

# Interview: Henry's Story by Katrina Shawver

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I was recently contacted about reviewing a new book that is a survival story in the truest sense...

When journalist Katrina Shawver met the eighty-five-year-old Henry Zguda, he possessed an exceptional memory, original documents and ph knack for meeting the right people at the right time. Told in an interview format, Henry relates a life as a champion swimmer and coach, interr three years imprisoned in Auschwitz and Buchenwald as a Catholic Polish political prisoner. This bridge to history is told with a pragmatic gall and is supported by extensive research, original documents, and rare photos. Ultimately, HENRY is the story of a resilient young man who sui wits, humor, friends, and luck.

I have the book on my To Be Read list and hope to have a review for you in the next month/so (the holidays sometimes throw a wrench into m plans). Until then, enjoy this peek into Henry's world!



## **Henry's Story**

*An Interview with Katrina Shawver*

### **What is HENRY: A Polish Swimmer's True Story of Friendship from Auschwitz to America about?**

Henry Zguda, a competitive swimmer from Krakow Poland, was arrested and imprisoned for three years in Auschwitz and Buchenwald for one reasor at a time that Germany had sworn to (once again) erase Poland from the map of Europe and destroy all things Polish. Like so many other Christian pi camps, he received very little credit for what he had lived through. In many ways I consider the story a view of the Holocaust through Polish eyes, a p known near enough. Henry survived by his wits, humor, luck and friends, and went on to live a full life without bitterness. I find that incredible.

### **How did this project begin?**

It was a completely random and serendipitous phone call. I was writing columns for The Arizona Republic and a member of the community called me insisted I write about Henry Zguda. So I called up Henry. We met. I wrote a column. Yet, a thought nagged at me. He had no one to leave his story to, told me it was unique, worthy, and huge. I still cannot explain why a few days later I impulsively called up this near stranger and suggested we collab story. That phone call truly changed the direction of my life.

### **How much research did you conduct for Henry?**

A ton. When I began I had never interviewed a concentration camp survivor, nor was I Polish or Jewish. I knew very little about Poland, especially dur 1940s, and 1950s. A lot of history is woven throughout the book to set the scenes and historical context for a time and place few people alive have ex acquired a small library of memoirs, biographies and reference materials related to Poland and WWII. I had to translate multiple documents from Gerr cross-reference Henry's stories with fact-finding. Ultimately, I knew I needed to visit Poland and Germany, retrace Henry's steps, and walk the ground: Buchenwald, which I did in 2013. Then in 2014 I struck gold when I located 130 documents with Henry's name on file with the International Tracing Sc kept falling into place.

### **What makes this story different from most other accounts of the time?**

It offers a different viewpoint of the camps, that of a Polish political prisoner, and stories I have verified have not been written elsewhere. I hope peopl moments in reading it. Second, this story is related in Henry's voice and told on a very personal level, akin to the interview format of Tuesdays with M most closely replicates our experience, and our growing friendship. The story continues after WWII to reveal a life lived without regret, and multiple fri a key role in his survival. Third, this book contains more than 80 original documents and photos, most not printed elsewhere. There are Henry's perso Auschwitz and Buchenwald stationery, transport lists, registration paperwork, Henry's personal photos, and others from museums. They add a visual r research that is included. Fourth, this narrative is far different than most of the time. Henry knew a lot of people. There truly are stories I have verified that have not been written elsewhere. The stories are not all dark and misery and Henry's wry sense of I throughout the book. Readers will fall in love with Henry. There are a few tough scenes, but both sides are authentic and real.

### **Who will this book appeal to?**

I consider HENRY an intelligent read for discerning adults, especially those interested in European history, World War II, and the Holocaust. A reader' is included for book groups. It is also ideal for college-level courses on WWII or the Holocaust. I have received a lot of support from the local Polish cc definitely anyone of Polish heritage or connections will appreciate it.

### **What do you hope your readers will gain from reading your book?**

This story reminds us that no single class of people was safe from Hitler's reach or imprisonment, and no country suffered more under Hitler and Stali Currently I'm saddened and disturbed by the rise in anti-Semitism, appearance of swastikas more frequently, and even attacks on Poles in some cour reminder of what really happened before, and the result of extreme hate. The Holocaust was real, and so were the deaths of six million Poles, three r three million Christian. I've used the following quote as the epigraph to my book. "The past actually happened, but history is only what someone wrote

Whitney Brown. This thought has kept me committed to this project for years. If I don't tell this story, it is truly lost. In a way, the book is my own contril of WWII and Poland.

**Where can we find out more about you and HENRY: A Polish Swimmer's True Story of Friendship from Auschwitz to America?**

HENRY can be purchased from most worldwide online booksellers worldwide. My website – [katrinashawver.com](http://katrinashawver.com) – contains a lot of information and resources. I [blog](#) regularly and people can sign up for my email list. I'm also on Facebook at [Read Katrina Shawver](#).



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[...] while ago, I introduced you to Katrina Shawver, an Arizona journalist who underwent an amazing journey into [...]

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