

# *If Not Now, When?* Readers Theater

Based on the book by Rebekah Lower

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#perserverance

Sol Nayman was born in Poland during the calm before the storm which preceded World War II. He went on the run with his family when he was only four years old, after the Nazis invaded their hometown and burned it down. Sol and his family found a kind of refuge in the Soviet Union, surviving for years in harsh labor camps and beating the odds of survival that many others succumbed to.

Cast:

Sol's Mother Sore Roize Rosenberg

Sol

Sol's Grandmother Esther

Sol's Sister Mania

Sol's Father Yudel Najman



Author Rebekah Lower

*"If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am not for others, what am I? And if not now, when?"*

**Rabbi Hillel**

## Scene 1

Stoczek Wegrowski (Stok), Poland

**Sol's Father Yudel Najman**: My family lives in Stoczek-Wegrowski (Stok) in the country of Poland in Eastern Europe. My wife and I have two children, a daughter named Mania and a son Salomon, who we love very much. We are Jewish and you will learn how that made us a target of hate by a madman named Adolf Hitler.

**Sol's Mother Sore Roize Rosenberg**: Our youngest child Sol was born in 1935 and we were hopeful for our family. We just wanted to work hard and raise our children in peace. We didn't have much but we were happy. Little Sol liked to play with an old white rocking horse. It was his only toy.

**Sol's Grandmother Esther**: As the oldest in the family, I want to tell you some history I lived through and remember. Back in 1919, Jews were targets in pogroms. This term "pogrom" is a Russian word meaning "devastation," or "riot." It refers to violent attacks on Jews by people who are not Jewish. Sometimes when they were attacked, the Jews just left and their homes were taken over by non-Jews. But sometimes Jews were killed for no reason other than they were Jews. Nearly one hundred thousand Jews were murdered in Ukraine and Poland in pogroms back in the early 1900s.

## Scene 2

The Forest

**Sol**: Children like me and my sister bring hope to a family. Hope for a brighter future. Sadly, it was not the case for us. On September 1, 1939 Hitler's army invaded Poland and World War II began. My family fled to the forest. From there we could see our town burning. The Nazis had set it on fire. Grandmother learned the hospital was on fire and she insisted on going back to help. We never saw her again.

**Sol's Father**: We climbed onto a filthy cattle car and were deported to the Komi Republic in the Soviet Union. Many fathers and mothers were in that cattle car. I'm sure they were thinking the same thing I was thinking "what's going to happen to my family?" We barely survived the trip but some were not so lucky.

### Scene 3

#### Life in the Camps

**Sol's Mother:** Life in the first camp was brutal. Many people were sick so disease was all around us. Winter seemed to last forever. We lived with another family named Mida in one room and took turns staying awake all night to fend off the rats with a broom. Mrs. Mida got an infection from a splinter and she died. Life was hard.

**Sol's Sister Mania:** It was an awful life but we cheered up when by some miracle our cousin Moishe came to the same labor camp. Naturally he moved in with us and he was able to trade some silverware for a gold coin that was sewed into Sol's sleeve to hide it from the Soviets. My brother Sol and I went to school and learned Russian. We sang all the Soviet patriotic songs sung by the Russian children.

**Sol:** We somehow managed to get through each day. Our goal was to "survive today, hope to see tomorrow." My childhood had been stolen by the Nazis and life was hard. But we had no idea how lucky we were to be in Russia and not in a concentration camp like so many Jews from Eastern Europe.

**Sol's Father:** After four long years, we were shipped to a village in Ukraine, a former republic of the Soviet Union. It had been destroyed by the war and we were to rebuild a beet sugar factory. We befriended a farm family called Mogila. They were very kind and shared whatever they could with us. Our children's days were busy with school, and we gathered around the radio to listen to reports about the war as often as we could.

**Sol's Mother:** Almost six years since we had fled from the Nazis, in May of 1945, the war officially ended. The Soviet government said that anyone who did not want to be a Soviet citizen would have to leave. So, we left and took our children to a displaced persons camp in West Germany. Later we learned that from 1945 to 1952, more than 250,000 Jewish displaced persons (DPs) lived in camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy.

## Scene 4

### Life After the War

**Sol:** The displaced persons camp is where my parents learned about the terrible atrocities committed against the Jews in many concentration camps. There was a camp about 13 miles from our village called Treblinka where most everyone from our hometown of Stok was murdered. I can't imagine how our parents felt when they learned the Nazis did this. Their grief had to be overwhelming.

Over 870,000 were killed at Treblinka concentration camp alone. Over 6 million Jews were murdered total. 2.5 million Jews were killed in the Soviet Union by the Nazis and their collaborators. I refer to this as "The Parallel Holocaust". Can you imagine everyone who goes to a Methodist Church or a Catholic Church in your city being murdered just because of their faith?

**Sol's Father:** There were many in Germany and other parts of Europe who hated what Hitler was doing. They were just too afraid to speak up. You're either going to be an upstander or a bystander. You must stand up when you see hatred, discrimination and intolerance. You must fight back against evildoers and terrorists or it might be your family taken from you someday.

**Sol's Mother:** As time went by, our family began to plan where to go next. We had family who lived in the U.S., but even with their help we could not immigrate there. Through a series of events and using that special gold coin that was sewn into our son Sol's shirt years before, we arrived in Canada in October of 1948. That's where we started a new life. A good life.

**Sol's Grandmother:** I watched it all from heaven and was so thankful my children and grandchildren lived and built a good life in Canada. You should know there were millions of victims besides the Jews. Roma (Gypsies) were targeted, along with those with disabilities, homosexuals, Polish, Soviets and more. The Holocaust destroyed vibrant Jewish communities across Europe. It must never happen again.