

# Tampa Bay Times

## Descendants of Holocaust survivors and Nazi sympathizers speak in remembrance



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TAMPA — One grew up in fear, the other in silence.

Both carried the burdens of their ancestors and found solace in speaking to someone on the opposite side.

Together, the daughter of Holocaust survivors and the granddaughter of Nazi sympathizers spoke to a crowd gathered Sunday at the Italian Club of Tampa in honor of International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

The United Nations set Jan. 27, the date Allied troops liberated the Auschwitz death camp in 1945, to honor the memory of Holocaust victims. The program, organized by the Tampa Bay Consular Corps, included speeches from survivors and descendants, city and county proclamations, a candle lighting ceremony and music.

For Bonnie Stein, growing up as the daughter of Holocaust survivors meant growing up in fear of Germans. It meant never complaining about being tired or hungry or else hearing stories of how her mother would've done anything for cooked peas after digging ditches for hours in a concentration camp at the age of 14.

"I had nightmares of things I had never seen," Stein told the audience. "Concentration camps. Beatings. Showers with poison gas falling on me. Dogs attacking me ... . As children of Holocaust survivors, we inherit fears that do not belong to us."

She learned about the Nazis after coming home from first grade. It was the first day of school, and all the other



children talked about spending the summer with their grandparents. Stein asked her mother why she didn't have any grandparents. The answer caused her mother to break out in tears: All four were killed during the Holocaust.

After moving to Redington Shores in 1997, Stein would eventually become a docent at the Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg. She carried with her a fear of visiting Germany until she heard about One-by-One, a nonprofit co-founded by Dr. Martina Emme that brings together descendants of Holocaust survivors and Nazi perpetrators.

Emme, a German from Berlin whose grandfather was a Nazi sympathizer, was raised in a home where the Holocaust was not mentioned. Any questions she asked were rebuked.

"The Holocaust is a wound still bleeding," Emme said Sunday. "To say, 'I am German,' makes me feel ashamed. There is shame and guilt in it."

Though she was born after World War II, Emme explained what she called the "second guilt:" living in a society where the Holocaust was not acknowledged. Germans hid from the truth instead of finding a way to heal and move past it, she said. They built a culture out of collective denial.

As Emme began to discover her family's link to the Holocaust, she saw it as her obligation to learn more. She said she's still trying to learn the details but that it's clear her grandfather was a member of the Nazi military and took part in Aryanization, taking ownership of property or a business Jews were forced to leave.

"I am a descendant of Nazi Germany ... there is no way to hide that," Emme said. "The Holocaust is terrible, horrible and can't be forgiven. Never. I can't change the past, but I can stand for the opposite way of my ancestors."

Phyllis Roth of Tampa was invited to Sunday's event by a friend. Though she's visited Germany and grew up in Miami hearing stories from Holocaust survivors, she had never listened to a Nazi descendant discuss the Holocaust.

"She spoke so much from the heart, it touched me." Roth said. "The way she said it can never be forgiven, that struck me. Because I've always felt that way, but I wondered if I was wrong. If we should forgive. But how can you forgive such horrendous things?"

Roth, who is Jewish and was moved to tears, said she appreciated how the program highlighted stories from all sides. And though it was a difficult afternoon, she was thankful to hear the stories and see such a diverse group come together to keep the memories alive.

"I think it's beautiful," Roth said. "There's no other way to explain it. I feel this sort of thing in my soul."

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