

November 7, 2013

Wallace All Faiths Chapel | Fish Interfaith Center | Chapman University



Perspectives on *Kristallnacht* 75 Years Later

November 9-10, 1938



CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

Rodgers Center for Holocaust Education

Stern Chair in Holocaust Education

Sala and Aron Samueli Holocaust Memorial Library

Department of History,

Wilkinson College of Humanities and Social Sciences



*"As I was watching the destroyed Synagogue and the Jews kneeling by the ruins,
I wondered whose turn would be next! ... Would it be our turn?
Will the same thing happen to our Protestant and Catholic Churches!"*

—A Letter by a Firefighter (excerpted)—

*"First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist.*

*Then they came for the Trade Unionists, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Trade Unionist.*

*Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew.*

Then they came for me-and there was no one left to speak for me."

—Martin Niemöller—

Perspectives on *Kristallnacht* 75 Years Later November 9-10, 1938

November 7 | 4-6 p.m.

Wallace All Faiths Chapel | Fish Interfaith Center
Chapman University

- Introduction Marilyn J. Harran, Ph.D.**
Stern Chair in Holocaust Education,
Director, Rodgers Center for Holocaust Education,
Professor of Religious Studies and History,
Wilkinson College of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Chapman University
- Legalizing Injustice Michael Bazyler, J.D.**
Professor of Law, Fowler School of Law,
Chapman University
- Perspective on *Kristallnacht* Idele Steuer Stapholtz**
Holocaust Survivor and Witness
November 9-10, 1938, Dinslaken, Germany
- Witnessing the World's Indifference Stefan Ionescu, Ph.D.**
Research Associate, Rodgers Center for
Holocaust Education and Department of History,
Wilkinson College of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Chapman University
- Perspective on *Kristallnacht* Engelina Lowenberg Billauer**
Holocaust Survivor and Witness
November 9-10, 1938, Berlin, Germany
- Experiencing Despair Jeff Koerber**
Research Associate, Rodgers Center for
Holocaust Education and Department of History,
Wilkinson College of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Chapman University

Perspective on Kristallnacht Curt Lowens
Holocaust Survivor and Witness
November 9-10, 1938, Berlin, Germany

Seeking a Way Out Shira Klein, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor, Department of History,
Wilkinson College of Humanities and Social Sciences,
Chapman University

Perspective on Kristallnacht Cantor Leopold Szneer
Holocaust Survivor and Witness
November 9-10, 1938, Munich, Germany

Discussion Among the Participants Moderator: Jennifer D. Keene, Ph.D.
Professor of History and Chair, Department of History,
Wilkinson College of Humanities and Social Sciences

Questions from the Audience..... Moderator: Jennifer D. Keene, Ph.D.

Closing Marilyn Harran, Ph.D.

El Malei Rachamim Cantor Leopold Szneer

*Reception to Follow in the Foyer of the
Wallace All Faiths Chapel*



CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

The Rodgers Center for Holocaust Education

The Stern Chair in Holocaust Education

The Sala and Aron Samuelli Holocaust Memorial Library



An Interfaith Service of Remembrance for *Kristallnacht*



Richard Fybel, guest speaker

*Son of Holocaust Survivors and
Associate Justice, California Court of Appeal*

Co-sponsored by:

The Rodgers Center for Holocaust Education

Fish Interfaith Center

Hillel

Chapman Interfaith Council

November 8 | 6:30 p.m.

Wallace All Faiths Chapel | Fish Interfaith Center
Chapman University

Admission is Free

For further information, please contact
The Rodgers Center for Holocaust Education

Idele Stapholtz



Idele Stapholtz was born Ida Steuer in Chemnitz, Germany on August 13, 1926. Her parents, Polish Jewish émigrés, met and married in Germany. When Idele's mother, only 18, died of complications from childbirth, Idele was placed in the care of a woman whose own child had died at birth. Her father, a teacher, visited often, sometimes taking her with him to the cemetery where her mother was buried.

When Idele was 4, father and daughter moved to Recklingshausen in Westphalia. Idele lived with the Jacobsons, whom she called "uncle" and "mama." She grew to love them and their four teenaged children. Idele's father

visited each day until the Nazis forced him to return to Poland.

The Jacobsons promised to look after Idele until her father could return with the documents which would enable the two to come to the United States where her father had relatives. Jews themselves, the Jacobsons believed they were safe since "Uncle" Jacobson had fought heroically in World War I.

When Idele was tormented at school by classmates who called her a "dirty Jew," the Jacobsons decided to send her to a Jewish children's home in the Rheinland, but the home was destroyed on *Kristallnacht*, November 9, 1938. A few days later she was taken to Cologne and then sent on a *Kindertransport* to Brussels, Belgium where she arrived on January 5, 1939.

A Catholic family, Madame Marie Goossens and her daughter Germaine, gave Idele a home. When the Germans occupied Belgium in May 1940, the Goossens went to extraordinary lengths to protect Idele. When she needed a tonsillectomy, they arranged for a doctor to perform the surgery in their home on the kitchen table. When Jews were ordered to wear the Yellow Star, a clerk at city hall told Germaine not to register Idele as a Jew. Germaine followed the advice which later saved Idele from deportation. The director of the Catholic High School, a nun in

the order Les Dame de Marie, Madame Eulalie, accepted Idele as a student knowing she was a Jew. Idele's best friend, Annie Lannoo, and her parents knew Idele's secret and, in spite of the danger, welcomed her to their home during summer vacations.

On September 3, 1944, Brussels was liberated. For Idele, joy was tempered by concern for the Jacobsons and her father from whom she had not heard since 1941. She learned that the Jacobson children were safe but that "Uncle" and "Mama" Jacobson had died in a concentration camp. She was told her father had joined the Polish underground, been caught by the SS, and sent to a death camp in 1942. She could learn nothing more.

Idele remained with the Goossens. In July 1947, she traveled to the U.S. to meet her father's siblings. When they encouraged her to stay and attend New York University, Idele, who had fallen in love with America, accepted. Two months later, she met her future husband Ben Stapholtz. When the couple married in 1949, Ben insisted they go to Belgium so her "aunts" could bless their marriage. The Goossens gave her only one piece of advice—"learn about your Jewish heritage and have a religious Jewish family."

Germaine visited Idele many times and Idele's two daughters considered her their grandmother. In 1993, with



Idele Steuer Stapholtz with rescuers
Marie and Germaine Goossens, 1941

her friend Annie by her side, Idele unveiled three plaques at Yad Vashem naming Germaine and Marie Goossens; Monsieur and Madame Lannoo; and Madame Eulanie, as Righteous Among the Nations.

*"Within my memory
of the madness of war
remains a vision of two
angels, two Righteous
Among the Nations."*

Engelina Billauer



Engelina Billauer was born on July 29, 1927 in Berlin, Germany. She was the youngest of three siblings with a brother, Wilhelm, nine years older, and a sister, Frieda, seven. Her parents, George and Taube Lowenberg, were deaf mutes. Engelina learned to speak and read sign language, as did her two siblings.

Although the Lowenbergs were the only Jewish family in their building, Engelina initially felt no hostility. Until 1935, she attended a public school and then went to a private Jewish girls' school. Life became increasingly difficult with restrictions on when Jews could shop and what they could purchase and with vandalism of synagogues and Jewish-owned stores.

From her bedroom on *Kristallnacht*, November 9, 1938, Engelina heard the sound of shattering glass and saw the night sky lit up in flames. The next morning, on her way to school, she saw her synagogue still burning. The children were sent back home. Fearing for her safety, Engelina's parents sent her to stay for a week with friends. As Engelina learned upon her return, during that week her brother Wilhelm had committed suicide.

Engelina's school was merged with another which she attended until June 1940. In September 1941, all Jews over the age of six were required to wear the Star of David affixed to their clothing. The Lowenbergs were now visible targets. On September 23, 1942, two Gestapo officers arrived at their door. Thinking they must have the wrong apartment since the blue-eyed, blonde-haired girls did not "look Jewish," the officers confirmed their identity and then ordered the family to pack their suitcases and leave. As they walked down the stairs and out of the building, their neighbors stood by watching silently.

The Lowenbergs were packed into the Levetzow synagogue with some 1,000 other Jews. On September 27, they were marched through the streets of Berlin to the railroad station. This time their fellow Berliners not only watched but hurled abuse, saying "It's about time we got rid of the Jews."

“The Gestapo officers stared at my sister and me. They were stunned we were Jews since we both had blonde hair and blue eyes. ‘Are you maybe 60 percent Jewish?’ one asked. ‘No,’ I said. ‘I am 100 percent Jewish!’”

The train passed through Riga, Latvia, where one group was taken off, and then traveled on to Estonia. Upon arrival, Engelina and Frieda were ordered to the left and their parents to the right and onto a bus. The girls ran to join their parents but the SS officer sent them away, promising them they would see their parents soon. It was a lie. Their parents were driven into the forest and killed in a mass execution.

The girls were sent to Talinn, Estonia where they worked in a shipyard. They, and three other girls with whom they became friends, were helped by a gentile worker at the shipyard who risked severe punishment to sneak them extra food. From Talinn the five girls were sent to a succession of camps, Ereda, Goldfilz, and Stutthof before arriving in October 1944 in Neuengamme, a sub-camp of Sachsenhausen, where they worked 12-hour shifts making hand grenades.

In March 1945, they were moved to Bergen-Belsen. On arrival, female SS guards set their dogs upon the girls. To this day, Engelina has scars on her legs and a deep fear of dogs. The five girls were assigned the gruesome duty of carrying bodies to a huge pile—a horrible task that defies description.

On April 15, 1945, the British army liberated the camp. Engelina, ill with typhus, was hospitalized for three

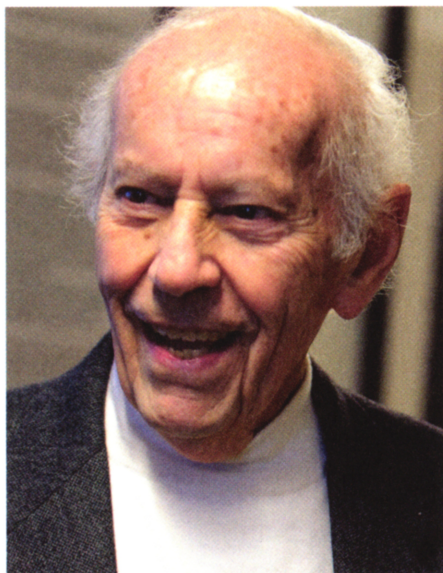
weeks. After she recovered, she joined her sister in the displaced persons camp now set up at Bergen-Belsen. There Frieda met and married a fellow survivor. When the couple moved to Lübeck, Engelina went along. They rented an apartment above a jewelry store owned by Holocaust survivor Julian Billauer whose son, Richard, Engelina married in February 1950.

In 1951, the Billauers came to the United States and settled in the Bronx. Now living in Santa Monica, they are the proud parents of two and grandparents of four, one of whom, Jesse, suffered a surfing accident which paralyzed him from the waist down. A motivational speaker, Jesse has found inspiration in his grandmother, her courage, proud affirmation of her identity, and refusal ever to quit.



Father George Lowenberg, brother Wilhelm, sister Frieda, baby Engelina, and mother Taube, 1927

Curt Lowens



“Now my head began to spin. I could not allow myself to be checked a second time. The ID card could be suspected as a fake, my bag contained papers revealing my activity, they could even discover that this young school teacher was a Jew traveling for the Resistance.”

As a respected character actor, Curt Lowens has mastered the art of taking on another identity. Yet this profession was actually thrust upon him out of necessity. For Curt, a German Jew, taking on an assumed identity, that of a Dutch gentile schoolteacher, became a matter of survival.

Born November 17, 1925, in Allenstein, East Prussia (now Olstyn, Poland), Curt Loewenstein spent his childhood in a home filled with music and laughter, feeling loved and protected even after Hitler's ascent to power in 1933 brought an unprecedented rise in antisemitism. Yet in time his parents could no longer shield their children from the growing hatred. Curt and his older brother were singled out for abuse at school and their father, whose services as an attorney were once in great demand, now became the “Jew lawyer” with no clients.

In 1936 the family moved to Berlin, hoping to find safety in the large Jewish community there. But conditions worsened daily, and with Curt's brother Heinz safely in England, the Loewensteins began making plans to immigrate to the United States. At last, after months of waiting and red tape, the family received their visa, leaving Berlin for Rotterdam, where they were to board the *SS Veendam*, bound for America and a new life.

But the day before the family was to leave, May 10, 1940, Germany invaded Holland. Curt's father secured a position with the Jewish Council in Amsterdam which meant a temporary reprieve from deportation. But in June 1943 the family was caught in an unexpected roundup and sent to Westerbork, a transit camp, before deportation to Auschwitz. Luck intervened and the family was miraculously released. They wasted no time in going underground.

Curt was the first to be taken into hiding by the student resistance. He received a false identity card and the new name "Ben Joosten." In January 1944, with his mother dead and his father safely hidden in the countryside, "Ben" became an active member of the resistance, carrying false documents, helping to hide Jewish children, and even saving two downed American pilots from capture. In the vortex of danger, the 17-year-old showed courage and ingenuity far beyond his years. The British who liberated "Ben" found his knowledge of English, Dutch and German an invaluable asset and offered him the opportunity to join the British Eighth Corps as an interpreter. In a twist of fate beyond fiction, "Benny" served as the interpreter for two British officers of the Military Government Detachment who placed the leaders of the Nazi government under house

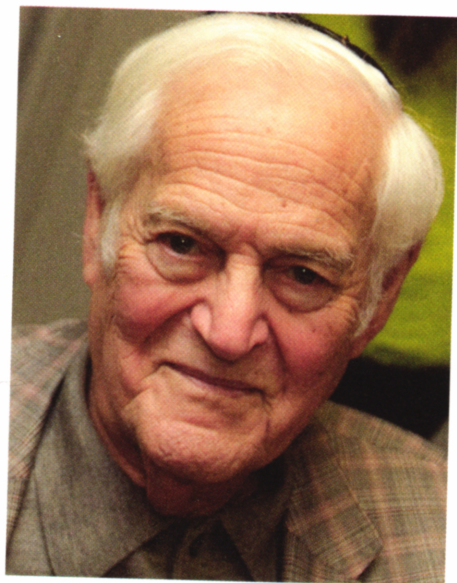
arrest. Not yet 20 years old, Benny stood face to face with Grand Admiral Doenitz, Hitler's successor. No longer did he have to hide his true identity.

In 1947, Curt, his father and stepmother immigrated to the United States. Curt found a job and explored his love of acting with night classes at New York's famed Berghoff Studio. It was there he met Katherine Guilford, his scene partner, and later his wife. Now, in America, he was free to choose the roles he would play, from Broadway to film and television.



Curt Lowens (right) with brother Heinz, 1936

Leopold Szneer



*"I have fulfilled my
childhood dream.
I have become a cantor.
I am a survivor."*

Leopold Szneer was born to Polish émigrés, Moshe and Dora Szneer, in 1921 in Munich, Germany. His father was a successful tailor with his own workshop. Life was good for the Szneers, their son Leopold and daughters Ester and Hanna. At the age of 5, Leopold began his education at a Jewish elementary school. Even as a boy he knew he was meant to spend his life giving voice to his faith. He studied *chazzanut*, cantorial singing, with the best teachers in Munich and even performed as a soloist in his synagogue's choir.

Nazism's rise to power threatened to end his dream and silence his voice. His Jewish school was closed, and only Nazi propaganda songs could be sung in the public school he attended. In 1935, Leopold left Munich to attend a theological seminary in Frankfurt-am-Main; however, under Nazi pressure, it closed in 1938. Arrested shortly after *Kristallnacht* in November 1938, Leopold was sent to Dachau, but his parents gained his release and sent the 16-year-old on a *Kindertransport* to Belgium, where relatives took him in. His sister Ester had made her way safely to London, England, in summer 1938. In spring 1939, Leopold's parents and younger sister joined him in Belgium. Unfortunately, Germany's invasion of Belgium placed the family in grave danger once again.

In 1942, the family received their deportation order. The resistance found a secure hiding place for Hanna, but Leopold refused to leave his parents. Desperate, the family hid in a dog shelter. Eventually they were discovered and arrested. Sent to the transit camp Malines shortly before Rosh Hashanah 1942, Leopold dared even there to give voice to his faith. He gathered ten men, including his father, to form a *minyan* and, hiding in a bunk, led a short High Holiday service. Denounced by a fellow prisoner, Leopold and the entire camp were ordered to confess who had dared to pray. Leopold stepped forward. Perhaps it was his courage that impressed the SS officer who let him go with the warning, "Here we do not pray."

The next years, including a time of solitary confinement in Breendonck concentration camp, tested the young man's faith. Eventually, with help from the resistance, he escaped, joined the partisans, and returned to Brussels, hiding for nine months in a small attic until the city was liberated by the Allies shortly before Rosh Hashanah 1944. Only then did Leopold learn that his parents had been murdered at Auschwitz in early 1944. Yet even this devastating blow could not shatter his faith or silence his voice. His fellow survivors in Brussels turned to Leopold to lead the first High Holiday service in freedom, attended by 700 survivors and liberators.

In 1946, Leopold met fellow survivor Isabelle Lubinewski whom he married a year later. In 1952 the couple came to the United States, and in 1953 Cantor Szneer led his first High Holiday services in his new home, fulfilling his childhood dream and inspiring decades of worshippers with his soaring voice of faith.



Cantor Leopold Szneer, front row left, at Reichenbach Synagogue, Munich, Germany, 1933

Chapman University Faculty Participants



Michael Bazylar is Professor of Law and The “1939” Club Law Scholar in Holocaust and Human Rights Studies at the Fowler School of Law at Chapman University. He is a leading authority on the use of American and European courts to redress genocide and other historical wrongs. Bazylar is the author of the book *Holocaust Justice: The Battle for Restitution in America’s Courts* (2003) contributor of chapters to various books on genocide and the law, and the co-editor with Roger Alford of *Holocaust Restitution: Perspectives on the Litigation and Its Legacy* (2006).



Marilyn Harran, Ph.D., holds the Stern Chair in Holocaust Education and is Professor of Religious Studies and History in the Wilkinson College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Chapman University. She is the founding director of the Rodgers Center for Holocaust Education. Dr. Harran was a contributing writer and consultant to *The Holocaust Chronicle* and is the author of two monographs on the Reformation. She was a contributor (with Elisabeth Leyson) to the memoir authored by Leon Leyson, *The Boy on the Wooden Box* (2013). She is a 2008 recipient of the Spirit of Anne Frank Award.



Stefan Ionescu, Ph.D., is a Research Associate in the Rodgers Center for Holocaust Education and the Department of History in the Wilkinson College of Humanities and Sciences at Chapman University. A native of Romania, Ionescu holds a Ph.D. in history from Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, an M.A. in history from Central European University in Budapest, Hungary, and an M.A. in Jewish studies from University of Bucharest. He earned an LLB from the Law School of the University of Bucharest. He is the author of articles in such journals as *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* and *Culture and Psychology*.



Jennifer D. Keene, Ph.D., is Professor and chair of the Department of History in Wilkinson College of Humanities and Sciences, Chapman University. She is a specialist in American military experience during World War I and has published three books on the American involvement in the First World War, *Doughboys, the Great War and the Remaking of America* (2001), *The United States and the First World War* (2000), and *World War I* (2006; 2010). She is currently working on several projects related to the upcoming centennial of World War I, including a new synthesis of the American experience during the war under contract with Oxford University Press.



Shira Klein, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor in the Department of History, Wilkinson College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Chapman University. Born in Cambridge, U.K., she received her B.A. from Tel Aviv University, her M.A. from La Sapienza University in Rome, and her Ph.D. in 2012 from the Departments of History and Judaic Studies at New York University. She is currently working on a book manuscript on Italian Jews, stretching from the 19th century until after World War II, provisionally entitled *Clinging to Italy: Italian Jewish Patriots, Exiles, and Survivors*.



Jeff Koerber is a Research Associate with the Rodgers Center for Holocaust Education and an instructor of Holocaust history courses in the Department of History in the Wilkinson College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Chapman University. He is completing his doctorate in Holocaust history at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, with research examining the prewar and wartime experience of young Jews from the borderland regions of the Soviet Union and Poland. Prior to his studies in Holocaust history, he received his B.A. and M.A. degrees in Architecture from the University of Illinois and practiced historic preservation architecture in Chicago.

