

Supper with Survivors: Holocaust survivors, young adults break bread, break down generation barriers

by [MDJ staff](#)

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It was a Mitzvah years in the making, as more than 70 young adults joined more than 40 Holocaust survivors at The Marcus Jewish Community Center of Atlanta on Feb. 21, for Supper with Survivors. Each survivor was paired with a young adult, who accompanied them before, during and after the evening's festivities, with the hope that connections and friendships would be made.



The event was spearheaded by Roey Shoshan, director of the MJCCA's Young Adult program, and it has been a dream of his since he began working at the MJCCA in 2011. "My first interaction with a Holocaust survivor was in Israel when I was 10- years-old," said Shoshan, a native of Petach Tikva, Israel. "The experience made a huge impact on me, and I always made a point to visit survivors to hear their stories, so I thought it would be worthwhile to connect my generation

with Holocaust survivors."

The MJCCA embraced the idea, and with funding and support from Karen Edlin from Eternal Life-Hemshech, an Atlanta-based organization formed to honor the memory of Holocaust victims and survivors, the event was able to happen. The response from the MJCCA's young adults as well as the survivors was immediate, and spots filled up quickly.

"Our goal was to create special connections — simply bringing the two sides to the dinner table was not enough." Shoshan explains that as part of the evening's itinerary, the young adults were required to phone their survivor before the event to make arrangements for the night's festivities, then pick up the survivors at their homes, accompany them to the event, sit with them at dinner, and then take them home. "We felt the car ride would serve as a great ice breaker," he added.

Upon arrival at the MJCCA, survivors and their young adult companions were smiling, chatting and looking forward to the dinner, where the animated conversations continued. Following the event, many young attendees wrote meaningful posts on social media.

The young participants were moved by the experience. Elizabeth Mennen, 27, and an actuary from Inman Park, was on board from the moment she found out about the event.

“I attended something similar while I was in college and found it extremely powerful,” she said. “I am aware that my generation is really the last to have the opportunity to get to know these survivors, and it is a privilege I do not take lightly.”

Mennen, who serves as a co-chair on the MJCCA’s Young Adult Committee, is an active participant in the center’s co-ed sports leagues, and she even met her fiancé, Zach Shader, at the MJCCA playing on a co-ed dodgeball team. The couple was paired with Ben Walker, an 81-year-old survivor from Romania.

Though she was apprehensive beforehand, Mennen says she was blown away by the experience.

“I was expecting to be moved and touched by their stories, but was not expecting to genuinely connect and laugh as much as I did with Ben and Ruth,” Mennen said, and adding that Walker’s wife could not attend the event due to illness, but she met the young couple when they dropped Ben off at the end of the night.

She continues: “Ben and Ruth were able to tell their stories with such grace, and they had so much insight and life to share. In such a short time with them, we were able to genuinely connect in a very meaningful way.” Mennen immediately shared the experience with family and friends, posting photos and an emotional commentary on Facebook. “I am honored to be able to pass along their stories for the rest of my life. The whole experience made me feel deeply proud to be Jewish.”

Plans are already underway for Mennen and Shader to have dinner with Ben and Ruth next month.

Mennen’s experience and feedback from other young adult participants, as well as comments from the survivors, proved the experiment was a success.

“It was one of the most meaningful nights of my life,” Shoshan said.

The MJCCA is already thinking about next year’s event, and hopes to host more outings with the survivors.

Eternal Life-Hemshech in Atlanta, an organization of Holocaust survivors, their children, grandchildren and caring friends, honors and perpetuates the memory of the six million Jewish victims who perished in the Holocaust.

The MJCCA is committed to strengthening the quality of life throughout metro Atlanta and is recognized as one of the most highly regarded Jewish community centers in the nation. From preschoolers and adolescents to young adults and active seniors, the MJCCA offers unique and engaging programs, events, and

services for every member of the community.

For more on the MJCCA, call 678-812-4000, or visit www.atlantajcc.org.

For more information on the MJCCA Young Adult program, contact Roey Shoshan at 678-812-4055 or roey.shoshan@atlantajcc.org.