

Upstander Connection

Dallas Holocaust Museum/Center for Education and Tolerance

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Thank You to Scholar and Philanthropist Lilian Furst



Image of Lilian Furst provided by USC Shoah Foundation

Lilian Furst often said she felt she had no real home. The brilliant scholar, professor and author even titled one her books *Home Is Somewhere Else*.

But in Dallas she found, if not a home, a rare place of contentment for a while. A Holocaust refugee from Vienna, she lived here with her father from 1975 until his death a

decade later.

“It [Dallas] was an alien culture, but it was a good time and her father became happy there,” Dr. Madeline G. Levine, a close friend, said.

Her father’s happiness might explain the astonishing gift she left the Dallas Holocaust Museum in her will.

\$1 million.

Museum officials will combine her gift with other donations to build a new and larger Holocaust museum in the West End. Levine said she believed Furst would approve.

“I think it would make her happy to contribute to the new museum and to make sure her father is remembered,” she said.

Furst was born in Vienna in 1931. Her parents were both medical doctors trained as dental surgeons, and she described an enchanted, fairy-tale childhood until the Nazis invaded Austria in 1938.

The family illegally fled to Belgium to hide but were later given admittance to Britain because the country was in need of dentists. She and her parents stayed in England for years, and Furst earned her Ph.D. from Girton College, Cambridge University.

After her mother’s death in 1969, Furst and her father, Desider Furst, left for the United States, traveling the country for her positions and named professorships at

Dartmouth, Stanford, Harvard, the University of Texas at Dallas and more. Her curriculum vitae says she was a UTD faculty member from 1975 to 1986.

It was in Dallas that Desider Furst penned his memoirs, but Lilian could not bring herself to read them while he was alive.

“My ulterior motive for not reading his autobiography was my fear of disappointment and of hurting him by somehow betraying that response,” she wrote. “Though an avid reader throughout his life and with a large vocabulary in English, his third language (Hungarian and German were his first and second), he had no experience in writing.”

She found that she was mistaken, however, after she finally read his work after his death. His memoirs were wonderful, and she decided to combine his story with her own to create an “autobiography in two voices.” *Home Is Somewhere Else*, one of the 23 books and countless articles and reviews she wrote in her lifetime, was published in 1994.

“She was extraordinarily attached to her father. She was very bereft when he died. She felt alone. She and her father had been a unit, especially after her mother died,” Levine said.

Furst called herself the “Anne Frank who lived,” and while she considered herself one of the “lucky” ones, she carried a burden throughout her life.

“I assign the *Diary of Anne Frank* in a course on adolescence in twentieth-century literature, and it tears me apart each time I read it. I feel that so easily, but for the grace of God, there go I,” Furst said during a National Humanities Center’s radio show interview once. “I don’t want to sound moralistic, but I think because I did survive, I am obligated to try to make something of my life, to do something for other people, to contribute something to this world.”

Furst died in her home with friends in Chapel Hill, N.C. on September 11, 2009. Her legacy – both by her pen and her actions – will live on forever.

— Katie Menzer, staff writer for the Dallas Holocaust Museum/Center for Education and Tolerance



Lilian Furst at Case Western Reserve University, 1978. Image 02294 property of Case Western Reserve University Archives.