

# e-LEGACY



BIRMINGHAM  
HOLOCAUST  
EDUCATION  
CENTER

Keeping the History and Lessons of the Holocaust Alive

MAY 2020

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear valued friends and supporters,

Since our last edition, our growing and talented staff have been hard at work moving our community education programs online, and we have seen immense increase in participation. Who knew a pandemic could cause a positive ripple effect in Holocaust education? And yet, now more than ever we must continue to fulfill our mission of memory - preserving our survivors' stories - and education - empowering teachers, students, and community members to learn the Holocaust history of hate, and to take the lessons and mold a more just and accepting community.

Esther Levy shared a powerful quote at the beginning of her inspiring and educational Bearing Witness program about her survivor mother, Tobi Komornik Gerson.

American professor, author, and Civil Rights activist, Julius Lester, said: "History is not just facts and events. History is also a pain in the heart, and we repeat history until we are able to make another's pain in the heart our own." This quote speaks to the essence and transformative power of our mission. We teach about the Holocaust - facts, events, people, places. And we build opportunities for people to become more empathetic, to see the "other" as one with us, and to honor the other's life story.

I am excited to share that we have added an important component to building and expanding our educational opportunities. Amy McDonald, Holocaust history teacher at Shades Valley High School, has joined our staff part-time as Education Consultant.

## FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CONTINUED...

Many of you know and appreciate Amy's work with our Teacher Cadre, working with Ann Mollengarden and other teachers to create curriculum for teacher workshops, and recently, as she effectively led our Community Education Series on the Warsaw Ghetto and rescuing Jews. Amy is also the co-author with survivor, Max Steinmetz, of *Determined to Survive*. And you won't be surprised to learn that Amy is writing another book about the Holocaust. Stay tuned for more details. Welcome, Amy!

In light of COVID-19 restrictions and our desire to continue to protect our most vulnerable community members, our annual fundraising campaign, L'Chaim, is going virtual this year. We are excited that David and Susan Silverstein will be our honorees. Save the Date: Sunday, August 23, 2020, at 2:00 pm. You don't want to miss it!

Warm regards and a strong dose of hope,  
Melissa

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## IN MEMORIARM



Edith Sanders, Holocaust survivor, born in Kaiserslautern, Germany. Edith and her family traveled to Italy in 1937 following the Nazi party's rise to power in Germany. In 1938, the family was forced to leave Milan and in 1939, they immigrated to Honduras. The BHEC is honored to preserve her story for future generations.

**LEARN MORE**

[bhecinfo.org/survivors/sanders-edith](https://bhecinfo.org/survivors/sanders-edith)

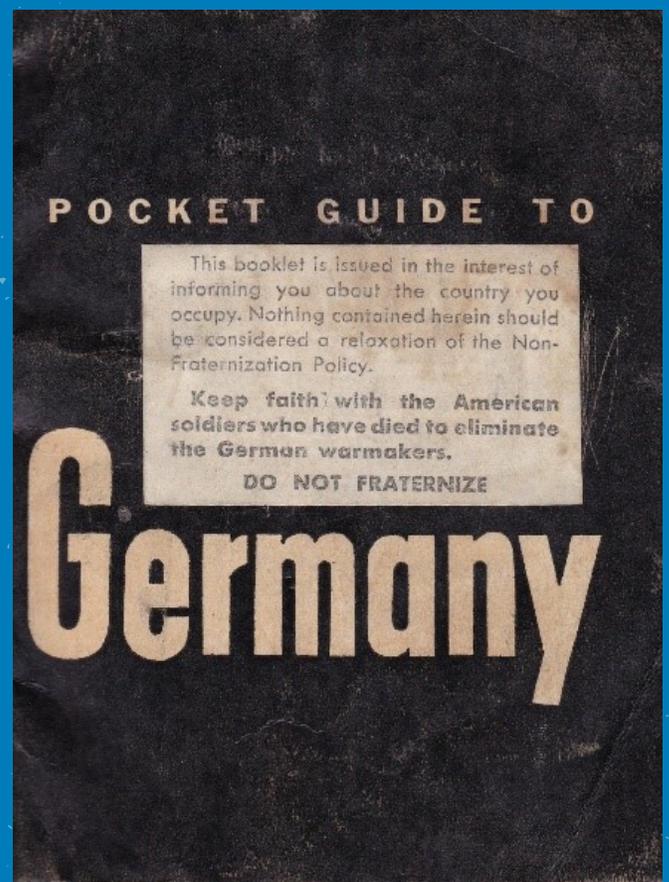
# THIS MONTH IN HOLOCAUST HISTORY

## LIBERATION

by Rachel Jones Lopez & Ann Mollengarden

As early as the summer of 1944, Allied forces began to close in on the Nazis. On July 23, 1944, Soviet forces were the first to encounter a Nazi concentration camp, Majdanek, in Poland. Subsequently, on January 27, 1945, they entered Auschwitz. Later that year, American forces liberated Buchenwald, Dachau, and Mauthausen as well as hundreds of subcamps, including Ohrdruf (a subcamp of Buchenwald).

Allied intelligence had known that Jews were being rounded up, deported, and massacred for years. As early as August 1944, major American newspapers covered the Soviet discovery of Majdanek. Similarly, in late January and February 1945, the Soviet liberation of Auschwitz made headlines, but these reports didn't seem to prepare the soldiers for what they would find. Certainly the "Pocket Guide to Germany" provided to troops headed to Europe did not mention concentration camps.



*Pocket Guide to Germany, 1944: published by US Government Printing Office for GI's who would soon be occupying the country; 4.5 x*

*5.5 in, 48 pgs.;*

*Gift of Mr. Leonard Held*

Friday Nite  
13 April 1945

Hello Everybody:

Dee & Mill; Peg & Mort; Ralph; Regina & Paul; Tippy; Willine:

This isn't a regular letter.

I have a story to tell you. But before I begin, let me advise you as follows; if you bothered reading about unpleasant things, don't READ this.

I'm not much of a story teller; but if ever I wanted to tell a story vividly enough to convey my visual and mental impressions, this is IT.

I'll begin this story by mentioning the town of Ohrdruf, Germany.

You may or may not have heard or read about this town via radio or newspapers on around the above date. If you had, then you know what I'm writing about. But you may have missed it in the anxious glance for the rapid advances on both fronts. Anyway, Ohrdruf, ~~is~~<sup>was</sup> a small Kraut town in the path of our advance. To casually run through it, it would look like any other small town that we have come through. But, it wasn't. In this town I saw a horror, the works of fiends; and that's what I want to tell you about.

(If there is any part of this which challenges your reason, I'll forgive and understand your choice to doubt it. This is the time when you include the statement "you'd have to see it with your own eyes to believe it". I ask you to believe it. I'll take an oath and vow that all I write here now is the truth and what I saw; and if anything came as hearsay, I'll point it out.)

Today, I saw the labor camp, or concentration camp, or extermination camp (all three apply) that the Nazis managed in the town of Ohrdruf.

From the outside, when I got out of my jeep, I saw little pine and spruce trees which only partially hid a double strand of barbed-wire fence about nine feet high. As I passed through the gate, I noticed that between the barbed-wire fence there was a ~~kind~~<sup>of</sup> "concertina", (a concertina is a rolling mass of barbed wire about three feet high. This is so that if any poor soul was fortunate enough in

US Army Captain George Mitnick of Jasper wrote this to his family upon the liberation of Ohrdruf:

*I can remember back when I would read about such things in newspapers. I would attach some distasteful significance to it. I was bothered by it yes, because it was human to react against it. But I confess that I read it all then in a detached sort of way. And after awhile, perhaps I forgot about it.*

**I DON'T BELIEVE THAT I WILL EVER FORGET WHAT I SAW**

**THERE!!**

Survivors had mixed reactions to their newfound freedom. While a few looked forward to being reunited with other family members, some felt guilty for surviving when so many of their relatives and friends had died. Viktor Frankl, a concentration camp survivor and psychiatrist expressed it this way:

*Timidly, we looked around and glanced at each other questioningly. Then we ventured a few steps out of the camp. This time no orders were shouted at us, nor was there any need to duck quickly to avoid a blow or a kick. 'Freedom,' we repeated to ourselves, and yet we could not grasp it.*

*First page of J. George Mitnick letter to family members, April 13, 1945; recounts his experience of the discovery of Ohrdruf concentration camp (subcamp of Buchenwald); 8.5 x 11 in, copied, 5 pgs.; Copies provided by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum*



*This man was too weak to speak.*

*wood monument of the dead prisoners*

*Crematorium*

*Part of hospital*



*Carrying bedding & clothing*

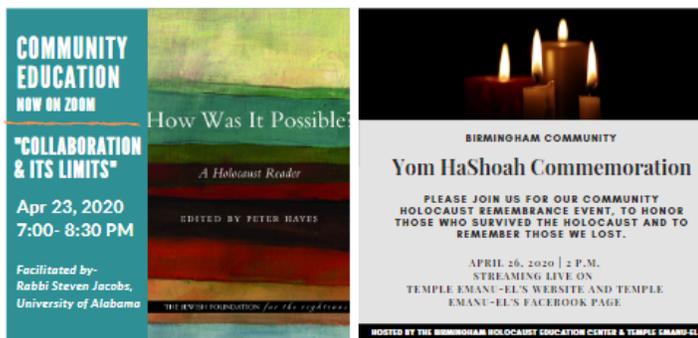
*From the scrapbook of Travis Ray Carter, Winfield, AL, liberated Buchenwald with US 3rd Army*

After liberation, more than two million Europeans were displaced, including 250,000 Jews. American, Soviet, British, and French occupying forces set up displaced persons (DP) camps to house them. In the first few months after the war ended, the camps were places of suffering and hunger. Jewish survivors were often held in the same camps with German civilians, or even Nazi perpetrators.

In the summer of 1945, President Harry Truman asked former US immigration commissioner Earl Harrison to tour the DP camps. Harrison was shocked by what he found and informed Truman: *"We appear to be treating the Jews as the Nazis had treated them, except that we do not exterminate them."* Based on Harrison's report, the United States established separate camps for Jewish DPs. President Truman issued the Truman Directive on December 22, 1945, which instructed State Department consular officials to give preference to DPs within the existing immigration quotas. Truman did not believe that Congress would be willing to expand the quotas, which had been in place since 1924, even in response to the clear humanitarian need...

And so the healing began.

# BHEC PROGRAMS



Miss the latest BHEC programs? Not to worry, check out all our online programs and previously recorded programs on our Facebook page and website event calendar.

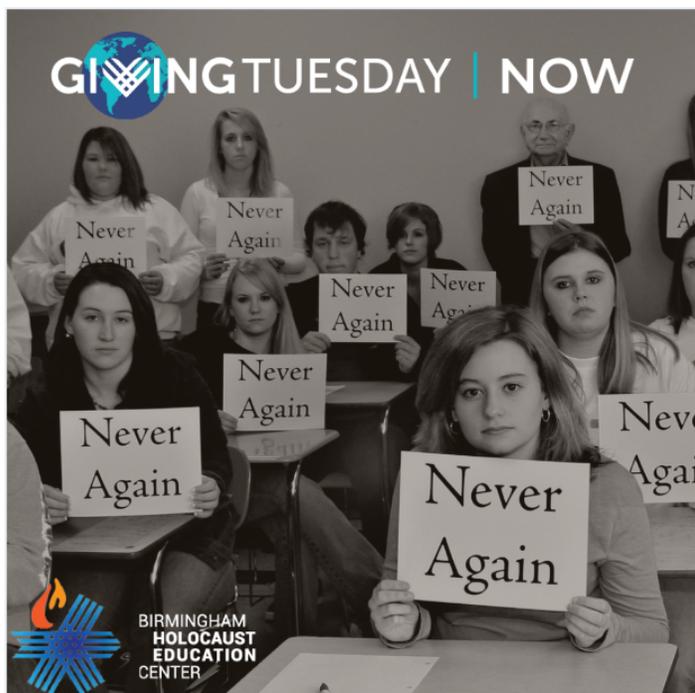
## Facebook

[www.facebook.com/BHEC.connect](http://www.facebook.com/BHEC.connect)

## Website

[www.bhecinfo.org](http://www.bhecinfo.org)

# #GIVINGTUESDAYNOW



This year the BHEC participated in #GivingTuesdayNow. A national day of giving in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The BHEC is so grateful to all who participated in making this a successful day of giving!

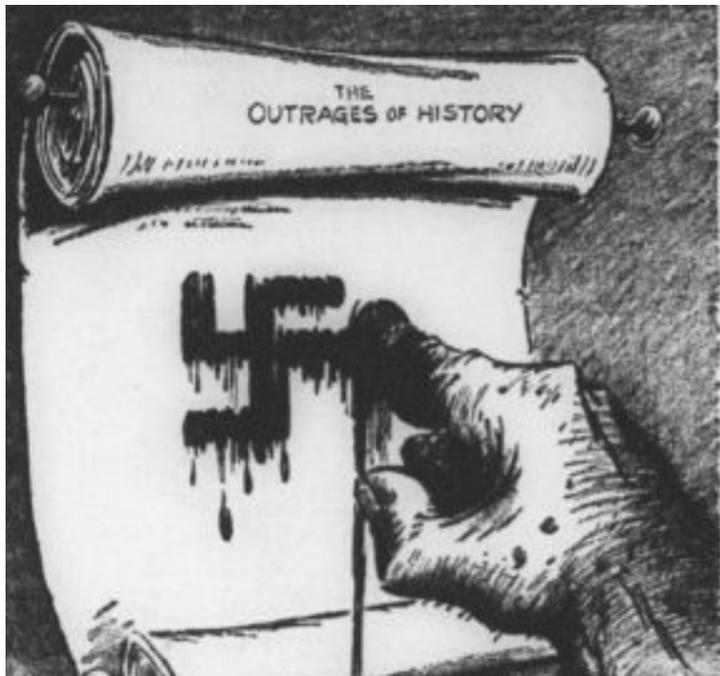
**The BHEC raised over \$2,600!**

We rely on the generosity of donors. It's never too late to give.

## DONATE HERE

[bhecgivingtuesdaynow.swell.gives](http://bhecgivingtuesdaynow.swell.gives)

## CONGRATULATIONS USHMM!



*Birmingham Post: November 16, 1938* BHEC Website

The BHEC wants to congratulate the US Holocaust Memorial Museum for its recent award for "Excellence in Programming" for its History Unfolded: US Newspapers and the Holocaust. Several submissions from the BHEC's own Kristallnacht in Birmingham Newspapers can be found in the museum's exhibit, which provides a glimpse into what local communities knew as the events of the Holocaust unfolded. The BHEC would like to continue our research efforts to explore our state archives more in-depth.

**CONTACT THE BHEC TO SEE  
HOW YOU CAN HELP**

[info@bhecinfo.org](mailto:info@bhecinfo.org)

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## L'CHAIM 2020



**Save The Date!**

**Virtual L'Chaim 2020**

**Sunday, August 23**

**2:00 pm**

L'Chaim will be inspiring as ever, and for everyone's safety and enjoyment will be a virtual event this year. Join us as we recognize our honorees David and Susan Silverstein, and applaud our Teacher Educator Award recipient.

# Tributes

October 2019- April 2020

## In Memory Of:

### Howard Koch

Becky & Alan Seitel

### Marvin Link

Sharon & Edward Bromberg

### Grant Levin

Becky & Alan Seitel

### Jessica Roskin's Father

Cathy & Paul Friedman  
Joyce & Maury Shevin

### Ellen Michelson

Sharon & Edward Bromberg

## In Honor Of:

### Karen Allen's Grandson

Joseph H. & Reva Engel Fdn.

### Emily & Bob Levine

Guin Robinson & Tim Parker

### Ann Skelton

Tricia Skelton

### Cathy & Paul Friedman's

#### Anniversary

Susan & Steve Greene  
Lana & Steve Royal

### William Martin

Sharon & Edward Bromberg

### Max Steinmetz

Marsha Asman  
Jerome Brown  
Pat & Alan Geldzahler  
Sylvia Goldberg  
Roslyn & Edward Moss  
Gloria Weintraub

### Richard Goldstein

Sharon & Edward Goldstein

### Henriette Oppenheim

Gail Lindley Andrews

### Melissa Patrick

Rick Clay & Linda Verin

### Riva Hirsch

Sally Frederickson

### Eli Pinhas

Lakeside Baptist Church

### Phyllis Weinstein

Cathy & Paul Friedman  
Leslie & Larry Krasner  
Judy Borisky-Metzger & Robert Metzger  
George -Ann & Alton Parker  
Renee Hirsch & David Schwartz  
Joyce & Maury Shevin

### Ronne & Donald Hess

Guin Robinson & Tim Parker

### Lynn Raviv

Cathy & Paul Friedman

### Holocaust Survivors

Dale Marcus

### Bunny & Joel Rotenstreich

Nathan J. & Helen Goldrich Fdn.

### Julianne Jorgensen

Riva Hirsch

### Abe Schuster

Susan & Barry Koretzky