

WHY HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR IS LIVING THE AMERICAN DREAM

FOR Holocaust survivor Ben Lesser, living the American dream was his only goal after surviving the horrors of the concentration camps.

In his new book *Living A Life That Matters: From Nazi Nightmare to American Dream*, Ben revealed the challenges and successes before Nazi Germany, during the Second World War and after his liberation to America.

Ben was born on October 18, 1928 to Shaindel (Shari) and Lazar Leser in Krakow. He and sister Lola were the only two of his family of seven to survive Auschwitz-Birkenau and Dachau concentration camps.

He recalled: "My family lived a happy, Orthodox life. My father had two successful businesses.

BY ZOE COHEN

"One was a kosher wine and fruit-syrup manufacturing business named Sklad and the other was a chocolate factory, named Pischinger's.

"But when war broke out, the Nazis marched right into our house and life turned upside down."

Ben was 10 when the Nazis came barging through the doors to find Jews.

They broke into his family home with burlap sacks

He killed the baby instantly

in their hands screaming "throw all your valuables in", violently forced his father to open the safe and took his mother's jewellery off her wrist.

Ben added: "At the same time, I heard crying from the next door neighbour. Lola and I saw a man swinging a crying baby by his legs screaming at the mother to make him shut up.

"I could see the Nazi was enjoying it. He killed the baby instantly."

As the war went on, things became progressively worse for the Jews.

The Nazis confiscated his father's businesses and all Jews were forced to leave their homes and belongings.

They moved to a small village on the outskirts of Krakow.

Ben's family had an unexpected twist of fate and avoided entering the Krakow Ghetto.

Though many of Ben's relatives died there, a young suitor called Mechel Lieber had eyes for Lola.

Ben explained: "He professed his love for Lola and told my father he wanted to marry her.

"Mechel's family were not going into the ghetto and were leaving Krakow. He asked us to move with him to Niepolomice, just outside Krakow.

"Because they were madly in love, my father said 'yes' and we were spared from the certain death of the Krakow Ghetto."

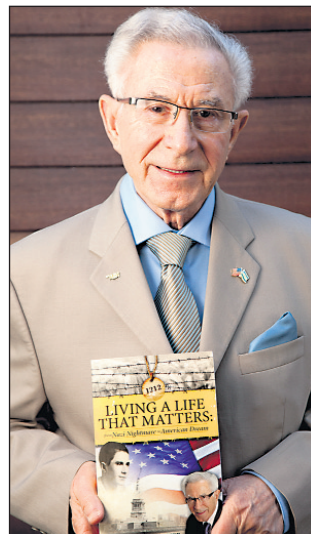
In 1941, Lola and Mechel married in a small family wedding in their back garden.

They moved into an apartment, but one night Mechel was warned of a raid on the Jewish people.

In order to escape, they hired a wagon and reached Bochnia, southern Poland.

Ben said: "Terrible things were happening in Bochnia.

Ben continues to fight intolerance



HORRORS: Ben Lesser

"In the middle of the night they picked up children and threw them into a truck. Parents were running after their children, but were mowed down by machine guns.

"Everyone tried to stay away from Bochnia, but coming from Krakow, we had no choice but to stay."

Once again, his sister's beauty saved them and they managed to obtain forged documents for the whole family to escape.

Eventually though, the family were transported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Ben describes graphically in his book, the inhumane conditions in the cattle cars as they were transported to the death camp.

He said at Auschwitz "all hell broke loose".

He recalled: "Women and children were directed to the right and men to the left.

"One minute I was holding on tightly to my little brother and my sister Goldie, and then the next minute they were gone. I never saw them again."

Lola and Mechel were the only other members of Ben's family to survive.

When the Second World War ended, 18-year-old Ben was taken to America.

Mechel and Lola had their first child, Heshi, and, in 1947, they received their visas and headed to New York City aboard the steam ship SS Ernie Pyle.

Ben received his visa a few months later and his uncle David made it possible for him to receive enough money to book passage on a ship.

He was taken from Bremerhaven, Germany, on the SS Ernie Pyle.

They were on the ship for two weeks and, just as they were about to lose hope, they approached New York City.

Ben spotted Lola and Mechel waiting outside the exit door and they fell into each other's arms, laughing and crying.

He said: "I knew that everything would be okay because one day I'd be an American."

Ben met Jean Singer at a Friday night dinner in Los Angeles and instantly knew she would make the perfect wife.

They married on June 17, 1950, and he became an American citizen three years later. They have two children, Sherry and Gail.

Ben's determined attitude led him to succeed in many jobs throughout his American life, including upholstery, plumbing, plastering, painting and writing.

He was a UPS employee for 25 years and, in 1980, started his real estate business Ben Lesser and Associates.

Jean and Ben left the real estate business and retired to Las Vegas.

In 1995, he was invited by his 10-year-old grandson Adam to talk to his class

about surviving the concentration camps.

More than 50 years since he had spoken about it, he was determined not to let its horror contaminate his American life and family.

In 2009, Ben founded the Zachor Foundation with the goal to reach more than six million individuals who

The next minute they were gone

want their voices to be heard and to stop intolerance.

He also started to hand out badges which consist of the word *Zachor* (remember) to represent the message he tries to convey.

Through the Zachor Foundation, Ben founded I Shout Out, for people to act, speak out against intolerance, injustice, racism or bullying.

He said: "When enough people are willing to speak up and speak out, change will happen and the world will be a better place."

■ zachorfoundation.org

Why Julian will topple six million dominoes in £1.58m Shoah tribute

BY SIMON YAFFE

ARTIST Julian Hanford has devised a unique way to mark the Holocaust.

London-based Julian is aiming to create an epic art installation of six million domino tiles entitled *FALL*.

But to deliver the project — which he hopes will take place in around six months time — he needs to raise £1.58 million.

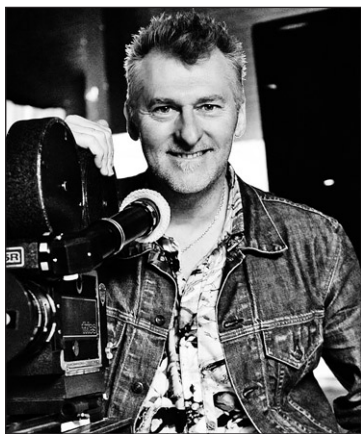
Consequently, it will be crowd-funded on PledgeMusic.

As part of the campaign, Julian has recorded a new version of Tears for Fears' *Mad World*, which features his 13-year-old daughter Aurelia, which is being released on iTunes, Amazon and Spotify.

A video is also being released of the track

Julian, 54, said: "I went to Bergen-Belsen when I was 13 as an army cadet. It left such an impression in me.

"What struck me was the sense



UNIQUE: Julian Hanford

of desolation — it was tangible. "Nothing was growing there and there were no birds singing."

He explained that his art explores the human condition and the ways people traditionally think about things.

Hereford-born Julian, who is not Jewish but has maternal Jew-

ish antecedents, added: "What I could never get my head around is the scale of the Holocaust.

"Through the six million dominoes, I want to get that sense of scale across.

"I struggle to visualise the vast figure — it is an abstract number, diluted by the passage of time.

"*FALL* is about trying to reframe the memory of the Holocaust 70 years on. Most people have a basic understanding of these events, but in some way the emotion and scale of the Holocaust is now somewhat disconnected with our present day lives."

The work consists of a block of tiles, which will take up the area of a football pitch.

The tumbling of the dominoes — which Julian is planning at Berlin's Tempelhof Airport — will take around 12 hours.

The gigantic block will be set up by world champion stunt domino master Robin Weijers and his team. The current world record is 4.5 million dominoes.

A Holocaust survivor will push the first tile, setting off the chain reaction of dominoes falling.

After the event, Julian plans to send every school in the country a domino with an education pack.

Prior to the toppling, Andre Singer's documentary *Night will Fall* will be shown. It was recently featured on Channel 4.

The programme chronicles the making of the 1945 British government documentary *German Concentration Camps Factual Survey*, which languished in British archives for almost seven decades.

Julian said: "The poppies at the Tower of London successfully reframed the symbol of the poppy.

"Everybody has worn them for years, but they buy them without thinking what it symbolises.

"The installation made people think what it is about."

Nearly a million ceramic poppies were planted in the dry moat at the Tower.

■ Details: www.fall15.com

MP Luciana's abuser banned from London

A WHITE supremacist activist, who tried to organise a rally against the 'Jewification of Stamford Hill', has been arrested for inciting racial hatred and banned from entering London.

Joshua Bonehill-Paine, of Yeovil, is accused of sending antisemitic messages on Twitter to Jewish MP Luciana Berger, who represents Liverpool Wavertree.

Bonehill-Paine wrote on his blog that police seized two mobile phones, a laptop and a "priceless" Nazi party badge.

The Board of Deputies welcomed his arrest. Vice-president Jonathan Arkush said: "It does not come as a surprise to discover that the self-promoting far-right activist with a criminal record has been arrested again.

"It is reassuring to see the police are taking strong measures to curb the actions of haters like him."

In January, Bonehill-Paine called for a "mass protest" in March against what he perceived as the "complete Jewification" of Stamford Hill, in north London, with particular focus on the Shomrim, a Jewish neighbourhood watch group.

Since his arrest, he has written on his blog "I will not stand for Jewry of any kind" — and vowed to expand his campaign nationwide.