



*How do you honor a promise made over 75 years ago?*

## TOSIA SZECHTER SCHNEIDER

At six years of age, Tosia Szechter moved with her parents and older brother, Julek, to her mother's hometown of Horodenka in what was then in Poland. Tosia fondly remembers her childhood, school, friends, and Jewish holidays, surrounded by her close and loving family. In the summer of 1939, however, Tosia's family was summoned home from a vacation. War was on the horizon.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland. World War II had begun. Tosia's parents chose not to flee, wanting to stay close to their family. An agreement between the leaders of Germany and the Soviet Union, Hitler and Stalin, divided up Poland. Now, Tosia's hometown was controlled by the Soviets. Conditions were difficult, but the family was together.



*Photo courtesy of Someone Must Survive to  
Tell the World*

*"Strong... family bonds had been our strength in the past, but now our unwillingness to separate, doomed us all for destruction."*

In June 1941, Hitler broke the agreement, and Germany invaded the Soviet Union. In July, the Nazis arrived in Horodenka. Tosia's father and brother were sent to forced labor. That fall, Jews were forced into a small ghetto, surrounded by barbed wire. Weeks later Jews were ordered to appear at the synagogue. Not trusting the Nazis, Tosia's father hid his family in the old mill where he worked. From there, they heard gunshots. Days later, they learned that thousands of people had been taken to the forest and shot. Over the next months, there were more massacres.

In October 1942, Tosia, her brother and mother were sent to the Tluste ghetto. It was horribly overcrowded and there was little food and medicine. Tosia's father remained behind. That was the last time she saw him, learning later that he died in the Holocaust. Tosia's mother, starving and suffering from typhus, told her daughter, "Someone must survive to tell the world." Tosia promised. Her mother died that winter. Tosia and Julek were now alone.

Deported to the Lisoce labor camp, they were forced to work in the fields. While Tosia was on a break the SS arrived and shot some of the workers. The next morning, Tosia found her brother dead, in a mass grave. Julek was seventeen years old. Without family, life seemed unbearable for Tosia, but she remembered her mother's words: "Someone must survive to tell the world."

An easier job and friendship with a girl named Fritzka helped Tosia face the future. Tragically, that winter, Fritzka became ill with typhus. Working in the fields one morning, Tosia heard shots. Her friend was gone, leaving only a blood stain in the snow. Again, Tosia was alone.

In March 1944, the Russians liberated Tosia's camp. While living with cousins in Romania, she met another survivor, Alfred Schneider. After coming to the United States in 1949, she and



Alfred renewed their relationship. They married in 1950 and in 1975 moved to Atlanta. Alfred became a professor of nuclear engineering at Georgia Tech and Tosia became a teacher. They had three sons and five grandchildren. Tosia took seriously her vow to "tell the world," writing a memoir and sharing her story with students and teachers.

Tosia passed away in September 2020, just a month after the passing of her beloved husband Alfred.



Map courtesy of US Holocaust Memorial Museum