

Research Creates a Bridge of Memory

Daniel Pyser of Har Sinai Congregation in Owings Mills, Maryland, with the encouragement of his parents, participated in the Remember Us Project. Daniel did research on the child he chose to remember, Adam Ungar, with help from Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. This is an account of how he went about it and what he learned.

Daniel writes: I was given a boy named Adam Ungar. I thought that in order to remember him, I should know some things about him. I decided to contact the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum to see if they could get me in touch with any family members. They asked that I write a letter detailing why I wanted the names of the family members. They would send the letter to the family members who could choose if they wanted to contact me or not.

I am grateful that a family member, Judy Finkelstein, decided to contact me. Her husband Abe's mother was Adam's sister, making her Adam's niece-in-law. Adam's sister's name was Helen and she was the only surviving family member. She is still living. Judy told Helen about me and what I was doing. I sent Judy a list of questions for Helen to answer. I was at summer camp when Helen called, so my mom talked to her. Helen also sent me a brief note about Adam.

Judy sent me a picture of Adam with Helen, as well as his death certificate, which I displayed next to a yahrzeit candle on the bimah at my Bar Mitzvah. I prepared a brief speech to tell the congregation and that speech also appeared in the program of that morning's service. During the service I read a speech describing exactly what I was doing, and I also led kaddish in his memory. At my party, I lit a candle for Adam as part of the candle lighting ceremony. This is what I said: "This last candle is a special one. It is in honor of Adam Ungar, a Polish boy who was not able to have the privilege of becoming a Bar Mitzvah. He was born on October 27, 1930 and was killed not even 13 years later on October 15, 1943 during the Holocaust. This candle and this day are dedicated to him and in his memory."

I received a donation from Helen's temple, in honor of my Bar Mitzvah and remembering her brother. I was honored to hear about that and glad she and her family appreciated what I did. The whole experience allowed me to learn about and remember a kid, just like me, whose life was cut short, solely because he was a Jew. Judy continues to remember us, especially during the Jewish holidays. My mother continues to email her at different times of the year.

What Daniel Learned about the life of Adam Ungar and his family

Adam Ungar was born on October 27, 1930 in Krakow, Poland to Alfred and Stefani Ungar. He had one younger sister, Helen. Adam was killed during the Holocaust on October 15, 1943 by the Nazis. Their family was together at the beginning of the Holocaust. They had run away. Their mother had papers so that the family could become Gentile. She was shot by the Germans about four months before Adam died because of the diamonds that she had. After she was shot, the Germans found the papers. Helen and Adam ran away with five other children. Adam was sent to a camp and his sister Helen was taken in by a Polish family and then a Czech family. One day, Adam was walking in the camp with a friend and two shots were fired, killing each of them.

Adam was a wonderful child. He was tall and had light coloring like his father. Helen and Adam were close. He played the piano. He was a skier. The family went to temple regularly. The family would spend the holidays with their grandparents who lived an hour away by train. Helen remembers that she and Adam would horseback ride while at their grandparents.

Adam's father moved to the United States in 1948. He settled in New York, where he was an accountant. He remarried and had another son, who lives in the Washington D.C. area. Helen remained in Czechoslovakia with another family until 1954, then came to the United States. She lives in California and has two children.

An Incredible Subsequent Connection

The Remember Us newsletter published a story last year (Fall/Winter 2008) about a bar mitzvah named Daniel Pyser and the research he did on the boy he was given to remember, Adam Ungar. The article included this paragraph: *Adam was sent to a camp and his sister Helen was taken in by a Polish family and then a Czech family.*

About one month after the newsletter was published this is what happened:

Daniel's rabbi received an email from a person named Zosia who lives in Canada. She had just purchased a computer and was learning how to surf the web when she came across the Remember Us newsletter. Inside she found the story of Daniel's remembrance of Adam Ungar, the young boy who perished. She was surprised and very emotional because Adam Ungar was her cousin. Adam's sister Helen survived the Holocaust and ended up staying for some time with Zosia's family in Czechoslovakia before she came to the United States in 1954.

Daniel's rabbi connected Zosia with the Pyser family who in turn connected her with Helen. Through Daniel and the Remember Us Project, Helen and Zosia have rekindled a lost family connection. Daniel writes: "When my mom told me what had happened with Zosia; how she read my article and contacted my rabbi, I thought it was exciting. Knowing that remembering Adam at my Bar Mitzvah impacted his family was meaningful in itself. However, being able to connect two lost family members through the article in the newsletter is incredible. I never expected to have such an impact on a family just by doing this mitzvah. It started off with receiving the name of a boy who perished in the Holocaust and has turned into a lasting connection with his family."