



Not like Sheep to the Slaughter: Vengeance or Justice?

with Michael and Bonnie Bart

March 14, 2018

1 hour, 39 minutes, 54 seconds

Speakers: Michael and Bonnie Bart

Transcribed by: Rachel E Lieu

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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Not like Sheep to the Slaughter: Vengeance or Justice? – with Michael and Bonnie Bart (2018)
Holocaust Living History Workshop

Time	Transcription	Slide Transcription
00:00	[The Library UC San Diego]	
00:05	[Not like Sheep to the Slaughter: Vengeance or Justice? – with Michael and Bonnie Bart]	
00:07	Susanne Hillman: I would like to welcome everybody to today's Holocaust Living History Workshop. As many of you know, the Holocaust Living History Workshop is an education and outreach program supported by the UC San Diego Library and the Jewish Studies Program, and I am Susanne Hillman the project manager. Today's event is overshadowed by two recent deaths; in the past 10 days, Agathe Erenfried and Gussie Zaks passed away. Both were early and enthusiastic participants in the Holocaust Workshop and I will certainly remember them. They played a key role in local Holocaust education. Their passing, I think, highlights the importance of the kind of work that our presenters are doing - Michael and Bonnie Bart.	
00:53	Susanne Hillman: It so happened that Gussie was the very first Holocaust survivor whom I invited to share her experience at the workshop, but it was Agathe, or Agi as her friends and family called her, whom I got to know more closely over the years. On several occasions, Agi spoke about her harrowing experiences here on campus, and she was strongly invested in combating prejudice and bigotry. I am very grateful for everything she has done for the Holocaust Workshop and the San Diego community. My gratitude, of course, extends to her daughter Judi Gottschalk, the sponsor of today's event. Without her generosity, we could not continue to offer a high-quality program that strives to be educational as well as meaningful in a world	

that continues to be torn by dissent and hatred. So please join me in acknowledging Judi's unstinting support for our Workshop.

- 01:57 Judi Gottschalk: Thank you so much for coming tonight, really appreciate your participation. As it turns out, tonight is becoming a confluence of my past, present, maybe my future. It's my honor and duty to sponsor tonight in my parent's memory, Berek and Agathe Ehrenfried. As Susanne spoke so eloquently about my mother, she was an inspiration to me in so many ways, and I learned so many lessons from her. And I'm going to just start with just a little bit about her and then I will move to introduce wonderful Mike and Bonnie. This is from my brother's eulogy, so forgive me if any of you were at the funeral. The Holocaust was an indelible part of her being. It kept a low profile as myself and my brother grew up, but she could no more escape its searing impact on her than she could crawl out of her skin.
- 02:53 Judi Gottschalk: Rather than be bitter or consumed by anger and horrendous memories, she turned them into raw determination and a vehicle for teaching others. She taught me and my brother, it's my brother and I, the importance of tolerance, of being Jewish, and courageous, and having the passion to make a difference in the world. She wrote and gave talks to thousands of high school and college students, and others, and she talked about her experiences certainly, but more importantly about what we should learn from them, about appreciating and protecting our rights and freedoms, caring for others, never underestimating the insidiousness of people, and the forces that could harm us, and speaking truth to power.
- 03:40 Judi Gottschalk: So tonight, it is not about my mother but it is about our speakers Bonnie and Michael Bart, who emulate what

my mother believed in. So it's so fitting that they are here tonight. When I met with Michael and Bonnie to talk to them, Michael - interestingly enough we all grew up in San Diego - and he knew my husband who passed away in 2011, and he remembered playing basketball with Bob at the JCC [Jewish Community Center] every day and considered him a good friend. And that was a surprise to me, and so that makes this even more meaningful. And Michael and Bonnie uh, chair, they've been, were chair people of Yom HaShoah for many years, and and took the leadership role in that. And they also included my mother in a beautiful remembrance about uh, liberation which included vignettes by Mike Zaks's wife, or a husband of uh, Gussie, who just passed away. So that's meaningful, and Lou Dunst who also uh, he and his family very, very supportive of this uh, of this effort. So sort of all a confluence of of things tonight.

04:56 Judi Gottschalk: So um, I want to start with Bonnie. I want to introduce Bonnie tonight, and then Michael. Um, Bonnie Bart is a producer of a just-completed eight-hour documentary film series titled, well it's right here, *Nekamah Freedom Fighters*. It's about the wartime experiences in Vilna, the Vilna ghetto, and with the Partisans of Vilna. She has produced several documentary film shorts. The one I just um, talked about, and many of her films, have been used for educational purposes, distributed to schools, distributed by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, to teachers attending Holocaust education conferences. What better purpose of her work but to teach about the Holocaust so that it never happens again, or anything like it. Um, she did produce the film that I talked about earlier, *Liberation 65 Years Later*.

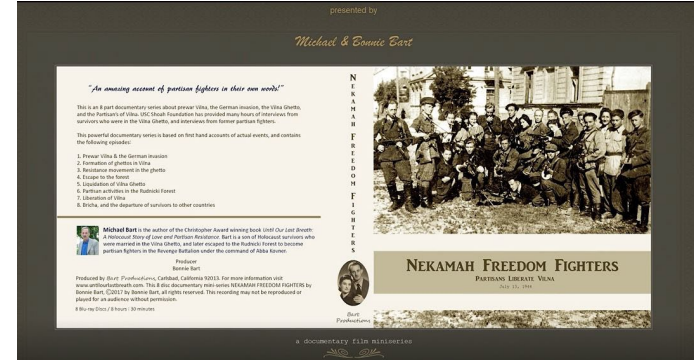
- 05:58 Judi Gottschalk: Um, I have to tell you a funny story about that. There was a piece of that, my mother was in it and it was her Shoah tape that Bonnie had used part of it. So my friend was sitting in the audience with two other ladies, and my mother is on talking in the film, and one of the ladies turns to the other ladies and says, that's Agi. She's had a lot of work done. And she had, but she was beautiful. Anyway, this film was introduced by Dr. Stephen Smith, Executive Director of the USC [University of Southern California] Shoah Foundation. So Bonnie's work goes far and wide. She has worked at the UCSD [University of California, San Diego] Library viewing and selecting survivor interviews from the USC Shoah Archive. Many of you may know that here at UCSD they have a very large library of survivor interviews, and I think most people can have access to them, and that's what makes this program so incredible.
- 07:06 Judi Gottschalk: She's provided the USC Shoah with many hours of, of her interviews, who were in the Vilna ghetto, and the former member of the Partisans of Vilna, Vilna. She got her idea of making the Vilna documentary film series while in attendance at the Christopher Awards ceremony in 2009. Her husband Michael, which we're going to talk about in a minute, graciously introduced and presented his Christopher Award by Rebecca Eaton, the Executive Producer PBS's [Public Broadcasting Station] Masterpiece Theater. So we have, great things I think are in store for Bonnie in the future with her film talent, and supporting this project.
- 07:50 Judi Gottschalk: So now I come to Michael. Michael Bart, he's right here in front. Michael is the multi-award-winning author of *Until Our Last Breath: A Holocaust Story of Love and Partisan Resistance*, published by St. Martin's Press in May 2008. He is

the son of Holocaust survivors. His parents were prisoners in the Vilna ghetto, where they met and married by the last remaining rabbi in May of 1943. They escaped the ghetto with a group of underground resistance members eight days prior to liquidation and walked all night to the Rudniki Forest. They became members of the Partisans of Vilna with the Avengers Group, under the command of Abba Kovner, and you're going to hear a lot more about that.

08:42 Judi Gottschalk: He was honored with this Christopher Award for his book, and I hope some of you will ask him more questions about that. Previous Christopher Award winners include Steven Spielberg, for *Schindler's List*, and Elie Wiesel, in the adult book category. So we really are among greatness here tonight and we so appreciate that he came, and with Bonnie. He's had dozens of author events through 2008, [200]9 and [20]10, and he was invited in 2008 to the Holocaust Memorial Museum in [Washington] DC for the author's book signing event. And I think I was there in that year. He is also known - he has San Diego roots - and he is known for his long-time position as chair of the Community Holocaust Commemoration. He worked tirelessly for seven years to make sure that event was what it deserved to be, the honor and memory of these incredible people who who survived so much. So I will stop and give you Michael and Bonnie, and again thank you so much for coming. This program is incredible. This is why I do this. It's such important work. Thank you.

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10:07 Michael Bart: Let me kind of tell you the format today. It's going to be very different than what I'm used to. When I was traveling around the US [United States] on book tour it, I was pretty much just kind of doing my thing, Bonnie would, is doing all the technology for me. Today we're connecting two projects and so this hopefully will be a much different and interesting program. But let me first start, start off by thanking you UCSD Professor Susanne Hillman. This amazing program is something that's just so important. I, I have - and I'll tell you about it as we get further along - kind of been on a self-imposed retirement for the last six years, and we'll talk about that, how and why. But, and I've turned down speaking events all around the US [United States]. This is the first program that I have agreed to be involved within six years because of the greatest respect I have for Susanne and this program, flat out. Um okay, Bonnie sets me up in the technology here.



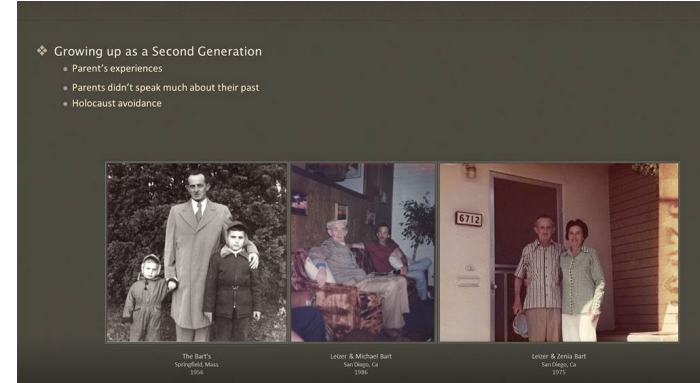
This is an eight-part documentary series about prewar Vilna, the German invasion, the Vilna Ghetto, and the Partisan's of Vilna. USC Shoah Foundation has provided many hours of interviews from survivors who were in the Vilna Ghetto, and interviews from former partisan fighters. This powerful documentary series is based on first hand accounts of actual events, and contains the following episodes.

1. Prewar Vilna & the German invasion
2. Formation of the ghettos in Vilna
3. Resistance movement in the ghetto
4. Escape to the forest
5. Liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto
6. Partisan activities in the Rudnicki Forest
7. Liberation of Vilna
8. Bricha, and the departure of the survivors to other countries

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11:22 Michael Bart: Let me kind of explain to you a little bit about my background. Both, of course, my parents were Holocaust survivors. They were in the Vilna ghetto. They were prisoners and they escaped. The thing about, most people realize when you grow up with a parent who's a Holocaust survivor, you either hear their pain or you feel their pain. If they are, if they talk a lot about it, you hear their pain. If they don't, you feel their pain. And so for me, the thing that had the biggest impact on my life happened before I was born. Because of the Holocaust, I never had grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins. They were all killed. My father lost every member of his family. I've never seen a photo of a member of my dad's family. My mother lost every relative she had except for one cousin who ended up in Israel. Fortunately for her, she had a couple of uncles who came to the US [United States] in the [19]20s, so she did have family. For me, the Holocaust was very difficult, and that's because number one, you saw the pain that your parents had. You knew the impact it had on you, and that you were different.

12:29 Michael Bart: And what I mean by different was, I wasn't just Mike Bart, nice guy, likes playing basketball, the end of the narrative was - his parents are Holocaust survivors. So people knew you were different than everybody else. So I made, at the time when I was going away to college, and I think [19]70, [19]71, I made a decision. I was going to change my narrative, and I was going to be, I was going to tell nobody my parents were survivors. I was going to, I was going to have all new friends. All my college friends, I was just gonna be Mike Bart, likes sports and he's a good guy. And that worked for me for 25 years. Two years before my dad passed away in [19]96, my mom sat down with me and she said, there's a lot about our



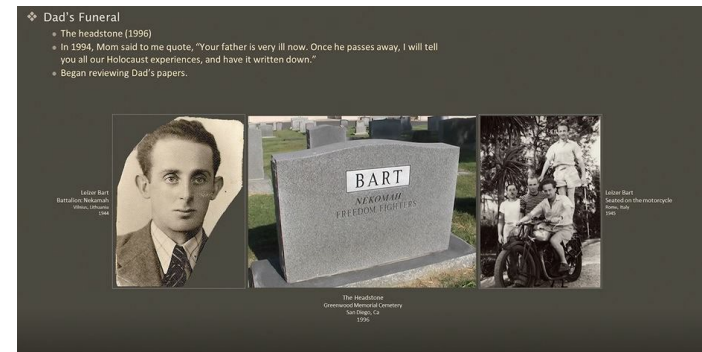
Growing up as a Second Generation

- Parent's experiences
- Parents didn't speak much about their past
- Holocaust avoidance

experience we haven't told you but your dad is too ill. Sometime in the future, I will tell you everything, and then we need to get it all written down. And I still wasn't really ready to jump into the Holocaust.

13:37 Michael Bart: So fast forward, my dad's funeral 1996, and there was a lot of people at the funeral - some I knew, some I had heard of, many I didn't because all the members of the New Life Club were there. And I was in a situation where I was talking to somebody straight on, my mother was right here and somebody came up from the side of me, and he he didn't identify himself. He said, Michael, you need to inscribe Nekamah Freedom Fighters on your parents' gravestone. And I remember thinking, what the hell is he talking about? And I looked over and didn't recognize him. He had a kind of a distinct hat on and then um, I said, excuse me? Could you repeat that? And he goes, Nekamah Freedom Fighters, inscribe it on your parents' gravestone. And I'm thinking like, what is going on? And my mom started talking to me, and I was kind of focused on my mom because she was showing early signs of Alzheimer's. And so I was trying to keep an eye on my mom, and by the time I dealt with my mom and I turned over, he was gone in a crowd of mourners.

14:47 Michael Bart: And frankly, I had no idea what he was talking about. So I go up to my parents' rabbi, Rabbi Rosenthal from Tifereth and I said, Len, have you ever heard of a Nekamah Freedom Fighter? And he said to me, he goes, no I have not, but *nekamah* is Hebrew for revenge. And I knew right away what he was talking about because the two aspects of my parents' Holocaust experience that they talked about a lot - my dad talked about his experience as a member of the Partisans of



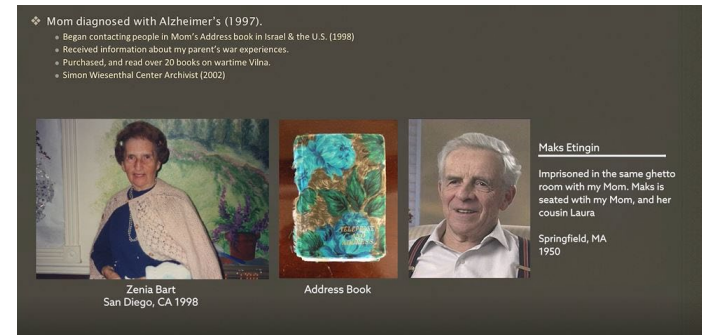
Dad's Funeral

- The headstone (1996)
- In 1994, Mom said to me quote “Your father is very ill now. Once he passes away, I will tell you all our Holocaust experience, and have it written down.”
- Began to review Dad’s papers.

Vilna, under the command of Abba Kovner, who they called our commander. And my mom talked about being born and raised in Vilnius, Lithuania today, then called Vilna, because she was proud of her heritage and her, but those are the only things that they talked about. But when he said Nekamah Freedom Fighters and then Rabbi Rosenthal said revenge, I knew where this was going.

15:46 Michael Bart: So, I go back to my mom's house and I started looking through my dad's papers. And you know, that's one of the the painful things. What you do is, when you, you lose a parent to go through their papers because you're reliving their history, and you're feeling their history. And I found a lot of papers that showed that Nekamah was the name of the revenge group that, under Abba Kovner, where my parents were in the group. Now one of the things that I did was I, I felt a responsibility to, because my mom was recently then diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and she was getting worse, and I felt a responsibility to share my uh, you know, what, get a hold of the people that they've been in touch with, and let them know my father died, my mother's got Alzheimer's. I don't expect she's going to be in contact in the future. So I grabbed her old address book and I then started calling everybody in there, telling about my dad. Little by little they were telling me a lot of information about my parents' experiences.

16:57 Michael Bart: Some of them were from Europe, some from the East Coast, and the more I knew, the more they would tell me. Because if you didn't know a lot, they weren't sure if your parents preferred it. And so, I still wasn't ready to jump into anything to do with the Holocaust because it was still very painful for me. But I was kind of slowly getting used to what was



Mom diagnosed with Alzheimer's (1997).

- Began contacting people in Mom's address book in Israel & the US (1998)
- Received information about my parent's war experiences.
- Purchased, and read over 20 books on wartime Vilna.
- Simon Wiesenthal Center Archivist (2002)

going on, and I felt a little bit more of a responsibility and um, so as I started getting information then I bought every book that I could find on the Vilna ghetto and the partisans. I read over 20. And this is from somebody who really didn't even want to tell anybody in college his parents were survivors. I remember when *Schindler's List* was out - and it's ironic, I won the same award he won - but when *Schindler's List* was out a friend of mine wanted to go see it. She didn't know that my parents were survivors, and I said, no, I don't do Holocaust films. And you know and then she said, that's kind of strange. And I go, that's what it is.

17:57 Michael Bart: So, a short time later, I had gone over to uh to the Simon Wiesenthal Center up in Los Angeles because I had got a hold of the archivist who told me that we had just got a lot of stuff from somebody with similar experiences to your parents from Vilna and if you want to look through the papers, and see if there's anything you'll look for. And she was nice, she spent, you know, a few hours with us. Well, what happened was, we got to the last box. We had been there two hours. I didn't find anything that I wanted to see, or that would help me in my little adventure. And she said, you know I got one more box. If you want, I'll get it. And then before I can answer Bonnie says, of course, we'll see it.

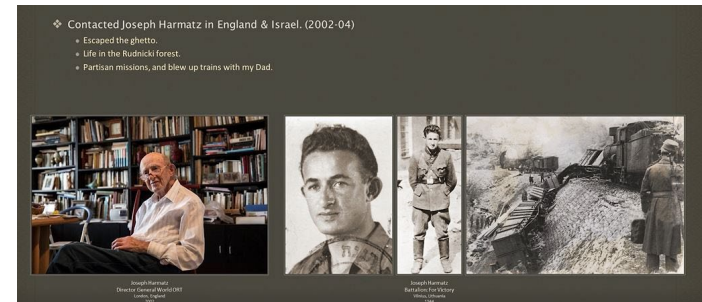
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18:45 Michael Bart: And so she pulls out this box, and we're looking at photos and documents, and I get to this photo on the bottom of the box. And the first thing is, I recognize the gentleman in the middle. That's Abba Kovner. In the US [United States] many people know who he is; in Israel, he's revered but you Google Abba Kovner but that was my parents' uh commander, and then I look to the right and I see my mother and father holding rifles. So I, I, I was keep getting these signs of maybe I should continue when somebody goes up to me at a funeral when I find this photo. So then here's what happened.



Simon Wiesenthal Center / Los Angeles, CA / 2002
Partisans of Vilna a day after the city's liberation /
July 14, 1944

19:31 Michael Bart: There is an organization throughout the world; it's called World ORT [Organization for Rehabilitation through Training]. It is, I believe and I could probably be corrected, the largest Jewish educational organization in the world. They, I know they're in a hundred cities, in many countries, and I found out this gentleman here to the left, named Joseph Harmatz, was the director general. He was, at the time, in London. Then he went to Israel. And what was interesting about him is, he was a member of the Partisans of Vilna. And I thought, well may, you know, I read, he had a book. I read his book. Maybe his book would have similar experiences, and there was. So I contacted the New York office, told him who I was. I'd like, you know if possible, to speak with them. Then I get a call back from them



Contacted Joseph Harmatz in England & Israel.
(2002-04)

- Escaped the ghetto.
- Life in Rudnicki forest.
- Partisan missions, and blew up trains with my Dad.

the next day with his phone number. He was staying in England and he wanted to speak to me.

20:21 Michael Bart: And what was interesting about him is, when I would speak to most of the survivors who would give me, you know, answer questions you ask them a question they give you an answer. They didn't give you a lot of detail and, you know, history is that, is in the detail often. And what was interesting about him was, he was an educator, and he didn't just answer questions. He would educate you. And what what was specifically interesting is, he went on many, many, many partisan missions with my, with my dad. And so he was my eye to what was going on, you know, in the past. But the first thing he explained to me that was interesting - and I'm fighting a little bit of a cold, so bear with me - what was interesting about me, about him, is he explained how and why they got out of the ghetto.

21:17 Michael Bart: The Jews who were imprisoned in the Vilna ghetto used to go to labor camps, to forced labor every day. But on September 1st, 1943 the Germans surrounded the ghetto and they weren't going on anymore, any more labor. They all knew there was trouble coming. So many of the members of the resistance, and there was a large resistance movement in the ghetto, a lot of them have been accumulating arms, started escaping in the middle of the night, and walking 25 miles to the Rudniki Forest. And I'm going to tell you about the forest in a minute. What was difficult and dangerous about that, the Germans would kill you if they saw you. The Poles and, the Lithuanians were living mainly in the city, the Poles on the outskirts.

- 22:04 Michael Bart: They were a combination of antisemitic or indifferent, but the Germans were incentivizing them by giving them money, giving them food, giving them whatever we want if you point out a Jew. And then the Germans would take the Jews kill them, and hang them, so everybody knew this is what's going to happen if you try to escape. Many members, over 200, escape from the ghetto and headed to the woods. Joseph was caught in the ghetto with about 80 members of the resistance on the last day when the Germans came in the ghetto to clear it out. So how did they get out? There, they got out through the sewer system. There's a large sewer system. It's probably about five foot high. They, 80 of them, crawled for six to eight hours through the sewers to get outside the ghetto, and then they walked to the Rudniki Forest.
- 23:00 Michael Bart: Now what's what's interesting about the Rudniki Forest is, many of the survivors call it the Rudniki jungle. And the reason is, it was 200 square miles. It was all swamps. And it was just, it was a primeval forest but there's no food source. And so, it was very difficult to get out there. Well, the first thing is, you got to get out there, and they had ultimately 300 - between three and 400 members of the Partisans of Vilna that got to the Rudniki Forest. Food and shelter were the biggest problems. The Russians were starting a partisan movement in that area. The Jews were coming, and coming quickly, but you - there's no food. There's no shelter. The Baltic winters are below zero. So the first thing they did is, they dug out, dug out underground bunkers. They lined them with young trees, and then they put branches on top. And that's basically, that was their shelter.
- 23:57 Michael Bart: Food, they would go to the smaller villages and see, with a little bit, whatever they could trade them with, and

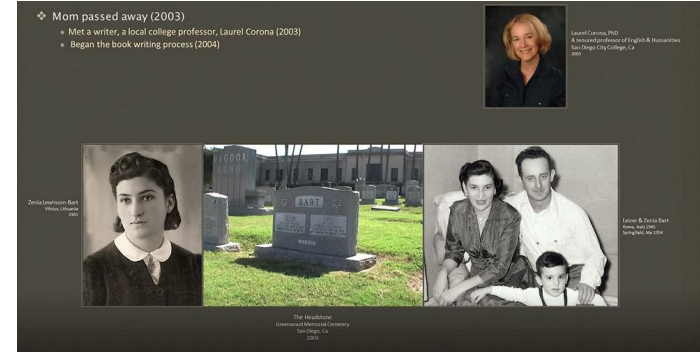
then eventually they had to flat out steal food. And, but initially, there wasn't, they weren't going to exactly do a big resistance against the Germans. So the first thing they did is, they had saws and they cut out all the telephone lines on the outskirts of the Rudniki Forest. Now what made that interesting - the Rudniki Forest, on the outskirts of it was the East-West train line going between Central Europe and the Eastern Front. So the German army group north, that was fighting in - then Leningrad, today St. Petersburg - was getting all their troops, all their fuel, and all their supplies on the Grodno train line going right outside the Rudniki Forest.

24:48 Michael Bart: So the first thing the partisans did is they went out there and they cut all the telephone communication lines, to cut off all communication. Then, then they started splitting rail lines, so that way they could derail trains. When that started happening Moscow gave the Russian partisans orders to not only train the Jews how to blow up trains, they also gave them heavy equipment, are, you know, heavy arms. And so, the difference between a Russian partisan and a Jewish partisan is, a Russian partisan - they weren't going to take major chances because they wanted to go home to their family. The Jews, they were young, they were - he called them reckless because he said, we didn't know any better - but they were fighting for the honor of of their family, and the Jewish people. And they were going to, they figured, they were all going to die, and approximately a third of the partisans died during the period that they were at.

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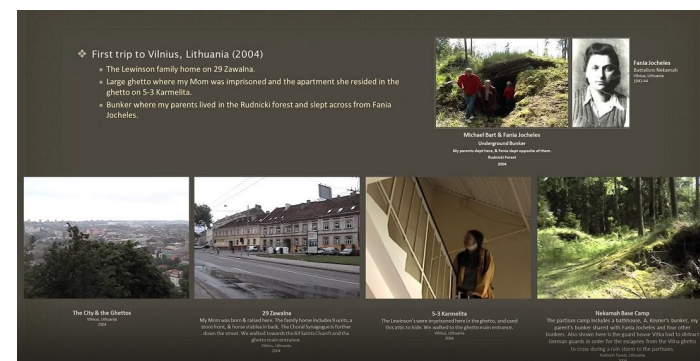
25:49 Michael Bart: Um, my mom passed away in 2003, and um it, that was sort of painful because when you lose the second parent, you feel the first parent even more. And, you know, Judi and I were talking earlier, you know, her beloved mom just passed away, and when the second parent passes away you feel it, you feel the whole thing more. But ironically, shortly after we, we met a local college professor who was also doing contract writing for Lucent Books, writing educational books and so I agreed with, to get her involved in a project to help me write the book. Our roles were really clear. I would give her the information. She would get it in her head, then she would write it down. I would edit it, and send it to the publisher and so, you know, we we basically worked on it. And we had three literary agents that wanted to work with us, two in New York, one in, in California. We had multiple publishers that we were talking with, ultimately we got picked up by St. Martin's Press which is one of the largest publishers in the world. And people say, when you know, they're part of the Macmillan group. It's sort of like applying for college and getting accepted in one of the best schools in the country.

27:10 Michael Bart: Well, what happened is Laurel, my, the co-author, she said, I need to, in order to really effectively write something, I need to see it. So we went on a trip to Vilnius, Lithuania, the three of us, Bonnie, myself, and Laurel. First thing we did, we looked at the old ghetto, to see the remains of it. We looked at where my family - my mom's family was very wealthy. They owned a lot of property. We saw their properties, and we had a very - I don't know what's a good word for, to describe her. She didn't never took no for an answer for a guide and interpreter, and so she was getting us in places you couldn't imagine. But



Mom passed away (2003)

- Met a writer, a local college professor, Laurel Carona (2003)
- Began the book writing process (2004)



First trip to Vilnius, Lithuania (2004)

what I said to her is, what would be the most special thing, is if we could somehow get out to the woods where the partisans were. And she said to me that, you know, after the War, the Soviet Unions put some roads in there because they wanted to memorialize where all the partisans were. And so, but it had been many years, and the area was in disrepair. But she found a driver who was willing to take us wherever we needed to go. And she found a little partisan, her name was Fania [Jocheles] who not only lived across the street from my mother growing up, she was a distant cousin, but she shared the same dugout bunker with my mom and dad for a whole year while they were living in the Rudnicki Forest.

- The Lewison family home on 29 Zawalna.
- Large ghetto where my mom was imprisoned and the apartment she resided in the ghetto on 5-3 Karmelita.
- Bunker where my parents lived in the Rudnicki forest and slept across from Fania Jocheles.

28:37 Michael Bart: She took us out there and showed us the forest and so, it was the fir, the trip was overwhelming for Bonnie and I. There was so much to take in that it was just nearly impossible. So what happened was Bonnie and I decided, we were going to go back on our own - just Bonnie and I - and we wanted to get a little bit more history, and Bonnie wanted to do a lot of filming. And I had been in touch with Joe Harmatz the, the gentleman who I talked about, from World ORT, all the time. We would talk because he retired, and he had a lot of free time, and he loved to educate. That's what, he's an educator, and so we had been talking all the time. He knew we went to our first trip to Vilna. I didn't tell him we were going on the second trip, and the reason for it is because he'd just had quadruple bypass surgery. And the way I left it with him is, when he's recovered and feeling better he'll call me, and I didn't want to tell him to put strain on him.



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29:37 Michael Bart: So Bonnie and I are in the old ghetto, walking through on our second trip, and I hear a voice that was really distinctive, and I got closer. He was giving a tour group a tour of the old ghetto, and I hear, and I get closer. And I yell, Bonnie come here, and she's waving me off because she's filming. And then I get closer, and I hear. And I go, Bonnie, you got to come here now. And then she came over and I went up to this, the tour guide, I thought, and I said, Joseph? And he goes, yes? And I go, do I look familiar to you? And he goes, no. And I go, I speak with you in Israel all the time. And then every person in his tour group turned toward me, to see who is this crazy person. And then I said, I'm Michael Bart. The first thing he said, you look exactly like your dad.

30:33 Michael Bart: Then he just got emotional; I had to hold him up. Because what is the probability of me going 8,000 miles on a trip, walking through the old Jewish ghetto with somebody who, not only used to go on partisan missions with my dad - and one of the things that he told me that I'll never forget. He said to me that the most important thing in his life is his family. The second most important thing is his, his feeling about what he did to stop the Nazi war effort because, he was telling me on the partisan missions, and he, he said, that he and my dad would go on one every five days, and they were successful about half the time, and the Russians taught them how to blow up trains. But he goes, we would set mines on the trains with - it took about, to get from the Rudnicki Forest, their camp, it took about five hours of walking because they went in so deep in the forest where all the swamps were that the Germans couldn't get them.

31:37 Michael Bart: They would blow up trains and then they would go to the edge of the forest. They'd pull out a cigarette and wait to



Second trip to Vilnius, Lithuania (2005)

- My chance meeting with Joseph Hartzl!

see what happens next. And I go, what does that mean? He goes, if there was a lot of smoke you got a fuel train. If there was a lot of secondary, excuse me, if there was a lot of secondary explosions, you got a an ammunition train. And then if there's a lot of gunfire, you got a troop train, and run like hell. And so, he said, he, when he was telling me that, he was putting me on the ground where I could kind of feel their experience. And they basically - when you see Bonnie's trailer, by the way, we're going to be showing a trailer a little bit later - basically it's in the eyes of the people who experienced it, and you'll hear about a lot of the train missions. So the second thing on this trip, we went back to the forest. There was another partisan who was visiting there, and they'd come from Israel, named Motl Gurwitz and he was also a partisan who went on a lot of missions with my dad. So it was a little overwhelming.

32:37 Michael Bart: So now, some of this stuff is going to be, I'm going to tell some powerful stuff and some funny stuff. Gussie [Zaks], you know, I had known 50 years, and I grew up with her kids. And so Gussie's loss is personal and painful for me but I got to tell you a funny Gussie story. And you know, my dad always said in life when things are lousy you either laugh or cry. Well, I'll tell you something to laugh about. So, come back from our second trip to Vilna and I tell Bonnie I'm craving deli food, and so, let's go to DZ Aikens. And so, I sit down at the table at DZ Aikens, and who's right behind me? Gussie and Mike Zaks. Now Gussie I've known for 50 years, or 40 years at the time, maybe 50. Mike had met my father in Europe before the war, so there's a personal connection with Mike and I, even more so than Gussie. So Gussie says to me - I told her we came back on a second trip; we're working on a book about my parents'



Holocaust Commemoration Committee with Mike Zaks & his wife, New Life Club President Gussie (2005)

- To my surprise, appointed Chair for 2006!

experiences - and she says, would you be, you know, we have the Holocaust commemoration the Yom HaShoah. Would you be willing to come to a meeting sometime and maybe you have some ideas that can help us?

33:49 Michael Bart: And I thought, I'm busy. And I go, I don't really have time. But you know, I, I, how do you say no? I could say no to Gussie, but I could never say no to Mike because Mike has a connection with my dad. And I go, okay I'll come to a meeting, and I will attend, and if I have an idea I'll let you know. But I'm not sure, you know that, anyway I go to a meeting, and this is the funniest story. So, go to this meeting at the JCC. There's about probably 15 people there. I didn't know one person except a couple of survivors. Gussie stands up - and I'm going to imitate Gussie because I do an excellent Gussie imitation. That's where instead of laughing or crying, we're going to laugh. She goes, I want everybody to meet Michael Bart. Michael's mother and father, they're dear friends of mine and he's a wonderful boy. We would like him to quote, become the chair of this program, take over the entire event, and be in charge of the committee. And the first thing I, when I heard that, I thought there's another Michael in the room. She's not talking about me. That's crazy, you know.

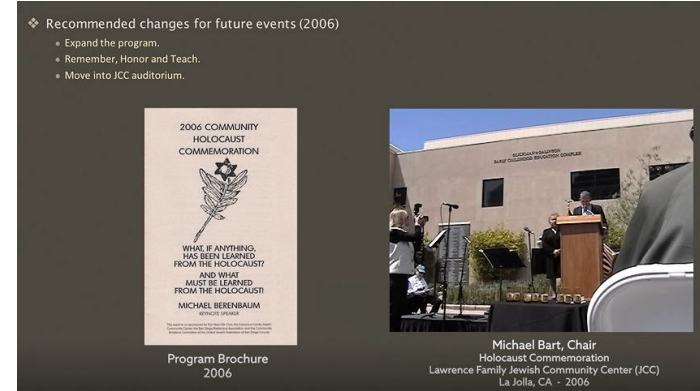
34:57 Michael Bart: And the second thought is, I thought maybe if I run for the door will anybody notice? And so I, you know there's a word in Yiddish, I had the biggest case of *shpilkes*, where I'm just going like this, thinking how the hell am I going to do this. So all of a sudden the hand comes and grabs me here, and it was Mike Zaks. And then he said, Michael, we need your help. So at the end of the meeting, after it was over, now everybody in the meeting, nobody knew who I was. They're all staring at me like,

who is this crazy person? Is he Jewish? I mean, they, they didn't know. I wasn't really active in the Jewish community and, you know, some of the looks that I got were precious. But anyway, so we exchanged phone numbers and emails with the members of the committee and then Gussie and Mike approached me. And Mike said, are you okay? And I go, well it's not exactly what I expected. And he goes, but if we told you what we were planning, you wouldn't have showed up. And I go, you're right, I wouldn't have. So I said, what, what do you, what's the deal? And he goes, the deal is we need, we know we need to make changes in the program. We know we're getting older and we'd rather have it come from the second generation, and we know you. And I said, okay, I'll try it for a year, and if I can help, we'll see. We'll talk after that.

36:16 Michael Bart: So basically I, I went to my first committee meeting and I, first thing I said is, eighty percent of the people come into this program are either survivors, or kids, or grandkids. It was held outdoors. I would say there might have been 300 people coming, maybe 250, 300 each year. The Holocaust garden at the JCC is actually beautiful, and there's a big wall with all the survivors' names on it, including my parents. So for them, they like to be out there. What I said to them is, number one we need to make this more of a community program. This was a New Life Club program. The community was invited you know every, anything other than that was was not telling the truth. You need to make this a program where this is for the community to honor the members of the New Life Club and to, but open it up, and really at make it more. And they agreed to do that, number one.

Not like Sheep to the Slaughter: Vengeance or Justice? – with Michael and Bonnie Bart (2018)
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37:13 Michael Bart: Number two, I said, you need to be more aggressive in advertising this program, getting the word out. Um all right, Bonnie gave me a look. So I thought maybe - I didn't hit the button that was supposed to hit - um, but basically I wanted to make it to where, and also it was a memorial service, give it a theme every year, make it educational. So in the first year, I went to the committee and I said, I'd like to see, I heard he's living in LA [Los Angeles], Michael Berenbaum, Dr. Michael Berenbaum. He was the project director who created the Holocaust Museum in [Washington] DC, and I heard he moved to LA [Los Angeles]. And so the reason I heard is I developed contacts at the Museum in Washington and somebody told me, and they gave me a number to contact him. So I call, got to hold of him, told him who I was. I said, I'd like for you, if you'd be willing, to come speak at our program. And he said I'll get back to you. And I went to my committee and Gussie - this is the famous Gussie, of the funniest Gussie line. When I said that I'm gonna try to get Michael Berenbaum she goes, you'll never get Michael Berenbaum. He'll never come to this program, and then I got Michael Berenbaum to come to the program, and we'd establish the theme about what we've learned from the Holocaust. I asked the survivors, I begged them, let's go indoors next year but they weren't ready to do that because they, they were so connected. And it, there we could go multimedia. We could have films. We could double, triple the size, more comfortable.



Recommended changes for future events (2006)

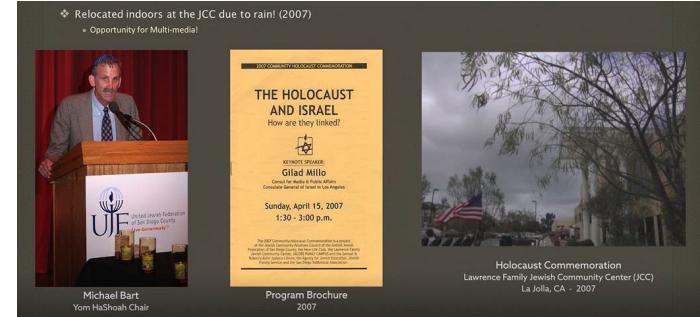
- Expand the program.
- Remember, Honor and Teach.
- Move into the JCC auditorium.

Not like Sheep to the Slaughter: Vengeance or Justice? – with Michael and Bonnie Bart (2018)
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38:50 Michael Bart: So next year we had a program where we got a representative from the Israeli Embassy coming to our program and we, but all of a sudden they say there's a chance of rain. And our violinists came up, and they walked by Gussie and myself and another one of the survivors and said, we need to go indoors. We don't play in the rain. So we all went indoors. Everybody loved it. The survivors loved it and then we basically pushed forward into making it a new, a theme every year where you educated. I came up with a line that I'm glad to see that they still use, remember, honor, teach. Remember the victims of the Holocaust, honor its survivors, and teach future generations.

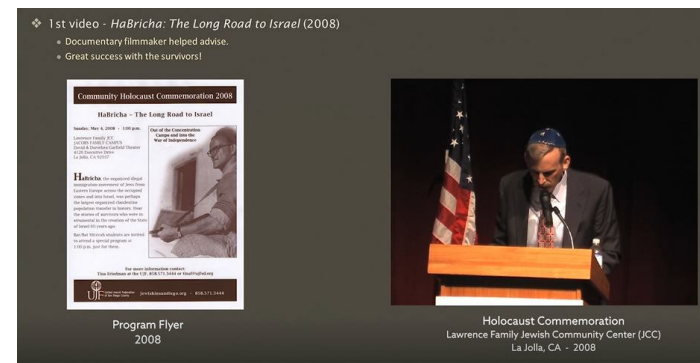
39:38 Michael Bart: So um, what happened is, this was the first year we were going to create a film. Bonnie had the luxury of some time where she went back to college to learn subjects and classes that she wanted to learn. One of them was technology and filmmaking. She offered to make a film and we came up with a theme called the Bricha, the, the Jewish Holocaust survivors going to Palestine. And so Bonnie worked on the film for a couple of months. Then we brought it to a committee meeting, and at the committee meeting, it was classic because nobody knew what the quality would be. We had a member of the committee who was a professional documentary filmmaker, Michael Flaster, and we thought oh, we're in trouble. And we also had the survivors. Are we going to please them? We showed the meeting and what happened is, Michael Flaster, the first thing he said is, this is really well done. And that was really good to hear for all, for all of us.

40:42 Michael Bart: Then um, one of the uh, one of the members of our committee who was, you know, a clock watcher said, is there a way we can maybe shorten it just a bit? Because the



Relocated indoors at the JCC due to rain! (2007)

- Opportunity for Multi-media!



1st video - *HaBricha: The Long Road to Israel* (2008)

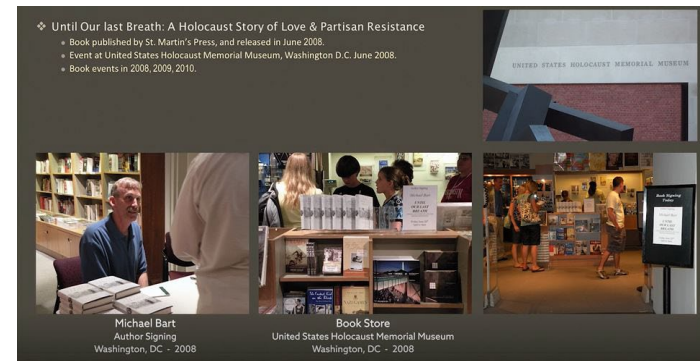
- Documentary filmmaker helped advise.
- Great success with the survivors!

Not like Sheep to the Slaughter: Vengeance or Justice? – with Michael and Bonnie Bart (2018)
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program might go over. And what happened is Michael Flaster then said, well the one person in there, his name is Moisha, if you cut him out you'll lose about five minutes, and Mike Zaks got so mad. He stood up. He went up to Michael Flaster. He pointed at him. He goes, don't you dare touch Moisha. And so, guess what? We didn't touch Moisha and we showed the film. The film was really, really well received. We had rabbis wanting copies for the synagogues. The federation wanted um - I recognize that handsome guy on the right because I think he's here. His nickname is handsome Ben Midler.

41:33 Michael Bart: But anyway, my book came out in 2008. The name of the book was *Until Our Last Breath*. The, the name came because Abba Kovner, in the Vilna ghetto on December 31, 1941, got members of the resistance together and gave a fiery speech. There was probably 150 members and said Hitler intends to kill all the Jews from Europe. We shall not go like sheep to the slaughter, we shall fight until our last breath. So we named that after Abba Kovner's line. Now I had developed relationships with people at the US [United States] Holocaust Museum and one of them said, when your book is, comes out from St. Martin's Press, have your publisher send us a galley copy, and we'll send it to the chief historian at the Museum. If he reads and approves of your book, we'll plan an event for you at the Museum. And you know, I was a little naive, I didn't understand a lot of this stuff. And so he, he loved the book. He approved it. So for the release of our book, we had a book signing at the Museum.

42:42 Michael Bart: So Bonnie and I, for those of you haven't been to the Museum, it's enormous, and thousands of people go there every year. It's unbelievable. So Bonnie and I are the type, we

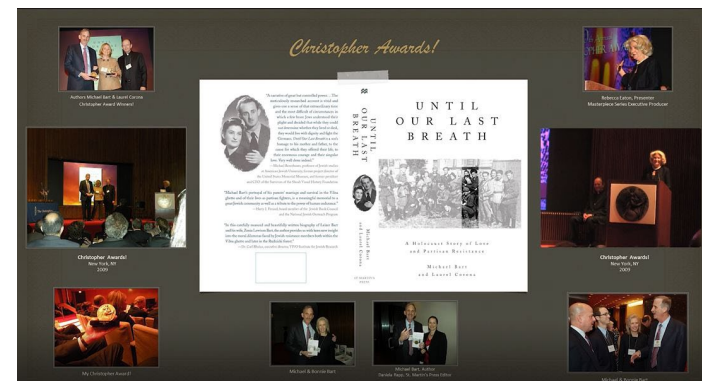


Until Our Last Breath: A Holocaust Story of Love & Partisan Resistance

- Book Published by St. Martin's Press, and released in June 2008.
- Event at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C. June 2008.
- Book events in 2008, 2009, 2010.

always show up an hour early for everything. And we show up an hour early and we see, we were told where to go, and there's a line of people. So we get in the back of the line and, I don't know any better, it's going nowhere. And then finally, I asked somebody in front of me who's a Catholic priest. I said, excuse me father, could you tell me um, you know, are you in line for something that's specific? He goes, yeah. There's a Holocaust author named Michael Bart who is going to be signing books, and we're in line this get a book signed. And then I turned to Bonnie and I said, we're in the wrong line. And then I turned back to him and I said, I hear he's a handsome fellow. Okay, shortly later, about an hour and a half later - and I remember his name was, it was Father Donovan - he goes through the line and they, they tell me what they want inscribed in the book and I, to Father Donovan. And I, I thought of, and I remember saying, please share this story, so we never forget. And then I go, best wishes Michael Bart. And he goes, thank you. And he goes, I'll share this. And he walks away. He turns; he goes, hey, by the way, he is a handsome fellow. So there's my Holocaust Museum.

43:58 Michael Bart: Okay, now this story gets kind of crazy, 2009 I get a call from my publisher at St. Martin's Press. And I had an amazing publisher, amazing editor and she said, I got some really good news for you. And I go, what's that? And she goes, your book won a Christopher Award. And I'm thinking, well who the hell is? I don't know who Christopher is. And I go, that's nice. Are you going to mail it to me? That's what I said to her. And she goes, now I don't think you understand. In our business a Christopher is huge. It's given by a Catholic organization for 60 years for books and film that affirm the highest value of the

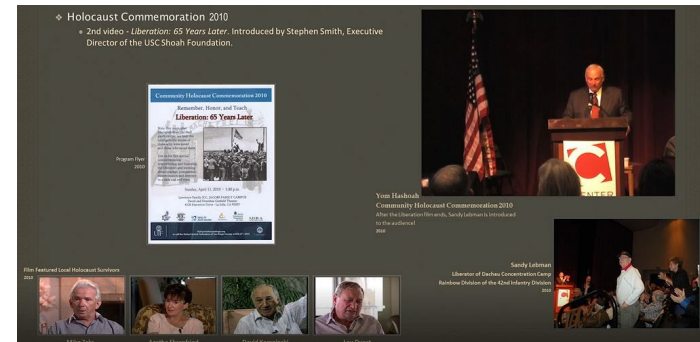


Not like Sheep to the Slaughter: Vengeance or Justice? – with Michael and Bonnie Bart (2018)
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human spirit. Steven Spielberg, like was mentioned, won it for *Schindler's List*, Elie Wiesel for *Night*.

44:44 Michael Bart: And then you know, the year that I won the Christopher, I was sitting next to Steve Lopez who won it for *The Soloist*, for his book, and then Clint Eastwood won it for his production of *The Changeling*. And so, when I went to the Christopher Award I wasn't going to go to the program because it was on a Thursday before our Sunday, our Sunday Yom HaShoah program and all the members of my committee really got on me and said you are going to go to your program. And so I went to it, and I was amazingly and graciously introduced by like she, like it was mentioned by Judi, Rebecca Eaton, the executive producer of Masterpiece Theater. At the end of her introduction to me, she said to everybody there, there were about 300 people at the Time Warner building, the press was covering it live. She said, this book needs to be made into a film - first time Bonnie heard the, was thinking film.

45:40 Michael Bart: Okay 2010, I got the uh, the idea came from a Holocaust survivor Rose Schindler. She mentioned this is the 65th anniversary from the time we were liberated, and we got, we came up with a theme, *Liberation: 65 Years Later*. Bonnie, using footage from the USC Holocaust Museum of survivors talking about their experiences being liberated, include I mean, local survivors and military people who who liberated the survivors, created this film. She, I couldn't help her on the film, so she had two of the members of the Yom HaShoah committee working [with] her. One is here today, Vera Lorell the other was Bela Breziner working with her and they worked on this thing for months. But the thing that we did different is, I decided, let's do



Holocaust Commemoration 2010

- 2nd video - *Liberation: 65 Years Later*. Introduced by Stephen Smith, Executive Director of the USC Shoah Foundation.

press releases for this three months early, and let the community know, and get the community's involvement.

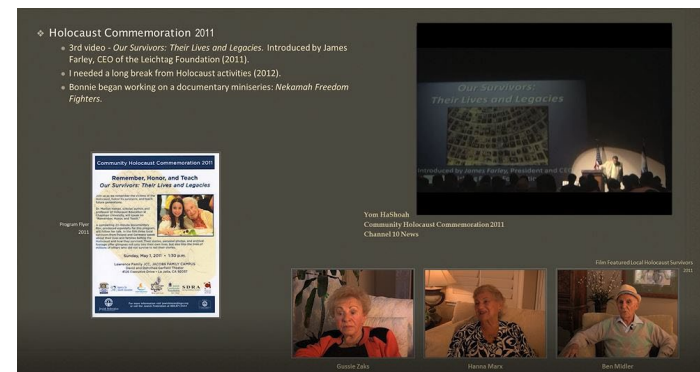
46:46 Michael Bart: And then there was an article written in the paper, and then I'm getting military groups, you know, and so we basically build up a, an unbelievable event that, but we were worried about how we're going to seat everybody? The auditorium holds a lot. You can set up folding. So what we did, if I remember, is they, they, upstairs they had a big screen, and then that would be accommodated I think another 150. We had a turnout like you couldn't believe. We had coverage from four tv [television] stations. Now, I played a little surprise on my committee that I didn't tell anybody until the day of the event because I wanted to make sure it happened.

47:25 Michael Bart: But I would, I found out a story about uh, when Dachau was liberated. Dachau was liberated by the American troops who got there, and there was a reconnaissance mission of troops in armored cars that got to a building thinking there might be prisoners of war that are American prisoners of war. They had no idea what the building was. They get there and then what happens is, they find out that this was the concentration camp Dachau. And then guards, Nazi guards, started shooting at them. So the, the gentleman who was in the lead armored car yelled to the, everybody crashed the gates. He dove back into his vehicle, they all got out and killed everybody they killed uh, they liberated.

48:12 Michael Bart: They got their first ones that got to Dachau. I found out he's alive, and he was 87 years old, and he. So I contacted him. Then he had me contact his daughter, a UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles] history professor. Then

what happened is she arranged for her father to come. So I told nobody on my committee. I just said I have a surprise. And I remember Alma at the JCC was kind of mad at me. She goes, I'm too tired for a surprise. I go, this is a good surprise. And so what happened is, I told the story about how Dachau was liberated by accident, and then I told the story about Sanford Liebman. And then I announced that he's 87; he's still in good health living in Santa Barbara, and he's here with us today, and I'd like everybody to to acknowledge him. Stephen Smith, the USC Shoah CEO was there introducing Bonnie's film. He stood up, the first one, gave - we had the longest standing ovation ever at a Yom HaShoah program, which was a rare thing to have at a Yom HaShoah.

49:14 Michael Bart: Okay this was the lat-, this is shortly, this program here was the last one I was involved with because number one, my life had become - 80 percent of my phone calls and my emails were to do with the Holocaust. The, the federation, there was a new person at the federation said, yeah, I hear they call you Holocaust Mike. And I'm thinking, oh good. You know, Holocaust Mike. What happened is, a lot of survivors got a hold of me and said, we want a film made of us, because we use footage from USC Shoah, a lot of them never got interviewed by Shoah. So Bonnie created another film with her team where basically, we were interviewing local survivors. At the end of this program, I told Bonnie that I was physically and emotionally tired and that I need to retire. So Bonnie said to me - and I'm going to introduce her in a second - she said to me that, I would like to continue working on a documentary about the the Vilna experiences with the partisans. And I, and that I basically told everybody I was retiring. This is the first event that I have done



Holocaust Commemoration 2011

- 3rd video - *Our Survivors: Their Lives and Legacies*. Introduced by James Farley, CEO of the Leitchtag Foundation (2011).
- I needed a long break from Holocaust activities (2012).
- Bonnie began working on a documentary miniseries: *Nekamah Freedom Fighters*.

Not like Sheep to the Slaughter: Vengeance or Justice? – with Michael and Bonnie Bart (2018)
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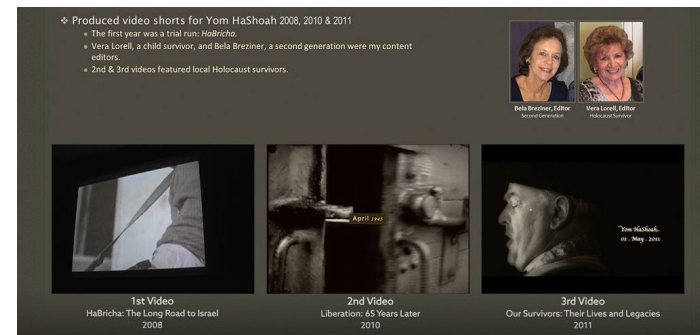
in six years, and it's because of professor Susanne Hillman. But I'm gonna introduce my wife Bonnie.

50:47 Bonnie Bart: Hello, oh it's on. Okay, hi. My name is Bonnie Bart and I'm Michael's wife, of course, and today I'm here to talk about how I came to make an eight-part documentary series about Vilna and the Partisans of Vilna. But first...

51:00 Speaker 1: Excuse me, could you talk into the mic?

51:02 Bonnie Bart: Yeah. Yes. But first of all, I'd like to thank Professor Susanne Hillman and UCSD for hosting us today, and also for supporting me and my work at the Holocaust Living History Workshop. Susanne met me and my film editors many times here at the library, allowing us access to the USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive of survivors' oral testimony. So thank you, Susanne.

51:28 Bonnie Bart: After the rain in 2007 brought the Holocaust commemoration indoors of the auditorium at the Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center, the JCC, I mentioned to my husband Michael we should somehow utilize the big screen through film. So the following year the committee agreed to have me produce a film about the Holocaust. The first year was just a trial run. Michael was my advisor on the content. The goal in producing short films for the Holocaust commemoration was to relate a feeling more than it was to tell a history. It was the 60th anniversary of the creation of the state of Israel and the theme was, to show the link between the Holocaust and Israel, and I really wanted to please the survivors, have their support, and to honor them. This was very important to me so the first film we made in 2008 was called *HaBricha*. It was about the survivors'



Produced video shorts for Yom HaShoah 2008, 2009 & 2011

- The first year was a trial run: *HaBricha*
- Vera Lorell, a child survivor, and Bela Breziner, a second generation were my content editors.

escape from Europe to Palestine after the War. The reaction from the audience was very positive. We had a lot of good feedback and many local educators, rabbis, and others requested copies of the film. Then in 2010, the Holocaust commemoration committee expressed interest in having another film produced. However, this time, with local survivors featured in the film. It was called *Liberation: 65 Years Later*.

- 2nd & 3rd videos featured local holocaust survivors.

52:51 Bonnie Bart: Michael wasn't able to help me with the com, with, with the commitments because of his book and his role as chairman of the Holocaust program, but I still needed help with the content editing. So two members on the Yom HaShoah committee, Vera Lorelle and Bela Bresziner offered to help me with film editing. Vera, who's here with us tonight, of course, and well, she's a child survivor whose husband's family is from Vilna. Bela's father grew up in the same small hometown as Michael's dad in Poland. So together the three of us viewed oral testimonies of local survivors here at UCSD. Then we obtained the footage from the USC Shoah Foundation and other film footage and photos from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC.

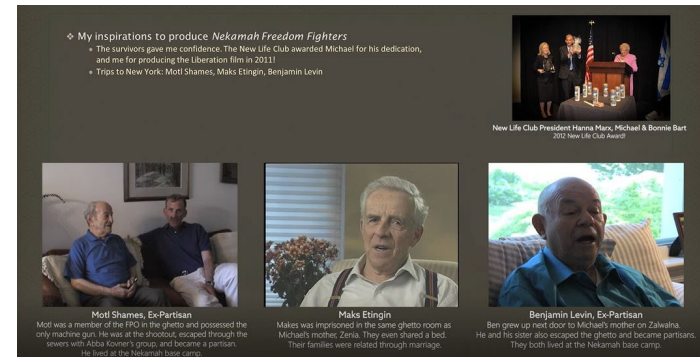
53:41 Bonnie Bart: So every week or two, Vera and Bela came to my house and gave me feedback on the film editing I had accomplished the previous week and ideas for the week ahead. We made a good team and we had a great setup. By the third video we made in 2011, we conducted our own interviews of three local survivors called *Our Survivors: Their Lives and Legacies*. I blacked out our windows, bought professional box lights, microphones, and cameras, and turned my house into a production studio. So there was a lot of action going on around our house, but once Michael became exhausted and needed a

Not like Sheep to the Slaughter: Vengeance or Justice? – with Michael and Bonnie Bart (2018)
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break our house fell silent. And that's when I got to thinking, this is a good time for me to focus on Michael's parents' story, Nekamah Freedom Fighters.

54:29 Bonnie Bart: By this time the survivors had given me the confidence I could produce films that they were proud of. The New Life Club even presented an award to Michael for his dedication to the Holocaust program, and to me for producing the film in 2011. Also, I was greatly inspired by the survivors we met on our trips to New York and also Vilna-Vilnius, Lithuania in 2004 and again in 2005. In New York, we met former partisan fighter Motl Shamas, the only member of the underground in the Vilna ghetto that possessed a machine gun. We met Maks Etingin who had been forced to live in the same crowded ghetto room as Michael's mother, uncle, grandmother, and great-grandmother. And we met another former partisan, Ben Levin who had grown up next door to Michael's mother, and was also imprisoned in the ghetto.

55:24 Here is a photo of both Motl Shamas and Ben Levin at the liberation of Vilna. Then on our trips to Vilna, we met former partisan fighter, Motl Gurwitz. Motl had been on many sabotage missions with Michael's father to blow up trains, and he gave us a tour of the ghetto and he showed us where the resistance members had a shootout with the Germans on Strashun Street. Then, further down the street in a basement, underneath what was the public bathhouse, he showed us the weapons training center used by the resistance. We were able to gain access to



My inspirations to produce *Nekamah Freedom Fighters*

- The survivors gave me confidence. The New Life Club awarded Michael for his dedication and me for producing Liberation film in 2011!
- Trips to New York: Motl Shamas, Maks Etingin, Benjamin Levin

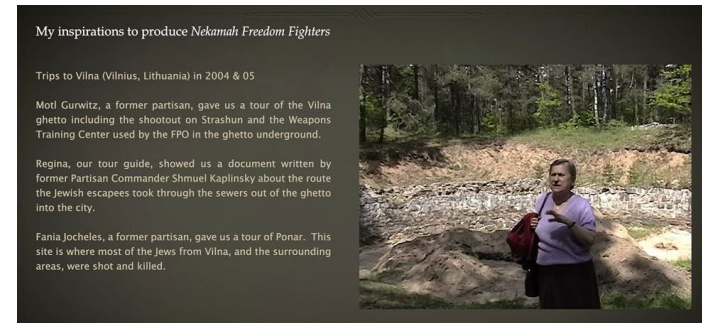


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the room and climb down through the floorboards into the very dark and long basement. It's pretty amazing.

56:11 Bonnie Bart: And then on our trip to Vilna Regina, our guide in Vilna, Regina took us to the Jewish Museum and showed us the route the escapees took through the underground sewers on the day of the ghetto's liquidation. The route was documented for the museum by Shmuel Kaplinsky, a sanitation worker who led the group from an entrance to the sewers built inside a mechanical workshop in the ghetto, then through the sewers for seven hours and exited in the city at Ignoto street. The group was split and made their way to two forced labor camps still in existence Kailis, a fur factory, and HKP, a military truck repair shop. From there the groups left for the Rudniki Forest, so we followed their path to HKP, then to the forest, where we found Partisan Camp Nekamah. The bunkers were in disrepair but amazingly, they were still intact. Another former partisan Fania Jocheles showed us where the Jews from Vilna were all shot and killed at Ponar. She told us how Jewish prisoners were forced to burn the bodies there and then, in 1944, twelve of the Jewish prisoners at Ponar escaped and were found by the Jewish partisans in the Rudniki Forest. When Fania told us this story, she was standing next to the pit where the prisoners had slept in a bunker. The story was fresh in her mind since Motl Zeidel, one of the prisoners who escaped from Ponar, had just visited Vilna on the 15th of April 2004 for the 60th anniversary of their escape.

58:00 Bonnie Bart: So all these stories were very interesting to me and I felt they were very important. I videotaped every move we made in Vilna and kept the tapes in the event there came a time it might help us share their stories. Remember, Michael felt a



My inspirations to produce Nekamah Freedom Fighters

Trips to Vilna (Vilnius, Lithuania) in 2004 & 05

Motl Gurwitz, a former partisan, gave us a tour of the Vilna ghetto including the shootout on Strashun and the Weapons training Center used by the FPO in the ghetto underground.

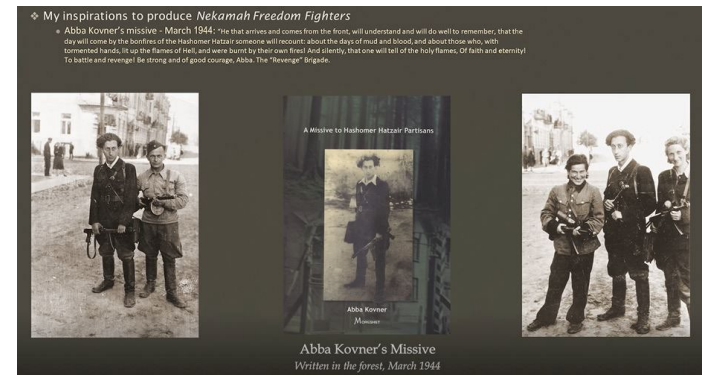
Regina, our tour guide, showed us a document written by former Partisan Commander Shmuel Kaplinsky about the route the Jewish escapees took through the sewers out of the ghetto into the city. Fania Jocheles, a former partisan gave us a tour of Ponar. This site is where most of the Jews from Vilna and the surrounding areas, were shot and killed.

Not like Sheep to the Slaughter: Vengeance or Justice? – with Michael and Bonnie Bart (2018)
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great responsibility towards his mother who wanted to have her Holocaust experiences written down, but after Michael's father died, his mother began showing signs of Alzheimer's, and Michael immediately knew it was too late. He knew the task was now his and his alone, and it became important to me to help him in this task.

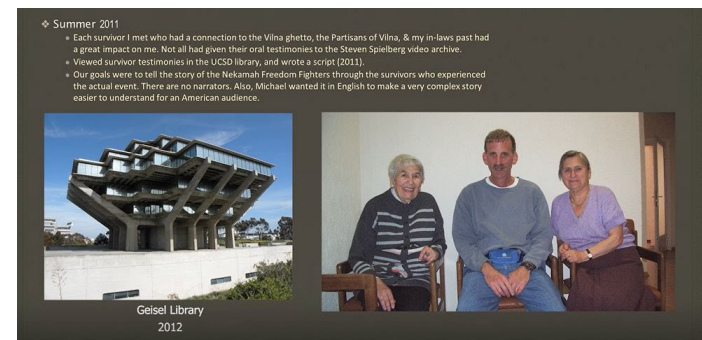
58:40 Bonnie Bart: One of my greatest inspirations was the partisan Commander Abba Kovner and Kovner's missive written to the Hashomer Hatzair partisans in the forest just prior to the liberation of Vilna in March of 1944. He said quote, he that arrives and comes from the front will understand and do well to remember that the day will come, by the bonfires of the Hashomer Hatzair, someone will recount about the day of mud and blood and about those who, with tormented hands, lit up the flames of hell and were burnt by their own fires. And silently, that one will tell of the holy flames, of faith, in eternity. To battle and revenge. Be strong and of good courage and it's signed Abba, the revenge brigade. This quote speaks to me because Michael's father was a staunch Hashomer Hatzair and now it was Michael's task to tell his story, tell their story.

59:40 Bonnie Bart: So in the summer of 2012, I began to view survivors' oral testimonies from the USC Shoah Foundations Archive available here in the UCSD Library and I wrote a script. At this point, I really didn't even know I could make a cohesive story from this oral testimony, this oral testimony archive. But after the summer, and after I finished writing the script, Michael and I felt we could do it. Our goals were to tell the story through the oral testimonies of survivors who experienced the actual events. There are no narrators. This film series is not meant to be entertaining, but purely educational.



My inspirations to produce *Nekamah Freedom Fighters*

Abba Kovner's Missive - written in the forest, March 1944

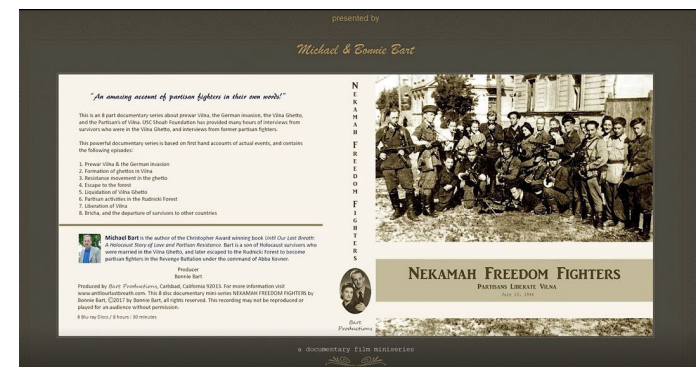


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1:00:25 Bonnie Bart: Michael wanted the story told in English, to make a very complex story easier to understand for the families of survivors. After writing the book, many of the second generation, and even the third generation, contacted us with questions they still had about their parents' experiences. Many of their parents had not shared details of their Holocaust experience with them. This film brings clarity to those families who still had, to this day, have questions about the stories their parents related to them, or never shared at all. As Michael says, anyone with a connection to Vilna, this film is pure gold. I hope this documentary helps anyone who has a connection to Vilna and the Partisans of Vilna better understand their families' experiences.

1:01:14 Bonnie Bart: The documentary series tells of pre-war Vilna, the Vilna ghetto, the underground resistance movement in the ghetto, the prisoners' escape to the Rudniki Forest, the Jewish partisans sabotaging the Nazi war effort, the liberation of Vilna by the Red Army, the part, and the partisans, and the survivors leaving Europe for Israel, the United States, and other countries. For the Nekamah Freedom Fighter project, I used oral testimonies from the USC Shoah Foundation, and archival footage, and photos from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. I also included some of my own footage. There are 22 Holocaust survivors featured in this film. The documentary series is based on first-hand accounts of actual events detailed and documented by them.

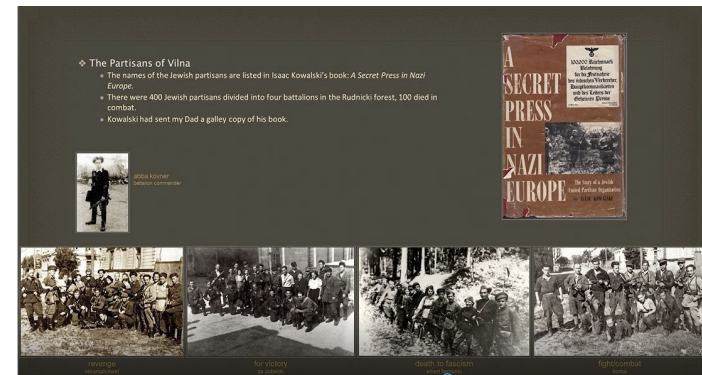
1:02:07 Bonnie Bart: I completed two versions of the documentary series. The first version has eight episodes, each about 60 minutes, on Blu-ray disc. The second, more abbreviated trailer version, is five parts with each segment about 30 minutes. The



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trailer version tells a story but not with as much detail as the complete documentary series. We will now be viewing a 30-minute trailer titled, *Forest*. It's about the resistance members who escaped the Vilna ghetto prior to the liquidation of the ghetto and were able to safely reach the Rudniki Forest and became members of the Partisans of Vilna. But first Michael will introduce the film and give you the background on what we're about to watch.

1:03:02 Michael Bart: This will just take a second. Basically, when we start off in this particular trailer, and I think it's about 25 minutes, you're going to see footage in the beginning of soldiers. And you're wondering, who this is? What this is? One of my contacts at the US [United States] Holocaust Museum contacted me. He was the director of their Spielberg Film Library at the Museum and he said, we just acquired something you're going to want to see. What it was, they got it from the Russians, this was footage showing the Russians, as well as the Partisans of Vilna, liberating Vilna, which is an amazing piece of footage. But again, just some quick numbers, and then we'll, we'll go to the trailer. There were approximately 400 members of Partisans of Vilna. Maybe a little over 100 were women, and the rest were men. Over a third, approximately a third died in, in the one year in combat. The Russian partisan movement had about a thousand members. The Jewish partisans took on the more dangerous missions because they felt they had nothing to lose. And so, they were, you know, getting food was very difficult, and they had to go to the larger villages to basically steal food. And a lot of the villages were selling to the German troops, so it was really complicated.



The Partisans of Vilna

- The names of the Jewish partisans are listed in Isaac Kowalski's book: *A Secret Press in Nazi Europe*.
- There were about 400 Jewish partisans divided into four battalions in the Rudnicki forest, 100 died in combat.
- Kowalski had sent my Dad a galley copy of his book.

- 1:04:24 Michael Bart: Now two other quick points. There is a particular um, part of this thing it talks about a village called Koniuchy and it's very powerful and Koniuchy was a village that was in the outskirts of the forest near where the train lines were. And whenever the partisans needed to go on a mission, they had to go by Koniuchy or they were going to be having to go another two or three hours longer, and that would make it even more dangerous. Michael Bart: Koniuchy was the, the Germans were arming the villagers of Koniuchy. And they were basically saying, kill partisans and we'll give you money. We'll give you food. We'll give you anything, weapons and so, they were using the Jewish partisans, I'm not sure about the Russian partisans, as trophies. And every time they went on a mission they would kill them.
- 1:05:16 Well finally, and you'll hear this in the documentary, in the video, Moscow gave orders to the Lithuanian commander who was in charge of all the partisans in the Rudniki Forest that you get, you take out the village. Completely burn the village - eliminate the village. And so approximately 150 of men, Jewish partisans, and approximately 150 Russian partisans did that. And they basically then, eliminated losing men on every mission. And then no other villagers collaborated with the Germans and they survived. Finally, General Eisenhower - who turned out to be President Eisenhower - gave a, a powerful quote. In his quote, he said, that the organized efforts of the resistance in the forest area of Lithuania, Belarusia, made a significant difference to the the war effort in World War II because they could not get a train that would go very, you know, easily east-west. So they weren't able to get supplies. They weren't able to get troops. Every time they

went on a mission, they stopped them cold. So now we're going to play a 25-minute trailer.

- 1:06:49 [Russian Newsreel / Liberation of Vilna / Battle Frontline, July 1944]
- 1:07:05 [Producer Bonnie Bart / A Documentary Series Rudnicki Forest / Nekamah / Revenge / Freedom Fighters in Vilna, 13 July 1944 / A Bart Film Production / Presented by Michael Bart, a son of partisan fighters]
- 1:08:26 [When Germany invaded Russia-occupied Vilna in 1941, there were 80,000 Jews. At war's end, 500 Jews remained alive in Vilna, and 2,500 returned from the Soviet Union.]
- 1:08:35 [Leizer and Zenia Lewinson Bart, Z"l, of blessed memory / Nekamah Freedom Fighters]
- 1:08:40 [The day will come by the bonfires of the Hashomer Hatzair movement, someone will recount the days of mud and blood, and silently, that one will tell of the Holy Flames, of faith, of Eternity! To battle and revenge! Chazak Ve'ematz / Abba Kovner - March 1944]
- 1:08:55 Hirsch Warszawczyk: [Hirsch Warszawczyk / Escaped the ghetto Sept 15, 1943 / Rudnicki Forest] We were the first group to reach the Rudnicki jungle and the luck was that a day before we came the German army just left the jungle. So when we came, was nobody there, no partisans, nobody.
- 1:09:15 Benjamin Levin: [Benjamin Levin / Escaped the ghetto Sept 11, 1943 / Rudnicki Forest] And we, we went to the place to meet Batya [Russian Partisan Commander]. Batya was this old

Russian. So anyway we was waiting for him about the night or two, finally came some Russian partisans, paratroopers. They had all this radio equipment, worked behind the lines, who came, who was already sent a long time ago, that bases, small bases. And then came the Batya, So Batya knew this guy Chaim Saltz and he told him where to stay and he said, and whatever question, you're a part of Batya's unit.

1:09:52 Hirsch Warszawczyk: [Hirsch Warszawczyk / Partisan / Rudnicki Forest] Batushka means father. Yemelyan Barykin, a white beard, he was the commander of the Russian partisans. We got very friendly with him and he the first one to give us a few rifles. He was the first one to show us how to get food and then, starting like two, three days later, every day a group used to come from Vilna, from ghetto, and we got about maybe eight groups came out.

1:10:25 Benjamin Levin: [Partisan Rudnicki Forest] Then we learned to take the pine branches and make huts because if you put a lot the rain doesn't go through and was living in huts. And then he says that the Germans and the peasants know about this, so we went to the swamps deeper, and deeper. And Batya, guiding us and about two or three weeks later it came in another group from Vilna - all from the second group Shlomo Brand, Natak Rink, [unclear] Lippenholtz and we got about 70, 80 people, 90 people. And we had about 20-something rifles, and we had a lot pistols. Natak had two, Brand had two and we had the 14 shooters, Belgian pistol but you put 14 bullets and the Russian was crazy for this, crazy. They would giving two, three rifles for every 14 shooter, and then and came the, the F.P.O. [Fareynikte Partizaner Organizatsye] group.

- 1:11:22 Isaac Gordon: [Escaped the ghetto Sept 23rd / Rudnicki Forest] I went to the Vilna organization and through the sewers. I went out to the Rudnicki Forest to the partisans, and Zelda [Treger], Zelda came, and there was another group. We moved in two groups because it was too much in one group. So we came to a very small village, Marcelin. The Germans do not go already there. So the Germans they used to come to a certain point, it would not go into the forest. So that the territory that the partisans had in control, that was a very dense forest southeast of Vilna and a very bad grounds. So when the group came, and the first group was there, and they saw us, they were so glad to see us because they thought that we are already dead.
- 1:12:22 Anna Lubocki: [Reconnaissance Scout Rudnicki Forest] After the liquidation, people who succeeded they went out via the underground sewers. My younger brother was with the group. My younger brother went down through the sewers, and they went to Kailis, and from there, partisans already led them to the woods, and I met them at the outskirts of the woods. It was the middle of the forest with a guard standing to see if the Germans are coming over [unclear] was not organized well yet. So then I left the Russian groups that were already in Rudniki Forest, then I went to stay with the Jewish group. Then they formed a Jewish, just Jewish group, partisans.
- 1:13:11 Isaac Gordon: [Partisan Rudnicki Forest] So we when we came in we lived in, in in small huts from, made from leaves from branches of trees. But it got rainy; it got snowy. We were laying almost in water. And there wasn't too many partisans there yet, but there was a few people that were thrown on parachutes from Moscow into that forest to organize the Lithuanian brigade. Then there was a special group that was thrown from Moscow.

Captain Alexei was in charge, a Russian officer and they were mostly Russian soldiers, officers that were hiding in the forest, and he had a contact with Moscow. Moscow supplied him with dynamite, and the main work was to to put dynamite and to blow up the the train, the railroad, and the train.

1:14:17 Benjamin Levin: [Partisan Rudnicki Forest] After September the F.P.O. group they came in terrible condition. Oscar came with Abba Kovner. Vitka [Kempner] came with him, and [Bluma] Markowisz and Ruska [Korzhak], the sisters, came with him. They came in sick, broken apart. They went to the, the Swiss for two, three days and they came to our bases, and we took them in, and we shared with them everything. And we was going out for, what you call [unclear], for food and especially Natak Ring. He was coming and going. He was coming in with 25 people who just came, taking 25 fresh ones and going all the way back. He never was tired, very tough guy. He did the best job in the first two months. I would say, without him and Mitia Lipenholcz and [Shlomo] Brand, we would never survive in the beginning.

1:15:16 Michael Lipenholcz: [Squad Leader Rudnicki Forest ex-Polish Army Soldier] Then we had to eat. We had to do everything. We didn't have a spoon, and we didn't have a fork, and we didn't have a plate, and we didn't have no food. And we had to take it, we had to rob it, take it. In the beginning, I was ashamed to show my face to other guy. I used to put on handkerchief. I was ashamed, handkerchief on my face, but this was just the beginning. Then I got it, got used to it. That's the way it was, and we had a lot of girls, and they were good - some of them. Yeah, but we couldn't take them a lot because when when a farmer see a girl come near, he was suspect. He wouldn't give nothing.

- 1:16:05 Sol Aronwicz: [Partisan Rudnicki Forest] Food, we would get from the big farms that prepared food for the Germans. So we had people that would tell us that the Germans are coming in two days to take some of the food for the army, and so we would get that earlier with weapons and take the food, and get the wagons, and the horses from the farm people, and load up the wagons and bring the food into the base. And then we would send the horses, with the wagons, back to the, to the farms.
- 1:16:45 Abram Zeleznikow: [Partisan Rudnicki Forest] The actions against the Germans have been mostly in cutting down communication, cuts down the telephone lines, and also very important thing is tearing up railways. Our first action was to go and destroy some railway lines. For this, we had to go over an embankment of the railway. And the first time they come the Germans have been fighting with us and they start shooting and our commander was a young girl, a member of Hashomer Hatzair, Ruska Markowicz, and when the Germans opened fire of us, about 15 of us we have been on the other side from the embankment, and we couldn't go any further. So she's tied with another friend of mine on the other side from the embankment, opened fire on the Germans. All the fire from the Germans went to here, and we could then withdraw. Thanks to her about 15 of us had been able to withdraw.
- 1:18:06 Hirsch Warszawczyk: [Partizan Rudnicki Forest] Yemelyan Barykin, the commander of the Russian partisans, he was the first one to take us to blow up the railroad. He gave us two or three of his men with their ammunition, and they showed us how to use it. And we were me, my brother, and two more. We were four. And the in, and though it was early morning and a train came in and we blew up the train, and we were so stupid. We

are so stupid that we we tried to walk through the train to to grab a a rifle, or a machine gun, or automatic pistol, even a pair of boots. And we were lucky, thanks, God. Everything we did was luck. And then when the groups started to come, they started to divide in groups and, and organized a partisan movement.

- 1:19:14 Dina Rozenwald: [Partisan / Battalion: For Victory] And then we organized our group. It was mostly Jews the name of my group was [unclear] for victory; that was my group.
- 1:19:27 Abraham Zeleznikow: [Partizan Rudnicki Forest] There was a quite big group of Jews. It was about 400 Jews in the forest. Some Jews come with us through the sewage, some Jews run away from the little villages around the forest. And when we came to the Rudniki Forest it was about 400 Jews in the forest, and the 400 Jews have divided in four groups when they had all commanders from the United Partisan Organization. The first group, whose commander was Abba Kovner, was called Revenge, Nekamah. The second one with Shmuel Kaplinski, he was the commander, was called Victory. The third, to which I belonged, when his first commander was Imka Lubocki was called Fight and the fourth one was called Death to Fascism.
- 1:20:44 Michael Lipenholcz: Squad Leader / Battalion: Revenge] Over here was a guy but he was from the party, the communist party. He says, at least he says, at least 300 people, 300 people were our responsibility. He says to me, listen, we're here more than a year. We had to live, and we had to build the bunkers. All of a sudden I became a building technician, a builder, and they're still standing.

- 1:21:16 Hirsch Warszawczyk: [Partisan / Battalion: Death to Fascism]
And they sent us to blow up the tracks. It was called uh [unclear]. It was very close to a bridge, a railroad bridge. The railroad bridge was protected by Germans and the tracks we had to block both sides where they, where the two tracks get together. I remember, even after it started to, to blow up the, the noise like from grenades. We were running and counting. And every time it blows up, lights. I don't remember how many blows, it must be at least 150, but we did a lot of damage. My brother himself, he blew up 16. Sixteen times he blew up for the railroad, 16 times. He was in a group that was just [unclear], [unclear] group. That's a group that blows up trains.
- 1:22:30 Sol Aronwicz: [Partisan Rudnicki Forest] And we did a lot of work that helped in winning the war because if a train was going to the front with soldiers, or with weapons, and we would put dynamite under it and get out into the woods and pull the, and the uh, and the the rails would burst, and the train would turn over. So for about two, three days till they would fix it, everything stopped, and then maybe 15, 50 miles, 50 kilometers further down another group of partisans did the same to the same train. So as a result, a train never came in time to the front.
- 1:23:17 Benjamin Levin: [partisan Battalion Leader] And once we went for uh, action - I don't remember what it was - and on the way back we made a [unclear]. And I was driving one cart and then I was on the list when I was very tired, and I fell asleep. And next to me was sitting [Chaim] Szlakman, my brother's friend, and he said to me you go in the back and lay down and I will drive the horses. And all of a sudden we got ambushed. We got ambushed and our horse was hit. And he got hit in the legs too, and when he fell down from the cart, he fall under the horse.

And then the horse pulled up on him and when I waked up, and I was really in sleeping position, I just slide down from the cart. And was shooting all around and was Lithuanian, Polacks, and Germans. I don't know how the first three carts got through but at least two got stuck. And me, and Szlakman and [Raska] Markowicz and another, they got stuck. And Shlomo Brand was a commanding officer this time. And Szlakman, the guy what was under the horse, I was trying to to get him out but it was impossible. The horse was laying on top on him. So me and Raska decide to run. So the first thing, I took off his rifle because it was the most important thing, and his bullets, and we started to run. It was about the open field, and Raska was screaming, you run fast, you run fast. And I was in front running, and I was running, and I see Raska is still behind me, far away. I turned around I said, [unclear]. She couldn't drop all because she had her bullet here, and the rifle holding in. And she turned around to shoot back and they killed her on the spot, right in the head. And she fall right near me, and I was continue running. In the meantime, the whole group realized three or four people are missing, and they turn around, and they start to look for us. I already reached the base. I find the base by myself, and I was the only one who came. That was when we lost two, or three people, or four people. And Szlakman, the guy what was under the horse, they caught him and they hang him from the legs.

1:25:42 Speaker 2: And at that time our boys were sent out all over to destroy the trains. And on our road is a village, and a few days before they killed five of our boys, and every single time we were going over there they were shooting on us. We have already casualties but we decided already to make, to even up.

- 1:26:10 Abram Zeleznikow: [Partisan Battalion: Fight] There was a quite big Polish village, Koniuchy [Kaniukai, Lithuania]. A village from about 4-500 people and Koniuchy was on the route to bring some food, or when we went to some military actions we had to go through this village. If not, you had to go another 20 or 25 kilometers to go around. And when you made 60 to 70 kilometers a night, another 20 made a very big difference. And whenever we tried to go through, we lost some people. After a while it come, an order from Moscow that we have to burn the village at all. We shouldn't leave anything, not human and not animal. Everything has to be burnt, and nothing should be, be touched.
- 1:27:14 Moshe Okuniew: [Partisan battalion: Fight] I was in front of the, of the village and I was the Second [unclear]. This mean, I had a machine gun. I was carrying the [unclear]. Grisha Gurwicz was the first. He was carrying the [unclear] and I had in addition I had a revolver. Anyway [unclear] coming into the village. We surround the village. We had all our [unclear] had 100 people probably, about 70 were armed. So the thing is we surrounded in here, every house. We have four people surround it, we go in. It was just in the morning, we make a fire. We truly were burned and we killed all of them.
- 1:28:04 Anna Lubocki: [Reconnaissance Scout Battalion: Revenge] When they were going to burn a village that used to tell on us, used to call the Germans on us. So as a prize, they offered me to go to when we were going to burn a village. This was like a gift to me. I should be able to burn their houses all the ways with them. But otherwise, I didn't participate in in any attacks.

- 1:28:29 Abram Zeleznikow: [Partisan Battalion: Fight] It was mobilized about six or seven groups. I think we have been about three or four hundred men and we took over the village and started to burn and kill everybody. After this, we had a free passage, and the peasant around have been very frightened, and they worked with us. This is the why you, unfortunately, had to deal with the people that have been standing in your way. The actions gets more and more, but come May, June, the Red Army broke through. And we could see that the around the forest was a big movement from the German army but was retreating. And it was the feeling that the end is near.
- 1:29:27 Benjamin Levin: [[partisan Battalion Leader] We had every day communicate from the radio because we had radios all around. The Russians had radios, we had radio and we knew what's going on. I know that they conquered, and they're moving up from Moscow this way. And it's a matter of time will say, the Russian army is coming. And with the Russian army came near Minsk, we knew it's a matter of two-three weeks and it's over.
- 1:29:52 Moshe Okuniew: [Partisan battalion: Fight] They give us an order from Moscow to leave the [unclear] to leave the partisan area to go block the road [unclear] and the surrounding and to prevent the retreat of German army. All of the partisan about five, probably about 3-4,000, we collected and we went went to, to Vilna on the road. In the beginning, I didn't see too many Germans. We saw a lot of tracks. We approached a Vilna, on outskirts, and at that time we united, united with the Russian army.
- 1:30:46 Hirsch Warszawczyk: [Partisan / Battalion: Death to Fascism] So when we met the army, and the army said that they need

somebody to bring him across the river, around the city, I was the first one to say I'm going. I volunteer. I, I showed him the way, how to go around the city and coming from the city from that side. I was like [unclear] so we came to Vilna, from the side of Ponar. Just the smell from it, from the burning bodies, from from the dead. I don't care who it is and how how much he went to the war, but this could make anybody sick.

1:31:35 Abram Zeleznikow: [Partisan Battalion: Fight] On the way to Vilna, we had to go through Ponar. When we come to Ponar, Ponar was a place where the the Soviets prepared some storage for petrol. And when the German come in, in June, July from [19]41, they decided to make it the place of killing of Jews. And when we come, we saw there was one place where there was fresh corpses, and the last corpses of the soil have been about 90 Polish Catholic priests. and you could see the movement of of the plain. It was still moving. You can see everything moving. Look, I was then quite young. I was only 19 and of course, when we went into Vilna we have went with a lot of anger, and we start the fights. We come to a place where there was a Jewish labor camp and we find bodies of the last Jews from the labor camp what have been warm. And one of them was a teacher of mine [unclear]. A very known Jewish poet and when we touched his body it was still warm. They shot them maybe an hour or two before we, we liberate them. So you, you can imagine the anger.

1:33:18 [Nekamah / A Documentary Mini-Series / There were 300 Jews who escaped from the Vilna ghetto to the partisans in the Rudnicki forest, one-third were killed in action.]

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- 1:33:34 [Sol Aaron / Name at Birth: Schloma Aronwicz / Nickname: Shleyymke / Birthplace: Wilno, Poland / Birthday: November 11, 1921]
- 1:33:38 [Abram Zelenikow / Name at Birth: Avram Zeleznikow / Birthplace: Vilna, Poland / Birthday: May 25, 1924]
- 1:33:43 [Isaac Gordon / Name at Birth: Israel Gordon / Nickname: Izia / Birthplace: Vilna, Poland / Birthday: July 23, 1929]
- 1:33:48 [Anna Dlugi / Name at Birth: Anna Lubocki / Nickname: Nuisia/ Birthplace: Moscow, Russia USSR / Birthday: February 7, 1918]
- 1:33:53 [Benjamin Levin / Name at Birth: Benjamin Levin / Nickname: Beniek / Birthplace: Vilna, Poland / Birthday: April 9, 1927]
- 1:33:57 [Michael Lipenholcz / Name at Birth: Michael Lipenholcz / Nickname: Mitia / Birthplace: Vilna, Russia USSR / Birthday: November 7, 1917]
- 1:34:02 [Michael Okunieff / Name at Birth: Moshe Okuniew / Nickname: Moshe / Birthplace: Vilna, Poland / Birthday: April 24, 1923]
- 1:34:07 [Dina Kagan / Name at Birth: Dina Rozenwald / Birthplace: Radzyn - Lublin, Poland / Birthday: May 8, 1919]
- 1:34:12 [Harry Reischer / Name at Birth: Hershka Warszawczyk / Nickname: Hirsh / Birthplace: Vilna, Poland / Birthday: June 6, 1922]
- 1:34:16 ["The disruption of the enemy rail communications throughout Occupied Europe, by the organized forces of the Resistance, played a considerable part of our victory." Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower]

1:34:40 [Resources: Why We Fight: Divide & Conquer, 1943 / The Nazis Strike, 1943 / The Battle for Russia, 1943 / www.archive.org / United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington DC, USA / YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York City, USA / Ghetto Fighter's House Museum, Western Galilee, Israel / Yad Vashem World Center for Holocaust Research, Education, Documentation and Commemoration Jerusalem, Israel / Lazer Ran Jerusalem of Lithuania. 3 vols. New York: The Laureate Press, 1974 / Bart Family Collection / Music: Orange County Klezmers Echoes of Vilna: Songs of Remembrance from the Ghettos "Zog Nit Keynmol" Copyright 2004 www.ocklezmers.com / Kevin MacLeod "Crusade" "Devastation & Reveng" "Dark Times" License under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/> incompetech.com / The oral interviews are from the archive of: USC Shoah Foundation The Institute for Visual History and Education Founded by Steven Spielberg / Special Thanks to the Partisans of Vilna: Sol Aronwicz, Anna Lubocki, Myron Chejfec, Moshe Okuniew, Isaac Gordon, Dina Rozenwald, Benjamin Levin, Gabriel Sedlis, Mania Kaplan, Mitia Lipenholcz, Pohl Bagrianski, Hirsh Warszawczyk, Abram Zeleznikow / For more information: www.college.usc.edu/vhi / UCSD Holocaust Living History Workshop" Deborah Hertz, Program Director Susanne Hillman, Program Coordinator / Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Bruce Levy, Project Coordinator Leslie Swift, Film Researcher / USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education: Stephen D. Smith, Executive Director Douglas Ballman, Manager External Relations / Funding by: Michael & Bonnie Bart / Film By: Michael Bart, Author Until Our Last Breath: A Holocaust Story of Love & Partisan Resistance St.

Martin's Press, 2008 Christopher Award Winner! / In loving memory of my parents: Leizer & Zenia Lewinson-Bart / Both were in the Vilna Ghetto, were married there, and escaped together 8 days prior to liquidation, and were partisans in camp Revenge located in the Rudnicki Forest / Nekamah: Freedom Fighters in Vilna a documentary film series all rights reserved - copyright 2017]

- 1:36:00 [The "Nekamah Freedom Fighters" documentary miniseries is available from the UC San Diego Library on Blu-ray disc.]
- 1:36:02 Susanne Hillman: You will have time to ask some questions, only a couple. Oh, okay, thank you. Yes.
- 1:36:10 Speaker 3: I want to thank you both for the book and for the series, the video series, fantastic. Learned a lot about some of the bravery and heroism. And I, I hate to ask this question, because you do cover the whole story of Vilna. And just like in the Warsaw ghetto, it wasn't just heroes and partisans, there were also collaborators, whether it's the Judenrat, Jewish council, or the police that they either got to volunteer or forced to volunteer. And what I'm getting at is, about two years ago for the first time, I saw photographs of the Jewish police that were helping the Nazis round up the victims, march them to the trains, pushed them into trains. So the, the partisans, when they were in Vilna, try to do something to stop those people from being collaborators?
- 1:37:19 Michael Bart: My mic on? Can you guys hear me okay? That's a that's a powerful question. it would take a lot longer than we could, I could answer it here. But fundamentally, there was a Jewish Judenrat that basically was managing the ghetto, and

there was a person, a lot of people um, named Jacob Gens that was controversial because people thought he decided who lived or died. There was a different, another side to that too. And the other side is, if he didn't give the Germans the amount of people that the Germans were demanding, the Germans would kill everybody. So he's thinking that I'm going to do what I can to save as many lives as he can. The ghetto police is complicated. Some of them were with the underground, helping them smuggle in weapons. Some of them, you know, really weren't you know, and there were some that were harsh. So that's all over the map, and so that's, that is a question that would take an hour to explain. But you know, there's a lot of good books, if you're ever really curious about that, about life in the ghetto. And the Vilna in the ghetto is a little bit different than the Warsaw ghetto. But that, I mean, I can't, it's hard to answer that question in 60 seconds. So, but how about we grab a couple more because we got to wrap up? Sorry.

- 1:38:38 Speaker 4: The partisans, did they do anything to get rid of the [unclear]?
- 1:38:42 Michael Bart: The partisans, no. The partisans movement, they started the resistance in the ghetto, and then they wanted to get out of the ghetto so they could make a difference in the war effort. That, the, because it was controversial - were they doing the right thing, were they saving Jews, or were they collaborating with the Germans? There was a lot of conflicting point of, points of view. So, sir.
- 1:39:03 Speaker 5: What was the, what is the source of the uh, the video uh, taken in the ghetto? Where, who took those?

1:39:11 Michael Bart: I got that from the US [United States] Holocaust Museum. When the Soviet Union collapsed and they were really desperate for money, they were looking for anything they could sell, and they found footage that was taken in the Vilna ghetto. And it happened to be with the Partisans of Vilna, with the Red Army, with them liberating. And then they sold it to the US [United States] Holocaust Museum. My contact at the museum called me and said, I got some gold for you. And then, when he sent it to us, we realized he did. But that's a good question maybe one more if we if somebody has one I know it's been a long evening well thank you very much, everybody, appreciate it.