



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Rebecca Yomtov Hauser, seated second from left, was the only family member in this picture who survived the Holocaust. Her daughter, Bonnie Hauser, will speak next month at the Person County Library.

# Holocaust survivor's story lives on

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Rebecca Yomtov was only 20 in 1944 when German soldiers arrived in her hometown of Ioannina, Greece, rounding up every Jewish person in the community and shipped them off to concentration camps in German territory.

She was the only member of her family who survived the year-long stay in two of Germany's most notorious prisons: Bergen-Belsen and Auschwitz.



**Hauser**

After Allied soldiers freed prisoners at the end of World War II, Yomtov emigrated to the United States. She married a man named

Manny Hauser and had a family, but she didn't keep quiet about her experiences in the prison camps.

Rebecca Hauser died in 2018 at the age of 95, but she had made a name for herself

See **Survivor**, Page 6A

## SURVIVOR

Continued from Page One

as part of a speakers bureau made up of Triangle area Holocaust survivors.

Accompanied by her daughter, Bonnie Hauser, Rebecca Hauser spoke to tens of thousands of people over the years, describing her experiences and expressing her belief that people ought not to stand by and watch atrocities take place without doing something about them.

Though her mother passed away last year, Bonnie Hauser has continued working with the speaker's bureau and, on May 11, she will speak at the Person County Public Library. The event begins at 2 p.m. It's free and open to the public.

Over the years, Bonnie Hauser has collected photos and other mementos of her mother and she uses a video interview done with her mother before her death to let her mother continue to tell her own story.

"I like to set things up and give them some context and then let her tell her own story. I think it just means so much more when people hear these stories from someone who lived them," Bonnie Hauser said.

In the videos, Rebecca Hauser recalls the day soldiers first came to her hometown and took everyone away. She relates many of her expe-

riences in the concentration camps and she remembers the day soldiers liberated the camps.

The often poignant stories are interspersed with pictures of her family and black and white video footage taken in the prison camps.

Bonnie Hauser says she's happy that she can continue to help share her mother's story. "I give a little bit of background and let her tell the story. We're tag-teaming. It works really, really nicely. It's an honor for me to do this," Bonnie Hauser said.

Bonnie Hauser admits that telling her mother's story on her own can be kind of grueling. But her mother was never uncomfortable talking about it. "She always had a smile on her face and it's hard to imagine that she was subjected to that. That was a level of humanity that we can't imagine. It was pretty unbelievable what they went through," Bonnie Hauser said.

Bonnie Hauser's appearance coincides with the Person County Library's Community Read project which, this year, considers a book titled *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, which tells the story of a boy who meets another boy whose life and circumstances are different from his own. The two strike up a friendship that has devastating consequences. Copies of the book are available at the Person County Library.

# Survivor imparts valuable lesson

Here's a little inside baseball for you.

Every day, we get unsolicited press releases from dozens of places.

Some of the press releases are thinly-veiled advertisements promoting a product or a service. They go in the trash bin. Others are sent to us from places so distant we can't imagine any Person County reader having even a remote interest in the topic of the press release.

Other times, we get press releases from local people, organizations and local government agencies. Those typically make the pages of the newspaper and provide readers with information we believe they can use.

Sometimes, though, a local organization sends us a press release that merits a deeper look. We will use the information in the press release as the basis for a story a member of our news staff writes.

That was the case recently when we received a press release from the Person County Public Library. That place is a gold mine of exciting stuff – but that's a column for another time.

This particular press release was about a woman who's coming to speak on May 11.

Bonnie Hauser is the daughter of Rebecca Hauser. Rebecca died in 2018. She was 95. More impor-

tantly, she was a survivor of Nazi Germany's concentration camps during World War II.

That evil period in world history is now nearly 75 years in our rear-view mirror. I have yet to meet anyone who believes the Holocaust wasn't as bad as historians make it out to be. There are Holocaust deniers out there, but they strike me as fringe actors more interested in making a name for themselves than casting a fair light on history.

Bonnie Hauser accompanied her mother on many of the speeches Rebecca made as part of the Holocaust Survivors' speaker's bureau. She heard her mother's stories dozens of times.

And, in the wake of her mother's death, Bonnie Hauser continues to share the lessons learned from her mother's experiences. Interestingly, she's found a way, in death, to keep her mother's message alive. Visitors who attend the address at the Person County Public Library on May 11 will hear from Rebecca Hauser herself. Someone filmed Rebecca Hauser telling her stories and her daughter uses that video to let her mother continue to tell her own story.

I watched the video last week and it's startling. It's also uplifting.

Rebecca Hauser didn't let her experience define her life. She walked out of the concentration camp, returned home to Greece

and, eventually, made her way to the United States.

Bonnie Hauser made another interesting observation last week when I was talking with her about her upcoming visit. She pointed out that 13 million people died in the Holocaust. That number sounded high to me. I had always heard that 6 million died in the Holocaust. Actually, that's how many Jews died. Another 7 million people who weren't like Adolph Hitler's race, also died. They died just because they weren't like Hitler. Wrap your head around that.

Germans have learned the lessons of the Holocaust. They no longer have a military machine capable of offensive warfare. The German people recognize the stain Hitler left on their heritage.

I once worked with an exchange student from Germany. I asked her how people in Germany today view Hitler and that era. She quickly shook her head and said she didn't want to talk about it. Clearly she was ashamed of the association.

But while Germans may have learned those lessons, people in other parts of the world clearly have not. Witness genocides in places like Cambodia under Pol Pot in the 1970s and Rwanda in the 1990s.

We would all do well to crowd into the Person County Library on May 11 to learn, from someone who experienced it, how wrong it is to denigrate or mistreat someone else because they are not like us.



**JOHNNY'S JOURNAL**

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