



NEBRASKA STORIES OF HUMANITY

Holocaust Survivors & WWII Veterans,
Network Portal & Educational Website

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NEBRASKA INDIVIDUAL PROFILE CARDS



Bea Karp

Born 1932
Lauterbach, Germany

Bea Karp was born Beate Stern, in the small town of Lauterbach, Germany in 1932. Her family included her parents and a younger sister, Susie. Bea's father owned a textile business, and the family lived a comfortable life in a nice home. Lauterbach was a small town, but not devoid of anti-Semitism. They moved to Karlsruhe, Germany to live near relatives to escape hostility. Settling into a very small apartment, Bea missed having a yard play to play in, but she was able to make some friends. One day, while playing outside, two Nazis approached. In her anger when they turned around, Bea picked up some pebbles and threw them at the Nazis' backs. They chased the girls, who managed to escape.

Bea's uncle and grandmother moved to Israel, but her father did not want to leave Germany. On November 9, 1939, during the Kristallnacht pogrom, Bea's father saw their synagogue burning, prompting him to attempt to save religious articles. The family waited for him to return that night, but he did not come back. One day much later, a man, covered with blood and mud arrived at their apartment. Bea realized it was her father. He had been rounded up with other Jewish men on Kristallnacht and sent to Buchenwald concentration camp. Following a prolonged recovery, he was forced to become an unlikely brick layer to sustain the family.

In **1940**, two Gestapo knocked loudly on the kitchen door ordering the family to pack. Bea went to the living room to retrieve a beloved doll. One of the Nazis followed her pronouncing, "You won't need the doll where you are going." Not wanting the Nazi to have the doll, she threw it on the floor, breaking the porcelain face into many pieces. Bea and her family were transported by passenger train to internment camps in the south of France where they were searched and all valuables were taken from them, including her mother's gold earrings, torn from her ears by a Nazi.

Although they never truly felt safe, Bea and her sister Susie were saved by the Jewish French Underground, Œuvre de secours aux enfants (OSE), and were hidden in numerous chateaus and convents until the end of the war. They were never reunited with their parents who were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. After the war, Bea and Susie lived with relatives in England until they traveled to New York in 1947. Bea and her husband, Robert later settled in O'Neill, Nebraska and then in Omaha with their four daughters. Bea Karp spent her life sharing her testimony, especially to students, about her experiences and the danger of hate.



Clarence Williams

Born 1911

Crescent, Iowa

Staff Sergeant Clarence Williams was a combat medic assigned to the US 122nd Medical Battalion, 42nd Division (the Rainbow Division) during World War II. Williams deployed to France in January **1945** and was present at the liberation of Dachau concentration camp in April of that year. Clarence photographed both the liberation of Dachau and other experiences he had during the war in Europe. Growing up in Crescent and Council Bluffs, Iowa, he eventually settled in Lincoln, Nebraska after the war. A collection of photographs and letters written between he and his wife, Gretchen, detailing his World War II experiences, were made available to the Institute for Holocaust Education in Omaha, Nebraska by Clarence's son, Dr. Tom Williams.

In a letter to his wife, Clarence wrote about his experience of liberating Dachau, "Had a new experience today that I will never forget as long as I live. I had read a lot about concentration camps and the brutal treatment given the prisoners but often wondered if it were all true. Now I can vouch for it."

Not Too Far Distant is a play based on Clarence's letters home during the war. The play, written by Blixt Arts Lab playwright Becky Boesen, premiered at the Jewish Community Center in Omaha in 2022. Since then, the play has traveled with performances all over the state.



Fred Jeruzalski Kader

Born 1938

Antwerp, Belgium

Fred was born in Belgium sought safety after his family left Germany when Hitler came to power in the 1930s.

In September of **1942**, when Fred was only four years old, he and his mother were at a train station in Antwerp waiting to be deported to Malines transit camp, located between Antwerp and Brussels in Belgium, and then to Auschwitz. His mother told him to walk away and leave the train station. Fred obeyed his mother and was found wandering the streets of Antwerp by a nun. The nun took him to a home where other Jewish children were being hidden. Unfortunately, the cover was denounced to the Gestapo in October, and all the children were subsequently taken to Malines. Fred was then rescued from this camp and taken to an orphanage in Wezembeek Oppem near Brussels, once again escaping deportation to Auschwitz. He remained at the orphanage for the remainder of the war. Not until he was an adult did Fred discover that his parents, two older brothers, his half-brother and half-sister were murdered in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

While living with extended family in both Brussels and Montreal after the war, Fred decided to attend medical school. He knew that he had survived the Holocaust being rescued as a child and was determined to spend his life helping children as well. Fred graduated medical school in 1964 as a pediatric neurologist, married, and had three children.

Fred and his family moved to Omaha in 1974, where he became one of the first pediatric neurologists in the area. Fred spent his life speaking to the children and adults in the surrounding community about the Holocaust and his experiences.



Hanna Rosenberg Gradwohl

Born 1937

Colburg, Germany

In August 1937, Hanna Rosenberg, and her parents, Ludwig and Ilse, fled Sonneberg, Germany. Her paternal grandparents, Hedwig and Benno Rosenberg, stayed in Frankfurt where they had moved after fearing persecution in Sonneberg. On September 2, **1942**, fearing she would soon be deported, and her possessions would be looted, as happened to other Jewish homes and businesses, Hedwig asked a Christian neighbor to hide some of the family's belongings. One of those was her black Persian lamb coat, an item that was not only warm, but fashionable in the 1930s. The neighbor, fearful of the looting and violence in Frankfurt, buried the coat in her backyard for safekeeping. The Nazis came for the Rosenbergs soon after. They were put on a train headed to the Theresienstadt Jewish ghetto located in what is now the Czech Republic. From there, they were taken to Treblinka extermination camp in Poland. On September 29, 1942, the Nazis murdered Hedwig and Benno. Before the war ended, 850,000 men, women, and children were killed at Treblinka.

Meanwhile, Hanna's family, including her parents Ludwig and Ilse, arrived in Lincoln, Nebraska, and settled in the home of her maternal grandparents, Alfred and Kate Speier. One day, after the end of World War II, a large package arrived containing the Persian lamb coat. The Rosenbergs' neighbor had unearthed Hedwig's beloved coat from her yard and mailed it to Lincoln, Nebraska. Ilse had her mother-in-law's coat cleaned and repaired at Mack Pachman's Furrier in downtown Lincoln. She remembered Hedwig every time she wore the coat. Eventually she donated it to the Nebraska State Historical Society, along with a collection of household items the Speier and Rosenberg families brought with them when they escaped Germany.



Hanna acclimated to her new life in America and was active socially and academically throughout high school and at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. She married David Gradwohl in 1957, and they raised a son and two daughters in Ames, Iowa.



Harold H. Heins

Born 1915

Garrison, Nebraska

Harold Heins was born in Garrison, Nebraska. After his mother passed away from cancer in 1940, Harold married his wife Ruby, and they settled into a house with his father to help on the farm. A few years later, Harold received his draft notice and was inducted into the service in January of 1942. He served in World War II in the Third Army, 546th Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion, 44th Infantry Division. He rose to the rank of Sergeant.

Heins was a liberator of Ohrdruf concentration camp, a subcamp of Buchenwald. They entered the camp in April of **1945**, and what they found was beyond anything they could have imagined. Harold recalled, "People don't know what an emaciated body looks like unless they see something like that. The people you meet, that look will never go away. They're so lost. They don't know where they're going. They don't know... they're helpless. I've seen it." Harold also remembers General Dwight D. Eisenhower's important visit to the camp, letting the world know what happened.

Harold returned to his wife and children in David City, Nebraska the United States in October of 1945. Many years later, he was gifted a ring by the wife and daughter of First Sergeant Hassen, the officer in charge of his battery when they first took over Ohrdruf. The gift of the ring meant a lot to Harold, and when he told an interviewer of its significance, he said, "It's probably one of the only rings... that I know of in the country and it shows the map of where we all were, the date the war ended, and all the battles we were in there were six of them."



Irving Shapiro

Born 1923

Międzyrzec, Poland

Irving Shapiro was born Israel Szapiro on April 15, 1923, in Międzyrzec, Poland to a large extended family. In May of **1939** he graduated from high school, and the following September, the war broke out.

In 1942, the Germans brought transports of Jewish people from all over Poland into Międzyrzec. The first transport of 20,000 people who were rounded up in the marketplace included Irving's mother. Irving begged a guard for his mother's release, and he agreed. Irving hid his mother in a barn, but she was discovered and transported to her murder in Treblinka with the others.

Irving was later assigned to forced labor at Majdanek concentration camp with his brother Abraham after hiding in the ghetto. Sometime in 1942, Abraham tragically disappeared. Irving was then put on a transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp. He was taken from Birkenau to Buna where he was assigned to the machinist's detail.

On March 18, 1945, Irving, along with other prisoners, was sent on a death march during which a guard asked Irving to take care of the commandant's dog. When others were too weak to walk, the dog pulled Irving through the snow and kept him warm, saving his life. Later, they were loaded into boxcars traveling fourteen days to Dora-Mittlebau concentration camp. Irving was liberated by Russian soldiers three months later.

Irving searched for his brother Abraham throughout his lifetime. All of Irving's extended family perished during the Holocaust. He married Clara Zaltzman in 1945, in Neustadt, Germany, later immigrating to Canada with their first daughter. In 1955, they moved to Gering, Nebraska, building successful businesses. Irving and Clara had two additional children.

In the late 1980's, a swastika was burned into the Shapiro's lawn in Gering, Nebraska. In response, Irving told others, "I want you to know it is not just history. It (anti-Semitism) still exists today." Even when faced with hatred in his own community, Irving dedicated much of his life speaking about his experiences and teaching others about the Holocaust.



Ignaz "I.G." Grossman and Miriam (Golomb) Grossman

Born 1910 and 1916

Ružomberok, Czechoslovakia and Konin, Poland

I.G. was born in Ružomberok, Czechoslovakia (now Slovakia). He came from a large, close-knit family. He and his brothers loved to ski. He and a brother trained as machinists, owning a successful machine shop. When Czechoslovakia was invaded in **1938**, their lives were forever changed. I.G. joined the Czech army as a tank commander, but they were soon defeated, and he was sent to Auschwitz. When his mechanical skills were discovered, he was then sent to Gusen Zwei, a labor sub-camp of Mauthausen. While working in a factory that melted down jewelry stolen from Jewish families, I.G. secretly hid small amounts of gold. Allied soldiers liberated the camp in early May 1945. When I.G. left the camp, the hidden gold was liberated with him.

Born in the small town of Konin, Poland, Miriam also grew up in a large family. The family moved to Łódź before the German invasion where Miriam became a nurse. When the Nazis took power, things changed quickly for the family who was forced into the ghetto almost immediately. Suffering from malnutrition and lack of medicine, Miriam's parents died in the ghetto. She was eventually deported to Auschwitz with her two sisters and a cousin. She was chosen for work, but her sisters and cousin were gassed.

After liberation, Miriam spent three years at the Linz-Bindermichl Displaced Persons Camp (DP) in Austria where she met and married I.G. in 1947. Their only son, Alex, was born there in 1948. They left for the U.S. in 1949 and arrived in Omaha, Nebraska by train with a few single dollars in their pocket.

In Nebraska, I.G. used his mechanical skills for his livelihood, using his prisoner number "33072" as identification the rest of his life. Recalling the story of the ring, his daughter-in-law said, "When thinking about the history of the ring, many things can be said about what it represents, including perseverance, strength, cunning, determination and pride. I.G. would often have a smile on his face when remembering the one small way he was able to get back at the Nazis."

Miriam, the only survivor of her family, spoke publicly about her experiences, speaking out against discrimination, and standing up against injustices wherever possible. Later in life, Alex gave them three grandchildren who brought their grandparents much joy.



Katherine (Kitty) Williams

Born 1924

Sáránd, Hungary

The second youngest of eight children, Katherine (Kitty) Ehrenfeld was born in 1924 in Sáránd, Hungary. Kitty lost her mother, as well as a younger sister, to typhus as a young child, and her father did not want to remarry. Although family life was forever changed after the death of her mother, Kitty recalls a house filled with many books and musically talented siblings. Kitty's father was well respected in the community, and for a while, the family felt secure in Hungary. However, they were among the few Jewish families in the vicinity, and unfortunately, they could not avoid antisemitism for long. Kitty's father's business was taken away, they were forced to wear a yellow star, and where and when they could go around their own town was limited. Eventually, Kitty was confined to her home and then to ghettos in Sáránd and Nagyvárad.

Like most Hungarian Jews, Kitty and her father were transported to Auschwitz in **1944**. They were put into a selection line and then separated. Kitty's father was murdered in the gas chamber upon arrival; however, Kitty was briefly reunited with an older sister while there. Four months later, Kitty was moved to Allendorf concentration camp in Germany where she endured forced labor in a factory and was subjected to harsh chemicals from undetonated bombs.

Kitty was liberated on April 1, 1945. In total, six of her siblings survived the war, including the sister she saw in Auschwitz. Kitty married a United States serviceman and emigrated to Council Bluffs, Iowa, in 1947. She raised three children and worked for US Bank where she became a Vice President. In a videotaped interview, Kitty stated, "I would like to dedicate this video to all the millions that were killed, but mostly to my dad, who didn't have a chance to tell his story."



Leelo Sommerhauser

Born 1914
Nuremberg, Germany

Leelo was an only child born to her parents in Nuremberg, Germany. Her family belonged to a Reform synagogue, observing the major Jewish holidays. Leelo's grandparents and other extended family were all born in Germany.

After graduation from school, Leelo began a career as a pedicurist and had many customers around Nuremberg. When the Nazis came to power, she and her family endured many changes: her non-Jewish maid could no longer work for them, they could not enter their synagogue through the front doors, and Leelo had to keep her large wedding a secret as major celebrations were not allowed for Jews.

Leelo had the opportunity to witness several speeches by Julius Streicher, an early member of the Nazi party and founder of the antisemitic and racist newspaper, *Der Stürmer*. She recalls that his speeches included messages implying that Germany "had to get rid of the Jews." Realizing that Hitler was not going to stop his persecution, and hearing terrible rumors about concentration camps, Leelo and her husband left Germany and headed for the United States. They arrived in New York in January **1938** on an affidavit provided by Leelo's cousin. Both their parents stayed in Germany.

Leelo's father's business was confiscated, and on the night of Kristallnacht, her father was thrown down three flights of stairs that required 20 stitches on his head. Her parents were able to depart Germany six months before the war started. They lived in England for several months, until Leelo and her husband were able to bring them to the United States to live with them. While in New York, Leelo and her husband had two children, a son and a daughter. With the help of friends, Leelo's husband was able to obtain a job in Lincoln, Nebraska, and her parents moved with them.

Unfortunately, Leelo's in-laws, Albert and Babette Sommerhauser remained in Germany where they became ill. They were both deported and murdered in Auschwitz.



Lou "Rudi" Leviticus

Born 1931

Aalten, The Netherlands

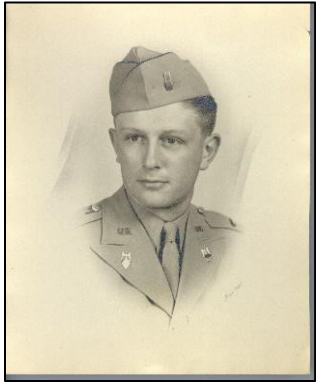
Born in Aalten in the Netherlands, Lou's family moved to Amsterdam when he was a child. His parents were not religious. Lou's father was a foreign correspondent for a recycling company, and his mother stayed home. Lou's paternal grandmother loved him very much and spoiled him with books, trains, and anything he wanted. His family lived near Anne Frank, and he was friends with her cousin.

In May **1940**, Germany invaded Amsterdam and Lou's life began to change. He went to a Jewish school, so his non-Jewish friends left. After that, all Jews in Amsterdam were forced to wear a yellow star. Lou, once again, was separated from his friends and made to feel different. They were not allowed to play together. Rights and freedoms were stripped from the Jewish people of Amsterdam. Jews were suddenly disappearing and taken on transports, including Lou's girlfriend. This was heartbreaking for him, and although he looked for her after the war, he never found her.

In the beginning of 1942, Lou's father was sent to a forced labor camp. He later escaped and joined Lou and his mother who were hidden in several organized safe houses. In October that year, the family was discovered, but Lou managed to escape by jumping off a third-floor veranda. After three weeks of running to and from different hiding places, Lou was taken in by people from the underground. His parents were transported to Westerbork, a transit camp, and then to Auschwitz where they were gassed shortly after arrival. Lou spent the next three years hiding, running from place to place until he met Karel Brouwer, a young man who was married and worked as an undersecretary. The couple took Lou in and many others, helping Jews avoid capture by the Nazis. Lou was given a new identity and was able to travel and go to school.

After the war's end in 1945, Lou immigrated to Israel where he earned an engineering degree and served in the military. He came to the United States in 1974 earning a doctorate degree from Purdue University. Lou became a faculty member in agricultural engineering at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, in 1975. He served as the director of the Nebraska Tractor Test Laboratory and retired in 1988. Lou married Rose, his constant supporter. Together they built a wonderful life that included two daughters, five grandchildren, and one great-granddaughter.

In 2004, Lou wrote a book, *Tales from the Milestone*, where he wrote about his Holocaust experiences and the devastation it brought to his family.



Maurice Udes

Born 1922

Pine Bluff, Arkansas

Maurice Udes was born to a Jewish family in Pine Bluff, Arkansas in 1922. His paternal grandparents fled Eastern European pogroms, oppression and lack of opportunity prior to World War I, first settling in New York City and then in Arkansas. The family owned a retail dry goods store. Maurice's mother's parents had made their home in America after leaving their family in Germany. He kept a collection of letters written by his grandmother's sister during her internment during World War II reflecting hope and appreciation for any assistance from her family, but also cries of despair.

Maurice's Aunt Frida had come to the US in the early part of the 20th century but had returned to Germany. She married Jakob Rein in 1921. Sadly, Jakob passed away in 1933. As the Nazi's came to power, Frida's relatives in America tried to bring her, her stepdaughter, and another young woman to the United States, but she waited too long to request passage, and they were deported to Gurs concentration camp in the south of France. Despite the family's attempts from America, Frida and the girls were murdered in the Nazi concentration camps.

Maurice served three years in the US XXII Corps Artillery, Occupation Force in Germany as First Lieutenant during World War II and participated in the liberation of Dachau concentration camp in April 1945. He lamented that during his years in Europe with the Army, he was unable to locate his aunt and the girls. "I was at Dachau as an American serviceman," he noted. "I saw crematories and the incinerators."

Maurice came to Omaha following World War II to work for Lyon Metal Products. In 1951, he established the successful Builder's Supply Company. In 1990, Maury and his wife, Joan Udes, gave a gift of \$200,000 for the resettlement of Soviet Jews in Omaha, Nebraska. Their gift to the "Passage of Freedom Fund" was his way of repaying an old debt. He said, "My dad was born in Russia. He was six months old when my grandparents immigrated and someone had to help him get here. My grandmother tried many times to get her sister out... to send her money... you have to do something." Udes recalled his father telling him of the conditions in Eastern Europe. "Our people were denied educational opportunities and there was prejudice against them because they were Jewish. It was never considered illegal to beat a Jew. I know that this is something that my father and grandfather would have wanted me to do," he explained. Maurice and his wife were known as talented ballroom dancers, winning many contests over the years.



Melvin Thielbar

Born 1923

Oberlin, Kansas

After graduating from high school in Danbury, Nebraska, Melvin Thielbar served as a Field Lineman Specialist in the U.S. Army's 45th "Thunderbird" Infantry Division during World War II. From January 29, **1943**, to October 14, 1945, Melvin's tour extended from Southern France and Southern Europe to Northern Africa. The major accomplishments for which the 45th is remembered are the liberation of 32,000 inmates at Dachau concentration camp in Germany, which Melvin recalled as the most impactful period of his service. He also considered the battle at Anzio, as a turning point in the victory of the Allies in World War II. The unit saw a total of 511 days of combat, with more than 20,000 soldiers in the division killed, wounded or missing in action.

Melvin typically avoided recounting his wartime experiences, especially around his family. However, he recognized the significance and gravity of his first-hand account and chose to share his experiences with Nebraska students. Melvin's message, carried on by his daughters Pamela Messinger and Candy Simmons, was that the Holocaust must never be forgotten to ensure it never happens again.

In April of 2009, Thielbar and about 700 World War II veterans from across Nebraska boarded 747 planes in Omaha and were flown in two flights to Washington D.C. to view the World War II Memorial. When asked about the honor flight, Melvin said, "It brought so many memories back, talking with other guys. I am so glad I went."



Roy Long

Born 1922
Blair, Nebraska

Roy Long was born on August 7, 1922, in Blair, Nebraska. Roy and his family endured the challenges of the Great Depression while growing up on a farm. Recruited by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's football coach, he became an outstanding quarterback, setting a national record of 55 attempts in one game, a record which stood until 2004. He also joined UNL Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program.

Roy was drafted into the army in **1942** and served as Second Lieutenant in the 71st Division. Long faced the unforgiving realities of the European Theater of Operations, enduring harsh living conditions, encountering mines that took the lives of his comrades, and witnessing the horrors of the Guns kirchen Lager concentration camp in Wels, Austria. When asked about what he encountered at the camp, Long said it gave him a greater appreciation of life and what he could be.

Post-war, in 1946, Long served as a guard during the Nuremberg War Trials, witnessing top Nazi officials such as Hermann Göring, Rudolf Hess, and Alfred Yodl testify. Later in his life, Long dedicated himself to educating young students about the reality of war, offering a unique first-hand account. Roy Long's legacy represents compassion and empathy in the face of tremendous adversity. He hoped future generations would look to the past and learn that we all share responsibility in preventing crimes against humanity.

In August of 2017, Chancellor Ronnie Green of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln awarded an honorary Doctor of Education degree to Roy Long in recognition of his outstanding service to humankind during his service during the war, as well as for his contributions in education, mentoring of young people, loyalty, and service to his alma mater.