

Dr. Leatrice Bergida Rabinsky (1927-2018)

Holocaust Education Pioneer



A noted Holocaust scholar who pioneered Holocaust education in schools, Dr. Leatrice Rabinsky is remembered as a Master Teacher and influential figure whose career spanned more than 40 years.

The Cleveland native and graduate of Glenville High School, Rabinsky earned her B.A., M.A., and PhD. from Case Western Reserve University.

Her grandfather, Rabbi Dr. Philip Rosenberg was the spiritual leader of Knesseth Israel Synagogue. Her father, Sol Bergida was a founder of Young Israel (Cleveland); her mother, Cerlin Bergida was a longtime Hebrew, Sunday School, and nursery school teacher.

Profiled in the chapter of "Honoring the Dead and Comforting the Bereaved" in Debby Flancman's book, *The Jewish Woman Next Door: Repairing the World One Step at a Time (2007)*, she explains that her friendship with young Holocaust survivors in 1947 motivated an "overwhelming desire to keep alive the memory of those who were murdered, to sustain the emotional lives of those who survived, and to spread the message of tolerance." That desire became her mission, as she dedicated her life to laying the groundwork for perpetuating Holocaust education.

In 1973, she started a Holocaust literature class in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District, which became the model for Holocaust education programs across the country. Then in 1975, she organized the first of a long series of *Journey of Conscience* trips, taking students to the sites of the Holocaust in Europe and on to Israel to interview Holocaust survivors.

“What the students needed to really understand the magnitude of the Holocaust was a journey to see what they were studying,” Rabinsky explained in a September 14, 2007 interview with the *Cleveland Jewish News*. “Thirty years ago the idea of visiting the concentration camps was not well accepted, and many thought I was crazy,” said Rabinsky. But thanks to the generosity of the Jewish Community Federation’s Ratner, Miller, Shafran Foundation, the first group of students traveled to Poland.

From these visits and subsequent classes came journals and slide presentations which were used throughout the United States and in other countries as well.

Selected by the Cleveland Heights-University Heights School District as its *Teacher of the Year* and its nominee for the 1978 *National Teacher of the Year Award Program*, Rabinsky was cited for bringing an awareness of the Holocaust in a dynamic way to the students in her Literature of the Holocaust course. A leader in the Orthodox Jewish community as well, she and her husband, Irving, were jointly honored with the 1976 Friedland Award of the Bureau of Jewish Education, for their contributions to the cause of Jewish Education

In 1996, Rabinsky was one of 300 educators who participated in an international conference on Holocaust education at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. She and her colleague, Carol Danks of Kent, OH, presented a workshop they designed for Ohio schools. They also presented an exhibit of student art, publications and projects from Cleveland Heights High School, Yeshivath Adath B’nai Israel, Fuchs Bet Sefer Mizrachi, and Roosevelt High School in Kent. Both Rabinsky and Danks served on the Ohio Council of Holocaust Education, now known as the Ohio Council on Holocaust and Genocide Education (OCHGE).

With Gertrude Mann, she co-authored *Journey of Conscience: Young People Respond to the Holocaust*. Along with the National Council of Teachers of English Committee on Teaching about Genocide and Tolerance, Rabinsky and Danks were editors of *Teaching for a Tolerant Word, Grades 9-12: Essays and Resources*.

During her quarter century of service at Heights High School, she had been in the forefront of teaching, researching, and lecturing about the Holocaust. Upon her retirement from Heights High in June 1996, Rabinsky wrote in the school newspaper, “There is life beyond the walls of the school. I don’t just teach a subject; I teach human beings.”

Besides her tenure at Heights High School, Rabinsky also taught adult education courses at Siegal College for more than 15 consecutive years. While her work focused primarily on the Holocaust, she also developed courses in other areas for the Siegal Community of Lifelong Learners.

In 2014, the Jewish Federation of Cleveland committed \$50,000 over a 10-year period for Holocaust education at Heights High. The Cleveland Heights High School Alumni Foundation receives a \$5,000 annual renewable grant from the Federation's George F., Stephanie M. and George L. Traub Fund. Some of the grant is used for the Dr. Leatrice Rabinsky Holocaust Study Scholarship.

Recognizing the lifetime work and legacy of Dr. Rabinsky, The Kol Israel Foundation created the Dr. Leatrice B. Rabinsky Holocaust Education Resource Fund. This fund enables students from schools with limited financial resources to access local Holocaust education institutions and programs.

Leatrice Rabinsky passed away on June 5, 2018, at the age of 90. She was the beloved wife of the late Irving. Survived by her children Linda (Rabbi Abraham) Bensoussan, Rene (Marc) Kurs, Marc (Peninah) Rabin and David Rabinsky, as well as many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Services were held Wednesday, June 6, 2018, in Cleveland. Interment Israel.

More on Dr. Leatrice B. Rabinsky and Holocaust Education

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Ohio Council on Holocaust and Genocide Education --
<https://ochge.org/>

Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage: The Museum of Diversity and Tolerance -- <http://www.maltzmuseum.org/>

The Nancy & David Wolf Holocaust & Humanity Center --
<https://www.holocaustandhumanity.org/>

Dayton Holocaust Resource Center -- <http://daytonholocaust.org/>

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www.ClevelandJewishHistory.net