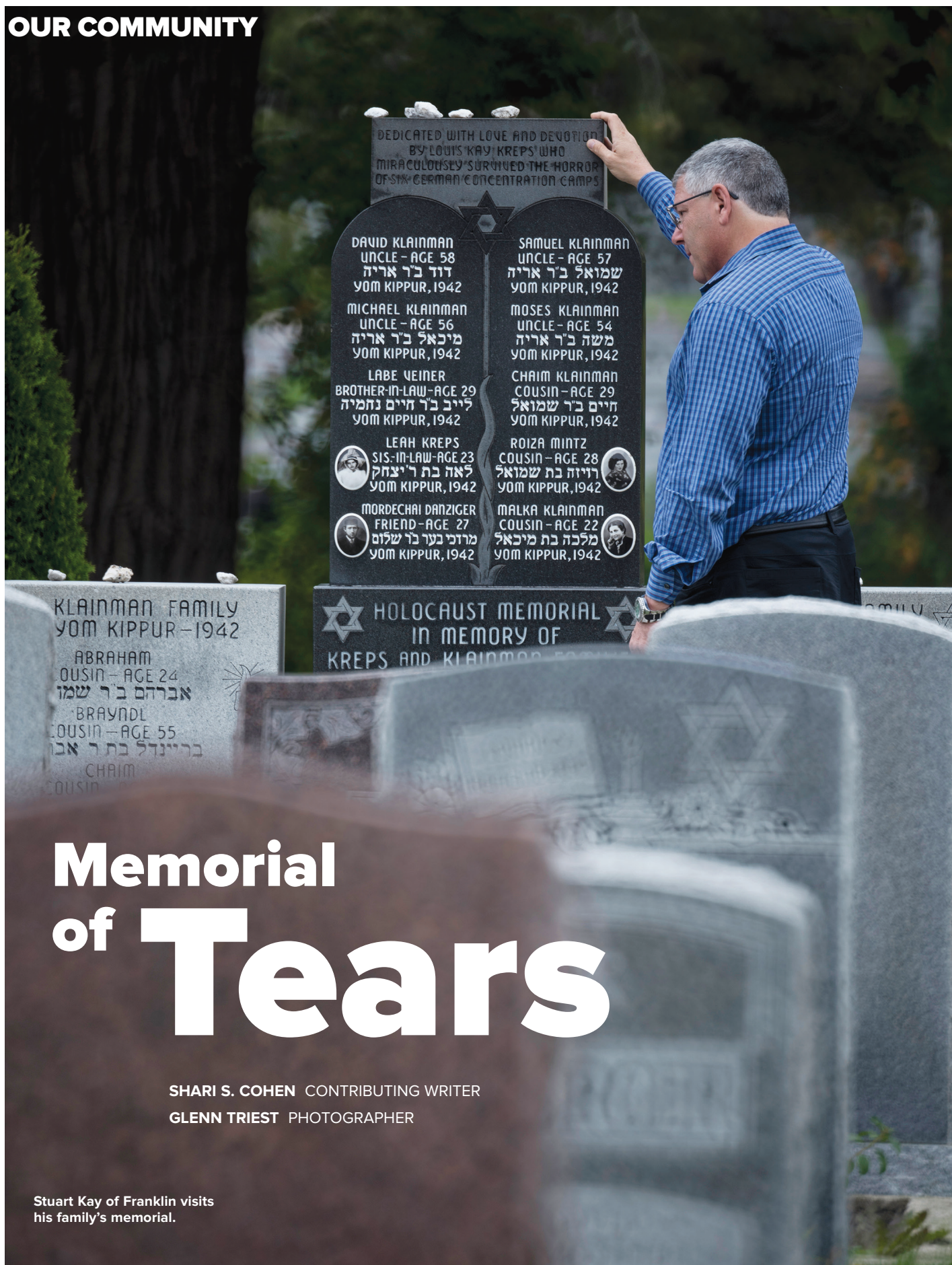




Memorial of Tears

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Stuart Kay of Franklin visits
his family's memorial.

Cemetery monument memorializes the Kay family and the graveless Holocaust victims of Wloszczowa, Poland.

The myriad of tombstones of Chesed Shel Emes Cemetery in Clinton Township are uniform in height and shape, lined up in even rows that mark the graves of hundreds of Jewish Detroiters.

But Section 18 has one tombstone unlike any other with several components — a tall centerpiece with two carved dark stones positioned one above the other, framed by two light-colored stones similar to the cemetery's gravestones. This is the Kay/Kreps monument created by Louis Kay to remember and honor his 200 family members and 800 other Jewish families of Wloszczowa, Poland, who were killed during the Holocaust.

Leybus Szyja Kreps was almost 14 when the Germans invaded Poland and took over his hometown in September 1939. Wloszczowa is located

in Kielce province, about 70 miles north of Krakow. According to *The Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos during the Holocaust* before World War II, the town had 2,700 Jewish residents — about one-half of its population. Kreps' parents had a grocery store in Wloszczowa, where the family had lived for 150 years, according to his adult children.

During the fall of 1942, Kreps' parents, six of his siblings and many other family and community members were transported to Treblinka and killed on Yom Kippur. Kreps and two of his brothers were saved from that fate as they had been sent to Skarzysko — a brutal labor camp in Poland.

The camp's German operators would ask new prisoners if anyone wanted to go home. Those who raised their hands to indicate yes, including Louis' brother Yisrael, were sent into the forest and shot. His brother, Shmuel, died from illness while at the camp during Pesach in 1943.

Kreps managed to survive more than three years of suffering in seven labor and concentration camps in Poland and Germany. His son Dr. Marc Kay, 66, who lives in Phoenix, said, "He survived in case there was a brother, and so there would be some Jews. No one could survive."

On April 11, 1945, Kreps was liberated by the Americans, and he then returned to Wloszczowa. Similar to other survivors' experiences, some former neighbors and townspeople were not happy to see them — preferring to keep the houses and businesses that they had taken over from Jewish

residents who were transported to concentration camps. Kreps had one bit of luck; he was able to retrieve family photos saved by a childhood

Louis Kay, who was named a JN Mitzvah Hero in 1989.



JN FILE PHOTO

friend. Many Holocaust survivors have no such family photos.

In 1949, the Joint Distribution Committee helped Kreps emigrate to the U.S. and he settled in Detroit. He changed his name to Louis Kay and began building a new life with Gladys Silverman, his American-born wife. Kay started off working in a factory and then as a scrap metal dealer, eventually opening a bottle recycling company which expanded over the years. The Kays had four children and lived in Oak Park.

'A PLACE TO GO'

"The Holocaust was very present in our house. One side of the family doesn't exist. There were pictures of his family on the wall. He would go to cemeteries, and there was nothing to go to," said son Marc.

"He needed a place to go," added Victor "Avi" Kay, 62, who lives in Jerusalem.

So in 1969, Kay had a stone created at Chesed Shel Emes listing the members of the Kreps and Klainman (his mother's maiden name) families who perished during World War II at the hand of the Nazis. Individual photos are encased next to the names of eight family members along with their ages at the time of death. (Photos weren't available for several family members.)

Part of the stone is shaped like the tablets of the Ten Commandments. Marc, who was 14 at the time, remembers other survivors coming from out of town for the monument's dedication in 1969. Stuart Kay, 58, who lives in Franklin, believes that this was the first personal Holocaust memorial in the U.S.

Visiting the cemetery monument

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KAY FAMILY

Louis Kay and his four siblings: Brothers Aaron and Szaya, Sister Rojza, nephew Zuchor and Louis (front right).

OUR COMMUNITY



Stuart Kay of Franklin visits his father, Louis Kay's grave

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was a frequent Kay family trip. Chesed Shel Emes has several memorial benches dedicated to the Jewish residents of communities that were decimated by the Nazis. Kay wanted to install a bench, but cemetery rules permitted memorial benches only for entire Jewish communities, not individual families.

Undaunted, Kay designed an addition to the existing monument — one that highlighted the 800 Jewish families from Wloszczowa who were killed by the Nazis. A stone bench was then installed at the plot and there was a dedication for the expanded monument in 1990.

Next to the Kay monument

is a burial plot for a fellow Holocaust survivor, a man whom Kay knew in Detroit. Despite some rancorous business dealings between them, when the man died, destitute and with no friends or relatives to bury him, Kay paid for his burial and held shivah for him at the Kay family home in Oak Park.

This was one of many of Louis Kay's good deeds remembered by family, former employees and friends. He helped individuals in need, regardless of their religion, race or personal circumstances. In 1989, he was recognized as a *Jewish News* Mitzvah Hero. Kay sold 10,000 trees for the Jewish National Fund through Detroit B'nai B'rith and was active in many charitable organizations, especially those supporting Israel. He received the State of Israel's New Life Award that

honors Holocaust survivors for major achievements.

The death of almost an entire family leaves an unimaginable burden of loss and sadness. But Louis Kay's survival meant that his four children (Rhonda, Marc, Avi and Stuart), their 10 children and four grandchildren will sustain the family name and help ensure the continuity of the Jewish community.

Marc Kay's son, Joshua, helped to bring about a state law mandating Holocaust education in Arizona. It was a difficult three-year effort led by local Holocaust survivors to ensure that the horrors of the Holocaust are known now and in the future.

Louis Kay died in 1999 at age 73. He and his wife, Gladys, are buried in graves that are adjacent to the Kay memorial monument. [In](#)

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