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ZITKIN, Ellen

OBITUARIES

Ellen Zitkin, 62; Holocaust survivor

CRANSTON — Ellen Zitkin, 62, of Rosemary Street, who survived the Holocaust by hiding in a Catholic orphanage, only to discover later that her parents had perished in death camps, died yesterday in the Philip Hulitar Hospice In-Patient Center, Providence.



She was the wife of Burton Zitkin, an accountant and former American soldier who fought in Europe to end the war. She also was the widow of Henry H. Weiss, a psychologist.

Though she had lived in Cranston for more than two decades, Zitkin once said that the unspeakable terrors she lived through made her feel as though she didn't belong anywhere.

"I'm like a wandering Jew: It's this feeling that you're not part of anything, of not belonging."

Zitkin was 8 years old when the Germans marched into Kovno, her village in Lithuania, and forced all Jews into the ghetto. For years, her family lived in a three-room house they shared with others, hiding in the attic and cellar to evade German troops who swept through to seize and shoot.

Determined to save the life of her daughter, Zitkin's mother, Claire Griliches, bribed guards with the cache hidden in her corset and slipped through the ghetto's gate with young "Ellinka" as Christmas approached in 1943.

They reached a safe house, where sympathizers took the child. Zitkin never saw her mother again. A few weeks later, she was bundled onto a horse cart and taken to a Catholic orphanage, with a new name, Ella Michilovna. There, she became a Christian.

Her parents and brother, Zvi Griliches, were less fortunate. On a July night in 1944, troops marched them to the Kovno train station.

Claire was sent to a concentration camp at Stutthof in northeastern Germany, where she died later of typhus. Zitkin's father, Ifim, and Zvi were taken to a slave-labor factory near the Dachau concentration camp. Ifim, malnourished and exhausted, died a short time later.

As the end of the war neared, Zitkin, then 12, was found by an aunt and with false documents — her last name was changed to Geffen — slipped out of Lithuania for occupied Germany, where she was reunited with her brother. It was there she learned that her parents could not keep a promise they had made to her during those winter months in 1943: "They had said they would come to get me."

Zitkin and her brother emigrated to America, where Zvi became a professor of economics at Harvard University.

Zitkin, who by then had reclaimed her Jewish heritage, married Weiss in 1957 and for years they lived in Madison, Wis. When he died in 1971, she moved with her children to Newton, Mass., so she could be near her brother at Harvard. She later married Burton Zitkin.

Her experiences were so horrible that Zitkin could not read about wartime Europe. She even blocked out the names of the death camps where her parents had died.

During the Persian Gulf War, Zitkin recalled how the yellow ribbons tied to trees made her feel uneasy — they were the color of the Star of David that she was forced to wear so long ago.

Until her retirement 10 years ago, she worked as an office worker for the American Universal Insurance Company in Providence. Zitkin was a member of Temple Sinai in Cranston, Hadassah and of ORT.

Besides her husband, she leaves a son, Jeffrey Weiss of Sharon, Mass.; a daughter, Claire Weiss of Mount Horab, Wis.; a brother, Zvi Griliches of Cambridge, Mass., and four grandchildren.

The funeral service will be tomorrow at 11 a.m. at Mount Sinai Memorial Chapel, 825 Hope St., Providence. Burial will be in Sharon Memorial Park, Sharon, Mass.

ZITKIN, Ellen (Griliches)

June 4, 1996. Beloved wife of Burton Zitkin and the late Dr. Henry H. Weiss. Residence, 31 Rosemary St, Cranston. Dear mother of Jeffrey Weiss, Sharon MA, and Claire Weiss, Mount Horeb WI. Dear sister of Zvi Griliches, Cambridge MA. Devoted grandmother of Kailah, Eli, Roya & Adam. Funeral Service 11:00 a.m. Thursday at MOUNT SINAI MEMORIAL CHAPEL, 825 Hope at Fourth Sts. Relatives and friends are invited. In lieu of flowers contributions may be made to Rhode Island Holocaust Museum. Memorial Observance at the home of Mr. & Mrs. Jeffrey Weiss, 7 Iron Hollow Rd., Sharon, MA. Thur 2-4, 7-9 pm & Fri 10am-2pm & Sun 10am-7pm.