

LIVES LIVED

After surviving the Holocaust, Lena Allen-Shore spent her life building a better world

JACQUES SHORE, EMILY SHORE AND SIGMOND SHORE

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This article was published more than 3 years ago. Some information may no longer be current.

Lena Allen-Shore: Writer. Teacher. Fighter. Romantic. Born Nov. 17, 1921 in Jaslo, Poland; died Dec. 3, 2018, in Ottawa, of congestive heart failure; aged 97.





Lena Allen-Shore.

THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Lena made a promise with God during the Second World War that if she and her family survived, she would work toward a better world. When the war ended, and she, her brother and parents miraculously survived, that is exactly what she spent her life doing.

Lena excelled in school and grew up in a family that valued education and intellect, she had private tutors for French, Hebrew and piano. A lifelong love of music meant she was still playing and composing her own songs just days before her death.

After the war, Lena worked as a journalist where she met Sigmond Shore, also a survivor who lost his entire family in the Holocaust. Given the instinctual reaction of survivors to make the most out of life, two days after they met, Lena and Sigmond were engaged and, two weeks later, married. Lena was always quick to recount this story, especially to her granddaughters, saying it was already time for her to dance at their weddings.

Lena and Sigmond moved from Poland to Paris, where Sigmond worked as a diplomat and Lena a journalist, while also continuing her studies at the University of Paris. In 1951, abandoning the Communism of Eastern Europe, they made their way to Canada, deciding upon Montreal where they could speak French and live in one of the largest Jewish communities in Canada. There, they raised their two sons, Michel and Jacques. Both sons knew that they had a “funny mother,” a description that Lena quite liked. Instead of baking cakes or cookies, Lena wrote poetry and composed her own songs. Two made it on the popular Hit Parade. And the bulletin boards of her sons’ classrooms held press clippings about her published books.

When Sigmond died suddenly in 1967, Lena took over his import business. And once Michel and Jacques were well on their way in university, Lena completed her PhD. At 58, after 26 years in Montreal, she moved to Philadelphia with her second husband, Edward Greenberg, to focus on her writing and begin her career as a “professor to teachers.”

Lena loved an audience and she found this in the classroom. Her ability as a philosopher to build bridges between people was remarkable and her persistent stubbornness in getting her messages across – whether in her novels, music, poetry or lectures – was unique.

Despite surviving the atrocities of the Holocaust, Lena’s message was rife with optimism. Building Bridges may be her best-known book, but she considered her guide to meaning and happiness, Ten Steps in the Land of Life, as one of her best.

Lena founded her Center for the Advancement of Human Potential and created 28 accredited interdisciplinary courses linked to Gratz College in Philadelphia. An endowment program in her name is now being established.

Lena was courageous, sometimes to the chagrin of her family. In elevators or taxis, she would start up conversations with strangers (she was fluent in six languages) asking questions about life, dreams and aspirations. If language was an issue, there were always hand gestures. She then offered lessons, guidance and her two cents of what mattered most in life. For that, she will always be remembered.

Jacques Shore is Lena’s son and Sigmond and Emily Shore are two of Lena’s grandchildren.

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