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New life for survival story

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BY JOHN CHADWICK

STAFF WRITER

Joseph Horn was 69 when he achieved his dream of publishing his Holocaust memoir.

Three years later, in 1999, the Glen Rock man died.

Now his daughter, Sandra Rubenstein of Woodcliff Lake, is carrying on his mission, telling the story of a young Jewish boy, who, with luck and perseverance, survived the Nazi death camps.

Indeed, Horn's book, "Mark it With a Stone," though rife with eyewitness accounts of Nazi brutality, also details the chance encounters and kind gestures that saved Horn's life. Some of his benefactors were Jewish, such as one of the camp trustees whose presence likely kept a Nazi officer from shooting Horn. Others, however, included Germans who protected him after an abortive escape attempt.

"There were many situations where he was able to get hope from people who really gave of themselves," Rubenstein said. "When someone reached out with an act of kindness, it gave him hope to go on for another day."

Armed with a new edition of the book, as well as digitally remastered video interviews of Horn, Rubenstein is presenting her father's story at schools, synagogues and bookstores.

Rubenstein said she's especially motivated because the ranks of Holocaust survivors are dwindling. The number in the United States declined from an estimated 98,000 to 72,000 in the last five years, said Max Liebmann, of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants.

"We are old," said Liebmann, who added that the actual numbers are probably 15 to 20 percent higher because some ultra-Orthodox Jews do not register with the organization.

Rubenstein, a teacher at the Horace Mann School in the Bronx, said she's presenting her father's experience as a universal story relevant to young people growing up in a violent world.

"I even talk to them about bullying," she said. "When you think

of bullying, it's putting someone down because they're different. That's not that much different than prejudice, and if unchecked, it becomes hatred."

Joseph Horn was born and raised in the city of Radom, a community in central Poland infected by anti-Semitism long before the Nazi onslaught.

"The first rule I learned was never to strike back when hit by a Catholic child," he wrote. "Doing so could start a pogrom."

He was 12 when the Nazis invaded and began their campaign of mass murder.

Horn endured a succession of crowded ghettos and camps before arriving at the infamous Auschwitz camp. He survived, in part, by getting a spot on a labor detail in which the treatment was relatively humane.

But his assignment involved working near the camp's arrival platform, where he watched the grim procedure that greeted the hundreds of thousands of newcomers getting off the trains. They were split into two groups – one headed for suffering, degradation and a slow death in the camps, and the other marched off to the gas chambers.

"The most shocking aspect of it all was the very ordinariness with which it was treated by all those who were involved," Horn wrote. "Three thousand men, women and children ... killed in barbaric fashion, sent up in smoke, and an hour later everything was back to normal."

After the war, Horn worked as a haberdasher and owned the Hi-Style Hat Co. in New York City for more than 30 years.


Rubenstein said her father was not an overtly religious man, yet still believed in the goodness of the human spirit.

"Even after all he endured, he did not harbor any bitterness or want revenge," she said. "For him to still be that way, I think there is a God."

E-mail: chadwick@northjersey.com

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