

The Gershon and Roza Lewkowicz Prize in Jewish-Christian Relations

My parent's history as Holocaust survivors has overshadowed my whole lifetime. My father, Gershon Lewkowicz, was born in Kielce, Poland and died of a heart attack 10 November 1972. My mother's death the night of 24 February 2004, was equally unexpected.

There were sixteen years between them. When they married in Kielce, Poland at the end of the war, 10 December 1945, she was 21 and he was 37. They were married almost one year after the Russians entered Kielce, on 15 January 1945.

At the time, my father was in charge of the soup kitchen for Jews returning to Kielce from Russia, the camps, the forest, or from other hiding places. Less than 200 from a pre-war population of 25,000 returned. My father told me that he did not have a shirt for the wedding and my mother no dress, that the Gypsies who had brought him in from the forest gave him a shirt.



My mother, born Roza Opolska in Warsaw on 3 September 1924, survived the Warsaw Ghetto and two concentration camps as slave Jewish labour in Deblin and Czestochowa. Both were part of the Hasag Company armaments production run by the German army and the SS. During these years, the conditions she endured were such she never had a period.



My father, Gershon Lewkowicz, survived the Kielce Ghetto, the Kielce work camp, one of few who escaped the Treblinka death camp, and was a leader with David Barwiner of a resistance that failed because it was betrayed. He also survived almost two years in the forest around Kielce with other Jews who were hunted by Germans and anti-semitic Poles, including groups of the underground army. It was Polish bandits who helped him survive.



As well, both my parents survived the infamous Kielce Program on 4 July 1945, after surviving the war. My mother was seven months pregnant with me. A leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Resistance had to bring an armed railway car to rescue those Jews who survived this incomprehensible murderous hate.



It took centuries for the initial welcome Poland gave to the Jews to turn to vicious hate, and the Catholic Church had a prominent role in the demonization of the Jews.

The Second Vatican Council recognized its impact and desire to enact positive changes in liturgy, dogma, and thinking of the Church's relation with the Jews. It is my hope is that this will engender further discussion and encourage change that will remove hate and anti-semitism from all the reaches of the Church's dominion.

I dedicate this prize to my parents, Gershon and Roza Lewkowicz.