

KNOW EMERSON

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Holocaust archives help ensure the world will NEVER FORGET



He was only 6 when he crouched in a cemetery and watched as 12,000 people were executed and pushed into mass graves. It was 1941, and Nazi snipers were gunning down thousands of Jews packed into the graveyard in Stanislawow, Poland. But Robert Geminder, his grandmother, mother and older brother survived.

"It was pure luck," he said in a recent interview. "We got to the cemetery first, so we were in the back. The 6,000 to 8,000 people that were left were told to go home when it got dark and started snowing."

Living in Rancho Palos Verdes, Geminder has many stories with a similar theme: Without a little luck, he would have died in the Holocaust. Geminder was born Aug. 3, 1935, into a wealthy family in Bielsko, Poland.

Robert Geminder, a Holocaust survivor who teaches math and science at St. Mary's Academy in Inglewood, escaped from a Jewish ghetto that was about to be wiped out by the Nazis by hiding underneath his mother's skirt. *See Inglewood Photographer*

'We knew we were going to be killed'

But four years later, their lives would change forever when Germans launched an attack that devastated their town. During the siege, Geminder's father, Mano, was overcome by fear and stress. "We were pushing mattresses against the windows," Geminder said. "And my father had a heart attack at this point and died." As the Nazis invaded, the family was forced to leave. "My mother kept telling me, 'We're going to have to do a lot of walking,'" Geminder said. "We didn't take much with us. Whatever we took, we had to carry."



Holocaust survivor Robert Geminder shares a laugh with his students at St. Mary's Academy in Inglewood. *See Inglewood Photographer*

Geminder, his mother, Bertha, grandmother Golde Glotzer and brother George headed toward Russia but were turned away at the border. They eventually settled in an apartment in a Jewish ghetto in Stanislawow.

"In this ghetto, it was horrible," Geminder said. "I used to step outside and see people killed. I would look through the window and see things like babies being thrown against the wall, people hung from telephone wires."

He lived that way for a year, until his mother heard a rumor that the Nazis were planning to kill everyone in the ghetto. She had a job working for the Nazis outside the ghetto and came up with a plan to smuggle her family to safety.

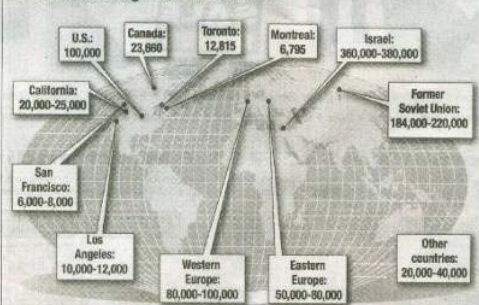
"I walked out of the ghetto under my mother's skirt," Geminder re-called. "And my brother walked out of the ghetto under another lady's skirt."

The young boys hid in a closet all day at their mother's work. "I couldn't sneeze, I couldn't do anything," Geminder said. "I had to be quiet for hours and hours and hours." At the end of the workday, Geminder escaped with his mother, brother and his mother's companion, Emil Brotfeld, whom

Geminder's grandmother was left behind and was killed when Nazis purged the ghetto and later married. They traveled around Poland, living as Gentiles with the surname Kaminsky. They even attended church on Sundays. In 1944, they were in Warsaw when Polish rebels tried to liberate the city from Nazi rule. After the uprising failed, the Germans planned to eliminate the city's population, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

Everyone was loaded on to trains headed to Auschwitz. "We, as Jews, knew what was going to happen," he said.

Locations of living Holocaust survivors



SOURCES: Israeli Prime Minister's Office; American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors; the Jewish Federation of America and USA Federation Canada; California Legislative Analysis Office

"We knew we were going to be killed." As they were waiting to board the train, Geminder's mother noticed that one of the cars had an opening on top, so they made their way toward that car. When the train stopped about 100 yards from the concentration camp, they climbed through a hatch and escaped.

The family left Poland for Czechoslovakia when the war ended in 1945 and eventually ended up in a displaced people's camp in West Germany. In 1947, they took a boat to Ellis Island and settled with extended family in Pittsburgh, Pa., where Geminder went to school.

He graduated from Carnegie Mellon University in 1957 with a degree in engineering. He married his wife, Judith, in 1959, and the couple has lived in Southern California ever since. They have three children - daughters Miriam, 43, and Ellen, 42, and a son, Shia, 38.

Today, Geminder teaches science and math at St. Mary's Academy in Inglewood, where his students call him "Mr. G." Geminder along with his mother and his stepfather - who both died in the late 1990s - have told their stories to the Shoah Foundation, a nonprofit established by Steven Spielberg to record testimonies of Holocaust survivors. He's also created his own Web site dedicated to his tale of survival - a feat he attributes to his parents' intelligence and determination.

"They are the real heroes," he said.

Robert Geminder has created a Web site dedicated to his survival of the Holocaust.
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