



## Press Release

### Genocide Memorial Built on Foundation Of Personal Loss, Redemption and Hope

*'Our stories are braided into one'*

*8 witnesses to genocide – Available for interview*

**ROHNERT PARK, March 1** – It is the small, individual stories of human beings – survivors of genocide and the offspring of the dead and other victims – that often provide the understanding of events that are so huge they can be beyond our imagination and comprehension.

Those stories are the foundation of the Erna and Arthur Salm Holocaust and Genocide Memorial Grove that will be dedicated at Sonoma State University on March 29.

The memorial grove sculpture by SSU Professor Jann Nunn is a glass tower and cylinder of eternal light based at the convergence of two railroad tracks anchored to the ground by ties made up of some 460 bricks inscribed with personal memorials to victims of genocide.

The personal memorial bricks were purchased by families and friends of victims of the Holocaust and genocides in African, Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the Americas.

“Whether we are Native American, Jewish, Cambodian, Armenian, Rwandan, or the people of Darfur, our stories are braided into one,” said Brenda Flyswithawks, a Cherokee American and one of the supporters of the Sonoma State project.

The memorials cover a wide array of human motives and feelings, most of them expressing a commitment to remember.

“I promised my dad that we would not forget,” said Rohnert Park resident Giselle Perry whose father and grandparents escaped the Nazis in 1935 but whose lives were never again the same. “I have always felt that they too suffered from the painful, emotional distress and abuse of being mistreated in and, then, forced away from their country -- their lives there. In a way, they too suffered a type of death and grief.”

Below are the stories and contact information of residents of Northern California who have purchased memorial bricks, and who are available for interview in advance of the March 29 dedication at Sonoma State. Some of these stories are in first person and some are based on telephone interviews. They are available as a resource, contact information, and to be used freely.

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***These people didn't exist until Sonoma State put up a memorial to genocides.***

Robert Arakel – **Available for interview**  
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**DAVIS** – Jack Arakelian was 20 years old when he left his family in Marzevan, Armenia, in 1913, bound for New York to go school.

He would never see his family again. While he was in school his father and a younger brother died of natural causes. Then in 1915, Jack's mother, Maritza Arakelian, and sister, Nemzar Arakelian, were killed in the Armenian genocide.

“He got word – and it was never confirmed – that his Mom and sister were gunned down on the steps of the church in Marzevan by the Turks,” said Robert Arakel, Jack's son who lives in Davis.

Robert Arakel said his father, who is now deceased, never went home.

“Home was Armenia when he left,” said Robert Arakel. “He was supposed to go back but there was no place to go back to.”

Instead Jack Arakelian stayed with his relatives in New York who then moved to San Francisco where Jack's uncle was a physician and had a doctor's office in the Flood Building on Market Street.

Jack went to college, took business courses, and eventually went to work for the Hale Brothers department stores. Eventually Jack dropped “ian” from his surname because, his son said, “people had too much trouble with it.”

Robert Arakel said his dad rarely spoke about the genocide and the death of his mother and sister.

“He really didn’t bring it up, but it bothered him,” he said. “He spent a lot of money trying to find out what happened, but he never found out, to the day he died, what had happened to his mom.”

Not for sure how she died nor where she was buried.

Arakel is a retired AT&T worker in San Francisco. He lived in Petaluma where he raised a family before retiring to Davis in 1988.

He said he purchased memorial bricks for his dad and dead grandmother and great aunt.

The brick will be inscribed:

*Maritza Arakelian Nemzar Arakelian  
Marzevan, Armenia  
Victims of Armenia Genocide  
1915 Turkey  
Family of Jack Arakel*

“I’m doing it to honor my father,” he said. “And there’s another reason. Basically my father’s mother and sister disappeared in Armenia. They have no grave site. They have no grave stone.”

The SSU project, he said, “at least gives them some marker in the world.”

“I want them to be recognized. These people didn’t exist until Sonoma State put up this memorial. These people *did* exist.”

\* \* \*

***My father has an amputated spirit . . . and there’s no fix for that.***

Rene Powell – **Available for interview**  
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**HERCULES** – For Rene Powell and her dad, 83-year-old Gerald Punitzer Powell, the Sonoma State project and the memorial brick they have purchased will provide some measure of peace after years of wondering how and where Gerald’s German Jewish parents died.

“My father has lived a tormented life of wondering, how and where,” she said.

Rene Powell is a student at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. She is writing her thesis on art and artists and how they were used by the fascists during WWII.

She chose to write about art, she said, because the money that paid the way for her dad, Gerald, and his brother, Helmut, to get out of Berlin in 1938 was raised by the sale of a painting by a relative living in London.

Powell's grandparents, Herbert and Martha Punitzer had hoped to leave Germany with their sons, but the money was not enough.

"My father was 12 and his brother was 14. They were sent to London to be looked after for a brief time by an aunt and uncle. My grandparents said they would soon follow when they got the money. They didn't get the money and they never got out," she said.

The boys never heard from them again, not until after the war.

Gerald was a soldier in the British Army when the war ended in 1945.

"My grandparents both wrote letters and left them in a box with the neighbors who were not Jews. Dad went to Berlin and got the box from the neighbors. Bone crushing sad. One of the letters began, 'If you read this then we are dead'" she said.

Powell said her grandparents were last seen alive in the Jewish ghetto of Lodz, Poland, where starvation was rampant. She said the family believes that Martha and Herbert died in Lodz of starvation or were taken to Auschwitz where they died.

"I grew up in the shadow of this and have a lot of second generation grief," said Powell. "When this came out, about the Sonoma State memorial, I was so taken at the idea. Part of what drives my spirit so is that there is no place, no final resting place for the deceased."

Powell said she does not know if there will be any final peace for her father.

"He is ill and he has an amputated spirit as a result of all this, and there's no fix for that," she said.

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***The Sonoma State project is especially important because so many of these things of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as in Darfur.***

Peter Stanek – **Available for interview**  
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**SAN RAFAEL** – Peter Stanek is a member of the Rape of Nanking Redress Coalition. He also is current president of The Global Alliance for Preserving the History of World War II in Asia. The RNRC is one of 41 local organizations around the world that are part of Global Alliance.

He became involved with the RNRC after reading Iris Chang’s 1997 bestseller, “The Rape of Nanking.”

The Coalition and Alliance exist to preserve the history of the 300,000 Chinese civilians slain by the Japanese Imperial Army during the 1930s and the 20 million to 35 million people believed to have died at the hands of the Japanese Army from 1931-45.

In a telephone interview, Stanek said the Sonoma State genocide memorial project enables people with common experiences to remember victims of genocide and to resolve to make the notion of “never again” a reality.

“We need all of these things memorialized,” he said. “The Sonoma State project is especially important because so many of these things of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as in Darfur,” he said. “It means that we will have a public acknowledgement and appreciation of the Asian Holocaust in addition to the European Holocaust,” he said.

“The Rape of Nanking Redress Coalition takes every opportunity to remind people about the nature of holocausts that have occurred and the need to expose this history so we all understand that such things have happened and that we need to work together to see that they don’t again,” he said.

Stanek said the Coalition demands that Japan acknowledge genocides in mainland China during WWII .

“Without an apology by the Japanese government and compensation for their crimes, there can be no true peace among all the nations of the western Pacific,” he said.

The RNRC has two bricks embedded in the SSU memorial sculpture site.

One is inscribed: Rape of Nanking, 300,000 Murdered

The other is inscribed: Atrocities of Pacific War, 35 Million Murdered in Mainland Asia

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*I promised my dad that we would not forget.*

Giselle Perry, MA PPSC – **Available for interview**  
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**ROHNERT PARK** – Thank you for offering me the opportunity to share my thoughts and feelings about why I decided to become involved with the SSU Holocaust & Genocide Memorial.

My father, Walter A. Simon, was born to a Jewish family in Frankfurt, Germany in 1926.

Although he and his immediate family were fortunate enough to find a way out of the increasingly hostile environment that arose during the Nazi's rise in or around the year 1935, I have always felt that they too suffered from the painful, emotional distress and abuse of being mistreated in and, then, forced away from their country -- their lives there. In a way, they too suffered a type of death and grief.

One of my dad's grandfathers was living in London during this time, and thus was able to help the family relocate first to London for about a year, and then after procuring visas, to New York. However, this did not happen before the Nazis stole my grandfather's leather business away and confiscated his World War 1 German veteran medals and memorabilia.

Although extremely grateful to be alive and, in their case, bearing the education and means to reconstruct a life in the United States, I personally do not believe that my father and his parents every truly recovered from this experience. After sharing many talks on the subject with my father, and hearing about my father's unspoken experiences from my mother, I came away feeling some of the great pain and nightmares that lingered and, I feel, influenced some of my dad's life decisions up until his death in 2002.

Most of all, however, my reasons for purchasing a memorial brick for the Simon (paternal side of dad's family) and Münzesheimer (maternal) families involve the concern my father voiced, that his family's history and Jewishness (faith and culture) would be forgotten by his children and future generations. Both my brother and I grew up more influenced by our mother's Mexican Catholic heritage, despite always celebrating our Jewish side as a family. We both ended up married to non-Jews.

Despite all this, I promised my dad that we would not forget. I continue to actively celebrate my paternal history and culture, while also sharing what I can with my own children.

I often bring my kids to the SSU campus lakes on weekends, to feed the ducks and geese. Soon we'll have another compelling reason to be on campus.

The memorial brick will carry the inscription:

*In Memory of the Simon and Münzesheimer Families*

\* \* \*

***Our stories are braided into one.***

Brenda Flyswithhawks – **Available for interview**  
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Santa Rosa Junior College  
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Clan: Bird Clan  
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**SANTA ROSA** – It is with respect and honor that I accepted the invitation to participate in the SSU Holocaust & Genocide Memorial Grove Project.

Genocide is not something that any of us would like as the focus of what brings us together; however, it is of the utmost importance that we do come together from our different cultures, spiritual beliefs, and experiences to remember times in history that we are committed to doing whatever it takes to insure that it never happens again, to anyone and or to any group of people.

Native peoples of North America have survived the effects of genocide since the invasion of our territories in 1492. It is our stories of survival that bring us together. Whether we are Native American, Jewish, Cambodian, Armenian, Rwandan, or the people of Darfur, our stories are braided into one.

The SSU Holocaust and Genocide Memorial Grove gives us the opportunity to publicly honor all of our ancestors who gave their life so courageously, as well as to publicly declare that these horrific events DID happen in history and that we will not have them be denied.

For this reason, I choose to be involved and support the SSU Holocaust and Genocide Memorial Grove.

\* \* \*

*To thank my mother . . . for recognizing the Nazis for what they were.*

Hans Angress – **Available for interview**

Cotati

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**COTATI** – I bought 3 tiles.

I bought a \$250 tile to honor the couple, Alida and Ton Kooy, who hid me from the Nazis from September 1943 until the end of the war, May 1945. Alida and Ton were total strangers to my family and yet they offered to risk their and their two boys' lives in order to protect me.

I bought a \$100 tile to remember my father, Ernst Angress, who perished in Auschwitz on January 19, 1943.

Finally I bought another \$100 tile to thank my mother, Henny Angress, for recognizing the Nazis for what they were. She was determined, after my father was arrested, that neither she nor the two sons she was now responsible for would end up in the Nazi clutches. She succeeded. The three of us ultimately survived separately in hiding with various families.

Inscriptions on bricks purchased by Angress read:

In Honor of Ton Kooy  
and Alida Laroo-Kooy  
Who hid me from the  
Nazis in Holland  
Sept. 1943 - May 1945  
Bedankt, Hans Angress

Ernst H. Angress  
In Loving Memory  
Berlin 8-5-1883  
Auschwitz 1-19-1943

Henny Angress  
Thanks, Mutti!  
Berlin 4-4-1892  
Petaluma 1-27-1985

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## **A survivor's daughter for life**

Prof Elaine Leeder – **Available for interview**

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**SEBASTOPOL** – Elaine Leeder has been dealing with the Holocaust and genocide all her life.

As Dean of the School of Social Sciences at Sonoma State University, she oversees the university's Center for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide. She has been a visiting scholar at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

And she was raised by a father whose mother, Yenta Leah, sister, Althea, and brother, Hershel, were murdered by Nazis at the beginning of World War II, and a mother who lost aunts, uncles and cousins – more than 100 relatives in Poland – to the Holocaust.

“I've been a survivor's daughter my entire life,” said Leeder, a former visiting scholar at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Leeder's father, Zalman Sneierson, lived with his family in Kupiskis, Lithuania, as the war approached. Relatives in America raised enough money to bring one of Sneierson's family to the United States.

Althea was supposed to go. But she was needed at home to take care of an ailing father, so in 1939 as Germany was mobilizing she sent her brother Zalman in her place.

In the U.S., Zalman Sneierson settled in Boston and became a junk dealer. Back home, his father died of natural causes and the rest of the family died at the hands of neighbors, Lithuanians Nazis sympathetic to the Germans.

“They were taken to a field where they were forced to dig their own graves and then they were shot,” she said.

Leeder's mother, Ida Tolpin, a first generation Polish American, suffered the same loss.

“Her relatives in Europe all died in the Holocaust,” said Leeder.

Though safe in the United States, Leeder's parents remained victims all their lives, living quietly, never making a fuss, in the family home in Boston suburb of Lynn.

“They were living in fear,” she said of her parents whom she said worried “the neighbors will come.”

“I was an American, and I wondered what was wrong with my folks,” she said. “In retrospect, there was nothing wrong with them.”

Leeder said her family history compelled her to become a student and teacher of the Holocaust and, eventually, conceive the idea of a memorial on the SSU campus during a discussion in her living room with other relatives of genocide victims.

“This is probably my lasting memorial, something physical I can leave,” she said. “It means we won’t forget. It does not mean we’ll not do it again. It means we won’t forget.”

Leeder’s memorial bricks for both sides of her family and when possible show the names and birth years of her relatives and when they were killed:

**SNEIERSON**

Yenta Leah 1877

Althea 1913

Hershel 1921

Kupiskis Lithuania

June 28, 1941

**THE TOLPIN FAMILY**

Ostrog Poland

Aug. 1941- Oct. 1942

\* \* \*

***Roots of life yanked from native soil***

**Corlene Van Sluizer – Available for Interview**

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**SANTA ROSA** – Hans Sluizer fled his native Netherlands in 1939 and immigrated to the United States where he inserted a “Van” between his first and last names so that people would not mistake him for a German.

His daughter, Corlene Van Sluizer of Santa Rosa, offers this recollection and perspective on her father’s search for self and place as a displaced person, the lasting impact it had on

his family, and why she has memorialized her family at the Erna and Arthur Holocaust and Genocide Memorial Grove at Sonoma State.

The Red Brick  
by Corlene Van Sluizer

As a result of my father's experience of displacement, as a Dutch Jew fleeing to America in 1939, I too became displaced as he moved his family around the USA. Holland and Mexico after the war. Eventually my mother returned once again to America with her two girls where there were several more moves.

His home, the roots of his life, had been yanked out of his native soil and he could never find them back. His garden had become a graveyard.

From this legacy of displacement, of uprootedness, I have inherited the inability to attach to place. In my attempt to re-establish some slight sense of nest, of location, of roots, I look to my genealogy. A map. At least I know that I came from somewhere; people with names woven together and my name amongst them. I make this attempt to weave these names so that I can feel that I exist in a context of tribe, clan, and community. As fragile as that is, it is meaningful to me.

I buy a brick for my uncle Max Sluizer, whom of course I never met, and this symbolically reels him closer in and his children whom also died. Ghosts I can name; family I can imagine like photos on the wall saying you existed and therefore I exist. I am honoring your memory Max more in the name of my father, your brother, and in the name of your extended family of which I am a part; a beginning, a taproot, a place to be claimed, a brick with the Sluizer name on it for me and my children and their children. A place we can visit and feel the history of our ancestry and the reminder, a shadow on my heart with the possibility of belonging anew.

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