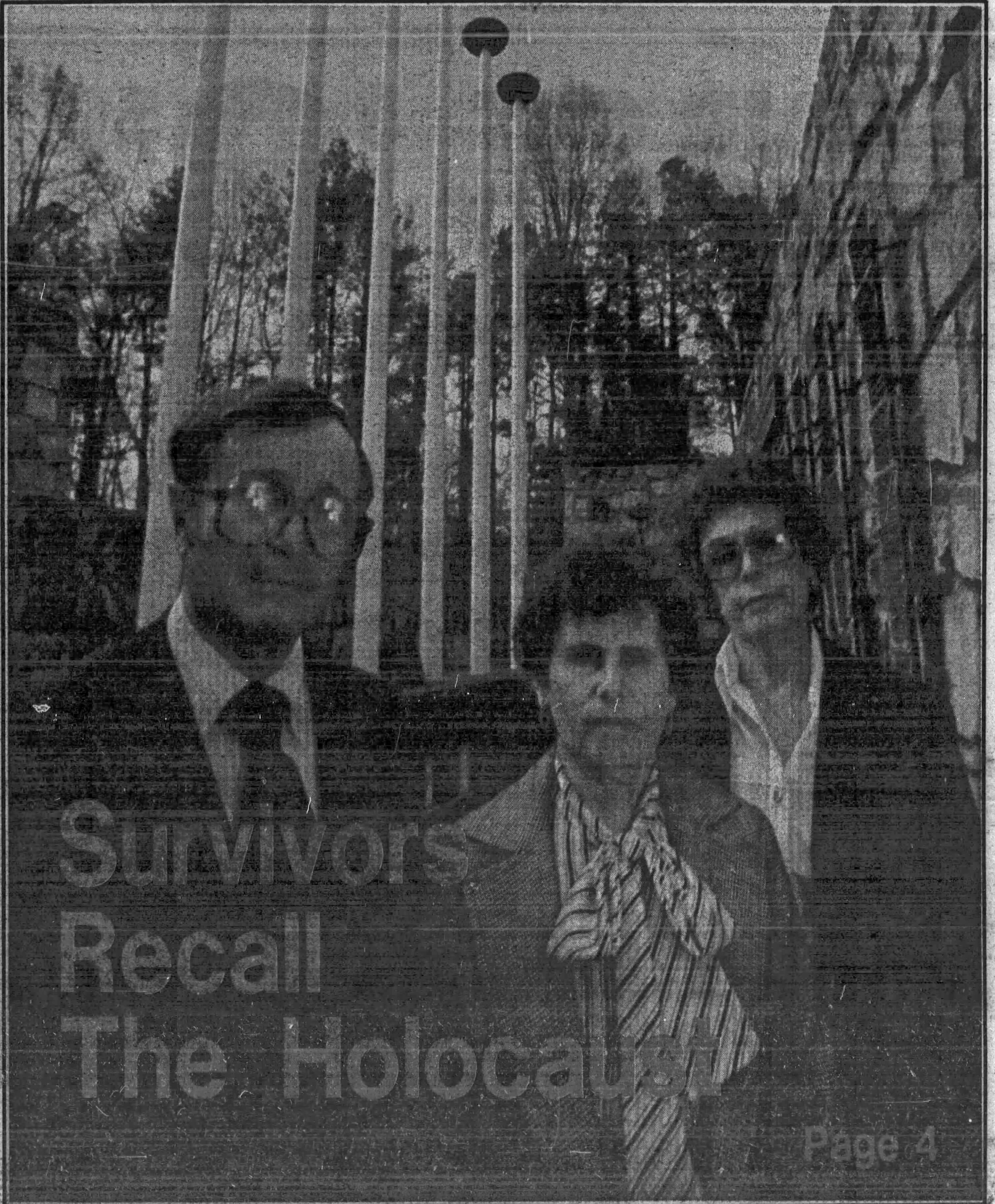


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Intown extra



**SURVIVORS
Recall
The Holocaust**

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COVER STORY

Nazi Horrors Burn In Jewish Memories

By STEVE WRIGHT
Reporter, Intown EXTRA

After more than three decades the nightmares still come.

They don't come as often as they used to — only a few times a month, but survivors of the Nazi Holocaust say they still get flashes of the horrors that happened more than 35 years ago.

The 6 1/2 million Jews who were exterminated in World War II will be remembered Sunday by survivors, friends and other members of Atlanta's Jewish community. A special ceremony will be held at 1:30 p.m. in Greenwood Cemetery at the Monument to the Six Million, the first official "Day of Remembrance" as proclaimed by President Jimmy Carter.

Four bars of soap, made by Nazi soldiers from the bodies of holocaust victims, were buried at the site of the monument when it was dedicated in 1965. They are the only physical remains 150 Atlanta families have of those they lost.

For Alex Gross, president of Hemshech, an organization of holocaust survivors, those bars represent his mother, father, aunts, uncles "and most of my cousins and friends." His sister-in-law, Ruth Gross, lost her parents, grandparents, five of her eight brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts.

Rose Tuchman will remember her three sisters and brother, plus her father mother, grandparents and her "whole family. Out of 50 cousins there were only three survivors."

Members of the newly formed Children of Holocaust Survivors will light six giant candles at the monument, representing the 6 1/2 million, as well as the six major extermination camps in which they were killed: Auschwitz, Treblinka, Maidanek, Buchenwald, Bergen-Belzen and Dachau.

Dr. Fred Crawford, professor of humanities at Emory University, will be the featured speaker. He is in the process of gathering information from American servicemen who liberated the various camps for a book on the holocaust.

Gross said it took him about 25 years before he could talk about his concentration camp experiences.

"They were almost too painful to think about, much less talk about to other people," he said.

Now, he is a frequent speaker on the topic and is sometimes joined by his sister-in-law.

Discussion has not been as easy for Mrs. Tuchman, though, but she was willing to share some of her experiences "so people will not forget what happened. If you forget it, then something like this can happen again and again."

Although they did not know each other, Gross, Mrs. Gross and Mrs. Tuchman lived in Poland before the war and each spent some time in the Auschwitz extermination camp complex between 1939 and 1945. Before the camps, they were rounded up from their various towns and villages, like thousands of other Jews, and taken to ghettos and forced to live and work in squalor.

Gross was 14 years old, Mrs. Gross was 12 and Mrs. Tuchman was 13.

They were "not like the ghettos here," but were old buildings in an old part of town, or maybe an isolated field with tents set up near the edge of a village, Gross said. Barbed wire surrounded them.

Whole families were assigned to small crowded living quarters, often just one room. Food was scarce and sanitation conditions were poor or non-existent, Gross said.

"What they (Nazis) wanted was to make animals out of us," Mrs. Tuchman said. "And by putting us in such living conditions, they almost succeeded. Everybody was getting a very small portion of bread. And sometimes a father couldn't live on this piece of bread and he would go at night and maybe steal



Staff Photo—RAY WEST

Alex Gross and his sister-in-law Ruth (right) look at his family plaque mounted on the wall of the Monument to the Six Million while Rose Tuchman (left) reflects over the names listed

(bread) from his child."

They were forced to hard labor, often in factories and heavy industrial plants, making ammunition or other things necessary for the Nazi war effort. Work often lasted 16 hours a day, Gross said.

Beatings and humiliation were part of everyday life in the ghettos, Mrs. Gross said.

"If they (the Germans) gave us a beating, it hurt, but you went on and were OK," she said. "But

on her family plaque. The plaques represent the members of about 150 Atlanta families who perished in the Nazi Holocaust.

when they took your father and your grandfather, and they took your mother" and beat them in front of you, "that's what hurt."

She said German soldiers took her 80-year-old grandfather "and beat him up in front of the kids . . . Half of his beard was torn out with the flesh. He was a very orthodox, devout person."

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COVER STORY



Staff Photo—STEVE WRIGHT

Rose Tuchman was 13 when her family was captured by Nazis. She was one of the few members to survive the extermination camps and reluctantly tells of her experiences 'so people will not forget what happened. If you forget it, then something like this can happen again and again.'

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As bad as life was in the ghettos, however, it was better than in the extermination camps, he said.

"They (Nazis) closed up the (Lodz, Poland) ghetto for a whole day and they segregated us from all the old people and all the children," Mrs. Tuchman said. "They wanted to eliminate . . . those who would not produce (work)."

She said as the Nazi soldiers rounded them up "they would throw the children from the windows (of the buildings) into the trucks — from second and third floor windows."

The children ranged from small infants to about 10 years old, she said.

Gross said when he was taken they were crammed into open railroad cattle cars and taken to Birkenau, part of the Auschwitz complex.

When they arrived "all I saw was flames coming out of these tall chimneys" and he smelled "the stench of human flesh." Anywhere from 10,000 to 40,000 people a day were gassed and burned in special crematories, he said.

"They were truly death factories," Gross said.

"It's hard to describe," Mrs. Gross said. "It's like I had died, and I'm in hell. Because I saw these flames, and smelled this stink. And I saw (lying about) a head, and bones, and teeth. And I had to constantly keep on pinching myself" to realize it was all happening.

Gross says he still remembers "when they opened up those sealed doors" from the cattle car and they were told to get out.

"You know, I had my father, mother and brothers with me, and as I looked around suddenly I found myself alone, in front of a big (Nazi) SS man with his folded arms," Gross said. "He was just as important . . . as God. He had the decision in his hand of who should live and who should die.

"Those he told to go straight went automatically to the gas chambers, to the right the young, healthy women; to the left the young, healthy men. He pointed the way."

Their heads were shaved, their clothes were taken from them and they were told to shower, Gross said. Then ill-fitting clothes were "tossed" to them.

Gross and other men were forced to do hard, manual labor in large manufacturing plants, but "actually the work saved our sanity, because it kept us occupied."

Mrs. Gross and Mrs. Tuchman had nothing to do "but wait until my turn to die," Mrs. Gross said.

Food was consistent with the surroundings. Sometimes it was a soup "made from just plain weeds, cut from the garden and boiled," Mrs. Gross said. It was served every four days in a common bowl, to be shared among 20 women. There were no spoons.

Mrs. Tuchman remembers a soup made from ground-up radishes, "leaves and all" that was boiled together. Once a week or so Gross said the men got about a quarter of a loaf of bread "that was mostly sawdust."

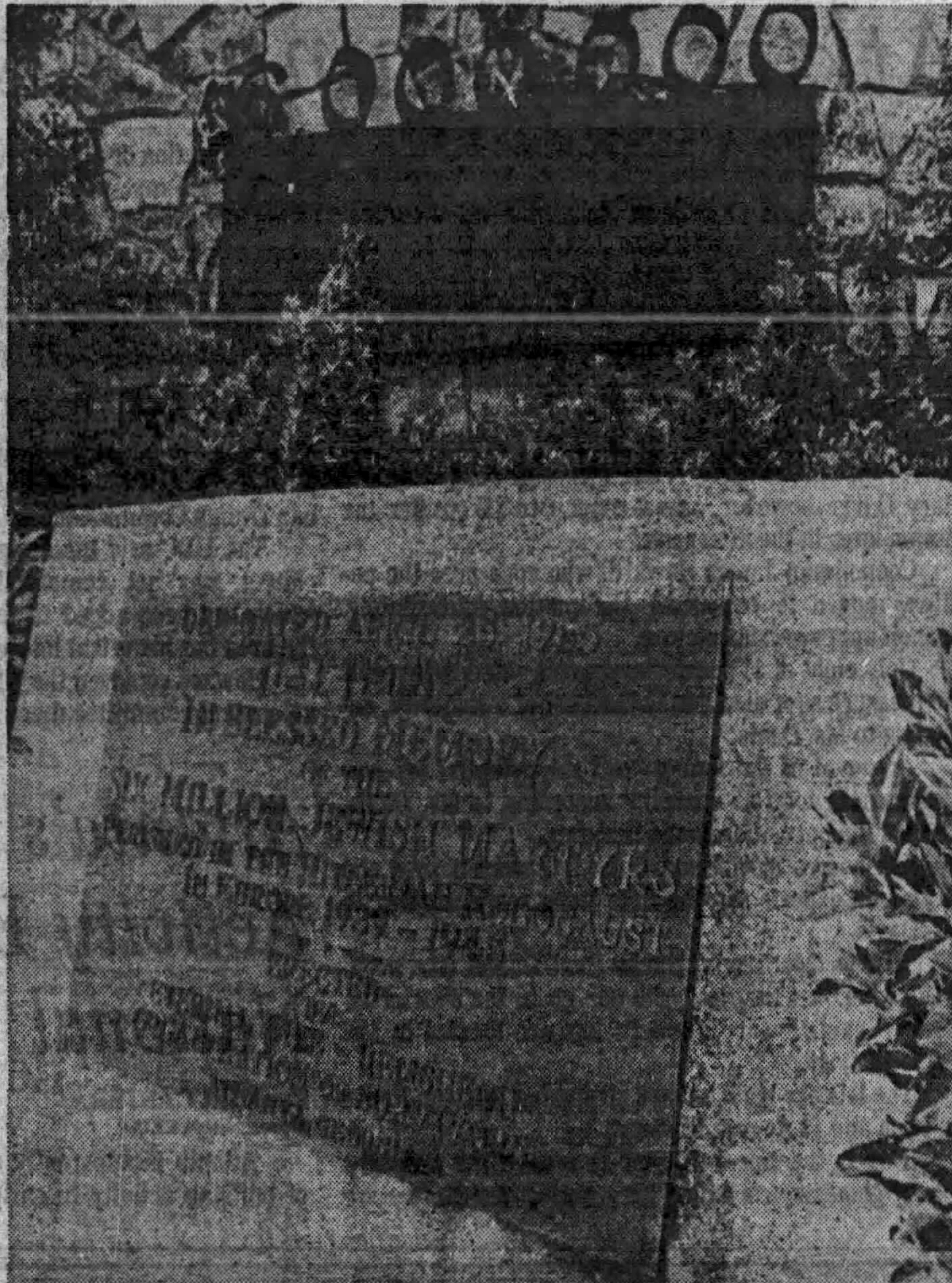
Sleep was nearly impossible at night, Gross said, "because you had to hold your hand onto the bread. If someone stole it, you were dead (from starvation). So you had to hold onto the bread, sometimes for a whole week."

He said sometimes he still wakes up, clutching his hand in the same way he did nearly 40 years ago.

Gross said the average length of survival in his part of the complex was about three to four weeks.

"It wasn't so much the hunger," he said. "It was the humiliation. The beatings. The constant threat."

He said one high-ranking female German official would occasionally come into his camp "and used to make



Staff Photo—RAY WEST

This plaque is placed in front of the Monument for the Six Million erected in 1965 in remembrance of the Jews exterminated by the Nazis in World War II. A special memorial service will be at 1:30 p.m. Sunday in memory of those who died.

us stand . . . with our arms out so she could pick out the exact colors of skins that she wanted to make lampshades out of with tatoos on them. And there were some SS men behind her with sharp knives who would just chop off your hand or the skin . . ."

Hanging parties were a nightly amusement to the German soldiers, Gross said, with anywhere from three to 20 men chosen at random and hanged.

Disease ran rampant throughout the extermination camps because of the horrible sanitary conditions, but "you didn't let the Gestapo know you were sick," Mrs. Gross said. "The minute they saw you were sick, out you went to the gas chambers."

She said she had "rubbed a blister all over my lip, down my tongue, down my throat" and ran "a high fever constantly." But she hid her sickness from the soldiers by covering her mouth with her hand whenever they came by.

Gross said rats "were so bold they would climb on top of the bunks and eat away at your toes. And you had no strength to fight them off."

Each morning he would find "one or two of my comrades were dead next to me."

He said he weighed only 60 pounds when the war was over.

That was nearly 40 years ago, but

Gross, Mrs. Gross and Mrs. Tuchman say their experiences are burned forever in their memories.

"I believe I can remember almost 90 percent of exactly what happened then, in exactly the order it happened," Mrs. Gross said. "There is no way you can forget."

"Right now, we have other problems," Gross said. "It seems that all of us (survivors) are suffering from some sort of illness — everything from ulcers, to tuberculosis, to hypertension, mental breakdowns and cancer. It seems a lot of the children have been affected . . ."

Gross said some of the survivors believe they are suffering ill effects from being forced to work around and breathe hazardous materials, while others believe they may have been given chemicals in experimental hospitals which are now causing physical problems.

Gross said he suffers from ulcers and rarely gets more than three hours of sleep at night.

Many of the survivors and their families are "pained because of the lack of action" by the U.S. government to bring Nazi war criminals to "justice."

"I don't carry any hate, but I want to see justice . . . those that are murderers should be brought to trial," he said.