LIMMUD FESTIVAL 2026 • SUNDAY 14:00 – 15:00

Marching for the Living

Reflections on the 1988 March of the Living, Soviet Refuseniks, and Restored Jewish-Austrian Community

Presented by Robin Lansman • Sponsored in 1988 by Maidenhead Synagogue

PRESENTER & LINEAGE

From 1987 Soviet Refuseniks to Poland 1988

3rd-Gen Survivor

Shaped by maternal grandparents from Vienna and Germany whose lives and communities were uprooted.

USSR Refuseniks 1987

Visited Jewish families trapped behind closed Soviet borders—denied exit yet excluded at home.

Poland 1988

Generously sponsored by Maidenhead Synagogue to join the inaugural March of the Living.

PART I • APRIL 10–17, 1988 • NISSAN 5748

Key Stages of the 1988 Journey

A personal written account across Lublin, Majdanek, Krakow, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Warsaw, and Treblinka

THE 1988 ROUTE • PART I

Key Stages: Warsaw to Auschwitz-Birkenau

- **Arrival in Warsaw & Lublin:** Pre-war community of 42,000 reduced to 30 families, below a minyan.
- **Vernichtungslager Majdanek:** Preserved gas chambers, crematoria ovens, 18 watchtowers, and 7 tons of ash.
- **Krakow & Auschwitz-Birkenau:** Packed Kazimierz prayer halls prior to the three-mile march in falling snow.



Historic Warsaw Old Town, arrival point in April 1988

THE 1988 ROUTE • PART II

Key Stages: Ghetto, Treblinka & Heroism



Memorial monument at Okopowa Street Jewish Cemetery

- **Warsaw Ghetto Memorial:** 350,000 confined on 220 calories a day; paying tribute at 18 Miła Street and the Umschlagplatz.
- **Treblinka Forest:** 17,000 rough-hewn stones standing in silent memory of 800,000 murdered victims.
- **Heroism Quiz & Lessons:** Celebrating Jewish wartime resistance and the urgency of communal unity.

APRIL 12, 1988 • LUBLIN

A Vanished Center of Torah Learning

- **42,000 to 30 families:** Once a thriving hub of Polish Jewry, left without enough men to form a minyan.
- **Lone caretaker:** Concentration camp survivor tending tombstones dating back to 1535 and 1541.
- **Former Yeshiva:** Medical school students leaning from windows to mock Jewish visitors reading the plaque.



Historic Old Town skyline and gateway in Lublin

VERNICHTUNGSLAGER MAJDANEK

Preserved Architecture & Field Notes



Mausoleum dome covering over 7 tons of human ashes

- **700-acre extermination camp:** 350,000 murdered; surrounded by 18 watchtowers ironically echoing *Chai* (Life).
- **Mausoleum dome:** Sheltering a vast pit holding over 7 tons of human ashes on the site of the open pyre.
- **Field pencil note:** Rose beds thriving on ash-fed soil beside the front gate and everyday bus stop.

KAZIMIERZ TO OŚWIĘCIM

Packed Shuls Before the Railway Tracks

- **Kazimierz prayer halls:** Restored historic shuls filled with young Jewish visitors from across the globe.
- **Bleak transit:** A seven-hour journey through torrential rain and industrial Silesia.
- **Parallel tracks:** Active railway line running right beside the road approaching Oświęcim.

Historic cobblestone street in Kazimierz Krakow

Historic streets of Kazimierz, Krakow's Jewish quarter

THE INAUGURAL MARCH

Three Miles Through Falling Snow

1,500 young Jewish participants walking from Auschwitz I to Birkenau

AUSCHWITZ I TO BIRKENAU

Blue Jackets & Israeli Flags in Silence



Walking the three-mile route between Auschwitz I and Birkenau

- **1,500 youth:** Wearing blue Magen David coats past the iron *Arbeit Macht Frei* gateway.
- **Silent witness:** Local townspeople watching from behind net curtains as workmen stood still.
- **Hatikvah at Birkenau:** Survivors weeping openly as Kaddish and Hatikvah echoed across the ruins.

AUSCHWITZ I EXHIBITIONS

Personal Relics & Cold Bureaucracy

- **7 tonnes of human hair:** Plaited braids behind glass alongside IG Farben Zyklon-B order forms.
- **Suitcase *M. Frank*:** Marked *Holland, 1915* among ceiling-high mounds of confiscated luggage.
- **1,000 per barrack:** Three-tier wooden bunks beneath the slogan *Eine Laus – dein Tod*.



Brick barracks and perimeter fence at Auschwitz-Birkenau

WARSAW & TREBLINKA

Stones in the Forest Where 800,000 Perished


Granite memorial stones at Treblinka surrounded by pine forest

- **Warsaw Ghetto:** 18 Miła Street command bunker and the newly built marble Umschlagplatz monument.
- **800,000 victims:** Treblinka bulldozed and planted with pine trees to conceal industrial mass murder.
- **Kaddish in silence:** Standing around the symbolic mass grave pit among 17,000 memorial stones.

WARSAW CONVENTION CENTRE • LIVE BROADCAST

Remembering Jewish Wartime Heroism

- **12 global finalists:** Tested live on Israeli television on WWII Jewish resistance and courage.
- **Beyond victimhood:** Honoring Jewish fighters and rescuers too often forgotten in popular memory.
- **Singing in Warsaw:** Youth singing and dancing in the streets outside under watchful police eyes.



Archival gathering celebrating Jewish cultural resilience in Warsaw

1988 MEMOIR TAKEAWAYS

Lessons to Be Learnt

Modern Danger

Systematic genocide executed with modern technology would leave zero survivors.

Jewish Unity

Solidarity across Orthodox and Progressive communities in good times, not only in crisis.

Am Yisrael Chai

A secure, defensible State of Israel anchors Jewish freedom and survival.

1987 USSR TO 2026

Contribution, Conditional Belonging & Security

> *"Jews give deeply to every society, yet vocal minorities still render belonging conditional."*
>
> **Reflection on Soviet Refuseniks & Contemporary Antisemitism**

- **Trapped behind borders:** 1987 Refuseniks denied exit yet excluded from full civic life.
- **Rising hostility:** Loud minorities testing Jewish safety across nations today.
- **Secure Israel:** An essential pillar for Jewish dignity and everyday resilience.

RECLAIMING HERITAGE • 2026

Becoming a Jewish Austrian

Identity Reclaimed

Becoming a *Jewish Austrian*, rather than merely acquiring a travel document.

Dec 10 Archive

Recording oral-history interviews alongside fellow descendants of Vienna and Germany.

Restored Network

Reconnecting strangers whose families and vibrant communities were once torn apart.

OPEN CONVERSATION

Themes for Discussion

1. **Physical Witness:** How does standing in Auschwitz in 1988 compare to how we transmit memory today?

2. **Reclaiming Citizenship:** What does becoming a Jewish Austrian mean across generations?

3. **Everyday Resilience:** How do Jewish unity across denominations and a secure Israel sustain us today?

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Questions & Discussion

Thank you for joining this session. With enduring gratitude to Maidenhead Synagogue for sponsoring my 1988 journey to Poland.