

HENRI LANDWIRTH

Like the special children Give Kids The World Village serves, its founder, Henri Landwirth, a Holocaust survivor, knew all too well what it was like to have childhood taken away. Born in Antwerp, Belgium, in 1927, Henri spent his youth in the Nazi death and labor camps during World War II, including Auschwitz and Mauthausen after being separated from his family. By war's end, both of his parents had been killed but, miraculously, Henri and his twin sister, Margot, survived and were reunited.

Henri came to America with \$20 in his pocket and little knowledge of the English language. Soon after, he was drafted to serve in the Army. Henri used his GI benefits to learn hotel management and landed a position in a hotel, taking every opportunity to learn each job in the industry. This first job became a lifelong career.

Landwirth moved to Florida in 1954 and began to manage the 100-room Starlight Motel in Cocoa Beach, near Cape Canaveral. Later as the owner of a Holiday Inn near Walt Disney World Resort he was often asked to provide free accommodations to critically ill children on their wish trips to the theme parks. He always said yes.

After his retirement, Henri devoted himself to improving the lives of those in need by starting numerous foundations and nonprofit organizations including Give Kids The World in 1986. "I never had any control over my life as a child," he once said. "I think that is what inspired me to do what I'm doing, to thank you for this life I have. And with God's help, I'll be able to continue serving...for as long as I'm needed..."

Henri Landwirth received numerous honors throughout his lifetime include being named one of the 12 Most Caring Individuals in America by the Caring Institute, Humanitarian of the Year by Parents Magazine, and Floridian of the Year by the Orlando Sentinel. He received an honorary doctorate of Humane Letters from the University of Cincinnati and was invited to carry the Olympic torch twice.

Henri passed away in 2018. His life and the story of Give Kids The World are chronicled in his book, Gift of Life, which was published in 1996.

Give Kids The World Village®

