

inTIME

STAND

UP

SPEAK

OUT



LEND A

HAND!

“STAND UP
SPEAK OUT
LEND A HAND!”

INSIDE

- ★ One family's mission to promote tolerance and respect
- ★ Fighting hunger in America

Made possible by



GERDA AND KURT KLEIN
FOUNDATION

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photo credit: USHMM, Courtesy Lydia Chagoll



Gerda Weissmann Klein and Kurt Klein

From Terror to Tolerance

How Two Activist Spirits Were Born



Gerda Weissmann Klein and Kurt Klein were both teens when the horrors of World War II changed their lives. From their personal suffering and loss, they developed a deeply held belief in the essential values of tolerance and respect for others—and the importance of taking action through service to help people everywhere.

Photo left: Gerda as a 15-year-old.

ON MAY 8, 1939, Gerda Weissmann turned 15. That fateful spring day was the very last birthday she would ever celebrate with her family together—mother, father and her brother, Artur. It was the last she would celebrate in freedom until 1945. By then, Gerda, a Polish Jew, was the only one of her family and close friends alive.

The terror began in September 1939, when Nazi Germany invaded Poland and Gerda's hometown of Bielsko. Artur, 19, was sent to a slave labor camp in Russia. Notes written on scraps of paper told of his survival until early 1943. Gerda never learned where or how her brother died.

Gerda and her parents, Julius and Helene, managed to stay together for three years. They were forced to live in

the cellar of their home and then in one room in a small Jewish ghetto the Nazis established in Bielsko. On June 28, 1942, Gerda saw her father for the last time. The next day, she was separated from her mother. Her parents perished in the gas chambers.

Through three years in slave labor camps—dressed in rags, always hungry, with the knowledge that death could come at any time—Gerda carried on. She stayed close to three girls as they moved from camp to camp: Ilse Kleinzähler, Suse Kunz and Liesel Stepper.

In January 1945, they were four among 2,000 female prisoners who were forced on a three-month “death march” from Germany to Czechoslovakia. Only 127 women survived the bitter cold,

starvation and sadistic guards. Gerda's three friends died. Gerda, weighing 68 pounds, lived.

The first U.S. soldier she met was a German Jew who had fled the Nazis at age 17. Though Kurt Klein hadn't suffered the physical torments that Gerda had, he knew loss.

A Failed Rescue

Kurt Klein grew up in Walldorf, Germany. He turned 13 in 1933, the year Hitler came to power. Three years later, with conditions growing worse for Jews, the Kleins decided to emigrate to America. Kurt's sister left first, and then Kurt followed in 1937. The year after, Kurt's older brother arrived. Next, the children thought, would be their parents.

But time was running out. In Germany, Hitler's campaign against the Jews had become more violent. Yet U.S. laws remained strict about the number of immigrants allowed into the country. In December 1938, Kurt's parents were given a number for an appointment to apply for a visa to the U.S. There were 22,344 cases ahead of them. Kurt estimated it would take two and half years before his parents' turn would come.

As they waited, their situation grew desperate. In October 1940, the couple was deported to Vichy, France. Food in their detention camp was meager. Their diet was watery soup and bread.

Kurt believed it was possible to get his parents to safety as long as they were in unoccupied France. But always there were obstacles, caused chiefly by the indifference of the U.S. State Department—an indifference that kept them and other refugees from getting the necessary documents to enter the U.S.

In September 1942, Kurt's letters to his parents were returned, stamped "no forwarding address." Two months later, he was drafted into the U.S. army. That same month, he received a note saying that visas for his parents had been approved.

As a soldier in Europe after the war, Kurt discovered his parents' fate. They had been deported to Auschwitz and had died there.

Real-Life Fairy Tale

During her years of suffering in the camps, Gerda dreamed of being rescued. She also dreamed of love, marriage and having a family. That she would find all of those longings fulfilled by a U.S. army intelligence officer was extraordinary.

Gerda had not bathed in three years, her hair had turned white and she was a skeletal shadow of a being when she met Lieutenant Kurt Klein, outside a factory where the death march survivors had been placed. Whereas men in uniforms had represented brutality to Gerda, here was a soldier who treated her kindly. Kurt even politely opened the door for her as she led him to the other "ladies," as he called them—most barely alive.

The dream for Gerda blossomed into reality. Kurt kept close watch over her during months of recovery. On the day he told Gerda that his unit had been called back to the U.S., he proposed marriage. In 1946, they were wed in Paris.

The two then set sail for the U.S., settling in Buffalo, New York. Kurt became a businessman, and Gerda became a writer. Together, they raised three children.

Activists Together

That could have been enough. But the experience of their early lives charged them to action. They were determined to educate others about the dangers of intolerance unchecked. Their personal mission also included supporting civic activism to end hunger, a condition Gerda knew all too well during the war. They resolved to make young people the focus of their efforts to promote tolerance and respect through education and community service, and they have spoken before thousands of students across the United States. They traveled to Columbine High School in Colorado following the tragic shooting deaths there in 1999. Columbine students found kindred spirits in Gerda and Kurt. The Kleins understood the students' loss, upset and confusion over why they survived when their friends did not. And in the Kleins' example that deeply felt pain can be converted into positive action in service to others, the students found a focus for their own pain and grief.

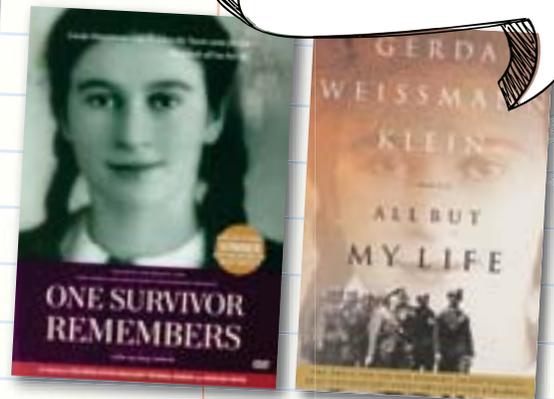
Kurt died in 2002, but Gerda continues to share their moving experiences—and call to action—with students. She has spent much of her life trying to ensure that what happened to her as a teenager does not happen to other generations of teens. She offers her story of survival as inspiration—and she challenges every young person to make a difference by helping others.

5 rules to live by
and serve by

from Gerda &
Kurt Klein

- *Never give up on your dreams.
- *Pain should not be wasted—use it for good.
- *Discover what you can do by doing for others.
- *Compassion and understanding are gifts everyone can give.
- *Show tolerance and welcome diversity, and you will greatly enrich your life.

FIND OUT
MORE



Read about Gerda Weissmann Klein's war experience in her autobiography, **All But My Life**. Your teacher has a copy for class use. Also provided is **One Survivor Remembers**, a documentary about Gerda that won an Academy Award® in 1996.

Teens Making a Difference

How are teens getting involved in their communities?

Here are schools who have discovered that they can connect with others through service and make their own corner of the world a more tolerant, respectful and inclusive place.

CLARENCE CENTRAL SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

Clarence, New York

Since 1990, students and teachers at Clarence Central Senior High School have held an annual one-night sleep-out on school grounds. The event always takes place on the first Friday of February, in deepest, darkest, coldest winter. The participants are required to take a class on cold-weather protection before the sleep-out begins, all the students are dressed warmly, and they can go inside for brief periods to warm up. "The sleep-out is a symbolic gesture that brings attention to the plight of the poor and homeless, particularly those in the Buffalo area," notes Kevin Starr, a teacher at the school. At the same

time, the students are raising money for 10 charities, including the Klein Foundation. Since 2000, donations each year have totaled at least \$20,000. During the 20 years that the event has taken place, more than \$319,764.00 has been raised. The sleep-out isn't the only fund-raising project that takes place at Clarence Central. Each year, there are two blood drives as well as clothing drives. Having sleep-outs to call attention to the homeless has spread to some college campuses, thanks to Clarence grads. Now, that's something to sleep on!

J.B. ALEXANDER HIGH SCHOOL

Laredo, Texas

Living on the U.S.-Mexico border brings together people of diverse cultures and languages. This sometimes leads to difficulties between legal authorities and citizens and among citizens themselves. "Our goal," according to J.B. Alexander High School teacher Beverly Herrera, "is to teach our students to lead our community into an acceptance of differences in faiths, races, languages and cultures."

The idea of fostering understanding and acceptance among Laredo's citizens began as a small project by 31 freshmen students in Herrera's English class. It was so successful that it soon became a citywide effort. The goal: to better understand people's different beliefs and cultures and to create solutions to enable

citizens from different backgrounds to get along. The Alexander group began by organizing a Tolerance Zone on campus, which has become a model for other campuses around town.



The painting marks the beginning of the Tolerance Zone at J.B. Alexander High School. This is the zone's logo, surrounded by butterflies painted by teens who pledged to work toward greater tolerance. The logo was designed and painted by student Gracie Serabia.

"These students quickly realized that although we have differences, we are all immigrants looking for a place to succeed. These enthusiastic freshmen defied skeptics and understood that doing nothing only makes the situation worse," Herrera noted.

EAST CREEK FAMILY CENTER

Chaska, Minnesota

East Creek Family Center is home to two unique service projects that help build compassion and understanding



Students from Clarence Central Senior High School spend a chilly night near Buffalo, New York. It's all for a good cause, though: raising money for charity.

AKRON CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Akron, Ohio

A team of juniors from the semirural Akron Central School District in Ohio reached out to a Buffalo, New York, inner-city center for homeless girls called TRY, which stands for Teaching and Restoring Youth. TRY, run by

American cities face. New Orleans Government, law enforcement, community leaders and well-intentioned citizens cannot agree on a plan.”

To illustrate their concerns, seven students who took a documentary film class, hosted by the arts program Studio at Colton, have been working on a yearlong project to create a feature-length film, currently titled *Murder Through the Eyes of a Child*. The teens, with the help of professional

filmmakers, are also making individual documentaries about how their lives have been affected by threats or real acts of violence. During this process, the directors will interview New Orleans citizens and civic leaders to discuss the crisis of violence. Footage from the students' films will be juxtaposed with adult interviews to help explore and understand the nature of violence and, hopefully, encourage more people to work out solutions.

toward people with disabilities and learning differences. Students from local high schools team up with elementary school kids who participate in East Creek's Stepping Stones program. Stepping Stones is designed for students from kindergarten through fifth grade who have learning disabilities and require individual, emotional and behavioral support. Each week, the high school students meet with the Stepping Stones kids, and together they perform team-building activities. The activities help the younger students learn how to work well with others and improve their social skills.

In a second program, called New Beginnings, another group of high school students learns about the challenges facing people with hearing and sight loss and translates that knowledge into action. Students gather information about various local programs that assist the blind and then create projects to help guide such people on trips to the mall. These programs benefit everyone involved and teach important lessons about compassion and understanding.

J.S. CLARK HIGH SCHOOL

New Orleans, Louisiana

New Orleans, Louisiana, has been called the Murder Capital of the United States. Most of the city's homicide victims are African Americans, and they are often teenagers. According to students at J.S. Clark High School, “This is our city's greatest neglected crisis, with profound implications for the issues of violence and crime other

volunteers on a small budget, serves homeless young women who are victims of domestic violence and abuse. The center is a safe haven for girls of all races and backgrounds.

The juniors dug a reflective garden and urban vegetable patch in Buffalo in early May 2009. The project linked Akron students, who are able to enjoy the outdoors, to a declining neighborhood of abandoned homes and garbage-laden lots where the TRY Center is located. The students wanted to share their love of green space with the girls at TRY to help them see “new life” and to let them know that others cared about them. The garden has become a place to remember victims of city violence, a place where rural and city kids come together, and a place that thrives only with the ongoing commitment of students to keep the flowers and plants growing.



WHAT YOU CAN DO:

Taking action to end hunger



Courtesy The Klein Foundation

Gerda Klein at the 1996 Academy Awards, where the documentary about her life won an Oscar.

WHEN ONE SURVIVOR REMEMBERS, the documentary about the life of Gerda Weissmann Klein, received an Oscar® at the 1996 Academy Awards ceremony, she was there. What was Gerda thinking about amid the celebrities and the celebration? Food. But not the fancy menus at the post-Oscar parties. She recalled the war, the death march and waiting her turn, battered bowl in hand, hoping the ladle would dip deep enough so she'd get a potato along with the meager broth. "I don't want children to live in a world where a potato is more valuable than an Oscar," says Gerda. And "I don't want children to be in a world where an Oscar is so important that you forget that there are people who do not have a potato."

Working to solve the hunger issue is one of the goals of the Klein Foundation. Through education and advocacy, the Klein Foundation

“I don't want children to live in a world where a potato is more valuable than an Oscar,” says Gerda. And “I don't want children to be in a world where an Oscar is so important that you forget that there are people who do not have a potato.”

challenges young people to get involved. Hunger, after all, is a problem for children: in the United States, 13 million kids do not get enough to eat. And it is a problem in every community in America. You can make a difference by helping to end

hunger where you live.

THE FACTS ABOUT HUNGER

Hunger is due to the inability to purchase enough food to meet basic nutritional needs. You don't have to be starving to be hungry. Hunger in the United States does not look like photos you may have seen of extremely thin children with swollen bellies. Hunger in America can be much harder to recognize.

Missing a meal, not eating on a regular basis, not having enough to eat at mealtime—not by choice but because of lack of food resources—are conditions of hunger. And these conditions are experienced by an astonishing number of people in a country bulging with food.

Each autumn, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) releases a report titled Household Food Security in the United States. In the report, the USDA uses the phrase “food insecurity” to describe individuals who “at times during the year were uncertain of having, or unable to acquire, enough food . . . because they had insufficient money or other resources.”

According to the USDA, one in every eight Americans struggles with hunger. More than 36.2 million people live in food-insecure households in the United States.

WHY HUNGER, IN A LAND OF PLENTY?

Hunger is a problem for many people, not just those who struggle with homelessness and poverty. For many people, rising costs force difficult choices between paying for shelter or for food, or, in the case of the elderly, between expensive prescription drugs or food. Tough economic times put even more people at risk.

According to Feeding America, “[The hungry] are often hardworking adults, children and seniors who simply cannot make ends meet and are forced to go without food for several meals, or even days.”

Taking Action in your Community

Our world today is not very different from that which Gerda and Kurt faced as young adults; unfortunately, there are numerous examples of the lack of tolerance for diversity and the loss of respect for personal differences. Many of us wonder how to make the world a more positive and accepting place. What can you do to make a difference in your school or neighborhood?

INVESTIGATE CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Who lives there? How do they live? Articles, interviews, posters or displays can be designed to highlight the range of identities and cultures. Reflect on the number of traditions you've come across and the mutual influences they show. Organize your own "Coexistence" concert or cultural festival that brings together a range of cultural traditions.



PARTICIPATE IN MIX IT UP DAY

"Mix It Up" believes in the power of youth to create and sustain real change. This program provides ideas and tools to help you break the walls of division in your school and community. For information, visit

www.teachingtolerance.org



David Leavitt of Pinellas, Florida, started a program to take leftover school cafeteria food and give it to food pantries.

At the same time, federal programs to feed the hungry, such as nutrition programs for children and the elderly, are not reaching all those in need.

Investigate hunger and you'll find that stories abound of individuals and families who are overwhelmed by many challenges in their lives. And some people are either too embarrassed or too proud to seek help. Hunger is a deeply complex and emotional issue.

LOSING MINDS TO HUNGER

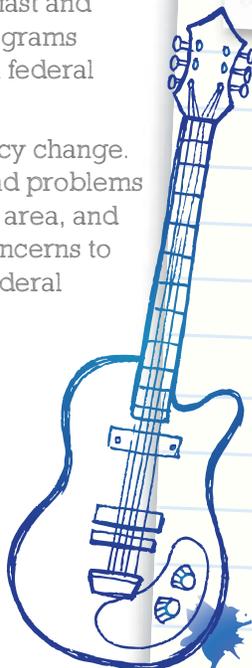
It makes sense that when there is no breakfast to be had, learning can suffer. Research shows that children from food-insecure households experience irritability, fatigue and difficulty in concentrating compared with other children.

When it is hungry, the body's scarce nutritional resources are used first to keep the major organs functioning, second to gain or maintain height and weight, and finally to support brain activity that leads to learning. In very young children, whose brains are growing rapidly particularly in the first three years, the consequences of hunger can be tragic. Children who are born with normal brain functioning can become learning impaired for life simply because they did not get enough to eat.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Here's what you can do to help the hungry.

- Volunteer at a soup kitchen or food pantry
- Organize a food drive or raise money for local food charities.
- Educate others about local hunger. Investigate hunger in your community, and then get the word out.
- Advocate for change in your school. Are eligible students getting the breakfast and summer food programs available through federal funds?
- Advocate for policy change. Explore issues and problems of hunger in your area, and then take your concerns to local, state and federal elected officials.



THE ACTIVIST'S PLANNER

Ready to get started with service? Or motivated to expand the service projects you are already doing? Here are tips and ideas.



SERVICE SUCCESS TIPS

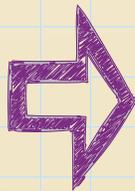
- **Volunteer for projects you care about.** You'll give more and enjoy it more when you devote your time and energy to something that matters to you. Remember the advice from Gerda and Kurt Klein: Discover what you can do by doing for others. Think about how you can turn an interest into an avenue for service.
- **Team up with friends and classmates.** You can often do more working together; and you will inspire and motivate each other. Consider starting a service club in your school as a way for teens to connect.
- **Commit to what you can do.** You don't have to turn service into your life—unless you want to. Give whatever time you can. What's important is keeping the commitment you make.

MORE WAYS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The ideas in this issue are only places to start with service. How else can you help? Here are common needs in just about every community. Consider:

- Environmental cleanups
- Assisting in local hospitals
- Painting, repair and yard-work projects in poorer neighborhoods
- Tutoring kids or adults who can't read
- Coaching a sport through an after-school or community program
- Volunteering as a companion to a younger child through a big brother/big sister project
- Helping in an animal shelter or with an animal-rescue group

WHAT ELSE? CHECK OUT THE ONLINE RESOURCES TO THE RIGHT!



TELL US about your service project and activism

E-mail kleinfoundation@usa.net and describe what your class, your club or you on your own are doing to help others.

8 Please include your name, school, city, and state.

RESOURCES for Ideas and Activism

*Klein Foundation:

www.kleinfoundation.org

Find out about programs and projects to end hunger and promote tolerance, including a step-by-step guide to community-service activities.

*Do Something:

www.dosomething.org

Do Something provides ideas, tips and opportunities for students to get involved in causes from the environment to helping the homeless.

*What Kids Can Do:

www.whatkidscando.org

This national nonprofit group was founded in 2001 to list ways that students are working to improve their communities through service. Find out what other teens are doing around the United States through its feature stories and links to other service sites.

*Teaching Tolerance:

www.tolerance.org/teens

Discover ways to build a more tolerant world, beginning with your town. This site is a place for people interested in getting rid of bigotry and creating communities that value diversity.

*VolunteerMatch:

www.volunteermatch.org

This nonprofit online service is dedicated to helping volunteers "get out and do good." Enter your zip code to find out who needs help in your area, including specific opportunities for teen volunteers.

*Network for Good:

www.networkforgood.org

Check out the Youth Volunteer Network for real teens' service stories and ways to get involved.

*Youth Noise:

www.youthnoise.com

Connect here for "Take Action" routes to service and advocacy.