



Alan "Woody" Morawiec, left, holds a microphone for his father, Chaim Baruch Morawiec, during a speaking engagement at Abiding Hope Lutheran Church on May 4. Alan founded the Holocaust Shoe Project to keep the survival story of his father alive.

Son helps keep father's Holocaust memories alive

Story and photo submitted
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Two special visitors helped Littleton's Abiding Hope observe the last day of Holocaust Remem-

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brance Week on May 4: One was the founder of the Holocaust Shoe Project, the other his father, a Holocaust survivor.

Alan "Woody" Morawiec, a teacher at Summit Ridge Middle School in Littleton, founded the Holocaust Shoe Project to keep the incredible survival story of his father, **Chaim Baruch Morawiec**, now 88, alive. Chaim, who lets Alan tell most of his story, came from Brooklyn to add a few comments of his own — and sometimes fatherly "corrections" — and answer questions.

As the generation of Holocaust survivors ages, it has become the job of their children to learn and tell their stories so the world will not forget the executions of six million Jews and five million others by the Nazis once the survivors are gone.

The younger Morawiec collects usable pairs of shoes to display as a memorial to those who died, and

then gives them to charity. Why shoes? When Allied soldiers overran the Nazi death camps and freed the few remaining alive, they discovered piles of many thousands of shoes that once belonged to those who had been slain. Those who liberated Auschwitz in 1945 reported that the six barracks that escaped fires set by fleeing Nazis alone contained 38,000 pairs of men's shoes and 5,255 pairs of women's shoes. Shoes come in all colors and sizes, just like people, "Woody" Morawiec said, and so represent the personalities and humanity of each of those lost.

The Nazis, ever efficient, had forced other death-camp prisoners to sort the clothing of those slain, including each pair of shoes, and often prisoners only discovered members of their families had been killed in the same camp by coming across a familiar pair.

Woody Morawiec's collection of shoes, both a symbolic and charitable counterpart to those symbols of death preserved by the Nazis, has reached 25,779 pairs since the start of the Holocaust Shoe Project, to which Abiding Hope contributes.

Chaim Morawiec, the only member of his family to survive the Holocaust, was born in Parzew, Poland. When he was 13, his family moved to a town called Kobryn. Chaim was 19 in 1939 when the Germans occupied Poland. His two sis-

ters were taken in 1941 to a labor camp. The family found out later that everyone taken that day was executed. His father was also taken to a labor camp later, and Chaim was ordered to go as well.

While there, a Ukrainian guard approached him and said, "If you stay here, you will die." The guard a member of a group noted more for its pro-Nazi sympathies than its leniency, said that he would "turn my back and you and your friends can escape." Could they trust the guard? Chaim and his friends discussed the risks and decided to take the chance. The guard turned his back and he and two friends escaped. After four weeks, traveling on foot and only after dark, they found their way back to Kobryn.

There Chaim found information that his father was still alive, but that the rest of his family had been killed. In 1942, the Nazis liquidated the Kobryn ghetto by gunfire, and his father was among those killed. There had been about 7,000 Jews about half the town's population. The total number of Jews who were killed was 6,998, which left only two survivors. Chaim was one.

Woody Morawiec noted that despite the vows to "never forget" the Holocaust, the world continues to suffer genocides: in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and currently in Darfur.