

Sharing histories of the Holocaust

By [Cindy Cantrell](#)

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Looking back, Newton resident **Danny Mandeau** said, his 79-year-old mother's early years were remarkably similar to those of **Anne Frank**. Born in Germany, **Eva Mandeau** fled from the Nazis with her family to Holland. After being captured, she was transported to the Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen concentration camps.

The difference, however, was that Eva Mandeau survived.

While Danny Mandeau has always been aware that his mother lived through the Holocaust, it was never a focal point of discussion at home. It wasn't until he heard the stories of other Holocaust survivors and their children and grandchildren who attend Temple Emanuel in Newton that he felt the impact of his family's history — and the obligation to record it for future generations.



David Greenfield
Temple Emanuel in Newton will honor its Holocaust survivors in a special ceremony April 12.

“The word I’ve heard survivors use over and over again is ‘fortitude’ — what it took for them to make it through,” Mandeau said. “It’s been such a powerful experience to hear so many perspectives from so many individuals.”

As chairman of Temple Emanuel’s Holocaust memorial committee, Mandeau and vice chairmen **David Greenfield** and **Dennis Buchenholz** of Newton have been assisting congregation members in communicating the impact of the Holocaust on their lives through a documentary and book. The project is part of the temple’s Yom HaShoah (Holocaust) commemoration, “Passing the Legacy of Shoah Remembrance L’Dor V’Dor — from Generation to Generation.”

The public commemoration ceremony will be held at 7 p.m. April 12 in the Rabbi Chiel Sanctuary at the temple, 385 Ward St. in Newton Centre.

According to Greenfield, past commemoration events have typically featured guest speakers and a candle lighting ceremony involving the temple’s few remaining Holocaust survivors. As the survivors have entered their 80s and 90s, however, the force of their voices has diminished. So last year, a different kind of program was held, celebrating instead the temple’s 30th anniversary of receiving a Torah hidden from the Nazis by the Jewish community of Dvur Kralove in the former Czechoslovakia.

Following that success, former Holocaust memorial committee chairman **Alan Edelstein** suggested that Greenfield and Buchenholz may want to share their own experiences as children of Holocaust survivors at a future event. “That got us to thinking,” Greenfield said, “that we probably weren’t alone.”

In November, the committee sent e-mails and letters to all 1,100 families in the congregation, seeking members with direct connections to the Holocaust. Nearly 80 people came forward, including Tufts University president **Lawrence Bacow** and **Erik Goldhagen**, whose father, **Daniel**, wrote “Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust.”

“We were stunned,” said Greenfield, who has been on the committee for more than 30 years. “We thought, ‘Where have these people been?’, when in reality they’ve been sitting next to us the whole time.”

Next week’s event, to be held on the fifth day of Passover, will continue the tradition of honoring Holocaust survivors through a multigenerational candle-lighting ceremony. Narratives by 32 temple members will be shown in a 20-minute documentary produced by **Naomi Raiselle** of Watertown-based Generations Cinemastories and scored by renowned jazz musician **Bo Winiker**. The committee’s book, containing 25 vignettes from individuals who preferred to write about their experiences, will also be distributed.

Greenfield said he chose to write his family’s story out of concern that he wouldn’t be able to adequately convey all the information — or, possibly, hold his emotions in check — during a videotaped interview. His contribution to the book describes the journey of his parents, **Joseph** and **Rachele Greenfield**, who were both raised in Poland but met after the war in a refugee camp in Austria.

He writes, “There was never a time I did not know of or feel the Shoah. Holocaust denial or revisionism was not in my vocabulary. What I did absorb as I navigated adulthood and parenthood was a profound awe of how my parents were able to start over and carry on after falling into and climbing out of the abyss of their youth.”

While Greenfield’s experience isn’t unique, there are many other examples of families who rarely, if ever, mentioned the Holocaust. One 49-year-old woman in the film only learned after her father’s death that he had been a survivor.

“With each passing year, we lose more eyewitnesses to history. It’s more important now than ever for us to pass the torch, so that the Holocaust continues to have relevance for future generations,” Mandeau said.

“For myself, I wonder, am I impacting my kids? Am I doing my due diligence? All you can do is pass on the foundation built by the men and women before us and hope they understand it.”

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