

**International Day of Commemoration in Memory of
the Victims of the Holocaust**

**Memorial Ceremony, General Assembly Hall
27 January 2014**

Remarks by Rena Finder, a Holocaust survivor

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, my family and friends,

It's a huge honor to be here today, an honor I share with all the survivors.

We are here today to pay homage to our loved ones, to mourn together, to pray together, and to remember what can never be forgotten.

Forgetting is dangerous.

As we pass the torch of memory to the next generation and those yet to come, we hope that their children and grandchildren will find the world a better place to live in than the one we are leaving them.

It is hard to believe that this is the 69th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Is it that long ago? And yet it seems like it was just yesterday that the 300 women from Schindler's list were snatched from the gas chambers in Auschwitz. Oskar Schindler bribed the commander with a fortune of diamonds. We were the only transport leaving Auschwitz to live.

The war started 75 years ago. I was just a little girl, getting ready to enter 5th grade. Suddenly I became an enemy of the state, sentenced to be killed. And here we are today!

It's a miracle.

Every survivor is a miracle.

My miracle happened because I was on Schindler's list. I am here because Oskar Schindler would not stand by and watch innocent men, women, children and

babies murdered. We committed no crime. Our only crime was that we were Jewish.

While the world was plunged into darkness, it closed its windows and doors and became blind and deaf to our begging for help.

Oskar Schindler risked his life to save us.

I survived with my mother and my grandfather, who at 76 was probably the oldest man to survive because of Oskar Schindler. He gave us life, a chance to grow up, get married, and have children, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

How can you thank a man who gave you life?

All the Schindler's survivors wanted to shout and tell the world about our saviour! After the war, we all tried to help him financially since he was no longer able to live in Germany. We could barely help ourselves, but we would do almost anything for him.

After the liberation, we expected the world to welcome us, to roll out the red carpet and open its arms.

We were wrong. It didn't happen.

People were ignorant about the holocaust and confused about how to deal with those of us who survived.

We found that most people didn't really care very much to hear our stories. In 1979 I became a resource speaker for Facing History and Ourselves, an organization that trains teachers how to teach about the lessons of history and help students make connections to their own lives. I spoke to many different classes about my experiences and of course our saviour, Oskar Schindler. Teachers and student were amazed that so little was known about our hero.

And then another miracle happened: Thomas Kenneally wrote the book "Schindler's list." I met him when he came to Boston and of course bought many books for my children and friends.

And suddenly another miracle happened. Steven Spielberg was going to make the movie about Oskar Schindler.

There were quite a few movies made about the holocaust. They were shown in selected theatres, at selected times. Not many people got to see them, but when Steven Spielberg started to make the movie, it was making the headlines from day one. This director, famous for his amazing adventure films was making a movie about the holocaust, about a man called Oskar Schindler? Everyone was curious.

During the horrible winter in 1993 when the movie was filmed in Krakow, survivors, residents and tourists from all over came to watch. The Krakowians were fascinated that the movie was shot in their beautiful city. After the premier of "Schindler's list" the wall of silence was shattered, the fog cleared and the survivors from all the camps and the liberators came out from under the shadows. We were free at last! Free to speak up, free to say "I am a survivor" or "I am a liberator", "I was there, and I am an eye witness."

After all, so many said it didn't happen. This movie reached millions all over the world, reached everyone's consciousness, everyone's living room.

It is one of the best teaching tools. It teaches that every one of you can make a difference in the lives of others.

Don't ever say there is nothing you can do, there is always something you can do. In this age of bullying it teaches the students how powerful they are. Don't just stand there or hide when you see trouble; run to get help. Tell your teacher or a policeman and tell your parents.

Don't be a bystander, to be a bystander is worse than to be a perpetrator. Be an up-stander like Oskar Schindler! Oskar Schindler who could not stand by and watch horrific murders of innocent men, women, children and babies. He risked his life to save a thousand people. There is no way we would have survived without him.

Albert Einstein said, "the world is a terrifying place not because it's full of bad people, but because of the people who do nothing."

Steven Spielberg is a visionary and he is an up-stander. Years ago he realized that in 20 to 25 years there wouldn't be any survivors or liberators left as witnesses to this history. He established the Shoah Foundation; teams of well-trained people traveled the world to interview and record survivors and liberators. The Shoah Foundation now has over 52 thousand testimonies, translated in over 30 languages. The work still goes on to reach to victims of other genocides .Tragically there are so many in this world.

Now through iWitness, an interactive educational part of Shoah, teachers, students, historians and researchers can access 1200 testimonies on the internet. It's so amazing and easy that even a computer dummy like me can do it!!

You are a righteous among nations, Steven.

You are another Schindler.

You are making sure that the world will always remember what they would like to forget.

For the Schindler's list survivors, you are a member of our family.

We love you. You are everybody's grandson.
May you go from strength to strength.

Thank you,

Rena Ferber Finder