TRIBUTE TO JACK TRAMEL
HON. TOM LANTOS
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Thursday, April 23, 1998

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, today representatives of the Congress, the Administration, and the Supreme Court gathered in the Great Rotunda of this historic building for the National Civic Commemoration to remember the victims of the Holocaust. This annual national memorial service pays tribute to the six million Jews who died through senseless and systematic Nazi terror and brutality. At this somber commemoration, we also honored those heroic American and other Allied forces who liberated the Nazi concentration camps over half a century ago.

Mr. Speaker, this past week Fortune Magazine (April 13, 1998) devoted several pages to an article entitled “Everything in History was Against Them,” which profiles five survivors of Nazi savagery who lived in the United States, penniless and built fortunes here in their adopted homeland. It is significant, Mr. Speaker, that four of these five are residents of my home state of California. Mr. Jack Tramiel of the San Francisco Bay Area, was one of the pioneers that Fortune Magazine selected to highlight in this extraordinary article, and I want to pay tribute to him today.

Jack Tramiel, like the other four singled out by Fortune Magazine, has a unique story, but there are common threads to these five tales of personal success. The story of the penniless immigrant who succeeds in America is a familiar theme in our nation’s lore, but these stories involve a degree of courage and determination unmatched in the most inspiring of Horatio Alger’s stories.

These men were, in the words of author Carol J. Loomis, “Holocaust survivors in the most rigorous sense,” they “actually experienced the most awful horrors of the Holocaust, enduring a Nazi death camp or a concentration camp or one of the ghettos that were essentially holding pens for those camps.” They picked themselves up “from the very cruelest of circumstances, they traveled to America and prospered as businessmen. They did it, to borrow a phrase from Elle Wiesel, when everything in history was against them.” They were teenagers or younger when World War II began. They lost six years of their youth and six years of education. “They were deprived of liberty and shorn of dignity. All lost relatives, and most lost one or both parents. Each . . . was forced to live constantly with violent reminders of the Holocaust that next time he might be ‘thumbed’ not into a line of prisoners allowed to live, but into another line headed for the gas chambers.” Through luck and the sheer will to survive, these were some of the very fortunate who lived to tell the story of that horror.

The second part of their stories is also similar—a variant of the American dream. These courageous men came to the United States with “little English and less money.” Despite their lack of friends and mentors, they found the drive to succeed. As Loomis notes, “many millions were wagered by the heavy, exhausting battleground of the Holocaust had the same opportunities and never reached out of seize them as these men did.” Their success in view of the immense obstacles that impeded their path makes their stories all the more remarkable.

One other element that is also common to these five outstanding business leaders—they are “Founders” of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum here in Washington. They have shown a strong commitment to remembering the brutal horrors of the Holocaust, paying honor to its victims, and working to prevent the repetition of this vicious inhumanity.

Mr. Speaker, Jack Tramiel is one of the five Holocaust survivors and leading American entrepreneurs highlighted in this article. Jack began as a typewriter repairman and moved on to establish his own firm, Commodore, which initially manufactured typewriters and adding machines. In 1976 he moved into the field of computers and took Commodore to $700 million in sales in 1983. As we here in the Congress mark the annual Days of Remembrance in honor of the victims of Nazi terror, I am inserting the profile of Jack Tramiel from Fortune Magazine be placed in the RECORD.

Jack Tramiel—Silicon Valley Founder, Commodore Intl.

Only 10 when the Nazis marched into his city of Lodz, Poland, in 1942, Jack Tramiel (then named Idek Tramski) witnessed a kid’s thrilled reaction to the sheer spectacle of the scene: weapons glinting in the sun, soldiers goose-stepping, planes overhead. “It was a fantastic thing,” he remembers.

Reality crashed down after that. Lodz’s Jews—one-third of the city’s 600,000 people—were gathered out of their homes into a crowded ghetto. For nearly five years Jack (an only child) and his parents lived there in one room, scavenged for food, and worked—his father at shoemaking, Jack at a pants factory. The faces that the Tramiels saw in the ghetto changed constantly: Jews were sent to Germany to better themselves, others periodically delivered to Auschwitz for extermination—and no doubt extermination. In August 1944 the Tramiels themselves were herded into railroad cars, told they were going to Germany to better themselves, and instead shipped to Auschwitz. Jack’s vivid memory of the trip is that each person received a whole loaf of bread as a ration—a feast beyond his imagi-

nation. At journey’s end, the men were sepa-

rated from the women (at which point Jack lost track of his mother) and then them-

selves split into two groups, one permitted for the time being to remain in Auschwitz’s gas chambers. Jack and his fa-

ther were thumbed into the group that sur-

vived.

A few weeks later, Jack and his father were “examined” by the notorious Dr. Josef Mengele and thumbed again into a survivors line. “What do you mean—examined?” Tramiel is asked. “They were transported on a spot job outside Hanover, Germany, and then thumbed to building a concentration camp into whose barracks they themselves moved. In weather that was often bitter cold, they worked in thin, pa-

jama-like garments, and they grew increas-

ingly emaciated on a deprivation diet: water “soup” and bread in the morning, and a potato, bread, and more “soup” at night.

By December 1944 the Tramiels were assigned to different work crews and seeing
each other only occasionally. At one of their meetings the father told the son that many young people in the camp were managing to smuggle food to their elders—and why hadn’t Jack offered to help his father? Such stories he studied for days how to deal with an electric fence that stood between him and an SS kitchen and finally succeeded in burrowing his way in to steal food—potato and some peels. But when he got the food to his father, malnutrition had gripped the older man and grossly swollen his body. He could not lift it after, had collapsed, and Jack’s camp’s infirmary. Later, Jack learned that the death was directly caused by an injection of gasoline into his father’s veins.

As the Spring turned into the spring of 1945, Jack Tramiel himself grew increasingly fatalistic. But then a strange end-of-the-war tableau unfolded. First, the Germans vanished from the camp; second, the Red Cross moved in briefly, overfed the prisoners to the point that some died, and then left; third, the Germans returned and then vanished again. On their heels came two American soldiers—‘‘20-foot-tall black men, the first blacks I’d ever seen,’’ says Tramiel—who looted the camp, pillaging the prisoners hiding beneath the straw of their bunks, said something in English that one Jew gleaned as ‘‘More Americans will be coming in here soon and a tank rolled up; it stood a Jewish chaplain in dress uniform, who declared in Yiddish: ‘‘You are free,’’ and told the tank to move on. These were troops of the American Army. The month was April 1945, and Tramiel was 16.

Tramiel, today 69 and a fireplug in build, stayed in Europe for more than two years after liberation. He told many of his childhood and early adulthood selections of those days concern food: how he tricked his way into a sanitarium to a rich, and shamelessly fattening, diet; how he learned to work in the American Army kitchen; how he did odd jobs for ‘‘money or food.’’ But he also learned during this time that his mother was alive and back again in Lodz. He saw her there but then left, resolved by that time to marry a concentration-camp survivor he’d met, Helen Goldgrub, and go with her to the U.S.

The two wed in Germany in July 1947. They got to the U.S. separately, though—he first, in November of that year. His confidence was strengthened by what he’d survived, bordering on hubris: ‘‘I figured I could handle almost anything,’’ he says. He started out living in Berlin, then moved there in January 1948 on a scholarship to New York City; got a job as a handyman at a Fifth Avenue lamp store; learned English from American movies; and at their end pigged out on chocolate instead of eating regular dinners.

Then, in early 1948, he did the improbable, joining the U.S. Army. By the time he left it four years later, he’d been reunited with his wife and fathered a son (the first of three). The Army had also pointed him to a career in computing. ‘‘I figured I had my education and my experience and it stood a Jewish chaplain in dress uniform, who declared in Yiddish: ‘‘You are free,’’ and told the tank to move on. These were troops of the American Army. The month was April 1945, and Tramiel was 16.

Then, in early 1984, just as annual sales were climbing above $1 billion, Tramiel clashed with a Commodore stockholder mightier than he, Irving Gould—and when the showdown was over in December, the nature of their quarrel was never publicly disclosed. Today, however, Tramiel says he wanted to ‘‘grow’’ the company, and Gould didn’t.

Commodore was really Tramiel’s last hurrah. True, he surfaced again quickly in the computer industry, agreeing later in 1984 to take over—for a pittance—Warner Communications’ foundering Atari operation. But in a business changing convulsively as IBM brought out its PC and the clones marched in, Atari was a loser and ultimately a venture into which Tramiel was unwilling to sink big money. Eventually he folded Atari in 1985, a $3 million stock, a few dollars a share. Tramiel himself disbanded. His Commodore empire had capitulated the finance business, was in the process of selling them at prices that Commodore couldn’t match.

With Commodore again reeling, Tramiel vowed never again to be at the mercy of a vital supplier. In 1975 he joined a small Massachusetts company called Commodore, which he had been approached by: it had a chip that was effectively a microprocessor. Jolly good, thought Tramiel, not so much thought as word. And indeed it was: 40 percent of all the personal computers sold in 1983 was a Commodore, and a few months later, 30 percent of the PC market was a Commodore. Naturally, charity fundraisers took Tramiel up. When those for the Holocaust Memorial Museum appeared, he at first thought of it as just one more philanthropic cause to be supported. But his wife, Helen, 69, who spent her concentration camp days at Bergen-Belsen, is intensely aware that by her husband’s standards, millions of other Jews did not. ‘‘No,’’ she said admantly, ‘‘for this one we have to go out all.”

INTRODUCTION OF POSTAL SERVICE SAFETY AND HEALTH PROMOTION ACT

HON. JAMES C. GREENWOOD OF PENNSYLVANIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, April 23, 1998

Mr. GREENWOOD. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to treat the U.S. Postal Service the same as any private employer under the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

The fact that the Postal Service has not been covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Act in the same way as private employers—denuding private employers with whom the Postal Service directly competes for business—is apparently due to the fact that both the Occupational Safety and Health Act and the Postal Reorganization Act were being considered at the same time by Congress, and most observers believed that any attempt to cover the Postal Service with the Occupational Safety and Health Act would have been futile. But then, in early 1984, just as annual sales were climbing above $1 billion, Tramiel clashed with a Commodore stockholder mightier than he, Irving Gould—and when the showdown was over in December, the nature of their quarrel was never publicly disclosed. Today, however, Tramiel says he wanted to ‘‘grow’’ the company, and Gould didn’t.

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Of course, there are always exceptions to this rule. IBM, for example, has always been a major player in the computer industry, and it has always dominated the market. IBM’s success is due in part to its ability to consistently produce high-quality, reliable computers. Another factor is its strong brand recognition, which has helped it to establish itself as a leader in the industry. IBM’s strategy has been to focus on innovation and product development, rather than on cost cutting. This has allowed the company to maintain its reputation for quality and reliability, even as other companies have struggled to keep up.

In terms of the future of the computer industry, it is likely that we will see continued growth in the use of mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. These devices are becoming more powerful and affordable, and they are increasingly being used for a wide range of tasks. It is also likely that we will see continued growth in the use of cloud computing, which allows users to store and access their data over the internet. This has the potential to simplify many aspects of computing, making it easier for users to access and manage their data.

Overall, the computer industry is a dynamic and fast-moving field, with constant innovation and change. It is likely that we will see continued growth and development in the coming years, as new technologies emerge and the industry adapts to meet the changing needs of users.