

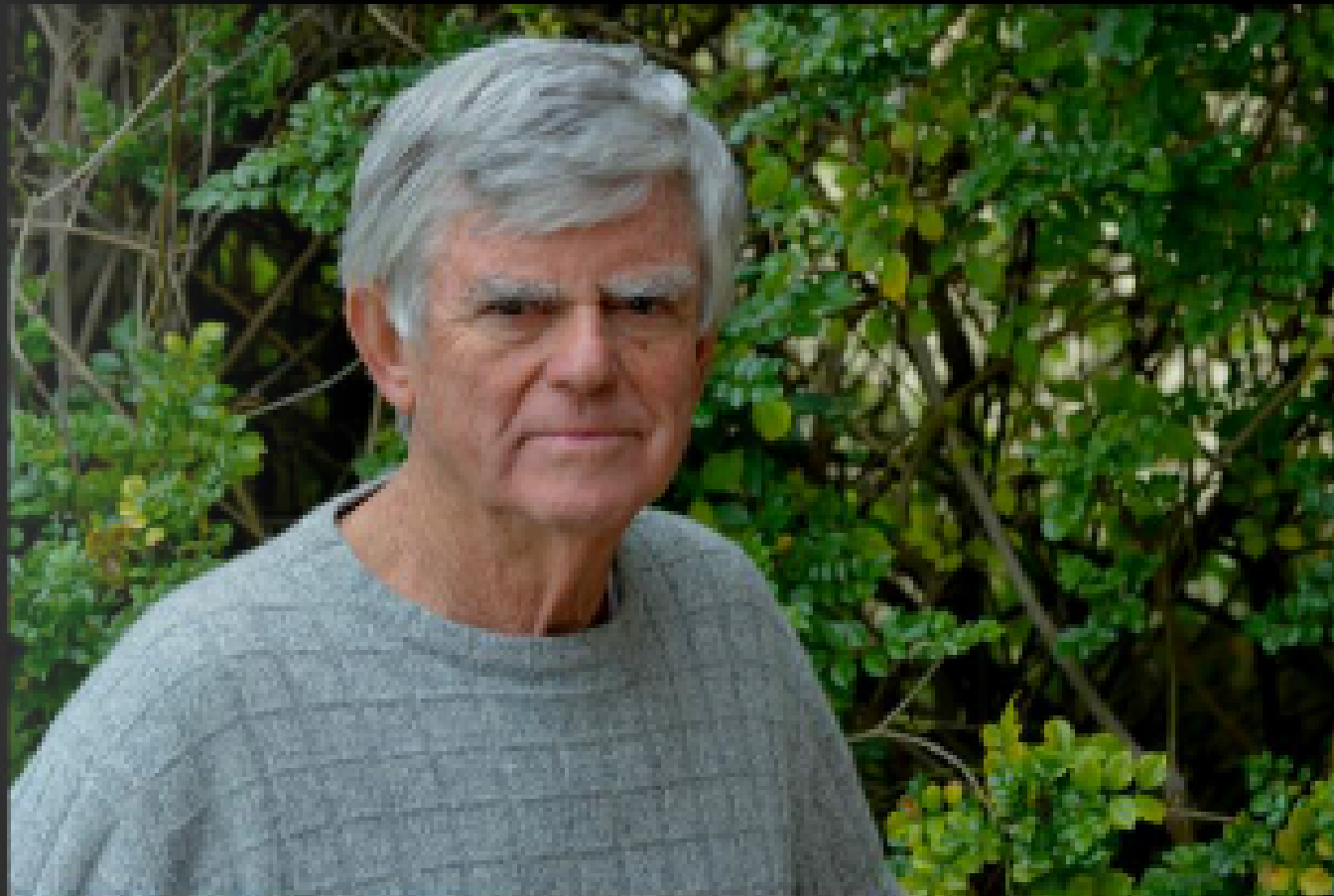


Portraits Of Survival

By
Wendy Wolman-Ledner

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**“I was between the ages of 6 and 10 during this time period.
I was always very hungry and very scared. I did things that
no child should ever have to do.”**



**“Today, I am living in my first happy childhood.”
Robert Geminder**

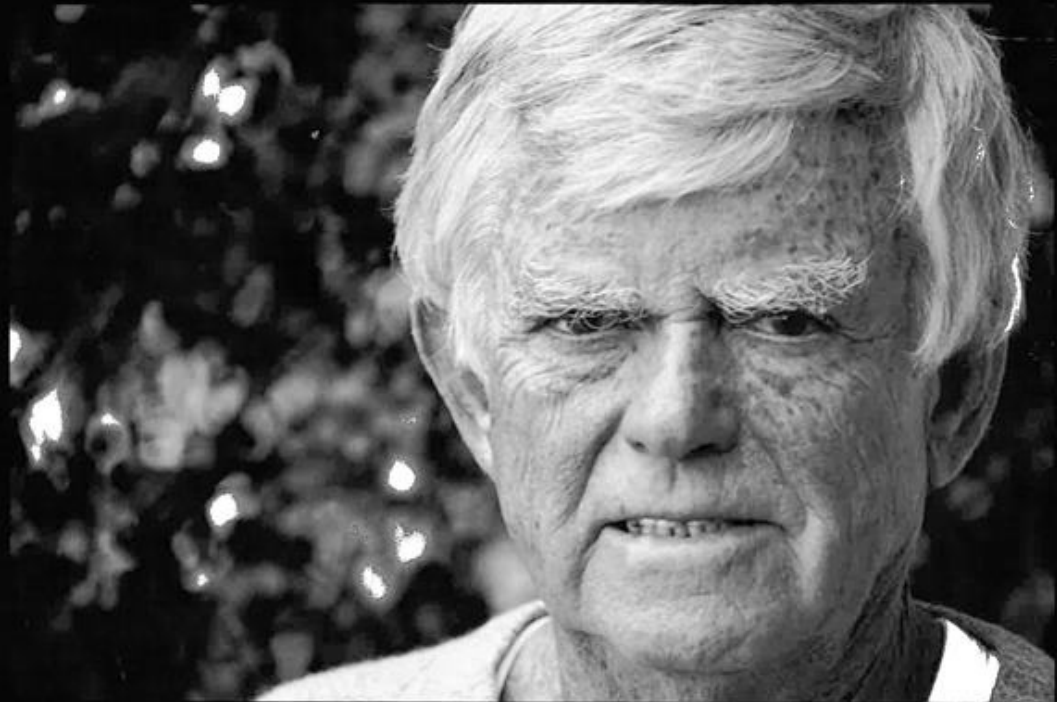
Robert Geminder
Born: August 3, 1935
Wroclaw, Poland

"I come out of the Holocaust, through a strange bit of luck, I am alive today. The Nazis herded 18,000 Jews from the village in Poland where I lived, and marched us to the town's cemetery. Together with my mother and brother we were among the first to arrive there. When all the people were assembled the Germans systematically shot 12,000 people. I watched as they shoveled the bodies into a mass grave. Apparently, at the last moment they spared the rest of us to be sent into slave labor. For the next four years, my mother, step-father, brother and I managed to escape the Germans. We escaped from slave labor camps and ghettos."

Cruelly, children in ghettos were deemed to be of no use. Because they could not work or go to school, the Nazis considered them a hindrance and an inconvenience.

Periodically, Germans would raid the ghetto with dogs, looking for children and killing those they found right on the spot. Although Robert had managed to survive these random assaults by the Germans, he and his family were not so lucky after the Polish uprising in the ghetto. The Gestapo sent Robert and his family to the train station to take them to Auschwitz, along with thousands of others from the ghetto. Robert's parents knew that going to Auschwitz was a death sentence for their Jewish family. Upon arriving at the train station, Beryl, Robert's mother, saw that one of the train cars was not fully enclosed and did not have a roof. Sensing that this may be their only opportunity to escape, she rushed her family to that car. By a brief chance of luck, before the train had reached Auschwitz, it made a sudden unscheduled stop. Taking advantage of a rare precious moment, Robert's Step-father managed to get his family up and over the side of the roofless train car and they fled into the forest. This unscheduled stop is ultimately what saved Robert's life. After arriving in the United States, Bob quickly learned English. He graduated from Carnegie Melon University with a degree in Engineering. And had an illustrious Engineering career. Towards the end of his engineering career, he began to think about taking on a new challenge. He returned to school and earned teaching credentials. He explained, "Over the years, I have spoken about the Holocaust to thousands of middle and high school students. I thoroughly enjoyed the interaction with them and learned that many had never met a survivor before. When I began to reflect on another career, I knew that teaching was my new calling."

Shortly after meeting Bob, I quickly came to realize that Bob is the kind of person we should all try to emulate. If ever there were a 'Poster Child' for how to stay motivated, vibrant, and vital, Bob would be the number one contender. Bob's uplifting energy and enthusiasm for learning, teaching and staying active are extremely inspirational. As I reflected on our conversation, I started to think of how our society has become so ungrateful, greedy and self entitled. Food, shelter and an education are taken for granted. We expect these things will always be provided. And here is a man whose childhood was filled with unimaginably terrifying experiences. He has known adversity that few can begin to fathom. Yet, he has never allowed his past to hold him back. He has used his past to fuel his ever evolving future. Having had such a strong impact on me in our brief visit, I have concluded that if Bob were to decide to embark on another career, he could become the next great 'Motivational Speaker.'





NEVER FORGET

The bed is warm
My belly is full

The sweet air hints of apple pie
Next to me, my wife stirs
The night is still and quite
I am free
I am safe
I am home

My senses satisfied
I am lulled to sleep

Like clockwork
The peace of the night is torn

Shattered by horrific screams
Paralyzed with fear

I bolt upright
Terror courses through my entire being

What creature could create such frightened sounds?

Sadly, I realize
It is I

They say that “we must never forget”

If only I could