



## Gift of Life

*Henri Landwirth, J. P. Hendricks*

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## **Gift of Life** Henri Landwirth, J. P. Hendricks

This is a memoir of a philanthropist and Holocaust survivor who started two charitable organizations: Give Kids the World foundation and Dignity U Wear charity. Landwirth is Jewish and lived in a ghetto in Krakow, Poland, during the Nazi Regime. Between the ages of 13 and 18, he was shuttled between Nazi death camps and labor camps. His father was killed and buried in a mass grave near Radom. At the end of World War II, Henri was marched into the woods to be shot, but a Nazi soldier spared his life and told him to run. "I never knew what my life would be like," he says. "Frankly, I didn't know if I would live." Landwirth, originally a native of Belgium, left Europe after the war, arriving in the United States with only US\$ 20 in his pocket. Soon after settling into New York, he received what he thought was a welcome letter from the president. It was a draft notice. He served in the U.S. Army, learning English along the way, and used his GI Bill benefits to take a course in hotel management. He went on to earn a job at a New York hotel, working in every capacity available. In 1954, he moved to Florida and managed the 100-room Starlite Motel in Cocoa Beach near Cape Canaveral. During these early days of U.S. space exploration, the original Mercury Seven astronauts lived at the Starlite Motel, giving Landwirth the opportunity to build friendships with the astronauts, as well as with network news anchor Walter Cronkite. During the 1970s, Landwirth founded the Fanny Landwirth Foundation in honor of his mother. The foundation's work resulted in the construction of a senior citizens center and a school in Orlando. He also created a scholarship program for underprivileged children in Israel. The foundation's work continues today.

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