

## Nathan & Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center

A program of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation

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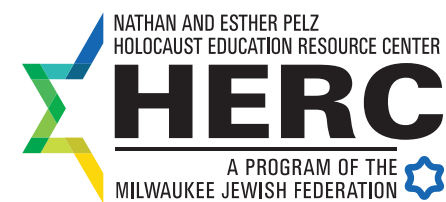
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Pictured right:  
*Pinat Hatikvah, A Corner of Hope* –  
 an outdoor space dedicated to life after the  
 Holocaust, situated on the Milwaukee  
 Jewish Federation's Karl Jewish Community  
 Campus in Whitefish Bay.

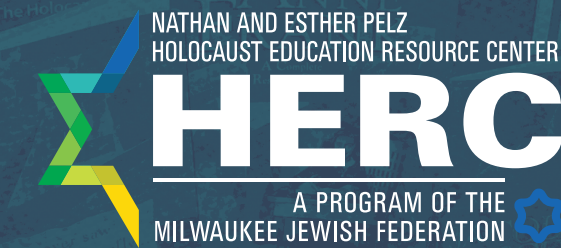


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## Our Mission

*The Nathan and Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center (HERC) is dedicated to building a better world, embracing diversity, and confronting racism and hatred by teaching the lessons of the Holocaust.*



## The Nathan & Esther Pelz Holocaust Education Resource Center

FALL 2018 NEWSLETTER

# Edgar Inselberg: A Story of Resilience

*During one session of last year's Holocaust in Greece series, Louise Jesse, an active member of the Milwaukee Jewish community, approached our staff and related to us an incredible story which she had hardly shared before – of how her father, Edgar Inselberg of blessed memory, survived the Holocaust in Athens as an eleven year old boy. Since then, Louise has participated in HERC's Second Generation training and is proud to be joining our growing Speakers Bureau. She wanted, for the first time, to share with our community the story of Edgar, who passed away this past spring.*



Edgar was born in Athens, Greece on June 15, 1930 to Valentine and Louisa Inselberg. I have a younger brother Alfred, who was born on October 22, 1936. Many people are surprised to learn that I am a Greek Jew. In fact, Jews have been in Greece since at least 300 BCE.

The world and Europe were in turmoil during my youth. During World War II, the German Army reached Athens on the 27th of April 1941, raising the Nazi flag at the Acropolis. We lived in Athens in the Italian zone, where Jews were not persecuted. Still life was not easy. Many people died of starvation. During this time, my mother grew very sick. She died of complications following surgery in September 1942.

On September 20, the Nazis started their "action" against the remaining Greek Jews. They demanded a list of the names and addresses of all Jews residing in Athens and of all those who had helped Jews escape. My father decided that we should go into hiding quickly and quietly. My father, who spoke multiple languages, decided to join the partisans as a translator. He left us and all of his property in the care of a friend. Earlier he had prepared false identity cards for us showing that we were Christian. We were placed with a nice young couple who received monthly money for our upkeep. By early 1944, neighbors of the couple we were staying with began asking questions, so we were forced to move to the cold, dark basement of a house at the base of the Acropolis. We were given very little food and were overcome with hunger, even though



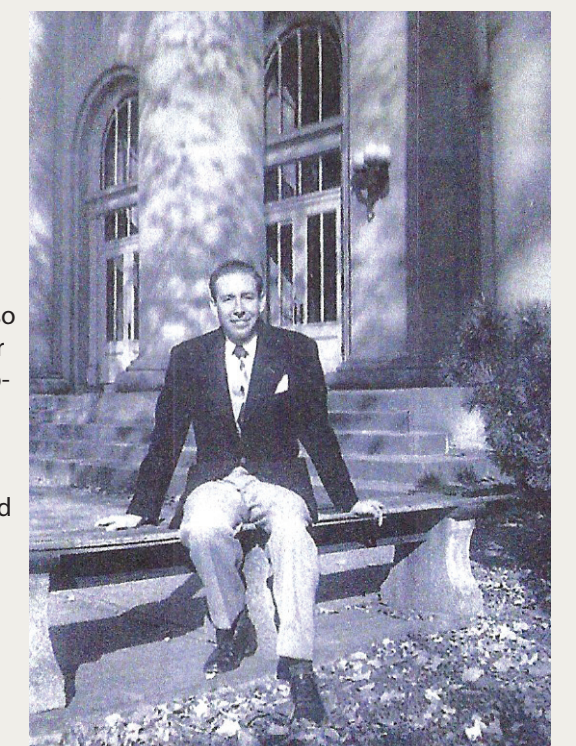
the couple received money every month for our care. I found a Greek-English dictionary and taught myself English. At night people would congregate around the radio to listen to the BBC news which I would translate into Greek.

On October 12, 1944 liberation arrived. All of this time we received no word about our father, but he surprised us by arriving on my brother's birthday. It turned out that my father's "friend" had taken all of our family's property, leaving us penniless. In addition, the house had been confiscated by two Greek officers who had collaborated with the Nazis. After a court battle, we received a small portion of it back in the form of sharing the house with the people who had stolen it from us.

The Second World War was followed by a civil war in Athens. The Greek officers who had been living in our house brought a squad of Greek soldiers who beat up our father in front of us and arrested him for being a "communist." We were left in the house with no money, hungry, and abused by threats from the officers. From time to time some nice people would give us something to eat. Two months later, a British soldier came carrying a package with canned foods that my father had sent with him. The soldier told us that our father was safe but in a detention camp, and that because of his social and language skills he had been put in charge of food distribution there. In this way my father was able to collect food for us and send it with this nice soldier. About three months later, my father returned home. We went to his office and discovered that it had been looted. He was silent and dismal. Suddenly he stood erect proclaiming, "They did not steal everything! I still have my brains and reputation." I truly admired him for not breaking under the burden of so many sorrows. This attitude has helped me overcome difficult times in my own life.

My family experienced nasty anti-Semitism in our neighborhood and school. My father resolved to send us abroad to more favorable environments. Fortunately, I was an excellent student and received a scholarship to study in the United States of America, so I left Greece in the summer of 1948. My goal was to obtain an education on how to grow crops in Palestine. I hoped to make Aliyah by moving there someday and putting my education to work supporting the now Jewish state of Israel.

My uncle Armand, my father's older brother, lived in New York City. He thought it would be best for me to attend a school close to him. So I began my education at Cobblestone Community College. There I was taken under the wing of the pres-



*Continued on back page*

### Edgar Inselberg | Continued from front page

ident. As a result of the president's mentorship, I was accepted to Cornell where I graduated Summa Cum Laude with a bachelor's degree in agriculture. I then went on to obtain a master's degree at the University of Illinois in Champaign, as it had the best agronomy department in the country. Agronomy is the science of crops in relation to soil and fertilization, which is exactly what I needed to learn so that I could eventually apply these skills in Israel.

It was in Champaign that I met my wife, Rachel Marzan, a Fulbright Scholar from the Philippines, at a mixer (dance) in 1955. We were married in 1956 at the campus Hillel. Rachel had been raised Catholic, but converted to Judaism prior to our wedding. After Rachel graduated with her master's degree and I completed both my master's and doctoral degrees, we spent time in Columbus, Ohio, where Rachel obtained her doctorate from Ohio State University. In 1965, we did in fact make aliyah to Israel where I worked at the Weizmann Institute and Rachel studied Hebrew and sought work. The lack of employment opportunities and cost of living led us back to the United States in 1966. We were both able to obtain positions as professors at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo where Rachel taught in the education department until her retirement in the 1990s, and I taught in the biology department and was also an advisor later in my career.

After retiring and during the summers we traveled to many parts of the

world. We dedicated time to our synagogue, as well as to other Jewish causes, such as the UJA. It was, and still is, important to me to support Jewish causes locally and throughout the world.



Our daughter, Louise was the first generation of our family to be born in the United States in August of 1960. She was named in memory of my mother, Louisa. She married a wonderful man, Jon Jesse. They have two sons, Alex and Jason. Both of them attended the JCC Jewish pre-school in Milwaukee, and then the Milwaukee Jewish Day School from kindergarten through 8th grade.

Both of our grandsons chanted the same Haftorah that I chanted in memory of my mother, for their Bar Mitzvahs. It is a Sephardic Jewish custom to chant the Haftorah

which corresponds to a Yorzheit (anniversary of a death). In the case of my mother, it was the second day of Rosh Hashanah. I was fortunate to be alive not only to witness and participate in both Alex and Jason's Bar Mitzvahs, but also to teach them the Haftorah using the Sephardic trope melody. This is truly miraculous when I consider what could have been my fate during the Holocaust. This truly fulfills the obligation of L'dor va'dor - from Generation to Generation.







# UWM & UWO Study Abroad Trip to Poland & Lithuania

This summer, during the last week of May and the first week of June, Dr. Karl Loewenstein, Associate Professor of History at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and Dr. Shay Pilnik, HERC's Executive Director, led a group of fifteen students from UW-Oshkosh and UW-Milwaukee on a study abroad trip to places of the Holocaust in Poland and Lithuania. The group of students created a blog for the trip, sharing reflections as they witnessed some of the most gruesome sites in the history of mankind, each student writing a blog post for each of the trip's fifteen days. We wanted to share with you some highlights from the blog, which can be found in its entirety on the HERC website at [HolocaustCenterMilwaukee.org/Blog](http://HolocaustCenterMilwaukee.org/Blog)

My name is Alexandria Oemig and I am a student at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh majoring in Psychology. Our trip to Poland & Lithuania has already been full of powerful and memorable moments, but today will be one that I won't soon forget.



We began our day with a bus ride towards the Majdanek camp. On the way, we stopped at a former railway station that served as a deportation point. Approximately 29,000 Jews were deported from the Lublin area to the Belzec death camp. Today, the station is no longer in use, and in its place is a lovely memorial. It was striking how close to the main road it was. It makes sense, because it was a former railway station, but it still surprises me how the atrocities happened out in the open. The camps themselves were a bit further out of the way, but still fairly close to town, too.

We got back on the bus and continued on to Majdanek. While Majdanek wasn't exclusively an extermination center, it was one of the most lethal concentration camps. It is also one of the camps that is the best preserved. We walked through the gas chambers, stained with blue from oxidized Zyklon B. We passed the barracks and looked at the exhibitions. Toward the end, we went through the crematorium, which was particularly moving. The sterility and cold efficiency was evident and poignant. After seeing the ovens, we walked up to the memorial monument. I didn't really know what to expect, other than a mention of ashes under the dome. Walking up the steps and seeing the pile of ash (mixed with soil) took my breath away. It was terrible and moving and horrifying.

Later, when we visited the Belzec memorial, a verse from the book of Job (16:18) was featured. It spoke to me as a plea from the victims: "Earth, do not cover my blood; let there be no resting place for my outcry!" We cannot cover over the atrocities of the Holocaust, we cannot bury their cries for justice, and we must heed their warnings so it never happens again.

My name is Laura Markley and I am a Secondary Education major in Social Science with a minor in history at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh. My experience here will be incredibly beneficial for my future classroom and students by being able to provide a first-hand account of the sites of the Holocaust in Poland and Lithuania.



From the Radegast train station, people in the Lodz ghetto were sent to the extermination camps. Over 145,000 people from the ghetto were sent to different extermination camps. Above the entryway of the memorial, a sign says "Thou shall not kill," a sad, but powerful reminder. We walked to the physical station in which several railcars were on display. One of the railcars had a warning sign displayed on it saying "For safety reasons, no more than a maximum of 20 persons in the car." It was rather ironic to display that to people because, as Tomasc said, "the Germans would fill these cars with 70-100 people." How? How is it possible that 70-100 people could fit in this tiny railcar while we were getting cramped with 17 people? I think that that was the point of the sign. To show to us the severity and extreme conditions that people from the ghetto endured to their unforeseen deaths.

The rest of our morning was spent visiting memorial sites like the Polish Children's Camp Memorial and the Righteous Among the Nations Memorial. There are not enough words to describe the feeling you get when you see these kinds of places. We made our last trip to the main walking street, Piotrkowska where we walked around and stopped to eat Jewish/Polish cuisine. While a lighter day in terms of sites or museums seen, it was a heavy day with stories and facts about those who were part of this terrible time in history.

My name is Christopher Gauger and I graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh in 2017 with a major in History and a minor in Geography.



On our day in Kaunas, we visited the Ninth Fort, located on the north side of Kaunas, which was used by both the Soviet and Nazi regimes to carry out mass murder and oppression during the 20th century. When the Soviet Union invaded and annexed Lithuania in 1940, the NKVD used the fort to imprison, torture, and execute political prisoners. But the worst horrors were yet to come. In 1941, Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union and Lithuania was quickly overrun by the Nazis, who took control of the Ninth Fort and transformed it into a killing site. Tens of thousands of Jews from throughout Europe were sent to the Ninth Fort to be murdered in mass shootings as part of the Holocaust. Even after the Soviets retook Lithuania, the fort continued to be used as a site for repression by the post-war Soviet government. Today, the Ninth Fort has been transformed into a museum dedicated to its history both as a military fortress and as a site of oppression under both the Soviet and Nazi regimes. A dramatic monument to the Jewish victims of the Nazis now stands outside the fort.

The Ninth Fort shows that the Holocaust was not just limited to the extermination camps like Auschwitz-Birkenau or Majdanek or Belzec. Not all of the Jewish men, women, and children who were murdered were gassed and cremated.

But the Ninth Fort fails to present the full history of the massacres that occurred there. Its museum neglects to mention the fact that ethnic Lithuanians participated in the Holocaust in Lithuania; they helped the Nazis carry out the mass killings of Jews. The museum portrays Lithuanians in an entirely sympathetic light. It claims that all of the atrocities committed in Lithuania during the 20th century were perpetrated by either the German Nazis or the Soviet Communists. The museum has an exhibit called "Lithuanians, The Saviors of the Jews" that discusses in detail how Lithuanians helped save Jews during the Holocaust. While it is important to acknowledge these rescue efforts, it is also important to recognize that not all people chose to be heroes, and that some people chose to be villains.

Lithuanians, as a nation, suffered horribly at the hands of the Nazis. And yet some Lithuanians willingly assisted the Nazis in murdering Jews. We must realize that history is not black-and-white, and we cannot truly learn from the past if we are willing to ignore or erase the parts we dislike.

My name is Biak Cin Thang and I go to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. I am from Burma and majoring in Theology with a focus on perspectives of different religions around the world.



We continued our journey to the Vilnius Jewish Museum. There are two young men from Austria who volunteer and lead tours. According to them, there were no extermination camps in Lithuania, but only places where people were murdered by shooting. More than 200,000 Jews and other people were murdered, including children, ill people, and elders. Before the Germans came to Lithuania, the Lithuanians began killing Lithuanian Jews for no reason. They even killed their neighbors and friends. When I heard about this, I was shocked because I can't even imagine why such a horrible thing could be allowed to happen. In addition, there is a photo on the wall at the museum of the family of Shay Pilnik, the HERC Executive Director who joined us on the trip. He was with us today and told us that his great-grandfather was killed by local Lithuanians. It was sad to hear this personal story from the Holocaust.

We got in the bus and went to Paneriai Memorial. In this place 100,000 people were shot; over 70,000 were Jewish. The natural setting of the memorial is so beautiful and calm. However, it feels lonely because the Germans and Soviet Union turned the beautiful natural place into one of the horrible and darkest places in history. Now, there are only memorials. We saw the memorial to 70,000 Vilnius Jews who were murdered and burnt by the Nazi executioners and their accomplices.

Even though the Germans burnt the bodies of innocent people, they are still alive in my heart. Visiting these places helps me to keep the memory alive and to educate other people on what happened.

# Holocaust Survivor Dr. Irene Butter to Visit Milwaukee in October

By Kari Altman

Holocaust survivor Dr. Irene Butter has dedicated much of her adult life to speaking with students and adults about her experience during World War II, stressing the importance of being "Never a Bystander" and the idea that one person can make a difference. Dr. Butter is a peace activist and Professor Emerita of Public Health at the University of Michigan. She is a co-founder of Zeitouna, an organization of Jewish and Arab women working for peace and a founder of the Raoul Wallenberg Project at the University of Michigan. The newly published book "Shores Beyond Shores: From Holocaust to Hope, My True Story" was written by Dr. Butter along with John D. Bidwell and Kris Holloway.



Dr. Irene Butter

Dr. Butter will be speaking about her story of survival during the Holocaust at Congregation Sinai on Sunday, October 28 at 2pm. Immediately following Dr. Butter's presentation, there will be an opportunity to meet Dr. Butter and purchase her book.

In anticipation of this educational and meaningful event, Dr. Butter kindly shared with HERC a few memories of her courageous survival as a young girl and her advice for the future:



**WHAT** Dr. Irene Butter, "Shores Beyond Shores: From Holocaust to Hope, My True Story", a partnership between HERC and Congregation Sinai.

**FREE** and open to the public

**WHERE** Congregation Sinai, 8223 N. Port Washington Road Fox Point

**WHEN** Sunday, October 28, 2pm

This program is generously sponsored by:

- Werner L. Loewenstein Memorial Endowment
- The Sweet, Halaska & Bankier Families in loving memory or Michael & Esther Bankier
- Terry & Diane Jacobs in loving memory of Phyllis & George Jagiello

**When did you begin speaking about the Holocaust? Why did you decide to speak?**  
There were four decades of silence before I started to speak about the Holocaust. First of all, no one would listen. Moreover, I was focusing on starting a new life in America, and it took time to feel ready to talk about it. Eventually I realized that it was my responsibility to be a witness for what happened during the Holocaust, and to not only tell my story but also to represent the voices of the 6 million Jews who were murdered and whose voices were silenced forever.

**Why do you think it's so important to share your story with young people, particularly today?**  
Young people need to become aware of the parallels between what happened during the Holocaust and what is happening today. Unfortunately history repeats itself. Ethnic cleansing, persecution, deportation, refugee camps, breaking up families, and loss of freedom are all the product of authoritarian governments. It is my hope that when young people hear my story they will recognize the importance of preserving democracy.

**Do you remember the moment when your life as a free young woman ended and your Holocaust experience began?**  
When the Holocaust began I was a child. Nazi policies changed our lives very gradually. The moment when it hit me sharply was when I had to turn in my bicycle. Among many other restrictions Jews were forbidden to use any form of public transportation and having to give up my bicycle shrank my world significantly.

**Is there a specific memory that you would like to share with our community?**  
My worst memory still is when my father died on a train that took us from Bergen-Belsen to Switzerland, when we were so close to being free. My father had done everything possible to save our family and then we had to leave him behind in a small town in Germany.

**What do you believe that we can do to fight indifference, hatred, racism and anti-Semitism today?**  
To fight hatred and all the isms of today I feel we should focus on young people by teaching them about dignity and respect for all human beings. Young people should be motivated to become "change makers," to stand in the shoes of others less fortunate than themselves, and to confront hatred, injustice, and bullying. I tell students that "one person can make a difference" in building a better world, even when the problems are large and we think of ourselves as being small. A key message in my work is "Never a Bystander."

## HERC would like to thank its Create A Jewish Legacy Donors

Thank you for making HERC's legacy yours!

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## A look back...



On Sunday, March 18, HERC and Congregation Shalom hosted Louise Borden, author of the children's books "The Journey that Saved Curious George: The True Wartime Escape of Margret and H. A. Rey" and "His Name was Raoul Wallenberg: Courage, Rescue, and Mystery during World War II," who spoke to 240 members of the Milwaukee community. The next day Louise spoke to more than 500 students from Bayside Middle School, Milwaukee Jewish Day School, Notre Dame School, and Steffen Middle School.



HERC was honored to host local organization Serve2Unite's student summit on Wednesday, April 25 at the Harry & Rose Samson Family JCC. Students from Fernwood Montessori, Lloyd Barbee Montessori, and Messmer High School toured Pinat Hatikvah: A Corner of Hope and the Harry & Rose Samson Family JCC with Dr. Shay Pilnik, heard from Hours Against Hate coordinator Andrea Bernstein, ate an Israeli lunch of falafel and shawarma, and concluded their day by hearing from HERC Speakers Bureau member Howard Melton.

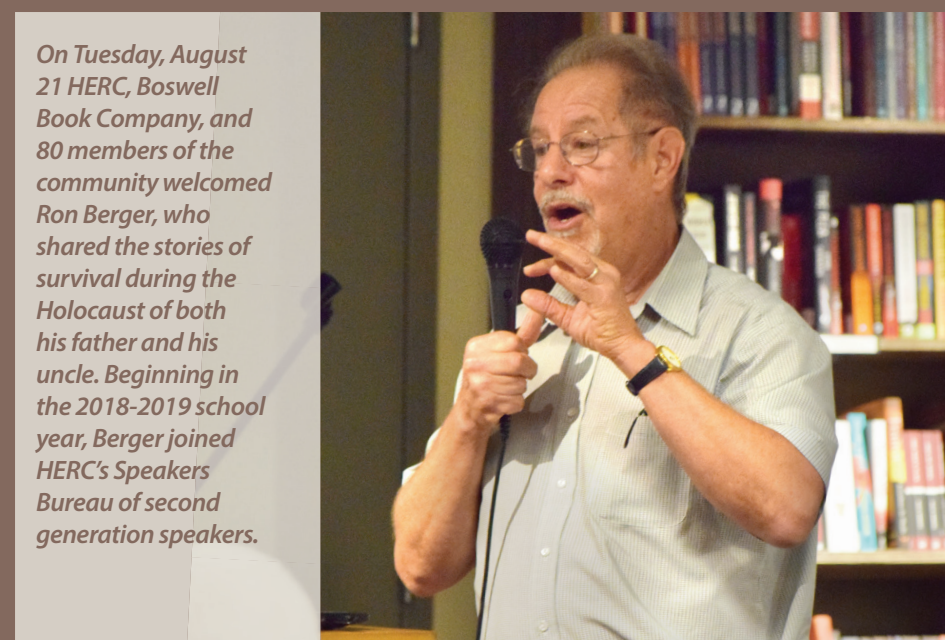


The 2018 Sidney & Nina Widell Memorial Series held on Wednesday, March 21 featured a staged reading of "Chiune Sugihara: Unsung Hero of the Holocaust." The performance looked at the life of Sugihara who, as Vice-Consul for Japan in Lithuania, saved several thousand Jews by issuing transit visas so that they could escape to Japan. The program also included the testimony of Chaya Small, a Sugihara survivor.

HERC's team of volunteer Holocaust educators taught nearly 5,000 students in the 2017-2018 school year. On Thursday, May 17 at the Jewish Museum Milwaukee, a group of 10th grade students from Escuela Verde discuss the context of primary sources from the Holocaust with volunteer educator Chis Cowles.



On Tuesday, August 21 HERC, Boswell Book Company, and 80 members of the community welcomed Ron Berger, who shared the stories of survival during the Holocaust of both his father and his uncle. Beginning in the 2018-2019 school year, Berger joined HERC's Speakers Bureau of second generation speakers.



On Sunday, April 8 at the Harry & Rose Samson Family JCC in the concluding Holocaust Stories: In their Honor program of the 2017-2018 year, Ben Merens interviewed Renata Laxova, who was saved by Nicholas Winton's Kindertransport.

In the 2017-2018 school year, HERC reached out to more than 1,000 students across the state of Wisconsin through its various field trip opportunities. On Thursday, May 3 at Congregation Emanu El B'ne Jeshurun, students from the communities of Fall River, Milwaukee, and Wauwatosa learn about the Torah as a part of HERC's flagship field trip "From Ignorance & Fear to Knowledge & Understanding: Jews, Judaism, & the Holocaust."



On Sunday, June 3, Debbie Simon Konkol, Joanne Simon Weinberg, and Chris Simon Halverson told the incredible story of their family's experiences during the Holocaust. The Simon sisters retraced the steps of their grandmother Alice Simon, who was murdered by the Nazis, and their father Rev. Dr. Carl Simon, a Presbyterian minister whose family history inspired him to become a civil rights activist, even marching with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Selma. HERC Board of Directors member and Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Shalom, Rabbi Ron Shapiro worked alongside Rev. Dr. Simon for many years as a part of the Interfaith Conference of Milwaukee.



## ...and ahead

The first speaker of the 2018-2019 Holocaust Stories: In their Honor series at the Harry & Rose Samson Family JCC will be Sam Peltz. Sam will share his story with the community on Sunday, October 21 at 10am.



Join Dr. Shay Pilnik, HERC's Executive Director, as he leads a three part course titled "The Holocaust in Perspective" which will take place at the Harry & Rose Samson Family JCC at 10am on Wednesdays, October 31, November 28, and December 19.



This year we commemorate the 80th anniversary of the November 9th & 10th pogrom known as Kristallnacht. Join our community commemoration which will take place in the Rubenstein Pavilion of the Ovation Jewish Home on Sunday, November 11 at 2pm.