

Editor's note: This story appeared in the April 27, 2014 edition of The Chronicle Telegram. Reprinted with permission of The Chronicle Telegram.

Erwin Froman, Lorain County's remaining Holocaust survivor recalls ordeal at Auschwitz death camp **by Anna Merriman/Chronicle Telegram**

Almost 70 years ago, Erwin Froman was a teenager, clutching tightly to his father's hand as he stepped off of a train into a new, chaotic world. Minutes later, he felt a firm grasp on his shoulder as a German soldier pulled him away from his family and into Auschwitz. That was the last time he held his father's hand.

"It's engraved in my brain," Froman, now 85, said from his Amherst home, remembering the feeling of being alone in a concentration camp he, at 15 years old, knew nothing about.

What followed was a year of work and the constant fear of death as Froman and the other prisoners in Auschwitz were slowly dehumanized until, Froman said, they were made into animals.

He escaped with his life and moved to Lorain after the war, but decades later, the memory of the pain he endured in the Holocaust still follows him.

Today is Holocaust Remembrance Day, which marks the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in 1943, and Froman, recognizing that he is one of few survivors left, said he plans to try to keep the story of the Holocaust alive. "If we don't tell the story, who is going to?"

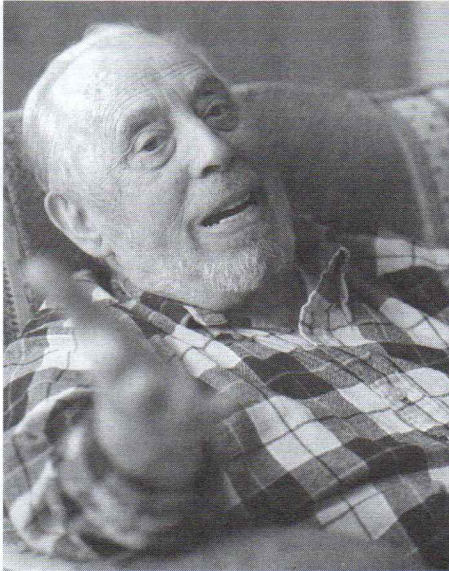
On his first day in Auschwitz, Froman stood in empty wooden barracks, the walls of which were lined with beds that fit six people to a bunk without mattresses. It was a confusing moment for the teenager, who believed that he and his father were being sent to work in a field. He knew nothing about where he was — the camp that would become the most notorious labor and extermination camp of the Holocaust.

"I asked where my parents were," Froman said of one of the first encounters he had with another boy who had been in the camp longer than he. The boy led him to the front of the room, opened a door and asked "What do you smell?"

"I smelled flesh," Froman said. "That's when he explained what Auschwitz was."

For the entire year Froman spent in concentration camps, he was never given a number tattoo. Shortly after he arrived in Auschwitz, he was taken to Birkenau, a sub-camp in Auschwitz. Between January 1942 and March 1943, 175,000 Jews were killed in the gas chambers at Birkenau, according to the Jewish Virtual Library.

Froman said that explained why he was never given the tattoo. "They thought, 'We'd get rid of them,'" he said, adding that no one expected him to live through Birkenau.



Erwin Froman talks about his joy at being alive and living in America.
BRUCE BISHOP/CHRONICLE

It was through a twist of fate that a train arrived to Birkenau one day, needing 37 prisoners to labor in another concentration camp. Froman was one of the few chosen and though he remembers horrible working conditions as he and other prisoners were forced to produce war supplies in an Austrian concentration camp, he counts himself lucky.

"The danger of being exterminated was not there," Froman said, adding that had he been left behind at Birkenau, he would not be alive today. In that camp, Froman quickly began to realize how the Holocaust changed people, especially those he might otherwise have called allies.

"They were worse than the Germans," Froman said of the Capo; prisoners who were appointed leaders of labor squads and who regularly beat and dehumanized Froman and other prisoners.

"People became animalistic," he said.

Supplies like food and water quickly ran out after repeated bombings from American and English soldiers destroyed railroad tracks leading into the camps. It was then that Froman and other prisoners, already weak and malnourished, went on an 48-mile "death march" in search of food. "I didn't call it a death march," Froman said. Though he remembers how many prisoners fell down from exhaustion and were left to die.

When they finally arrived at another labor camp, Froman said he was put to work and stationed in "barrack 10," where a member of the Capo told him, "None of you will get out alive." Sick and malnourished, they went back to work.

"People were skeletons," Froman said.

In 1944, he was 75 pounds and still 15 when a United States Jeep pulled up to the camp three days later and announced that they were liberated. But after years of torture and suffering, the words seemed empty. "We were animals. What does it mean, 'free?'" Froman said.

Four sisters out of his 10 siblings survived. Soon after the war, Froman found them in Germany. While he describes the moment as a "big reunion," Froman said the horror of what they had endured had not yet sunk in.

It was only years later, when Froman moved to the United States on a small herring boat that he began to realize what he and his family members had been through.

Froman immediately moved to Lorain, where he met his brother, who had come to the States before the war.

As he learned the language and began to make friends, including meeting his wife in New York, Froman said he fell in love with the country that for him, signified a new life. "I said, 'Erwin, where are you? You're in the United States ... realize where you live.'" Even now, Froman has to hold back tears as he talks about how grateful he is. "You don't realize how lucky you are," he said.

After he and other Holocaust survivors began establishing themselves in their new lives, Froman said they began to talk about their experiences to keep the memory of what happened in World War II alive.

"Fifty years ago, I didn't think I would reach the age I reached now," he said. "Someone, somewhere, someplace, wants me here."

With the help of his son, Froman got his GED, an accomplishment he describes as one of the proudest moments of his life. He opened up a butcher shop in Amherst and remains the last living Holocaust survivor in Lorain County.

"Life must go on. You can accomplish more," Froman said of how he continues on after the suffering he saw in the Holocaust.

Yet, Froman adds, certain memories will never leave him, especially the moment he stepped off the train into Auschwitz.

"I'm still holding my father's hand."

In addition to his myriad other accomplishments, Erwin Froman is now a "friend" of the pope!



To explain...Maura Zagrans of Elyria, a published author of 2 books (and former wife of A.B.I. congregant Eric Zagrans), is a friend of Erwin's. Maura, a graduate of Notre Dame University, is a contributor to a new book from Loyola Press entitled **Sharing the Wisdom of Time by Pope Francis and Friends**. Erwin tells me that back in July, Maura interviewed him and a crew came to Avon to photograph him.

The Amazon.com website describes the book as follows:

A collection of personal stories in which grandparents and elders from around the world share from their "reservoirs of wisdom" to inspire and guide.

We have all heard that the only constant in life is change. How can we prepare ourselves to walk toward that change with confidence, trust, and faith? How can we maintain our vision without losing our way?

In **Sharing the Wisdom of Time**, Pope Francis offers a simple but profound solution: To see where we should go, we must understand where we've been. The experience and wisdom of those who have come before us can provide the guidance we need to approach tomorrow free of fear and needless anxiety. **Sharing the Wisdom of Time** is an international effort that collects the stories of elders from over 30 countries carved from lifetimes of experience.

From a blind basket weaver in Kenya to an acclaimed filmmaker in Hollywood, from a **survivor of the Auschwitz concentration camp** to a centenarian midwife in Guatemala, every story is a testament to the power of faith, perseverance, human resilience, and love.

The experience and lived wisdom of our grandparents and elders can guide the leaders of tomorrow to move forward creatively and confidently as they envision a future of hope. The testimony of our elders will help us to look above the horizon and see the stars.

A beautiful black and white photograph of Erwin adorns the back cover and there's also a color photo of Erwin and Maura with the editors' note at the beginning.

What did Erwin say in his interview? You'll have to buy the book to find out – or in the words of the late Helen Goldberg, "the library is a wonderful place!"

OPPORTUNITES FOR GIVING TO A.B.I.



There are many ways in which we can honor or memorialize someone at A.B.I. Synagogue. Here is a reminder of the many funds available to you:

- Building Fund*
- Eitz Chaim Fund*
- Endowment Fund*
- Fannie Freedman Teacher Training Fund*
- General Operating Fund*
- Frances S. Goldberg Holocaust Education Fund*
- Ruth and Itzie Sepsenwol Matzoh Fund*
- Jonathan Klein Memorial Scholarship Fund***
- Marc Jacoby Kiddush Fund*
- Lorain Jewish Relief Emergency Fund*
- Rabbi's Discretionary Fund*
- Religious School Education Fund*

Send Contributions to:
Agudath B'nai Israel
1715 Meister Road
Lorain, OH 44053

**Mail to the Community Foundation of Greater Lorain County
9080 Leavitt Road, Elyria, OH 44035

The Foundation acknowledges all donations and also notifies the Klein Family.

All donors who contribute gifts of \$10 or greater will be acknowledged in the Community News.



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'A frenzy of senseless evil': Holocaust remembered in Lorain

by Evan Goodenow, The Chronicle-Telegram

The horror of the Holocaust was remembered in the words of two survivors who immigrated to Lorain. The Wednesday tribute, part of international Holocaust remembrances, occurred before about 200 people at Agudath B'nai Israel Synagogue.

Actor Bob Kenderes portrayed Tibor Messinger, who died in 1993. Actress Marcia Mandell portrayed Goldie Nisenbourn, who died in 2013. The portrayals were from oral histories of Messinger and Nisenbourn.

Born in Hungary in 1918, Messinger was a slave laborer during World War II in Poland, Russia and Ukraine from 1942 to 1945.

Beaten, starved and hung by the arms from a tree, Messinger said he was about 60 pounds by the end of the war. Among the atrocities he recalled were watching a 10-year-old girl die after being bayoneted in the stomach by a German soldier and fellow laborers being frozen to death by having cold water poured on them in subzero weather. Messinger recalled being particularly haunted by watching six skeletal concentration camp inmates hung from a Christmas tree on Dec. 25, 1944, after being accused of stealing food.

"That sight has always been implanted in my brain," Kenderes said. "I can still see it clearly today in all its horror."

Messinger reflected how unbelievable it was how much he and fellow survivors were able to endure. "The atrocities never ended," Kenderes said.

Messinger said he survived because a concentration camp commander turned over the inmates to the International Red Cross in exchange for safe passage for the commander and his family to Switzerland. Messinger came to Lorain in 1949 and later became an insurance salesman.

Nisenbourn was born in 1919 in Romania and was imprisoned in the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp and other camps in 1944-45. She recalled a guard pointing to smoke coming from the crematorium when she asked what had become of her parents.

Nisenbourn recalled being beaten for not properly moving a corpse to the crematorium and seeing some inmates commit suicide by electrocuting themselves on electrified fences.

"I often ask myself, 'Why didn't I touch those wires,'" Mitchell said. "The reason is because I wanted to live."

Nisenbourn's camp was later liberated by the U.S. Army. She married and had three children, immigrated to New Jersey in 1949 and later moved to Lorain. Messinger and Nisenbourn both praised the U.S. for giving them a new home.

(The Chronicle-Telegram Holocaust coverage continues on page 17, column 3)



Rabbi Shalom Plotkin of Agudath B'nai Israel

Rabbi Lauren Werber of Temple B'nai Abraham

Rabbi Enid Lader of Beth Israel - The West Temple

The event was co-sponsored by Agudath B'nai Israel, Temple B'nai Abraham of Elyria and Beth Israel - The West Temple in Cleveland.

Opposite page, clockwise from top right: Bob Kenderes portrays Tibor Messinger; Marcia Mandell portrays Goldie Nisenbourn; Erwin Froman, Sheila Evenchik, Sascha and Shelly Burgess (Tibor Messinger's great-granddaughter and granddaughter), Steve Werber, Art Goodman look on as Debbie Schmitt and Priscilla Goldstein light a candle in remembrance of mothers; Oberlin students Anna Ferro, Talia Greenberg and Sarah Keller sing; A large crowd filled our sanctuary

This page (above l-r): Erwin Froman and Sheila Evenchik light a candle in memory of martyrs; Shelly and Sascha Burgess look on as Steve Werber and Mark Jaffee light a candle in memory of scholars and teachers; Art Goodman and Steve Smith light a candle in memory of members of the Underground