



Among about 500 child survivors of World War II concentration camps is this group photographed by Russian liberators at Auschwitz. Marc Berkowitz, now of New City, New York, is third from the right in front and Ruth Webber of West Bloomfield is fourth from the left at the rear. Recently, the two met in Southfield.

Red Wing to chair special sports meet

The Association for Retarded Citizens/Oakland County will present its fourth annual "Civic Stars" competition at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Southfield Sports Arena. Reed Larson, defenseman for the Detroit Red Wings, and his wife, Kathy, are the Honorary Chairpersons for this year's event. Many Knights of Columbus teams from Milford, South Lyon, Walled Lake, Monaghan and

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Auschwitz survivors reunited

By Shirlee Rose Iden
staff writer

"The eyes of the dead were so beautiful. They didn't have to be afraid any more."

Marc Berkowitz, for whom the Holocaust began at age 8, reflected on his hideous experience. He had journeyed to speak at an Israel Bond dinner honoring Southfielder Norman Adelsberg.

Ruth Webber, who may be the youngest child to survive the Nazi terror, came to try once again to speak of that which for her has been unspeakable, the story of death through which she somehow lived.

They sat in the Michigan Inn lobby, sipping juice and coffee, and remembering.

Just days before, they had met at the Washington, D.C., Holocaust Reunion. They stood beside a blow-up of 12 young children, behind barbed wire, and dressed in prison stripes and caps.

"The picture was taken one day after we were liberated in January 1945," Berkowitz recalls. "The first day they spent trying to clear the camp (Auschwitz) of mines and booby traps. When this picture was snapped, there were almost 100 photographers clicking away."

RUTH SAYS: "The picture was taken by the Russians soon after they entered the camp. I was told about it by a friend who saw it at Yad Vashem (Israeli Memorial). She recognized me and wrote to me."

"Each of us who didn't know what we looked like then could recognize each other. I can recognize seven of the 12. Five of them I know personally."

Webber, who came to live in West Bloomfield from Toronto 13 years ago with her survivor husband, Mark, and their three children, doesn't speak at bond dinners.

"For me it was easier to speak of the Holocaust then, than 27 years later," she says.

A child of 4 when the Nazis marched into Ostrowiec, the Polish city where she was born in 1939, she remembers that the Jewish people were put into a ghetto. "Our ghetto absorbed Jews from other cities and even German Jews. I stayed until 1942."

With her mother, father, sister and three grandparents, she lived in the ghetto until it was liquidated. "My father arranged for my mother and I to work in a factory. I was just 7 but I was smuggled into a work camp."

HER MOTHER kept her alive by sending her into the forest each time a

selection was scheduled. "There was always an argument with the Germans about whether they should allow children in the camp."

In 1944, the Germans decided to dismantle the camp and Webber wound up in Auschwitz, missing another selection because she had come from a work camp.

"That transport was one of a very few that were allowed into Auschwitz with children. I was there until liberation though my mother was sent out in August 1944," she says.

"We were put in a children's barracks and I said to my mother, 'your being here won't prevent my going up in smoke.'"

"For years we lived with indescribable fear, never knowing which moment would be our last. We were always treated like cattle. We were like sealed, signed and delivered. I felt like a mouse in a maze — never knowing which way to go."

One recent night, Webber woke with a shiver. "I haven't had that since camp," she says. "I seem not ready to speak of it all."

Berkowitz's personal Holocaust began in 1941 in Czechoslovakia. He was just 8 years old when the Germans sent him with his parents, brother, sister, and twin sister, Francesca to Galicia.

"WE STAYED in a Polish ghetto called Kolonatal until 1942 when the Germans did a public execution. My father and brother were murdered. We tried to run away and we did."

For nine months the refugees struggled through an attrition march, without food or adequate clothing, eating refuse and animal feed.

"We tried to get back to Czechoslovakia," Berkowitz explains. "We always entered towns at night and were careful. Then we went where we thought we could safely cross the border. A Gestapo man on a bike captured us."

After interrogation, they were sent to a prison in a larger town, then to their home town where they were quarantined.

"I was the only one healthy," Berkowitz recalls. "My sister was so thin and weak she couldn't even walk."

They were kept in fields and in a hangar for a few days, then put into railroad cars. "The doors banged in and you could feel you were sealed in," he says.

"We tried to make the elderly and the sick comfortable, but we were in those cattle cars for four days. Through the cracks we could see some familiar countryside."

INFAMOUS AUSCHWITZ was the

last stop. "The name meant a resort place to a Jewish speaking person," Berkowitz points out.

"The constant, sweet smell of bodies burning was all around us. Still, we were kept in the cars until late at night, then taken to a selection site."

Berkowitz' mother began to scream to God: "You've killed my family all ready. Kill me, but don't kill my twins."

The Germans who heard her cries quickly called for Dr. Josef Mengele knowing that he was looking for twins for his diabolical experiments. When he arrived, he had Marc and Francesca taken away.

Within a few days, the experiments began. "They're difficult to describe, but they did everything you could to a human being," Berkowitz says.

For eight months, the experiments went on. The twins didn't have to stand in line for food and could walk from barrack to barrack. Mengele hinted at sibling incest, but Berkowitz was adamant against this sin.

On July 11, 1944, Berkowitz' mother was to die in the gas chamber. She told him "You're needed — I'm going to my husband, my other children. If you lose faith in God, or are bitter against humanity, I'll tell God to bring you to me."

THE LAST thing she told him was that he was always a good boy and he should be a good boy.

"I was picking brussels sprouts for Dr. Mengele when I saw a large group of women walking toward the gas chamber. I knew my mother was among them. She was wearing a blue polka dot dress and waved to me, then covered her eyes."

"I saw her walk into gas chamber no. 3 and in an hour I saw smoke come out and said Kaddish (prayer for the dead)."

Following liberation in January 1945, Berkowitz and Francesca spent time in displaced persons camps, tried unsuccessfully to go to Palestine, then immigrated here. "We were almost adopted by a Detroit family, but we wouldn't give up our name," he says.

In the Lower East Side of New York, he worked and sent his sister to school, foregoing the music education he would have liked. Now married with a growing family, he lives in New City, N.Y.

"I consider us from the other world," he says, referring to all surviving children. "Not even 500 children were saved from all the camps, only 167 from Auschwitz."

"From one to two million children died in the Holocaust."

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