

"In 1938, my sister Henia entered a local beauty pageant and was crowned Miss Lutsk. I still have the photo of her from the newspaper. I was so very proud of her. When I look at my daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughter, I see her."

"In the dark, stifling cattle car my aunt gathered my cousins and me around her. She said to us, 'You must try to survive. And, if you do, you must promise you will never forget what happened. Tell of it!'"



Rubin Halpern

MY SISTER HENIA

Rubin Halpern was born in Lutsk, Poland (now the Ukraine) on April 10, 1922. His father, Mosche, was in the lumber business and his mother, Goldie, cared for Rubin; his sister, Henia, three years older; and brother, Selik, five years younger. Rubin was especially close to his sister Henia who in 1938 had been crowned Miss Lutsk. She was both beautiful and talented. Until the war ended his education, Rubin attended school, studying Polish and Hebrew, among other subjects.

In 1939, as part of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Treaty, Lutsk came under the control of the Soviets. Germany broke the treaty and launched a surprise attack in 1941. After extensive bombing, the German army entered Lutsk on June 25, and the city's Jews became immediate targets.

On July 4, the SS ordered all Jewish heads of households to bring a shovel and go to the Lubart fortress, a 13th-century castle located on the outskirts of the ghetto. Rubin watched as his father and some 2,000 other Jewish men marched to the fortress for what they assumed would be a day of forced labor. Instead, the men were ordered to use the shovels to dig their own graves and were then shot. When his father did not return at nightfall, Rubin knew that something had gone terribly wrong and that his father had been killed.

In early December, the remaining Jews were ordered into a ghetto. Since Rubin's home was already within that area, the family did not have to move, but they struggled to cope with

the horrible conditions—little food and sanitation and terrible overcrowding—while grieving for Mosche. Hard physical labor drained Rubin of what little strength he had. In these months, Rubin stuck close to his brother-in-law who had promised his father he would look after Rubin.

During the week of August 19, 1942, some 17,000 Jews, including Rubin's mother, sister, and brother, were taken from the ghetto to Polanka Hill where giant pits had been dug. Members of a special SD (Security Service) unit manned machine guns at each corner and slaughtered everyone who arrived.

Following the murder of his mother, brother, and sister, Rubin became separated from his brother-in-law who was later killed. Rubin was among the few to escape from Lutsk. For more than two years, he hid, going from village to village, sometimes living with partisans in forests and caves, enduring hunger, illness, and brutally cold winters. He was liberated, a few miles from Lutsk, by Soviet soldiers in early 1945.

After liberation, Rubin was sent to a displaced persons camp in Kassel, Germany where he met his future wife, Lola, also a survivor, whom he married in 1948. The couple immigrated to the U.S. and settled in Los Angeles, where they raised their two daughters. Having lost all of his family by the time he was 20, Rubin finds his greatest joy and purpose in life in his roles as husband, father, grandfather of five, and great-grandfather of three.

Regina Hirsch (Landowicz)

THE LUCKIEST KID IN THE WORLD

Regina Hirsch was born in Lodz, Poland, in 1928 into a large family that eventually came to number nine girls and one boy. The German invasion of Poland in 1939 meant immediate restrictions and harassment for Regina and her family. On one occasion, her father was made to scrub the sidewalk before his beard was shaved off by laughing German soldiers. Regina would never forget the sight of her father crying at this terrible humiliation and violation of his beliefs as an Orthodox Jew.

Soon the Landowicz family was forced into the Lodz ghetto. Gentile neighbors offered to take Regina's sister Lily, but their mother refused to be separated from her youngest child. Regina, her parents and three sisters, Ruth, Sally, and Lily, still only a young child of eight, all worked in the ghetto's factories. Even with everyone working the family typically ran out of food by the end of the week. To help out, Regina would eat only a portion of the bread she received, hiding it until the end of the week to share it with her family when they had none.

In April 1940, Regina came down with typhus. After falling into a coma, she awoke in a ghetto hospital in a bathtub full of ice with a young woman watching over her who exclaimed to her, "You are the luckiest kid in the world!" As the woman told her, had she arrived in the hospital only a day earlier—the day before the ghetto was closed—she would have been murdered in the Nazi roundup of doctors, nurses, and patients. But all Regina could think about was the fact that during her illness her gorgeous head of hair had been shaved off. She was so ill it took her six months to walk again.

Over the next years, the family narrowly avoided deportation several times, but in June 1944, the ghetto was

liquidated. Their attempts to hide, first in an abandoned factory and then in a cemetery, failed, and Regina, her mother, and three sisters were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau on August 27, 1944.

The family was immediately separated. Ruth, Regina, and Sally were selected to live, while twelve-year-old Lily, who looked much younger because she was so malnourished, was sent to the gas chambers. Again refusing to be separated from her youngest child, Regina's mother went with Lily.

Regina and her two sisters spent six weeks in Auschwitz before being transported to Oderan, a sub-camp of Flossenbürg. From there they were taken to Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia where they were liberated by Soviet troops on May 9, 1945.

Following the war, Regina spent 4 1/2 years in the Landsberg displaced persons camp in Germany. She learned that of her large family, only she and three of her sisters, Ruth, Sally, and Judy, who had spent the war years as a slave laborer in the Soviet Union, had survived.

Regina immigrated to the United States in 1949 and settled in Los Angeles. Soon after arriving, she began attending dances to meet people her own age. At one occasion, her date introduced her to Phillip Hirsch who, as she discovered, was not only from Lodz but had lived quite near to her. They felt an immediate connection and were married less than a year later. They have now been married 57 years.

Today Regina lives very near her three sisters, Ruth, Sally, and Judy. They see or talk with each other by phone almost every day; three sisters who share an unbreakable bond of family and of memory.

"In April 1940, I came down with typhus and fell into a coma. I awoke, lying in a bathtub filled with ice, with a young woman watching over me. She exclaimed: 'You are the luckiest kid in the world.' Not only had I survived typhus, but I had narrowly missed being taken in a round up and killed."



"In 1938, I heard the founder of the Zionist organization, *Betar*, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, speak. He said, 'The roofs are burning over your heads.' He tried to warn us, but I was young and idealistic and couldn't imagine that what he was saying could be true."



Sophie Lazar (Bielawska)

THE ROOFS ARE BURNING OVER YOUR HEADS

Sophie Lazar was born the fourth of five children on July 27, 1921 in Lodz, Poland. Her father Max Bielawska owned a fabric-dyeing company and had the means to give his children an education. Sophie completed gymnasium, preparatory study for the university, before Germany invaded Poland in 1939. Through her older brother Arie, Sophie became involved in the Zionist organization *Betar* and by the age of sixteen was leading meetings. In 1938, the founder of *Betar*, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, came to Lodz and warned that "the roofs are burning over your heads"—Polish Jewry was in imminent danger. Although Sophie thought Jabotinsky must be exaggerating, her brother Arie took the warning literally and fled to Palestine that same year.

When Germany invaded Poland, Sophie and the other *Betar* girls mobilized with the Red Cross. They cared for the wounded until they had to flee to avoid capture. In late 1939, Sophie, her parents and two sisters were ordered out of their home and into the ghetto. Sophie's ingenuity and leadership helped both her and her family survive. She was given the job of supervising eleven male janitors who cleaned the houses of the German administrators. When she was not working, Sophie continued her involvement with *Betar* even though the group was now outlawed.

Over the next years, conditions in the ghetto worsened and more and more people, including Sophie's father, died from disease and malnutrition. Sophie now drew even closer to her mother and two sisters. When they were seized in a roundup, Sophie was devastated.

Sophie stayed with her boyfriend's family until they were all deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau at the end of July 1944. Only on the train did her boyfriend tell her what he had learned from secretly listening to BBC radio broadcasts—that the camps were factories of death. The shock of that news and the impact of what she saw before

her—chimneys spewing smoke and prisoners with shaved heads and emaciated bodies—threw her into a state of shock. Only the support of her friends carried her through her first days in the camp.

A few weeks later she was transferred to Ravensbrück, a women's concentration camp in Germany, but that was only a temporary stop on her way to Mühlhausen, a sub-camp of Buchenwald. Assigned to the ammunition factory, Sophie once again became a leader, obtaining extra rations for the younger girls and teaching them Hebrew songs.

After eighteen months in Mühlhausen, Sophie and the other women were transferred in early April 1945 to Bergen-Belsen which by that time had become a dumping ground for prisoners. There was no running water and no food; lice were everywhere, and soon Sophie became gravely ill with the typhus. Only the arrival of British soldiers on April 15, 1945 saved her life; she weighed a mere 70 pounds.

Liberation brought the realization of how much she had lost. She learned her boyfriend had died and that her brother Josef had been killed in the Warsaw ghetto uprising. Only her brother Arie who had fought with the British Brigade from Palestine had survived. Shared grief drew her to Max Lazar, fifteen years her senior, whom she had known in the Lodz ghetto and who had lost his wife and two daughters. They married and moved to Israel in 1946. The birth of her first child brought Sophie both joy and sadness as she felt deeply the absence of her own mother. Although Sophie had hoped to stay in Israel, Max believed there were more opportunities in the United States. In 1951 they and their daughters, Chana and Frieda, arrived in Los Angeles. For years Sophie told no one about her experiences, but the presence of Holocaust deniers made her realize she must once again become a leader, speaking for those whose lives had been taken from them.

Adam Krispow

A LEAP INTO THE UNKNOWN

Adam Krispow was born on September 12, 1923 to a middle class Orthodox Jewish family in Warsaw, Poland. He enjoyed school and hoped to study metallurgy, but the German invasion of Poland brought his education to an abrupt end. Although Adam and his family survived the relentless bombardment, his father's business did not. At the age of 16, Adam went to work to help his family. No longer did he think about the future, only about surviving.

In fall 1940, the Germans established a ghetto, but since Adam's home was within the ghetto's boundaries the family did not have to move. On May 12, 1941, Adam was seized in an *Aktion*, a round up, and sent to forced labor. He would never see his family again.

His first job was widening and repairing roads as Germany prepared to invade the Soviet Union. Next he was transported to Pustkow, where he spent three years building an enormous SS training camp.

In August 1944, Adam was sent to Auschwitz- Birkenau. He had no idea that he was among the fortunate few to be chosen to live. He was tattooed with the number A18164 and quarantined before being taken to the sub-camp Gleiwitz. There he faced a life or death decision. When a large steel plate dropped on his hand, Adam endured the pain of a festering wound and a badly broken finger and kept working rather than admit that he was hurt. He knew that the inability to work was a death sentence.

On January 18, 1945, the Germans evacuated the camp. The prisoners were marched in the snow and freezing rain and then loaded onto a freight train and sent first to Gross-Rosen and then to Buchenwald. From there Adam was moved once again, this time to Fliesberg, a brutal labor camp. In April, the prisoners were again loaded onto box cars with no food or water. Knowing that escape was his only hope, Adam and his best friend William knocked out

the barbed wire over the small window, hoisted themselves up, and jumped into the Czech countryside.

Their next days were spent evading the Germans as Adam became weaker and more desperately ill. After he was liberated by American soldiers in early May 1945, he was hospitalized for two months for pneumonia and typhus. When he was well enough to travel, he was moved to a displaced persons camp near Salzburg, Austria where he found work at the American military motor pool. It was there that he met his future wife Lola.

The American soldiers to whom he told his story were outraged and offered him a chance to take revenge on their prisoners of war. Adam refused, saying that if he committed murder he would dishonor the memory of his family and demean himself. Given an opportunity for retribution on those who had taken everything from him, he chose to take nothing from them.

When the motor unit moved to Vienna, Adam went with them. There he met an American army officer who helped Adam come to the U.S. The officer paid for Adam's passage, met him when he arrived in New York, and took him to his hometown in Pennsylvania. This act of extraordinary altruism helped Adam regain his faith in humanity.

Only a few days after arriving and knowing no English, Adam started working in a local factory. He wrote Lola who had arrived in the U.S. a few months earlier and was living in Philadelphia. He soon joined her and the couple married on January 11, 1948. They became the parents of a son, Jeffrey, and are now the grandparents of two. They moved to Los Angeles in 1962 and recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary—two survivors who embrace life fully while always remembering the families they lost.

“The officers went down the line shooting each girl. I knew I would be dead in moments. Then they stopped. There were four of us left. It was unthinkable that they would leave witnesses to such a crime. I had the feeling my father was looking down upon them and saying, ‘Don’t touch the baby!’”

“Every day more prisoners died. The stench of death was overwhelming. William and I knew we must escape if we hoped to live. We knocked out the barbed wire from the window of the box car and jumped into the darkness and the unknown.”



Lola Krispow (Lerer)

DON'T TOUCH THE BABY

Lola Krispow was born on October 2, 1923 to Szymon and Golda Lerer in Lodz, Poland. Lola was the adored baby of the family with three older siblings, two brothers, Akiva and Sol, and one sister, Rose. Her father owned a general store in Lodz and was also president of the local synagogue. He was known for his generosity and charitable acts, often allowing customers to purchase items on credit when they had no money for food or other necessities.

As war seemed imminent, Lola's brother Sol urged his father to move the family to Russia, but Szymon, who had served in the Russian army in the Great War, was reluctant to give up all he had built in Lodz. Sol left and was able to survive the war.

Lola's home was within the area that became a closed ghetto on April 30, 1940. Szymon's acts of kindness were now reciprocated as the ghetto's leadership helped the family avoid the round ups and deportation to the Chelmno death camp that began in January 1942. Szymon's connections also got Akiva a position with the ghetto police. Lola's mother, however, fell victim to the hardships of the ghetto, dying in May 1940 at the age of only 46.

Lola, her father, brother and sister remained in the ghetto until it was liquidated in the summer of 1944 and the remaining inhabitants were sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Upon arrival, Lola and Rose were separated from Szymon and Akiva. What occurred at Auschwitz was no longer a mystery to those arriving and in the shower Lola and Rose held hands and prayed that water, not gas, would come from the pipes. Although she and Rose were spared, Szymon and Akiva were sent to their deaths.

For the next four months, Lola and Rose experienced the horrors of Auschwitz as ditch diggers. Each found her strength in the other. In January 1945 as the Russians neared, the Germans sent

the Auschwitz prisoners on a death march, an experience nearly breaking the sisters' bond. Rose, unable to walk because of frostbite, was ordered onto a bus. Lola refused to be separated from her one remaining family member and so feigned injury, but her ploy to join her sister failed. She was sent to another bus which traveled a brief distance before Lola and the twenty other girls were ordered out and into the forest. There the SS officers began systematically shooting the girls one by one. Lola, near the end of the line and knowing that she would soon be killed, wrestled with agonizing questions: Would anyone find her body? How would anyone know who she was? Then, suddenly, the shooting stopped and the four remaining girls, including Lola, were allowed to go. Their survival was quite simply a miracle since it was unthinkable for the Germans to leave witnesses to such a crime. She knew her life must have been saved by her father looking down on her crying, "Don't touch the baby!"

Lola was reunited with Rose in Czechoslovakia about four months later. Together they were liberated by the U.S. Army and sent to a displaced persons camp in Salzburg, Austria. It was there that she met fellow survivor Adam Krispow who would become her husband. Rose fell in love with and married a GI.

Lola arrived in the U.S. in late December 1946, joining her sister and brother-in-law in Philadelphia. She started work right away, attended night classes, and learned English. Adam joined her, and the two married in January 1948. In 1962, they moved to California for Lola's health. She remains in close touch with her sister Rose, who lives in Florida, and with whom she shares an unbreakable bond of loyalty and love.

Jack Lewin

A LIFELONG LOVE OF YIDDISH

Born in Lodz, Poland, on April 13, 1927, Jack Lewin had both Jewish and Christian neighbors as he was growing up, but because of the pervasive antisemitism, he never had a Christian friend. His parents, Hersh, a house painter, and Dinah, a seamstress, worked hard so their only child could attend a private Jewish school where he learned not only the required Polish curriculum but also Yiddish language, literature, and culture.

In February 1940, the Germans ordered the Jews of Lodz to leave their homes and move into the ghetto. In the extremely overcrowded ghetto, Jack and his parents were fortunate to share a room with Jack's maternal grandparents. Food became increasingly scarce and when the Nazis promised a small salary to anyone who volunteered for the Poznan labor camp, Jack's father did so knowing that the money he earned would enable his family to buy food and other necessities. For a time the wages came, but one day they stopped, and Jack knew without being told that his father had died.

For the next three years, Jack worked in a ghetto factory that made confiscated furs into linings for German army uniforms while his mother worked in a factory sewing uniforms. The two survived on less and less as starvation ruled the ghetto.

In August 1944, the ghetto was liquidated and Jack and his mother were deported to Auschwitz. Dinah, only 45 years old, was sent to her death while Jack was sent was judged young and healthy enough to work. Ordered to Birkenau, he spent two weeks crammed into a barrack with 1,000 other boys before being taken by truck to Trzebinia where he was assigned to rebuilding bombed out IG Farben oil refineries. Jack's job was carrying bricks, exhausting physical labor. His daily ration of food, a tiny portion of bread as hard as a rock, was not enough to sustain him. His attempt to steal potatoes failed and he was severely beaten, drenched with ice cold

water and then made to stand outside in the bitter cold of winter.

In mid-January 1945, the Germans evacuated the camp and marched their prisoners back to Auschwitz. Exhausted by the many hours of walking in deep snow without food or water, Jack could not go on. When the officer in charge asked those who were too weak to out of the line, Jack stepped forward. He realized that his decision meant death. Yet, rather than fear, Jack felt a sense of peace, believing that in death he would be reunited with his beloved parents. To his surprise, the prisoners were marched not to the gas chamber but to Block 28 at Auschwitz, the so-called medical ward, where the guards simply dumped Jack and the others. Jack's spontaneous decision turned out to mean life not death since the prisoners, no longer guarded, could eat their fill of the soup left in the camp barracks.

Ten days later, on January 27, 1945, the Russian army entered the camp, and for the first time in five years, Jack experienced freedom. He returned to Lodz to search for his family but found no one. Not yet eighteen, Jack decided to leave Poland, going first to Berlin where he worked in a U.S. Army kitchen peeling potatoes—staying as close to food as he could—and then in January 1946 sneaking aboard a train to Brussels, Belgium.

In Brussels, Jack met his future wife Regina whom he married on May 8, 1947. Prohibited as refugees from applying for Belgian citizenship, the couple immigrated to Melbourne, Australia in 1950. In August 1965, with their two daughters, Dinah and Sylvia, they moved to the United States.

Over the years, Jack never forgot the Yiddish education which his parents had sacrificed so much to give him. In Melbourne he acted in the Yiddish theatre and in Los Angeles he remains an active member of the Yiddish Culture Club, helping to publish the Yiddish literary periodical *Heshbon*.

"My mother was a seamstress and my father was a house painter. I was an only child. My parents sacrificed so that I could attend a private Yiddish school. That school gave me a love of Yiddish language and literature that has stayed with me for nearly 75 years."

"I was only fifteen years old when I saw my parents for the last time. For the first year I was in the slave labor camp, I received letters from them. Then the letters stopped coming. That is when I knew I would never see them again."



Regina Lewin (Szwarcfeld)

NO MORE LETTERS

Regina Lewin was born on October 3, 1927 in Bendzin, Poland, a coal-mining town situated on what was then the Polish-German border. Her father owned a shoe factory, and Regina enjoyed a comfortable, middle-class life. Although her parents were aware of the growing danger from Germany, they were convinced that the situation would be resolved politically and believed that even if Germany attacked, Poland's Jews would be treated as humanely as they had been during the Great War.

In the days immediately following Germany's invasion of Poland in September 1939, Regina and her parents, Hersz and Sala Szwarcfeld, discovered that this time German policy would be very different. Suddenly there were decrees forbidding Jews from using the sidewalks, and a strict curfew was imposed. Adults were required to wear armbands with the Star of David so they could be immediately identified. Some of the city's leading Jewish citizens were publicly hanged. Regina's education at the Jewish public school, Maria Konopicka School for Girls, came to an abrupt end as she was starting the sixth grade. Jewish children were no longer considered worthy of receiving an education. Yet even during this difficult time, Regina and her parents found comfort in the fact that they were together.

In May 1942, the family was separated, and 14-year-old Regina, along with other girls under the age of twenty, was sent to the slave labor camp of Oberaltstadt, a sub-camp of the Gross-Rosen concentration camp. The beauty of the alpine landscape contrasted starkly with the harshness of life at the Kluger factory where Regina worked producing thread for German army uniforms. The work was monotonous, exhausting, and dangerous. Regina was assigned the difficult job of monitoring a machine that

fed and wound the thread onto the spools. When the thread became tangled, she had to reach into the machine to untangle it, a dangerous maneuver in which she could easily have lost a finger.

During her first months in the camp, Regina's spirits were lifted by letters from home, but those letters ceased after about a year. Separated from their families, Regina and the eight girls in her barrack supported and encouraged one another to get through the frequent selections that meant life or death. They even dared to share a laugh and secretly make fun of their supervisors, but Regina knew how precarious life was, especially after she saw a long line of emaciated male prisoners march past the factory on what she later learned was a death march.

On May 8, 1945, Jewish partisans and the Soviet army liberated Oberaltstadt. With the help of the Red Cross Regina made her way home and later traveled to Berlin with two of her cousins where she lived in a displaced persons camp until an aunt living in Brussels located her and arranged for Regina to join her.

At eighteen, Regina began her life anew, taking classes to become a seamstress. On an evening outing at the movies she met her future husband, Jack Lewin, who had survived a death march similar to the one that Regina had witnessed. They married on May 8, 1947, the second anniversary of Regina's liberation, and in 1950 moved to Australia where they lived until 1965 when they joined Regina's aunt who had settled in the United States. With their two daughters, the Lewins made their home in Los Angeles. On May 8 each year, Regina and Jack celebrate their anniversary—60 years in 2007—and the day that made possible their marriage, family, and life together.

Paula Lebovics (Balter)

SILENCE IS NOT AN OPTION

Growing up in Ostrowiec, Poland, as the youngest of six children born to Israel and Perla Balter, Paula had to find her voice early on. Surrounded by many relatives on the family estate, "Pesalle" as her family affectionately called her, developed a love of the limelight and enjoyed singing for her musical family.

In September 1939, just a few weeks before Paula's sixth birthday, her idyllic life was shattered by Germany's invasion of Poland. In late 1940, an open ghetto was established and Paula's once wealthy family was ordered into a cramped single room. Fortunately, Paula's older brother Herschel secured work with the division of the Judenrat, the Jewish Council, which oversaw sanitation. Although the job exposed him to typhus and tuberculosis, it gave him access to medicine and extra food, and, more importantly, to information.

In fall 1942, Herschel learned that a selection would soon occur. Those without work permits would be deported to the death camp Treblinka. None of the forty members in Paula's extended family had papers so they had to "disappear." Herschel dug a crawlspace beneath a shed in an abandoned lumber yard and guided each person there under the cover of night. After the selection, Herschel smuggled them back into different areas of the ghetto. The Balter family would never be united again.

As the ghetto transitioned into a hard labor camp, Paula had to save herself since she was too young for a work assignment. During the day, she hid with her brother Josef in different places—an attic, a small closet, and a broken kiln in a brick factory. She experienced hunger and fear, but it is the red patches on the snow, remnants of mass executions that she remembers most vividly. Among those killed were Paula's grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins.

Josef, five years older, was able to find work; Paula was

now entirely alone. She was captured and about to be shot by an SS officer. As he drew his pistol, he told her to turn around and face the wall. She refused. At that very moment a laughing, drunken SS officer came along and told her captor not to waste a bullet on a child. Paula was saved and assigned work.

In early August 1944 the Nazis closed the Ostrowiec camp and sent the workers by cattle car to Auschwitz. On the train Paula was united for a brief time with her brother and parents but was separated from all but her mother upon arrival in Auschwitz. Though she was weak from beatings and starvation, Paula kept up the spirits of the prisoners by singing for them. Eventually she was sent to the *Kinderblock*, children's barrack. She learned to become invisible to avoid the "Angel of Death," Josef Mengele, who regularly visited the block to select children for his "experiments."

Paula was reunited with her mother when Auschwitz was liberated by the Soviets in January 1945. They traveled to Ostrowiec where they begged their former caretaker for a room. After ten survivors were murdered by Polish antisemites, mother and daughter fled to Lodz and were reunited with Herschel and Josef who smuggled them out of Poland and into a displaced persons camp in Germany. Paula and her mother would spend the next six years there.

In 1952, Paula and her mother immigrated to Detroit, where Paula worked to support her mother. In 1957, Paula married Michael Lebovics, but sadly, three weeks before the wedding, Paula's beloved mother died of cancer. The newlyweds moved to California the next year. Michael opened a jewelry business and the couple had two children, Linda and Danny.

Throughout her harrowing Holocaust journey, the spirited young girl held fast to the belief that "silence is not an option" and that she would live to tell people what she had experienced.



**"I found my voice and haven't been silent since.
I speak whenever I'm asked and sometimes even when
I'm not asked. I believe that silence is not an option."**

Felice Newman (Winer)

A DOORWAY INTO THE PAST

Felice Newman was born in Lodz, Poland on January 16, 1921 to Wolf and Gita Winer. Her father was a journalist who wrote for English language Zionist newspapers and was a leader in the Zionist labor organization, Hitachdut. He was an avid reader and self-taught scholar. Felice grew up speaking Polish and Hebrew. Although it was a financial hardship, her parents sent Felice and her brother Benjamin, seven years younger, to private Hebrew schools. These were happy days, especially in February 1938 when there was a reunion of some three hundred family members.

Felice dreamt of studying in Jerusalem and becoming a teacher, a dream shattered by the German invasion. On September 13, the Gestapo arrested Wolf—the first Jew to be arrested in Lodz—on false charges of spying for the British. He was sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin where he died in April 1940. The same week her father was arrested Felice received permission to travel to Palestine, but she knew she must stay and look after her brother and mother.

In late February 1940, the family was ordered into the ghetto. Felice was given an office job by the Jewish Council—a sign of respect for her father. Her mother was permitted to work at home, sewing earmuffs for German soldiers while Benjamin, only twelve, worked in a soup kitchen. Assigned to tabulate statistics for births, deaths, and marriages, Felice learned firsthand how many were dying in the overcrowded and disease-ridden ghetto.

In August 28, 1944, Felice and her family were deported to Auschwitz. The cattle car was so crowded, with some 150 people, that everyone had to stand, pressed against each other, for the journey that lasted a horrific three days.

Upon arrival, the SS separated the men, women, children, and elderly. Benjamin, still a child, was sent to the left to his death

while Felice and her mother were ordered to the right. Seven weeks later Felice's mother was taken from the barrack. At 44, she was judged too old and useless to live.

A week later, Felice was sent to the labor camp Halbstadt where she built bombs, which she and the other women secretly sabotaged. Felice shared her bunk with a cousin and her barrack with many girls from Lodz. They became family, at night telling stories from the books they had read when life was still normal. Felice held her listeners spellbound when she recounted *Gone with the Wind*.

Felice and her cousin were liberated on May 9, 1945. She remained at the camp a few weeks to gain strength, but fearing rape from drunken Russian soldiers, she left as soon as she could. When she returned to her home in Lodz, she found a Polish acquaintance living there. Looking through the doorway, Felice felt as if she were looking into a photograph from the past—the furniture, even the bedspreads, were just as they were when her family lived there. Felice told the man she only wanted her family's photos and documents, but he pushed her out, saying that he would never keep the papers of a Jew in his house and had burned them all.

Shortly afterwards, Felice left Poland and joined a group of young people hoping to immigrate to Palestine, but her journey ended in the displaced persons camp in Landsberg, Germany. There she met Morris Newman, Dachau survivor. They married in 1945 and had a daughter, Gail, whom Felice named in honor of her mother. In May 1949, the family came to the United States, settling in Los Angeles near Morris' brother and sister.

Felice joined The "1939" Club in 1956. With her fellow survivors, she relives not the horrors of the past but the beautiful days before the war when a young girl could look forward to family reunions and a future full of promise.



"When I returned to my home in Lodz, the door was opened by a gentile acquaintance of my family. I looked through the open doorway and saw the furniture, even the bedspreads, just as we had left them. I felt as if I were looking into a photograph of the past."

"I asked Kowal to show me the location of the murders. He took me to the exact spot of the mass grave. I asked him why the grave was not marked, and he told me that the Polish government required that a next-of-kin make the request and that none had come forward."



Sidney Pressberg

A MONUMENT TO MEMORY

Sidney Pressberg was sixteen when Germany invaded Poland in 1939. The second of eight children with two brothers and five sisters, Sidney grew up on the family farm in Kulno. In a village of only 500 people, everyone knew who belonged to the fifteen Jewish families.

Over the next months Kulno passed from the Germans to the Soviets and back to the Germans. One evening as Sidney was walking home, he saw German soldiers take two Jews from their home and execute them. Sidney urged his family to join him in fleeing to Russian territory, but they made the decision to remain.

Wrenching though it was to do so, Sidney left his family but before reaching Russian territory, he was captured by the Germans. Only another bold move enabled him to escape and make his way to Lvov where he worked for the Russians as a laborer.

Sent to the Ukraine, he spent six months in freezing weather and horrible living conditions. Once again he made the decision to flee, sneaking onto a train and hiding for two days in a pile of coal. He journeyed to Lvov where he lived with his cousins until he returned from work one day to find them taken. Sidney went to the authorities hoping that they would send him to the same place as his cousins; instead, they put him in jail and then transported him to a camp near the Finnish border where he worked chopping trees. In the bitter cold, more than half the men died.

When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941, Sidney was given a choice—to fight on the front lines or to work in a Siberian labor camp. He chose Siberia, a decision that nearly cost him his life when his train was bombed in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) by German planes, destroying every car but his.

Although the war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945, the authorities refused to allow Sidney to leave Siberia until April 1946. He returned to Poland to search for his family. As he neared his home, he was recognized as a Jew and threatened with death if he continued. Fearing for his life, he went no further, convinced that no one in his family had survived.

On his own again, he joined a *kibbutz* where he worked for food and a place to live. In late 1946, he went to Italy, but rather than going on to Palestine as he had planned he decided instead to go to the United States where an aunt was willing to sponsor him. He arrived in 1948, sending soon thereafter for his wife whom he had met and married in an Italian displaced persons camp.

The couple settled in New York where Sidney worked in a butcher shop. In 1955 they moved to Los Angeles where he opened a small meat market. With his savings, he purchased land and in 1961 began his own real estate development firm. In 1984, he opened the Orlando Hotel near Beverly Hills.

That same year Sidney decided to return to Poland to seek definitive answers to what had happened to his family. From a neighbor, a boy of seven at the time, he learned that on July 14, 1942, SS officers had ordered the mayor of Kulno to identify all the Jews. More than ninety people, from babies to the elderly, including three Christian Poles, were taken to a nearby forest, ordered to form a circle and then shot and buried in a mass grave—still unmarked.

Determined to honor their memory, Sidney hired an architect and paid for the building of a memorial. On July 11, 1986 the site was dedicated—a gift of love from a son to his family.

Mazda Rosenroth (Czechanovski)

GO TO THE OPPORTUNITY

Masza Rosenroth was born in October 1924 to Mordechai and Malka Czechanovski in Konstancin, Poland. Her parents provided a loving Jewish home for Masza, her older brother Leon, and her two younger sisters, Gutia and Surra.

Fearing what might happen to 17-year-old Leon, Masza's parents smuggled him out of Poland and into Russia soon after the German invasion in September 1939. Masza would not see him again until the end of the war in 1945.

Her parents' worst fears were realized only a few weeks after the war began when they were expelled from their home and marched to a holding area where they spent three weeks housed in overcrowded conditions with little food and no sanitation. Many died of typhus.

In January 1940, the family was sent to the Baluty section of Lodz, an area that at the end of April became a closed ghetto. Masza was fortunate to be assigned to a factory manufacturing German army uniforms. The terrible conditions of the ghetto proved too much for her parents; Mordechai died of starvation in 1941 and Malka less than a year later. Masza, only 18, was now responsible for her two younger sisters.

In September 1942, Masza's younger sister, Surra, only 12, was seized in a round up of those the Nazis considered "useless"—the old, the sick, and the children. Masza was terrified that she might next lose Gutia.

In August 1944 the sisters were deported to Auschwitz. The trip, in an overcrowded cattle car, lasted an eternity, more than eight hours, with no food, water, or air. When the train finally arrived at Auschwitz, half of those in their car were dead.

The sisters survived the initial selection, were stripped and

shaved, and sent to a barrack where they slept five to a bunk. Three days later they were transferred to Bad Kudowa (now Kudowa Zdroj, Poland) where V-2 rockets were built. Masza worked a 15-hour shift operating a complex machine with rows of buttons. She was threatened with death if, by mistake, she pushed the wrong one. Although she was afraid for herself and her sister, Masza vowed that her oppressors would never break her spirit. Her tenacity and courage gave strength and hope to Gutia. Finally, on May 8, 1945, Russian tanks appeared at the camp's gates and the prisoners were liberated.

Although free, Masza and Gutia had nowhere to go. They were sent first to a displaced persons camp located in the former concentration camp of Dachau. Through the Red Cross, they learned their brother had survived the war in Russia. They contacted him and were reunited at a DP camp near Regensburg in the American zone. From there the three siblings traveled to Munich where Masza worked for the American Joint Distribution Committee. When they learned a cousin had survived and was living in Frankfurt, they moved there where Masza met and married a fellow survivor, Jakob Rosenroth, in December 1947.

Masza put all her energy into leaving Europe and coming to the United States. In 1949, after two years of trying, the couple found an organization to sponsor them. They settled in Buffalo, New York where Masza worked in a dress shop while Jakob established himself in business. Life was not easy, especially at first, since the couple spoke no English and had no money, but they persevered. In 1962, with their daughters Sharon and Michele, they moved to southern California—fulfilling the dream of Masza's father that she should leave Poland and "go to the opportunity, go to America."

"When I was seven, my father told me that I must not stay in Poland but instead go to the opportunity—go to America."



"Our rescuer saved three letters from my parents, written in the winter of 1942-43. These letters are the most precious possessions I have. In them, one can read their love and worry for my sister and me and their anguish at being separated from us."



Jenny Unterman (Leijdesdorff)

LETTERS OF LOVE

Jenny Unterman was born in Amsterdam, the Netherlands on July 15, 1938. Jenny, her older sister Hanna, and her parents, Isaac and Sarina Leijdesdorff, lived over the drugstore they owned. Her parents also owned a photography store nearby where her father sold cameras and developed pictures.

In May 1940, Germany invaded and occupied the Netherlands and in 1941 every Jew was compelled to register. By September of the following year, Jenny's parents decided that the family should go into hiding, their daughters in one location and they in another. Throughout the next years, the girls would stay with a number of Dutch Christian families.

Until December 1942, Jenny and Hanna stayed with Cornelis and Petronella Kromhout in Leiden. Subsequently, they spent a brief time on a farm near Leiden and then were placed with Gerrit and Jacoba van den Berg in the town of Ede. Jenny later learned that sometimes Mrs. van den Berg would take the two little girls out on a walk so that their parents, hiding nearby, could catch a brief glimpse of their daughters.

In April 1943, the two girls were moved yet again. This time the sisters were separated. Hanna was placed in the home of a pediatric nurse in Breda who was hiding nine Jewish children while caring for ten babies of unwed Dutch mothers. There was space for only one more Jewish child, and Hanna was considered old enough to help care for the babies. Jenny was placed with Janny and Bram van Vianen in the city of Leiden. She stayed with them until spring 1944.

In 1991, 47 years later, Mrs. van Vianen, then 93, told Jenny how she had once inadvertently put them all in danger when, as she was hanging out the window, she was spotted by children in the street who asked her name. Jenny, only five, told them that she had to go ask whether she should give them her real name or her

"hiding name"! In April 1944 after a raid in which Bram van Vianen was arrested, Jenny was moved again, this time to Breda where she was reunited with her sister. They were liberated by the Canadian army in October 1944.

Jenny's parents did not survive. Their hiding place in Ede was betrayed and the couple was arrested, along with two other Jews, and taken to the transit camp Westerbork. Since Isaac and Sarina had not reported in 1942 as required for forced labor in Germany, special punitive measures were taken against them. They were sent on the first transport from Westerbork to the death camp Sobibor on July 20, 1943 where they were murdered three days later.

After the war ended in May 1945, Jenny's and Hanna's aunt and uncle located their nieces and gave them a home in Amsterdam. In time, Jenny and Hanna came to call their aunt and uncle Mom and Dad. Jenny returned to school, completed high school and went to work.

At a dance in March 1962, Jenny met her future husband David who was completing his medical studies at the University of Leiden. They wed in August and moved to the United States where David's mother, brother, and sister were living. The couple settled in southern California near David's brother and his wife. The Untermans have three children and six grandchildren.

In the 1990s, Jenny began the search for her rescuers—wanting to thank them in person for their courageous acts. As an adult, she has struggled with anger and a sense of abandonment even while knowing that her parents gave her up to save her life. Only in 2003 when one of her rescuers gave her three letters written by her parents, letters filled with love and worry, did she begin to heal from the deep wound of separation. These letters are Jenny's most precious possession.

The Sala and Aron Samueli Holocaust Memorial Library
Chapman University
Presents

HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS: THE INDESTRUCTIBLE SPIRIT
PHOTOGRAPHY BY BILL ARON

Honoring Sol and Fay Chase, Holocaust Survivors
Featuring Members of The "1939" Club, An Organization of Holocaust Survivors and Descendants
Made possible by a generous gift from Irving M. and Nancy Fainbarg Chase

WRITTEN BY PROFESSOR MARILYN HARRAN

Based upon survivor testimonies
With contributions by Liam Maher IV
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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.

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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Severyn Ashkenazy

THE REBIRTH OF JEWISH LIFE

Severyn Ashkenazy was born in Tarnopol, Poland (now the Ukraine) in 1936. His mother, Bronislawa, was a talented musician who spoke several languages. His father, Izydor, was a chemist, mathematician, and scholar of Judaism. Severyn and his brother Arnold, three years older, studied Talmud at their father's knee.

In September 1939, as a result of the secret pact between Hitler and Stalin, Tarnopol was occupied by the Soviets. Targeted as members of the capitalist elite, the family lost their home and business. The Soviets sent them to the town of Trembowla where both parents were required to work.

When Germany attacked the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the family returned home to retrieve what they could. At the age of five, Severyn witnessed public hangings and death by starvation.

In August 1941, the Germans announced that only essential workers would be spared deportation. The couple hid their children and reported to the authorities with their stamped permits in hand—only to learn that the directive had been a ruse and all who appeared were to be deported. Only Bronislawa's beauty saved the couple's lives. A German officer admired her and allowed husband and wife to remain in the city.

Thanks to his training as a chemist, Izydor was appointed a food inspector for the army. The work assignment gave him precious time to search for a hiding place for the family. Since Izydor had followed the Talmud's injunction to save one third of his wealth in gold, he had the funds to bribe a farmer to construct a hidden cellar under a cellar. The family escaped first with Izydor joining them eight months later. For two long years, Severyn stayed in the tiny bunker, reading, studying French, and playing chess. He learned always to let the farmer win.

In February 1944, the Germans ordered the area evacuated. The farmer insisted the Ashkenazy family leave. Izydor believed they should search for another hiding place in town, but Bronislawa argued they should secretly return to the cellar. She won the argument. The decision saved their lives since the Germans and Ukrainians hunted down and murdered any Jews they found in the open.

The family's greatest challenge was finding water. Afraid that the Germans had poisoned the wells, they drank only melted snow. Severyn's uncle, who always gave his small ration of water to the children, died of malnutrition shortly before their liberation in April 1944.

After liberation, the family traveled west with the Soviet army, settled first in Lvov and then in Krakow. In 1946, the family moved to France where Izydor started a successful clothing business. Severyn completed high school and began his university studies. He accompanied his family when they immigrated to the United States. On the ship, he was amazed when it seemed that everyone knew of and was celebrating his 21st birthday. He learned later, however, that the decorations were in honor of George Washington's birthday!

The family settled in Los Angeles where Severyn graduated from UCLA. He advanced to Ph.D. candidacy in French literature before going into business, becoming a successful hotel and real estate developer. Deeply committed to the rebirth of Jewish culture and progressive Judaism in Poland, in 1999 Severyn founded the Beit Warszawa Jewish Cultural Association. He now divides his time between Los Angeles and Poland.



"In 2000, ten Jews attended the first Shabbat service at Beit Warszawa. Now more than 100 often attend. Jewish culture in Poland is being reborn."

"I always asked questions. The school principal worried that my teachers, some of whom were Nazi sympathizers, would report me."



Ruth Birndorf (Bernstein)

A N I N D E P E N D E N T S P I R I T

Ruth Bernstein was born on August 13, 1931 in Munich, Germany. From an early age, she demonstrated an independent spirit. Ruth despised the fairy tales her nanny read her and so she taught herself to read.

Ruth's father, Hugo, was an engineer who worked in the shoe industry. He frequently traveled, and Ruth looked forward to his return when she, her older sister Esther, and parents would go for outings in their car. When the trips ceased, Ruth thought it was her fault since she was sometimes car sick, but the reality was that Jews were no longer allowed to own cars.

Ruth attended a private Jewish school since Jews were excluded from public schools. On November 10, 1938, Ruth arrived to find her school engulfed in flames while soldiers in a nearby barrack watched and laughed. However, not all the family's neighbors turned against them. One young man, who had joined the SS to protect his outspoken father, shopped for them, buying butter and other items that Jews were no longer allowed to purchase.

Ruth's father left the country on an extended business trip to the Netherlands in 1937 but did not return. In December 1938, Ruth's mother began preparations for the family to join him. Before leaving, they went through the ordeal of an "inspection," with the SS poking bayonets into their laundry hamper to make sure no one was hiding. Only the intervention of their neighbor enabled them to leave with their belongings. After the war, when Ruth tried to find their protector to thank him, she learned that he had been killed on the eastern front.

Life in their new home of Tilburg, the Netherlands, was difficult for Ruth. An inquisitive child, she always asked

questions in school. Since some of the teachers were Nazi sympathizers, the school's principal removed her from her classes and assigned her to work in his office so she would not draw attention to herself.

The German invasion of the Netherlands in May 1940 placed the family in new danger, especially Ruth's father who was a member of the resistance. In May 1943, a sympathetic policeman warned them of a German raid in time for Hugo to flee to Amsterdam and for his family to find a hiding place in Tilburg. The school principal and others protected them until the town was liberated in November 1944.

Ruth's father was not as fortunate. In late summer 1944, he was deported to Auschwitz. He survived a winter death march but lost his right arm to a bullet. The Soviets who liberated him compelled him to work for them as an engineer. Only after great hardship was he reunited with his family.

After the war, Ruth attended a Catholic school where the nuns helped her catch up on the years she had missed. She studied at universities in Leiden and Amsterdam where she excelled in the sciences and received degrees in chemistry and medical technology. In 1956, at the invitation of Johns Hopkins University, she came to the United States and later joined her sister in Chicago where she worked in a research laboratory at the University of Chicago.

Ruth married Raymond Birndorf, a physician, in 1961, and the couple had two daughters, Lori and Debbie. In 1973, the family moved to Los Angeles. Ruth retired from laboratory research at age 70, but remains engaged in the active questioning of life that has defined her character since childhood.

Jack Bruck

DEFIANCE AND LUCK

Jack Bruck was born to Israel and Dina Bruck in Lodz, Poland on June 15, 1918. Jack had four older sisters, Nadine, Sarah, Rose, and Bella, and two younger brothers, Sal and Barry. He had a wonderful childhood with many playmates.

War changed everything. In February 1940, the Germans ordered the Jews of Lodz into a ghetto. When a call went out for volunteers who were promised better living conditions outside the city, Jack, then twenty-one, responded. The promise proved false. Jack was sent to a labor camp near Spiegelberg in Germany where the barracks were not yet completed and where the men slept in the snow for six weeks. Jack worked on the Autobahn, supervised by a brutal foreman.

Next he was sent to a munitions factory in Eberswalde where he constructed bombs, dangerous work that left his wrists permanently scarred by burning oil. Jack risked his life to sabotage the bombs so they would not fit in the casings. When his actions were discovered, the guards savagely whipped him. Only the intervention of the French prisoners of war, who heard his screams and refused to work until the beating stopped, saved his life. He was to be hanged as a saboteur, but the officer who ordered the execution was reassigned, and Jack was allowed to recover in the hospital.

In 1943, he was ordered to Auschwitz-Birkenau and then to Buna where he was reunited with his younger brother Sal and where their German foreman showed the men rare kindness and humanity.

In late 1944, Jack and Sal were sent to Buchenwald and assigned to clearing rubble in the nearby city of Weimar. One day, as Jack was moving stones, he suddenly smelled bread. He

dug at the rubble until he uncovered a bakery that had been shelled and found warm loaves of bread. The discovery was a rare stroke of luck.

Next Jack was transported to Flossenbürg where he again cleared rubble before being sent by open cattle car to Gleiwitz. The men traveled for eight days with no food and with snow as their only source of water. They were then ordered to march and Jack was forced to pull a wagon filled with Nazi war loot. He assumed they would be machine gunned when they reached their destination, but their long ordeal ended when American tanks rolled in on April 23, 1945.

For a time Jack worked for the American Counter Intelligence Corps. In 1947, he married Nina, a fellow survivor, and in 1949 they had a daughter. That same year they immigrated to the U.S., arriving in New York and continuing by ship to New Orleans. Jack worked in a printing shop and began the slow process of learning English.

Jack and Nina didn't feel at home in New Orleans, especially with the racism that was part of life in the South, and decided to move to Los Angeles where Nina had a cousin. The couple struggled to establish themselves and make a living. Jack often worked 18-hour shifts, leaving little time for family, but he was determined to succeed. His efforts were rewarded when he opened his own store and eventually purchased several others.

The couple's second daughter was born in 1955. In 1957, Jack's youngest brother, Barry, who had immigrated to Canada, moved to Los Angeles. With brother, children, and now two grandchildren, Jack has the full life for which he worked so hard.



"The Germans told me to pick the tree where I would be hanged. I refused. Luck was with me. My execution was cancelled."

"My father always put the well-being of others above his own. He was truly a righteous man."



Although they spell their last names differently, Barry Bruck and Jack Bruck are brothers.

Barry Bruk

ACCEPTED AS A JEW

Barry Bruk was born the youngest of seven children, four girls and three boys, in 1924 in Lodz, Poland. His parents, Israel and Dina, were Orthodox Jews. After services, Israel often invited those less fortunate to share dinner with the family.

Easily recognizable by his attire as a Hasidic Jew, Barry was a target for antisemitic bullies, but his big brother Jack's fists helped protect him. When he was eight, Barry and a friend resolved to walk to the port city of Danzig (now Gdansk, Poland) and sneak aboard a ship to the United States. They heard that in the U.S. Jews were treated like anyone else. Their empty stomachs put an end to their journey after only half a mile.

Barry completed the seventh grade before war ended his studies. In early 1940, the Germans ordered the Jews of Lodz into the newly established ghetto. The family's apartment, already located within the ghetto, became crowded with relatives forced to leave their homes. Barry and his brothers slept on the dining room table.

In December 1940, Barry's brothers Sal and Jack were deported to forced labor. Barry's job as a mechanic, maintaining the sewing machines in one of the ghetto's factories, exempted him from deportation. His four sisters also worked in the factories.

Throughout 1942, starvation ruled the ghetto. To help his family, Barry secretly tore out cobblestones and planted seeds. He and a friend took turns guarding the plot at night to make sure no one stole the precious beets. In summer 1943, Barry's beloved father died from starvation.

When the ghetto was liquidated in 1944, Barry, his mother, and sisters were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. His mother, only fifty-seven, was sent immediately to the gas chambers. He lost track of his sisters.

Barry spent two weeks at Birkenau. He seized the chance when the guards asked for mechanics for assignment to another camp. He made sure his brother-in-law, a tailor, also stepped forward so that they could stay together. They were sent to a labor camp near Chemnitz, Germany. When the camp was bombed, the guards ordered the prisoners to remain in the open, exposed to the phosphorus bombs, while they took cover in the air raid shelter. When the dust cleared, none of the prisoners was hurt, but the shelter had been demolished, killing all within.

The prisoners were marched to a nearby camp. One day, seeing men lying starving and unfed in the hospital, Barry picked up a pot of soup and began to feed them. A guard brutally assaulted him, but Barry's courageous act, emulating the altruism he had learned from his father, helped the sick men to survive another day.

In mid-April 1945, Barry and some 400 other prisoners were marched south into the Sudetenland. They slept in forests and pigsties until May 8, 1945, when their SS guards disappeared, American tanks rolled in, and they learned the war in Europe was over.

Barry returned to Lodz where he was reunited with his sisters and his brother Sal. From there he went to a DP camp near Flossenbürg, Germany. His foremost goal was to leave Europe. When he learned there would be a long wait to immigrate to the U.S., he chose Canada. He arrived in Montreal in September 1948.

In 1957, Barry and his wife Selene, also a survivor, moved from Montreal to Los Angeles where his brother Jack was living. Barry had finally reached the destination of his boyhood dreams.

Harry Eisen

N O P L A C E L I K E A M E R I C A

Harry Eisen was born in May 1917 in Izbica Kujawska, Poland. His parents were Orthodox Jews, and his father taught in the yeshiva (rabbinical school). Harry's mother died when he was very young, and his father married a widow whose son, Abe Kmietek, became Harry's best friend.

When he was thirteen, Harry chose work over study. He moved to Warsaw where a gentile friend ran a meat production plant. Harry quickly learned the trade and became a partner in the firm when he was only fifteen.

Harry was drafted into the cavalry in 1938. With the outbreak of war in September 1939, Harry, as a corporal, led 300 men into battle. Although he fought bravely, even the best trained and toughest cavalry unit was no match for German tanks.

Harry was captured and sent to a forced labor camp where he did back breaking work in a coal mine. In 1942, he was transferred to Auschwitz where each day was a struggle to survive hunger, disease, and brutality.

In January 1945, Auschwitz was evacuated, and Harry was sent on a death march. He knew that he could not long endure the bitter cold, so he, Abe, and two friends made a daring break. They found a cabin with hot cocoa and soup cooking on the stove, left by German soldiers whose bodies they discovered nearby. To the freezing, starving men, it was a miracle, especially to Harry, who years before had dreamt that he was running through the forest and chanced upon a house with cocoa cooking on the stove.

Harry and his friends hid in the cabin until they were discovered by Russian soldiers who suspected them of being

Germans and nearly shot them on the spot. Their commander tested the young men's claim to be Jewish by asking them to recite the Hebrew prayer, "Shema Israel," "Hear, O Israel." When they did, he broke into tears that they were fellow Jews.

Harry and Abe made their way back to Izbica but found no family. There Harry met Hilda, a former classmate and fellow survivor. They were married in 1945 and moved to Munich where Harry's cousin was living.

The Eisens came to the United States in 1948. Harry was thrilled to learn that he and the President of the United States shared the same first name. He took it as a positive omen. They settled in Arcadia, California and raised enough money to buy 100 chickens. Each day Harry bicycled around town selling eggs. The hours were long and the work hard, but the couple was determined to succeed. In 1952, Harry bought the facility he was renting, and in 1958 the family moved to Norco where Harry established the Norco Egg Ranch as one of the largest egg suppliers in the western United States. In 2000, Harry sold his business. He now consults as well as managing various properties.

A generous philanthropist, Harry has been honored with the Ernst and Young Entrepreneur of the Year award for his contributions to the agricultural industry. However, it is his family that means the most to Harry: his wife Hilda; their four children, Ruth, Mary, Howard, and Frances; and eight grandchildren. In July 2005, Harry and Hilda celebrated their sixtieth wedding anniversary surrounded by family and friends. A determined young man from Poland had indeed achieved the American dream.

"I arrived as a penniless immigrant determined to succeed. When I learned that I had the same first name as the President of the United States, Harry Truman, I took it as an omen that I would."



Ralph Fischer

CHUTZPAH AND LUCK

Ralph Fischer was born in Lodz, Poland on November 28, 1922. He had an older brother and sister and a younger sister. The family lived in a large apartment above their factory.

As a boy, Ralph was especially taken with American culture, especially American movies, and even more so with those that featured cowboys. Before the war brought his education to an end, Ralph planned to study engineering and come to the United States.

In spring 1940, the family was ordered into the ghetto. A gentile acquaintance, forced to move out of the area designated as the ghetto, gave the family his house. It had a beautiful garden which Ralph tended. However, the head of the Jewish Council, Chaim Rumkowski, insisted it was his prerogative to determine who lived there. The Fischers were evicted and assigned a single room in the poorest area of the ghetto. Outraged, Ralph took every fruit and vegetable he could carry with him. As punishment, he was arrested, jailed, and then deported by the Germans to a labor camp in Poznan.

Ralph was moved from labor camp to labor camp within the Poznan area. Sometimes he was lucky in his work assignments; sometimes not. In one camp, because he had the same last name as his German supervisor, he was assigned to carry light surveying equipment. Sometimes through sheer chutzpah, audacity, Ralph made his own luck. Finding a box car full of potatoes, he tied the bottom of his pant legs and stuffed the legs full. His strange walk gave him away, and he was sentenced to the same number of lashes as potatoes he had taken—44. Undeterred, after the whipping, Ralph went back to the box car and took more.

In early 1943, Ralph was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau. A prisoner he knew from Poznan alerted him to raise his hand when the Germans asked for bakers, even though Ralph had no experience. His advice, which Ralph followed, spared him grueling physical

labor, but it did not spare him suffering. One day Ralph saw a group, guarded by soldiers with machine guns, walking slowly to the gas chambers. They were small children, one little girl holding a doll as big as herself. For the first and only time, Ralph wept.

In late 1943, he was sent to Mauthausen and assigned to a work detail carrying granite blocks up 186 steps, known as the "Stairway of Death." If someone died working - as happened frequently - the remaining men had to carry the body, as well as the blocks back to the top. Ralph knew he wouldn't survive long in the quarry, so one day, finding his luck in an abandoned broom, Ralph began sweeping. Afterwards, he started white washing the gutters. The guards assumed that the job he had created for himself was indeed his work assignment.

In late 1944, Ralph was sent to Ebensee, a sub-camp of Mauthausen. Once again he had good jobs, keeping the stove going in a shed, and bad ones, drilling tunnels through the mountains. He even turned a leg injury into opportunity when the hospital director gave him a job after he recovered.

Ralph was liberated by the U.S. army on May 7, 1945. He returned to Lodz to search for his family only to find that none had survived. He left Poland, going first to the American zone in Germany and then to Paris where he found work. He married Auschwitz survivor Rosette Cygelfarb on January 19, 1947. The couple had their first child, Claude, in 1948. Three years later, sponsored by Ralph's uncle, the family came to the United States and settled in Paterson, New Jersey where their second child, Cathy, was born in 1956.

In 1962, the couple moved to Los Angeles where Ralph became a partner and then the owner of a lumber business. The dream of his youth—to come to America—had been achieved by luck, courage—and chutzpah.

Freda Goldstein (Weinstock)

A P R E C I O U S P O T A T O

Freda (Frajdzia) Weinstock was born in Olkusz, Poland in October 1926. Her parents owned a general store and worked hard to give Freda, her three sisters, and two brothers a good life. In 1939 when Germany invaded Poland, everything changed—Freda could no longer attend school, her parents lost their store, and the family was forced to leave their home and move into a two-room shack.

In March 1942, the Germans conscripted Freda and the other girls to do forced labor. When the soldiers broke down the door of the shack to take her, Freda's mother stood between them and her daughter and tried to fight them off. The officer in charge brutally kicked her to the ground. Freda never saw her mother again.

Freda was taken first to the Klettendorf labor camp near Breslau (now Wroclaw, Poland). After a year, she was sent on an excruciating journey by cattle car, with no food, water or sanitary facilities, to Ludwigsdorf, a sub-camp of Gross-Rosen where conditions were even worse than in Klettendorf. Working in the munitions factory was both exhausting and dangerous.

One day Freda found a potato that had fallen off a truck. To the starving girl, it was a treasure. The guards refused to allow her to have it—it was after all the property of the Reich which no Jew could take. They whipped Freda until she passed out from the pain.

On May 5, 1945, Ludwigsdorf was liberated by the Soviet army. Freda was gravely ill with pneumonia. Her legs were swollen and covered with sores from the chemicals in the factory. As soon as she was able to travel, a few weeks later, she returned to Olkusz to search for her family. The news was the worst she could have imagined. Neither her parents nor her siblings had survived. All had been killed in Auschwitz.

In her home town she met Sheldon Gleitman, a neighbor and friend of the family, who had returned to look for his relatives. Like Freda, he too found no one. The two comforted one another and together made their way back to Germany, to a displaced persons camp near Munich.

Freda and Sheldon married in December 1945 and came to the United States in 1947. The next year, Freda gave birth to the couple's first child, Steven, and five years later to their second, Richard. The couple worked hard to give the children the education and opportunities they had missed. When their sons became accomplished professionals—Steven an attorney and Richard the owner of a real estate company—they felt their dreams had been realized.

Sheldon passed away in 1989. Five years later, Freda married fellow survivor Irwin Goldstein with whom she shares a life centered on family, children and grandchildren, life's most precious and irreplaceable gift.

"In telling my story, I have two great hopes—that people never forget what happened and that genocide never happens again."

"I found a potato that had fallen off a truck. It was a treasure. When the guards discovered it, they whipped me until I passed out. They didn't care that I was a starving."

