

WJCS's Chief Development Officer, Susan Lewen, Retires

WJCS'S Chief Development Officer, Susan Lewen, announced her retirement in July after "nine wonderful years," thanking the WJCS community for its support, calling the organization a "safety net of Westchester county." She remarked, "The care and compassionate services and programs that I've seen WJCS professionals deliver, the time and heartfelt commitment of our amazing Board members, the generosity of our donors, and the support of foundations, government organizations, and the Westchester government and business community are truly astounding." She maintained that her "dedication to WJCS, which transforms lives for the better every day, will never wane. And I hope your commitment to WJCS will stay strong and vital. Westchester needs WJCS and WJCS needs you!"



The Broader Definition of Holocaust Survivor Leads to Reparations for an Increasing Number of People

BY RABBI MICHAEL GOLDMAN, DIRECTOR, WJCS HEALING CENTER

Years ago, I ran a social program for seniors. Every year at Yom Hashoah, we would gather in a circle and listen to the reminiscences of our group's members who had survived the concentration camps. Over the course of years that we spent together, the Holocaust Survivors' stories grew more detailed and nuanced. Perhaps, the trust which had grown among us inspired one of our members—I'll call her Sima—to speak up, quite unexpectedly. We knew that Sima was born in Poland, and moved to British-Mandate Palestine as a little girl. But until that particular Yom Hashoah, she had never said a word about how she got there.

It was after Sima had listened to the Survivors' testimonies and we all recited El Malei and Mourners' Kaddish (traditional memorial prayers) for those who died in the Holocaust, that she said, almost in a whisper, "I know I am not really a Holocaust Survivor. But I want to tell my story, because I think about it a lot. I was eight years old in 1938. My parents had a bad feeling about Germany so they packed me off to visit my aunt in Palestine. They told me that it would only be for a short time, and then they would come get me and bring me back home. Instead, they, and everyone else in my family, were killed in Treblinka. The place I had called home was wiped from the map."

"What do you mean you're not really a Holocaust Survivor?" exclaimed another member of our group. "Of course, you are a Survivor. Maybe, you didn't see what I saw in Auschwitz. But the things you didn't see because of the Nazis—your parents, your friends, your school, your shtetl, your whole life—makes you more like me than not like me. You are a Survivor."

Amen to her words. Many Jews were not nec-

essarily imprisoned in the camps, but nevertheless suffered displacement, poverty and other deprivations at the hands of the Nazis: There were Jewish children who fled Germany on the Kindertransport; Jews in the Soviet Union who endured the German blockade of Leningrad or were evacuated from the western republics to the Urals or Central Asia; children who were hidden in convents and homes of Righteous Gentiles, and children born in the post-war displaced persons camps.

These Survivors, formerly not acknowledged as such, are now at last being officially recognized. The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany ("The Claims Conference"), the agency responsible for disbursing reparations money to Jewish victims of the Holocaust, recently broadened its definition of "Survivor" to include Jews whose experience matches some of the situations I describe above. Part of the motivation for this expansion of "Survivor" comes from recent advances in understanding trauma. Part of it comes from the sobering fact that our community of Survivors is rapidly dwindling, leaving the Claims Conference with a growing fund which they are mandated to spend, and little time to spend it.

Whatever the reason, we at WJCS want you to spread the news that many Jews who lived in Europe around World War II who were previously not recognized as Holocaust Survivors, now are. And they are eligible for financial support through the Claims Conference. That support can cover basic necessities for aging people to live with health and dignity, such as medical equipment and home care.

If you think that you might be such a person, or if you think you know such a person, please contact Allison Danzig, Coordinator of Holocaust

Survivor Services at WJCS, at adanzig@wjcs.com. Allison will be happy to help you determine whether you (or your person) are eligible.

I have met Holocaust Survivors who decline support from the Claims Conference, usually for one of the following reasons:

"I don't need extra care." To which I say: while I am glad that you are independent today, I still wonder, are you planning on living forever, and staying perfectly healthy while you do it? Please, tell me your secret. In the meantime, why not apply for Claims Conference benefits? The process takes a while.

"The money should be spent on people who are less fortunate than I am." To which I say: Claims Conference money is earmarked especially for you, and no one else. If you suffered because of the war but didn't experience the concentration camps, you may be used to thinking of yourself as someone who really didn't suffer at all. As

it is written in the Book of Lamentations, "Is there any suffering like my suffering?" In other words, what's the real use in comparing my suffering to another's?

"I don't want anything to do with those Germans. Not even with their money." To which I'll offer two rebuttals. One: Ezekiel (Ch. 18) chides Israel for meting out the sins of the parents on their children. The Talmudic Sages enshrined this principle into law: Let each person, in their generation, be judged for their own actions. Second, are you worried about antisemitism today? If you were to accept reparations from the Claims Conference, you'd be freed up to spend that money on supporting important causes, such as fighting antisemitism or providing a Jewish education for your grandchildren.

For more information about the Claims Conference, visit their website: <https://www.claimscon.org/>

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