

# Remembering Holocaust survivor Leo Bretholz: See you soon again, dear friend



**Leo Bretholz (March 6, 1921 - March 8, 2014)**

**Photo: Many thanks to Lisa Shifren Photography**

Leo Bretholz has inspired John Carroll seniors for years with his words of wisdom and courage as he recounted the atrocities that he and countless others endured at the hands of the Nazis during the Holocaust. Leo died peacefully in his sleep on Saturday, two days after his 93rd birthday.

Most recently, Leo and a number of his friends and associates from the Speakers' Bureau of the Baltimore Jewish Council joined us on February 25 for our annual Holocaust Remembrance Day. Included were personal interactions between small groups of hosting seniors and the survivors, a liberator, and several other special guests, tours, displays, and lunch, along with small group survivor talks, a large group assembly featuring student presentations, music, and a heart-wrenching talk by one of the liberators of the Buchenwald concentration camp.



*Leo Bretholz speaking to the seniors of the John Carroll Class of 2013 who are gathered with other Holocaust survivors.*

*(Photo by Patti Murphy Dohn)*

Sharing his story with school groups in the Baltimore area countless times over the past five decades, Leo's biggest fear was that the Shoah stories would die with the survivors. The 2011 documentary "See You Soon Again" conveys the harrowing impact that continually recounting their story has had on Leo and other survivors. We hosted a screening of the film at John Carroll in October of 2012. 2010 John Carroll graduate Meredith O'Connell was featured in the film as she dedicated her Senior Project to keeping Leo's story alive so that no one will ever forget what Leo has called "the worst event in the totality of recorded history."

My school, along with a multitude of other schools and organizations, is strongly committed to honoring the memory of Leo Bretholz and all the survivors of the Shoah by telling their stories to the generations yet to come. A group of students and adults from John Carroll will represent our school and honor Leo's legacy by attending his 1 p.m. funeral service today at the Levinson Chapel in Pikesville.



*Leo with John Carroll seniors from the Class of 2013. (Photo by Patti Murphy Dohn)*

I will never forget my last conversation with Leo Bretholz. He called me at home on the evening of February 25. He wanted to thank me for the photos that I took earlier that day which I had emailed to him. He told me again what a great day he had at John Carroll and that our commitment to never forget means so much to him. And he reminded me to tell my husband the pope jokes that he told me that day. Leo loved telling this Catholic campus minister pope jokes and making me laugh. We ended the conversation with "I love you. Talk to you soon."

Yes, Leo, you were loved and cherished by many.

Thank you for the conviction to tell your story so that we will indeed never forget.

Rest in peace. See you soon again, dear friend.

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*Two weeks ago: Leo with John Carroll seniors from the Class of 2014*

*(Photo by Patti Murphy Dohn)*

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### **Remembering Leo:**

*Leo was a true inspiration! I feel extremely blessed to have met him and all of the Holocaust survivors. It saddens me that he has passed away because now I know the younger grades at John Carroll will not get to meet him (including my sister). When I met him, I felt like I met a celebrity! His story and his life made me realize how fortunate I am to have the life I have.*

—Sierra Ficca, John Carroll Class of 2013

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*The members of the John Carroll community have been privileged to learn of courage from Leo Bretholz. In confronting the horrors of the past, he has celebrated life through strength, grace, and humor. His loss is great but only because his presence was so profound.*

—Mrs. Deborah Stathes, John Carroll English Department

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*This man inspired me beyond any human on earth.*

*Leo Bretholz was one of the driving factors in my decision to be a Holocaust and Genocide historian. When I was 16 and we had a group of survivors at JC, he was “mine” for the day. We had lunch, I gave him a tour, and then when I walked him back to the bus, we sat and chatted. He asked me to promise him that I would continue telling his story and the stories of all who were present that day. I agreed and never realized how much that promise meant to me. I received my Masters in Holocaust and Genocide studies in 2011 and had Leo up to West Chester University for a human rights workshop that March. He spoke to grad and undergrad students*

*about his story and our friendship spanning over 7 years. We had a long somber drive reflecting on the current situation of the world, genocide, and his fear that history would repeat itself when the survivors are gone. He never stopped teaching or trying to make a difference in the lives of his students and friends. He was a beautiful neshama (soul) and my life is richer for knowing him.*

—Elizabeth Burger Seabolt, John Carroll Class of 2005

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*I'm deeply saddened. Leo's loss will be felt by so many: by the survivor community, by the Baltimore community, and the John Carroll community, but most especially by his family and friends. My heart, my thoughts and my prayers go out to his wonderful family. Leo and his story touched and affected so many people. He was such a wonderful man of humor, who taught me how not to just survive, but how to truly live. He had such a profound effect on my life. My life was forever changed with the honor and privilege of helping share his story in the documentary "See You Soon Again." I feel blessed to have known him, and to have considered him a dear friend. He made me a witness, and because of him I will share his story until the day I die, making sure mankind never forgets the atrocities of the Holocaust. I will truly miss him, his jokes, his warmth, and his hugs. To Leo: I hope you are at peace, my dearest friend. You changed me for the better, and you will always be in my heart, and I will see you again someday, where I look forward to seeing your smile.*

—Meredith O'Connell, John Carroll Class of 2010

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*Scholar, gentleman, humorist, Holocaust survivor, a righteous man: Leo Bretholz was a gentle, loving man with a twinkle in his eye. He endured separation from and loss of his family as a teenager and struggled to hide and escape from the Nazis for seven years. Like so many other Holocaust survivors, Leo worked tirelessly during his "retirement" years, speaking to and inspiring thousands of students with his experiences during the Holocaust, teaching all about hope and endurance and love. Leo continued this work up until 10 days before he died. The entire community mourns the loss of this unique member; I mourn the loss of a beloved friend.*

—Jeanette Parmigiani, Director of Holocaust Programs, Baltimore Jewish Council

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### **Learn more about Leo Bretholz:**

#### 1. “See You Soon Again”

Directors: Lukas Stepanik, Bernadette Wegenstein

Writer: Bernadette Wegenstein

2. “Leap into Darkness: Seven Years on the Run in Wartime Europe,” Leo’s memoir which was co-authored by Michael Olesker, was published in 1998 by Random House.

3. Leo Bretholz’s oral history was recorded and preserved in 1989 for future generations by the National Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

All six parts of his interview can be viewed [here](#).