

“The opposite of love is not hate, it’s indifference.” (Elie Wiesel)

Nobody can undo the grief and losses of the Holocaust victims. Their past marks their present, their suffering is enduring. Traumatic memories are part of everyday life for Holocaust survivors. It is shocking that in Switzerland presently at least 80 of these surviving Holocaust victims have to live in dire poverty, and we must not be insensible to this. Humaneness obliges us to support these survivors, in order to improve their evening of life.

Now or never – because tomorrow, it will be too late

Also the youngest among Holocaust survivors, who were born only in the last phase of the war, are presently aged over 70. The number of survivors is steadily decreasing. Consequently, there is an urgency to react without further delay and to alleviate their poverty today.

Due to their growing age, increasingly torturous memories and generally deteriorating state of health, the living costs of Holocaust survivors are growing higher year after year. This increase in costs is not covered sufficiently in every case. Sorrows about too small pensions, too high own contributions to medical services, insufficient social welfare and unforeseeable expenditures are a double burden on Holocaust survivors. Every uncertainty about their personal future prompts their traumatic memories.

Holocaust survivors

Holocaust survivors have withstood the pogrom and extermination policies of the National Socialists in ghettos, in labour or concentration or extermination camps, in hideouts, by disappearing with a false identity, among partisan or resistance movements, or by fleeing to countries not involved in the war. Most of them experienced multiple traumas, lost their relatives, lived in mortal fear, and underwent most brutal violence. «The extreme aspect of the experience of having survived the Holocaust is the fact that the basic assumptions of a trustful living together seemed to have been invalidated» (Harald A. Mieg).

In 1945, the liberation from the camps, hideouts and false identities went along with a shock of the real dimensions of the mass murder. Only then, many of them became conscious to the fact that their families had been annihilated.

Consequences for the survivors

In defiance of the atrocious experiences of persecution, deportation, selection, hunger, torture, forced labour and the murder of relatives, most survivors found the strength and courage to live on, to build up a new life, and venture into the future.

In the years after the the war, most of the survivors manifested a stunning self-strength in mastering their lives. Only few of them had to be sent to psychological hospital care.

They responded well to the challenges of society, but often paid the price for it by the haunting traumatic memories.

The experiences of persecution and the brutal loss of relatives left deep-rooted traces. The values and basic assumptions of human behaviour such as justice, morals and humaneness had been turned upside down.

Holocaust survivors often struggle to feel true joy, they are more vulnerable, bear a deep, silent pain in themselves that affects their interpersonal relationships. Most of them are accompanied by fears day by day; they fight against sleep disorders, nightmares and also physical secondary failures. A female survivor from Zurich says:

“I just know that the Shoah (Holocaust) has changed me for a lifetime. I used to be a merry, hilarious, astute child, and I have been a profoundly sad adult.”

While in the post-war era they focused on building-up of a new existence, as normality and future had priority, many survivors still were increasingly haunted by their memories. In old age, the mental and physical capacity of defence has become weaker. Another female survivor in Switzerland explains:

“I notice that the older I grow – also during the day, when I just sit around – the stronger it gets. Before I had blocked it out, but with advancing age it has come back, it is always present. It is impossible to forget. The earth is not deep enough for being able to bury these memories.”

Holocaust survivors in Switzerland

After the war all survivors, 90 percent of whom at the time were aged between 16 and 45, saw themselves confronted with the question: where to go after all they had experienced? returning to their old homeland was no option for most of them. In some places they were not welcome anymore; in Eastern Europe moreover the communist regimes established themselves shortly thereafter. The majority of Jewish survivors in Europe thus emigrated to Israel or the USA.

However, in various ways some Holocaust survivors came to Switzerland too, during and after the war. But only during the 1990s the general public truly became aware of their existence, triggered by the distribution of humanitarian relief to survivors, and the publication of books and news articles.

Their journeys to Switzerland:

- Successful **escape** during the war – often thanks to the help of Swiss «Righteous Among The Nations».
- Entry into Switzerland based on «blood for goods» negotiations with the National Socialists. Among them was the so called “Kasztner transport”, by which 1,600 Hungarian Jews came to Switzerland in 1944, or the “Musy transport” of 1,200 prisoners of war from Theresienstadt in February 1945. Authorities urged the refugees to return to their homelands or immigrate elsewhere after the war, but at least 1,600 of approximately 30,000 Jewish refugees remained in Switzerland.

- After the war, survivors – especially children and youth – from concentration camps could come to Switzerland for **convalescence**. The «Buchenwald children», for example, were part of them.
- **Fleeing from communism**, tens of thousands of refugees came to Switzerland in the context of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 and the Prague Spring in 1968. Disproportionately many of them were Jewish, and some of them had survived the Holocaust. In the 1970s, sporadic survivors came from Russia and Poland in the course of humanitarian relief actions.
- Yet another group of Holocaust survivors arrived in Switzerland during the past 70 years **due professional or private reasons**.

Exact data on the number of Holocaust survivors within Switzerland does not exist. Some survivors never registered as such, especially orthodox ones or those having converted to Christianity. Today, the number of Holocaust survivors in Switzerland amounts to an estimated 150 to maximum 200.

Mission of the foundation

The Gamaraal Foundation wants to grant three times a year a financial contribution to needy Holocaust survivors, who today often can barely fund the utterly necessary expenses. At the occasions of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27 January as well as of Passover and Rosh Hashana (Jewish New-Year), they thus can afford something that normally would exceed their possibilities. This support also is a symbol of solidarity and empathy, and it shall give pleasure and a little happiness to those brave victims.

“According to the Claims Conference, presently 86 poverty-stricken Holocaust survivors are registered in Switzerland”.

Moreover, the Gamaraal Foundation desires to respond to survivors’ applications for monetary support, whereby contributions to home help, transports, dental care, or medical treatment.

About the foundation

The Gamaraal Foundation was established in 2014 by its current president of the board of trustees, Mrs. Anita Winter. As a daughter of two Holocaust victims, she directly experienced the implications of persecution. The foundation is an answer to the deep dismay about the poverty of these individuals, who had to suffer so immensely already during the Holocaust.

The Gamaraal Foundation is tax-exempt by the Canton of Zurich. Based on this, donations in the Canton of Zurich and in various other cantons are tax-deductible according to the scope of tax legislation.