

Obituary: Jean Feran

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NEW ORLEANS — Jean Feran, 94, of New Orleans and La Crosse died Saturday, July 9, 2016 at Eagle Crest North.



A Holocaust survivor, she was born Jirina Zelezna Jan. 25, 1922, in Novy Bydzov near Prague, Czechoslovakia, to Professor Karel and Milada (Schick) Zelezna.

After the German invasion of Czechoslovakia, Jean's mother and stepfather, Moritz Silbiger, were taken to Terezin transit camp in 1942, with 2,000 other Jews, all told they were going to a labor camp. They were never heard from again, and sadly, Jean has no information about where and when they died. Their names and date of transport are recorded on the wall of Pinkas Synagogue, Prague, along with 77,296 other Jewish victims from Bohemia and Moravia. Most in that ghetto/labor camp were killed in Auschwitz and Treblinka. Over 80 of her relatives died in concentration camps during the Nazi Holocaust.

Jean was initially permitted to stay in Czechoslovakia. Hoping to become a doctor, she began her studies at Charles University. She was not allowed to go to medical school because of her religion, and eventually was prohibited by Nazi laws from continuing at University.

Jean was scheduled to report to concentration camp in 1945, but her country was liberated by the Allies shortly before that happened.

After the war, Jean worked as a secretary for the Ministry of Industry, before being given a visa to Sao Paulo, Brazil, to visit an aunt who fled Europe shortly before the outbreak of war. There she met her husband, Fred Feran (Alfred Feuermann), a refugee from Slovakia, then part of Czechoslovakia. He had left for Palestine three days before the Nazi occupation, and was in Brazil pursuing a new life after losing most of his own family.

After marrying in 1947, they immigrated to the United States and lived in New Orleans, where Fred worked for his cousin, Leah Pulitzer Antin, co-owner of Antin's Jewelry on Royal Street, New Orleans. He also was so well known for his Old World craft skills that timepieces for repair were sent to him from around the country.

Jean was active in her book club and many Jewish organizations, serving as president of the New Orleans chapter, and vice president of the Southern Region of Hadassah, Temple Sinai Sisterhood, New Orleans, and the National Council of Jewish Women. She possessed an intense love of classical music and maintained numerous music ticket subscriptions. She was a gracious hostess of frequent dinner parties for her many friends and extended Pulitzer family cousins. She often returned to Europe to travel and to decorate her home on Napoleon Avenue. Paris, Florence, and Prague were her favorite cities.

Jean's story was featured in the New Orleans Times-Picayune in connection with the Precious Legacy traveling exhibit at New Orleans Museum of Art, in 1985. The collection of Judaica treasures from Czechoslovakia consisted of items the Nazis stole from Jews in that country.

Jean and Fred lived in New Orleans until 2005, when Hurricane Katrina floodwaters destroyed their home. They were evacuated to Texas, and then moved to La Crosse to be near their daughter.

She is survived by her daughter, Maureen (Dr. Robert) Freedland and their children, Benjamin (Sara) of Plymouth, Minn., Celia of La Crosse, and Leah Freedland of New York City; daughter-in-law, Phyllis Feran of New Orleans; granddaughter, Leslie (Gary) Cohen of Lake Forest, Ill.; and three great-grandchildren, Sadie Ruth and Davis Russell Cohen, and Charlotte Melanie Freedland.

Fred preceded Jean in death in 2010, and their son, Russell, died a week later.

Graveside services will be conducted 11 a.m. Friday, July 15, in Hebrew Rest Cemetery No. 3, at Pelopidas and Frenchmen Streets, New Orleans. Rabbi Ed Paul Cohn will officiate.

Memorials are preferred to Maureen and Robert Freedland Community Fund for Studies of the Shoah (Holocaust) of the La Crosse Community Foundation, P.O. Box 1811, La Crosse, WI 54602-1811, a nonprofit endowment Fred and Jean Feran helped establish, or to the charity of the donor's choice.

Special thanks to Eagle Crest North for its love and professionalism as Jean's home for almost five years, and to Ann Malin and Florann Graf, La Crosse friends who loyally visited Jean through the years.