

The Survivors among us part 2

Shirley Gertler d. April 27, 1993

There are those among us who have gone through the worst hell that the human imagination can devise. We can find no meaning in it. Yet, as with Shirly Gertler, we can overcome what we have gone through, rebuild, and in the process, be the greater for what we have gone through.

Shirley was born near Lodz, Poland towards end of WWI, and she met & married Harry Gertler in Lodz. He was a prosperous young businessman, a factory owner. 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 and come here to LA, where they had relatives.

They came without a penny, barely the clothes on their backs and no food even for their daughter. At that time, there were no social services and no government subsidies for refugees, nor was the Jewish community equipped as it is today to help out.

They had to struggle, day by day, to scrape together penny by penny--Their experience taught them to overcome every obstacle. Whatever was offered, George was ready to do--neither would ever dream of becoming a public burden.

Fortunately, Shirley was very talented, skilled, and an excellent worker. She became a seamstress, soon made her way to top seamstress with the noted designer of haut couturier, Galanos, the same company that made dresses for Nancy Reagan.

Shirley had good taste, and was always immaculate and well dressed herself.

Their savings went into business, and they opened liquor supplies business.

All of this served them in good stead. Even though George was not in good health himself, they were able to maintain themselves in comfort.

Shirley loved her family, She loved children in general, and when Tammy, their daughter, married Marshall Rubin, she then gave her fullest attention to her grandchildren, Julie and Amy. She could finally dedicate herself to them as she could not allow herself with her daughter, when every day was a matter of just making it.

In her later years, she was able to take an active part as lifetime member in Hadassah, Bnai Brith, and, while she was still in good health, she went often to our own sisterhood and to Shabbat services at Hollywood Temple Beth El. Both she and George were active with the American Congress of Jewish Survivors of Concentration camps.

In these last few years, age and illness took its toll, she could no longer enjoy her sunset years. She was fortunate that her husband, George was so devoted through her. He watched her, cared for her, made sure that she got all the attention she needed at home, & not go to a nursing home.

We all want to be remembered. She used to greet me every Shabbat, tease me "I bet you don't remember my name" and I would tell her, because she was so very pleasant and very sweet, that I made a point of remembering her.

Keep in mind that what Shirley and George went through was the worst evil the human mind had devised. Yet she went ahead with life, the two raised their daughter, and established themselves well in this new land of their adoption. For all that they went through, they succeeded in making good out of the evil that had befallen them. For this, she should be praised. May the memory of her perseverance and determination to carry on be for a blessing.

Jack Wasserman

He was born in Romania on June 9, 1925 to Yitzhak and Freida Wasserman, and grew up with a brother Reuben, and a sister, Frima.

While he was still a teenager, World War II broke out, and eventually, his entire family were caught up in the Nazi dragnet. By miracle, they survived the camps. His camp was liberated by the Russian army, which immediately drafted him into action, and he was wounded. Luckily, he was able to get away from the Russian army and made his way to the front- That was then the American zone in Germany, near Munich.

There in the locale was a young woman, Hilda, who had fled from Czechoslovakia. They had passed each other by, but not taken real notice.

Soon, he was able to get to Canada-a relative there, Morris & Frieda Tabachnik, brought him in and adopted him-.He became a part of their family and remained close ever since.

He had in all these years been a man of family ties, and he kept in constant contact with them, the children of his brother and sister, and other relatives both in North America and in Israel, where he visited often Israel. In appreciation of that closeness family members have flown here from Toronto, Detroit, & Florida.

In Detroit, which was just across the border from where he stayed with the relatives he met the same young lady he had seen in Germany. On Nov 11, 1951, they married.

They had three children, and from them, merited seeing grandchildren.

The son Harold, married to Pam and daughter Kimberly-9

son-Morrey, married to Stacey and daughter Alyssa 8, son Mitchell, who at 5, will carry on the Wasserman name.

son-Gary, married to Debbie, with her children- Brian 16, Jennifer, 19, who have become part of the family.

They soon settled in Windsor, Ontario, across the river from Detroit- He opened a Grocery Business, did well, but the special climate of California drew him-- He picked up and resettled in LA-He opened a Car wash, one of the first of the modern automated

car washes that are significant part of LA culture. Several others followed, and he went from that to real estate. Jack kept on in work as long as his health was good up till a few years ago.

Jack adored his children & grandchildren, and gave them all his support. He was very proud of them.

Jack's children knew they could rely on him; he was always available, on call for his family, no matter what. His ethos was "Give more than take."

Jack loved life, and he expressed it with a wonderful sense of humor. Even when he was at his sickest, kept up joking with the nurses.

Both Jack & Hilda together kept active in B'nai Brith, they loved bowling, dancing, and playing cards with friends. The two were exceptionally close and committed to each other, for 42 loving years. Love was always there over those. He always expressed his love for his wife openly. "Honey, I love you." Never could they remain angry with each other.

Leo Schaechter

Our dear friend, Leo Schaechter was just such a warm, and loving soul, who loved people, who had as his purpose in life to help others.

He was born in Poland, 79 years ago to his father Leib and, mother, Perl, who died when Leo was young. One brother, Sam Schechter, is still alive, but his household also included brothers Wolf, Jack, Mendel, and sister Kaile.

The family lived in the village of Pitcomin, near Lvov. He grew up on the farm, where his family raised grain crops. This was not common for Jews, of east Europe, who were more often crowded in cities and the shtetls. Little did they realize that this life in the outdoors would be a life saver later on.

When Leo was in his mid-20's, the family had to go into hiding as the Nazis began their murder of the Jewish people. Their farm was taken over by Polish peasants who knew them and protected them, and the men in the family were able to work for these peasants. The brothers were able to conceal their sister, and although Leo himself was captured at one time by the Nazis, but he managed to survive, as did the rest of the family members. This itself was a rarity. While his experience was bitter, it did not damage his soul and spirit.

At the war's end, he was in DP camps in Germany, then returned to his home village, and finally, he made his way to America.

Here, he had an aunt and uncle, who had come much earlier to this country. But he was not able to stay with them, and made his way to California, where he had his cousin, Sylvia and husband Harry Kurtz, now deceased.

This became his new family--they welcomed him warmly into the household, and ever since, have kept warm relations, as he kept close also to their children, Jack(& wife Karen Ann) & Barbara(& husband Phil Krohn) & their grandchildren. It is his cousin, Sylvia who has made the last favor to Leo, the Hesed shel emet, in arranging for his funeral. Close relations with cousin Sylvia(& husband Stanley Schreiber), other relatives in east coast and Israel and nephew on wife's side, Richard Meyers.

In US, he engaged in various jobs, first for Manischewitz wines, then with a screen door manufacturer.

Later in life he met and married his wife, Helen, whom he loved and adored for 25 years, until her death several years ago. They didn't have children of their own so he found enjoyment in watching the children of his family and friends.

His wife, Helen brought him into synagogue life, they joined HTBE in 1976, and when she died, he realized that his one home was this Temple. He grew into it. His heart and soul were at HTBE. Never missed an opportunity to help as needed--kitchen, kiddush, luncheons, dinners. Bingo. He was apart of all events. He was the only man I have ever met to be made an honorary member of a Sisterhood. I presume he was their best brother.

The synagogue sustained him, gave him meaning in life, gave him love. We will recite Kaddish in his memory in our chapel.

In the last few months, he was beginning to show signs of declining health and was slowing down a little, yet not for a moment did he step back from his participation in this synagogue.

Every Shabbat, we would gather in the Sapper Hall, I would make the hamotzi, cut the first few pieces of challah, and then turn around and offer him the knife. No, Rabbi, your doing a good job" he would joke, but I never wanted to take away his Hazakah. This last Shabbat, yesterday, as I sliced the Challah, I could no longer turn the pleasure over to Leo.

Benjamin Rapaport D Sept 9, 1995

I still recall meeting him at the engagement party for his niece, Karen to her fiancé Joseph Cohen. I recall how he entertained me with stories, one after the other and danced joyously at the occasion. I had the immediate sense of one who was filled with life, a love of life and a wish to share that spirit with all around.

Benjamin was born 84 years ago, in what was then the Austro-Hungarian empire, but before he reached Bar Mitzvah age, it had become Romania. He trained to become an electrician and worked hard and well.

During the Holocaust, Romania became an ally of Hitler, and Benjamin ,together with his brothers, Emil and Alex, as well as sister Giselle, were fortunate to have been in Bucharest, where Jews were spared deportation to the concentration camps. At the same time, his sister Agnes, had managed to find safety in Budapest. Sadly, they were not able to save their parents, Zvi and Rivka.

Benjamin made his life in Romania after the war, but realized that he had no place under the communist regime, under the thumb of Stalin. He longed to be in Israel, and for his desire , was arrested by the government and held in jail for 5 years.

Finally, in 1960, he and his brothers were allowed to leave for Israel, where he settled, for the first time in a land that was happy to have him as a Jew.

His brother , Emil, and his sister Agnes had in the intervening years, come to the United States, and in 1978, he decided to join them, as Emil was ill, and he wanted to look out after his little sister, Agnes. He was always a loyal and caring brother.

Then, in 1980, his small circle was expanded, as his niece, Agnes, with her husband Julio Nahmias, and their daughters Karen and Nicole moved here.

He had always been a confirmed bachelor. One of his friends said it was because he wished to make as many women as possible happy, which he couldn't do if he were married to one. However, he enjoyed being an uncle to his nephews and nieces and their children. There were his sister Frieda's children: her daughter Agnes, Married to Julio-their children- Karen Cohen & Nicole Nahmias

and her son Gabriel Goldsman, married to Gloira- their daughter-Giselle Goldsman

His brother Alex's children, Nicholas Rapaport and Chava Rosen(married to David), and their child Yosef.

He was delighted to be at the wedding of his grand-niece, Karen to Joseph Cohen, and he only wished that he could see his sister, Frieda as a great-grandmother, and his niece, Agnes a grand-mother.

He had, as I mentioned, a great zest for life. He was eager to learn something new, and keep on top of world affairs. He was conversant in Romanian, Hungarian, Yiddish, Hebrew and English, and could tell good stories in any of these languages. He loved playing violin, especially gypsy melodies, and often played benefits for his favorite organization, Shelters for Israel, or for his friends and family at parties.

Miklos Herschko

Miklos Herschko went through the iron and fire and water and survived it all, because he found that lovingkindness indeed, was greater than death. It was his lovingkindness that enabled him to rebuild a world that had been stolen from him.

He was born in Dbrecen, Hungary, the country's 2nd largest city, on July 28, 1912. He never got to know his father, who died as a soldier just when Miklos was born. His mother alone raised him & his older sister.

He was blessed with physical and emotional strength and went to work in the sheet metal business. These two facts proved to be a Godsend for him.

When Hitler's henchmen took over Hungary, he was caught. Because of his strength and his skills, he was fortunate to be sent to labor camp instead of the death camp.

He survived the Holocaust but lost his entire family. He headed back to his home city, hoping to find some surviving remnant.

At same time, his wife-to-be, Paula, came back to the same place, her home town as well, looking for survivors. Now, neither had any family left, but they found each other and married in 1946.

They settled in the Carpathian region, which had come under Russian control. Their only son, Tibor, was born in 1947. They looked after him as the apple of their eye. He was their only true possession in the world and they made sure that he had the college education that they could not have.

In 1969, Tibor married Paula, whom they came to love dearly, and in 1970, their first grandson, Peter, was born. In 1973, they had to bid farewell to Tibor and his family, who were able to get out of the Soviet Union and to the United States.

Their greatest moment came when Tibor redeemed Miklos and Paula and brought them here, in 1975, just in time for the birth of their second grandson, Tom. This was their dream--to see grandchildren, who have now become fine young men.

Mikos was able to work in the US until he retired here in West Hollywood. His favorite activity was to be with his grandchildren on weekends. His family was his ambition. and he was most caring husband, father and father in law, and grandfather. He was determined to create for his family what he never had . He would give his life for them.

His only other real pleasure in life was to sit at the Farmer's Market with old friends and reminisce.

He had a deep love and knowledge of his Jewish faith, he would daven morning and evening. He passed that love on to his family. His son Tibor has been a great help in the Temple, repairing our air conditioning equipment and other mechanical troubles that arise in such a huge synagogue. He passed it on to his grandchildren as well, who are the product of good solid Jewish education.

Mikos and Paula loved each other with an everlasting love for 43 years. In these last years, although both had diabetes, the disease disabled Paula, and Miklos dedicated himself to caring for her till her death in 1989.

This was his world. He recreated the world that had been stolen from him by Hitler, and he let them know it. His last words to them, just a few days ago, was " I Love you all". His care and lovingkindness will survive him through you.

May his memory of love and devotion be for a blessing in your lives., Amen.

Gussie Lippel Dec. 9, 1995

Gussie was born in 1909 to Babette & Jacob Hamburg in Dolina, then Austro-Hungary. It was the same town as my father's, there were only 2,000 Jews in that town, and she was only a few years younger, so it was quite probable that they either knew each other or had friends in common.

Her parents were very devout Jews, as was the nature of that town. Even the town apikores, and there was one, didn't dare open the front door of his shop on Shabbos. Her grandfather looked after her in those early formative years, and from him and the community she had learned the love of Jewish life and heritage that stayed with her to the end.

After World War I, that part of Europe was ceded to Poland, which was less friendly to Jews than the Austrian empire had been. At sixteen she went to Cologne, Germany, where an uncle gave her work in his store. It was a good time for Jews in Germany, when they were fully entitled to all civil rights in the Weimar Republic.

When she was 20, a young man, Julius Lippel, a contractor for a tractor company, came to visit. The visit turned into love and in 1931 they married and settled in Dusseldorf. The first child, Berthold, was born in 1932, and just then, the Jewish dream turned into nightmare, as Hitler came to power.

Barbara was born in 1937, and, after Kristalnacht, after the persecution in Germany became unbearable, Julius was able to leave first, to Belgium, then in 1940, he spirited out the rest of the family.

They spent the war in labor camps, then in the city, sometimes in hiding, sometimes in the open in the area of Brussels, wearing the yellow badge, covering it where possible.

The only way to save their children was to place them for safekeeping, Barbara in a Catholic orphanage, Bert in a Christian Boys School. As the war ended, they reunited but even then, survival was a struggle, as Belgium would not allow the refugees the right to work.

Fortunately, Julius' father, Max, had gotten to the US before the war. He and other relatives sponsored Gussie and Julius, and they came to this country in 1949.

They settled in New York, where Gussie worked at the Barracini candy store. They were able to begin life anew, and support and educate their children. Bert studied electric engineering at MIT, Barbara, nursing at Bellevue.

Gussie was privileged to see them marry and raise families of their own.

Berthold(Bert) married Beatrice in 1959, and Barbara married J. Brin Schulman in 1961.

Barbara & J. Brin had moved to Los Angeles, his original home, and as their first 2 children were born, Gussie & Julius would come out to visit, until with the birth of the third child, they decided it was time to move here for good. Bert & Bea too had settled in Denver, and then Tucson, also not as far from here as from New York.

Gussie kept on working, first with Barricini's, then with Newbury. She almost wouldn't stop , until 1989, at age 79.

She was the best friend to her grandchildren, their " second mother". They would take her all their problems tell her their secrets- career, boyfriends. They would have slumber parties at her home. Made each one feel" the most important". If any of them were ill, in the hospital, she would spend the night with them when Barbara couldn't.

On Bert 's side, there were Miriam, who married Bennet Blum, then Naomi Lippel with her children Joshua & Jacob, next Rebecca, who married Robin Lockhart, and Elisheva Lippel.

On Barbara's side, there was Deborah , and as I mentioned, our paths crossed-- she married Eric Silverthorn at whose Bar Mitzvah I officiated when I was a young Rabbi in Houston. They have their children, Emily & Blake.

Then there are :Jessica ,Joshua, Dayan, and Iriet.

She & her husband Julius took care of each other, until he passed away in 1978, after 46 years of marriage. In the years since, she would go often, to visit his grave, care for it, tend it, keep out the weeds, and thereby continue to express her love for him.

She took up new activities, after she retired at 79, senior's clubs, trips, and she would organize activities with her fellow widows. She kept her life full.

She kept a traditional and observant Jewish household, and saw to her children's Jewish training, She never rode on Shabbat & Holidays, she would walk to her children's home and walk to Hollywood Temple Beth El on Shabbat mornings, a

long distance.

She loved to be in the chapel, for here, she had come to say Kaddish after her dear Julius, and found friendship and comfort from the other minyannairs.

There she became good friends with Rebbitzin Henrietta Klein, whose husband, Rabbi Isaac Klein, had been a friend of my father's in Germany after the war. Again, a small world.

She believed in the two classic virtues of tsedakah and gemilut hasadim. She kept a pushke, a charity box, and any time any one of her family or friends was sick or in trouble, she would put in some money, and a prayer, that her charity would be rewarded with that person's health and well being.

She engaged in gemilut Hasidim, acts of lovingkindness, to her family, friends, and neighbors, and visited them when they were ill, to give the hope and courage.

Adelle Alexander -- I am including her, for while Adelle was not herself a survivor, she was the wife of our dear Gabbai, Joe Alexander, who has been mentor to youth and a living testimony to what has happened to our people.

Your wife, mother, sister, relative and friend, Adelle Alexander, has been like Miriam, a source of water, a source of care and nurturing to you.

Adelle was born in Towanda, in Eastern Pennsylvania, on July 28, 1930, the daughter of Louis and Florence Edelstein, who owned a furniture business there. She was sister to Phyllis Edelstein.

She was a very studious girl, with a musical touch, as she played violin in the school orchestra.

Towanda had a very small Jewish community and little to offer a young single woman, so Adelle moved to Harrisburg, the capital of Pennsylvania, where she worked for the Federal government.

At the same time, a young man, Joseph Alexander, had come to a visit. He had survived the concentration camps of Eastern Europe, and had come to Harrisburg in 1949.

He stayed but for a short time, went west where he had a cousin, Mark Alexander, and an uncle who had helped him start out in the military clothing business.

Joe had decided to take a vacation back to Harrisburg, where he had made good friends. Adelle was introduced to Joe by a mutual friend, and immediately, she knew that she had found her true match made in heaven. Within two weeks, they were married, and Adelle began a new life for herself, going with Joe to Los Angeles as Mrs. Alexander.

Business was good, and while she helped out from time to time in the store, she was able to devote herself to her husband and to their children, son, David, and daughter, Helen.

She kept the family close together, kept in close contact with her sister, Phyllis, who was back east, and with Joe's cousin, Mark, and his children. She made good friends here, like Phyllis and Gary Wolf.

In her spare time, she like to knit Afghans, bowl with the league at Bnai David-

Judea and support charities like the city of Hope and the Torah Fund at Beth Jacob. Adelle and Joe have been members of ours at Hollywood Temple Beth El for 28 years.

Like Miriam, she provided you your well of water--for 38 years, for the same length of time that Miriam supported the children of Israel in their march through the wilderness. Now, at the age of 65, she has been taken from you, and the nurturing that you had from her will now be through the warm memories of her that can never be taken away, and from the good that you will do in her memory.