# Chapter 6.2 What was it like to survive the Holocaust?

Resource sheet 6.2.1

**Individual survivors depicted in the textbook:**

**Leon Greenman**

The fact that Leon Greenman was English born draws an immediate connection to students using the textbook in English schools. You will find that many of the lessons and teacher-training sessions created at UCL Centre for Holocaust Education feature Leon for this reason. But there are several other reasons why Leon’s testimony takes such prominence in UCL’s work.

1. His considerable humanitarian action in England after the Holocaust in relation to educating young people. This shows survivors like Leon saw the importance of learnng about the holocaust and wanted to help by giving eye-witness account.
2. His mission to warn of the dangers of far-right and neo-Fascist groups to help protect future generations.
3. The sheer power of his story and the extraordinary effect that films of him giving testimony has on the viewer – whatever age.
4. The Centre’s access to rare insights into Leon’s life after the war and the manifestations of the long-term trauma on his life gathered from the Centre’s Programme Director (RAL) whose close friendship with Leon provided a lens onto this.
5. The large collection of artefacts, documents and photographs held by the Jewish Museum London some of which are available online.

**Summary text about Leon.**

Leon was eventually liberated by the American army at Buchenwald concentration camp on the 11th of April 1945. He was 35 years of age, physically broken and in need of significant hospital treatment. He received no counselling nor any financial help from any country to get him back on his feet.

Months after the war ended Leon learned that his wife and son had been murdered hours after they arrived at Auschwitz-Birkenau. It was news that would haunt him for the rest of his life. He returned to London – the place of his birth and built his life there. He never remarried but dedicated his life to telling the world what happened to him and his family in the hope it would serve to warn future generations of the dangers of neo-Nazism and other dangerous political ideologies. During his incarceration, he had made a ‘covenant’ with God: should he and his family survive the camps he would dedicate his life to bearing witness to the atrocities that befell his people so that it might prevent it every happening again to anyone. Notwithstanding the fate of Else and Barney, Leon almost immediately set about bearing witness to the Holocaust. He would often say: **‘**If I had survived to betray the dead it would have been better not to have survived.’ He spoke to anyone who might listen. This became a mission that eventually would lead him to spend his days touring schools, universities and various faith groups to tell his story. His lectures would often conclude with the words: ‘Stay away from fascism, racism, Nazism… in other words stay away from hate.’

He lived alone in London, was staunchly independent and surrounded himself with photos of the loved ones he lost and ephemera about the Holocaust. Related books papers photos in surrounded him in every room. Despite struggling with enduring trauma, Leon had a wonderful sense of humour that would captivate young people and teachers whom he spoke to in schools. He possessed a positive spirit, a strength of belief in human beings and their potential for good. ‘*While you are here, do the right thing…create love and understanding… and that will create happiness’* were words that became his mantra.

Leon, now in his 80s also became a fervent activist standing up against fascists and neo-Nazis in the UK. He worked tirelessly for the Anti-Nazi League. As a result of his fervent persistence and courage to speak out, he became a target for neo-fascist groups. While he admitted to experiencing fear in the face of such attacks he remained undeterred and continued his fight to combat all forms of racism. ‘I vowed to G-d that I would never let my monstrous memories die and I will continue my fight’

He died at the age of 97 on March 7th 2008.

**For further information:**

Leon’s testimony appears in the Centres following sessions:

Authentic Encounters with the Holocaust: A starting point for Teachers. This coure is available online: <https://www.holocausteducation.org.uk/courses-events/online-cpd/>

**Other ways to access information regarding Leon Greenman:**

You can see film of Leon Greenman interview by enrolling for the UCL MOOC which can be found at <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/holocaust-teaching>

or by visiting the Shoah Foundation archive <https://sfi.usc.edu/>

A visit to the Jewish Museum to the Leon Greenman Exhibition would provide an excellent starting point for learning about Leon’s life. Educational programme provided by one of their lead educators can also be booked.

If your students are keen to learn more about Leon you could invite them to email questions to UCL Centre for Holocaust Education and we can post via our website responses to some of the most common question that are sent in.

Look out for new UCL materials relating to Leon Greenman (currently in production). These will examine in greater detail what it is to survive a genocide and will reflect on Leon’s life after the war.

In December 2020 a UCL national student project will be launched to commemorate the 110th anniversary of Leon’s birth.

**Other survivors mentioned in the chapter:**

**Mala Tribich:**

For more information about Mala Tribich see the film produced by UCL as part of the ***Belsen75*** project: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o\_LRRQAPb2I](https://eur01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3Do_LRRQAPb2I&data=02%7C01%7C%7C1c2f35fe3f8f48755c8208d85e22f4bd%7C1faf88fea9984c5b93c9210a11d9a5c2%7C0%7C0%7C637362851508265985&sdata=pAwmWrY%2BOp%2FM4H1ZSiMrY7iAqr2l9iu6sp2icQKMcc8%3D&reserved=0)

This film captures Mala and fellow survivor Susan Pollock as they reflect on the moment of liberation from Bergen Belsen by the British army on 15 April 1945. Both were just 14 years of age.

A summary of Mala’s story can be found on Holocaust Educational Trust’s webisode <https://www.het.org.uk/survivors-mala-tribich>

**Kitty Hart- Moxon:**

Information about Kitty Hart-Moxon can be found here. Kitty was one of the first to speak out about her experience in 1980s. She made a TV programme about her returning to Auschwitz with her son. It was the first TV programme of its kind and for many was the first British survivor heard speaking openly about the horrors of Auschwitz.

Further info about Kitty can be found on the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust website: <https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/kitty-hart-moxon/>