

The Survivors, Living to Tell About It

Leo Bretholz

Born: Vienna, March 6, 1921.
Crossed a river into Luxembourg at night when he was 17. Escaped seven times from the Nazis and their collaborators. On Nov. 6, 1942, jumped from a train on its way to Auschwitz.

Arrived in Baltimore in 1947, worked as a salesman for a textile firm and then had a retail book business for many years. Author, with Michael Olesker, of "Leap Into Darkness: Seven Years on the Run in Wartime Europe."

Quote: "There was a woman on the train. Some of the people said, 'Don't do it.' But this woman pointed her crutch at me and my friend and said, 'You must do it. If you succeed you will be able to tell the story.'"



Benjamin Meed

Born: Warsaw, Feb. 19, 1918.
A member of the underground in Warsaw, he helped smuggle people out of the ghetto. He had to consider everyone an enemy and knew informers would turn him in for peanuts, vodka and butter.

He felt safe only with his cats and dogs.

On May 24, 1946, he arrived in New York with \$8. He is the founder of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors.

Quote: "Someone told me there was the possibility of buying a passport to get to Latin America. I got it. My younger brother, much better looking than me, came and asked me if he could go. He asked if it was a trick. I didn't think too much about it. He went and I never heard from him again. They were all shot that night."



Eugene Lebowitz

Born: Uzhhorod, Czechoslovakia, Sept. 5, 1928.
Spent six weeks in a ghetto, traveled by cattle car to Auschwitz, then was sent to work at an electrical plant and munitions factory in Jaworzno. Lost his parents and youngest sister. Forced to walk in a death march for 1½ months, with very little food, to near the Czech border. Sneaked into Landshtut, a concentration camp that was not supposed to admit Jews. Liberated by the Russians on April 29, 1945.

After the war, went to Palestine, then Chicago, married and became a shoe importer. Moved to Puerto Rico, then Miami. Raised two children, has six grandchildren.

Quote: "[On the death march,] we picked up whatever garbage there was to eat. There was a lady traveling on the road pulling a sled, she had three loaves of bread. As we passed by, that bread disappeared. I got about one bite. The SS killed four or five people trying to find the bread. But the bread was gone."



Fritz Gluckstein

Born: Berlin, Jan. 24, 1927.

Was counted as a Jew because his father was Jewish. Stayed in Berlin for the war, doing forced labor that ranged from working at a Jewish cemetery to cleaning up after air raids and even repairing Adolf Eichmann's headquarters. Was rescued from deportation during the Rosenstrasse Protest, in which the gentle spouses of Jewish men rounded up by the Nazis held a week of demonstrations, demanding the release of their husbands and children.

Moved to New York in 1948, lived in St. Paul and Rockville, worked as a veterinarian and for the U.S. Public Health Service.

Quote: "I had to wear the star and one night I was caught without the star. The Gestapo was a young guy and I could see he was deliberating whether my Jewish side or my German side was more dominant."



Gluckstein's Christian aunt, Elfride Dressler, helped him during the war.

Judy Freeman

Born: Uzhhorod, Czechoslovakia, March 2, 1929.

Deported at age 15 to Auschwitz. Believes she is the only member of her family to have survived. At one point she was in the gas chamber anteroom, awaiting her turn. Saved when an air raid siren sounded and Nazi guards sent them back to their barracks. Survived a death march to Bergen-Belsen, where she was liberated by British soldiers. Returned to her home town to search, in vain, for a living family member. Met her future husband, they immigrated to New York and worked in factories until he was hired to teach Hebrew school in

Omaha, Neb. Eventually settled in Allentown, Pa., where they reared three sons, and she directed a Jewish nursery school. Retired to Florida, where her husband died in 2000. She plans to marry her companion, Ernest Jacobs, also a Holocaust survivor, in December.

Quote: "In Bergen-Belsen, I lost all hope. We lived in overcrowded barracks infested by lice. Lice carried typhus. There was a huge epidemic of typhus, and huge number of people dying every day. They were thrown out of doors on a huge pile. Seeing these mountains of dead, I kept thinking, 'I came this far, and there's no way that anybody could survive this. I'll be thrown on one of these piles.' I was really more dead than

Some 2,000 Holocaust survivors are gathering this weekend at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. Each represents a story of loss and courage. Reporters Debbi Wilgoren, Jacqueline Trescott and Reilly Capps interviewed 25 of them. Here, in brief, are their accounts.



Track to hell: At the end of one of history's bitterest journeys looms the guardhouse to the Birkenau death camp.

Louise Gips

Born: Bobowa, Poland, Dec. 24, 1933.

Was not quite 6 years old when her family fled to Ukraine following the German invasion of Poland. They were captured by Russians and sent as prisoners of war to Siberia. Released in 1942 when Hitler attacked Russia, fled to Tajikistan for remainder of the war.

Immigrated with her parents and three siblings to Cleveland, where her maternal grandparents lived. Her family embraced countless young refugees from the war who had lost their entire families. One of them became her husband. They married when she was 18 and he was 23. Louise worked in a bakery, Harry in a factory, until they bought a small dry-cleaning business. She and her husband are attending the reunion with their daughter and son-in-law, a grandson and his fiancée. They have three children and five grandchildren in all.

Quote: "In Tajikistan, my father firmly believed



Gips and her husband, Harry, each fled the war. They found refuge—and each other—in America.

in washing me down every single day with a bucket of vodka. Everyone in my family was down with the typhoid fever. My mother, my sisters, my brother. But I didn't get it. Because I was washed down with vodka."

Sonia Schreiber Weitz

Born: Krakow, Poland, Aug. 27, 1928.

Forced into the Krakow ghetto when she was 11 and then moved to five locations, including Plaszow (Oskar Schindler's factory), Auschwitz-Birkenau and Bergen-Belsen camps. Lost 84 members of her family, including her parents. On May 5, 1945, she and her sister, Blanca, were liberated.

In 1948 she moved to Peabody, Mass., and worked in shoe and leather factories. She is the co-founder of the Holocaust Center, Boston North, and the author of "I Promised I Would Tell," a memoir and collection of the poetry she composed and memorized in the concentration camps.

Quote: "I wrote the poetry in my head. It was a wonderful weapon to be able to renew yourself from the cold, the hunger, the disease and the violence. I dreamt of my father's laughter and my mother's cooking, and that had a lot to do with my remaining sane."



Flora Singer

Born: Antwerp, Belgium, Aug. 16, 1930.

Had five different places in Belgium, including with the legendary Father Bruno. Later she, her sisters Betty and Charlotte and her mother stayed with nuns in the Convent of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows. Lost a grandfather, an uncle and five aunts, among others.

In 1946, joined her father, who had fled to the United States in 1938. She married a soldier, had two children. Worked at home as a dressmaker and translator in New York. Later worked at her husband's bagel bakery in Wheaton. In 1976 graduated magna cum laude from the University of Maryland. Later got a master's and taught at Montgomery County high schools.

Quote: "I'm happy to go to the cemetery



Singer reunites with her cousin Henry Donig in 1998 in Los Angeles, ending her decades-long search for him after the Holocaust.

to see my mother and father here, because at least I know where they are. The rest of my family, I don't know where they are. They went up in smoke."

Leon Ginsburg

Born: Maciejowice, Poland, June 12, 1932.

Spent the war running from one town to another. Was captured four or five times and managed to get away. Spent one winter hiding on the farm of a Polish Catholic family. Was 12 at the end of the war and was the only child of 5,000 Jews in his home town who survived the Holocaust. Went back to Maciejowice in 1991 and erected monuments on three mass graves.

Came to New York in December 1946, stayed with relatives. Earned a degree in electrical engineering and has worked as an engineer and developed equipment for dental labs. Is the vice president of the Holocaust Museum and Study Center of Rockland County, N.Y.

Quote: "I ran away with a group of people and fell asleep. When I woke up no one was there. I figured they were hiding in the cemetery and I called out in a quiet voice, 'Isaac.' No one answered. Several weeks later I am in a ghetto and a Jewish policeman asked me 'If another boy could share my bed. We talked about how we had been running. And he said the worst thing that happened... was he was hiding in a cemetery and in the middle of the night the dead people came out and made noises. I said, 'What did they say?' He said they were yelling 'Isaac.'"



Miles Lerman

Born: Tomaszow Lubelski, Poland, 1920.

Spent 23 months as a partisan in the forests of southern Poland. His family was murdered. When he went back to his home town of 13,000 after the war, only 11 people were alive.

In February 1947 moved to New York and then New Jersey. A petroleum executive, Lerman was appointed by President Jimmy Carter to the Advisory Board of the President's Commission on the Holocaust.

He served as chairman of the Holocaust Memorial Council and helped raise \$200 million for the museum.

Quote: "The obligation of the partisan was to drive the German soldiers crazy, to do as much damage as we could. We were infatuated where they had a depot with gasoline and diesel. We took it, and even poured diesel on their sugar. Our message was: Here are people who are willing to die on their feet, not on their knees."



Judy Freeman and Ernest Jacobs plan to marry in December.

Ernest Jacobs

Born: Satoralajuhely, Hungary, June 23, 1921.

Forced labor at a concentration camp in Hungary from 1942-44, escaped while on a march toward Germany. Found his family in Budapest ghetto, then shipped to Bergen-Belsen. Liberated en route to the Theresienstadt concentration camp in April 1945.

Reunited with mother, sister and younger brother, then with an older brother—who had immigrated to United States before the war, joined the U.S. Army and ended up fighting in Germany. Arrived in New York in 1951. A year later, married a Belgian Jew who had been hidden by a Catholic family during the war. Worked as a tailor, roofer and taxi driver, then bought a

cleaning store. Two children, five grandchildren. Retired to Florida. His wife became stricken with Alzheimer's disease and died in 2001. Fell in love with Holocaust survivor Judy Freeman; they plan to marry in December.

Quote: "The bridges were bombed up and destroyed. The German officer who was in charge of this train decided he was not going to go any further, because he doesn't want to get captured by the Russians. He actually declared that we are freed. The Americans will be here in a day, he said, and we should stay close to the train and he will protect us and then the Americans will arrive. The next day, they did. April 13. My brother survived with me. After a couple of weeks, I went back to Bergen-Belsen, where I found my sister, in very, very bad condition. But I found her, and was able to help her."