

Holocaust survivor, journalist and historian Marian Turski dies at 98

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“Do not be indifferent,” he was known to say, as he advocated for education, Holocaust survivors and Righteous Gentiles.

Holocaust survivor Marian Turski, who worked in postwar Poland as a journalist and historian, died on Feb. 18 in Warsaw. He was 98 years old.

Born Moshe Turbowicz to Elias and Helena Rachel Turbowicz on June 26, 1926, he grew up in what was then part of Poland and what is now Lithuania.



In 1942, he and his family were sent to the Lodz ghetto. His father and younger brother, Wolf, were transported to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration and death camp in Poland, where they were killed; his mother was sent to Bergen-Belsen in Germany. She survived and was later reunited with her son.

Turski was sent on one of the later transports from the Lodz ghetto to Auschwitz, where he survived the camp and a death march in January 1945, after which he was transported to Buchenwald in Germany, followed by another death march to Theresienstadt, where he was liberated by Russian troops. He was said to have lost more than three dozen family members in the Holocaust.

Unlike many Polish Jews who fled war-torn Europe, Turski settled in Warsaw. He studied at the University of Wrocław and married Halina Paszkowska, a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto. She died in 2017. The couple had one child, Joanna Turska, a flautist who lives in Chicago.

He was active with the youth wing of the Polish Workers’ Party, later working in the press department of the Polish United Workers’ Party. In 1958, he became a columnist for the weekly *Polityka*, where he worked for most of his career, also heading its historical department. He also wrote a number of books.

But it did not come without controversy. A member of the Communist party, he aimed to help rebuild Poland, even serving for a time as a censor. It was then that he changed his name to something less ethnic. But as Jews again faced a wave of antisemitism and anti-Zionism following Israel's Six-Day War in June 1967—namely, in March 1968 among a purging of Jewish professionals—he broke off such ties.

Turski and his childhood friend, Roman Kent, also a survivor of the Lodz ghetto, worked after the war as forces in fostering Holocaust education, supporting Holocaust survivors and standing up for Righteous Gentiles who assisted Jews during World War II.

Kent later became president of the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous (JFR), a position he held until his death in 2021.

Turski received numerous honors and awards over the years. He held supervisory positions as well, serving as chairman of the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland, and sitting on the boards of the Association of Jews, War Veterans and Other Victims of the Second World War II; the International Auschwitz Council; and the association that oversees the Wannsee Conference House.

He was also instrumental in the creation of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw, a landmark institution that preserves and honors the legacy of Polish Jewry.

Under his leadership, the museum became a key destination for the JFR's European Seminars, where U.S. Holocaust educators were taught about the history of Jews in Poland. POLIN became the chosen venue for the JFR's annual receptions honoring Righteous Gentiles in Warsaw.

“He dedicated decades of his life to Holocaust education, and his friendship was truly appreciated,” said Stanlee Stahl, executive director of JFR. His absence will be profoundly felt.”

Turski was “respected in all circles, Jewish and non-Jewish,” she told JNS. “He had a way that made everyone comfortable. He was intuitive, a good and decent man—a renaissance man—and very well-loved.”

‘Let us not be afraid’

The last time she saw him was in Warsaw six months ago in September 2024 at the 10th anniversary of POLIN (its exhibits opened to the public in the fall of 2014). The first time was on a trip to Poland in September 1992, shortly after starting her job at JFR.

“I got there, and Marian Turski met me and took me under his wing,” she said. She has since been to the country on 50 to 60 other trips.

For years, Turski supported the Never Again Association, which counteracts racism, antisemitism and hate speech, and published articles in the organization’s magazine, titled *Never Again*.

He also wrote to Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder of Facebook (as well as CEO and chairman of Facebook’s parent company, Meta Platforms), to advocate for the removal of Holocaust-denial pages, posts and groups as part of the [#NoDenyingIt](#) campaign launched by other Holocaust survivors.

Stahl recounted the 11th Commandment, according to Kent and Turski: “Do not be indifferent.”

On International Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2019, Turski was invited to the United Nations to give a speech to the General Assembly. He spoke the next year at the ceremonies in 2020, the 75th-anniversary event, before the start of the pandemic that shut down the world for a while.

On Jan. 27, at the age of 98, he was the first speaker—presenting the lead remarks—at International Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremonies in Warsaw, which this year marked the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1945. He ended his talk with prescience: “Let me repeat—let us not be afraid to convince ourselves that we need a vision of not only the present but also of the future, of what’s going to happen in the decades to come.”

Stahl exhibited no hesitancy about her awe at Turski’s involvement year in and year out when it came to the Holocaust and those affected by it.

“He always had time for people,” she told JNS. “You would look at him, shake his hand, and say, ‘Thank God, this person survived.’”

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