

ELIASH,

LEA

Holocaust survivor who spread hope dies

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PROVIDENCE — Witnessing the violence that came from learned hatred, Lea Eliash spent her life teaching forgiveness and humanity.

Eliash, a Holocaust survivor who devoted her life to telling her story of survival and the atrocities suffered by millions of Jews, died yesterday from a massive stroke. She was 89 years old.

"The most amazing thing about

her is that she wasn't bitter and she wasn't angry; she wanted to educate people," said her daughter, Asya.

In 1997, Eliash received an honorary doctorate degree in public service from Rhode Island College for having told many people around Rhode Island of the brutality she had witnessed more than 65 years ago.

After the Nazis occupied Lithua-

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nia in 1941, her husband, Solomon, was sent to the Dachau concentration camp. Eliash worked in a factory in Kovno, Lithuania, making gloves and vests for German soldiers.

Learning in 1942 that the Nazis planned to kill all Jewish children, Eliash arranged for a Christian family to keep Asya and smuggled her out of the ghetto in a shopping bag.

In 1944, Eliash crawled beneath the barbed wire fence in Kovno's ghetto when the electricity was shut off. Living on the run, she was reunited with her daughter months later.

Eliash and her daughter were living in a displaced persons camp in 1947 when they were reunited with Solomon. The family emigrated to the United States in 1951.

The Christian family served as an example of humanity for Eliash, her daughter said. Despite the indignities Eliash experienced, "That's what she came out of it with, rather than

anger and bitterness. She came out of it with goodness."

She had promised her husband before he died in 1978 to tell others about the Holocaust, so Eliash crisscrossed the state, spreading her message and her memories in schools and at the Rhode Island Holocaust Museum. She taught Hebrew at Temple Emanu-El in Providence for more than 40 years.

Eliash was preceded in death by her parents and her sister, Sarah Isaac Kotler. She is survived by her daughter and her grandson, Jonathan.

A memorial service will be held at 1 p.m. today at Temple Emanu-El, with the burial at Lincoln Park Cemetery in Warwick. Shiva will be observed at her residence at 266 Morris Ave. today from 7 to 9 p.m., Tuesday through Thursday from 2 to 4 p.m. and 7 to 9 p.m., and Friday from 2 to 4 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to Temple Emanu-El or to the Rhode Island Holocaust Museum. Funeral arrangements are being handled by the Sugarman-Sinai Memorial Chapel.

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