

## Liberation & Post-War - Overview

### Overview

**Allied forces witnessed horrific crimes as they moved across Europe from mid-1944 and into 1945. Jewish survivors emerged from hiding, camps, or secret identities. The survivors of the Holocaust, with determination and resilience, spread throughout the globe to rebuild their lives.**

**By mid-1944, Nazi Germany's stronghold** over Europe began to erode. As Allied troops (led by the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union) advanced, the Nazis made attempts to cover up their crimes.

**When the Germans surrendered** in May 1945, the war did not end for the survivors. Many required long hospital stays. Displaced persons (DP) camps were established by the Allies to give refuge to the survivors who stayed for weeks, and sometimes years. They searched for family members and friends, or attempted to return home — often finding nothing waiting for them. Their houses and possessions had been stolen from them, and most of their neighbors had turned a blind eye or, worse, played a role in their persecution. The survivors who found their way to the Pacific Northwest came with hopes of freedom and a chance to start a new life.

### Holocaust Survivors - Video Clips

The survivors featured below live or have lived in Washington State. The country listed in parentheses is the country in which they were living during the Holocaust. These survivors, with their history and stories, have shaped our community, contributing to its richness and diversity. They challenge us to understand history through personal narrative - to see complex human beings behind the facts.

**David Wilsey** <https://youtu.be/0QeHH2elcSk>

David Wilsey was born in Oconomowoc, Wisconsin in July 1914. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin Medical School in 1939 and married Emily Belk. A skilled anesthesiologist, David enlisted in the Army in September 1944. Throughout his deployment, he wrote to Emily nearly every day. These

vivid and heartfelt letters exposed the harsh reality and horrors of war. In April 1945, Dr. Wilsey was one of the first doctors to enter the newly-liberated Dachau concentration camp. He spent weeks caring for thousands of survivors, even sending Emily photos of their typhus ward. David wrote to Emily about Dachau, saying, “All I ask is that you ‘instill’ it into as many thousands [of] others as you can—till maybe we can get millions to ‘see’ it!”

In November 1945, Dr. Wilsey returned from Europe forever changed by the Nazi atrocities he witnessed. A few years later, the Wilseys moved to Spokane after finding out the town had only one anesthesiologist. Dr. Wilsey started his own practice, where he worked for 40 years. David and Emily had three children: Terry, Clarice, and Sharon. They helped found St. Stephen's Episcopal Church. David was a Boy Scout leader and member of Physicians for Social Responsibility.

David passed away in 1996, never speaking of Dachau. Emily passed away in 2008. One year later, while preparing the family home for sale, their children found David's letters. His daughter, Clarice, was deeply affected by her father's untold experiences as a liberator and felt compelled to share his story. She donated his letters to the Holocaust Center for Humanity and joined its Speakers Bureau as a Legacy Speaker. Clarice says, “I feel called to be his voice.”

### **Henry Butler - <https://youtu.be/ECKty-TuQ4w>**

Henry Butler was born Hans Buxbaum in August 1921. The Buxbaums, a tightknit German-Jewish family, fled the Nazi regime in the 1930s. Henry immigrated to New York, where he was drafted into the US Army in December 1942.

As a native German speaker, Henry was selected to train at the secret Fort Ritchie Military Intelligence Training Center in Maryland. He and thousands of others returned to their homeland to help defeat the murderous regime they had fled. Called “Ritchie Boys,” they used their German skills to interrogate prisoners on the front lines with the 3rd Army.

Henry was discharged from the Army in October 1945. He moved to California, where his parents had settled. In 1947, Henry met Olga Meyer, another Jewish refugee from Germany.

They quickly fell in love and were married on August 8th. That afternoon, they set out for the Pacific Northwest, which became their home.

They had two sons, Ron and Steve, and built full lives in Seattle. Avid travelers, the Butlers took countless trips across the world. Henry started his own business and was a leader in his Jewish

community, serving on several boards, including at Temple Beth Am. Henry and Olga remain active members of the Seattle community.

### **Stella DeLeon** <https://youtu.be/LbxZ8uP9G8k>

Stella DeLeon was born to a large Sephardic family on the island of Rhodes in 1926. In July 1944, the Nazis deported 1,700 Jews from Rhodes to Auschwitz, including Stella, her 7 siblings, and their parents. From their 2,000-year-old Jewish community, only 151 Jews survived, including Stella and her sister Flora. Tragically, their sister Janetta died of typhoid just three days before liberation.

On April 15, 1945, Stella and Flora were liberated by British soldiers in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. After months of recovery, Stella and Flora made their way to Rome.

In December 1945, a cousin in Los Angeles found the girls' names on a list of survivors and agreed to sponsor them to come to America. Stella immigrated to America aboard the SS Marine Shark, landing at Ellis Island in May 1947.

Stella lived in Los Angeles for two years before meeting her future husband Ralph DeLeon while on a trip to Seattle. They were married within six weeks, and Seattle became her home. Stella was an active member of the Ezra Bessaroth Sephardic synagogue and regularly volunteered at the City of Hope Cancer Center. Stella was an active member of the Holocaust Center's Speakers Bureau. Stella and Ralph had two children, whom they named Rochelle and Jack in memory of Stella's beloved siblings. Stella passed away in 2001.

### **Vera Federman** - [https://youtu.be/TnHF-2r\\_y28](https://youtu.be/TnHF-2r_y28)

Vera Federman was born in Debrecen, Hungary in June 1924. The Nazis invaded Hungary in March 1944. On Vera's 20th birthday, the Franks were deported to Auschwitz. Vera was separated from her parents, and she never saw them again. Vera was liberated by the American Tank Corps on March 28, 1945. Upon returning to Debrecen, she discovered that she had only one surviving relative: her beloved cousin Marika. Their lives shattered, they found refuge in a DP Camp in Austria.

In May 1946, the Hillel foundation for Jewish campus life offered scholarships for educated, English-speaking survivors to enroll in American colleges. She and Marika both qualified, and left Europe for the University of Washington in December 1947. Vera and Marika came to America on the SS Marine Tiger, docking at Ellis Island.

Soon after moving to Seattle and starting her studies, Vera met Marvin Federman, a US army veteran who had served in Europe. They married in 1949 and had two children, Murray and Judy, and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She and Marika remained very close their whole lives. Vera shared her story as a member of the Holocaust Center's Speakers Bureau. She passed away in 2017.

## Questions

- 1) What challenges immediately faced survivors of the Holocaust?
- 2) What challenges did survivors likely face in the DP camps?
- 3) What obligations, if any, do (or should) countries have to the survivors of genocide, war and mass atrocity?
- 4) What challenges did the Allied forces face when they encountered the camps?
- 5) After viewing the associated video stories of the above survivors and liberator (David Willsey), choose one story that most impacts you and explain how the story contributes to your understanding of the post-war challenges faced by survivors or liberators.
- 6) For many survivors and refugees of war or genocide, "survival" is the hardest part of surviving. Consider the following quote from author Goran Rosenberg, recounting the experiences of his father and other Holocaust survivors:

*"You who have survived Auschwitz are all damaged, whether it shows or not, and whether you care to admit it or not. Some of you deal with the damage better than others and are able to build a new world on the ruins of the old one and see all kinds of horizons opening up, and after a time no one can see or even suspect where you come from and what you're carrying with you – but no one is safe from the shadows."* (Rosenberg, Goran, *A Brief Stop on the Road from Auschwitz*, p 307 (Other Press, 2012).

What do you think the author means in this quote?