BEARING WITNESS: Holocaust Survivors Tell Their Remarkable Stories

Featuring Personal Experiences of Atlanta Survivors

ATLANTA, GA – The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum announced the 2014-15 series, "BEARING WITNESS: Holocaust Survivors Tell Their Remarkable Stories" with a debut program on September 7th featuring Tosia Schneider, a Holocaust survivor from Poland and author of the memoir, "Someone Must Survive to Tell the World."

The speakers, all Atlanta residents, recall their experiences during the Holocaust. Their words rise above hatred and retribution to speak about the strength and will that enabled them to survive and go on to build new lives.

"This really is what the series is about -- the ‘4Rs’, resilience, resourcefulness, resistance and rescue that people who lived through the Holocaust needed to survive," said Dr. Lili Kshensky Baxter, director of the Weinberg Center for Holocaust Education at The Breman. "To hear about these experiences close up and in person is truly humbling."

Dr. Baxter added: "Imagine most of your family – your mother, father, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins – murdered in a pragmatic, industrial machine driven by the ruling political party - The Nazis. That is what happened during the Holocaust's. These stories tell us how the human spirit prevailed over the atrocities in Europe before and during World War II and how it is relevant to genocides taking place today."

The Breman's Bearing Witness program is in its fifth year and has been building a loyal audience, according to Aaron Berger, executive director of The Breman.

"A barrier for many to hear this live testimony from the Holocaust has been the price of admission," he said. "A grant from the Sara Giles Moore Foundation allows everyone to hear these stories first-hand, and it's free. We hope students and young professionals will take advantage of this offering, because it is vitally important their generation continues to share the stories once our witness generation is gone."

Mrs. Schneider is scheduled to speak on Sunday, Sept. 7 at 2 pm, to commemorate the 75th anniversary of Germany's Sept. 1 invasion of Poland, which started the Second World War. The series intertwines history
with personal recollections, such as Herbert Kohn's program near the 76th anniversary of Kristallnacht, which he witnessed.

In a film about her personal story, Mrs. Schneider recounted her mother's wishes for her children: "(My mother) wanted us to believe that we had a future. She wanted us to believe that we would survive this world. Sadly, I'm the only one who survived."

After the family was deported to the Tluste ghetto, Mrs. Schneider's mother contracted typhus and died in the winter of 1942. In the summer of 1943, Tosia and her brother Julek were forced to work in the fields of the Lisoce labor camp. While working, Julek was shot to death by the SS. He was her last close relative.

Herbert Kohn, from Germany, vividly remembers Kristallnacht, the nationwide pogrom on Nov. 9-10, 1938, during which all the country's synagogues were burned along with Jewish-owned stores. The name refers to the shattered glass on the streets from the fires and broken windows.

"I was there. I saw the glass on the street in Frankfurt. I saw the burned synagogues, my synagogue that I went to was burned and all the others," Mr. Kohn said. "I saw the fire trucks and police standing by, and not doing anything except keeping the fire from spreading. And I was there when the storm troopers came to my house . . . they came in and forced my mother to the floor."

That night his father was taken away, and his mother immediately set about planning a way to get the family out of Germany and to the United States. They received helped from a British consul officer who stamped their passports with transit visas.

"This person was a righteous gentile . . . he also was not a bystander," Mr. Kohn said. "There were four groups of people involved in the Holocaust: the victims, the perpetrators who did it to the victims, the rescuers who helped the victims, and the bystanders. The largest part of the group was the bystanders. The whole world was a bystander."

Henry Friedman, from Hungary, survived a German firing squad. He had been drafted into the Hungarian army, and upon leaving home his grandmother had him blessed, which he felt was a "sheet of protection" for him throughout the war.

"I am not a religious individual, but I am a very, very spiritual one," Mr. Friedman said. "I do believe that without that blessing I would not be here today."

He suffered beatings and shrapnel wounds during the war along with almost certain death of the firing squad. But his blessing embraced him as he regained consciousness in a mass grave under the bodies of others who had been shot and killed by the Nazis. He had suffered a shoulder wound, but he survived the execution.
“This is a generation that is passing,” Dr. Baxter said. "We want to make sure that the present generation has the opportunity to hear their stories. It's one thing to read about the Holocaust in a book or see a movie. It's a completely different experience to hear someone tell you 'this is what happened to me.' It connects you with history. It's mesmerizing, and becoming rarer by the day."

Bearing Witness is a project of the Weinberg Center for Holocaust Education at The Breman Museum in Atlanta. Each event will be held at the museum on Sundays at 2 p.m. on the dates below:

- Sept. 7 - **Tosia Schneider**, Poland, wrote the book, "Someone Must Survive to Tell the World."
- Nov. 2 - **Herbert Kohn**, Germany, was an eyewitness to Kristallnacht and someone who survived that night and a war of horrible proportions.
- Dec. 14 - **Mort Waitzman**, USA, liberator of German concentration camps and awarded the bronze star for valor.
- Jan. 4 - **Henry Friedman**, Hungary, survived a firing squad, protected by his grandmother's blessing.
- March 8 - **Goldie Bertone** and **Betty Sunshine** are sisters and children of survivors from Poland. They will tell the story of their mother, Bella, who escaped Dachau.
- May 3 - **Penina Bowman**, Romania, an Auschwitz survivor who married an American GI. Her handmade wedding dress is on display at The Breman.

For most of the speakers there will be a personal 20-minute film, after which the survivor will add to the content and allow the audience to ask questions. And while admission is free, those planning to attend are urged to arrive early, as priority is given people who arrive first.

The Breman Museum, **Atlanta's Jewish Museum**, is located at 1440 Spring Street, (18th Street across from the Center for Puppetry Arts) Atlanta Georgia, 30309. For more information, contact The Breman Museum, (678) 222-3700 or visit TheBreman.org.

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