

Karl Goldberg Prepared Remarks February 2019

In February 2019, Karl Goldberg spoke to teacher/educators attending the 2019 SC Council for Social Studies conference in North Charleston SC.

Here are his prepared remarks, used with his permission.

Good morning everyone.

I want to thank Frank Baker for asking me to come and tell my parent's story. It is an honor to be here. The story I am about to tell is mainly a survival story of two Jewish sisters; however, one could substitute "Jewish" with "Christian" or any other religion or race. All one has to do is read the news to see evidence of the persecutions in Syria and Iran today.

Most of you have seen and heard the stories of the Holocaust. It was a living hell for six years. My mother has lived in this wonderful country for 70 years now. Her life and my family have been strongly influenced by the war.

My mom will never forget the day in April 1945, when a tall, blond, tearful American soldier came up to her at Kaufering VI Concentration Camp and said "we are gong to take care of you now." It was the day she had been afraid to dream about for the previous six years. She always said that she cannot describe the feeling concerning this unknown man and the American Army, who were going to give her a second chance to live. To this day she wishes she knew that soldier's name.

In pre-war Poland, my mom, Bluma, and her sister, Cela, led happy and carefree lives in the small southern town of Pinczow, Poland. Their father, Haskell, was a leather merchant. He was fairly religious. Their mother, Rachel, kept the family home. There was a total of five sisters and

one brother. Bluma, my mom, was 13 and Cela, her eldest sister, was 17 when the Nazis stormed into town.

Our family was Jewish in a Catholic country. Life was not easy but the family was comfortable with a strong sense of fortitude that young people have. Then Hitler's Nazis came and life would never be the same. Pinczow was too small to have a ghetto, so the Nazis just burned it. Their big sister, Genya, was married and had a baby. She and her husband, along with their child, went to live and hide in the cellar of a burned out house. After a period of living with such a strong smell of smoke, her husband contracted typhoid fever and died in what was left of the town hospital.

The Germans ruled. Right away, as you know, all Jews were forced to wear yellow armbands with a Star of David to separate Jews from the rest of the population. If a Jew was caught without it, he or she was shot on the spot. Even years after the war, my Aunt Cela would sometimes say that when she went out,... for a split second, ...she thought she had forgotten her armband.

The Nazi's would shoot to kill. They terrorized. Earlier, the family had heard that the Germans wanted all Jews wiped out; but, who could believe it?

Life under Nazi rule was grueling. From the beginning, they would shoot about 5 people a day... always the community's best, the most educated, the professionals and the "intelligentsia". They did away with the leaders in order to prevent a possible uprising. They were always in their Nazi uniforms, with a show of strength in groups, in the middle of town. Never did one see a lone Nazi near the edge of town. They had some fear.

Conditions worsened. It was Rosh Hoshanah, the Jewish New Year.. My Grandfather left the house...we think to go look for a new hiding place. The Nazis stormed into town. My

Grandmother told Cela and Bluma to run and hide in the nearby woods. The sisters were screaming and crying, saying they would never leave their family, leaving would be impossible. My Grandmother, however, stuffed all the family's money into Cela's pocket and shoved Cela and Bluma out the door. The sisters ran into the woods. Their mother had saved their lives by this heroic deed; however, they never saw any of their family again.

It was an amazing thing. Can you imagine a foreign army coming into Columbia, burning our homes and businesses, or terrorists rushing into your church with guns, having to flee into the woods to save your life, to be humiliated, tortured and starved for years with no hope of salvation? We think it impossible today; but here came the Germans, the most cultured, educated, sophisticated and philosophic" people in Europe performing these horrific acts.

Cela and Bluma lived in the woods and eventually came upon two cousins and an Uncle in the forest. Winter was fast approaching and the weather was growing colder and colder. Cela and the cousins would sneak to nearby villages and buy bread with the family money. After several months of hiding, the full force of winter was upon them. It became clear that survival would not be possible in Poland's frigid winters so the sisters made their way to the outskirts of a town called, Chmelniek, where another Uncle lived. This Uncle was a carpenter and had a wood shop. The Nazis had not taken him since they could use him for the war effort. This Uncle allowed the sisters to hide behind stacks of lumber for several days until the SS men came looking. Some local villagers had seen Cela and Bluma and had reported them to the authorities. Twice the SS came looking, but had no luck catching the savvy sisters. Cela knew this situation could not last.

They had heard announcements through megaphones that any Jews hiding could come and meet a truck and be taken to a work

camp. By now, most Jews had heard about "the Final Solution", and the death camps at Treblinka, and Auschwitz. They were terrified of being sent to their deaths, however, they realized they had no choice. They headed for the truck. As it turned out, this time, the Nazi's were telling the truth. They were taken to a Hassag, a work camp, which was an ammunition factory.

Living conditions here consisted of barracks with wooden slats on the floor with straw on them for beds. For sleeping, there was no more space than a body could take up. No room to roll over. Every day there was formation at 5:00 am to be counted for the fastidious German records. During the counting, if someone appeared to be too old, too young or too sick, they would be shot or sent to Treblinka, a death camp.

One night, while working at her ammunition machine, Bluma was more tired than usual. She was fighting sleep and let her eyes close for a couple of seconds. She was awakened by a viscous Nazi fist to the face. That mistake never happened again! While at this work camp, Bluma did receive the "honor" of cleaning the German's offices. For that she was given a extra piece of bread.

There at the ammunition factory, the sisters toiled as slaves; 12 hour shifts, whether it be day or night, freezing cold, the devil standing over at all times. Teenage girls with no parents, no experience and no sanitation. There was no hope for the ending of the war, certainly no hope for the defeat of the Germans, and no information regarding the fate of their family. Bluma and Cela only had the solace of having each other, knowing they could die together.

What had happened to the world? What had happened to their beautiful family and the carefree beginnings of a teenager's life? Could they ever dream of a liberation where a tall American soldier would one day call them out of the barracks with tears streaming down his face and ask about their history

and welfare, assure them that they would be taken care of from that point on? It was the furthest thing from their minds. The only question was whether they should follow their instinct for self preservation or go the easier route and allow the Nazis to end their misery quickly.

By the grace of G-d, the sisters worked hard and did what it took to survive the work camp for 3 long years, making ammunition for the German cause. Eventually, the Russians started to close in from the East. The Germans responded by bringing the sisters to Germany, to the dreaded Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.

Bergen Belsen was not a work camp. It was a death camp, although there were no crematoria there. It was just a place to go to die. Upon arrival Bluma and Cella saw people with that skeletal look, the gaunt look of starvation and death.

After processing at Bergen Belsen, the Nazis took away all their remaining possessions. Bluma and Cella received a real shower and had their heads shaved, as you may have seen in the documentaries.. They were also issued the stripped prison uniforms. After the shower, they separated those that appeared healthy from those that were ill or weak. I don't have to tell you what happened to those who did not pass the test.

The sisters were sent to the barracks, which consisted of a cabin with straw on the floor. There was no running water or toilet. Again, only room enough for a body to lie down. Their day consisted of arising before dawn for roll call formation, a breakfast of a piece of bread and lukewarm coffee, moving heavy debris such as tree trunks back and forth all day, no lunch and then a supper of warm water with a cabbage leaf. The following days consisted of the same tasks while more and more people dropped and died. At the same time, Anne Frank, who was in Bergen-Belsen as well, met her fate.

Eventually, Bluma and Cella had a small stroke of luck in that the Germans moved them to Burgau, Germany, to work in an airplane factory. If they had remained in Bergen-Belsen, they would have surely perished in those horrid conditions. At this factory, they painted German emblems on airplanes.

The sisters were moved again and again until they came to a sub camp of Dachau called Kaufering VI (Turkheim). Dachau is a camp just outside of Munich. Perhaps some of you have visited this horrible place in your travels. At Kaufering, one's only goal was to have an existence. Bluma became very ill with Typhus. Cella helped her by sacrificing some of her food rations. Somehow, Bluma recovered to find Cella stricken with typhoid fever and gravely ill. My mom took a terrible risk and sneaked into the kitchen and stole Cella some food. By then, the risk didn't matter as both Cella and Bluma were barely holding on to life.

Finally, they heard guns. The shots were coming closer and closer. There was fire and explosions in the woods nearby. During this time, prisoners were dropping like flies. There was no food, not even for the German guards. All prisoners were lying sick and dying. Then Bluma and Cella saw the American soldier that I mentioned earlier. Again, my mom wishes she knew his name.

Bluma and Cella knew they were free, but it didn't really matter. They weren't even hungry anymore. No one even changed their expressions. Everyone was skin and bones. They were taken to a hospital in Landsburg, Germany to be nursed to health. Only then did they cry. Only then did the feelings come. Only then did they discover that they were the only survivors of their beautiful family, that my Uncle Kalmen and Grandfather, Haskell had joined the partisans and were killed just a few months before the war ended, the rest of the family having perished in the chimneys of Treblinka.

After some recovery, my mom and aunt were placed in a

displaced persons camp, which was funded by the Red Cross and HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society). While at this displacement camp, they met and later married best friends, David Miller and Felix Goldberg and began their road to as normal lives as possible.

73 years have passed since that bittersweet day the American soldier delivered that first act of kindness. I will be forever grateful to those allied soldiers who risked their lives in order to deliver freedom.

For the greatest part of the liberated Jews, there was no ecstasy. Families and homes were lost. There was no place to go, nobody to hug, no one waiting. Jews had been liberated from death and the fear of death, but not from the fear of living. My mom wishes she could say that her strong will was the sole reason she survived the Nazi brutality. Again, she was only a 13 year old girl with a 6th grade education when the Nazis marched into her idyllic town in Poland. To this day, my mom credits her big sister for leading her well as Cela had an amazing instinct for preservation and survival. It would have been easy to touch an electrified fence or possibly commit an obvious attempt to escape, thereby getting shot. Cela was the voice of reason concerning these thoughts.

As mentioned earlier, Bluma and Cela met their future husbands at the displaced persons camp in Germany. Both men had survived Auschwitz together as best friends. Both were wily and strong and won the competition for the attractive sisters. Cela and Bluma married David Miller and Felix Goldberg in a double wedding ceremony. Soon after marriage, both became pregnant and gave birth to their first born in Germany. It was always assumed that both families would make their way to the newly formed country of Israel, as no one in the group had a sponsor in the United States. Through an amazing stroke of luck and smarts, Cela found a way to come to the United States. Jewish communities in towns like Columbia were sponsoring families like ours and helped to get them

resettled. Cela found the way and Bluma followed 3 months later, in 1949 to Columbia, SC.

With very little money, education or language skills, the families persevered. Walking or riding a bike to work, David and Felix were just waiting for a chance to control their own destinies. The couples struggled for years, but kept the faith. Through hard work and determination, both Felix and David eventually owned their own successful businesses. By 1957 Bluma and Felix had 3 children, Cela and David had 2. All have gone on to successful lives.

Bluma was blessed to have her husband and sister with her until the year 2000, when both Cela and Felix passed away within just a few months of each other. It is obvious she misses them dearly, as we all do.

Bluma is 92 years old and is doing well. As did Cela, Felix, and David, she has spent much of her time speaking to groups, such as yours, telling her story, in the hopes this horrific event will not be forgotten. Now she leaves it up to her children, nephews and nieces to continue her legacy.

If my mom was speaking here today, she would end by saying a hearty **"thank you"** and **"G-d bless America"**!