

USC Shoah Foundation
& Zikaron BaSalon
Host Kit

The Story of Kurt Thomas

In this kit you will find:

- Testimony of Kurt Thomas
- Details on the structure of the event
- Tips for a meaningful event
- Discussion ideas



**Thank
you**

Thank you for choosing to host a Zikaron BaSalon event this year and congratulations on joining a community of people who choose to commemorate the Holocaust in an intimate and meaningful way.

Zikaron BaSalon events mostly occur during the week of Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day), which begins on the evening of April 27th this year.

These events take place in tens of thousands of homes and communities in Israel and abroad. Anyone can host a Zikaron BaSalon event in their living room or virtually. The choice to hold an event is strongly linked to the sense of responsibility for shaping the way the Holocaust is commemorated both as a community and as an individual.

It is easy and simple, and we are here to guide and help you along the way.

Tips for a meaningful salon

- 1 Invite your family and friends. You may choose to host in-person or virtually. The number of guests depends on your preference, or capacity within your space.
- 2 We suggest preparing light refreshments to make sure that the physical space the guests are in is comfortable, open and welcoming.
- 3 We recommend that the duration of the entire event not exceed two and a half hours.
- 4 If members of your family or other acquaintances survived the Holocaust, try talking about them and telling some of their stories. Addressing a personal connection can enhance your salon's impact.
- 5 Make room for the feelings of all participants. There's no right or wrong way to experience Zikaron BaSalon.
- 6 Remember that each salon is - and should be - unique and different, so do not worry if your salon looks different from somebody else's. Organizing your salon is simple.

Before we start:

Today, we will use the power of testimony, expression and discussion to commemorate the Holocaust and explore its impact on society across time. We will begin with testimony.

Historically, Zikaron BaSalon has brought survivors directly into our homes. Now, for the first time, we will utilize testimonies from USC Shoah Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to collecting audio-visual interviews with survivors and witnesses of the Holocaust and other genocides.

After learning about the survivor, we will consider some questions and then watch an abbreviated version of their testimony.

Following the viewing of this testimony, we will create a safe, open space for meaningful discussion. After the discussion we will end our program with some questions you can think about and reflect on individually.

The Shoah is much more than a historical event. Even today, its ramifications can be felt in many aspects of our world. We anticipate that this conversation will be unique, fascinating and perhaps emotional.

Prior to viewing Kurt's testimony, consider the following: Why is it important for us to learn about this history? Why is it important for us to hear this story in the survivor's own words?



Testimony

“A person lives as long as they are remembered”

The first part of the Salon focuses on historical testimony. It offers an opportunity to learn and connect to the stories of the Shoah.

Kurt Thomas was born in the city of Brno, Czechoslovakia, in 1914. He grew up in Boskovice, a small town with a famous medieval Jewish quarter. Kurt was drafted into the Czechoslovak Army, where he received military training.

After the Munich agreement of 1938 and the subsequent creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia by German occupiers in 1939, Kurt was forced to return home. Soon after, a forced residence territory for Jews was created in the former Jewish quarter of Boskovice, and then, in 1942, Kurt and his family were deported to the ghetto in Theresienstadt. They did not stay there for long. After a few months they were deported to the East, through Trawniki and on to the Piaski ghetto in occupied Poland. One of the jobs Kurt performed while there was farm work for the Polish Podsiadly family. In November 1942, Kurt was deported through Trawniki to the Sobibor death camp, where he managed to survive until the prisoner uprising in October 1943. After escaping from Sobibor, Kurt returned to Piaski, where the Podsiadly family hid him for nine months until liberation. Kurt returned to Czechoslovakia with a Czechoslovak army unit, but decided to leave the country just before the Communist takeover in 1948. With the help of distant relatives, he eventually immigrated to the United States.

The interview was recorded in Boca Raton, Florida in 1997.

Kurt's Story:



Full testimony



Expression

Play music,
sing together,
read a poem,
light a candle

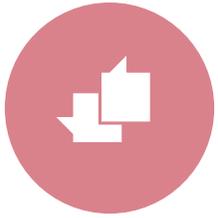
In the second part of the event, we create a transitional stage to allow us time to process the testimony and create a safe and open space for a meaningful discussion.

Following Kurt's Testimony, invite your guests to express themselves and share thoughts, stories or ideas.

To further engage your participants in the experience, we suggest inviting them to share a personal or family story; bring a reading, instrument, song, or poem; or similarly contribute.

On Zikaron BaSalon's website, you will find resources such as playlists with songs, complete with chords and lyrics, so that your participants can join in.





Discussion

A facilitated discussion that focuses on the memory of the Holocaust and its significance in our lives

In the third and final part of the event, participants are invited to have an open and stimulating discussion.

The first part of the discussion will focus on the testimony viewed, while the second part will reflect on connections to the present day. We recommend choosing 1-2 from questions in each section. Hosts are free to add their own questions to both sections.

The testimony

- What are some of your initial reactions to this testimony?
- What did you learn about how Kurt and his family lived before the war?
- What did you learn from Kurt's specific experience? How did this knowledge compliment your existing understanding of the Shoah?
- How do you think the Shoah impacted the lives of survivors and their families?
- Why do you think Kurt chose to assist in the pursuit of justice in the post-war era?

Connections to our days

- Think about the two terms: forgiving and forgetting.
- What do you think is the biggest danger for the memory of the Shoah?
- What might motivate a person to risk their own life for somebody else?
- What can we learn today from the rescue stories of the past? How can we help today?
- How should we (as individuals and as a society), react to situations of hardships and trauma?
- How did this testimony and the discussion connect to the world today?

Questions to go home with

- What is your biggest takeaway from tonight's experience?
- What do you think your personal responsibility is in remembering?

About USC Shoah Foundation

USC Shoah Foundation's mission is to develop empathy, understanding and respect through testimony. Founded in 1994 by Steven Spielberg, USC Shoah Foundation began as a project to preserve the stories of survivors of and witnesses to the Holocaust.

Today USC Shoah Foundation's Visual History Archive is the world's largest archive of oral testimony on genocide, housing 55,000 testimonies conducted in 65 countries and 43 languages. USC Shoah Foundation is also a global leader in Holocaust education, reaching millions of learners around the world each year.

What You Can Do After Hosting Your Salon:

Please share this information with your guests

Post about your experience as a host on social media and include a link to [USC Shoah Foundation](#) and [Zikaron BaSalon](#).

Tell a teacher about USC Shoah Foundation's free educational platform, [iWitness](#).

Send us information about a survivor whose testimony is not part of USC Shoah Foundation's archive, so the we can interview him/her as part of our [Last Chance Testimony](#) collection.

[Request a copy](#) of a loved one's testimony.

[Sign up](#) to be invited to future USC Shoah Foundation events.

Additional resources for educators, students and/or community members

(E) Educators | (S) Students | (C) Community members

- *Echoes and Reflections* - This resource empowers middle and high school educators with dynamic classroom materials and professional development. (E, S)
- *The IWitness platform* – Teaching with testimony. Through powerful, thought-provoking engagement with first-person stories from survivors and witnesses of genocide, students worldwide develop empathy, understanding and respect while deepening their learning across the curriculum. Testimony-based digital educational activities can be found in the *IWitness activity library*. (E, S)
- *Teaching Film with Testimony* - a multifaceted interdisciplinary approach that offers educators best practices and educational resources for using film and audiovisual testimony to support student critical literacy and promote empathy. (E, S)
- *The Willesden Project* - a global educational initiative inspired by the power of story to transform lives, this groundbreaking initiative combines testimony, technology and music to reshape Holocaust education. (E, S)
- *Dimensions in Testimony* - an interactive biography of Holocaust survivor, Pinchas Gutter. Through Dimensions in Testimony, students, educators and community members can ask questions that prompt real-time responses from a pre-recorded video of Pinchas - engaging in virtual conversation, redefining inquiry-based education. (E, S, C)
- *Global* - IWitness currently has content in 16 languages with 9 local language pages (and the numbers are growing). (E, S)
- *Addressing Antisemitism* - Developed in partnership with UNESCO, this page offers guidance, resources and educational materials for teachers to address the challenging topic of antisemitism. (E, S)
- *The IWalk app* -testimony-based local history walk through Kosice, Slovakia (*Apple Store, Google Play Store*). (E, S, C)