

Holocaust survivors honoured with Freedom of the City of London



Sabina Miller was the only member of her family to survive the holocaust

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Two Polish-born Holocaust survivors, Sabina Miller and Ben Helfgott, were honoured yesterday with the Freedom of the City of London for their work with the [Holocaust Memorial Day Trust](#).

Mrs Miller, 92, has no photographs from when she and her family were moved into the Warsaw ghetto — she was the only one of them to survive. All that remains is the cardigan her mother bought for her then 16-year-old daughter in 1938 and which, by some miracle, made it through the war relatively unscathed. “I must have worn it all the time,” Mrs Miller said at her home in West Hampstead, north London.

Her own existence is testament to her determination to survive. After recovering from a bout of typhus, during which her parents disappeared, she was smuggled out of the ghetto to live with an aunt in the countryside. Later she went on the run, living in a hole in the ground in the woods, begging for food and twice changing her identity in an attempt to keep one step ahead of the Nazis. She was infested with lice at this time and her feet were so damaged by frostbite she could not wear her boots. Once, arrested by the Gestapo, she refused to admit she was Jewish and, in an outrageous bluff, told them: “Ask my mother — she is only 25km away.” But the

woman she mentioned was not her mother: if the Gestapo had called her, the game would have been up.

At the end of the war, she met a Polish Jewish officer who asked her: “Are you Jewish?” Still terrified, she said no. The next day she sought him out, and told him the truth: they ended up crying on each other’s shoulders. “He said, ‘Don’t worry, there are Jews left in the world’.”

Mr Helfgott, 85, from Harrow in north London, was nine when war broke out and his family were forced into the ghetto in their home town of Piotrkow in central Poland.

In 1942, when the deportations to Treblinka began, Mr Helfgott and his family managed to avoid the cattle trucks. But in December that year his mother Sara and younger sister Luisa were shot dead, along with 550 other Jews who had been in hiding.

He and his father were sent to Buchenwald, where they were separated. Mr Helfgott learnt later that his father was killed on a death march to what is now the Czech Republic. “He tried to run away,” he said once. “They caught up with him and shot him like a dog.”

When Mr Helfgott was liberated in May 1945, he weighed just six stone. Two years later he was given a new home in England, where he embraced a love of sport. He took up weightlifting and by 1956 was captain of the British team at the Olympic Games. “Hate is corrosive,” he told The Times in 2012. “Sport is a leveller.”

Despite all he suffered, Mr Helfgott said he has never been motivated by thoughts of vengeance. “I refused to poison my life with revenge,” he said yesterday. “Instead I was left with a dream — to live in a world of understanding, compassion, fraternity and love for my fellow man.”