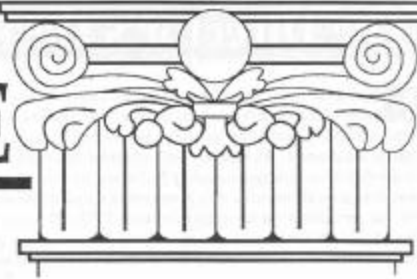


THE MUSE

The news of the Sonoma County Museum



This is what I remember

Sonoma County Survivor Project exhibit

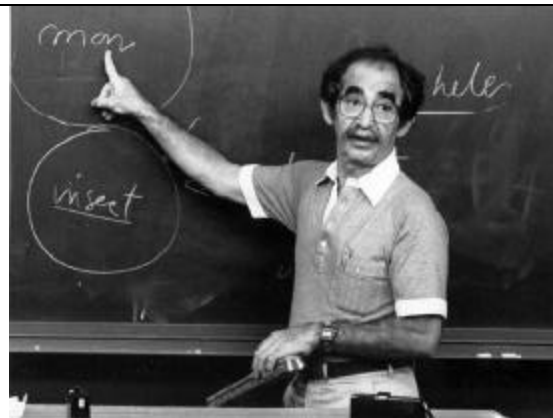
By Rosalie Phillippi

Former Buddhist monk Chhuon Pok lost all his family, was shot and buried for dead by the Khmer Rouge during the Pol Pot regime in his native Cambodia. But he climbed out of his grave... Thy Hor Hang, a Cambodian with two daughters in their late teens now, was active with his wife in films and TV. The family had to flee their native land, but they survived.

Paul Benko lost his father and mother to Nazi prison camps when he was a child in Eastern Europe. He suffered torture and slavery because he was Jewish. ... Vera Korkus was a teenager when she survived the death camps in Austria... Renée Newman recalls coming home from a skiing trip in Austria to find a sea of Swastikas in her home town; the Germans had taken over her country and later took over her family's business... Susanne and Alfred Batzdorff fled Germany in their late teens. Susanne's parents had been physicians in Germany when worsening conditions ended life for a family that had been respected for hundreds of years. They too survived.

Ed Hirabayashi was interned at Tule Lake during World War II in the United States and was suspected along with his Boy Scout troop of turning on lights at night to signal the Japanese... Mei and Shiro Nakano were interned at Amache Camp in Colorado during the same war because they were Japanese Americans... Margaret Murakami had four brothers serving in the U.S. military while her family was in a camp.

What do these victims of racism and



**Paul Benko of Santa Rosa,
Nazi concentration camp survivor.**

how my parents felt. These are photos of my lost ones. This is what I remember.

Fifty photos and oral histories, telling their stories as well as dozens of others, will be on exhibit at the Sonoma County Museum from May 1 through June 9, as the Sonoma County Survivor Project. The project is the work of photographer Phyllis Rosenfield and writer Lisa Slater with the help of more than a hundred individuals in our community who shared their expertise, research and resources in a true labor of love.

Coordinator of the project is Lisa Slater, collector of oral histories and wife of Rabbi Jonathan Slater of Temple Beth Ami in Mayette Village. Phyllis Rosenfield, wife of Judge Arnold Rosenfield of the Superior Court in Santa Rosa, is the photographer who

genocide have in common besides the hellish conditions in which they spent their early lives? They are all survivors and are now our neighbors in Sonoma County. Despite their early traumas, they are able to join together with other survivors living here to provide others from perhaps suffering similar fates. With their help we can bring statistics (How many people died? How much was lost?) down to intimate stories: This is how I felt. This is Chhuon Pok is now a business and religious leader in the Santa Rosa community... Thy Hor Hang's daughters are now attending Sonoma County colleges... Margaret Murakami is now living in Santa Rosa. One of her brothers died in the war and another is living in Oakmont... The Batzdorffs fled to New York and are now in Sonoma County... Paul Benko is a biology professor at Sonoma State University... Vera Korkus runs a business out of her home in Sebastopol... Renée Newman is retired but remains an active and involved member of the Santa Rosa community. Mei and Shiro were married in the camp and Shiro later served in World War II in army intelligence.

Phyllis and Lisa conceived the idea for the project five years ago, in October 1986. Phyllis said she wanted to do a photographic study of people she knew from the community who had survived the Holocaust, and Lisa recalled a magazine in which she had admired photos of Russian immigrants who told their story in first person, handwritten letters which were printed under their photos. Lisa regretted that she had not asked her grandmother more questions pertaining to her experiences.

"We started out to make those statistics into a more personal matter and show how individuals involved felt, because statistics, while overwhelming cannot show individual suffering. We began to add the Cambodians and Japanese to show that it can happen again and all races can be subjected to prejudice of wars and hatred."

in Santa Rosa, is the photographer who enlarged and reproduced historical family photos, created her own photos for the project, and brought them together to find a meaning, a thread of humanity among the insanities of the world. The pictures and history reflect the people in their ordinary lives, and their personal stories.

Represented in the exhibit are the neighbors we introduced in the first part of this article.

Yet there can also be demonstrations of humanity. The survivors would not be here had they not been helped by friends. Paul Benko recalled the Danish prisoners of war in his camp, for instance, who shared their rations willingly, while others refused. "It isn't only food, it isn't only the shelter. It isn't only clothes – but the belief that human beings need to feel something worthwhile, with a sense of dignity inside them that empowers them to survive."

The project was sponsored by the Center for the Study of the Holocaust at Sonoma State University and the Sonoma State Academic Foundation. A grant for the exhibit was received from the Sonoma County Foundation which collects and distributes donations from various people in the community to fund worthy projects in art, music, social studies, education and other cultural studies that benefit the community. In addition, many other individuals have contributed generously to the project.

The project is especially concerned with our youth here in the county. Curriculum and resource materials aimed at integrating the exhibit into the "Human Rights and Genocide" unit of the California Social Studies Framework will be available through the project and the museum for teacher use and school visits. Although some photos have appeared elsewhere, this is the first time the Survivor Project has appeared in its collective state.