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# 'Marking off the days': Civic Center remembers Holocaust survivors

By Noah Grant | [ngrant@sanfordherald.com](mailto:ngrant@sanfordherald.com) Mar 27, 2018 Updated Mar 27, 2018

Rose Mills' parents survived the Holocaust.

On Monday, she told their story.



The Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center hosted the fifth annual Holocaust Remembrance event, with the help of The Center for Holocaust, Genocide and Human Rights Education of North Carolina. Sharon Halperin, an organizer for the center, and Mills are daughters of Holocaust survivors. They both spoke Monday afternoon.

Halperin focused her speech on explaining Judaism, particularly focusing on their beliefs and rituals, while pondering why they have been the subject of hate and attacks.

“If you remember anything from my part of this program, I hope it is that Judaism teaches us to respect and love all people regardless of religion, race, ethnicity or culture,” Halperin said. “We want above all to live in peace, to exchange knowledge and skills and to help those less fortunate than ourselves.”

Mills spoke less about Judaism, but told the story of her mother, Elizabeth, and father, David. David was born in Poland and moved to Berlin while Elizabeth was born in Berlin. Mills said her father was not religious, while her mother practiced her faith.

“My mother told me that all through schooling she felt discrimination by her teachers because she was Jewish,” Mills said. “Teachers would make rude remarks and make fun of the Jewish children in the class.”

Mills' parents married in Berlin, but she said “it wasn't long after their wedding that the situation for Jews in Germany went from bad to worse to unbearable.” She described Kristallnacht, or the “Night of Broken Glass,” which was a main event in the Holocaust's early stages. Jewish businesses and synagogues were vandalized and destroyed while Jews were arrested.



Several members of her family were affected by the Holocaust, and Mills briefly told their stories. There were Rosa and Simon, her grandparents on her mother's side, and Arthur, her uncle. They were deported to Poland in 1939.

"That was the last time my mother ever saw her parents or her brother," Mills said. "We know they were killed, sometime in 1941."

Elizabeth's aunt Cilia was sent to Terezin in the Czech Republic, which Mills said was seen as a holding camp before people were sent to die. Cilia later died at Auschwitz, while Elizabeth's aunt Johanna died in Terezin.

David's family was affected as well, as his sister, brother-in-law and niece were all killed.

Mills' parents planned to escape and go to London, where Elizabeth had an uncle who could sponsor her. Elizabeth went ahead, while David was unable to make it out. Mills said her mother lived in London throughout the war but never knew her husband's status. There were nights where Elizabeth was forced to sleep in a bomb shelter.

David faced harsh conditions, as he was sent to a forced labor camp. Instead of staying, he decided not to go to work one day and found refuge with a Christian friend. When it got too risky, David moved into a small tool shed outside of Berlin, only two miles from German SS headquarters.

"My father stayed in that tool shed with barely any food through the freezing winters in Berlin for nearly three and a half years, marking off the days, months and years," Mills said.

Mills said that as David hid, he kept a razor blade in the cuff of his pants because he planned to take his own life if he was captured. He never had to use it, as he was liberated in May 1945.

Elizabeth had family in Chicago, moving there in 1946. The couple reunited in 1946, living in a rooming house before moving into a more permanent home.

To close, Mills recalled a 1993 visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. She passed a section that held hundreds of identification cards and she just happened to spot her father's. Her mother had sent several documents to the museum.

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# Noah Grant

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Rose Mills is the daughter of two Holocaust survivors. She told their story Monday at the Dennis A. Wicker Civic Center.



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Rose Mills, left, and Sharon Halperin, right, answered questions from attendees Monday afternoon during the fifth annual Holocaust Remembrance event.

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