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Ben Lesser: Breaking the Silence

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

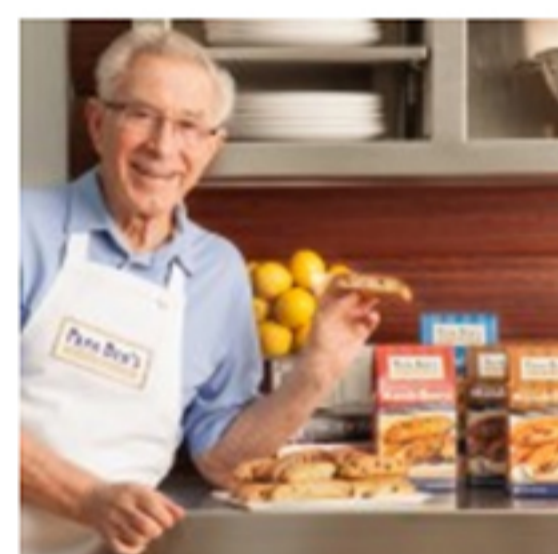
Part 3 in 3-part Series

Ben Lesser had remained quiet about his childhood experiences; he spared his children and grandchildren from the terrifying details of the Holocaust. He wanted them to grow up and enjoy their childhood innocence. For 50 years he rarely spoke of those events until a request from his young grandson, Adam, helped Ben make the decision to break his silence.



"Papa Ben" Lesser (middle left), CEO and Ben's wife Jean Lesser (middle right), President and daughter Gail Lesser-Gerber (far left), COO and Granddaughter, Jenica Gerber (far right) (Courtesy)

Adam's fifth grade class had been discussing World War II when he mentioned that his grandfather was a Holocaust survivor. His teacher asked Adam to invite Ben to speak to the class about his experiences in the concentration camps. Ben made the painful decision to share his story with his grandson's class, and soon after, he was sharing his story in classrooms around the nation.



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

Since then, Ben has shared his story with hundreds of classes and at religious and community events. Ben has been back to his home country several times with his family, visiting spots filled with childhood memories and horrors. He has visited his parents' grave and has even gone back to Auschwitz-Birkenau, a painful reminder of the terror that he experienced at the hands of Nazis soldiers.

In 2009, Ben founded The Zachor Holocaust Remembrance Foundation, whose mission statement is "To Insure The Remembrance Of The Holocaust". By 2011, over 90,000 "Zachor" ("Remember" in Hebrew) pins had been distributed across the country.

In 2010, the entrepreneurial bug hit Ben, and he decided to take on another project to recreate his father's mandelbroyt (Jewish "twice baked" bread) recipe. Today, Papa Ben's Kitchen operates in honor of Ben's father. Part of the proceeds from Papa Ben's Kitchen are donated to The Zachor Holocaust Remembrance Foundation.

In 2010 Ben and Jean also celebrated 60 years of marriage, and in 2011, he published his autobiography, *Living A Life That Matters: from Nazi Nightmare to American Dream*, which shares intimate details about his early childhood, experiences in the concentration camps, and his life in America.

Ben Lesser's decision to share his horrifying experiences has helped many people around the world appreciate the importance of understanding, empathy, and love. Because of his courage and willingness to break his silence, Ben's message, "Zahor", will live on in the hearts and minds of people around the world.

The beautiful story of a young boy who experienced so much hatred and yet became a man who teaches the importance of love, serves as a reminder that it is in each of our power to make this world a better place. In Ben's own words,

*"We can choose to learn about the mistakes of the past so that we don't repeat them...
We can choose to educate ourselves about both local and global events...
We can choose to move ahead toward success instead of staying stuck in misery...
We can choose to express respect instead of hate...
We can choose to Live a Life That Matters."*

For more information regarding Ben Lesser's causes, visit [The Zachor Holocaust Remembrance Foundation](#) or [Papa Ben's Kitchen](#).

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