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## Ben Lesser: Surviving the Holocaust

Mac O'Malley, Assoc. Editor - Special Features | April 26, 2013

### Part 1 in 3-part Series

The horrors of the Holocaust are accepted as a terrifying part of World history, tragedies that we cannot quite comprehend. But for some, the Holocaust is not just a history lesson, it is a part of their childhood. Many Holocaust survivors, such as Ben Lesser, an American author and entrepreneur, have chosen to share their stories so that their experiences may help shape future generations. In this three-part American Newzine exclusive, we profile this remarkable man.



"Papa Ben" Lesser showcasing his new products (Courtesy)

Baynish Leser, known to many as Ben Lesser or Papa Ben, was born in Krakow, Poland on October 18, 1928. His parents, Lazar and Shaindel Leser, instilled in their five children the traditional religious customs of their Orthodox Jewish heritage. Ben's early childhood was filled with happy memories of a loving family, but at 10-years-old, his life was forever altered by Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939.



A young Ben Lesser (Courtesy)

Ben spent the next few years after the invasion moving around Europe with his family and witnessing the deaths of many Jews. Horrifically, his parents were executed in an attempt to escape from Bochnia. But this tragic chapter in his life had just begun. In the spring of 1944, Ben and some of his family were piled into cattle cars and brought to Auschwitz. Ben was separated from two of his siblings, who he would never see again before they died in the most notorious of the death camps.

Although only 15 at the time, Ben took responsibility for his surviving uncle and cousin. He even received a beating in his uncle's stead, realizing his uncle was too weak to survive the punishment. When asked what gave him the courage to do so, Ben replied, "I may have only been 15 but I was not a child for a very long time. I loved my uncle and cousin very much. At that time they were my only family. When a member of your family's well-being or life is in jeopardy, you do everything in your power to save them. I would not call it courage. I acted on instinct. It was the right thing to do, so I did it."

Despite his efforts, Ben could not save his cousin and uncle from a fate shared by many of his loved ones. When American soldiers finally freed the prisoners from Auschwitz in 1945, the starved and exhausted 15-year-old boy who had selflessly watched over his family had no home to return to and had no knowledge of any surviving family members.

— ANi —

For more information on the Holocaust, visit the [Memorial and Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau](#) or [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#).

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June 9, 2014

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