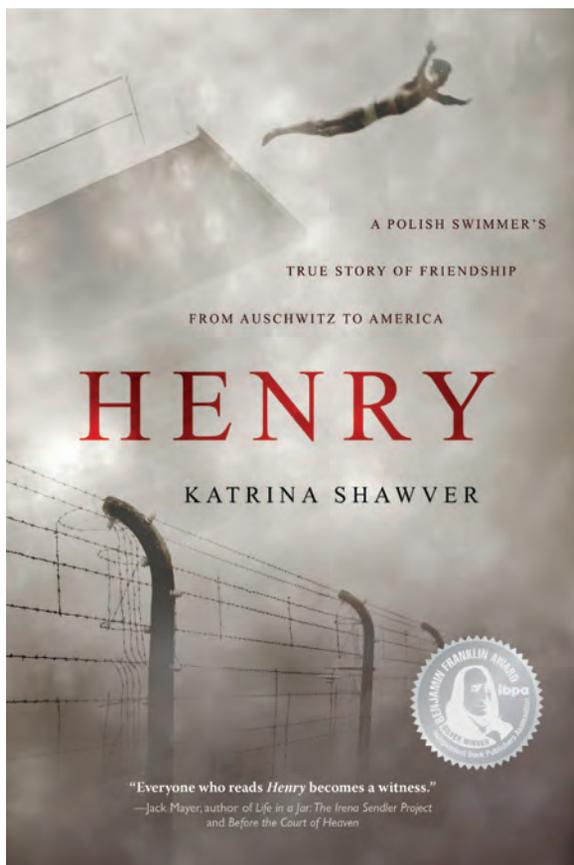


# PUTTING PEN TO PAPER

Local author Katrina Shawver shares the evolution of bringing a Holocaust survivor's story to life

BY HEATHER LYNN HORVAT



**Katrina Shawver**, author of *Henry: A Polish Swimmer's True Story of Friendship from Auschwitz to America*, is curious by nature, but did not initially set out to write a book.

Without ever taking a college journalism class, Shawver landed a job with *The Arizona Republic* after writing a letter to the editor in response to a story published by the newspaper. She stayed with the newspaper for more than 11 years and wrote hundreds of columns, including a short piece on Henry Zguda, a champion swimmer who was imprisoned for three years in Auschwitz and Buchenwald as a Polish political prisoner.

"After that initial interview for the newspaper, I knew there was a bigger story. Henry made such an impression on me in a short time, and I became friends with him," Shawver says. "You don't spend so much time writing someone else's story unless you like the person."

Shawver says that meeting Henry was a gift from the universe and something that was meant to happen. She met with him twice a week for six months, recording his stories.

Henry and his wife, Nancy, did not have any close relatives to share these stories with and if it were not for Shawver, they might have been lost forever. "Henry was one of a kind. I was simply the messenger," she says.

Henry passed away in 2003, a year after they met. But it was not until 2010 that Shawver began to write his story in earnest. After transcribing his recorded interviews, she focused on compiling one story at a time. Through many years of research, she was able to verify 95 percent of Henry's stories of his camp experiences, exactly as he told them. In 2014, she experienced an aha moment when she located numerous documents with the International Tracing Service on Henry's experiences at Auschwitz and Buchenwald.

"Curiosity makes a good writer. You have to dig for the facts below what people tell you at face value," says Shawver, also sharing some sage advice for aspiring writers: To simply sit down and write. "Writing is hard work. It's like going to the gym. Give yourself permission to write badly, and keep going. Edits come later."

Shawver is working on her next book while continuing to write on her blog and for her monthly newsletter. She also teaches writing workshops and does speaking engagements at libraries, book festivals, book clubs, social organizations, and bookstores. Her book, *Henry*, can be purchased at various bookstores around the Valley, including both locations of Changing Hands. *Henry* is also available at local libraries and through the Arizona Talking Book Library community.

This month, Shawver will be at Desert Foothills Library in Cave Creek on Aug. 13 from 2 to 3:30 p.m. for an author talk and book signing. To learn more, visit [www.katrinashawver.com](http://www.katrinashawver.com).