

Resilience, Perseverance and Fortitude: Lessons from My Parents

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After my mother's recent death, I shared my eulogy for her with JLCW's Editor-In-Chief, Daniel Garrie. My parents were both Holocaust survivors who came to the United States for a better life. Their stories of survival still amaze me to this day and they truly represent the triumph of the human spirit. Daniel and I discussed their stories and how, in this technological world, resilience, perseverance and fortitude are still essential to ensure the continuity of progress.

In my classroom, I have occasionally found that a basic knowledge of history has been lost in our educational system and that even in the most technical arena, there is value in understanding the lessons from our past.

So, I will tell you my parents' stories very briefly. My father was the sole survivor of his family of seven. At the age of 15, he ran away from a small town in Poland after the Nazis occupied his town. Using his own street smarts, he traversed almost all of Eastern Europe and finally ended up as a partisan heroically fighting the Nazis. He managed to talk his way out of Eastern Europe after the war was over, ending up in Brussels, where he met my mother. My mother and her cousins were sent out of Belgium to find refuge just

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one week ahead of the Nazi occupation. They were arrested in France by the Vichy French authorities (collaborators with the Nazis), placed in a detention camp, and ultimately sent on a train to the Auschwitz concentration camp. But the train broke down and in those few extra days, her uncle managed to bribe Vichy officials to release them. Then they began an arduous journey across the Pyrenee Mountains to Spain, where they were jailed. They were ultimately released and lived in Madrid until the war was over.

My parents' families were decimated by the Holocaust, but they were not ready to give up. They started anew in the United States and raised their family with few relatives, but they replanted what had been uprooted by the evil of the Holocaust. Their lives were not easy and their memories were difficult, but they decided as they said, "to not give Hitler any more victories."

Why is this relevant to us in this cyber age? Simply because resilience is much more than a marketing catchword – it is our ability to aspire to the future and make things better for our families and all humankind. It reminds us that we need to ask the right questions about the use of technological or cyber power. It also reminds us that the tremendous power of technology must be harnessed for good; technology cannot be used to undermine democracy or support evil. And we need to persevere, to create the norms, to establish the guideposts that will allow us to use this power without fear while allowing creativity to flourish.

The challenges we face today in cyber warfare are quite different than those of the last century. But the core lessons I learned from my parents – resilience, perseverance and fortitude – are just as valuable today as in the dark days of WWII.