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Eva Unterman: Holocaust survivor Holocaust survivor Eva Unterman will tell her story at interfaith commemoration

■ Commemoration founder to recount years in ghettos, concentration camps

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By BILL SHERMAN World Religion Writer | 2 comments

Voices of Oklahoma: Eva Unterman

For 17 years, Holocaust survivor Eva Unterman has brought guest speakers to Tulsa from around the world to shed light on one of history's darkest times — the systematic extermination of 6 million Jews by Nazi Germany.

But Eva herself has never been the featured speaker at the [Yom Hashoah](#) Interfaith Holocaust Commemoration that she founded and organizes.

On Thursday, the last Yom Hashoah she will oversee, she will tell her own story. The event will be at 7 p.m. at B'nai Emunah Congregation, 17th Street and Peoria Avenue.

For many years, Eva recently told the Tulsa World, she had only memories of her five years in ghettos, concentration camps and a munitions factory, and was unable to



Eva Unterman revisits the Radegast train station in Lodz, Poland, where she boarded a train as a child to be transported to Auschwitz concentration camp. Courtesy



18th annual Yom Hashoah Interfaith Holocaust Commemoration

Who: Speaker Eva Unterman

What: "The Last Transport: My Childhood



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Video



During the Holocaust"

When: 7 p.m. Thursday

Where: B'nai Emunah Congregation, 17th Street and Peoria Avenue

Note: Parking is limited. Shuttle bus from Temple Israel, 2004 E 22nd Place, before and after event.

connect all of those memories to historical facts.

But after three trips to Europe and extensive reading and research, she now knows what happened to her and her family.

"I have it all confirmed, with dates and everything, by scholars," she said.

Eva had a normal, happy childhood growing up in Lodz, Poland, until Germany overran her country at the outset of World War II.

In the winter of 1940, just after her seventh birthday, she and her family and all the other Jews in her neighborhood were rounded up in the street, carrying only those possessions they could stuff into pillow cases.

"I had my little bundle, too," she said.

She and her parents and two grandmothers were herded into a dilapidated part of the city and forced to live in an old building without running water or bathroom facilities.

At first, the Jews made the best of the situation in the [Lodz Ghetto](#) by setting up schools, hospitals and an orchestra, but conditions soon deteriorated. Eventually the school closed.

There was not enough food. German soldiers came into the ghetto, saying they were going to take the children to a place with more food, she said. The children who went never came back. Whenever the soldiers came to collect the children, her parents hid her along with other children in a dry well.

Her paternal grandmother died in the ghetto.

After four years, she and her parents and maternal grandmother were crammed into a train and transported to [Auschwitz concentration camp](#).

"There was an awful smell in the air," she said.

"We didn't know we were at Auschwitz, and we were smelling burning human skin."

The men and women were separated. The women were stripped, their heads were shaved and they were issued coarse, pajama-like striped clothing.

They were housed in long, lice-infested barracks with an open latrine and no way to wash.

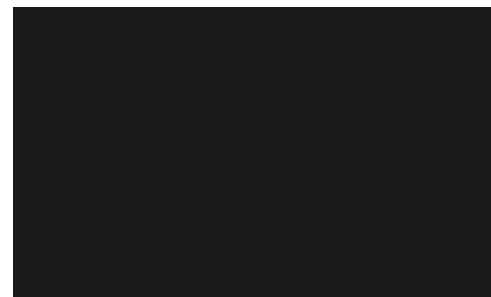
"There is no way to describe the hunger," she said. "What joy it was to find a small piece of potato in the thin soup we received each day."

Next, she and her mother and grandmother were transported to [Stutthof concentration camp](#) on the Baltic Sea.

Once, a group of soldiers asked for volunteers to mend their socks in exchange for a piece of bread.

Eva's grandmother was among the volunteers. The soldiers took them out and shot them.

"They were entertaining themselves," she said.



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A few months later in November 1944, Eva and her mother were transported to Dresden, where they worked in a munitions factory.

She sorted ammunition on a conveyer belt.

One reason she may have survived, she said, is because "a working Jew was worth more than a dead one."

They were nearly killed when the Allies bombed Dresden, she said.

Then an 11-day forced march took them to [Terezin concentration camp](#) near Prague, Czechoslovakia. Those who could not make it were shot along the way.

About a week later, on May 8, 1945, the last day of the war in Europe, Russian soldiers liberated their camp.

"The SS just vanished into thin air. There was a lot of crying and a lot of rejoicing," she said.

But the end of the war was not the end of troubles for Eva's family and for many other Jews.

"We were stateless. ... In 1945, no country wanted us anymore than in 1939," she said.

She and her mother were reunited with her father, and eventually they opened a gift shop for Allied troops in Germany.

And they loved Americans.

"Americans were known as the most generous and fun people," she said.

One day, an American GI named Herb Unterman walked into the store and became a friend of the family.

"Every American soldier was like family," she said.

Eventually she and Unterman were married in Toronto, Canada, because she couldn't get approval to enter the United States. Six months later, in 1953, they moved to the U.S. and in 1961 moved to Tulsa. Herb Unterman died in 2008.

Eva said she is delighted to be a naturalized American.

"I appreciate living in America. I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

"I think this is as good a place on this planet as there is. Is it perfect? No. There are some issues, but we're the only country with the freedom to dream."

For many years, Eva did not tell her story.

"Our wounds were too fresh to even talk about it," she said.

"We survivors didn't talk about it, and no one was asking."

But in the 1970s, she was invited to talk to a group of students.

Since then, Holocaust education has been her passion, she said. She has worked with teachers, established the Council for Holocaust Education and organized educational trips to Europe. She started the annual Yom Hashoah and organized it every year, but this year will be her last. Suzie Bogle, the new director of Holocaust education for the Jewish Federation of Tulsa, will take over Yom Hashoah, and work with teachers on Holocaust education.

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Eva said much work remains to be done.

She is concerned about growing anti-Semitism in Europe.

"It's absolutely mind-boggling. There's anti-Semitism in places where there are no Jews. Hitler didn't invent it. But he found fertile soil."

Yom Hashoah is sponsored by the Tulsa Council for Holocaust Education and the Tulsa City-County Library.

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John Elwell posted at 9:26 am on Sun, Apr 12, 2015.

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Eva, look around anti-Semitism bigotry is even found here in America. And its generally found in our most tolerant members of society.

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Tim Walden posted at 8:50 pm on Sat, Apr 11, 2015.

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This story has been told so many times..... yet it must always be told. Thank you for your strength to teach others. We never know when this could happen again, hence we must hang on to family and friends, we need them. This premise paid off for so many people within the holocaust. You will live forever.

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