LIVIU LIBRESCU WITH WIFE MARLENA. HE BARRICADED HIS CLASSROOM DOOR SO STUDENTS COULD ESCAPE

THE VICTIMS

By Richard Alleyne
and Felix Lowe

A HOLOCAUST survivor who escaped communism for a new life in the West emerged yesterday as a hero in the Virginia Tech killings.

Liviu Librescu, 76, who had taught engineering science and mathematics at the university for 20 years, gave his life so that others could escape from the gunman, survivors said yesterday.

According to witnesses, the Romanian-born lecturer barricaded the door of his classroom against the killer and told his students to jump from the second-floor window. Many broke their legs in the fall but survived. Prof Librescu, however, was shot dead as he held the door.

Yesterday an impromptu shrine was set up on the campus, with flowers and his picture.

"He was an exceptionally tolerant man who mentored scholars from all over our troubled world," Ishwar Puri, his department head, said.

Many of the students who survived sent emails to his widow, Marlena, telling how he saved their lives.

His son Joe said: "My father blocked the doorway with his body and asked the students to flee."

When Romania joined forces with Nazi Germany in the Second World War, Prof Librescu was interned in a labour camp in Transnistria and then deported with his family and thousands of other Jews to a ghetto in the city of Focsani.

As a successful engineer under the post-war Communist government, Prof Librescu found work at Romania's aerospace agency. But his career was blocked in the 1970s because he refused to swear allegiance to the regime and he was later fired when he requested permission to move to Israel.

After an intervention by the Israeli prime minister Menachem Begin, the family moved to Israel in 1978, and in 1986, to America.

His widow said yesterday: "I lost my best friend. He was a great person, who loved teaching more than anything." His death was also mourned in Romania.

"It is a great loss," said Ecaterina Andronescu, rector of the Polytechnic University in Bucharest, where Librescu graduated in mechanics and aviation construction in 1953.

"We have immense consideration for the way he reacted and defended his students with his life."

Professor who escaped Nazi death camps gave his life to save students

Liviu Librescu

THE PROFESSOR

The 76-year-old professor of engineering, pictured right with his wife, Marlina, died saving the lives of several of his students by blocking his classroom's doorway as Cho approached. His actions allowed students to climb on to a window ledge and jump to relative safety.

His son Joe, who lives in Tel Aviv, Israel, said: "My father blocked the doorway with his body and asked the students to jump. Students started opening windows and jumping out. His work was his life in a sense."

It was a brutal end to a life scarred by violence, murder and oppression. When Romania joined forces with Nazi Germany in the Second World War, he was interned in a labour camp in Moldova and then deported along with his family and thousands of other Jews to a central ghetto in the city of Focsani, Romania.

He avoided being transported to the death camps with his family when a shipment of Jews from his native Romania was held back from the capital, Bucharest, in 1944 because the country changed allegiances. According to a report by the Romanian government in 2004, between 280,000 and 380,000 Jews were killed by Romania's Nazi-allied regime.

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Professor Librescu eventually emigrated to Israel in 1978 with his wife. He moved to Virginia in 1985 and received several grants from Nasa to further his research. His daughter-in-law, Ayala Librescu, said: "He has been teaching there for 20 years and was a senior world-renowned lecturer. He is the professor with the highest number of publications in the history of Virginia Tech." Professor Librescu's second son, Arie, told *The Jerusalem Post* that his father had been an "ambassador" for Israel in a community with many Muslim residents.

The rector of the Polytechnic University in Bucharest, Ecaterina Andronescu, from where Professor Librescu graduated in 1953, said: "It is a great loss. We have immense consideration for the way he reacted and defended his students with his life."