



Noemi Ban

September 29, 1922 - June 7, 2019

Noemi Ban passed away on Friday June 7th, 2019 in Bellingham after a brief illness, surrounded by her loving family and friends. She lived to the “honorable” (her word) age of 96 (and a half, as she would insist). Although it was her generous heart that gave out in the end, that heart touched our community and many other communities worldwide.

Noemi was born on September 29, 1922 in Szeged, Hungary to Samuel and Juliska Schonberger. Although she grew up in a cultured Jewish home, she and her family witnessed Hungary’s slide from democracy to Nazi dictatorship. As a result, Noemi’s mom, with unusual foresight, insisted that she learn a manual skill, as a seamstress, which could aid in her survival in an anti-semitic wartime environment. The path of her young life was completely disrupted by the Nazi invasion of Hungary. As she has related so eloquently to countless audiences, the Nazis deported her and her family to Auschwitz, where her mother, grandmother, younger sister and baby brother were murdered. Because of her unparalleled resilience, good health, manual skills and courage, she survived 3 months in Auschwitz as well as a subsequent transfer to Buchenwald labor camp, where she helped to sabotage the making of Nazi bombs.

Following the war, she reunited with her father back in Hungary and rekindled a pre-war relationship with Earnest Ban, whom she married in 1945. They had

two sons and lived in Budapest where they had successful careers as teachers. During the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, she and her family, at her insistence, escaped from Hungary, fleeing Communism as well as the return of Fascism. They found their way to America and settled in St. Louis, Missouri.

After learning English, Noemi embarked on a second award winning teaching career lasting 23 years. In 1982, she and Earnest retired to Bellingham to be close to her son, Steve's growing family. After several years of traveling, Earnest became ill. She was his primary caretaker until his death in 1994.

Shortly before Earnest's passing, Noemi began a third chapter of teaching, volunteering her time and energy speaking and co-writing a book about her experiences in the Holocaust, with her message of survival, resilience, and love. Not only did Noemi's speaking and writing provide an ongoing purpose to the last 25 years of her life , but it significantly impacted the life of every member of her audiences. Her wish was to continue speaking as long as she could and she did so until the very end of her life.

Noemi received many awards during her teaching and Holocaust education careers:

1980: Teacher of the Year in St. Louis, Missouri

1998: Golden Apple Award

1999: Honorary Doctorate, Gonzaga University

2003: Washington Education Association Human and Civil Rights Award in the category of International Peace and Understanding

2004: Excellence in Holocaust Education Award

2006: Northwest Women's Hall of Fame

2010- Americanism Award from Daughter's of the American Revolution (DAR)

o 2012: One of Bellingham Herald's "Ten Who Cared"

2013: Honorary Doctorate, Western Washington University

and finally.....

Volunteer of the Year Award from Assumption Catholic School, received at 12:30 PM on June 7, 2019, three hours before she passed away.

Noemi is predeceased by:

Juliska Schonberger, mother

Samu Gabor, father

Erzsebet Schonberger, sister

Gabor Schonberger, brother

Earnest Ban, husband

Irenke Gabor, step-mother

Joseph Schonberg, uncle

Helen Schonberg, aunt

Stephen Schonberg, cousin

Noemi is survived by:

Steven Ban (Janis), son

George Ban (Pat), son

Grandchildren: Rachel Tefft (Nathan), Julia Ban, Miriam Ban (Mark Dudinski),
Jeremiah Levine (Rachel Light), Karen Martin, Jason Ban (Erica)

Great-grandchildren: Molly, Isla and Samuel Tefft; Brooke, Nadia and Jaxson
Martin; Alexis and Jordyn Ban

In lieu of flowers, memorials may be sent to the Ray Wolpov Institute for the
Study of the Holocaust, Genocide, and Crimes Against Humanity or the New
Synagogue Fund of Beth Israel Synagogue, Bellingham, WA.

Tribute Wall

CT

“ I had the honor of bringing Noemi to my middle school, Mt. Baker in Auburn, many years to speak with our 8th graders. I would drive to Bellingham to pick her up the day before, and I was lucky to have that travel time with her to hear more of her stories. The students, year after year, adored her. It was thrilling for me as a teacher to witness their absolute awe in being witness to her living history. They always wanted to hug her. She was courageous and so generous. I am forever grateful to have known her.
Chris Thorington
8th grade teacher

Christine Thorington - June 07, 2019 at 12:00 AM

TS

“ I had the honor of presenting Noemi to many of my classes in the Mt. Baker School District over the years. The last time I heard her address a group of students, however, was in my grandson's 5th grade classroom at Silver Beach Elementary. She still received the same full attentive audience, the same respectful questions, and the same sincerity of youth wanting to hug her at the conclusion of her meaningful message. It was my privilege to know her and always be greeted by her welcoming smile. Her legacy will live on in the hearts and words of those who continue to share her story. Tim Shepherd

Tim Shepherd - June 07, 2019 at 12:00 AM

AH

“ Noemi spoke several times to students at Central School in Ferndale and her message of love and forgiveness in the wake of deplorable horrors had a profound effect. We were honored to have her as a guest at our production of “Fiddler On the Roof.” She rose above tragedy and eloquently and significantly touched many lives. Thank you, Noemi. Condolences to her family.

Arnie Hummasti - June 07, 2019 at 12:00 AM

PK

“ Noemi Ban is a National Treasure. I was honored to listen to her speak several times and to read her book A wonderful lady who despite her childhood under a Nazi regime spoke of love and forgiveness. . May her message never be forgotten. Condolences to her family. Phyllis Kiehn

Phyllis R. Kiehn - June 07, 2019 at 12:00 AM

RS

“ Mrs Ban was a strong, lovely, & courageous woman. I attended many of her talks on the Holocaust. She was a great speaker, it was as if you were there with her. My deepest sympathy to her family and friends. God Bless!!

Robin Stephens - June 07, 2019 at 12:00 AM