



Dr. Leon Chameides, MD.

A TRIBUTE FROM DR. LEON CHAMEIDES

One of the More than 150 Individuals Sheltered by Archbishop Sheptytsky

Dr. Chameides was born in 1935. During the Holocaust he was sheltered by Archbishop Sheptytsky. Emigrating to the United States after the War, he studied medicine and went on to become founding chair of Pediatric Cardiology at Hartford Hospital and the Connecticut Children's Hospital.

Thank you very much for inviting me to participate on this festive occasion when the Ukrainian community of Canada, through this morning's resolution in Parliament, is honouring the memory of one of the great leaders and heroes of the 20th century, Metropolitan Andrei Sheptycky.

I owe my life to his courage and brotherly love. In our people's darkest hour, forsaken by all, Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, the Uniate Church that he headed, and the Brothers of the Studite Order, had the courage to answer in the affirmative the ancient Biblical question, "Hashomer achi anochi?" "Am I my brother's keeper?"

I was born in Katowice, Poland, where my father, Rabbi Kalman Chameides, served as community Rabbi. Days before the outbreak of the war, our family fled eastward to the Lviv region, to the small town of Shchirits, where my father was born and where his family still lived.

On August 12, 1942 my father, clearly seeing what was in store for us, with the help of the Rev. Dr. Gabriel Kostelnik, approached Metropolitan Sheptytsky about hiding his two sons, aged 7 and 9. The Metropolitan was at first concerned about hiding boys, who could be easily identified as Jews, but after consulting with his brother, Klementi, now Blessed Klementi, and with Sister Josepha, he agreed. I was much too young to understand it then, but what incredible courage as well as a sense of desperation it must have taken for my parents to send their two children away into a Christian environment! I was taken to *Sviatyi Yur* (St. George's Cathedral residence) in the fall of 1942. I met the Metropolitan in his library. He was sitting in a wheelchair covered with a blanket. He motioned me to come forward and he patted my head. He said something but I do not remember what.

I suddenly found myself, at the age of 7, bereft of everything and everyone familiar to me. I was given a new name, Levko Chaminskyi, a new religion, and I was taught new prayers in Church Slavonic. I was taught to speak Ukrainian, and forbidden to speak a word about my past or my family. I had to be careful never to bathe or go to the toilet with other boys.

I spent the next two years in the Studite monastery in Univ. During that time, Brother Daniel Temchyna, who was in charge of the monastery orphanage, Brother Marko Stek, who would move me whenever there was a German raid (sometimes in the middle of the night) and other priests – whose names are unknown to me – constantly risked their lives, because the penalty for hiding a Jew was death.

The monastery in Univ was self-sustaining, and all the children, in addition to going to school, had farm chores. Because it was self-sustaining, we did not suffer hunger until the middle of 1943, when the Germans confiscated our animals and metal farm equipment. There were about 26 children in the monastery and three of us were Jewish. In addition, and unknown to us, our schoolmaster, whose name was Mikola Dyuk, hid another little boy with his mother and aunt in his attic. After many years of searching, I was finally able to find the others about 25 years ago. Dorko Brorowicki, whose real name is Oded Amarant, was reunited with his parents in Israel, where he works as an engineer. Danylo Czerwinski, whose real name is Daniel Adam Rotfeld, remained in the monastery because his entire family was murdered and no one claimed him. He was repatriated to an orphanage in Poland, proved to be an outstanding student, and eventually became Foreign Minister of Poland and a Professor of Foreign Affairs. He was with SIPRI, a Swedish disarmament organization, for an unprecedented 10 years, and today is Poland's negotiator of difficult issues, especially with Russia. The little boy I told you about who was hidden in our school's attic became Roald Hoffman, Professor of Chemistry at Cornell University, a Nobel Laureate in Chemistry, and a published poet and playwright.

As a result of the Metropolitan's leadership and heroism, historians tell us that 150 Jewish lives were saved. To save that many lives must have taken the silent cooperation of hundreds of priests and their households. And yet, despite the danger, there was not a single case of betrayal and, after our liberation in 1944, not a single case of a child being kept by the Church against the family's wishes.

The Talmud tells us that the saving of a single life is equivalent to saving the whole world. I would amend that: the saving of a single life is equivalent to saving many worlds. By saving the life of one 7-year-old boy, they saved the worlds of my three children, the worlds of my seven grandchildren, and the worlds of an unknown number of descendants yet to come.

I want to conclude by speaking with you from the depth of my heart – *z moyeyi dushi*. I am in complete agreement with the mission of the Ukrainian Jewish Encounter: "To deepen understanding of the breadth, complexity, and diversity of Ukrainian Jewish relations over the centuries, with a view to the future." You have clearly understood that the future is built on a foundation of the past. National memory consists of perceptions of events and personalities and it is therefore critical to examine these, together and honestly, so as to increase the storehouse of shared national memories. The richer that storehouse, the closer will be the relationship between our two peoples. History has thrust me in the role of being a witness to both the worst and the best aspects of this relationship. I carry within my soul the burden of antagonistic feelings: on the one hand, feelings of betrayal by our Ukrainian neighbors as the first pogrom I experienced was not at the hands of the Germans but those of our neighbors; on the other hand, feelings of everlasting gratitude. If the UJE approaches our mutual history with honesty, you will surely succeed, and I wish you Godspeed.



Clement (Klymentii) Sheptytsky, brother of Metropolitan Andrei and superior of the Studite Monks. Clement died in 1951 after several years in Soviet exile.