Rhoda Katz Holocaust Education Endowment Fund

Rhoda Katz's childhood years growing up in Toronto were a time of great happiness. Rhoda was one of three daughters born to well-known architect Benjamin Swartz, designer of Kensington Market's well known Kiever synagogue and many other historic buildings.

Rhoda remembers her family home being filled with the sounds of laughter from her high-spirited sisters and their friends. From her father, Rhoda learned the importance of giving. She took note of the regular parcels her father sent to a relative in Israel, despite not even being sure of their connection. From her mother, she learned the importance of family, a lesson learned by watching her mother's daily outings by bus to visit Rhoda's grandmother on Palmerston Avenue.

When Rhoda was 12, she had an experience that changed her world. One of her close friend's parents were Holocaust survivors, and when they left Europe, they brought with them the books showing mass graves, skeletal bodies, and many other atrocities.

"It had a lasting effect on my life," said Rhoda, explaining that the incident marked the beginning of her lifelong thirst for books on the Holocaust.

After meeting her husband, Bernie, and subsequently moving to Hamilton, the couple came under the influence of community activist and philanthropist Bill Morris, who encouraged his large circle of friends to get involved and give back to the community. Bernie would become a significant philanthropist in his own right, and Rhoda was filled with pride when Bernie was asked to be a Negev Dinner honouree.

Rhoda, too, took her philanthropy seriously, becoming one of Hamilton's first Lions of Judah. She looks back on those early years, when she was part of a large group of dynamic and dedicated Jewish women working with a sense of shared purpose on behalf of Jewish charitable causes, with great fondness.

Like their parents before them, Rhoda and Bernie raised their sons, Benjy, Danny and Larry, and their granddaughters Amanda and Jordana, to live generously and give back to community.

Rhoda Katz

BOOK OF LIFE