

## The Survivors Among Us -Tales of Resilience and Rebirth- Part 1

From the eulogy notes of Rabbi Norbert Weinberg

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### 1) Agatha Szatmari 1934-2019

Agatha was born to Erzsebet Gertler and Dezso Rosenmann, in 1934, at a time when the Jews of Budapest were very comfortable in their Hungarian identities. All of this blew up, as World War II broke out, and Hungary allied itself with the Germans. Things went downhill rapidly, and when Aggie, as she was known, was but 5, her mother was rounded up, never to be seen again, the family lost its business. A few years later, as the Nazis undertook the systematic destruction of the Jews of Hungary, her father was rounded up. Agatha was left entirely on her own, age 10, to survive as a “street kid”, with help from neighbors and strangers who helped her hide from the Nazi executioners.

Her father escaped by chance as British bombers derailed the train that was carrying him off to the death camps.

As the war ended, he returned to Budapest, and they reunited. Life was far from a paradise and the Soviets took over control. Luckily, her experiences, instead of crushing her, made her resilient and she managed to continue her education and get a position in accounting when she was around 15 and 16.

In this topsy-turvy world, she looked for an anchor, and at age 17 she found it in Peter, himself only 19. The workers’ paradise that the communists had promised had devastated the Hungarian economy, the students rose up against the Soviet forces in control and were brutally slaughtered. Young Aggie and Peter had enough and were able to escape to the US and Miami.

Because she had experience in accounting, she was lucky to find work at the famous Fontainebleau Hotel; she boasted that she would hob nob with the famous stars of that period. However, the struggles of starting a new life in the US took their toll on her marriage and she found herself again on her own. She befriended another young woman, Marianne, and soon both moved on to new opportunities in Los Angeles

She found work here in the accounting Department at Cedars Sinai Hospital and at that time married Frank Szatmari. They worked hard, invested in property, and she opened “Aggies Beauty Salon” on Melrose Ave. She flourished as businesswoman and was proud of her

business savvy that made her financially sense for the future. While she parted ways with Frank, she continued managing the properties that became her share of the business.

She was very fortunate to meet Peter Feinman, man who became her life partner; they remained together for 44 years. He was a standup guy, very well loved by all and he was constantly at her side, looking out for her as she became increasingly sickly over the years. He passed away 2 years ago suddenly and it was a tremendous blow for her.

With all that she went through, she never was able to have children of her own, so but she was very fortunate when a very fine young woman moved into her building, Alla ... Young Alla had a violin and piano teacher who was also Aggie's best friend, so Alla had known about her from childhood. When she was 22, she moved into the building and Aggie soon adopted her and came to call her "daughter" when she introduced her to people. She said, "God sent Alla to her". They remained very close together and Aggie watched over this young woman as she went through life, acting as a mother would as Alla's family had moved up north to Seattle. Later on, Alla married Andreas ..., and he in turn became a great friend to Aggie, tutoring her in computer use and helping with managing the building. The two couples would visit each other often, share dinners, the shared meals together they would visit each other as they developed a congenial and warm relationship. In the last years, after Peter died, it was Alla who was at Aggie's side watching out for her.

Aggie had this strong sharp mind. She kept handling her own accounts till the last days, to keep her mind sharp. She was computer literate and active in emailing friends and family and in following up on the latest news and forwarding in-depth reports to people she thought would be interested so I got quite a few very good articles from her.

She was very resilient, for her life experience made her very strong and tough but childhood traumas of losing her mother and hiding on the streets, fending for herself. Despite that, she was able to build a life for herself and people were attracted to her. Especially after her dear Peter died, people she had befriended looked out for her, so that she was never alone, never abandoned.

As I think of this account of the life of Agatha Szatmari, I think of so many young adults today, in this country, who believe the world is coming to an end, that no one ever had it as tough as they do now, and I just wish they would just learn the lessons in life from Agatha Szatmari, may her memory be for a blessing.

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## 2) Clara Mauskopf

March 29, 1922 - June 8, 2001, age 79

Clara Mauskopf, who passed away at the age of 79, was the daughter of Usher Anshel and Hinda Laia Schwartz, devout Jews of the town of Baia Mare, Romania, who were proud of the Rabbinic lineage in their family. She was one of three children, with her brother Alex Schwartz, married to Eva, who are here with us, and her sister, Eva Lovas, married to Laci, who live in Sweden.

In a normal world, she would have had a wonderful youth and young adult life, but as we know too well, Hitler's armies took over Eastern Europe, and she was interned in Auschwitz. She was one of the very few, too few, to have survived, and after her liberation, she rebuilt her life. In 1946, she married Carl Mauskopf, with whom she created a new world of their own.

They had their daughter, Maryann, and then, their son, Steven, and made a new life for themselves in this country. The Jewish philosopher, Moses Hess, declared that God could not be everywhere, so he invented mothers, and Clara took that role seriously.

Maryann succeeded as a lawyer, and married her professor, Richard Seltzer. Steven succeeded as a writer and marketing maven, married Patricia Anne, and presented Clara with two granddaughters, Nikki and Alecsandra.

Clara found herself in her family. She and Carl were devoted to each other until his death in 1983, and also turned that same devotion to her four children, since she was happy to count her daughter-in-law, Annie, and her son-in-law, Richard, as her own children. For them, too, she was always "Anyu", her Romanian nickname.

For her two granddaughters, she was the epitome of "grandma". They were her pride and joy; she would never miss a dance or performance of hers, and never missed out on "Grandparents Day."

She felt a special bond with her son-in-law Richard. In his last years, as he became seriously ill, she cooked, nursed and cared for him as only a

mother could, and the family could not say enough to express their gratitude to her for this. His loss just two years ago was a severe blow to her.

I had the chance to know her when I was Rabbi at Hollywood Temple Beth El. She made sure to have the same seats for high holy days, even as the Temple entered its twilight years. She had to have that assurance that she would have a place for all her family to be at her side. She also was proud to actively support Shelters for Israel, which provided housing and childcare for the people of Israel.

How was she able to do this? After all, she had seen her entire world burned out in front of her eyes.

I remember listening to Elie Wiesel, the great voice of the survivors of the Holocaust describes what the survivors of the concentration camps did upon liberation in 1945. Poles, Ukrainians, Russians who had been prisoners grabbed weapons and took revenge upon any Germans they could find. The Jews who were not only prisoners, but singled out for destruction, buried the dead, said Kaddish, and got married. Clara did just this. Her response to a world turned inside out, was the greatest act of faith-- it was to remain a loyal Jew, and to start a new generation, it was to rebuild and replace that which had been lost.

On Shabbat, we read the words of the Prophet Zechariah, who preached following the Holocaust of his day, the destruction of the first Temple, the first Kingdom, and the exile of the Jewish people. He spoke to those descendants of the survivors, reminded them, they were "ud mutzal min haesh, a brand plucked out of the fires, and through them, God would turn the mighty mountains into a flat plain. Clara was like that, the brand plucked from the flames, who set about to recreate the world around her, rather than smolder and vanish.

May her memory be a blessing. Amen.

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3) George Gertler

May 25, 1913-August 24, 1999

George Gertler was born on May 25, 1913, and was raised in what was once the vibrant Jewish community of Lodz, Poland. He was the child of Avraham and Hilda Gertler, with other brothers and sisters.

The Jews of the new country of Poland formed the vital backbone of the economy. Young George had soon made a name for himself as a successful businessman, met, and married Shirley. The future beckoned them, and they should have been able to spend their days in tranquility and comfort, but the dark night of Hitler destroyed their dreams.

They were both able to survive the concentration camps, itself a rarity, and as soon as the horrors of the war were ended, they began to piece together their lives as refugees. Poland was almost as inhospitable to Jews after the war as during.

Their daughter, Tammy, was born there, and as soon. As they were able to obtain a visa to the US, they moved first to New Orleans, and then to LA, where they had relatives.

They came as Tammy told me, with all of \$4 in their pocket. George took whatever work he could-- the once proud young factory owner now worked in a factory himself, as Shirley worked as a seamstress.

They worked hard, and while other workers stayed in the factory, George moved out on to his own with the meager savings he had, to open the first liquor store in Beverly Hills, and then several others. Their savings went into business, and they opened liquor supplies business.

His good business skills from before the war served him well. He prospered financially in this new land. He had a head for numbers and applied it successfully to playing the stock market. He was well off enough to allow himself to retire relatively young from active business.

His new world was in his daughter, Tammy. He and Shirley loved her, although, when Tammy was a young child, they had little physical to give her. George made up for it indirectly, when Tammy married Marshall Rubin. He helps support George, then a law student, so he can concentrate on his studies, and not worry about making a living also.

Then, when the granddaughters, Julie and Amy, came around, they lavished on them the time and bounty that they did not have in their early years in this country.

He was happy to see Julie marry Loren Gesas and thrilled with Amy's boyfriend. His great pleasure in these last days was to see the ultra-sound photographs of the baby in the womb that July is carrying.

Typical of so many survivors that I have known, he never spent time on himself--he could do without. But he spent it on others, whether it was the grandchildren, or on charity to many organizations. He used to joke that he was a "greenhorn", and a "Green horn by definition knows how to make money, and an American knows how to spend money.

George wasn't an "organization" man. He and Shirley had their circle of friends, mostly fellow survivors, and they took part in activities of the Lodzer, the 39'ers, the American Congress, and other groups of survivors, and they joined in actively in the various charities these groups were involved in.

The loss of Shirley in 1993 was very hard on him and his health began to fail afterwards. His days were made brighter, however, by his family, especially when he could no longer stay on his own, and had to move to an old age home. They came as often as they could, taking turns, so that he would have someone to cheer him up as much as possible, as often as possible.

George's life is a silent triumph. Others may boast and shout about their accomplishments. George, however, went through the terrible nightmare of the Shoah, survived it, rebuilt his life, built a family on these shores, and in the process, remembered to share his fortunes with others in need. That is a triumph that we must all acknowledge. May his memory be a blessing.

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- 4) David and Rose Honig-testifying about the Holocaust to Jews who were afraid to know of it.

David Honig October 3, 1995

David Honig was born in Krakow, the ancient capital of Poland, and the site of one of Europe's distinguished Jewish communities, where had resided the eminent scholars and sages who molded Judaism in the end of the Middle Ages.

David's official birthdate was listed as July 15, 1912--but this was in error. His true birthdate was on Yom Kippur day of that year. He made it up to erev Yom Kippur, here in Los Angeles, but if we keep in mind that his native Krakow is 9 or ten hours ahead on the timeline- then it was already Yom Kippur, and he had made it to exactly 83 years to the date on the Jewish calendar.

He was born into a very devout family, second to the youngest of five brothers. He carried his parents' deep faith with him throughout the years, and surely that is what enabled him to survive the worst.

He married Rose Silberger on Jan 1, 1935, and I recall that he told me that it was a well celebrated marriage, attended by all the Jewish dignitaries. and became a successful young businessman.

Their first child, Bronislau (Bronus), was born Oct 8, 1935, and they set about creating a warm and good household, hoping the ill winds from Germany would not affect them.

With the conquest of Poland, Hitler began his roundup and concentration of Jews, a scene that, for those of us who did not actually see it, was made highly visual by Spielberg's movie, Schindler's List, which concerned the destruction of the Jews of Krakow.

With the onslaught of Hitler's horror, David and Rose and Bronus were in the camps together. David's younger brother, Naftali, fled Poland at the beginning of the war, and was given up for lost. The older three brothers were murdered in the Shoah.

Rose & David suffered together through the notorious Plashov Concentration Camp, the camp from which Schindler drew his list. David and Rose were then sent to Auschwitz, and then separated.

Somehow, David managed to survive, and refused to believe that he had lost everything.

He set out to search for Rose and found her in Bergen Belsen. Sadly, they could not save their son, Bronus, who was murdered when he was only eight years old. He did find his younger brother, Naftali, who had survived in Russia, and the two were reunited in the late 1950's. Naftali, who had passed away only a few years

ago in Israel, married, had two children, and grand-as well as great grandchildren.

David and Rose were determined to rebuild from the ashes.

They settled in Augsburg, Germany until 1949. Their daughter, Barbara, was born there, in Augsburg, on June 8, and in July, they left the land of bloodshed for New York and haven. They came to Los Angeles, in the late 1950's. They would have the pleasure of raising Barbara, seeing her married to Gary Silbiger and then enjoy grandchildren, Karlo and Tania.

David told me that he found that in America, in his first years, Jews did not want to know of the fate of the Jews of the Holocaust. American Jews had turned a blind eye to the account of both the martyrs and the survivors, so concerned were they for their own security here, so concerned to make their place here, that tragedy had no room in their thinking. David made sure to make his story known.

He told me that he would speak to school children as often as he could about his experiences, until health problems caught up with him, and he didn't feel as comfortable in his speech.

He became active in the Jewish community and was a founding member of the Jewish Survivors of Concentration Camps. He then was active in the merger with the American Congress of Jews from Poland. He used to visit me in my office frequently, when he was on his way to a meeting of the American Congress, often to give me an invitation to one of their functions, and last, just a few day before Rosh Hashanah , to hand me, personally, the latest yearbook, marking the 50th year of the end of the Holocaust.

He was active with many organizations, in addition to the Congress, Jewish National Fund, Martyr's Memorial, the Wiesenthal Center, the Sholem Community Organization, and his synagogue, Hollywood Temple Beth El. There he could be found every Shabbat morning, together with Rose, seated with his other companions, fellow survivors.

The only times I noticed he was absent was when he and Rose were on a cruise far out in the ocean. I was always amazed at the vitality of this couple--neither were very well in these last years, yet they display so much strength and



vigor, and no illness or sickness stopped them from enjoying the bounty with which they had been blessed in this land.

David's last name was Honig, and for those many who speak Mama Loshen (The Mother Tongue, Yiddish) then, Honig is honey, sweet. Whenever I speak to David or Rose, I never could sense that here were people who had been to hell and back. Hitler could have destroyed all their possessions; he came near to destroying their bodies --like the infamous Satan of the story of Job--but he could not break their souls.

It was my personal pleasure to commemorate their 60th anniversary just this past January. I even had a new Ketubah that I made, to indicate this milestone. Appropriately, they dedicated their celebration to Jewish National Fund-- all gifts went to the people of Israel.

David left us quickly and suddenly, yet I remember telling Barbara at the news of his death, "Barbara, he outlived Hitler and his henchmen, and survived to build up a new world, which they could not destroy, and which we will never allow to be destroyed."

Rose Honig d. March 30, 1996

Rose and David made a great pair. Rose, Reizel, was a rose, that which smells sweet, in Shakespeare's famous metaphor, and David's family name was Honig, which means honey, just as sweet to the taste, and the two, were, indeed for those around them, the sweetness combined of the rose the honey.

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5) Irene and Rudy Wind

Saved by the power that his Tefillin gave him!

I am always amazed how it is that people who have passed through the Valley of the Shadow of Death manage to create life. It is what I witness every time I

talk with our survivors. I think of what it took for Irene Wind to rebuild a world that had been destroyed.

Irene was born in the new country of Czechoslovakia in March 15, 1926, almost 79 years ago. Her parents, George and Bertha Falk raised her in an Orthodox household together with her younger sister, Susie and brother Victor.

There had never been such a country before, and today, there is no longer such a country. But it was a promising world into which she had been born, and the country of Czechoslovakia had been carved out of the Austrian Empire as a result of the war to make the world safe for democracy, the war to end all wars, the 1<sup>st</sup> World war. While Irene wasn't talkative about her past, from time to time, she would tell her children of images that returned to her in her dreams of a joyful and good childhood. The only darkness on the horizon for her was a childhood fought with rheumatic fever which she survived.

On her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, this ideal world was shattered, for on that day on March 15, 1939, the German armies swallowed up Czechoslovakia. Thus began the nightmare. Three years later, she and her entire family were rounded up to be relocated in the East. They ended up in Auschwitz. Where she lost her mother and brother Victor. She stuck with her younger sister, Susie, who was the healthier of the two, and despite her frail health, and with Susie's encouragement and motivation, she managed to survive the horror. At liberation, in 1945, she wanted only to forget the past, and put it behind her.

There were two young men who had also survived the camps, Rudy Wind and Imry Lustig. They had managed to help each other out in those years and became good friends. When Lustig met Susie, he lost no time in letting Rudy know that Susie had a wonderful sister, Irene. So, the two sisters married the two friends, and the families remained close ever after.

They married in 1947 and settled in Carlsbad. That match lasted for 57 years, a marriage of two warm and loving partners in life. Their Judy was born in Czechoslovakia, and they were soon fortunate to get a visa to the US in 1949 before the Soviets could fully lock off Czechoslovakia behind the Iron Curtain. They settled first in Miami to join Rudy's brother, but the heat was unbearable,

and they moved to Los Angeles, where Irene had an aunt, Fannie. Robert, the second child, was born here.

Irene devoted herself to her family as a true and devoted mother. They remember her for the cookies and milk that awaited them every day after school, for the bedtime stories, for the fresh Hallah she baked, for the Shabbat table set with the best fresh chicken soup every week. These memories will never disappear from your memory. She kept the family together with dinners and festive gatherings and kept close to her sister and brother in law with their children, Betty Bromberg & Lorraine Anishban.

Like the heroic woman of the ancient Book of Proverbs, she not only kept the kosher household properly, but stood at her husband's side at work. Rudy had opened a jewelry store, following in his father's footsteps, at the corner of Santa Monica & Crescent Heights, only a few blocks from his house.

Their reward was to see their children grow and establish homes of their own.

Judy married Arthur and they have their children, Greg, who is married to Becky and David. Robert married Nancy and they have a daughter, Maddie.

She managed it all despite poor health from childhood; she had heart surgery at a young age and a stroke in 1981 that kept her from moving about freely. Yet even in these circumstances, she kept herself going. When Rudy retired from business in 1985 and devoted himself to her care, she taught him how to cook and kept on organizing family parties and dinners.

What kept her going? She had a strong foundation in Jewish values which she shared with Rudy. They were members of Hollywood Temple Beth El, to which they gave generously. They were givers, not takers, and as Irene taught her children, no matter how little you have, you must share with others."

She held out till the age of 79. She passed away Friday night, Erev Shabbat, and there is a tradition to leave this world on a Shabbat is the sign of a Tsadekes-a righteous person.

She outlasted Hitler, and she beat the odds on her weak health. The only one thing she was holding out for was to make it to her granddaughter's Bat

Mitzvah, in two years. But she was a survivor, and she survives, in your hearts, and will be with you in your hearts, as her children and grandchildren go on in the lives that she has made possible.

Rudy Wind

Rudy Wind was born in Czechoslovakia August 16, 1918, still under the Austro Hungarian Empire. Born into an Orthodox family, with three brothers, Bela, Tibor, Elamer (d in WWII), and sister Irene (Adler).

When he was young, the area came under control of the German occupation during takeover of Czechoslovakia 1938. In 1939 he was taken into labor camp for the first time and was in labor camps, such as Mauthausen, throughout the war until liberated by Americans.

A Rabbi asked him how he survived those years. Other pious Jews with long beards and peyos threw away their tefillin when the Nazis came to get them, but he kept his. He hid them, used them every morning before dawn. That kept him the strength to keep going." The tefillin brought me back home". He still kept his pair over the years.

He met Irene in Koshetzer, Czechoslovakia, through a brother in law, who had become his friend, Imry Lustig. They married, settled in Karlsbad, then came to the US in 1949. They settled in Miami first, because his brother was there already. The heat was unbearable, so after 2 years, they moved to LA, where Irene had an aunt.

He opened a jewelry store (following in his father's footsteps, as his father was a jeweler and he had learned trade from him). LA offered the best opportunity. He opened a store at the corner of Santa Monica & Crescent Heights, a few blocks from his house. It was not an easy business (there was always the danger of violent robbers), but he succeeded at it and supported his family. He operated it till 10 years before he passed away.

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- 6) Louis Hersh - placed in the concentration camp twice-first by the Germans and then by the British!

He was born in Romania in 1926, into a traditional Jewish family, son of Yehoshua and Leah Hershkowitz, with brother Milu and sister- Shelly, later Bendet.

At a time when youngsters are supposed to have been enjoying their teenage years, his life turned into a nightmare. When he was just 12, his father died, and Hitler's armies had overrun Romania.

His version of high school was a slave labor camp, which he was fortunate enough to survive.

When the war ended, he had to determine where his place was. Europe was the graveyard of the Jewish people, and he became one of the ma'apilim, the adventurous who braved the blockades the British had set up across Europe to keep Jews from Palestine. He was caught, and placed in a displaced person's camp in Cypress, where he met his soul mate to be, Mina Zilbershteyn, who had also been through the hell of ghetto, labor camp, and Auschwitz. She found in him an honest man, with a good heart, who was charming.

Mina was allowed to leave first, for Palestine, while Louis had to wait yet another nine months before the British would let him go as well to the new State of Israel. Once in Israel, Mina and Lois reunited, married in 1949, and settled in a kibbutz. In Israel, Louis served for a while in the army, and then found work as a painter. They settled in Magdiel and then Tel Aviv, and both their children were born in Israel-- Marilyn in 1953, then Eddie, in 1958.

Life was very difficult in Israel in those years, and Mina and Louis decided to try their fortune in the United States. In 1963, they came to Los Angeles where Mina's uncle and grandmother had preceded them.

Here Louis found a talent for the restaurant business. It was hard work, which kept him going as early as 4:15 in the morning until the evening. It was hard work, but he flourished in it, and when he retired from it eight years ago, he soon discovered that he missed it.

Mina and Louis raised the children here, speaking to them in all the languages they knew, Yiddish, Hebrew, English. They were pleased to watch them grow and see them married and start a family of their own.

Eddie married Wendy and brought them grandson Adam.

Marilyn married Richard Illig and brought them grandson Daniel. To these grandchildren, he was their darling "zayde".

.. Between the Holocaust, the years as a refugee, and the difficult years starting a new life, first in Israel, and then in America, Louis didn't have much time to further his education or cultivate hobbies. But once he was freed of the restaurant, and the rigors of day to day living, he discovered books, and spent his time reading mystery and spy novels. He enjoyed being with people of all stripes and origins, and was, as his son said, a Great Schmoozer (teller of tales). The

other pleasure he allowed himself was to get away from Los Angeles to Las Vegas. He wouldn't let the Horror of Hitler dampen his view of people, nor his spirit, Good, and happy- go- lucky.

He found comfort and support in his Judaism, and while not Orthodox in his practice, attended a small very Orthodox synagogue on Beverly Blvd.

Louis was not an organization man, although he and Mina both belonged to the Lodzer organization, a gathering of Holocaust survivors. He also had a knack for people, and everybody loved him, and he, equally, loved everyone, no matter what their origin or background.

## 7) Luba Rostovsky 2014

Faith that there are "No bad people, only people who do bad things."

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Luba's childhood account is vague because she had lost her family to Hitler and therefore preferred to not rehash her past. She was born to Leah and Yitshak Pomerants in the borderland between Poland and Lithuania June 28, 1928.

When a girl today would be celebrating her Bat Mitzvah with family and friends, Luba found her hometown invaded by the Nazis in 1940. In the turmoil, Luba and her younger sister fled for their lives and found safety in deep central Asia, Uzbekistan but her parents and other siblings could not escape, and they were never seen again. This was a very dangerous and difficult trek, one of hopping on freight cars and trudging on foot, almost 3000 miles. It was too much for the younger sister, who died in Uzbekistan. Luba had to struggle on her own, but she was fortunate that strangers took her in & helped her survive.

As I said, so many survivors, as they were raising their families, tried to put the difficult and painful past behind them. Luba did not dwell on what she went through or what was in the past. She wanted to put it away and move on.

After the war, she was allowed, as were others of the masses of refugees to make the trek back to Lithuania. By now, she was a young woman, found her cousins, Leah and Yosef, and started tasked of creating new life. She had a good head for numbers, took accounting courses, and landed a job in a factory. Like so many Jews of east Europe, she was facile with many languages, and this too helped her get through.

She met and married Meir Rostovsky, another refugee, in 1950. There they had their first child, Sarah. Conditions for Jews were miserable still and they packed up what little they had and escaped to Poland, where they met up with the representatives of the new Israel in transit camps that had been set up to get Jews out of Europe. They made their way to Israel, where Izzy was born. Then, by 1962, they were able to obtain a visa to the US, thanks to Meir's sister, Chayka, who had settled here.

The two started a new life- Meir painted houses, and Luba started to work at a Barton's Candy Store. She then got a job at Atarah's on Fairfax, and the couple became part of the fixtures of what was a vibrant Jewish life, before Fairfax became a skateboarder's center. Meir became the "mayor" of the district and Luba the first Lady, becoming friends with all the shop keepers and shoppers in the neighborhood. Local Rabbis would come to the shop, insisting that they would only buy from Luba. Any child that came to the shop was sure to walk away with a little gift from her. She would teach her son, Izzy, the lesson of Tzedakah by giving him a quarter to put in the cup of a beggar on the street. Izzy, in turn, would get his sons a sandwich to give to someone homeless on the street.

She should have been bitter and angry, because she had suffered so much as a young teenager and had lost her dear family. She did not let that loss get to her. She believed in good. She believed there were "No bad people, only people who do bad things." She turned her efforts to nurturing her children and then grandchildren.

Their two children made California their new home. Sarah married Armand Cohen and they have two children, Lynn and Michael. Izzy married Peggy and they have two children, Jason and Jacob

She was very close to her children's spouses. They were son and daughter, not in-law.

Her grandchildren made up for what she had lost in the Shoah and the trauma of exile. She was proud of them and made each one feel that he or she had a unique and special relationship—each one was the favorite. She wanted them to feel comfortable in her presence, so she was very tolerant and "hip" for her children and grandchildren and their friends. She made sure that each grandchild would have a roof over their head. She would never let them go away from her without giving something, even if it were the last few pennies in her purse.

Jacob knew her as completely accepting and loving, open minded, and people in turn loved her. She could accept her grandsons for being themselves without feeling that they

needed to meet anyone else's expectations. Jason too felt her unconditional love—she was concerned that they would be fed and sheltered. She wanted to give, not take.

Lynn learned to love and respect all and to treasure family from her. Luba would give the shirt off her back to help and was always there for her brood.

Even in her later years, she moved in with Sarah and Armand, who made her feel at home while Izzy and Peggy would make sure to take her out regularly. Her mind was still sharp up to the end.

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7) Mark Alexander 2002

-cousin to Joe Alexander

I recall, several years ago, having been in a close knit discussion with the renowned voice of the survivors of the Holocaust, Elie Wiesel. He spoke about what was the action of the various peoples who were liberated from the concentration camps by the allied forces. Poles, Russian, Ukrainians-- as soon as they were liberated-- went out to take their revenge upon their German tormentors.

What did his fellow Jews do? They buried their dead, said Kaddish, and went on to establish new families. Our Jewish version of the ultimate revenge is to survive and rebuild.

I thought of this meeting with Elie Wiesel as I prepared my thoughts today about your dear husband, father, grandfather, and friend, Mark Alexander, for he was part of that surviving remnant plucked from the flames of the Holocaust.

Mark Alexander was born on September 24, 1924, in Itzbitzi, Poland. His mother passed away when he was still an



infant and his father, Abraham Jacob Alexander, raised him on his own. Jewish life in Poland was far from wonderful after the First World War, yet there was the hope of creating a normal life for Jews in the new nation. All that was shattered when Mark was 15 years old and the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, starting the Second World War. Young Mark, like the millions of his fellow Jews, was designated as enemy of the Aryan race and the Nazis put him in concentration camp. Because of his age, he was allowed to work in the labor camps and was not sent off to the gas chambers. He was fortunate to team up with his cousin, Joseph Alexander, who was like a brother to him. They went through several camps, and then were transferred to Auschwitz in 1944. They survived that infamous institution, and finally ended up in Theresienstadt, Czechoslovakia, where they were at last liberated in 1945.

Mark was fortunate to get a visa to America in 1949. He and his cousin Joseph opened a tailor shop in 1950 at George Air Force Base in Victorville, California. Here he found his new world and rebuilt his life. Mark dedicated himself to working at George Air Force Base as the base tailor for 34 years.

Mark met Pearl Hyman and married her in 1952. They maintained a loving married life and in June of this year Mark and Pearl would have celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

They raised 3 children in a close-knit loving environment - Abraham, Myrna and Steven.

Mark had three loving grandchildren through Abraham and his wife Ellen- - Jennifer: Bradley and Kimberly. This is the greatest Jewish response to Hitler-- the continuation of a new generation.

Because of his own personal experience, he identified very personally with the State of Israel and the people of Israel. The recent disturbances, the suicide bombings, and the fighting that has ensued personally upset him. He hoped that the various parties could settle their differences and make peace very soon. We can only pray that, as we place him in his final resting place, that the fighting will subside once and for all.

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#### 8) Ralph Benjamin Fischer "Ralphie" 2014 Remaining a Mensch despite the suffering!

If anyone could have been bitter, surely Ralph Fischer could have earned that right. Nevertheless, in life, he put aside the terrors he had seen, and lived for the good that he remembered.

He was born 92 years ago in the City of Lodz, Poland. It was a major city, with 1/3 of the inhabitants Jewish. He was born into a traditional Jewish family of the time, moderately observant, but involved in the newly emerging Polish society. He received a modern education as well as traditional Jewish education. Childhood was filled with happy memories. For example, he recalled how his mother used to keep a ceramic stove, place apples in it to freshen the room, and then give the children the baked apple as a treat.

He loved Lodz of his childhood. There was a library, where he could read to his heart's content, and he always spoke with pride of Lodz's 40 legitimate theaters. An older brother had made it through dental school, but when Ralph was 17, 75 years ago this coming September, Germany invaded Poland, World War II exploded, and that was the end of his schooling.

The Nazis immediately rounded up Jews into what became 2<sup>nd</sup> largest ghetto after Warsaw.

One could survive 5 years of persecution only by being energetic, witty and determined. He made his way through numerous labor camps, volunteering for tasks that would take him out of

the confines of the ghetto walls. He had numerous close calls. He was sent on a labor detail to a tunnel, clearing huge rocks. He knew that no one would survive the heavy burden of labor, so he picked up a broom and began sweeping the floor. The guards assumed that was his job and left him alone. Another time, he was sent to gather potatoes that a tractor would dig up. He would put aside some potatoes on top of the harvester's engine and by the end of the day, he would have roasted enough to eat and that way, he survived starvation. Survival required determination and fortitude. You have seen movies of children caught by Nazi guards as they smuggled food into the ghetto and were beaten miserably. He was one of them- beaten with 80 lashes—and as soon as he was strong enough, he went out again to smuggle in more potatoes. Survival also required some charm, and a Nazi commandant took a liking to him because his family name sounded more German than Jewish. On such things, life and death would hang.

At end of war, he found self under Russian occupation but eventually made his way to Paris, where he had family members who had moved before the war.

He found an old family friend from the old neighborhood who introduced her to her younger sister, Rosette. Rosette's family had all emigrated from Lodz to Paris France, well before 1937. However, when the Germans overran France, Paris came under their direct control. Rosette's whole family was shipped back to Poland, to infamous Auschwitz. There, she lost her father and younger sister; she survived together with her older sister and mother and returned to France. Ralph and Rosette clicked and married in 1947. Their son, Claude, was born in Paris. Rosette enjoyed life in Paris, but soon, Ralph had an opportunity to get a visa to the US, land of opportunity. It was not an easy move, but eventually, they settled in and made America their new home.

They started from scratch in Patterson, New Jersey. He was pants presser, she was seamstress. Their daughter, Cathy, was born there.

11 years later, they had saved up enough to open a business with his brother in law- a lumber and hardware store in Inglewood. By 1987, at the age of 65, he had made himself comfortable enough to sell off the business and for once in his life, he could enjoy instead of struggle. Now he could enjoy his two grandchildren, Abraham and Leah.

They travelled widely-Russia, Asia, cruises, loved to work in garden, enjoyed fine music.

I asked the children, "What was it like to grow up in the house of survivors? Did their experience darken the children's youth?"

They knew that everyone in their parents' circle were "greenhorns", everyone had a tattoo, but nothing was ever told explicitly about what they had gone through. It was something kept close to the chest. Only in the 1960's, after increasing public awareness of the Holocaust and when they felt the children were older, did they begin to recount their experiences.- it was at that time that they began to answer questions, they were willing later to be interviewed by the Spielberg Shoah Foundation and then get involved with fellows of the Lodzer Group and the 1939 Club, Bnai Brith..

What kept him going? Despite what he went through, he remained a mensch, a decent and good human being, with no pretentiousness. He was focused on the positive in life, attitude of "moving forward".

Ralph, Ralphie, and Rosette enjoyed 67 years of a loving relationship together. Even in his last years, as he became infirm and needed her help, she was happy to be with him. Ralph passed away at the age of 92. He had gone through the worst that the human mind can imagine, and he came through a better human, a better mensch, despite it.

He will be sorely missed by you, but you have in your hearts this memory of a man who made a new life possible out of the ashes of the past. May his memory be a blessing.

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#### 9) Vojtech Horovitz 2004

Captured twice while escaping from the Concentration Camps, he made it out on the third try!

Vojtech Horovitz was born in what was then still Czechoslovakia in 1922. He was the older of 3 other brothers, Ladislav, Ernest, and Alex, and one sister Elka. We can be sure that his parents, when he was born, had high expectations. Afterall, Europe had gone through the war to end all wars, which had made possible the new state of Czechoslovakia.

We can only imagine what he was as a child and teenager from what he have known of him as an adult, full of good humor and cheer, a trait that stayed with him, and perhaps made him survive the impossible.

You are all too familiar with what happened. Just this Sunday, on the Jewish calendar, is the date as the Yom HaShoah, the Day of Recalling the Holocaust.

When Vojtech was 16, the Nazis took over Czechoslovakia while the world slept.

By the time he was 20, his entire family had been picked up and locked in the same concentration camp. He would never see his family members alive afterwards.

Other people succumbed and gave up. Vojtech was unstoppable.

Three times, he escaped. Twice, he was captured, and in the process, his hands were badly mangled. Others would have stopped; he did not.

A third time, he made it, and escaped as far as Moscow.

Even in the safety of the Soviet Union, it was not safe. In the midst of warfare, in a land where every stranger was seen as an enemy spy, he was hit by bullets so badly, that he needed a series of operations to save him; to his last days, he still had the bullets in his body that the surgeons could not remove.

When the war ended, he was able to be repatriated to Czechoslovakia in 1945. Three years later, he met a beautiful young woman by the name of Alice Lichtenstein and, being a

handsome fellow himself, with a winning personality, in a land where young Jews were few and far between, they soon married.

It was there that they gave birth to their daughter, Veronica, who was not only a beautiful child, but also a good daughter to her parents. Vojtech, in her eyes, was this most wonderful father.

While life in Czechoslovakia then was certainly better than under Hitler, life under the Soviet thumb was no worker's paradise, either. Still, Vojtech's charm and persistence enabled him to obtain gain work whereby he could support this family in relative comfort.

Their great break came almost 20 years later, when an opportunity presented itself, and Vojtech, Alice, and Veronica were able to smuggle themselves out to Vienna and freedom, and finally, come to Los Angeles. So too did the other survivors in the family, such as Alice's brother, Martin, and their mother, Charlotta.

Here, economic survival was now crucial. Again, Vojtech found his way. While Alice found a livelihood as a tailor for fur coats, Vojtech worked in a factory, but also saved his money. When opportunity knocked, he saw it and took it.

He purchased a retirement home, and since he had good humor and charm, as well as good business sense, created a successful venture.

Veronica in the meantime met and married Haim Behar, and through them, Alice and Vojtech were blessed as grandparents with Julia, now herself a young woman. Veronica also helped with Vojtech in running the home and, when in later years, he turned over the reins to her, she nevertheless could always turn to him for levelheaded advice, even to the last of his days.

What can we gain from the life of Vojtech? His good humor saved him and others in time of trouble and stress, for he always knew how to turn a bad situation into a good one. His experiences under the Nazis and then under the Soviets could have crushed him, as it must have crushed others, yet he did not whine or bemoan his fate. It could have crushed his soul, but he remained a committed and religious Jew, active at Hollywood Temple Beth El. He could have saved all he had for himself, yet as he was giving of himself to others, he felt that God gave back to him.