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## Museum archives keep history alive

**Posted:** May 11, 2016 | **Author:** leisahw | **Filed under:** Community | [Leave a comment](#)

Katrina Shawver of Phoenix was working on a manuscript of her friend Henryk Zguda's biography and was looking for information about what happened to him during the Holocaust. After contacting the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, she was shocked at the 130 documents she received with Zguda's name on them.



Photo by Richard Ehrlich for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

The records included prisoner transport lists, registration paperwork, infirmary dates, work statistics and block transfers.

"I never knew this cache of documents existed," says Shawver. "I think Henry would have been equally shocked."

Shawver had only met Zguda for a year before he passed away in 2003, but his widow granted permission for Shawver to write his life story. Through the documents, she corroborated many facts about Zguda's nearly three-year imprisonment in Nazi concentration camps as a Polish political prisoner during World War II.

"When I met Henry, I became fascinated that he had been through hell and back, a firsthand witness to Nazi crimes," she says. "He had no children to leave this story to, and it would have been lost forever had I not captured it."

Shawver is just one of more than 20,000 people who have successfully turned to the museum for help in their search for documentation about the fates of their loved ones and other Holocaust survivors — victims of the Nazis and their allies.

With more Holocaust survivors getting older and dying, getting accurate and complete information from the museum's massive archives to requesters as soon as possible is more crucial than ever.

Since an important archive called the International Tracing Service was opened in 2007, the museum has provided a free service that has united generations of families and tracked long-lost family members, helping Holocaust survivors, their children and grandchildren, to fill in the blanks in their family history.

"What is the greatest fear of survivors today? That when they are no longer here, what happened to them would be swept under the rug," says Paul Shapiro, head of the museum's Office of International Affairs who was instrumental in pushing to open the ITS archives. "These millions of original documents are an insurance policy against forgetting."

With more than 150 million pages of documents relating to 17 million people, the ITS collection contains a wealth of information about survivors and victims of the Holocaust and Nazi persecution and about displaced persons.

Facilitating research questions like Shawver's is the job of the museum's top-notch team of ITS researchers. Holocaust survivors and their family members contact the museum on a nearly daily basis with queries about relatives, and sometimes using nothing more than a first or last name, the ITS researchers try to find documents that will shed light on the experiences of these Holocaust victims.

Much of the museum's information comes from the ITS archive, established by the Allies after World War II to help reunite families and trace missing people. The archive, located in Bad Arolsen, Germany, includes millions of pages of documentation from World War II. It was kept closed until 2007, when, with help from the museum, it was opened to the international community. Now, 11 nations have access to copies of the archive, and the museum holds the U.S. copy.

The museum has received requests, both online and in person, from across the U.S. and from 75 countries around the world. Free of charge, the museum's researchers scour their own collections as well as the ITS archive in search of relevant documents.

The museum receives, on average, more than 250 requests per month. To date, the Museum has provided information in response to more than 23,000 requests, and researchers have assisted about 400 visitors onsite at the museum.

For more information, visit [ushmm.org](http://ushmm.org).

*Source: U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum*

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