

Lily Ebert BEM

My name is Lily Ebert, I am here with my great-grandson Dov and I am a Holocaust survivor. I am speaking in support of the Holocaust Memorial. I want to tell you about my story because in a few years' time I won't be able to. It will have become history.

I was born in Hungary, the oldest of 6 children.

When the Nazis occupied Hungary, we had to give up everything. My brother knew things would get worse; he hid a few items of jewellery, including a golden pendant, in the heel of my mother's shoe.

In July 1944 I was deported to Auschwitz Birkenau along with my mother, my younger brother and 3 of my sisters.

We travelled in cattle trucks, and the conditions were indescribable – people began to die.

As we travelled my mother said maybe we should swap shoes. And we did. After 5 days we arrived at Auschwitz. My mother, my youngest sister and my brother were sent straight to the gas chambers. I never saw them again.

I still find it hard to talk about Auschwitz – how do you describe a factory of death? A place of industrial killing?

The Nazis shaved our heads and took away our clothing. By chance, I was able to keep my shoes. When the heel of my shoe wore out, I moved the jewellery and kept it safe by hiding it in a piece of bread. It survived along with me and is the only thing I have from my childhood. I wear it every day.

Hundreds of members of my extended family were murdered during the Holocaust. I am telling you what took place because they cannot.

I promised myself, if I survive against all the odds, I will do all I can to share my story, for myself and for those that did not survive. And I do. The world should not forget the most terrible crime against humanity. I am a witness.

With the Holocaust Educational Trust, I speak to students and organisations as much as I can because I want them to know what happened. But I know that there will come a time when I can't do this anymore. That is why we must build this Memorial to educate the world and ensure that the terrible crimes of the Holocaust will never ever happen again.

Dov Forman

My name is Dov Forman and I'm 16 years old.

You might ask, what is a 16-year-old doing at a Planning Inquiry, and why do I care?

The answer is sat here next to me; my great grandma Lily Ebert. I do not remember a time when I didn't know about the Holocaust, or what my great grandma experienced. It is a part of my life and of all of Lily's many descendants.

Growing up I have heard Lily speaking formally and informally about her experiences during the Holocaust – especially through organisations like Holocaust Educational Trust.

During lockdown, not seeing Lily for two months made me realise how precious she is, and that she will not live forever. I also realised that I am now already older than she was when the Nazis invaded Hungary in 1944. As soon as the lockdown rules were eased and I could spend time again with Lily, I was determined to absorb her testimony whilst I still have the chance. I wanted to help people understand what she had to go through, just for being Jewish, so since then I have been promoting my great-grandma's testimony using social media. And the response has been remarkable – even connecting us to the family of her liberator.

I know that my great-grandma's story of surviving Auschwitz is not the typical story of the Holocaust. On arrival her mother, sister, brother, other family members and many other members of her community were gassed and cremated. That is what happened to most who arrived at Auschwitz.

The typical story has no witness to tell it. For most, their entire families, villages and communities were murdered in the ghettos, concentration, and death camps, by gas, starvation, and bullets.

It is our responsibility, as those who know what happened to tell those stories. Lily is a witness to the Holocaust. And I am her witness.

As Lily's great-grandson, the duty of sharing her story are now falling upon me and my generation. But, not everyone sees the tattoo of a number on the arm of their great grandma. Lily's tattoo reads A-10572 ('A' for Auschwitz, 'One zero' for block 10 and 572 for prisoner number). Most people in this country are not Jewish and do not know Holocaust survivors or witnesses.

I am studying history A-level at school, but the Holocaust is not a subject that can just be taught in a classroom and through a textbook.

So we need a Memorial and we need its accompanying Learning Centre. There is, after all, a lot to learn. We need an enduring reminder that the language of hate, if left unchecked, can turn into something far worse; a disaster that transcends national boundaries.

Locating this Holocaust Memorial next to the institutions and icons of the government imparts the message that needs to be heard. The heritage we should pass to future generations is that genocide is inhumane and unacceptable.

Remembrance of the Nazis' crimes against humanity should not be hidden from maximum public view. The Memorial is no use in some forgotten and remote location where it cannot be seen.

As a young person, seeing decision makers walk in and out of Parliament and knowing they see this important symbol of history reassures me that they know their duty to stop hatred in its tracks.

With education comes remembrance – this memorial will give people somewhere to remember and reflect. When we no longer have survivors like Lily among us, this memorial will help to ensure that their experiences are never forgotten. We can create the next generation of witnesses.

You have heard the story of my family, and the drive that we have to remember those we lost in the Holocaust. It is of vital importance that the stories of millions of others who have nobody to remember them are heard.

We strongly believe that a Memorial and a Learning Centre will enable this hope to become a reality. We cannot afford to wait. We cannot afford to hide away from our responsibility to remember the six million Jewish men, women, and children, murdered simply because they were Jewish.

On behalf of my great-grandma, my family, and all those who survived, we speak today, firmly in support of the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre. Thank you.