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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2022

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TOP: Tova Friedman, an 84-year-old survivor of Auschwitz, and her grandson Aron Goodman speak during an interview in Morristown.

RIGHT: Tova at age 6½, with an identification card given to her mother by the International Red Cross to provide safe passage home from Birkenau.

MITSU YASUKAWA/NORTHJERSEY.COM/ COURTESY

Former Sky Blue coach at center of report on abuse

Systemic problem seen harming women's soccer

Melanie Anzidei

NorthJersey.com

USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

Though Christy Holly's time with Sky Blue was brief, the former head coach's tenure on New Jersey's professional women's soccer team was plagued with complaints of verbal abuse, mistreatment and allegations of a toxic team environment, according to new details in a scathing report outlining systemic sexual and verbal abuse of players by coaches in the National Women's Soccer League.

Holly was asked to leave the team — since renamed Gotham FC — abruptly midseason in 2017 because of his "verbal abuse" and "relationship with a player." At the time, however, the club said Holly and the team agreed to part ways mutually. They thanked him, according to the report.

The former coach went on to work

See REPORT, Page 8A

84-YEAR-OLD NJ HOLOCAUST

SURVIVOR

BECOMES AN AUTHOR - AND TIKTOK STAR

Matthew Korfhage NorthJersey.com | USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

Tova Friedman's mother always told her the truth. The truth, she knew, was the only thing that could keep her daughter alive. So when Friedman's grandparents were murdered by Nazis in 1942, in the Jewish ghetto of Tomaszów Mazowiecki, her parents did not shield their 4-year-old daughter from the terrible facts. Never let them see you cry, Reizel Grossman told her daughter. Crying will make you a target. Don't look a Nazi in the eye. Don't wear a hat or scarf when they are present. These things, too, could mean death.

See FRIEDMAN, Page 4A

"I hope that books like that, mine and other survivors', will remind people, 'Hey, wait, don't be so fast to hate and to kill.'"

Tova Friedman

NJ schools await major ruling on segregation

2018 suit seeks overhaul of how kids are assigned

Mary Ann Koruth

NorthJersey.com

USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

A much-awaited ruling on a school segregation lawsuit could have historic consequences for New Jersey's public schools and add more than a wrinkle to a school year that is already politically and culturally polarized.

New Jersey's public schools are intensely segregated racially and economically, alleges a lawsuit filed in 2018 in state Superior Court in Mercer County against the state by the Latino Action Network, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other organizations.

The parents and guardians of nine Latino and Black children and one white child from Highland Park are also party to the suit, which says Lamont Repollet, then the acting commissioner of the state Department of

See SCHOOLS, Page 7A

Florio affectionately eulogized as 'a doer, a true public servant'

Phaedra Trethan

Cherry Hill Courier-Post

USA TODAY NETWORK - NEW JERSEY

GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP — New Jersey governors, legislators and members of the state's political elite came to the Dennis Flyer Theater in Blackwood to pay tribute Monday to Jim Florio.

Florio, a fixture in New Jersey and especially South Jersey politics for decades, died Sept. 25 at the age of 85. A memorial service to the former governor and congressman drew hundreds to the Blackwood Campus of Camden County College.

See FLORIO, Page 5A



Gov. Phil Murphy speaks at a memorial service for former New Jersey Gov. Jim Florio on Monday. CHRIS LACHALL/USA

TODAY NETWORK ATLANTIC GROUP

'We need to call out hatred'

Hearing in Teaneck on Monday delves into threats arising from hate, antisemitism. 1L

Problem fixed

The New Jersey state Assembly approves a revised \$500 child tax credit after a drafting error. 3A

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Friedman

Continued from Page 1A

“You must always behave in a way that you won’t be shot,” she told her little daughter.

In the Nazi-occupied Poland of Friedman’s earliest memories, a little Jewish girl could be shot for no reason. Friedman is now 84 years old, a grandmother eight times over, and still working as a therapist in Highland Park. But she was raised in the horrors of a Holocaust in which Germans murdered 6 million Jews, and millions of others, with gas and with bullets and with bare hands — aided by Polish and Ukrainian volunteers all too eager to assist in the genocide of a people.

Her mother’s unflinching truthfulness gave her the tools she needed to survive, Friedman says. And only the truth can protect against similar horrors happening again.

So even to children, Friedman now tells her story — the story of a little girl who survived the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Who saw the gas chambers, and lived as a witness. Who escaped a Death March in 1945 at age 6 by pretending to be dead herself, snuggling tight against the cold skin of a corpse.

Friedman tirelessly shares her story with schools and community centers, and with her family, taking her grandchildren to Auschwitz in 2020.

“You are what Hitler could not kill,” she told them, at the 75th anniversary of the death camp’s liberation by Russian soldiers.

And with the help of journalist Malcolm Brabant, she has finally published her story in a new memoir, “The Daughter of Auschwitz.” In her book, Friedman tells the story of a little girl who never knew any reality other than one in which Jewish girls died — and the new life she eventually built in New Jersey.

Her book has not left the New York Times bestseller list, or Canada’s, since its publication in early September.

And since last year, Friedman has also told her story on TikTok — a video social media platform most popular among the young, and which she still does not know how to use.

At age 84, she has become a perhaps unlikely TikTok star.

Teaching the TikTok generation about the horrors of the Holocaust

Friedman’s life on TikTok began with her grandson Aron Goodman.

During a Friday night dinner last year, he’d asked his grandmother if he could film her saying a few words about her experience as a survivor of the Holocaust.

He would post it on TikTok, he said.

“Tic Tac?” she asked. This was, of course, the breath-mint company where Aron’s mother, Itaya — Friedman’s daughter — worked at the time. “Why would a candy company be interested in Holocaust survivors?” she wondered.

At Itaya’s house the day after Rosh Hashana, Friedman beams at her grandson with evident pride as he explains that he saw posting her video testimony to TikTok as a way to preserve cultural memory and combat the antisemitism he still sees online.

Friedman has an easy laugh and kind eyes, not to mention a grandmother’s impulse to offer food to a houseguest — even if that guest is the third journalist to interview her in a day. She also takes an impish joy in describing the handsomeness of a certain national news anchor she’s met.

But her purpose is serious. Telling the story of the Shoah, the Holocaust, is as important now as it’s ever been, says Friedman.

She sees echoes of the hate she experienced in the



Tova (in color on the left) and other child survivors display their tattoos to the Russian photographers following liberation from Birkenau, 1945.

invasion of Ukraine by Russia, in rising antisemitism, in online political venom that seems to feed on itself.

“The world has not learned,” she says. There were just 15 years between Hitler’s publishing “Mein Kampf” and the building of extermination camps in Poland. Time is always short.

“I hope that books like that, mine and other survivors’, will remind people, ‘Hey, wait, don’t be so fast to hate and to kill,’” Friedman says. “Because as somebody said, ‘People who could burn books can eventually burn people.’”

In September 2021, Goodman posted his grandmother’s first videos about her experience in Auschwitz. He warned her not to be disappointed if only 10 or 20 people ever saw them.

That’s not what happened.

First it was a hundred people. Then a thousand. Now, nearly half a million people follow her TikTok account at @tovafriedman. Her videos have been viewed 50 million times.

Children and teenagers and teachers send her question after question about the Holocaust, and Aron takes them to his grandmother to answer in intimate personal testimonials.

Do you still believe in God? Did you ever want to remove your tattoo? Did you have to watch anyone be killed?

She has arguments with God, she says. And she would never remove the tattoo with the number she was assigned by her Nazi tormenters: A-27633. She now sees it as a sign of her moral victory against those who tried to take away her humanity.

In solemn answer to the last question, she explains on TikTok that “killing, in my childhood, was very, very normal. People were killed every day. You could see the bodies on the street.”

And often, children wanted to know: Did she meet Anne Frank?

Friedman answers each question patiently and sincerely, with the unexpected poignance of simple fact.

She did not meet Anne Frank, because even though they were there at the same time, Anne Frank was older. She would have been in a work camp, while Friedman was in the “children’s place,” the Kinderlager.

Besides, she says now, in the Morristown living room of her daughter, Auschwitz was not a social hour. “People don’t just meet each other,” she says.

A life that has become an inspiration across the world

In her memoir, and also on TikTok, Friedman does not stop her story at the liberation of Auschwitz by Russian soldiers.

She wrote of their former neighbors in Poland who told her family, upon their return from Auschwitz, that they wished all Jews had died instead. Of her aunt Helen, killed by a Polish mob after surviving the camps.

Amid barbarity, Friedman still finds the small moments of kindness — wherever they existed, among those who tried in their own little ways to resist or to remind each other of shared humanity. She describes

the kernel of dignity that her mother helped her keep, even as Nazis attempted to convince every Jewish person that they were not people.

And she tells of the life she was able to forge in the United States after the concentration camps, or during her brief time in Israel — after meeting a little boy named Maier Friedman who bought her a cheese sandwich when she’d just arrived in New York.

She decided that someday, she would marry him. “You’re crazy. You’re 12 years old,” her mother said. “You’re going to marry somebody you’ve just met?”

But of course, much later, that’s what she did.

Recently she was also able to reunite with two other survivors in New Jersey, shown next to her as children in a famous photograph taken by a Russian soldier at the liberation of Auschwitz. Lately she has taught herself to crochet, to hold Zoom videos to help refugees as a therapist during the pandemic, and to take and send phone videos.

Fans across the world send her letters, and questions, and gratitude for sharing both the trauma she has experienced and the life she has led.

Her grandson shields her from the antisemitic comments that still arrive on TikTok, he says.

“Things as bad as ‘Heil, Hitler,’ or ‘Hitler was right.’ ‘Should have killed more.’ ‘Didn’t happen,’” he says. He looks over at his grandmother, to register the change on her face.

“She’s hearing this for the first time. Because I shield her from the negativity.”

But most of the messages are from people whose hearts she has touched with her words and her videos. She asked her rabbi: Why would people be interested in me, when there have been 15,000 books about the Holocaust?

“He said, ‘It’s because you represent the children that aren’t here,’” she says. “What could have been, had those children been alive? Can you imagine: one million and a half Jewish children killed. Their ashes. You know, starved and beaten and drowned and torn apart. Those lives that would be musicians and doctors, and here I am just one little person that survived.”

Her daughter Itaya believes, in part, that it’s because her mother shows it is possible to have a good life after atrocity. Not just to survive, but truly to live.

On her mother’s behalf, she receives messages from people who have experienced hardships all over the world — people in Hong Kong or Mexico or India who have endured abuse, or rape, or unimaginable pain.

“Their letters say, ‘If you can survive what you did, and build a life and be happy ... if you can do that, I can do that,’” she says. “It is so heartwarming and heart-breaking at the same time, how her story inspires others to make changes in their life, and to see hope where they didn’t see it.”

As she speaks, Itaya Friedman’s eyes fill with tears. But she doesn’t wipe them away.

Matthew Korfhage writes about culture, food and equity for the USA TODAY Network’s Atlantic Region How We Live team. Follow him @matthewkorfhage on Twitter or email mkorfhage@gannettj.com.

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