



Holocaust survivors and others listen Sunday at the Al Katz Center. From left: Marie Winkelman and Janina Kozma, survivors of the Holocaust. AMARIS CASTILLO/Bradenton Herald

Survivors share at Holocaust Remembrance

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SARASOTA — Though it's widely taught the Holocaust ended in 1945, the genocide's impact never quit for survivors such as Cesare Andrea Frustaci.

"For many survivors, the Holocaust lasted for the rest of their life," the 77-year-old said in front of a small gathering Sunday at the Al Katz Center, 713 South Orange Ave., Sarasota.

Frustaci was one of a handful of Holocaust survivors who shared their personal horror stories in obser-

vance of "Yom HaShoah" or Holocaust Remembrance Day, which pays homage to the approximately 6 million Jews murdered by the Nazi regime.

During the Holocaust, Frustaci escaped Italy with his Hungarian-Jewish mother. But they ended up in Nazi-occupied Hungary where children were routinely brought to the river and drowned, he said.

"That was a daily practice in Budapest," Frustaci said as other survivors and attendees listened in silence,

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including some wiping tears away with their hands.

The Port Charlotte resident said he and his mother parted ways by her choice in the ghetto.

"She brought me on the street (on the first day) and she said: 'You have much more chance to survive being on the street than staying in the ghetto, so now go find a place to sleep, go find a piece of bread to eat and remember never ever come back here again,'" he said.

She then asked her young son to lower his head.

"I still feel her little hands on my head," he said, raising his hands before him. "She blessed me and said 'Now go.'"

Frustaci was 7 years old.

For Beverly Newman, co-director of the Al Katz Center, Holocaust survivors in the Manatee-Sarasota region such as Frustaci are treasures. Newman said this is the center's second annual Holocaust Remembrance Day observance, which is partly a memorial service for those who perished in the Holo-

caust and partly an introduction to survivors.

"I think that anytime we bring survivors together, it's a miracle because our Holocaust survivors are the backbone of the Jewish people," Newman said. "When you know their stories, it is miraculous that they survived, and these are the people here today who survived and thrived and have contributed so much to raising families and to raising the standards of society throughout the world."

Katz Center co-director Lawrence Newman led the room in prayer, reciting Mourner's Kaddish (a prayer praising God) in Hebrew and English — as well as prayers in memory of the Jewish martyrs and for all the departed.

Local poet Harold Wolfe read an original piece based on the Holocaust, which contained haunting mental images of "skeletal survivors wearing striped rags... hoping to observe the sun's warmth."

For the memorial service, the survivors were asked to light a candle — six in total — for the millions who per-

ished in the genocide.

Sonia Pressman Fuentes and Marie Winkelman participated in the candle lighting. Winkelman, 89, shared her own story.

A friend of hers offered to help Winkelman escape the ghetto when she was a teenager.

"The problem was the question: Should I try to save my life and leave everybody behind, or stay and go to a concentration camp or wherever — and be killed?" Winkelman said. Her parents said they didn't know how to advise her but ultimately agreed to let Winkelman flee the deadly ghetto with her friend.

"I begged him to stop taking part in the Polish underground because it was very dangerous," she said.

Her friend refused, saying it was his responsibility to fight the Germans.

"One day he took part in it and he never came back," said Winkelman, who was left alone without papers.

With the help of a priest, Winkelman continued on with a fake identity taken from a Catholic woman named Maria, who had

just died.

"I said, 'OK, I am ready to do it' and he gave me some wine and put on a cross and said: 'From now on, you are going to be a free person and just try to be brave the rest of your life,'" she said. "And that's how it happened."

As Winkelman shared her testimony, Angie Ramos stood by, eyes welling up with tears. The Sarasota resident said she was there to support her good friend of two years.

With a shaky voice, the 50-year-old Ramos admitted the survivor stories were so hard to hear.

"You read about (the Holocaust) the way we did in school — but it didn't affect me like this," she said.

Ramos spoke wonders of Winkelman, even showing photos of the survivor's artwork on her phone.

"I feel blessed to have met her — to have her in my life," Ramos said of her friend. "She is just amazing."

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