

The last eyewitnesses to the Holocaust in Eastern Europe are sharing their stories with us. Now more than ever, with the majority of young people and others who know little to nothing about the Holocaust, it is imperative we continue our work to record Holocaust testimony.

In addition to recording firsthand accounts from Holocaust Survivors, *The Survivor Mitzvah Project* also seeks out eyewitnesses and rescuers, recording their experiences for inclusion in SMP's Holocaust Educational Archive.

Firsthand experiences of local, non-Jewish people in the towns and villages where mass murder was commonplace, reinforces the testimony of Holocaust survivors and adds chilling details to the stories of hundreds of thousands of nameless Jewish victims.

On one of The Survivor Mitzvah Project's Emergency Aid Expedition to Moldova and Transnistria, we interviewed eyewitness Maria Zapaleu, (pictured at right) in Hincăuți, Northern Moldova. She lives an extremely harsh life. Her hut is tiny, just one room with a wood-burning stove, no plumbing and a few steps up to her bed. Maria is from an Orthodox Christian family and was approximately 11 years old during the Holocaust.



We also recorded Jewish survivor Lyubov Isakovna Vakar. Her account of the Holocaust in Moldova echoes Maria Zapaleu's account. While Maria and her family witnessed deportation marches from Moldova to Ukraine, 18-year-old Lyubov Isakovna walked in one of these brutal marches, carrying her young niece, who died in her arms from hunger and exposure. Lyubov Isakovna was forced to leave the child's body on the road, an experience that still haunts her today at age 99. The video testimonies of Maria and Lyubov can be viewed on our website.

Maria describes Jewish slaves building the paved road from Edinet to Briceni (Moldova): "They [the Jews] were greatly abused. Once

we went to another village to visit our grandmother and had to cross that road. Mother and Father sat in the front of our horse-drawn wagon, and I sat in the back. My mother said, 'Here is a piece of bread. Give it to the people who are building the road.' These were educated people who graduated from university. There were doctors among them! But they were barefoot, wearing only their underwear, building the main road. I threw food to them from the horse cart, whatever my mother had, and gave it to them. I did this quickly, in order not to be noticed by the soldiers. They (the Jews) were bleeding (would G-d not have made it so) because the rocks they were forced to carry were rough and jagged, excavated by blasting the nearby riverbank with machine guns. The road from Edinet to Briceni was built by the Jews. That's what it was like. Oh G-d, oh G-d."

She also told us this: "On the road where the Jews were marched, a woman started to give birth. The Nazi guards held thick whips, and one of them was whipping this woman. His whip became tangled in the umbilical cord. The baby started crying. All the Jews begged him: 'Stop! Don't kill her! She's in labor. She's in pain.' She was sobbing. Another soldier came over and said, 'Leave her. We will deal with her later. She will carry the baby.' This is how it was. My mother came out of our house, gave her a towel to wrap the baby in and offered her some food, telling her 'You need to regain your strength.' They [Jews] were hungry. Mother broke some bread into pieces which she passed around. 'Here, eat.' This is how it was. People were evil. It was scary."



**Lyubov Isakovna Vakar's sufferings could fill many books.** She marched on the road for months in the freezing cold winter rains, wearing only the thin cotton dress she wore when arrested the previous summer. She had no shoes. She was taken to Kodyma Camp, from which "no one returned." There she was shot by a drunken guard. Her entire family perished.

She was ill and starving. She is still profoundly grateful to kind people from the villages who defied the Romanian guards and threw food her way. She is also grateful to a village girl who helped her escape, brought her home, fed her, dressed her in warmer clothing, and had her mother clean Lyubov's bullet

wound. But shortly thereafter Lyubov was recaptured and brought to another camp and put on another death March.

All across Eastern Europe, survivors and witnesses shared their never-before-told stories with us, because they want future generations to know what happened to them. From Lithuania and Belarus to Moldova, Latvia, and Ukraine, we recorded witnesses and victims for posterity. For a preview of their testimonies, visit *The Survivor Mitzvah Project's Holocaust Educational Archive* at [www.survivormitzvah.org](http://www.survivormitzvah.org)



The last survivors of the Holocaust who went through these experiences now have multiple health issues due to their inhumane treatment during the Holocaust and decades of neglect after the war. Right now, many suffer from COVID-19. Their governments put the elderly in enforced isolation, denying them access to goods and services. Homecare workers were not able to visit the bedridden because there was no proper PPE available. Despite these challenges, *The Survivor Mitzvah Project* organized several emergency programs to bring financial aid, medical care, and PPE to them during the pandemic. It is imperative that we continue food and medicine delivery as well as home care to our bedridden survivors. Please help us continue our vital work by making a special donation this month. Many thanks for your ongoing kindness and compassion.

Donate online at [survivormitzvah.org](http://survivormitzvah.org) or send a check to:

The Survivor Mitzvah Project

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**The Survivor Mitzvah Project is a 501c3 non-profit public charity.**

**100% of your donation goes directly into the hands of a Holocaust Survivor in need.**