

Statement of Eugenie Lieberman
United States House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs
The Struggles of Recovering Assets for Holocaust Survivors
September 18, 2014

My name is Eugenie Lieberman, born Eugenie Segalowitz, daughter of Ivar Segalowitz. Ivar was a Holocaust survivor who lived and raised his family in Great Neck, New York. Sadly, my father passed away just a few months ago, succumbing to Prostate Cancer on June 23, 2014. My mother, Bernice Segalowitz, who still resides in Great Neck, my brother, Ralph Segalowitz, who lives in East Setauket, LI, our children, Suzanne, Melissa, Jonathon, and Michael, spouses, Cathy and Jay, and I will carry on his legacy of fighting for the rights of survivors. The sense of purpose and dedication to humanitarian causes that my father instilled in us brings me here today.

My father was born in Memel/Klaipeda Lithuania on August 17, 1930 of parents who were German citizens. The entire family, parents, Erna and Boris, Aunt Eugenie (after whom I am named), Uncle Tobias Mazur, his grandmother and great aunt, were all killed by the Nazi's. Ivar survived life in three concentration camps, having endured imprisonment in the Kovno Ghetto, then Dachau, Auschwitz/ Birkenau, and finally a death march to Buchenwald. At fourteen years of age, on April 11, 1945, he was liberated from Buchenwald by the American Army. He was the only member of his incarcerated family to survive. Upon liberation, he was shipped to a school for orphaned children of the Holocaust in France. After being there for two years, his aunt, his mother's sister, who had come to the United States before WWII, found him with the help of the Red Cross and sponsored him to come to this country.

When he got to the United States, he finished his high school education by attending Stuyvesant High School at night and obtained vocational training as a machinist during the day. In the following years, he worked in machine shops, began attending college at night, got married and served in the United States Army Intelligence Corp as a corporal during the Korean conflict. In 1968, he graduated from the City College of NY with a Bachelor's degree in Physics.

My father spent most of his working career in manufacturing engineering, serving as VP of Manufacturing for two companies on Long Island, and then as a consultant, obtaining 6 patents by the end of his time in the public sector.

In 2002, he was elected for his first three year term as a Great Neck Parks Commissioner. He served in that capacity for three consecutive terms, making significant contributions to the community, for a total of nine years.

Before World War II, Ivar's father, Boris, was a successful processor and distributor of Flax products in Lithuania. Ivar's grandmother owned a popular shoe store. My father always believed that his father would have provided for his offspring with Life Insurance. He knows that his father and grandmother were responsible business people, who were committed to their families. They would have purchased insurance in good faith.

My father, Ivar Segalowitz, survived several camps and death marches and was the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust. He was a U.S. military and Korean War veteran and a former elected official on Long Island. He was also the heir to several insurance policies – likely sold by European life insurance companies. Yet after all this service and participation in American civic life, he was unable to employ the basic constitutional right to sue insurance companies who cheated his family.

For as many years as I can remember, my father was active in pressing for all survivors to have their insurance rights restored, and to find help for the tens of thousands of Holocaust survivors living in poverty. He was on the Executive Committee of the Holocaust Survivors Foundation, and had traveled to Washington, D.C. on several occasions to lobby the New York Congressional delegation on these issues. He also reached out, on numerous occasions, to New York House Members and Senators to no avail.

My father was tortured by the fact that the United States government he revered and served would oppose his having the basic right to go to Court to pursue his family's insurance policies. This was tragically the case under both Presidents Bush and Obama. He knew he might not win, but how could he not even have the right to have a judge and jury of his peers hear his case?

He could not understand how Congress repeatedly turned the survivors down. In December 2013, even as he battled with his cancer that was growing more serious, my father left his sick bed to come into Manhattan to join a protest with other survivors when a Jewish organization was holding a dinner to honor the lobbyist for one of the major European insurance companies.

It is unfathomable to me at this point that this giant in life died as a second class citizen under U.S. law, despite the incredible losses he endured, and without the ability to reclaim the legacies of his parents, grandparents, and other relatives. After all, he was at the time one of thousands – many of whom have already died in frustration and humiliation, whose humanity has been denied by their own government.

Now Ivar is gone and will never have the satisfaction of learning about this part of his family's history – even though the records exist.

Ivar Segalowitz Insurance Claims

Ivar had spent an extensive amount of time and effort compiling information to support his claims. He had presented these documents and information to the proper organizations, institutions, and governmental agencies with no satisfactory response. From the available evidence, we can draw the conclusion that it was the intent of our relatives to purchase and keep their policies in force until they were needed. We only ask your assistance in obtaining the definitive proof that these policies existed and providing the judicial forum in which to obligate the companies to disburse the benefits to the insured's legal beneficiaries and heirs.

Ivar submitted claims to the International Commission for Holocaust Era Insurance Claims (ICHEIC) on the following relatives whose names were listed on the ICHEIC website:

Erna Segalowitz his mother

Siegmund Joseph, his maternal grandfather

Minna (Benjamin) Joseph, is maternal grandmother

Walter Lephene (Lepane) – Uncle, Mother’s sister’s husband

Margot (Joseph) Lephene (Lepane) – Aunt, Mother’s sister

The only policy that was acknowledged was for Siegmund Joseph, his grandfather, who died in 1929 and whose policy was paid out. His name was on the list published. However, as to the other four relatives whose names were published, who all were alive when the Holocaust began, ICHEIC “couldn’t find” any information about any of them.

In other words the only one that these companies “found” was the one that was already paid, so there was no harm in giving him that information. However, the unpaid policies remain secret and not accessible to Ivar despite the fact that the German insurers published his relatives’ names on the ICHEIC website, proving that these individuals did have policies. But the system has simply denied him all information, including the names of the companies that sold the policies! (ICHEIC sent Ivar \$1000 as a “humanitarian payment.”)

This was part of ICHEIC’s deal with Germany – names were published but the identity of the companies remained secret. That is ridiculous. And since Ivar was a Holocaust survivor, he does not have the right to go to court to get this information from Allianz, the most prominent German insurer of the time, or the German Insurance Association, which placed the names on the ICHEIC website. There is no legal remedy for him due to the U.S. government’s court filings and the failure of Congress to act. As my father would have, I am asking that the leaders of this Congress introduce and pass legislation restoring survivors’ insurance rights, like the legislation that was blocked in 2012, as soon as you can in 2015.

Needs of Indigent Holocaust Survivors

My father also devoted many hours in his retirement years advocating for the needs of indigent survivors who could not afford the basic necessities for a dignified old age. Thankfully, my father’s financial situation was such that he could obtain the care he needed. But he knew that so many other survivors were not so lucky. He understood how many survivors suffered from unimaginable physical and emotional injuries they suffered at the hands of the Nazi regime. If he were here today, he would also urge Congress to use its influence with the German government and other companies and countries that profited from the Holocaust to provide full funding for the needs of Holocaust survivors who need help throughout the world.