

Death camp survivors recall Nazi atrocities

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Poland with the Red Army in 1939. Simon stole goods for the underground resistance in Poland before he was captured in a secret police roundup. He endured beatings at the hands of the SS — a quasi-military unit of the Nazi party, used as a special police — before they let him go because he told them nothing about his work.

Nonetheless, Simon too was eventually sent to camps in German-occupied Lithuania and then Estonia because the Germans asked for one male from each family, and he went rather than watch his father go.

Eventually, all three Jews wound up in the death camps where Nazis and their collaborators continually selected thousands of people for either exhausting slave labor, cruel scientific experimentation or gas-induced death.

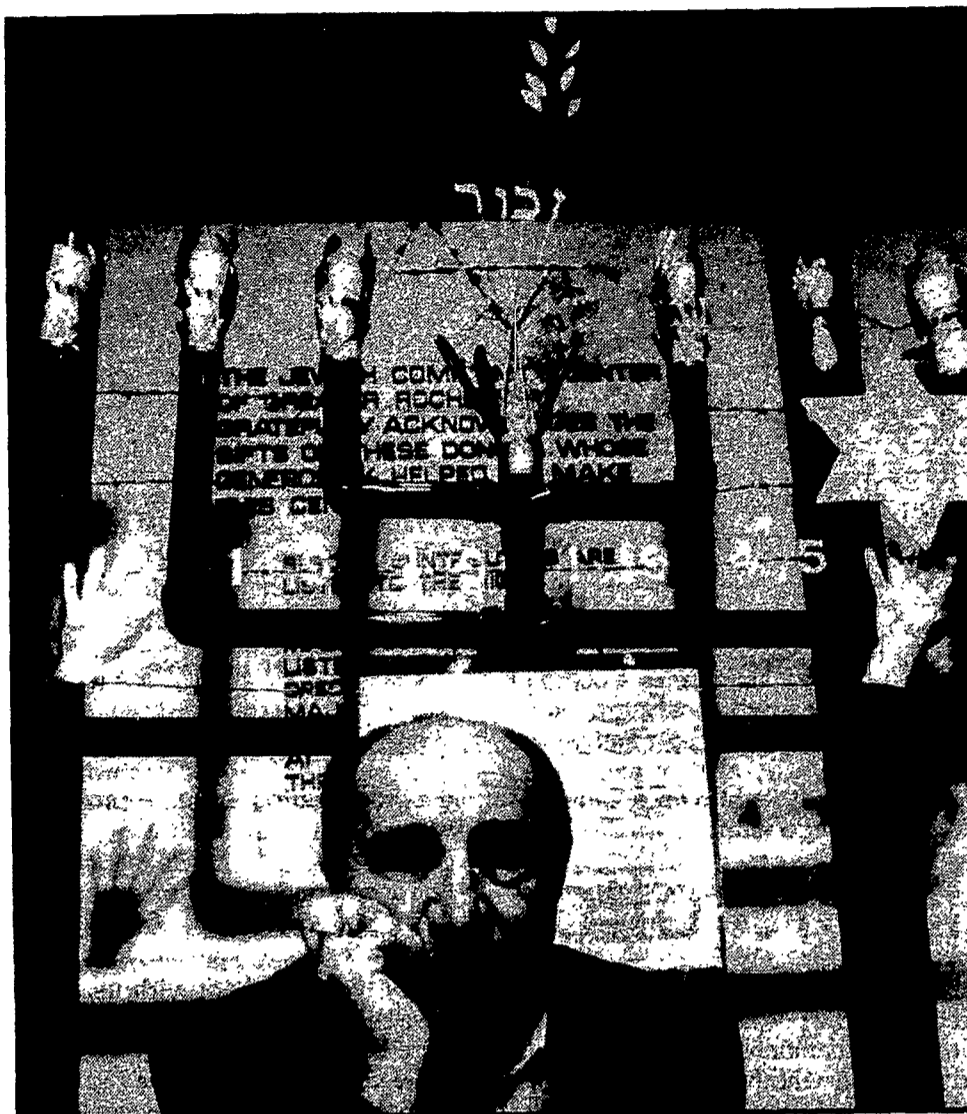
According to information supplied by the Bureau of Jewish Education's Holocaust Resource Center in Rochester, Jews such as the Rosens and Simon were not the only victims of Nazi terror.

Gypsies, Serbs, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, habitual criminals, beggars, vagrants, hawkers, resistance fighters from all nations, Polish intelligentsia and German opponents of Nazism all died or suffered in the camps.

Indeed, Simon recalled being shipped to a labor camp in Germany where he and his fellow Jews brawled with imprisoned criminals their first night.

"We started to fight," he said. "We got beaten terrible. But we became friends."

Life — if it could be called that — in the camps generally comprised forced labor, little sleep, and bits of bread and watered-down soup, all three



Babette G. Augustin/Photo editor
Holocaust survivor Irving Simon crouches in front of a menorah he designed as a memorial to his fellow Jewish victims and their descendants. The incomplete Star of David, made of barb wire, symbolizes six million Jews who were killed by Nazis and their collaborators.

survivors recalled. Death came seemingly arbitrarily at the hands of the Nazis and their collaborators, who killed on a daily basis those too weak to continue working.

"You ask me how I survived — I tell you, I don't know," Arthur Rosen

repeatedly stated.

He noted that one of his worst periods as a Nazi prisoner was when he was assigned to a work detail digging a canal from Jan.-March, 1943. He shivered in the cold for three months, often waist-deep in water

and wearing clothes that never completely dried overnight, he said.

"We turned to icicles," Rosen observed.

Only infrequent acts of kindness filtered through the murky mists of imprisonment. Simon recalled that an SS guard spared his life when he should have been shot for attempting to escape a camp.

A few months later, that same guard ordered him to take a pick and a shovel and dig up a certain spot in the camp. Simon saw buried in the dirt three pieces of bread.

"It was just like I found three diamonds," Simon said with a gleam in his eye as a smile came to his face.

Explaining to Simon that he had spared his life and fed him because he really wasn't a Nazi, the guard said he had been forced to join the SS, and that he had a son in the German army.

"Maybe someone will take care of my son, too," Simon recalled the guard saying.

Yet the SS guard was a rare commodity, the three noted. Cruelty, not kindness, ruled wherever the Nazis held sway.

Simon may have summed it up best when he described the death camps as "hell and earth mixed together."

Now living free of such hells in the United States, Arthur Rosen expressed the conviction of Holocaust survivors everywhere:

"Wherever there's a place where innocent people get killed, you should do everything you can to stop it."

EDITORS' NOTE: Bishop Kearney High School, 125 King's Hwy., S., Irondequoit, is slated to host a speech by a Holocaust survivor sometime later in May. Call 716/342-4000 or the Holocaust Resource Center, 441 East Ave., Rochester, at 461-0290 for information.

Museum

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unsuspecting Jews at a time to death camps. They can also touch the wooden prisoner bunks from Auschwitz-Birkenau, worn smooth in places from too many bodies.

"If (visitors) think about what they've seen, they will be uncomfortable, and that is good," said museum director Jeshajahu Weinberg during a press briefing.

The uncomfortable feeling starts as soon as one enters the \$168 million museum, built with private donations on land donated by the federal government and established by an act of Congress in 1980.

The huge atrium at the building's entrance is reminiscent of a train station. A stairway at the far end leads to a door set in brick that resembles the gate to Birkenau, Auschwitz's killing center.

Once inside the museum, the visitor has stepped into another world. And for the few hours it takes to see the entire exhibit, that world closes in. There are no hallways where one can escape; no opportunity to go back and forth among displays. The museum is designed to make one feel pushed along, almost forced, as were the concentration camp prisoners.

Amid the discomfort, there is also a connection with the persecuted. Visitors are immediately given a computerized identity card of a Holocaust victim who matches their own age and sex. The card includes a short biography which is updated at stations along the exhibit's route. Only at the end does



AP/Wide World Photos
President Clinton (center), Bud Meyerhoff (left) and Elle Wiesel, members of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, light the eternal flame during the April 22 dedication of the Holocaust Museum.

one learn the fate of the person on the card.

Other displays also depict the humanity of each Holocaust victim. There is a case of rusted silverware, umbrellas, hair brushes, scissors and kitchen utensils taken from inmates upon their arrival at a camp.

Even more disturbing is a display of 4,000 shoes, browned with age and smelling of dust — taken from prisoners before their deaths.

A picture of Catholic priests in Poland awaiting execution is on display. One priest is standing, the others are sitting on the ground; their faces are expressionless.

The exhibit tells of those who did

nothing to help the Holocaust victims — countries that ignored Jewish refugees who sought asylum and headlines which warned of unspeakable terror occurring in Europe.

It also gives credit to the men and women who helped to rescue the Jews. Among the thousands credited with such bravery are several Catholics, including Capuchin Father Marie Benoit, who helped 4,000 Jewish refugees escape to Switzerland and Spain.

Once museum visitors have worked their way down to the end of the exhibit, they can sit in the Hall of Re-

membrance, where an eternal flame burns over a crypt containing soil from all the concentration camps.

Words from the Book of Deuteronomy inscribed on the back wall of the shrine-like room poignantly tell the mission of the new museum:

"Only guard yourself and guard yourself carefully lest you forget the things your eyes saw and lest these things depart your heart all the days of your life. You shall make them known to your children and to your children's children."

Obituary

Helen S. Hickey, sister of bishop

ROCHESTER — Helen S. Hickey, the sister of Bishop Dennis W. Hickey, died at St. Mary's Hospital, 89 Genesee St., on Friday, April 16, 1993. She was 76 years old.

Born in Dansville to the late Walter M. and Aloysia (Sullivan) Hickey on Oct. 9, 1916, Helen attended St. Patrick's Elementary before she was graduated from Dansville Central High School, Seton Hill College, in Greensburg, Pa., and Katherine Gibbs Secretarial School, New York City.

In addition to serving on the staff of the National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C., she was an executive secretary for IBM as well as the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency until her retirement.

Helen was an active member with

the New York City area Seraphic Society, an organization of secretaries to executives of business firms.

An avid golfer and reader, she began golfing as a teen-ager and continued playing into her later years, according to Bishop Hickey. She also loved to solve crossword puzzles and traveled extensively as part of her job.

Bishop Hickey was the principal celebrant for Helen's Mass of Christian Burial at Holy Family Church, 415 Ames St. Interment was in Gate of Heaven Cemetery in Valhalla, N.Y.

Helen was predeceased by her sister, Kay Hickey Campbell. In addition to Bishop Hickey, she is survived by her niece, Mary Caldwell; grand nephew, Nicholas Caldwell; and grand niece, Alison Caldwell.