

# Holocaust survivor, Nesse Godin addresses Christian/Jewish Dialogue

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By Perilla A. Wilson

Nesse Godin, a Holocaust survivor, gave a riveting talk on her experiences as a teenager in Lithuania at a special presentation at the Jewish Synagogue, sponsored by the Christian/Jewish Dialogue. She is a volunteer and advocate for Holocaust education and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, having survived the Shauliai, Lithuania Ghetto, the Stutthof Concentration Camp, four labor camps, and a death march.

"Memories are for the sake of humankind," she said. This "woman of valor," as Joy Grodnick, her presenter called her, had many of those recollections to share. She was born in Lithuania in 1928 in a community of 10,000 and had two brothers. She was taken prisoner at 13 when the Nazis took over her town and was made to "clean the city of war damage" even though such damage didn't exist, she said. Many were "relocated," they could have no visitors, no schooling, could not walk on the sidewalk, and had to wear a yellow star on their clothing to identify them as Jews.

According to Godin, they "killed from the womb to the grave" because Jewish women were not allowed to be pregnant. The townspeople appealed to the Christian community but the Catholic priests said they "were afraid to get involved," she said. They then tried bribery. That succeeded but they were put in a ghetto, walled and gated. Thirty-five hundred were refused certificates and were taken to the forest and killed.

Godin remembers hunger and fear for her life as the overriding memories of her childhood. She recalls constantly hiding as soldiers came and seized all manner of people. "If any person would have given me an extra bite of bread, I would have been grateful," she said.

At age 15 and a half she had a job and her own food portion. She returned one day in November of 1943 to the room she shared with nine others to find trucks everywhere and to face deportation. The gestapo and the Lithuanians who "joined evil forces" ran through the ghetto and found all the hiding places. There were 1000 children under age 14, 500 elderly and a few hundred healthy person taken off to the gas chambers. She lost her father who was 47 because of the "evil allowed by humanity," she said.

Godin was sent at age 16 to Stutthof Concentration Camp, with 125 to a boxcar and one change of clothes, traveling four to six days. There were 4000 ghettos and dozens of killing places. She, her mother, and brothers were all sent different ways. They were stripped, beaten, body cavities searched for valuables, gold teeth pulled from their mouths and made to stand naked for hours. They were then given a dress, shoes and underwear.

The tents in the labor camp were cold and they had no other clothing. The people died of disease, starvation, dysentery. They were lined up for death marches through the villages of Poland and Germany until mid-1945 when the women were forced to dig two trenches, one for a bathroom and one for a grave, in which they put naked bodies because "clothes could be recycled but not bodies," she said.

In May, Godin said that the camp was liberated by the Russian army. There were 200 women left. At age 17 she was told "Now you can go." But she answered, "Where do I go?" Her mother and brothers survived. She eventually was reunited with her mother. One brother was saved by righteous gentiles, the other was at Dachau and after was sent to Russian and did not get out before their mother died.



Nesse Godin, 69, hails from Maryland and shared her childhood memories of hardship last year with 70 audiences.

Godin has scars on her back and one on her face which she says she can forget about but "the wounded soul you carry to the grave." She asked that the people there tell the world what happened to the Jewish people. "Don't let us be forgotten. Let this be a place to live together side by side...People in the United States need to be grateful and help each other regardless of race, creed, or color."