

RENEE FIRESTONE

Noted community leader, RENEE FIRESTONE, was born in Uzhorod, Czechoslovakia.

At the tender age of 20, Renee was imprisoned for 13 months in the infamous concentration camp, Auschwitz / Birkenau during the last years of World War II. Her entire family was murdered except for her father Morris, who died of tuberculosis shortly after liberation, and her brother Frank, who was a partisan.

Following liberation in May of 1945, Renee was reunited with her brother and her soon-to-be husband, Bernard. She settled in Prague, Czechoslovakia, where she completed her education at the Prague School of Commercial Arts. In 1948, Renee emigrated to the United States with Bernard and her infant daughter, Klara. After arriving here, she pursued her love of fashion, becoming a noted designer.

No stranger to the Los Angeles Jewish community, Renee Firestone is a tireless leader in many areas of social justice and Holocaust remembrance and education, conducting workshops for educators entitled "Human Rights and Genocide."

She is most known as the founding lecturer for the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Educational Outreach Program. She lectures to adults and students of all ages and walks of life, throughout the United States and abroad, about her experiences as a Holocaust survivor. Renee has been invited on many occasions to address the various branches of the United States military including the Marines, Air Force, and Army, as well as NASA. She is a presenter in the "Tools For Tolerance" program, addressing members of various local law enforcement agencies on issues relating to cultural diversity and sensitivity.

In addition to being the subject of countless television, radio, and print media interviews regarding the Holocaust and its contemporary implications, Renee was twice honored by Israel Bonds receiving both the Elie Wiesel Holocaust Remembrance Medal and the Golda Meir Award.

Since its inception, Renee has been a trainer, interviewer and educator with Steven Spielberg's "Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation," an organization founded to document the testimonies of the last remaining survivors of the Holocaust. Renee was rewarded for her tireless efforts by being featured in the film *The Last Days* which received the 1998 Academy Award for Best Feature Length Documentary.

Renee participated in a dialogue between Holocaust survivors, Second Generation and Nazis and children of Nazi's hosted by One-by-One, based in Berlin, Germany.

In 2004, Renee was a featured speaker in London for Holocaust Memorial Day, at a multicultural event commemorating the liberation of Auschwitz and the Genocide in Rwanda.

In 2006, Renee was featured in the documentary film, *Swimming in Auschwitz*, as well as appearing in a cameo role in *Freedom Writers*.

Finally, in December of 2006, Renee was the special surprise presenter to Steven Spielberg at the Kennedy Center Honors For The Performing Arts.

On May 17, 2010, Renee was honored at the annual banquet for Shalhevet Jewish High School for her years leading the graduating students on a heritage tour to Poland and Israel.

On May 27, 2010, Renee was honored once again by University of Redlands with their first ever honorary Ph.D. in Educational Justice.

Most recently Renee traveled to Rwanda to work with the Shoah Foundation's project training genocide survivors how to do video testimonies of their experiences.