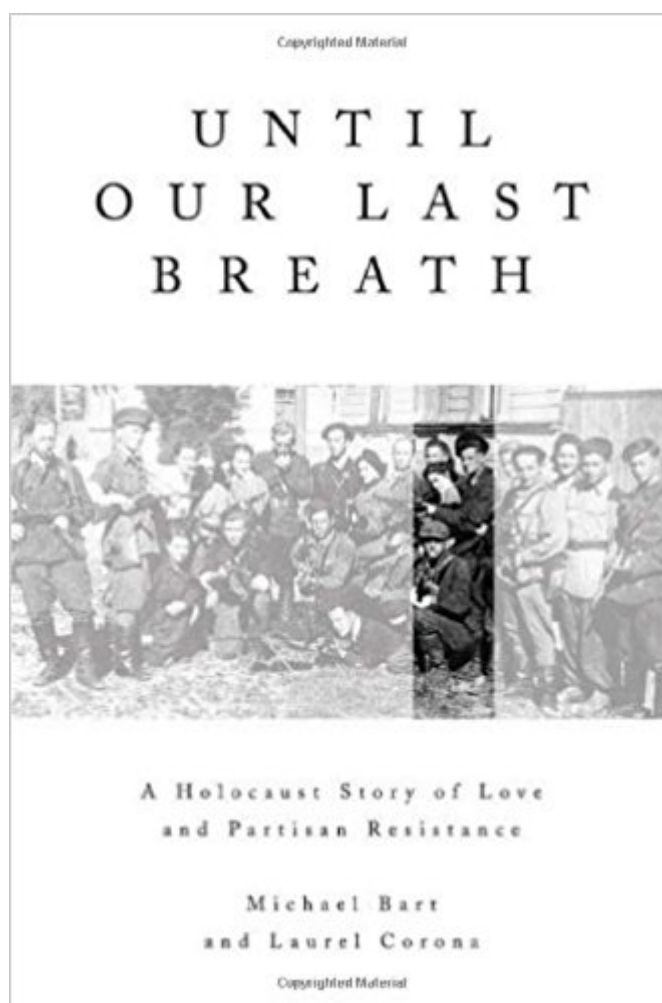


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Until Our Last Breath: A Holocaust Story Of Love And Partisan Resistance



Synopsis

At Leizer Bart's funeral, one of the mourners told his son Michael that the gravestone should include a reference to the Freedom Fighters of Nekamah, to honor his late father's involvement in the Jewish resistance movement in Vilna (now Vilnius), Lithuania, at the end of World War II. Michael had never heard his parents referenced as Freedom Fighters. Following his father's death, and with his mother in failing health, Michael embarked on a ten-year research project to find out more details about his parents' time in the Vilna ghetto, where they met, fell in love, and married, and about their activities as members of the Jewish resistance. *Until Our Last Breath* is the culmination of his research, and his parents' story of love and survival is seamlessly tied into the collective story of the Vilna ghetto, the partisans of Vilna, and the wider themes of world history. Zenia, Bart's mother, was born and raised in Vilna. Leizer fled there to escape the Nazi invasion of his hometown of Hrubieshov in Poland. They were married by one of the last remaining rabbis ninety days before the liquidation of the ghetto. Leizer was friends with Zionist leader Abba Kovner and became a member of the Vilna ghetto underground. Shortly before the total liquidation of the ghetto, Zenia and Leizer, along with about 120 members of the underground, were able to escape to the Rudnicki forest, about 25 miles away. They became part of the Jewish partisan fighting group led by Abba Kovner—known as the Avengers—which carried out sabotage missions against the Nazi army and eventually participated in the liberation of Vilna. *Until Our Last Breath* is intensely personal and painstakingly researched, a lasting memorial to the Jews of Vilna, including the resistance fighters and the author's family.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Only after Bart's father died did he learn that his parents, Leizer and Zenia, Lithuanian Holocaust survivors, had also fought in the Resistance. With his mother suffering from Alzheimer's, Bart cobbles together their story, which he and coauthor Corona, a professor of English and humanities at San Diego City College, relate along with the larger story of the Vilna ghetto. Leizer and Zenia's romance is unusually poignant against the background of the privations of the ghetto; the old social distinctions between Zenia's upper-class Lithuanian family and Leizer's poor Polish origins were brushed aside within the ghetto's confines. The young couple fled the ghetto in its waning days to fight in a part of the Resistance known as the Avengers. The group is best known for its controversial postwar activities, which the Barts declined to participate in, partly out of concern for Zenia's health. (The group's story was told in more detail in Rich Cohen's *Avengers*.) This is a powerful tale of the triumph of love under extremely difficult conditions. 106 b&w photos, 2 maps. (May) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Bart posits that his book presents two interrelated narratives. One is historical, describing events pertaining to the Nazi occupation of Lithuania and the experiences of the Jews during those years. The other is the story of Leizer and Zenia Bart, his parents. They had been involved in the Jewish underground resistance during World War II with a group led by Abba Kovner, and they had spent nearly a year living in the forest, blowing up trains and sabotaging telephone and other communication equipment. They had lived in the Vilna ghetto for two years before escaping to join the partisans. Bart was able to locate his parents' records and some important documents, including letters his mother had written to the U.S. from Vilna after the liberation and later from Rome where she and her husband lived as displaced persons. He also talked with Holocaust survivors who had known them. With 106 black-and-white photographs, this book is a work of exceptional historical importance. --George Cohen

The Author, Michael D. Bart, is my recently "discovered" USA relative whose ancestors and relatives lived and worked in Vilna long centuries until 1939-1945. The Vilna's life and death experience of his family is very similar to such experience of my family. There are some differences: my family stayed in the USSR after WW2 and his family did not. Michael's Parents, Zenia and Leo,

had and used the opportunity to escape from Vilna Ghetto and to join Partisans. What makes their story of love, struggle and survival unique that they were able to escape again from another Big Ghetto - "liberated by Soviets" and also "almost liberated from Jews" Eastern Europe of 1945-1946. Zenia and Leo lost their families in Lithuania and Poland and had nothing to do and to live for at their old places. They made their best again leaving their old lives behind and coming to the New World to rebuild their new life together from the scratch.

As someone who has spent years in Vilna, I know of the places which Michael Bart studied and Laurel Corona then wrote about. Mr. Bart did lengthy and in-depth work and Ms. Corona took that research in combination with her own visit to Vilna and research to turn *Until Our Last Breath* into a must-read. I have been fortunate enough to meet former Jewish partisans, Righteous Gentiles, and those rescued. After reading this book, I realize how much I missed by never having met Michael Bart's parents. They were real people cast into a surreal situation. No matter how inhumane conditions became, both of them managed to hold onto their humanity. They were heroes who never realized how extraordinary they were. The world is a far better place thanks to what they did. What they did was never surrender in the face of insanity and cruelty. If only all of us could be so strong. Thanks to Michael Bart for all of his efforts. Thanks also to Laurel Corona for putting the story down on paper so it can be shared with the world.

I have read many books about the holocaust but never one that told about the Jewish people taking a stand of resistance as this one did. This factual book was very well written and is a fast read. As survivors of the holocaust are aging and are passing on, may what they went through NEVER be forgotten and never allowed to happen again. I feel this is a must read book and should also be read by Jr. High and High School students.

Until our Last Breath is an excellent book for anyone wanting to know about the history of the holocaust and personal stories of people who survived - and didn't. I read it because I am helping a friend write up the story of her parents who were also partisans in the forest. The breadth and depth of this book were excellent. The meticulous research was evident. I would have liked to know more about the people but had to remember most of the research was done decades later when most of the people were gone. I read this book after *Defiance*. *Defiance* did have more personal stories as the author was able to interview many of the people she wrote about. I recommend both books to anyone interested in understanding what it was like to live through the holocaust and be a Jewish

partisan.

Very humbling story of survival and resistance. Most of us in the USA have no appreciation for the horror others have lived through.

We fought back. Many tried to fight back but hunger, Polish, German hunters and polish nationalists. Were all out. To kill the hunted Jew. This story is about fighting and surviving against all odds. Well written

This should be required reading for High School. This shows what people can do to survive when they work together. And who is hounded & hunted down more than the Jewish people.

Loved it. Great read.

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