

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR SPEAKS IN MORGAN HILL

The Holocaust has come to be understood as the supreme example of evil in the twentieth century. The German Nazi regime during the period of 1941-45 instituted a campaign of mass murder in concentration camps, resulting in the deliberate death of six million Jews, two-thirds of the Jewish population of Europe, and five million more other persecuted groups such as gypsies and homosexuals.

The Sisterhood of Congregation Emeth, South Valley's Jewish synagogue, invites the public to a special presentation on Wednesday, December 16 at 7:30 p.m. at 17835 Monterey Street in Morgan Hill. Magda Brown, an 82 year-old Holocaust survivor who is visiting her son's family in the Bay Area, will share her remarkable story.

Brown was born in Miskolc, Hungary, in 1927. Jews lived comparatively normal lives in Hungary, despite its being an ally of Germany in World War II. However, in 1944 German troops, including the infamous Adolf Eichmann, invaded Budapest and began implementing Hitler's "Final Solution."

Hungarian Jews began being deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in May, and soon some 444,000, half of the Jews in Hungary, were shipped off to the concentration camps; three quarters of them were immediately gassed upon arrival. The Nazis created a transition camp in Miskolc; Magda's family was forced to march through the city to the camp where about 14,000 other Jews were imprisoned.

On June 11, 1944, Magda's 17th birthday, she and her family were packed into a rail car and traveled for three days without food or water to Burkina in Poland; upon arrival she was separated from her family. After two months of imprisonment Magda was sent with a thousand other Jewish women to Allendorf, Germany, to labor in an ammunition factory, producing rockets and bombs for the German forces for up to 12 hours a day.

In March of 1945 the Hungarians were evacuated from Germany and sent on a death march for three days to Buchenwald. She escaped with some other prisoners, hiding in a stack of straw at a nearby farm until liberated by U.S. soldiers. After liberation Magda returned to Hungary, but was able to find only six cousins out of her 70-member extended family. In 1946 she was able to immigrate to Chicago and was reunited with her brother only in 1962, the only surviving member of her immediate family, an amazing story in itself.

Magda Brown was one of the founders of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center in Skokie. Exhibits there tell the story of the Holocaust from pre-war German life through ghetto life and concentration camps to eventual liberation and resettlement throughout the world, with a focus on post-war life in Israel and Skokie. More than 500 artifacts, documents, and photographs illustrate the story of the Holocaust, while testimonies from local survivors add personal details. It has approximately 250,000 visitors each year.

Brown's testimony shows the utter deceit of those who claim the Holocaust never occurred, and she often quotes to audiences the words of General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces: "I visited every nook and cranny of the camp [Buchenwald] because I felt it my duty to be in a position from then on to testify at first hand about these things in case there ever grew up at home the belief or assumption that the stories of Nazi brutality were just propaganda."

December 16, the night of the presentation, is the sixth night of Chanukah (also spelled "Hanukkah"), an ancient celebration of religious freedom. This Jewish festival lasts eight days each December, commemorating the rededication of the Jerusalem Temple in 165 B.C.E. by the Jewish Maccabees after its desecration by Greco-Syrians. Rabbi Debbie Israel of Congregation Emeth invites guests to attend this special event and participate in the Chanukah candle lighting which will proceed Brown's presentation: "With so much talk about Holocaust denial in the news, Iran in particular, we think this is a timely program for the community at large."

The audience is invited to a reception in the social hall immediately following the presentation to meet Magda Brown. There is no admission charge, but donations to the Museum and Emeth are welcome. For more information call 408-778-8200 or visit the congregation's website at www.emeth.net.