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## Emergency Humanitarian Mission to Ukraine

BY JANE ULMAN

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Zane Buzby, co-founder of The Survivor Mitzvah Project, is spearheading a 14-day whirlwind emergency humanitarian mission to central Ukraine in December to bring urgently needed financial aid to more than 70 elderly, impoverished and forgotten Jewish Holocaust survivors.

"Amazingly, these people survived the Holocaust, but I'm not sure they can make it through this winter," said Buzby, a sitcom director and former actress, whose grass-roots nonprofit seeks to provide desperately needed cash — as well as equally critical friendship — to more than 1,000 survivors in Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Slovakia and Ukraine.

Buzby hopes to raise \$100,000 to distribute to survivors on this mission. Most are living on pensions of about \$80 a month, insufficient to cover even the cost of heating fuel. Buzby said the economic crisis has had a devastating impact on their already precarious existence.

Buzby plans to visit survivors in approximately 25 cities and villages, depending on weather and road conditions. On this mission, ideally the first of four, she is focusing on assisting the oldest and most destitute survivors. She will spend New Year's Eve, for example, in the village of Korsun with Tzal Goisman, 87, a survivor who fought in the Battle of Stalingrad and still has shrapnel in his leg.



Survivor Mitzvah Project co-founder Zane Buzby, right, and Luidmila Petrovna, her guide and translator, on a trip to assist survivors in Belarus in 2007.



Ikhil Vigdorovich, who is in his late 80s or early 90s, lives in Uman. He writes, "I fought the Nazis from the first to the last day of the war, total 1,418 days and nights. I lost my arm close to the end of the war." He is desperate to locate his relatives

Another survivor on her itinerary is Semyon Kroch, 88, who lives in Kolomeyo, and who serves as cantor of his small shul. Kroch, who relies on multiple medications, none of which he can afford, recently fell, seriously injuring himself. He writes, "I am a lonely man with a small pension. I ask God in my prayers to save his people."

Buzby will also film the expedition for The Survivor Mitzvah Project archive, assisted by Noam Osband, a doctoral student in visual anthropology; Robyn Roth, who has worked with the organization for two years; and Luidmila Petrovna, a non-Jewish English teacher from Belarus, who serves as her "boot on the ground," translator and guide.

The Survivor Mitzvah Project, a 501(c) (3) nonprofit, was founded in 2002 by Buzby. While she raised \$225,000 in 2008, mostly in small donations, she said the organization needs at least six times that amount annually to meet the survivors' most basic needs of food, medicine, heat and shelter.

Buzby calls these survivors "the unluckiest generation," not only because the Nazis decimated their lives, but also because they have endured continual hardships, including Soviet labor camps, Chernobyl and the fall of Communism, which wiped out their savings.

According to Buzby, most American Jews assume that the survivors' needs are being adequately addressed, but the fact is that none of The Survivor Mitzvah Project recipients have received funds from the Conference on

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in America—Sirota and Felsher, from Baltimore—to leave them his personal belongings. Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, as they don't meet that organization's narrow definition of a survivor. Additionally, larger Jewish organizations have cut back aid, leaving survivors with minimal and sporadic non-monetary assistance, if anything.

"Some of these people are 98 years old," Buzby said. "This is our last opportunity to help them."

For more information about The Survivor Mitzvah Project or to donate, call (800) 905-6160 or visit [survivormitzvah.org](http://survivormitzvah.org).

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