

State House commemorates International Holocaust Remembrance Day as local survivor tells her story

By **Maddie Khaw** Globe Correspondent, Updated January 25, 2024, 7:44 p.m.



Magda Bader, a Holocaust survivor, spoke at at the Massachusetts State House in commemoration of Auschwitz liberation. JONATHAN WIGGS/GLOBE STAFF

When Magda Bader, 94, entered a Massachusetts State House room Thursday to speak about her experience as a Holocaust survivor, she noticed how young the faces in the crowd of around 50 people appeared.

“Look at all the young people here,” Bader, a Newton resident, said, turning to Debbie Coltin, president and executive director of the [Lappin Foundation](#), a Beverly-based organization dedicated to enhancing Jewish identity.

“With the alarming rise of antisemitism and other forms of hatred here and around the world, and with Holocaust denial, distortion, and lack of knowledge amongst the younger generations increasing, it is more important than ever to understand the critical lessons of the Holocaust,” Coltin said, introducing Bader.

Hosted by Senate Majority Leader Cynthia Stone Creem of Newton and Senator Joan Lovely, a Salem Democrat, the event marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day, which is held every year on Jan. 27, the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp.

This year’s commemoration theme is “[Recognizing the Extraordinary Courage of Victims and Survivors of the Holocaust](#).” It comes at a time of rising antisemitism across the globe, and the Israel-Hamas war rages on.

Almost 80 years after the Holocaust, [about 245,000 Jewish survivors](#) are still living across more than 90 countries, according to a recent demographic study by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Axios reported that there are [roughly 1,800 Jewish Holocaust survivors](#) in the Boston area.

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Bader's story starts in 1930, when, she said, she was born the youngest of 10 children to a Jewish family living in the town of [Munkacs](#), which at the time belonged to Czechoslovakia and is now part of Ukraine.

"Life was simple" back then, Bader said. Her family lived "side by side" with non-Jewish people and surrounding ethnic villages, she said.

In spring 1944, when she was 14, Bader's family was ordered to vacate their home and relocate to a ghetto. From there, her family was taken to Auschwitz during a harrowing multiday cattle car journey.

"Move fast," Bader recalled guards telling passengers when they arrived at the concentration camp. "You will see each other," she said they repeated continually. So she let go of her mother's hand, also separating from her father, one of her sisters, and the sister's baby.

Bader never saw them again.

"So this was the beginning," she said.

Bader went on to tell the story of her year, from ages 14 to 15, in Nazi concentration camps. She and the three sisters from whom she hadn't been separated took measures to remain together.

After several months in Auschwitz, Bader and her sisters were transported to another concentration camp in Germany. She and her sisters began hearing bombing overhead; realizing the war was intensifying, they escaped when the camp was left briefly unattended. They climbed through a window in the kitchen, where her sister worked, and crawled through the nearby wood.

After living free in Germany for a year, she made her way to England, then to the United States, where she studied at the University of Denver, earned her master's at Columbia University, and became an art teacher. She reconnected with her surviving siblings along the way.

Bader's message after sharing her story? One of kindness.

"If we believe that we are all God's children, we have to treat each other like we are God's children, no matter what religion, what background, and appreciate each other's worth," Bader said. "And listen to each other, and not fight and kill and hate."

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