

*Souls Echo* the name we chose for our newsletter was a relatively simple process -- a few emails were exchanged with lists of possible words, then word combinations, and then ... Voila. And since placing these two words together, we have followed the echo of Souls who have led us to many amazing discoveries.

We have found family members we did not know existed, rare photos that were not destroyed, four generations of our father/Ben Fainer's maternal family history through JRI Poland, including Ben's grandfather's burial place with a magnificent monument, and an entire community of Bedzin/Zaglembie survivors and their families scattered around the world.

And then, there is the man who Ben searched for to thank, but did not find. I feel their Souls must have spent thanksgiving together, as I woke up the next day determined to finish his search; we have shared that story below.

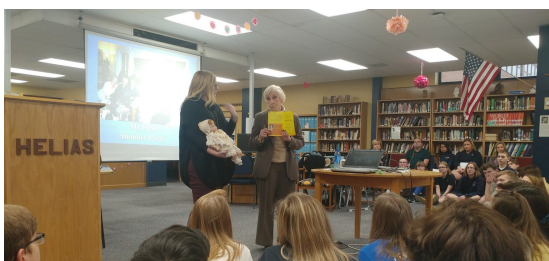


## Recent Programs

Survivors Rachel Miller and Ram Levy share their stories with students and others as testimony of the suffering they experienced and their family members who were killed. Speaking to dispel hate and to show students the power they hold to build a better life for themselves and humanity.

Photos from each school or community program can be viewed on our website at

[www.hannahfound.org/photo-gallery](http://www.hannahfound.org/photo-gallery)



February 6 at Helias Catholic High School in Jefferson City, MO, hidden child survivor Rachel Miller shared her story of suffering and survival as a child in Paris, France with 200 students and faculty.

Teacher/Organizer Sarah Kempker and Mrs. Miller



February 4 at Parkway North High School in St. Louis, MO, survivor Dr. Ram Levy tells students how righteous people of Bulgaria stopped Hitler's plans to deport and kill 50,000 Jewish people. North alumna Sharon Berry shared video and details of her father Ben Fainer's story.

Teacher/Organizer Amy Grisch and Hannah, an Orthodox Jewish student thanking Dr. Levy



January 29 at the St. Louis County Library, despite single digit temperatures and sub-zero wind chill, approx. 125 people bundled up and came out to hear hidden child survivor Rachel Miller's story.

Mrs. Miller sharing story about Christine-Cecil

## When the Holocaust Becomes Personal – An Unexpected Visit A Damaged Young Survivor Meets a Gentle Soul

*By Richard Friedman*

On November 23, 2018, the day after Thanksgiving, I received an email from an unknown party. The subject line was "Being Thankful" - a subject title that sounded suspiciously like yet another charitable or political solicitation. The text, however, brought my own self-sense of family history to another place entirely. It read:

Dear Mr. Friedman,

I am searching for a Richard Friedman, who is the son of Israel Friedman of blessed memory. In these days of thanksgiving, I am very thankful for the compassion and empathy Israel Friedman showed my father, Ben Fainer, when he found him in 1945 in Cham. I have included below some of what my dad wrote in his memoir Silent for Sixty Years, co authored by Mark Leach. After this except, Ben went on to talk about the time he and Israel spent talking hours at end over several days:

“As the combat troops continued moving forward with the tanks, support units arrived. The American soldiers came up and started telling us things in English. I spoke Polish and Yiddish (German, Hungarian and bits of other languages), but not a word of English. One of the guys came over, and I will never forget his name, Israel Friedman. And he said to me in Yiddish, “what is your name?” He was Jewish! I couldn’t believe it. I thought a great deal about the American soldiers, but I just never imagined that some of them were Jewish.

I blurted out, “Bendet, my name is Bendet”! He told that me that I was safe now. I was going to be okay. I sat down in the wet grass and utterly and completely stunned. Was this dream? My heart was filled with overflowing joy, but my head took a little while to catch up. For six long years I thought of one thing and one thing only, staying alive. Over and over, ever moment of every single day, I repeated the same thoughts: “Keep your eyes down. Keep your mouth shut. Keep working. Keep walking”

Then in a heartbeat it was over. The horror was over. I was free! I was free to look at the sky. I could look directly at people. I could look right into the eyes of this wonderful American soldier named Israel Friedman. I could do all this, and nobody was going to hit me in the chin with a rifle. Nobody was going to put a bullet in my head. It was a wonderful moment! My heart was singing, but my mind was spinning.

I sat and watched in amazement, as the Germans were loaded into trucks. They’d loaded my family onto trucks and now it was their turn. The American soldiers were firm ....but treated their prisoners with respect. The American soldiers treated us like kings!”

At the end of the email, Mr. Fainer’s daughter Sharon said she wanted to include a photo of Israel Friedman on the website she and her sisters set up to honor their father’s legacy and to continue his work in Holocaust education -- [www.hannahfound.org](http://www.hannahfound.org).

Attached to the email was a fuzzy, pixilated photo of Israel Friedman - my Dad - who was attached to the Army’s 120 Evac Unit, the first medical personnel to reach the Buchenwald Concentration Camp in April, 1945.

I knew my father had been at Buchenwald. He would talk about it if asked -- mostly to acknowledge how unprepared his unit was to deal with this kind of medical crisis.



He never, ever, claimed any heroism or personal accomplishment. But this was different. And it was very personal. My Dad had run into a specific young man, who had a name, Bendet (Ben) Fainer, who was interred for 6 long years in, as it turned out, no less than 5 different concentration camps. Ben’s initial imprisonment at 9 years old came within a week of Hitler’s invasion of Poland

which ignited World War II, and wasn't liberated until a couple of weeks before Hitler's suicide, which effectively ended the war in Europe.

And, because of my Dad's ability to speak Yiddish, he gave comfort to a young man damaged by surviving almost half his life in unspeakable horror. A young man who lost his mother, two brothers, and a sister in other Concentration Camps. Later, as an elderly gent, Mr. Fainer was persuaded to document his personal tragedy through his book and lecture into living testimony about the Holocaust.

And after 60 years of silence to recall his time and a Yiddish conversation with my own father! For our whole lives my brother and I always assumed that the only reason my parents occasionally spoke Yiddish was to keep secrets from our childhood ears. Now I learned that through that skill my father offered to young Ben the comfort and reassurance he so desperately needed. And through that skill, Ben's story apparently so touched my Dad that he offered to adopt Ben in order to bring him to America. My brother and I never knew any of this.

The fact that Mr. Fainer and my father's lives intersected at that moment 74 years ago has overwhelmed me and my wife since Thanksgiving. In his book Mr. Fainer writes, "I've recently been trying very hard to track down Israel's family. I'd love to learn more about him and tell his family members all he did for me. I'd love to talk with his children, to introduce myself as the adopted brother they almost had!"

Through the diligence of Ben's children, Sharon and Sandy in tracking me down, 74 years later, I guess Ben's wishes have been met.

Ours was not a religious household. Neither my brother nor I had a Bar Mitzvah. Neither did my father and, if I remember correctly, neither did his father. Of course we knew our Jewish cultural connection and I've always been proud of it. We Jews just can't shake our ancestry – and we shouldn't. Now, I also have a strong personal connection with the Holocaust itself.

As for my father, Israel Friedman, I always knew he was a good man and a wonderful father. But, this is like learning one of your parent's had an entire secret life that we knew nothing about. I've always been proud of him, but never more than now. I wish he, or my mother, or my brother, or our daughter, were still alive to share this experience.



Over the last month I've exchanged a number of emails with Ben's children. When emailing, we sign off by acknowledging how pleased we are to learn that we each have discovered new almost "relatives" and that we've become something different than mere casual acquaintances.

But, all this is really about Bendet (Ben) Fainer, his lost and living family, and all the other victims and survivors of the Holocaust and their families. The important lesson of this dreadful period in our human history is the disastrous consequences of hatred and intolerance – and the courage, loss and survival of so many innocents.

## Upcoming Programs

In early May, we are traveling to Oklahoma, where 600 middle and high school students will hear hidden child survivor Rachael Miller's testimony and Ben Fainer's story told by his daughter Sharon Berry.

We are planning another program with the St. Louis County Library -- Details to follow.

We are cataloging records and artifacts of Ben Fainer's, and his families' lives in Bedzin Poland, and Ben's imprisonment during the Holocaust.

You can support our efforts by making a donation below or by shopping at [Smile.Amazon.com](https://www.smile.amazon.com).

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If your school or organization would like to schedule a Holocaust Educational Program, Please Call or Email Us.



541 Byers Road  
Chester Springs, PA 19425

484-944-4017  
[info@hannahfound.org](mailto:info@hannahfound.org)  
[www.hannahfound.org](http://www.hannahfound.org)

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