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Survivor, 86, had ‘passion for learning and teaching’

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WINNIPEG – At the age of 86, the man referred to as “Winnipeg’s Elie Weisel,” passed away on Sept 6. About 600 people attended the Shaarey Zedek funeral.

Born in Drohobycz, Poland, Philip Weiss and his family were forced into the Drohobycz ghetto when he was 15 years old. Later, Weiss was moved to the Wieliczka salt mines as a slave labourer, then to another work camp, and to Austria’s Mathausen Concentration Camp. On May 5, 1945, the Americans liberated the camp.

Bryan Schwartz, Weiss’ son-in-law, in his eulogy said, “When I remember Philip, I remember the words of Rabbi Hillel, who said, ‘In a land where there are no men, strive to be a man.’”

Schwartz described Weiss as “a man gifted with talent and burdened with sensitivity; seeking God’s mercy but so often finding silence; determined, despite everything, to live on as best as he could, a loyal son of his God and his people.”

Alan Yusim, Midwest regional director of B’nai Brith Canada, said, “Philip will be dearly missed. He was very motivated to work with us on educational and advocacy initiatives directed at students – to keep the memories of the victims of the Holocaust alive, and so that it never happens again.”

Yusim recalled when he and Weiss attended a trip to the Northern Manitoba community of Fairford First Nation. “He gave such a moving, interactive session to the people there, telling them about his experiences.”

In 1947, Weiss was reunited with his family in Linz, Austria, and moved to Winnipeg in 1948. Once settled in Winnipeg, he started up a successful business, Philip Weiss Ltd. (a furniture design and manufacturing company). He retired in 2002.

According to Earl Barish, chair of the executive board of B’nai Brith Canada, Weiss’ brother, Leo, is married to Barish’s sister, Evelyn, and their families share a strong bond.

“Philip always had a kind word to say, an insightful sense of humour, and a generous nature,” said Barish.

“He was a joy to talk to, as one who was not shy about his opinions. He would say what was real, without any sugar coating.

“I don’t think with the kind of work Philip did that you can ever feel its finished, especially with his passion

for learning and teaching.”

In 2003, Weiss received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Winnipeg for bringing Holocaust awareness to young people through talks at high schools and universities across Manitoba. He also gave free screenings of the movie Schindler’s List to thousands of children.

Weiss was the Negev Award recipient in 2004.

He once said, “I always maintained a vision of the world past the Holocaust, and that is what kept me going. Weiss’ book, *Humanity in Doubt: Reflections and Essays*, was published in 2007.

[Article available at <<http://www.jewishtribune.ca/TribuneV2/index.php/20081002971/Survivor-86-had-passion-for-learning-and-teaching.html>>]