Holocaust survivors honor past

By JULIE KAY

Holocaust survivors Eric and Trudy Gidan will join other Jews worldwide in lighting one candle in their Hanukkah menorahs at sundown Dec. 23.

The lighting of the candles signifies tradition for the couple, members of Beth Shalom Synagogue and recently honored for their service and dedication by the State of Israel Bonds in New York City.

At 83, Eric Gidan, a German native, still remembers the Hanukkah spent at Dachau concentration camp where family memories were often too painful to recall.

There might have been a vague feeling that it was the time of year for Hanukkah, he said, "but there was nothing to celebrate with," he said shaking his head, "nothing."

"We didn't care what tomorrow brought," he recalled.

Seventy-nine-year-old Trudy Gidan, born in Holland, is a survivor of Theresienstadt concentration camp.

Jews were kept too busy working to think about any holiday observances, she said softly. "We were just trying to stay alive from day to day."

When we arrived (at the camp), it was Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. We went right to work. We were so busy, I don't remember any holiday. We didn't even know the days."

She didn't celebrate Hanukkah for two years after being liberated from the camp.

Modern menorahs light family's festival

Linda Dubois has been collecting menorahs for more than 10 years. They are displayed, year round.

Her children, Ari, Kupin, 10, and Kendall, Kupin, 6, each have their own menorah. Her stepchildren, Danielle, 7, and Benjamin, 9, are Catholic, but also enjoy participating in the Hanukkah lighting.

Her collection is more modern than the Gidans', she said. A musical menorah is usually the one lit for Hanukkah, she said.

There are several menorahs made by the children, fashioned out of clay, a sports menorah, and a geometric glass and marble menorah bought for its unique appearance.

An acrylic multi-colored menorah, nick named the "rainbow menorah," rounds out the collection.

Dubois said she has been drawn to lighting since childhood, "I grew up in Cleveland. We lit the candle at 5 or 5:30 in the evening, and I remember the snow falling. It was such a sight."

It's the warmth of the family celebration Dubois said she tries to carry over today, and it's the tradition of lighting the menorah that begins the nights of story-telling, songs and latkes (potato pancakes) in true Hanukkah fashion, she said.

Editor's note: The Advocate staff photographs by Mark Saltz.