



Torchlighters 2008

Zvi Unger



Zvi Unger was born in 1929 in Sosnowiec, Poland, to a large Orthodox and well-educated family. When the war broke out, his father helped raise funds to buy aircraft for the Polish army.

On 1 September 1939, the family fled, seeking safety in another district in Poland. Because of severe hardships, in 1941, Zvi and two of his brothers were sent to stay with relatives in the Swierzawa ghetto. In August 1943, the ghetto was liquidated. They tried to hide in an attic, but were discovered a few days later.

In September 1943, Zvi was sent to Birkenau. When he got off the train, an inmate whispered to him that he should say he was 18. Thus Zvi survived the selection, and later many others by hiding under benches in the work camp. Zvi also met members of the *sonderkommando*, and witnessed their uprising.

In January 1945, Zvi was sent on a death march to Germany. After ten days, the inmates were put on a train for Buchenwald. On 11 April 1945, he was liberated from the camp by American soldiers. He was the lone surviving member of his family.

After a hospital stay, Zvi was moved to a children's home near Paris. In 1947, he joined the Zionist Poalei Tzion movement in the South of France to prepare for his immigration to *Eretz Israel* in 1948. He joined the youth group at Kibbutz Ramat Hakovesh, and fought together with them in the War of Independence. In 1949, he was among the founders of Kibbutz Malkiyah on the Lebanese border, where he still makes his home. Over the years, Zvi has worked in bookkeeping, and also served as the coordinator of his kibbutz.

Zvi married Naomi, who passed away in 2007. They have four children and 16 grandchildren.

Ester Samuel-Cahn



Ester Samuel-Cahn was born in 1933 in Oslo, Norway to Rabbi Yitzhak Julius Samuel, the rabbi of Norwegian Jewry, and Henriette, both born in Germany.

After the Germans conquered Norway in April 1940, life continued more or less normally, though food was scarce and they were educated in private homes because the Nazis had co-opted the school buildings for military purposes. In the summer of 1942, Ester's father was arrested. A day before the arrest, a German officer had hinted to him that it might be best if he fled, but because of his responsibility towards his community, he refused to leave. He was interrogated at Gestapo headquarters, and then sent to Auschwitz.

In late November, a member of the Norwegian underground and friend of the family, Ingebjorg Sletten-Fosstvedt, warned Henriette of the impending arrest of the Jews. Sletten-Fosstvedt and another member of the underground, Sigrid Helliesson-Lund, moved her and her aunt's families to Christian neighbors and then to a villa outside Oslo. For their action in rescuing Jews, Yad Vashem later recognized the two as Righteous Among the Nations.

On 3 December, Ester's family and 30 other Jews were hidden on two trucks bound for safety in Sweden. After a dangerous and difficult border crossing, they arrived at a refugee camp, and from there Ester and her family moved to Stockholm. In the summer of 1945 the family discovered that her father had been murdered in Auschwitz. Her mother would later testify at the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem.

In 1946, Ester, her mother and two brothers immigrated to *Eretz Israel*. Ester trained as a teacher, and then graduated from the Hebrew University with a degree in Mathematics, Physics and Statistics. She went on to head the university's Department of Statistics, became Chair of the Israel Statistical Association, and was elected to membership in the Norwegian Academy of Sciences. In 2004, Prof. Ester Samuel-Cahn was awarded the Israel Prize in Statistics.

Ester and her husband Aaron have four children and 15 grandchildren.

Menachem Katz



Menachem Katz was born in 1925 in Berezahany, Poland, to a religious Zionist family. When Menachem was an infant, his father died. His mother remarried, and she and her husband Eliyahu had two daughters.

In July 1941, the Germans occupied Berezahany, and Ukrainians and Germans murdered many Jews. In October 1942, the town's ghetto was established, and on Yom Kippur 1942, hundreds of Jews were deported to the Belzec death camp. Together with 30 other people, Menachem's family hid in a secret room in the ghetto, and thus escaped deportation.

In the spring of 1943, the Nazis established a labor camp near the ghetto. Eliyahu and Menachem were taken to a beverage manufacturing plant, where they slept at night. Two weeks later, the ghetto was liquidated. Eliyahu fell into deep despair, and before committing suicide, commanded his stepson to "be strong."

Wounded while escaping liquidation at a local cemetery, Menachem hid in a wheat field and eventually reached the house of a farmer he knew. A few days later, his mother and younger sister arrived. The Polish farmer, Piotr Kmiec, hid them together with Shimshon Fogelman's family. When Kmiec was murdered, his wife Anna continued to hide them, even though the farmhouse was occupied by German soldiers. Piotr and Anna Kmiec and their two daughters were later recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations. In the spring of 1944, the families fled, this time into the forest, where they remained until the liberation of Berezahany in July 1944.

Two years after liberation, in October 1946, Menachem, his mother and his sister Rina sailed for *Eretz Israel*, eventually reaching its shores in 1947. Menachem studied architecture at the Technion in Haifa. He won many prizes in his field, published a book on architecture, and designed the museum at Kibbutz Baram in memory of the Jews of Berezahany. Menachem also initiated the renovation of the Atlit internment camp and voluntarily designed the reconstructed camp. He is active in the Berezahany Immigrants Association, and he published a book commemorating the Jews of Berezahany. He is currently working on restoring the Berezahany synagogue.

Menachem is married to Chanah. They have two sons and six grandchildren.



Michael Maor



Michael Maor was born in 1933 in Halberstadt, Germany; he was an only child. After the rise of the Nazis to power, his parents fled to Spain, and from there to Yugoslavia.

When the war broke out, Michael and his parents were deported to the town of Derventa. By 1941, the Jews were forced to wear the yellow star. They fled to Italian-held territory, but were imprisoned by the Italians in a concentration camp on the island of Raab. After the Italian surrender to the Allied Forces in September 1943, Michael's family fled to an area controlled by the partisans. One day, Ustashi forces attacked. Michael fled into the forest under fire. There he found his father, and the two remained in the snow all night. The following day they found his mother, and together made it to the city of Topusko.

In 1944, the Germans attacked Topusko. Michael fled once more into the forest but, on his return, discovered his parents had been killed. After suffering harassment and abuse in an orphanage for being the only Jew, he lived with various foster families, but always felt like an outsider.

After the war, Michael found his way to a Zionist training camp near Rome. In June 1945, he arrived in *Eretz Israel*, and was sent, together with the other passengers on his ship, to Atlit. He eventually arrived at Kibbutz Mizra, where he was adopted. Following military service as a paratrooper and officer, Michael studied photography in Germany, while working for the Mossad. Among other professional achievements, he attained documents from the offices of the General Prosecutor of Baden Essen proving Eichmann's involvement in the extermination of the Jews during the Holocaust. Back in Israel, Michael continued to work as a photojournalist while assisting the Israeli Secret Service. After another stint in the IDF, he established the intelligence branch of the Israel Border Guards, serving as their national intelligence officer for 15 years. Today, he volunteers as the Chair of the Israel Desk of the International Policemen's Association for German-speaking countries.

Michael is married to Sarah. They have three children and four grandchildren.

Noemi Shadmi



Noemi Shadmi, née Spitz, was born in 1931 in Debrecen, Hungary. When she was three years old, her affluent family moved to Budapest, where they lived a proud Hungarian life.

In 1944, Noemi's father and older brother were taken to a forced labor camp and murdered. Noemi, her mother and younger brother, Joschka, were moved to the poor part of town, together with all the Jews in Budapest. Their severely overcrowded apartments were marked with yellow stars. Noemi helped her mother organize a kindergarten, and every morning, at her mother's bidding, went to deliver soup to an elderly couple. One morning, they didn't answer their door. It was Noemi's first encounter with death.

One fall morning in 1944, troopers from the SS and Arrow Cross (the Hungarian fascist party) broke into their apartment, and Noemi's mother was taken away at gunpoint. Looking helplessly at the children, she told Noemi, "Take good care of your little brother, I trust you." Noemi still remembers the last look her mother gave her. Two weeks later, the children were moved to the Budapest ghetto. Noemi worked in the ghetto kitchen, and so was able to help feed her five-year-old brother. At night, she would sneak into the Christian part of town to beg for food. In the ghetto, she witnessed mass death from starvation, cold and random shootings by the SS and Arrow Cross. When the Red Army liberated the city, Noemi and her brother returned to their home, only to find it occupied by strangers who threw them out.

After discovering that her parents and older brother had died in the Holocaust, Noemi and Joschka sailed for *Eretz Israel*. The ship was intercepted, and its passengers sent to a detention camp in Cyprus. A year later, in October 1947, she finally arrived, settling in Kibbutz Kfar Giladi, where she helped found Kibbutz Gaon, and assisted new immigrants. In 1948, Noemi enlisted in the IDF, serving as a combat officer and receiving an award for bravery.

Noemi served in the Israel Police for 20 years, retiring with the rank of commander. Today, she gives testimony for Yad Vashem, lecturing widely around the country.

Noemi is married to Asher. They have two children and four granddaughters.

Meir Brand



Meir Brand was born in 1936 in Bochnia, Poland, the younger of two sons in an affluent religious family. In August 1943, sensing the imminent liquidation of the ghetto where they had lived for two years, his parents decided to smuggle him

out. Meir's father gave his son a tag with a note inside requesting that Meir be raised as a Jew. Afterwards, he explained to the seven-year-old boy the significance of the parting, and gave him a Polish name—Dudek-Jozef.

The parents paid a Pole to take Meir and his cousins Miriam and Itek to safety. After a three-week hike to the Slovakian border, Meir arrived alone in Budapest. There, he joined the refugees and orphans who slept under bridges by night; by day, they collected fruit and vegetable scraps from the markets and plundered bombed-out homes to survive.

In April 1944, he was taken in by Bertha Rubenstein, a member of the Zionist underground. Rubenstein hid Meir and other Jewish children, frequently changing hiding places. In June, she and Meir left Budapest on the Kastner train, arriving at Bergen Belsen, where they remained for the next eight months.

They were liberated in April 1945, and went to Switzerland. In August 1945, Meir received a visa, and emigrated from Italy to *Eretz Israel*. In September, a Belgian uncle contacted him after discovering his name on a list of survivors. The uncle told Meir that his parents Shoshana and Ya'akov and older brother Shimon had been deported to Auschwitz and murdered there.

Meir settled on Kibbutz Neveh Eitan with a relative, and in 1954 enlisted in the IDF. He participated in all of Israel's wars from the Sinai Campaign to the First Lebanon War. Meir studied Agricultural Economics, and was both farm coordinator and treasurer of his kibbutz. Later, he managed the meat division of the Tnuva cooperative, and after his retirement joined an office of economic consultants.

Meir is married to Hanna. They have three sons and eight grandchildren.