



Holocaust

SURVIVOR
stories

Remembering the Holocaust with Israel on *Yom HaShoah*

One way each of us can fight anti-Semitism is to make sure the Holocaust is not forgotten. The generation of people who survived the Holocaust more than 70 years ago is dwindling. What will happen when they are gone? Many of them fear that the very real and horrific things they went through will fade from public awareness after they are no longer around to remind us.

We must make sure that doesn't happen.

The Holocaust resulted from Adolf Hitler's determination to eliminate all people groups he deemed undesirable. These included the disabled, gypsies, homosexuals, and most of all, the Jewish people. Between 1933 and 1945, his regime worked to systematically murder six million Jewish people and millions more who didn't fit Hitler's definition of acceptable.

Remembering the Holocaust with Israel on *Yom HaShoah*

From the horrors that took place in World War II rose stories of heroes who saved Jewish lives.

Some names are well-known, like Oscar Schindler and Corrie Ten Boom. But there are also many others whose stories of bravery are largely unknown.

When faced with barbaric disregard and cruelty toward their fellow man, these ordinary people showed remarkable courage and kindness.

Here are a few of their stories...



COMMON
heroes

Part 1: An Elderly Man

Jewish men crowded into the basement of the town hall in Sosnowiec, Poland. They'd been rounded up by Nazi soldiers just four days after Germany invaded Poland. Marched at gunpoint, they were led to the stuffy, windowless basement. "Who is the rabbi?" a soldier demanded. "Step forward now, or 10 men will die!"

An elderly man stepped forward. The soldiers grabbed him and took him out of the room. They beat him mercilessly and pulled out half of his beard. When they finished assaulting him, they threw him back in the basement with the others.

The old man was not the rabbi. The rabbi was not among that collection of men. The noble, aged man could see what lay ahead. How many tens of men would die because no rabbi was present to step forward? He offered his life to save others.

As it turns out, the men were let go that day. They were conscripted to work for the Germans for a time before being sent to various concentration camps where many of them died.

Part 2: A Friend



Manya Friedman knows the story of the elderly Jewish man because her father was among the men taken to the city hall basement that day. Eventually, she and her family were deported, first to a ghetto and then to different camps. Manya was 13 years old when she was taken to work at Gleiwitz camp.

Years later, in January 1945, as the Russians advanced on Germany's strongholds, Nazi commanders talked about evacuating the camp. Manya's friend, Lola, was very sick in the infirmary. Because every morning, the soldiers threatened to burn everything down after they left with the able prisoners, Manya was determined to get Lola out. She convinced another friend to help, and together, they succeeded.

The three girls joined other prisoners, and officers took them to a train station where they were loaded into open railway cars with no roof. Each one received bread and a blanket. The blanket did little to stave off the bitter winter cold. Manya

Part 2: A Friend



knew Lola was too weak to survive the trip without help. She led her to a corner of the car and stood in front of her friend. With her hands on the side rails and her back to the pressing hoards, Manya protected Lola from being crushed.

For 10 days, Manya guarded Lola in that train car. When it was finally over, her arms were bruised and swollen.

All three girls survived the war, and Manya and Lola remained close friends after they emigrated from Europe and settled in different parts of the world.

Part 3: A Nurse



During that terrible train ride, Manya and the others were not given water or additional food. In the miserable conditions, a girl had fainted in the next train car.

A nurse from their camp was in that car, and, even in the face of her own suffering, the woman cared for others among her.

When the train stopped at a station, the nurse climbed up on the rails with a tin cup and begged a soldier for some water for the girl. Instead of giving it to her, he shot her. She fell to the ground between two cars. This nurse gave her life to help another.

Part 4: Strangers



The bread they'd received at the start of their appalling journey did not last long. Without water, prisoners quenched their thirst with the snow that fell on their blankets. They were cold, thirsty and hungry.

At one point, they found themselves stopped at a station in Czechoslovakia. Manya remembers the Czech people as very kind. They attempted to give the prisoners food and water, but German soldiers prevented it, even shooting some of those who tried.

Despite the danger, some Czech citizens were so determined to help the caged prisoners that they stood on overpasses and threw food down into the railway cars as they clattered by underneath. How many spirits did these ordinary heroes revive by their kindness? How many lives did the Czech people save by their unyielding compassion?

Part 5: A Husband



Manya was deported directly from her place of employment and sent to the Gleiwitz work camp, but her parents and siblings were taken to Auschwitz. She didn't know what happened to them until decades after the war ended.

Manya was at a get-together in Israel, where Lola had settled, and met someone who had been on the same transport as her parents. This person told her that during the selection process at Auschwitz, her mother and little brother were separated in a different line from her father and an older brother. Manya's father couldn't bear to let his wife and young child go alone to their fate. He left his line and joined them in theirs. They were all killed.

At first, Manya was angry at her father. After all, if he had stayed in his line, perhaps she would have had some family to reunite with after the war. But later, Manya came to appreciate his great love that would not let his wife and child go through alone what lay ahead.

Part 6: Final Words



Manya was rescued from Rechlin labor camp by the Swedish Red Cross in April of 1945. She eventually immigrated to America and spent many years volunteering at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). She traveled extensively, telling her story. In a USHMM interview recorded in 2013, just a few months before she died, Manya said:

“I still have a hard time comprehending how this could have taken place. And that’s why we’re trying to teach you – like a warning – what can happen when we do not speak up, when we do not get involved.... **Please speak up when you see injustice.... We have to be on the lookout.**”

MIRACLE

Survival



Surviving One of the Holocaust's Worst Pogroms

Night was setting in. Henry Solomon was surrounded by dead and dying Jewish people as he huddled against the back wall of the police station courtyard in Iasi (pronounced Yash), Romania. They'd been told to report and exchange their identification cards for new ones. But when they got there, they encountered a different story. Henry didn't know it, but when he entered that courtyard, he walked into the setting of what would be one of the most gruesome pogroms of the Holocaust.

It had been planned for days. Germany had invaded Russia, and now, German tanks and soldiers swarmed through the city of Iasi. When Russians bombed the train station, Germany insisted the Jews had provided the necessary information for the attack.

Tensions in town had grown to the point that

frightened non-Jewish families painted crosses on their houses or windows to indicate “Leave us alone.” They knew what was coming.

When an airplane overhead released a signal flare the night of June 28, 1941, shots rang out simultaneously all over town. German soldiers began rampaging through the city, pounding on doors, arresting Jewish men and indiscriminately killing.

Once-friendly neighbors turned on the Jewish people, joining in the wave of vicious aggression. “Our Christian neighbors,” said Lazar Leibovici, “whom I considered my friends, came out of their homes with iron bars, hoes, spades and guns and began to hit us.”

The streets were littered with the bodies of Jewish people who had been shot: Men, women and children. German soldiers and Romanian police rounded up Jewish people to detain at police headquarters.

Henry’s family lived on a corner where three streets met. His father refused to let anyone go outside. Instead, they hid and kept watch at the windows. When soldiers came to one side of the house, the men slipped out another.

But Henry had slept at the family's shop the night before and didn't know what had happened in his neighborhood that night. The following day, unaware of the danger, Henry went to the police station as instructed.

Haim Solomon told the story of what his brother saw when he arrived in the station's courtyard. Aligned on either side of the entrance were Germans and Romanians who savagely assaulted the Jews as they passed by, hitting them in the head with brutal force or shooting them in the temple.

Henry was among those who cleared the gauntlet unwounded. As twilight fell and he found himself near the back wall of the complex, the dead and dying all around him, he knew he had to do something. Without being seen, he and another detainee scaled the wall and fled.

They found a woodshed of a house with a painted-on cross. Inside, stacks of firewood reached the ceiling. They removed enough logs to lie down and hide within the pile, then replaced the wood on top of themselves. Then, they quietly waited.

Throughout the night and the next day, the shootings and arrests continued.

By mid-day on June 29, some 5,000–6,000 Jewish people had survived the entrance assaults and were assembled at the police station. Around 2:30 p.m., a false air raid siren blared, and soldiers opened fire on the corralled Jewish people. “The massacre continued for several hours,” notes the USHMM, “until the executioners were exhausted, and less than half of the Jewish prisoners remained alive.”

While Henry lay hidden under the firewood, his brother Haim remained holed up with his family in their home. For several days, they peered through ground-level basement windows and saw Jewish people marched down the streets and kicked or shot if they didn’t go fast enough, the local rabbi included. His body lay in the street for days before things quieted down and some neighbors removed it. After five or six days, the Solomons began to go outside again.

But that wasn’t the end of the Iasi Pogrom. The Jewish people who had survived the massacre at the police station had been herded to the depot and packed tightly into the cars of two trains. Hundreds “succumbed to heat exhaustion, suffocation, dehydration and suicide during the journey aboard crowded, unventilated freight cars in the heat of summer.”

The first train carried roughly 2,500 people and traveled in a circle for 17 hours before it stopped. More than 650 dead were removed to a mass grave. Soldiers denied water to survivors, and the journey continued. At each of several stops, hundreds more Jewish people were discovered dead. Local troops hired Gypsies to remove the bodies; their payment was anything they could take from the dead.

Fewer than 1,100 survived the Iasi death train that arrived in Calarasi on July 6. The second train carried 1,902 Jewish people crammed into 18 cars. Only 708 lived through the journey.

At the destinations of both trains, survivors were interned for one to three months, after which they were allowed to return to Iasi and what remained of their families.

Up to 13,000 Jewish people died during the Isai Pogrom and on the death trains. It is another brutal event of the Holocaust that echoes across the decades with the voices of real lives who suffered and died. All told, six million Jewish people died in the Holocaust. They were beaten, tortured, starved and executed. They endured cruel medical experiments, beatings, rape, and all manner of inhumane treatment.

A black and white photograph of a prison corridor. The corridor is paved with gravel and is flanked by brick buildings on both sides. The buildings have multiple windows and are topped with barbed wire. A street lamp is visible in the distance. The overall atmosphere is somber and institutional.

CLARA'S
story

Part 1: Clara



“She’s not my daughter; she’s an orphan. Will you take her?” Clara’s mother lied to the Catholic priest overseeing an orphanage. She also pretended she and the three-year-old girl weren’t Jewish. The priest, already looking after 12 Jewish children, had compassion and took Clara in. Her mother continued the pretense of being Catholic to work at the orphanage and be near her.

Sometime later, the Gestapo came looking for Jewish children. They killed the priest, and Clara ran into the restroom and locked the door. But the men had dogs who sniffed her out. They pounded on the door, shouting at the small girl behind it, “Get out! We know you are Jewish!” When they seized her, they pulled her by the hair to a car where she saw the other Jewish children.

When Clara’s mother learned the children were taken, she confessed to being Jewish so they would take her too. Only her persistence convinced them, and she joined her daughter at the Sereb labor camp. What came next, however, was the most traumatic for little Clara.

Part 2: The Transportation

At Sered, soldiers herded Clara and her mother into a railway car for cattle. They jammed so many people in that not a single person could sit down. Old, young, sick, they all stood – for a journey lasting four to five days. Clara recalls the unbearable smell. People died standing up. When the train arrived at Theresienstadt, the doors opened, and people, both alive and dead, fell out together.

Theresienstadt was a ghetto-labor camp and a way-station for Jewish people being deported to other camps and killing centers. It also served as a grand Nazi deception, a propaganda weapon. It was described as a lovely community where elderly Jewish people could retire safely. Due to outside pressure, the Germans allowed the Red Cross to visit a carefully staged Theresienstadt.

Part 3: Nazi Deception



In preparation for the tour, Nazis reduced the camp's population to a more comfortable size by stepping up deportations. They renovated barracks, planted gardens and then put on social and cultural events for the visiting officials.

Afterward, life in the camp returned to its horrible normal. Food was scarce, and many children were among those who died of respiratory and other illnesses.

Part 4: Haunting Memories

Clara remembers the gunshots she heard day and night at Theresienstadt. Executions, sickness and deportations thinned the camp population. Then new trainloads of Jewish people arrived, and the cycle repeated. Clara remembers another sound, too – SS troops laughing and enjoying themselves as they watched entertainment shows in the evenings.

How could such callous cruelty come to be?

Anti-Semitism, simply put, is racism or religious discrimination toward Jewish people, and it has been around for centuries. It has spurred forced religious conversions, expulsions from countries, violence, cruelty and murder. The same prejudice that escalated into the Holocaust still exists today. Each year, people unleash it on Jewish synagogues, cemeteries, businesses and people through vandalism and violent attacks. Anti-Semitism is a hatred that has gone on entirely too long.

Part 4: Haunting Memories

Clara was in her eighties when she told her story to one of Jewish Voice’s partner ministries in Israel. She vividly remembered the fears she felt during the Holocaust: fear of the Gestapo, separation from her mom and being alone. Her capture led to a lifelong fear of dogs. And she still doesn’t like being alone – because that’s when fears threaten to overtake her.

Clara volunteers at Yad Vashem, Israel’s Holocaust memorial center. She also receives visits from a Jewish Voice partner ministry and attends their weekly Bible study. At the time of writing this story, she does not know Jesus yet, but she enjoys the atmosphere there and likes learning the Bible.

Remembering the Holocaust

We invite you to remember Clara, Manya, Henry and others who survived the Shoah, the Hebrew word meaning “the catastrophe,” and pray for them. So many of them continue to endure the consequences of the trauma they experienced as children.

Israel’s Holocaust Remembrance Day – Yom HaShoah – is on the 27th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan. On the Gregorian calendar, the one much of the world uses, Yom HaShoah falls in April or May.

At 11:00 a.m. on Yom HaShoah, sirens blare throughout Israel, and the nation comes to a halt. Cars stop on the streets; shoppers cease browsing; teachers interrupt their lessons; employees set aside their work. And they stand – some right in the road outside their cars – for two minutes to show their respect for those who died and suffered in the Holocaust. They stand to keep the memory alive so that this generation and those that follow will be on guard to make sure it can never happen again. **Never again.**



A special thank you to the following sources, who diligently record the history of the Holocaust & the lives of those who were impacted. We are grateful that stories such as these may be written & shared – in order that atrocities like the Holocaust never happen again.

Common Heroes

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