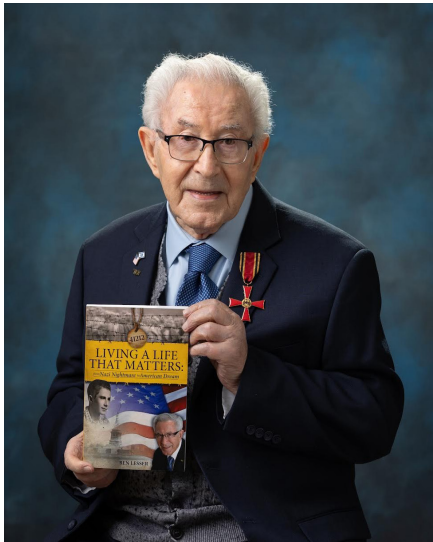


## For Middle and High School Students of History

Fall 2024

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**Ben Lesser** is one of the world's few remaining Holocaust survivors. He survived four concentration camps, including Auschwitz, a 7-week death march, and the notorious death train from Buchenwald to Dachau. He is the author of the book, *Living a Life That Matters*.

The Jewish people have endured discrimination for thousands of years. We have been expelled from countries, ordered to live in certain areas, and told which types of jobs we could hold. However, conditions for Jews in much of Europe improved significantly by the 19th and early 20th centuries. We could own land, get an education, and be full-fledged citizens of

the countries we lived in. That is, until the Germans began creating Jew-free zones all over Europe.


Let me tell you a little about myself. I am Ben Lesser, and I survived hiding from one community to the next—ghettos, four concentration camps, including Auschwitz, a seven-week long death march, and the most notorious death train from Buchenwald to Dachau, where nearly 7,000 walked-on and only 18 walked off. Three days after that, I was liberated. Only two of my immediate family of seven survived the war. Let me tell you a small fraction of my survival.

In 1944, I was 15 years old, and my younger brother Tuli and I escaped to Hungary to live with my Uncle Hershel and older cousin Isaac because Poland was no longer safe. But that didn't last long. When the Germans invaded Hungary, we were told we were being transported to labor camps. I knew something wasn't right and suggested to my uncle to be prepared. He looked into my eyes and listened. He cleverly exchanged his money into diamonds and hid them in the heels of several pairs of beautiful black shoes for each member of his family and mine.

The cattle cars were crammed wall to wall with men, women, children, elders and everyone's belongings. Three hellish days in the dirty, smelly cattle car when we reached Oswiecim (Auschwitz), a town in southern Poland, but the train did not stop there. The train kept going till it reached a large entrance with an iron sign above stating "Arbeit Macht Frei"—work makes you free. It all made sense at the time.

Pandemonium surrounded us once the cattle cars opened. Everyone shoving one another to get out and to find their loved ones. As I stepped out of the tracks, I heard barking dogs and German soldiers screaming instructions that we should leave our belongings and that women and children were to go to the right and men to the left. I recall seeing tall chimney stacks with flames shooting out of them and ashes flying like snow. The men in front of me said, "Oh, those must be smelting factories. That's where we will be working." Little did we know, and soon learned, that the smokestacks were part of the crematoriums.

*continued on page 2...*



It was chaos. I chose to stay with my uncle and cousin as an adult as we figured it was a labor camp and I could work. And for a few moments, I lost track of my sister Goldie and my youngest brother Tuli. I never saw them again.

I stood in line with men of all ages. A tall man wearing a white robe stood at the top of the line asking if we could run and were willing to work. Understanding and speaking German myself, I quickly stretched myself tall and spoke with a deep voice pretending I was 18, healthy, and ready to work. My uncle and cousin followed suit. This man, Dr. Mengele, was known as the Angel of Death. He determined your fate with a flick of a finger, right or left, whether you lived or died.

Once the selections were made, we were led to a room the size of a school auditorium. They ordered us to get undressed, take off our shoes, go to the barbers, and shower. My uncle and cousin did as instructed, but I hated to part with my black shoes with the diamonds, so I left them on. It was a miracle really. A sea of naked men walking to the showers and barbers with one man in black shoes. No one saw. No one knew. It was like God blinded them; they didn't see anything because if they had, they would have shot me for not obeying orders.

After showering, we were given a set of striped clothes and wooden shoes. I quickly changed and hid the black shoes under my arms. Then, we were directed to our barracks with wooden pallets and some straw as beds. We heard strange screaming and chanting from outside, but we were so tired that we ignored it and fell asleep.

That very night, my cousin woke me up. There was a missing slat in the wooden panel where we can see a raging fire out in the distance and heard odd chanting. We asked the *Stubenälteste*, the prisoner in charge of the barracks, what it was. He laughed and told us that three months earlier prisoners began digging ditches for the fiery pits, preparing for the influx of Hungarian Jews. I didn't believe him and decided to investigate it for myself. I snuck out for a closer look. There, I saw trucks with women, men, children, and babies being thrown into the fiery pits, some still alive. From that night on, every time I closed my eyes, that is all I saw.

The first two weeks in Auschwitz were like a game to the soldiers. Each morning the soldiers would have us line up in rows five deep for inspection. We stood there naked, exposed to the elements, sometimes for hours, while the soldiers looked us over and counted us. If you were too skinny they pulled you out, and you went to the gas chambers. You didn't know if you would make it through the day.

After two weeks, we were taken in trucks to Durnhau Rock Quarry, one of the largest sub-work camps of Gross-Rosen. Our job was to sledge the boulders into manageable pieces. Then we would run carts of rock down the tracks to the grinding machines and then back up the hill for more rock. It was back breaking work.

Over time, the diamonds that I snuck in were quite useful. I knew my uncle would not be able to keep up with this intense labor. I made a deal with the kitchen chef. I bribed him with the diamonds to give my uncle a kitchen job so he might have a better chance of survival. And he did for a while. My cousin and I also benefited because my uncle shared his daily rations with us. It wasn't long after that as the war was coming to a close that they had to evacuate the camp by foot, known as the Death March. It lasted seven weeks and people were dying all around me.

This January marks the 80th Anniversary of the Auschwitz liberation. I believe I survived because God needed an eyewitness to what happened and to be the voice for the six million souls that were silenced. "ZACHOR" – Remember. Remember us.

This is why I started The ZACHOR Holocaust Remembrance Foundation to continue to educate about the past, to never forget, but also to teach tolerance through Never Again. It is now your obligation to continue my message. The Holocaust did happen. ZACHOR. ■

The ZACHOR Foundation would like everybody to do an **www.I-SHOUT-OUT.org** to help them reach their goal of 6 million SHOUT-OUTS for the voices that were silenced. Their Foundation also relies on donations to ensure that the world will never forget and so that their programs are available for future generations. Donate today at <https://www.zachorfoundation.org/product/one-time-donation/>!





Access to the NHC network, which includes chapters in 46 states and over 19,000 members, is a great benefit of joining the NHC. We encourage you to read about other chapters in your state or across the country and explore new opportunities! To explore specific sites click on the **bolded** text to be redirected!

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**Frankton High School (IN)** at the unveiling of their historical marker for May Berry, who was born and raised in Frankton, then enlisted to serve in the Red Cross as a nurse during WWI and died in France. This marker was made possible through the Club's work with the Pomeroy Foundation. For information on how to apply for a Historical Marker in your community please visit their **Website!**



**Glenridge High School (NJ)** in front of the Washington Monument during their field trip to Washington, DC.





**Manhasset High School's** (NY) History Honor Society welcomed Justinne Lake-Jedzinak, the Director of Education at the Raynham Hall Museum, to their school this past October for a presentation about the American Revolution on Long Island. Ms. Lake-Jedzinak helped students understand more about what life was like back in Oyster Bay in Colonial America through the lens of four townspeople.



**Moline High School** (IL) completed an exhibit on family military members for Veterans Day, and they are also currently working with St. Ambrose University on helping them use their Veterans Legacy Project, which features over 300 Veteran stories that are interred at the Rock Island Arsenal National Cemetery.





**Richlands High School (VA)** traveled to the Biltmore Estate in historic Asheville, North Carolina. Built by George Vanderbilt in the late 1800s, this Estate is the largest privately owned house in the United States and is one of the most prominent examples of Gilded Age mansions.



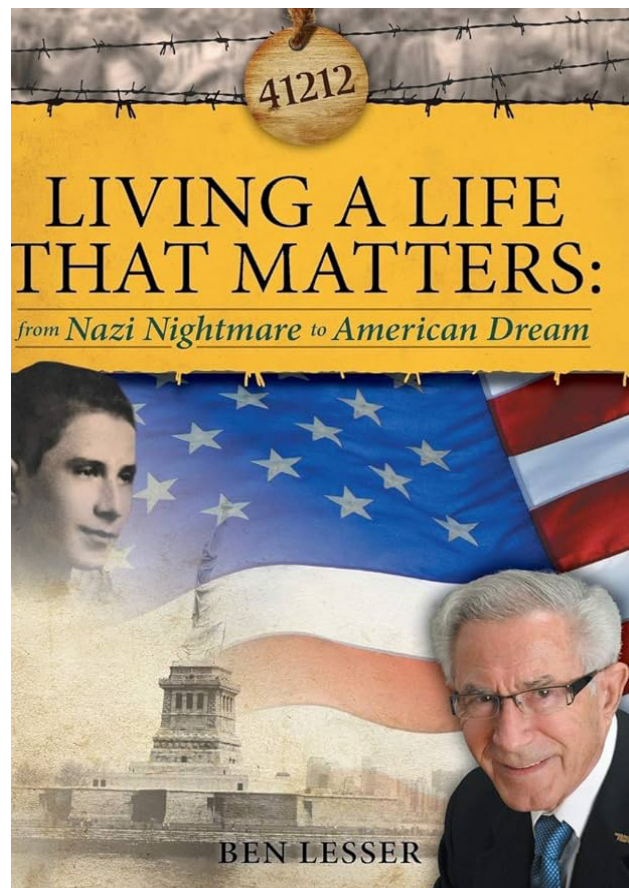
**Rainier Junior/Senior High School (OR)** attended the Marquis de Lafayette event in Vancouver, Washington, which celebrated the 200th year anniversary of his return to America in 1824. Lafayette was a French nobleman and military officer who volunteered to join the Continental Army, led by George Washington, during the Revolutionary War.



The National History Club was honored to be able to hold a special Zoom presentation at the end of October with Mr. Ben Lesser and his daughter, Gail Lesser-Gerber, where over 200 Club members attended. Ben is one of the world's few remaining Holocaust survivors and has been sharing his story for years all over the world. Ben survived being in four concentration camps (including Auschwitz), a 7 week death march, and being aboard the death train from Buchenwald to Dachau.

By sharing his story, Ben has become a leader in the movement to empower Survivors and encourage remembrance for generations to come. Ben has testified at two Nazi War Crimes trials, most recently in 2016 when he traveled to Germany to help prove the guilt of former Nazi guard Reinhold Hanning.

He is the founder of the **ZACHOR Holocaust Remembrance Foundation** and the author of the book, *Living a Life That Matters*. Ben and his family encourage teachers who are teaching about the Holocaust to visit their **website** for lesson plans and more!



## THE CONCORD REVIEW HISTORY CAMP



Are you a student looking to improve your research and writing skills? *The Concord Review* (TCR) History Camps are intensive online and in-person workshops in which secondary-school students learn and practice a toolbox of skills for researching and writing history.

Students must arrive with at least a subject they want to investigate, preferably with several books and journal articles that they've read about it, though they may bring a draft of their work-in-progress. With the guidance of experienced instructors, they learn and practice fundamentals of the historian's craft, enabling them to complete a historical research paper—a long-term project that takes upwards of two to six months. Many students who have attended our Camps have then submitted and had their papers published in *The Concord Review*. **More importantly, students will leave the Camp with the confidence and ability to further develop their academic writing skills, which will be of immense benefit to them in college and beyond.**

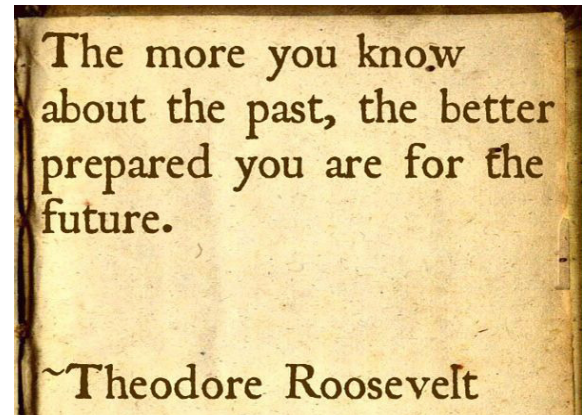
Camps have a 6 to 1 student to Instructor ratio, allowing students to get hands on coaching through the research and writing process that they won't get elsewhere. We are now accepting applications for our Summer 2025 In-person Sessions (Boston, Connecticut, San Francisco, and Vancouver) and our Online Sessions. To find out more please visit our **website**.

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"In my experience at my school, I haven't learned new writing skills since early middle school. I've always felt restricted in what I could write about and how I was able to go about it. This is an experience most of my friends share. Quite honestly, I've learned more about writing an excellent and sophisticated paper in these two weeks than I have in five years in school."



The NHC is proud to have the support of over 60 college history departments! We hope that any of our members who are interested in majoring in history in college will visit a college's website listed down below to find out more about the history department and its offerings.



American University	Loyola University Chicago	University of Alabama
Barnard College	Marquette University	University of Alabama Birmingham
Baylor University	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	University of Chicago
Boston College	Mount Holyoke College	University of Colorado
Boston University	New York University	University of Georgia
Brandeis University	North Carolina State University	University of Iowa
Carnegie Mellon University	Northwestern University	University of Illinois
Dartmouth College	Ohio State University	UMass Amherst
Drew University	Princeton University	UMass Lowell
Centre College	Rhodes College	University of Michigan
Georgia Tech University	Rice University	University of Mississippi
Gonzaga University	Rochester Institute of Technology	University of North Carolina
Fordham University	Santa Clara University	University of Pennsylvania
Franklin & Marshall College	Skidmore College	University of Richmond
Harvard University	Southern Methodist University	University of Rhode Island
James Madison University	Southwestern University	University of Texas at Austin
Johns Hopkins University	Stanford University	University of Utah
Kenyon College	Stony Brook University	University of Vermont
Louisiana State University	Suffolk University	Vassar College
Loyola Marymount University	Swarthmore College	Wake Forest University
Loyola University Maryland	Texas Christian University	Wellesley College

# NATIONAL HISTORY CLUB

The NHC would like to express our gratitude to the following people and organizations who make our important work possible...

John Abele	Penguin Random House
HISTORY®	Smithsonian Institution
George Washington's Mount Vernon	Society of Architectural Historians
The HBE Foundation	The Concord Review
Alexander Dreyfoos School of the Arts	The History List
American Association for State and Local History	Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund
American Civil War Museum	Patrick Allitt (Professor, Emory)
American Historical Association	Jim Belcher
Boyertown Museum of Historic Vehicles	Joan & Rick Gier
Gilder Lehrman Institute	Elizabeth Jones
HarperCollins Publishing	William Jordan (Professor, Princeton)
History 500	John Lane
Laurel Hill Cemetery	Howard Loken
Museum of Florida History	Beth & Bob Nasson
National Council for History Education	Lee Pollock
National Vietnam War Museum	Guy Rogers (Professor, Wellesley)
National World War I Museum	Henry Seng
National World War II Museum	Art Snyder
Omohundro Institute of Early American History	Rick Sperry
Organization of American Historians	Lisa Wingate

The National History Club is a 501(c)(3) organization that relies on grants and donations to support efforts. If you are passionate about history and would like to contribute to our mission of promoting history at the secondary level please contact **Robert Nasson** ([rnasson@nationalhistoryclub.org](mailto:rnasson@nationalhistoryclub.org)).

[www.nationalhistoryclub.org](http://www.nationalhistoryclub.org)