

DAILY NEWS

Holocaust survivor shares harrowing memories of World War II at Manhattan temple

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NEW YORK DAILY NEWS |
APR 08, 2018



Holocaust survivor Toby Levy shared her experience hiding from the Nazis during World War II at New York's Annual Gathering of Remembrance inside Temple Emanu-El. (James Keivom/New York Daily News)

Hiding in an attic in Poland, Toby Levy's Jewish father tried to stay positive by telling his family the Nazis couldn't kill them all.

"Somebody has to survive, no way is everybody going to die," he said. "We have to tell the world."

Holocaust survivor Levy is now 85 and still telling the world. On Sunday, she shared her too-close-for-comfort memories of World War II at Temple Emanu-El on E. 65th St., near Fifth Ave., for the Annual Gathering of Remembrance.

Levy's family hid in a barn for three months starting in 1942 after the Nazi invasion and then stayed in an attic for nearly two years.

"Every time (I) talk about this incident, I can't help but relive it," said Levy, an employee of the Museum of Jewish Heritage, which organized the speakers for the remembrance. "I still feel hunger."

She was joined by 36 female Holocaust survivors, who, accompanied by their great grandchildren, lit candles symbolizing a passing of the torch.

Six survivors from Hungary and Poland lit candles representing the renewal of Jewish life.



More than 2,000 people packed the Manhattan temple to remember victims of the atrocity. (James Keivom/New York Daily News)

In 1944, Soviet soldiers liberated the Levy family.

"None of us could walk and talk. We didn't cry, we didn't talk. We just looked at each other, 'Is it possible?'" Levy said.

Her family immigrated to New Orleans, where her father urged her to leave anger behind.

"My father told me not to hate. You have to remember, but don't hate. It's a very good lesson because hate will destroy you, not the one that you hate," Levy said.

"I have my revenge. I'm here. I'm enjoying life. Hitler did not succeed. Not only are we here, we're thriving."

By many estimates, the Nazis under Adolf Hitler ruthlessly killed 10 million people, 6 million of them Jews.



Erika Estis (l.), a survivor of the Holocaust, was joined by her daughter and grandchildren as she lit a memorial candle at the service. (James Keivom/New York Daily News)

Temple Emanu-El Rabbi Joshua Davidson said the survivors were an inspiration. "We, please, never to forget the horrors done to them, done to us," Davidson said, addressing survivors' grandchildren.

"Throughout this majestic sanctuary echoes our sacred calling to open the world's eyes to racism and intolerance in all their forms."

The gathering is held annually on the Sunday closest to Yom HaShoah, Holocaust Remembrance Day, on April 11.

"Maybe one day we will find the strength and the will to forgive, but we will never ever forget," said Dani Dayan, the consul general of Israel in New York.

"To this very day we remember the countries that expelled our Jewish communities and we'll remember the countries that embraced Jewish communities with open arms. We will always remember forever with gratitude the few that endangered their lives in order to

save Jews and the too many individuals, organizations and governments that collaborated with the Nazis."

Stephen Rex Brown