

The Whole Truth

A man who uncovered the incredible story of his parents' bravery demonstrates the lure of history and the pleasure of terrific nonfiction.

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Special to the Jewish News

Until *Our Last Breath: A Holocaust Story of Love and Partisan Resistance* by Michael Bart tells the story of his parents, Leizer and Zenia, who were part of the World War II resistance group the Avengers:

Q: Did you ever suspect your parents might once have led such unusual lives?

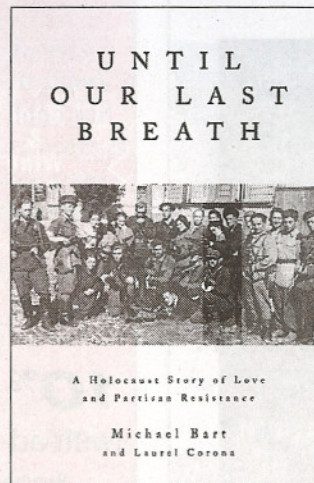
A: While I was growing up, my parents did not speak often about their Holocaust experiences. Either it was very painful for them to speak about or they didn't want to emotionally burden my brother and I with the agony of their past.

However, my mom spoke often about being born and raised in Vilna, a city she

described as having wonderful Jewish culture rich with many synagogues (106 prewar) and institutes of Jewish learning. She was very proud to be from Vilna.

My dad spoke often about being one of the partisans of Vilna with Abba Kovner, whom my parents referred to as "our commander." My father was very proud to have been a mainline partisan fighter whose assignments were primarily the sabotage and destruction of Nazi trains. He knew his contributions were important in slowing the transportation of supplies, fuel and troops.

It was only in the last two years of my



dad's life (1994-1996) when he began to tell me about my mom's losses, and my mom told me about my dad's losses. This is when I began to ask many questions.

Q: So many moments in your parents' histories — when your mother escaped death — and in your own research — such as when you discovered the picture of your parents with Abba Kovner — were extraor-

dinary, miraculous even. Do you feel different about life after this experience?

A: My life changed the day of my

father's funeral in 1996, when an unidentified man told me to inscribe "Freedom Fighter of Nekamah" on the headstone. Shortly after the funeral, I began my research. What I learned made me very proud of my parents and of my Jewish heritage. My father and other former partisans said to me that they didn't think they would survive the war; and they were going to fight the Nazis for the honor of their family and for the dignity of the Jewish people.

"My parents made two pledges to each other: to love each other and to fight the Nazis. Their commitment was 'until our last breath.'" □

Michael Bart speaks 1:30 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 9 (WB).