

# Holocaust story on Instagram hopes to attract a younger audience

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The advertisement for a new Holocaust memorial project in Israel is hanging on a wall. The digital poster says in Hebrew: "Eva's Story. If a girl had had Instagram during the Holocaust." "Eva's Story" is based on the diary of a 13-year-old Jewish girl from Hungary who was murdered in 1944 in the German Auschwitz extermination camp. Her fate is recounted in Instagram stories in English. Photo by: Robert Messer/picture alliance via Getty Images

**JERUSALEM, Israel** — The testimony of survivors has been the centerpiece of Holocaust commemoration for seven decades.

However, the world's community of aging survivors is shrinking. Global understanding of the genocide that killed 6 million Jews is declining. Genocide is the planned killing of a large group of people primarily because of their race or ethnicity. Those who promote Holocaust remembrance are seeking new ways to share witnesses' stories with younger generations. The Holocaust was the imprisonment and mass killing of Jews in Europe during World War II by Nazi Germany.

"The Diary of a Young Girl" by Anne Frank gripped older generations. The book describes her Jewish family's experiences in hiding from Nazis during the war. Now an Instagram account based on a true 13-year-old Jewish victim's journal is generating buzz among youth. It is called Eva.Stories.

"If we want to bring the memory of the Holocaust to the young generation, we have to bring it to where they are," said the project co-producer, Mati Kochavi. He is an Israeli high-tech billionaire who comes from a family of Holocaust victims, survivors and educators. "And they're on Instagram."

Kochavi and his daughter, Maya, have created a series of 70 Instagram stories of Eva Heyman's life. They follow the downward spiral of her world in the spring of 1944 when the Nazis conquered Hungary. Hungary is a country in Central Europe.

### **Eva's Story Shown On Remembrance Day**

Eva was one of approximately 430,000 Hungarian Jews who were deported to Nazi concentration camps between May 15 and July 9, 1944. Of the estimated 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust, around 568,000 were Hungarian. That number comes from Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial.

Eva's tale was produced as a Hollywood-style movie with a cast of foreign actors and a multimillion-dollar budget. It was shown throughout Israel's Holocaust Remembrance Day, which began at sundown on May 1. The updates appear as if Eva had owned a smartphone during World War II and was using Instagram to share her story.

The story went live on the afternoon of May 1, opening with Eva's happier teen experiences and then darkening as night falls. The Nazis tighten their hold on Hungary's Jews, taking her family's business, belongings and home. Eva is sent to the ghetto, where Jews were separated from other people and forced to stay. Later she is sent to the Auschwitz death camp in Poland.

The story's climactic event was timed to follow Israel's two-minute siren that wailed nationwide on May 2. It brings the country to a standstill at 10 a.m. in a yearly commemoration of Jewish Holocaust victims.

Even days before the series' release, the account had gained over 180,000 followers.

One of them was Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He posted a video to Instagram on April 29 urging Israelis to follow the account and spread stories of survivors via social media.

### **A Modern Take On A Holocaust Story**

"What if a girl in the Holocaust had Instagram?" asked an ad, released on April 28. The brief film shows simulated cell phone footage of Eva's imagined life. It shows her dancing with friends, a birthday with her grandparents and Nazi troops marching through the streets.

Dozens of Holocaust victims kept diaries of their experiences. The best-known one was written by Frank.

The Kochavis read dozens of the diaries before deciding on Eva. Maya Kochavi said she is the kind of girl "a modern kid in 2019 could connect to." She had a middle-school crush, family drama and grand ambitions to become a news photographer.

They hope Eva's account will engage otherwise disinterested or uninformed youth.

Yet the concept is not without controversy. While most of the feedback appears to be positive, some critics fear the story, with its Internet lingo, hashtags and emojis, risks making light of

Holocaust horrors.

### **An Attempt To Capture Young People's Attention**

"A cheapening of the Holocaust," one Instagram user, Dor Levi, wrote in Hebrew in response to the ad. He said commemorating the Holocaust should not be "on Instagram, between the butt of a random model and a video of a chocolate cake."

Maya Kochavi said she anticipated backlash. However, she defended Instagram as a place where "very powerful movements are happening," with potential to show history's relevance at a time when anti-Semitism is surging in parts of the world. Anti-Semitism is hostility toward or prejudice against Jews.

"It is frightening but quite clear to me. We might be the last generation that really remembers and cares about the Holocaust," said her father.

The Kochavis said that as part of their work, they found that a tiny fraction of social media conversations about the Holocaust in the U.S. and Europe are young people. Their research resonates with recent studies by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany. Those reveal significant gaps in Holocaust knowledge among American youth.

Human memories are fading. However, Eva's Instagram story contributes to a push by Holocaust museums and memorials to capture young people's attention. They're using interactive technology, such as video testimonies, apps and holograms.

The efforts aim, Maya said, "to make monumental historical events tangible and relatable." They want to preserve stories of witnesses forever.