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## MS St. Louis Passenger Shares Her Story at Edison Library

- [By Deborah Melman](#)
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(l-r): Eric Revilla, Edison Library; Eva Weiner, Holocaust survivor; and from Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey: Dr. Stacy Gallin (Center to Combat Antisemitism and Reinforce Multicultural Acceptance) and Laura Safran.

Nearly 50 people from the Edison/Highland Park area and beyond came to the Edison Library's Main location on Plainfield Avenue on the evening of May 12 to hear Eva Weiner speak about her family's experience escaping Nazi Germany on the ill-fated MS St. Louis in 1939. Although only 10 months old at the time, she was able to share all the details of the harrowing trip and subsequent war years in England as told to her by her parents, along with her own childhood recollections.

Weiner began by saying that she didn't originally consider herself a survivor of the Holocaust as she had not been in a concentration camp, or even in Nazi Germany during



After a week in the harbor, the St. Louis departed for Miami, a mere 90 miles away. Strict immigration rules prevented the ship from stopping in Miami, and the United States Coast Guard was sent to guard the ship and prevent anyone from jumping off and attempting to swim ashore. Facing diminishing supplies, Gustav Schroeder, captain of the St. Louis, made the heartbreaking decision to return to Europe. Schroeder knew what would happen if he returned the ship to Germany and ordered his crew to continue to treat the Jewish passengers well. One crew member was reportedly placed in the ship's jail for refusing this order. Upon his return to Germany, Schroeder was stripped of his title and position for having treated Jews humanely and was penniless, unable to get a job or earn a living. Years later, when survivors of the St. Louis heard about this, they collected money and supported him. Schroeder

was later named a "Righteous Among the Nations" by Yad Vashem for his actions.

Nations of the world could easily absorb the 900 or so people still on the ship, but only England, Belgium, Holland and France agreed to accept some, but not all of the passengers—despite the Jewish Agency offering each country money for each person they would accept. Of the 620 passengers who returned to Europe, 278 survived the Holocaust. Despite having relatives in Belgium, Weiner's father saved his family when he chose to get off in England because it was "furthest away from Germany." Weiner described her early years in London's bomb shelters as the Nazis fought the Allies, how her parents were able to get work in their professions (baker and couturier) and how her family eventually came to the United States. "I got my United States citizenship and worked for the federal government as a way of saying 'thank you' to this country for allowing me entry and the opportunity to worship as I wished."

Weiner noted that there are fewer and fewer Holocaust survivors and it is critical that their stories be publicized as the number of Holocaust deniers increases. "While it is mandatory to teach the history of the Holocaust in New Jersey, there are only 17 states that require it," she said. "And of those 17, some relegate the teaching to only one paragraph in a book. If we don't reach the next generation with this information, there may not be a next generation at all."



Eva Weiner speaks.

The event was presented to the public as part of the Edison Library's observance of May as Jewish History Month. According to Eric Revilla, library associate, the library was in contact with Laura Safran, director of community impact at the Jewish Federation in the Heart of New Jersey. The original request was for a suggestion of a movie that could be shown, but the library jumped on the opportunity when they learned that Weiner was available.

Library Director Allan Kleiman said, "This is an important program to be had at any time, but especially now. We need to talk about the Holocaust and the events that preceded it to learn and prevent it from happening again."