

## *Our Founder... Gerda Weissmann Klein*



Gerda Weissmann Klein is a renowned humanitarian, celebrated author, Holocaust survivor, 2010 Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient, and proud naturalized citizen. She describes her passion for giving back to her adopted country as such:

*“To perpetuate the miracle that is America, we must teach our children about its rich history as a nation of immigrants who chose this country and have given meaning to its ideals. Citizenship Counts will engage today’s students in civics education, combined with active participation in a*

*naturalization ceremony, to help ensure that the citizens of tomorrow will continue to foster tolerance, understanding, service to one another, and a greater appreciation for the privilege and responsibility of citizenship.”*

For more than six decades, Gerda Klein has captivated audiences worldwide with her powerful message of hope, inspiration, love and humanity. In her speeches and books she draws from her wealth of life experiences – from surviving the Holocaust and meeting her future husband on the day of her liberation, to her journey to the United States where she raised her family and has fought to promote tolerance and understanding among all people.

Gerda Weissmann was born May 8, 1924 in Bielsko, Poland. In 1939 her life changed forever when German troops invaded her hometown of Bielsko. From 1939 until the end of World War II, she lived in fear and deprivation. After being separated from her brother shortly after the invasion and from her parents in 1942, she worked in slave labor and concentration camps until she was forced to walk in a 350-mile death march. She never lost the will to live. When World War II ended in 1945, Gerda was left homeless and without family or friends. Despite all that was lost, she found a fairy-tale ending when she married her liberator, U.S. Army Intelligence officer, Kurt Klein. Two years after she immigrated to the United States as Kurt’s wife, Gerda became an American citizen. She founded Citizenship Counts to give back to her adopted country, the United States of America, on behalf of all of the opportunities and privileges that she has been given as a result of being an American citizen.