

# Authors book details man’s ordeal in Nazis camp

BY PAUL MARYNIAK  
Executive Editor

If she is not the first, East Valley journalist Katrina Shawver certainly is one of very few to accomplish what she has with her new book, “Henry – A Polish Swimmer’s True Story of Friendship from Auschwitz to America.”

Not only is it a rare book about an Ahwatukee resident by a virtual neighbor, but it also is a rare painstakingly documented historical look at the Nazis’ political persecution of Polish people simply because they were Polish.

Before his death on Thanksgiving Day 2003, Henry Zguda was a well-known figure around the Ahwatukee Recreation Center, but also an accomplished athlete through virtually his whole life.

“At one point he worked at the reception desk and knew everyone,” Shawver said. “He was in the bocce league. He swam near daily and played a lot of tennis. He was also very active in Arizona Senior Olympics – I believe in swimming – and also in seniors tennis. His office contained a whole bookshelf of tennis trophies and medals earned over the years, all while in Arizona.”

In his youth, he was a champion swimmer – but that was interrupted by his internment in two Nazis concentration camps, Auschwitz and Buchenwald, as a Polish political prisoner.

He and a friend defected from Communist Poland in 1956 at the height of the Cold War with the help of friends he met in Buchenwald,” Shawver said.

He and his wife, Nancy, who died in 2013, moved to Ahwatukee in 1980, and lived in the same house until their deaths.

Shawver and then-85-year-old Zguda met in 2002, a year before his death, in the course of her work as a columnist for the Arizona Republic.

She became so enthralled with his story that she set out to write a book – a labor of love that took her to the two concentration camps where he had been held prisoner.

Besides, his “lack of children, siblings and extended family played a huge part in my impulsive offer” to write his story. “Truly, there was no one else to care about or capture what instinct told me was an incredible story.”

Although family issues prolonged Shawver’s project into a 15-year effort, she eventually returned to it, determined to finish it.

“I knew in my heart of hearts I could not live with myself until I finished and held the book in my hands,” she said, adding that she even hired translators for German and Polish documents she had unearthed both among Zguda’s possessions and in her trips to Germany.

“So many stories and details came into focus and even greater historical significance than I first understood in 2002,” she said.

“Finishing this book is an incredible life



Katrina Shawver, left, became good friends with Henry and Nancy Zguda before they died.

accomplishment for me. I have followed my instincts the entire time, and I truly believe a higher power has helped propel the project to where it is today, and continues to open amazing doors.

“I outlived Henry, but now his story will outlive me.”

“Henry” is available for purchase in hardcover, paperback and eBook formats on most online book sites worldwide.

It also is available at both Changing Hands bookstores, one of which will host one of her two appearances next month.

The SanTan Sun News recently asked her about her research and the book:

**Q: Did you have to do other research in conjunction with this book?**

A: Absolutely. When I began, I had never interviewed a concentration camp survivor, nor was I Polish, Jewish or Catholic. I knew very little about Poland. I needed to comprehend the social fabric and cultural biases of a pre-war Poland, and a country at war.

The research component began with reading similar memoirs and biographies of the time as well as the history of Poland and the Holocaust. I have amassed a small library on the topics. It then grew to visiting the university library, combing websites for credible museums and institutions, and locating ever more resources. While in Auschwitz and Buchenwald I met with the lead archivists to verify facts and stories, and walk the

steps Henry did.

There I learned things I could only have learned by being there. There is no substitute for visiting a concentration camp in person. None.

An unexpected find came in 2014, when I discovered 130 documents with Henry’s name on file with the International Tracing Service. I think many people use the service to locate deceased relatives.

For me, I found verification of stories told to me personally by someone who was there. It was a WOW moment to locate those documents.”

**Q: What makes this story a significant contribution to WWII history?**

A: This account is far more than one man’s story. It honors the millions of Poles who were arrested, and so many who were frankly executed. Six million Poles were killed during the nearly six years the country endured World War II. Three million were Jewish, 3 million were Christian. In Auschwitz alone, 150,000 Poles were executed or died from starvation, disease, and mistreatment. Two Catholic saints were martyred in Auschwitz.

Additionally, no country suffered more, endured more, or lost more than Poland during World War II. The country was invaded by two genocidal leaders: Hitler and Stalin, both of whom were determined to destroy all things Polish.

Even worse, Poland fell under the rule of Russian Communism until 1989. For three generations of Poles, it was forbidden to teach Polish history or honor Polish heroism.

Subsequently, there are far fewer accounts from the Polish viewpoint, especially in English. I have gained a huge and lasting respect for Poles.

Few of Henry’s accounts can be found in history books, yet they are verified.”

**Q: What makes this account so relevant today?**

A: Henry witnessed perhaps the most extreme example of anti-Semitism: the calculated, strategic murder of millions of Jews. Today, there is a rise in anti-Semitism, hate crimes and swastikas...

This book also serves as a historical reminder that no group of people was safe from being targeted. There is danger if no one is allowed to disagree with their government without fear of retribution... Today, it is hard to discern real news from hidden agendas, and I wonder how many people truly question their information sources.

Even social platforms like Facebook use algorithms to determine who sees what. History is taught less and less to younger generations, or distorted or “softened.”

I hope this book causes readers to pause, think, and consider the lessons of history. ■

## PIANO FROM PAGE 43

first time when he was 9. He said it’s a fun competition, where he sees many “familiar faces.”

Samuel took first place at the Steinway Avanti Star Piano Competition, facing out-of-state judges, and he earned second-place honors two other times at the event.

He said when he was 14 he won the Arizona Musicfest Youth Piano Competition in his age division in the Valley and he has also earned second-place in that contest twice. Just last month, he got first place in division three at the Musicfest competition. Samuel participates in that event every year.

Performing last year with MusicaNova Orchestra was a thrilling experience, he said.

“I got to learn a lot and develop a lot of new skills,” Samuel said. “Everybody is integrated into one style of playing. You kind of have to be a team player.

He said he also loved playing Gershwin’s Piano Concerto in F major in that concert as “he’s an exciting composer.”

“At an early age, I would listen to his

music,” Samuel said.

Warren Cohen, musical director of the MusicaNova Orchestra, loved working with Samuel.

“Working with Samuel was a joy,” Cohen said. “He is extremely musical and sensitive, and of course has marvelous training and a first-rate technique, and he is a delightful young man. I couldn’t ask for a better soloist!”

Samuel said he hopes to become a professional pianist, as his father was before becoming a piano teacher. His goal is to get accepted to Eastman School of Music – University of Rochester in New York, The Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia or another well-respected music school.

Fei went to the Central Conservatory of Music, a world-renowned school in China.

A fan of various musical genres, Samuel even likes film scores, hip-hop and indie-style music. He said he loves the piano because compared to other instruments it is “more flexible.”

“You play with two hands,” Samuel said. “You have more control over different melodies. You could play both parts. You can have a lot going on with that.” ■

## GIRL SCOUTS FROM PAGE 46

part of its Nourishing Arizona program.

Jerri is thrilled her daughters were involved in the recipe contest promoting healthy foods.

“There’s commercials everywhere for the most unhealthy food and obesity is an issue in the United States,” she said. “I think it’s just absolutely important for them to learn just healthy ways of life, not just eating healthy but activity.”

“It’s very important. They know the difference between healthy food and junk food. It’s definitely not one of those things where they can never eat junk food; we try to instill in them everything’s okay in moderation.”

Girl Scouts-Arizona Cactus-Pine Council serves 20,000 girls in grades kindergarten through 12 in central and northern Arizona with support from over 10,000 adult volunteers.

Information: girlsoutsaz.org ■



Sandra Moore’s cooking has inspired her little sister Holly Phillips to try her hand in the kitchen.

## Sandy’s Spicy Salad

(makes six servings)

### Ingredients

- 1 cup cucumber
- 1/2 cup avocado
- 1 cup tomato
- 1/2 cup canned poblanos peppers
- 3 mozzarella cheese sticks
- 1 lime
- Salt and pepper

### Preparation

- Drain canned poblanos peppers and cut into ½ inch squares if needed
- Peel avocado and cut into ½ inch cubes
- Cut cucumber into ½ inch cubes
- Cut cheese into ½ inch rounds
- Put all of the ingredients into a bowl and add a squeeze of lime juice to

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