but antisemitic Poles were angered by his success and threatened his life. The Symsons left Poland, going first to Berlin and then to Munich where their son Morris was born.

In 1952 they immigrated to the United States. The couple faced many obstacles and both husband and wife had to work to support the family. In 1963, Sonia lost her husband to cancer. Three years later, Sonia met and married Kal Berson, to whom she has been married for more than forty years. Her son and his family live nearby and Sonia rejoices in spending time with her three grandchildren, knowing full well that family is life's greatest treasure.

Engelina Billauer (Lowenberg)

PROUD TO BE JEWISH

Engelina Billauer was born on July 29, 1927 in Berlin, Germany. She was the youngest of three siblings with a brother, Wilhelm, nine years older and a sister, Frieda, seven. Her parents, George and Taube Lowenberg, were deaf mutes. Engelina, as did her two siblings, learned to speak and read sign language.

Although the Lowenbergs were the only Jewish family in their building, Engelina initially felt no hostility. Until 1935, she attended a public school and then went to a private Jewish girls' school. Life became increasingly difficult with restrictions on when Jews could shop and what they could purchase and with vandalism of synagogues and Jewish-owned stores.

From her bedroom on *Kristallnacht*, November 9, 1938, Engelina heard the sound of shattering glass and saw the night sky lit up in flames. The next morning, on her way to school, she saw her synagogue still burning. The children were sent back home. Fearing for her safety, Engelina's parents sent her to stay for a week with friends. As Engelina learned upon her return, during that week her brother Wilhelm had committed suicide.

In September 1941 all Jews over the age of six were required to wear the Star of David affixed to their clothing. The Lowenbergs were now visible targets. On September 23, 1942, two Gestapo officers arrived at their door. Thinking they must have the wrong apartment since the blue-eyed, blonde-haired girls did not "look Jewish," the officers confirmed their identity and then ordered the family to pack their suitcases and leave. As they walked down the stairs and out of the building, their neighbors stood by watching silently.

The Lowenbergs were packed into the Levetzow synagogue with some 1,000 other Jews. On September 27 they were marched through the streets of Berlin to the railroad station. This time their fellow Berliners not only watched but

hurled abuse, saying "It's about time we got rid of the Jews."

The train passed through Riga, Latvia where one group was taken off and then on to Estonia. Upon arrival, Engelina and Frieda were ordered to the left and their parents to the right and onto a bus. The girls ran to join their parents but the SS officer sent them away, promising them they would see their parents soon. It was a lie. Their parents were driven into the forest and killed in a mass execution.

The girls were sent to Talinn, Estonia where they worked in a shipyard. From Talinn the girls were sent to a succession of camps, Ereda, Goldfilz, and Stutthof before arriving in October 1944 in Neuengamme, a sub-camp of Sachenshausen, where they worked 12-hour shifts making hand grenades.

In March 1945 they were moved to Bergen-Belsen. On arrival, female SS guards set their dogs upon the girls. To this day, Engelina has scars on her legs and a deep fear of dogs. The girls were assigned the gruesome duty of carrying bodies to a huge pile—a horrible task that defies description.

On April 15, 1945 the British army liberated the camp. Engelina, ill with typhus, was hospitalized for three weeks. After she recovered, she joined her sister in the displaced persons camp now set up at Bergen-Belsen. There Frieda met and married a fellow survivor. When the couple moved to Lübeck, Engelina went along. They rented an apartment above a store owned by Holocaust survivor Julian Billauer whose son, Richard, Engelina married in February 1950.

In 1951, the Billauers came to the United States and settled in the Bronx. Now living in Santa Monica, they are the proud parents of two and grandparents of four, one of whom, Jesse, suffered a surfing accident which paralyzed him from the waist down. A motivational speaker, Jesse has found inspiration in his grandmother, her courage, proud affirmation of her identity, and refusal ever to quit.



"I learned only when the Soviets released me that the war in Europe had ended the year before.
I began the long journey to Lübeck, Germany, to rejoin the father and brother I hadn't seen in seven years."

"The Gestapo officers stared at my sister and me. They were stunned that we were Jews since we both had blonde hair and blue eyes. 'Are you maybe 60% Jewish?' one asked. 'No,' I said. 'I am 100% Jewish!'"

Richard Billauer

FROM WARSAW TO KAZAKHSTAN

Richard Billauer was born to Julian and Malka Billauer on January 1, 1925 in Warsaw, Poland. His brother Adam was born in 1931. His parents put in long hours at the two jewelry stores they owned. Even when the family went on summer vacation, Julian joined them for only a few days. Richard attended a private school where he was one of five Jewish students. He enjoyed his studies and playing soccer, but since Richard loved to eat, his favorite time at school was the lunch hour!

The family's situation changed dramatically with Germany's attack on Poland in September 1939. The Billauers' apartment, along with all their possessions, was destroyed in the bombing and they moved in with Richard's maternal grandfather. An acquaintance of his father, a prospective business partner, betrayed Julian, directing the SS to his store and pointing him out as a Jew. The SS beat Julian and ransacked the store. With their life in chaos, the Billauers' greatest concern was for Richard, now, at 14, old enough to be seized for forced labor. His parents made the decision to send him to stay with friends in Bialystok.

When the situation in Warsaw seemed more stable, Richard tried to return, but the Russians who governed the area as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty sent him as a forced laborer to a camp in Siberia near the town of Kotlas. From May 1940 to June 1941, he worked cutting trees and sending the logs down the river. Although he received no pay and could not leave, Richard could write his family and receive packages. He exchanged the clothes they sent for extra food to supplement his meager rations.

When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, the camp was disbanded and Richard was sent to Chimkent, Kazakhstan where he worked first in the oil fields and then on a farm. Only in 1946, when he was released by the Soviets, did

Richard discover that the war in Europe had ended in May 1945.

Richard began the long journey from Kazakhstan to Lübeck, Germany where his father and brother, who had survived Auschwitz and several other camps, were now living. Along the way, Richard spent several months working with the British Brigade smuggling Jews to Palestine.

In Lübeck, Richard found that his resourceful father was already running a small jewelry store. His brother, he learned, had gone to Palestine. The meeting between father and son, after seven years, was an emotional one, especially as they grieved for Richard's mother who had died in the Warsaw ghetto.

Julian trained Richard to become a skilled watch maker. After being separated from him for so long, Richard enjoyed working alongside his father. One day, a beautiful young blonde walked into the store. Although Richard was immediately attracted to her, Engelina, also a Holocaust survivor, found Richard merely annoying, but Richard persisted, persuading her to go on a movie date. Eventually, he won her heart, and they became engaged on June 12, 1949. When Julian decided to join his younger son Adam in Israel, Richard and Engelina accompanied him, and, on the spur of the moment, wed under a chupah in Tel Aviv. Since Germany did not recognize their religious ceremony as legal, they had a civil ceremony when they returned to Germany. Their son George, named for Engelina's father killed in the Shoah, was born in April 1951.

Not wanting their son to grow up in a country that only a few years before had been responsible for so much death, the Billauers immigrated to the United States in June 1951, settling in the Bronx. While Richard worked as a watch maker, Engelina cared for their sons George and Michael, born in 1957. In 1984 they made one more journey, following their sons to California.

Fay Chase (Swidersky)

ALONE OF ALL HER FAMILY

Fay Swidersky was born in Lodz, Poland, on August 6, 1928. Her mother and father, Chava and Itzhak, were poor, but they gave their children a rich family and religious life. Fay's family—her parents; older brothers, Wolf and Mordechai; older sister, Razla, and younger sister, Zelda—always gathered to observe Shabbat. Fay's father was a shoemaker, but he found work difficult since he had been severely injured, losing sight in one eye, fighting as a soldier with the Russian army in World War I.

Fay attended a Jewish public school until Germany's attack on Poland and the onset of war brought her schooling to an end when she was only eleven. Her older brother Wolf fled to Russia but did not survive the war. Fay and the rest of her family were ordered into the Lodz ghetto, located in the Baluty slum, on March 10, 1940. They stayed in the ghetto, working in various factories that manufactured clothing, until the ghetto was liquidated. Fay's father Itzhak died there of disease and starvation at the age of 52.

In August 1944, Fay, her mother, her brother Mordechai, and two sisters were deported to Auschwitz. Fay, then 16, and her 21-year-old sister, Razla, were the only members of the family to survive the initial selection. Her mother, brother and sister Zelda were sent directly to the gas chambers.

Fay and Razla spent about six weeks in Auschwitz before being sent by train to a labor camp near Stutthof, near Danzig (now Gdansk), Poland. Each day brought deaths from hunger, disease, and ill treatment by the Ukrainian guards. In early

March 1945, the sisters were among the prisoners taken by train to a large farm near the Baltic Sea. With little water and no food or sanitation, only 125 of the 700 women survived the terrible journey. Dark-haired women were especially tormented by the Ukrainian guards, but since Fay had blonde hair and blue green eyes, she was spared.

From the farm, the few survivors were marched to a slave labor camp near Lauenburg. More prisoners died on this journey, including Fay's sister Razla. Now on her own, Fay was forced to continue the death march until they reached a large German estate where she was liberated on March 10, 1945 by the Russians. Terribly ill with typhus and weighing only 68 pounds, more than 30 pounds less than she weighed when the war began, Fay was treated in a Russian military hospital until early July 1945. From then until January 1946 she lived in a Jewish orphanage in Lodz where she met her future husband, Sol Chatinsky (now Chase), a fellow survivor from Lodz.

With the help of an aunt who had immigrated to the United States in 1905, Fay and her husband Sol came to the U.S. in May 1949. They settled in Los Angeles. Fay worked as a seamstress until Sol purchased a liquor store in 1961 where the couple worked together while raising their three children: Irving, Felicia, and Rosalind. Having lost her parents and siblings, becoming a wife, mother, and now grandmother of six—Matthew, Rebecca, Ryan, Blair, Brandon, and Catie—has given Fay the greatest joy and meaning in her life.

"The camp commandant threatened to kill me for running away. I told him to shoot me now since I would keep trying to escape. I said I would rather be dead than freeze or starve to death."

"My sister Razla, only twenty-one years old, could no longer continue the march. She was lying halfdead in my arms when a Ukrainian guard pulled her from me. She died alone in a field about fifty feet away from me. I was now completely alone."



Sol Chase

TO ESCAPE AND TO LIVE

Sol Chase was born in Lodz, Poland on January 18, 1925 to Fruma and Moses Chatinsky. His siblings included two younger brothers, Itzsak and Mordechai; an older sister, Sara; and a much older half-brother, Moses. Sol's father owned a fabric and textile business and was also a Talmudic scholar. Judaism was central to the family's daily life, and Sol attended cheder, a Jewish private day school, from the age of five until he was thirteen, when Germany's invasion of Poland brought his studies to an end.

On March 10, 1940, the family was ordered into the ghetto. Although the entire family could not escape, Sol's grandfather, to whom he was very close, told him that he was smart and strong and should save himself. Although the decision to leave his family was agonizing, Sol obeyed his grandfather. On March 11, 1940, as the last wall enclosing the ghetto was completed, Sol fled, walking between two passing streetcars to avoid detection.

When he arrived at the family's townhouse he discovered another Jewish boy hiding there. They decided to hide together but were soon betrayed by the building superintendent who turned them in to the Gestapo for the reward of a pound of sugar.

About March 13, the Gestapo took Sol from his family's townhouse to a special holding camp next to the now walled off Lodz ghetto. On his own initiative, Sol moved coal from a storage site to an area near a chimney. Asked by an SS officer what he was doing, Sol replied that he was tired of simply waiting and that moving the coal to where it could be used made sense. His act of initiative could have cost him his life; instead, the officer took the boy under his protection, giving him food and work and allowing him to sleep in the SS kitchen for the next several nights.

On March 15, the officer ordered Sol to leave on the next

day's train. Sol argued, unwilling to give up proximity to his family, food, and a warm place to sleep, but the officer insisted, giving him a bag of food and going with him to make sure he actually got on the train. This time it was following an order that saved Sol's life. Only later did he learn that while that day's train took the prisoners to labor camps, the next day's train took them to the death camps.

Sol's first destination was a labor camp near Limanowa in southern Poland where he cut trees and cleared roads. Once again Sol was guided by his grandfather's words. Three times he tried and failed to escape, but his fourth attempt succeeded and for nearly a year, until mid-1941, he found refuge with Jewish farmers. When they too were ordered into a ghetto, Sol found a hiding place with Catholic farmers who risked their lives to protect him. Even the village priest was in on the secret. But in late 1944, Sol's luck ran out when he was questioned and arrested. He was sent first to a labor camp and then by train to Germany. Once again Sol dared to escape and was hidden by farmers near Czestochowa until the Germans found him and sent him first to the Ravensbrück concentration camp and then to Ludwigslust. He was liberated there on May 2, 1945 by the U.S. Third Army.

Sol learned that of his entire family only his half brother, Moses, had survived. In Lodz, Sol met his future wife, Fay Swidersky, at an orphanage operated by a Canadian Zionist relief organization. The couple left Poland with the goal of trying to reach Palestine. After two failed attempts, they decided instead to immigrate to the United States. On May 5, 1949, their ship, filled with thousands of refugees, landed in Boston Harbor. The couple traveled to Los Angeles where they have lived ever since. Sol and Fay have three children and six grandchildren. Sol's daring, inventiveness, and luck enabled him to do what his grandfather had wished—to escape and to live.

Rosette Fischer (Cygelfarb)

A LIE OF LOVE

Rosette Cygelfarb was born on January 12, 1923 in Lodz, Poland to Esther and Szmul Cygelfarb. Szmul, who owned a store, often traveled to Paris for new fabrics, bringing back with him presents for Rosette, her older sister, Cecile, and younger sister, Rachel. His daughters were so full of energy that Szmul lovingly joked that he would trade his three daughters for six boys.

In 1937, when Rosette was 14, the family, except for Cecile who stayed behind to marry, moved to Paris. The move was a difficult one for Rosette who missed her extended family, and who, as a Jew and a foreigner, was treated as an outsider by her classmates.

When the German army marched into Paris on June 14, 1940, the Cygelfarbs tried to flee, but their car broke down and they were forced to stay. In June 1942, the government took away Szmul's license to operate a business. Rosette found work so for a brief time the family was protected from deportation, but when her job ended so did their protection. In January 1943, they were arrested and taken to the Drancy transit camp. They were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on June 23.

Szmul was sent to the coal mines in Jawornzo. Rosette and Rachel marched into the camp with their mother between them, hoping to make her appear younger and stronger. Their ploy worked. They were shaved and tattooed, their clothes exchanged for old military uniforms, and their shoes for uncomfortable wooden clogs.

For three months they worked in a commando carrying heavy stones back and forth. At one roll call, Rachel, ill with a high fever, collapsed and was taken to the clinic. A friend promised to sneak Rosette in to see her, instead, when they met she embraced Rosette and told her that her sister had died. Rosette insisted on seeing the body. Taken to a wooden shed, she saw a huge pile of skeletal bodies and at the very top her beautiful sister Rachel.

Rosette made the agonizing decision not to share her

grief, fearing that if her mother knew the truth she would no longer want to live. Rosette told a lie of love that Rachel had been sent to a better camp. She would later make the same decision when she learned her father had died, telling her mother that he was at the same camp as Rachel.

In late September 1943, Rosette and Esther were moved to another commando. They were helped by a fellow prisoner, a friend from France, who worked in the kitchen and smuggled them extra food whenever he could. On one occasion, Rosette was discovered with a package of margarine and whipped so badly by a guard that she went into shock. Only the support, quite literally, of her friends who held her upright during roll call enabled her to survive.

On January 18, 1945, Rosette and Esther were ordered on a death march toward Germany. When Esther wanted to give up, Rosette refused to let her. They reached Ravensbrück where they spent a month before being marched to a sub-camp, Neustadt Gleve. They were liberated by the Soviet army on May 2, 1945.

Rosette and Esther were sent to Paris, then to the south of France, before being assigned a little house in Paris with other survivors. They were reunited with Cecile, and Rosette met Ralph Fischer, the sole survivor of a large family from Lodz. They were married in 1947. Initially reluctant to bring children into a world of so much hatred and death, Rosette rejoiced when her son Claude was born in 1948. The family came to the U.S. in 1952, and the Fischers had a daughter Cathy, in 1956.

The Fischers, Esther and her second husband, and Cecile and her husband moved to Los Angeles in 1963. Rosette remained especially close to her mother who lived with Rosette and Ralph after her second husband passed away. Rosette remained her protector until the end of her life.

"We are stronger than iron. If I would read about my story, I would say it was just a made up horror story, but I know it is true. I lived it."



"I turned around and saw my father making a gesture. He put his finger to his lips. I knew he meant that I was never to betray the person who had given me the cloth. And I remembered his telling me that if I kept my promise, I would survive."



Frances Flumenbaum (Blady)

A DAUGHTER'S PROMISE TO HER FATHER

Frances Flumenbaum was born in 1923 in Slavkov, Poland (now the Czech Republic). She was the eldest of five children, with two brothers, David and Herschel, and two sisters, Phyllis and Sarah.

Frances was especially close to her father, Wolf Bar Blady, who owned a grocery store in the nearby town of Sosnowiec. Wolf was a devoted father, helping his children with their homework in the evening and readying them for school in the morning. Frances' mother Bela was a teacher in whose footsteps Frances hoped one day to follow.

The school Frances attended was closed shortly after the German occupation of Poland, but for a time she was granted permission to attend classes in Sosnowiec. On one of her trips in summer 1940 a relative gave her several yards of valuable cloth for the family to trade with their Christian neighbors for food. Frances smuggled the cloth to her parents by wrapping it around her body. Her ruse worked and she made several trips undetected. But on one trip her luck ran out and she was arrested. When her father learned of what had happened, he made Frances promise that she would never betray their benefactor, the father of seven, who would be hanged for his good deed. Her father told her that if she kept silent, she would survive. Frances promised that no matter what she would keep the secret.

When questioned and assured that she could return home if she gave up the name, Frances steadfastly asserted that

she didn't know. Even when the guards tortured her—burning her arms with cigarettes—Frances kept her promise. She was sentenced to six months slave labor picking fruit in an orchard. Ironically, it was Frances' capture that spared her life. When her sentence ended, she learned that all of her family, except her sister Phyllis, had been deported to Auschwitz.

From Sosnowiec, Frances and Phyllis were sent as forced laborers to Ludwigsdorf, Germany. Frances was assigned to a leather factory where she again dared to break the rules, stealing leather so the camp shoemaker could make shoes for prisoners who had none. Caught, she miraculously escaped serious punishment and for a brief time was even assigned as a maid to the camp's female commandant, cleaning her clothes and shining her boots. That job was followed by one in a munitions factory where the constant exposure to gunpowder seriously damaged Frances' lungs.

Following liberation in 1945, with nowhere else to go, Frances remained in the camp. There she met Sam Flumenbaum, a survivor of Buchenwald, whom she married in December 1946. They stayed in Germany until 1960 when Frances was well enough to immigrate to the United States. With their son William the couple settled first in Springfield, New Jersey and later in Los Angeles.

Of the Blady family, only Frances and Phyllis survived. Frances thinks often of her sister, brothers, and parents and of the promise a devoted daughter kept to her father.

Shirley Frankel (Rotstein)

SISTERS IN HIDING

Szaindl (now Shirley) Frankel was born to Joel and Rachel Rotstein on December 30, 1930 in Radzyn, Poland. She had five sisters and one brother, Moshe, who worked with their father in his tailor shop until he escaped to Russia shortly after the German invasion in September 1939.

The family kept kosher, observed the Sabbath and High Holidays, and spoke Yiddish as well as Polish. Shirley attended Hebrew school until it was closed by the German authorities.

In late 1940, rumors circulated that Radzyn's Jews would be moved to a ghetto. Such topics were not discussed in front of children, but Shirley, an inquisitive 11-year-old, listened at the door of the synagogue when her father and the other men debated what to do. A few months later, in spring 1941, the family was ordered into the already densely populated Jewish quarter.

In the late fall of 1942, the Rotsteins were among those taken to the Miedzyrzec ghetto where they shared a single room with several other families. The day they arrived, three of Shirley's sisters, Sarah, Feigy, and Chaja, moved to the attic. Shirley followed while her parents and sisters Basha and Toba remained downstairs. When German soldiers raided the house early the next morning, those in the attic remained undiscovered. A woman had pulled up the ladder when she heard the dogs and soldiers. She sat over the entrance, barring anyone from leaving. Her stubbornness saved their lives. Shirley's parents and two sisters were murdered in the death camp Treblinka.

The group of twenty stayed in the attic for two weeks. Desperate for food, they sent Shirley and another girl to buy bread. They succeeded in their mission, but on their way back they were spotted by a policeman. Terrified, they dropped the precious bread and ran. Shirley hid and later returned to the attic.

Although her sisters were ecstatic, the others were angry that she had lost the bread and fearful that she might have been followed.

A few months later, Sarah, blonde and fluent in Polish, made the decision to leave the hiding place and try to pass as a gentile. Instead, she was recognized as a Jew and shot. When the ghetto was liquidated in June 1943, the three remaining sisters were loaded onto an overcrowded, stifling boxcar. Immediately upon arrival in Majdanek, there was a selection. Shirley, skinny and still recovering from typhus, was sent to the left, to be gassed, but was spared when a female SS guard decided she could work. To Shirley it seemed that her parents must have intervened from heaven to protect her.

For two months, the sisters moved rocks from one side of the road to another. Offered the opportunity to go to another camp, the sisters volunteered, but their acceptance depended on passing another selection. Feigy and Chaja passed, but Shirley did not. Her sisters pleaded with the SS officer, and for whatever reason, he let her live. The girls were sent to the Skarzysko munitions factory where they spent about a year before being transferred to another forced labor camp in Czestochowa. Shirley, now 14, was assigned to the night shift. Starving and exhausted, she fell asleep on the job and was severely injured but knew she must keep working. Fortunately, liberation by the Soviet army came soon thereafter on January 16, 1945.

At 19, Shirley came to the United States. In September 1951, she married fellow survivor Karl Frankel. They are the parents of four and the grandparents of nine. They moved to Los Angeles, where Shirley resumed her education, interrupted in 1939, graduating from high school forty years later, in 1979, the same year as her oldest son graduated medical school.



"When my sisters and I heard the shouts and screams, we knew our family had been taken. We begged the woman guarding the entrance to lower the ladder and let us leave the attic and join our family. She refused. Her stubbornness saved our lives."

"I am so grateful for the fact that I grew up in a home where faith was so important. It was my faith that gave me courage."



Barbara Gerson (Nomberg)

FAITH AND COURAGE

Barbara Gerson was born in Warsaw to Viktor and Bela Nomberg. She grew up in an Orthodox Jewish home in Lodz, attended a private secular girls' school, and, until war intervened, planned to continue her studies at the university in Warsaw.

Her father's wholesale textile business was confiscated when the Germans occupied Lodz. Her brother Izak, six years older, fled to Soviet territory in October 1939. Her parents also made plans to leave, but her grandparents were too old for such an uncertain journey. It was decided that they would go to relatives in Czestochowa. Barbara was sent ahead to make the arrangements.

As he said goodbye, Barbara's father told her to do whatever was necessary to survive. She would later draw strength from remembering his words. On December 18, mother and daughter, wearing matching scarves as a sign of their love, walked to the train station. Barbara would never see her parents again.

When the SS boarded the train and ordered all Jews into the last car, Barbara made a courageous decision. She went to the bathroom and removed the Star of David she wore. She then lied to the SS saying in perfect Polish that she was not a Jew. Six days later she arrived at her destination.

In Czestochowa, where she lived with her aunt and uncle, work meant survival. Barbara made another risky decision—to buy a false identification card, stating her age as 18 not 15, therefore making her eligible to work. For two years she did hand crocheting and knitting for the wives of German officers.

In November 1942, Barbara met and fell in love with Robert Gerson, also a teenager. Under normal circumstances, they were too young to marry, but these were not normal circumstances. Using the ring belonging to a friend's mother and a wedding dress from a neighbor, the two were wed, surrounded by friends and

relatives—it was a rare moment of joy in the ghetto.

Barbara was assigned to clean the houses of Jews deported from the ghetto and to gather what they had left behind, from pots and pans to down pillows and quilts. As food in the ghetto became increasingly scarce, Robert risked his life to smuggle out furs in exchange for food.

In June 1943, Barbara and Robert were sent as forced laborers to the HASAG munitions factory where they often worked 19 hours a day. Robert again risked his life, smuggling bullets from the factory to the Polish underground in exchange for food and information.

It seemed a miracle when Barbara discovered she was pregnant. What should have brought them joy instead brought the heartbreaking realization that the pregnancy must be terminated since any woman found to be pregnant was executed. The procedure was performed in secret. Soon afterwards, Barbara became desperately ill with an infection. Since the doctor would have been severely punished if discovered, he lied and listed her condition as pneumonia. It was Robert who saved Barbara's life, trading bullets for medicine with the Polish underground.

When the Germans evacuated the camp, ordering all the prisoners on a death march, Robert and Barbara made another daring decision, to hide and risk being shot. Their courage paid off and they were liberated on January 17, 1945.

They spent three years in a displaced persons camp in Germany before immigrating to the U.S. in 1949, settling first in Brooklyn, and then moving to Los Angeles where they raised their two children, Victor and Sandra, both now attorneys. Barbara's brother, Izak, now Jack, survived the war in a Russian labor camp and also immigrated to the U.S.

Fela Gipsman (Fiszell)

SUSTAINING HOPE

Fela (Faigusz) Gipsman was born to Mosze and Sara Fiszell on September 6, 1926 in Bedzin, Poland. Fela had three brothers, Jakob, two years older; Szymon, two years younger and Kalman, four years younger. Her father owned a wholesale business that sold oil and other products, and Fela and her family lived very comfortably. All four children attended private Hebrew schools and Mosze and Sara taught their children to value education.

Growing up, Fela was a tomboy, enjoying the same activities as her brothers, including volleyball and swimming. She especially enjoyed riding her bike. Her brothers and their friends were not amused when Fela—a girl!—proved that she could ride a bike faster than they.

Fela's carefree childhood ended with the German invasion and subsequent occupation of Bedzin on September 4, 1939. She could no longer attend school and her father's business was confiscated. As Jews, the family faced constant harassment and restrictions—from when they could shop for food to which side of the street they could walk on. One day, Fela, only 13, was caught walking after curfew without her Star of David armband which all Jews were required to wear. Her punishment was kneeling on the hard ground all night without moving. Fela never went out without her Star of David again.

Late on a December night in 1942, SS officers came with no warning to the Fiszell home and took Fela from her bed for forced labor. Fela, then 16, had never seen her father cry as he begged them not to take her. Only much later would she learn that in August 1943 her parents and three brothers were deported to Auschwitz and murdered.

Fela was sent first to the Sosnowiec transit camp. From there, she was taken to Blechhammer before being transported

to the Schatzlar labor camp where she spent two and a half years. Fela worked long hours in a textile factory making thread, her feet and hands submerged in mud, strenuous work that exhausted her arms and back. The guards made a conscious effort to destroy the prisoners' will to live by telling them that it was their fate to work until they died—they would never be free.

Fela refused to give up hope and lived to see the guards proven wrong when the Soviet army liberated the camp on May 8, 1945. Desperate to find her family, Fela, weak and ill, began the journey back to Bedzin, but in Prague the Red Cross removed her from the train, saying she was too ill to travel. As soon as she could, Fela continued her journey home.

To see her hometown empty of those she knew and loved was a shattering experience. Finally, Fela met two cousins, the only family she would find, and the three of them left Poland, ending their journey in a displaced persons camp in Stuttgart. There she met Natan Gipsman, a fellow survivor from Bedzin, who became the love of her life. Fela and Natan were married in Munich on March 29, 1947.

In 1949 the couple immigrated to the United States, spending a few months in Lancaster, Pennsylvania before moving to Detroit, where Natan worked at Chrysler and both attended night school to learn English. Deciding that California offered a better climate and more opportunities, they moved to Los Angeles, arriving on the 4th of July, 1953. Natan attended a trade technical college and obtained his license as an electrical contractor. The couple worked hard to give their two sons, Jack, now an attorney with the Department of Agriculture, and Marc, an anesthesiologist, the education they had been denied, the education Fela's parents had taught her to value so highly.

"The guards at Schatzler made a conscious effort to break our spirits. They told us that we were doomed to work until we dropped and that we would never be liberated."

"My first job, working in the electrical supply store, saved my life. When I arrived at the Sackenhoym labor camp, they asked who had a skill. I identified myself as an electrician and even though I was no expert, I knew enough to survive."



Natan Gipsman

THE SKILL TO SURVIVE

Natan Gipsman was born in Bedzin, Poland on January 19, 1925. His parents, Isak and Chaja Gipsman, owned a confectionary shop that sold chocolates, along with fruit in the winter and ice cream in the summer. Natan and his sister Maniusia, five years younger, attended a private Hebrew school. Each year, Natan felt a special sense of pride when his school's flag was carried in the parade on Polish Independence Day.

Natan was 14 when German tanks rolled into Bedzin on September 4, 1939. Immediately, the Germans implemented anti-Jewish decrees, mandating that all Jews wear an identifying arm band with the Star of David, obey a strict curfew and walk only on one side of the street. Any violation—even jaywalking—could result in arrest and “resettlement,” deportation to forced labor. To remain with his family it was crucial that Natan find a job. Fortunately, in 1940, a family friend whose electrical business was taken over by a German arranged for him to be hired. For the next three years, Natan was spared deportation as he gained the skills that would repeatedly save his life. His father was not so fortunate and was deported to forced labor in Germany in September 1942.

In March 1943, when the authorities came for Natan, his mother, desperate to save her son, lied about his whereabouts. As a reprisal, they took her hostage and threatened her with deportation to Auschwitz if Natan did not appear. As soon as he learned of what had happened, he turned himself in, sharing a brief tearful embrace with his mother. He would never see her or his sister again. They were deported to Auschwitz in fall 1943 and murdered there.

Natan was taken to Sakrau, a transit camp, and then transported to the Sackenhoym labor camp. Although he knew

less than he pretended, he presented himself as a skilled electrician and then learned on the job what he needed to know. His bold gamble spared him from hard labor. In 1944, he was sent to Blechhammer, a sub-camp of Auschwitz, where he was tattooed and given threadbare rags and wooden clogs that caused painful blisters. Identifying himself once again as a skilled worker spared him from the heaviest labor, although he suffered through the same interminable roll calls and beatings as did the other prisoners. He once received 25 lashes for failing to remove his cap quickly enough as a guard passed.

In the summer of 1944 the camp was hit by Allied bombs. Natan was temporarily buried and nearly killed when a bomb detonated near him, but the bombing also gave him hope he would be liberated. On January 21, 1945, two days after Natan's 20th birthday, the Germans evacuated the camp and sent the more than 4,000 prisoners on a death march. Less than half the men who began the two-week march survived to reach Gross-Rosen.

From Gross-Rosen Natan was sent to Buchenwald and then to a satellite camp, Schoenebeck. When the Germans again ordered their prisoners to march, Natan escaped and evaded capture until he was liberated by the Russians on May 8, 1945.

After liberation, Natan went to Bedzin but finding no family returned to Germany. He later learned his father had survived and been liberated at Bergen-Belsen. In a displaced persons camp he met his future wife Fela, also from Bedzin. They married in 1947 and came to the United States in 1949, moving to Los Angeles in 1953. Natan eventually became an electrical contractor. The knowledge that had spared his life for so long now enabled him to provide for his family and to build a new life.

Lola Halpern (Kopelman)

TELL OF IT

Lola Halpern was born to Joel and Menucha Kopelman on December 25, 1926 in Lodz, Poland. She had three sisters, two older and one younger. Her father owned a fabric store for which her mother helped select materials. The family had little monetary wealth, but their home was rich in love and faith.

In the summer of 1939, the Kopelmans sent their two youngest daughters, Lola and Blimka, to stay with their aunt in the countryside. The girls enjoyed swimming in the lake and playing with their cousins. They were about to return to Lodz when Germany attacked Poland. Travel became impossible, and Lola and Blimka were cut off from their parents and sisters. In early 1941, for the first and only time, the girls received a postcard—somehow smuggled out—from their mother. She reported that they were confined to the ghetto and that their father was very ill. After the war, Lola learned that her father died later that year, and that her mother and sisters were killed at Auschwitz in 1943.

In fall 1941, Lola, Blimka, their aunt and her family were ordered to the Suchowola labor camp—the first of many camps Lola survived. Soon after their arrival, a selection took place, and Blimka, then 11, was sent to the death camp Treblinka. Lola worked at Suchowola for about a year, until she, along with her aunt and cousins, and hundreds of other Jews, was marched out of the camp. With no water or food, many died along the way. When they reached the town of Miedzyrzec, they were loaded onto a train, crammed into overcrowded, stifling boxcars.

Believing that they would soon be killed, Lola's aunt gathered her children and Lola around her and told them that they must promise to do whatever they could to survive, and if they did, they must witness to what they had seen. Soon after, Lola realized that a girl had successfully sawed through the

wooden bars covering the car's small window and had jumped out. Keeping her promise to her aunt, Lola followed, dodging bullets from the guards. She crept to a train station where a worker took pity on the shivering and starving girl, gave her food and water, and told her that her aunt's premonition was correct—the train was only a short distance from Treblinka.

Lola's only desire was to see her parents and sisters again so she began walking the long distance to Lodz, but soon realized that she would never make it past the many patrols. Instead, she returned to Suchowola where relatives sneaked her into the camp. When Suchowola was liquidated, Lola and the other prisoners were taken by truck to Majdanek near Lublin. There she survived a brutal commando assigned to "beautifying" the camp, carrying heavy rocks from one place to another.

Three months later, Lola was transferred to Skarzyzko where she worked for two years in a factory assembling sticks of dynamite. Considered a skilled munitions worker, she was transported in May 1944 to a factory in Leipzig, Germany. In March 1945, as the Russian army neared, the prisoners were sent on a death march. Lola kept going even when it meant walking in her sleep. On May 7, 1945, she was liberated by the Russian army.

After liberation, 19-year-old Lola was sent to a displaced persons camp in Kassel, Germany where she met and married fellow survivor Rubin Halpern. The Halperns moved to Hanover where their daughter Genia was born in 1949. Two years later, they came to the U.S. and settled in Los Angeles. In 1955, Lola and Rubin had a second daughter, Michelle.

Lola never forgot her promise to her aunt. For all those who were murdered—her parents, sisters, aunts, and cousins—Lola has remembered and witnessed.