



To Our Wonderful Friends & Donors,



As I write this we are busy preparing for our humanitarian trip to Latvia and Lithuania next month to bring emergency winter aid to elderly Holocaust survivors in 10 cities. To all of you who donated airline miles, supplies, medications or much-needed dollars to bring to the survivors, thank you!

Here in America, November means Thanksgiving. And because of you, for 1500 elderly Holocaust survivors in 7 countries, Thanksgiving is being lived every day. Not as a big gathering around an equally big feast, but as an eternally thankful state of being, with gratitude to you who have not forgotten them, who have shown them compassion, who have given them comfort by supplying the food and medicines they need for survival through the harsh winter and the loving-kindness that brings them hope.

Please accept their heartfelt thanks for participating in **The Survivor Mitzvah Project**, and helping us deliver the continuous financial aid they so desperately need. We have thousands of letters like this, expressing heartfelt thanks to all of you:

"I received your letter and the gelt, thank you very much. I do not know how to thank you for such care. May G-d give you strong health, happiness, joy, well-being, and many smiles, and may G-d make your dreams come true. This is great support for me. I love you very much and think about you often, and I ask G-d to make sure everything is well with you. Amen!!!"

These are "the forgotten", the last generation of Holocaust survivors, and we are the last generation to be able help them. This is our responsibility and also a wonderful opportunity for us to be counted among those who repair the world. When future generations ask about the last survivors of the Shoah still suffering 70 years after the start of the War, we will be able to say that we did something to help them.



Lyubov "Luba" Yankelevna is 83 years old, living in Ukraine. Her winter food supply will be the potatoes and other vegetables she grew this summer.

This Thanksgiving we share Luba Yankelevna's story with you. She has been a **Survivor Mitzvah Project** recipient for over 7 years. In the beginning of the project, there were no donors other than friends and family and so I "paired" Luba with my mother – they were almost the same age, both widowed, both had lost beloved brothers. Over the years, as my mother contributed to Luba's care, they exchanged letters and their friendship grew. Now they call each other "sister." They are alike in many ways but I cannot imagine my mother or anyone here in their 80s or 90s doing the backbreaking physical labor Luba and many other survivors must do simply to have enough basic food to eat this winter.



Right now, Luba is likely to be in her cinderblock apartment surveying her winter food supply. When I visited her in 2009 I was amazed that this resourceful village woman, torn from her home after the Chernobyl nuclear disaster contaminated everything, was sprouting and growing vegetables right in her apartment using repurposed plastic water bottles!

She grows bigger “crops” in a little plot of land located two hours away by bus. The effort to put food on her table is arduous and until harvest is over it is her life.

“Every other day I go to work the land. There is plenty of work, but it pleases my eye to see everything grow,” she writes. “I picked 8 buckets of onion for the winter, and planted dill in its place. Everything is without additives, nitrates or pesticides. But it all needs to be preserved: tomatoes, cucumbers, sorrel... This is what I do every day, constantly in motion... although my blood pressure shoots up often. But I swallow the pills and go back to the land...”



Her beloved children have moved far away to try to obtain work. Her husband died years ago and now she lives alone. Married at 17, Luba told us she was still a child with “wind in my hair” when they met, more interested in dolls than boys, but their love grew and their relationship deepened and soon they began communicating with “half a word.” She still talks to him at his gravesite.

“I went to the cemetery to my husband, cleaned the grave and planted a lot of flowers, told him all about my life as I miss him, but he is silent, does not talk to me ...”

And so Luba carries on tilling the fields, hauling heavy buckets of water on the bus, harvesting her crops. In August, she went to the fields to dig out the potatoes, lugged the heavy bags home and down the stairs to the basement, near the jars of vegetables she’d packed and sealed for the winter months ahead.



As we sit down to Thanksgiving dinner, the ground in Ukraine will have already frozen solid. Luba will manage with the food she grew herself this summer, augmented with groceries she can now buy due to the monthly aid she receives from The Survivor Mitzvah Project. With your help she will be also be able to afford heat and medications this winter.

It hasn’t always been like that.

Luba was born in 1929 in Polesie, in the Russian Ukraine. She remembers the purges under Stalin in the 1930s as “the worst times,” when “people were taken to Siberia and then disappeared without a trace for no reason.”

When she was just 12, as the Third Reich was marching to the east, Luba’s father was drafted. “My father was taken to the Front. Everybody was panicking. How to be? What to do? Where to go? There was one elderly Jew, Leybl der Trefer, who was a fortune-teller. He could tell you everything, how many children you will have, what was in your past and what will be... Leybl came to us and told my mother, ‘Take your daughter and leave.’”

They left by horse-drawn cart heading east to Nezhyn, Ukraine, and from there by cattle car to Voronezh, Russia, where they spent two months growing tobacco. But the Nazis kept coming and as they advanced Luba and her mother and the other Jews were always on the move, living in the cattle cars that were continuously bombarded by

German aircraft, and at train stations, often one stop ahead of the Germans, heading always further to the east.

“The Germans were bombing us on the way. We heard the terrible noise of the airplanes. We were running out of the cattle car across the tracks and embankments, and lay on the ground without moving. But the Germans would shoot at us from the airplanes with machine guns and would strafe us. There were wounded and killed among us. But G-d had mercy on myself and my mother.”

They made it all the way to Central Asia, to Uzbekistan, where they were put to work picking cotton.



“And so we worked as slaves. The weather was unbearably hot. I was often sick. I had typhus, then malaria. The climate wasn’t compatible with me. My mother started having heart problems. She was taken from the field to work at the farm bringing the cotton in. It was also hard labor, but what could we do?”

In 1943 Luba got the news: Her father had been killed in the Battle of Kursk, the largest tank battle of the war, which produced thousands of casualties. It would be the Nazis’ last strategic offensive in the east. By the end of 1944, Luba’s homeland was liberated and she and her mother headed home.

They were among the lucky few.

“Those who didn’t leave like us – and that was the majority of people – all were killed... There were four enormous mass graves... and in them two of my best girl friends, friends from my childhood, Manya and Fira, all our neighbors and acquaintances, everyone we knew...”

The town of Polesie like so many others in the path of the mobile killing squads was practically a ghost town.

“The Ukrainians told us that when the Germans occupied our shtetl, Leybl, who had stayed behind told them, ‘You Germans will go very far but you will run back very fast.’” For that prophecy a German pierced his head through with a bayonet and hanged him. Leybl, of blessed memory – let the earth be a feather for him.”

And so Luba and her mother, alone, without family or friends, began to live in the aftermath of war, to start anew. She married, she worked hard, she raised children, she grew old. But misfortunes continued.

“And then came a ‘treat’ in the form of Chernobyl, a nuclear disaster. That’s how it has gone in my childhood, my teenage years, and now in my old age. Once again I was forced to leave my home. But what could I do?”

Today, Luba carries on, knowing now, finally, she is safe because with your help she will be cared for and looked after. Life is what you make it. Luba has made her life one of optimism, thanksgiving and gratitude.

“I am very, very much thankful for your help and the money you send to me ... But what can I send to you? Let G-d give you health, happiness, prosperity, joy and longevity.”

When you sit down to dinner this holiday, you should know that somewhere in Eastern Europe you are being thanked – and remembered – by one or more of the survivors you are helping.

There are thousands more who need our help, who are living in extreme poverty, unable or too frail and ill to grow their own food. **And so we ask for your continued support as you consider your charity giving this year.**



Every dollar you donate to ***The Survivor Mitzvah Project*** goes straight to a Holocaust survivor in need in Eastern Europe. Perhaps to Galina Isakovna in Belarus, or Isaak Yosypovych in Ukraine, or Tevye & Zina in Latvia, or Moishe & Zoya in Lithuania, or Lev & Dora in Moldova, or any of the over 1500 elderly survivors your donations help. Strangers all, but like Luba, as we have gotten to know them through their letters and have learned their unique stories of survival, they have become like family.

Please be as generous as you can. You are their only lifeline. In December, as I travel to Latvia and Lithuania to visit as many people as possible, bringing them the dollars and supplies you have generously donated, I will also bring your friendship, love and compassion to those who are no longer "the forgotten."

With your continued support, we are – together – writing a more hopeful final chapter to the Holocaust, one of friendship, love and kindness.

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving!

- Zane Buzby

Donate online at: www.survivormitzvah.org or send a check to:

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