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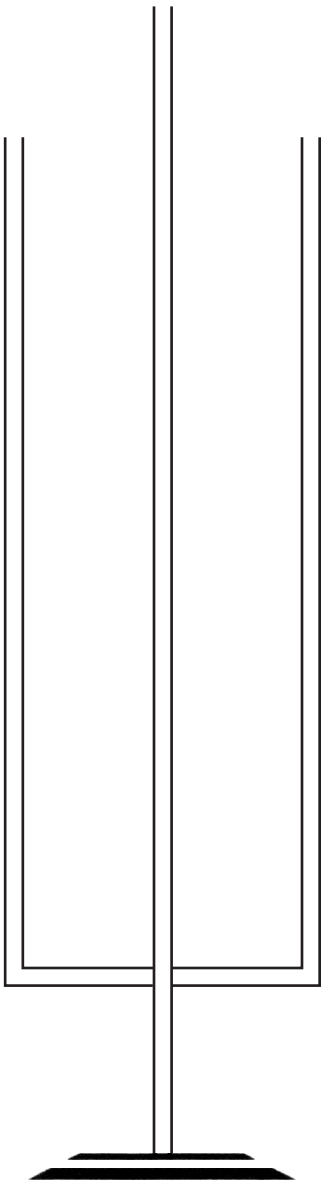

In memory of

Henry I. Rothman ז״ל

and

Bertha G. Rothman ע״ה

לחמו מלחמות ה׳

"who lived and fought
for Torah-true Judaism"

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PRISM
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL
FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATORS

PRISM: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Educators is a publication of the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration at Yeshiva University. Copies are available upon request. Contact prism@yu.edu to order.

EDUCATORS, HISTORIANS, PSYCHOLOGISTS, THEOLOGIANS, ARTISTS, WRITERS, POETS, AND OTHER INTERESTED AUTHORS ARE INVITED TO SUBMIT MANUSCRIPTS OR ARTWORK ON ALL ASPECTS OF THE HOLOCAUST EXPERIENCE.

Submissions due July 15, 2019.

KEEP IN MIND:

- Submissions must be emailed to prism@yu.edu in Microsoft Word, using Times New Roman 12 font type, double-spaced, justified, and paginated. The American Psychological Association (APA) *Publication Manual* (6th Ed.) is Yeshiva University's required reference guide for publications.
- Poetry submissions must be sent to **Dr. Charles Adès Fishman**, our poetry editor, at carolus@optimum.net. Poetry should be single-spaced. Include your name and email address on each poem.
- Photos and artwork must be attached as separate JPEG or TIFF files and accompanied by permissions and captions. All digital image files need to be a minimum of 5x7 inches and 300-600 dpi. Essays accompanied by documentary photos and artwork are given special consideration.
- Length of manuscript may vary; we seek essays from 4 to 14 double-spaced pages.
- Each issue, including all photos, will be available as a PDF on our web site, yu.edu/azrieli/research/prism-journal/, so permissions must include rights for online as well as print publication.

CONTACT DR. KAREN SHAWN AT SHAWN@YU.EDU WITH QUESTIONS, SUGGESTIONS, AND/OR QUERIES.

PRISM: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Educators is a peer-reviewed annual. Acceptance of manuscripts for publication depends on the following factors: sound scholarship; originality; clear, concise, and engaging writing; relevance to theme; value and interest to audience of educators; and adherence to style guidelines. We do not publish previously published essays unless prior approval from the *PRISM* editors has been granted.

The content of *PRISM* reflects the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of the Azrieli Graduate School and Yeshiva University.

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Introduction

When we called for papers on the theme of turning points, moments that changed a person, a family, a town, a country, or the world itself, we envisioned multiple submissions from historians about the April 1, 1933, boycott; the May book-burnings, the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, the 1936 Olympics, the Evian Conference, and of course, *Kristallnacht*, a pivotal event with such ramifications that Michael Berenbaum has called it "the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end."

While a small number of those essays came to us, we received an overwhelming number of poems, art works, and narratives, submissions from survivors, children of survivors, interviewers, artists, and poets who had a personal story to tell, who captured our theme exactly by sharing instances of understanding, grief, confusion, shock, loss, or simply reflection on what Lawrence L. Langer has called moments of "optionless anguish" that would forever shadow the lives of those who experienced them.

We do feature a submission by historian Rafael Medoff on the effects of three plays written and produced by Ben Hecht; an analysis of a graphic novel about pivotal moments in the life of a ghetto artist by our art editor, Pnina Rosenberg; and a fascinating look by Nathalie Ross at the pivotal and private moments afforded by mikveh use in the ghetto. However, this issue is devoted, in the main, to literature and art.

Breindel Lieba Kasher offers readers a remarkable look into decisive moments as experienced by survivors including the renowned Yisroel Gutman, who survived camps and death marches to become chief historian at Yad Vashem. Her interviews of him and of other survivors, pared here to their essence in narrative and poetic forms, personalize experiences not found in history books.

Jennifer Robinson's works grace our pages once again; her tales, lightly fictionalized only for the sake of literary elegance, introduce us to moments that help illustrate the tragedies inherent in the hiding experiences of families. She also shares her journey of learning about Jewish Warsaw, living as she did in an apartment that bordered the only remaining ghetto wall, and Jewish life in Poland in general.

Gloria Garfunkel, in her haunting, three-part reflection, writes of her attempt to be the bearer of her mother's memories; Joanie Holzer Schirm introduces us to her beloved father as she explains turning points in his Holocaust story and in hers; and Leonard Fuld tells a tale of a grandmother lost to the Nazi death machine, found, and lost again. Paula Ressler and Becca Chase share the turns on the pathways of their lives that led them to write a foundational text on teaching the Holocaust, published this year.

Mieczyslaw (Kas) Kasprzyk, an author and painter of Polish descent, offers ruminations he noted in his diary as he and his son returned to Poland and took in the countryside on a journey by bus. His painting, vivid and evocative, reflects a moment of the nightmare the Holocaust was for those who endured it. Marty J. Kalb, Francine Mayran, Samuel Shats, and Florence Weisz contribute works that add a visual dimension of learning to the texts they illustrate. Weisz's work also graces our cover, its stark labyrinth her interpretation of the Berlin monument.

Aristotle noted that poetry involves more understanding and thus may be "superior to history" in helping readers grasp the truth of a situation; we think the poems herein illustrate this observation. Each of those we have chosen is visceral and cerebral, gut-punching and exquisitely crafted. They exemplify "the synthesis of hyacinths and biscuits," Carl Sandburg's definition of poetry. We are honored to publish two works by our poetry editor, Charles Adès Fishman; and offerings by the other poets, including Karen Alkalay-Gut, Marjorie Agosín (translated from the Spanish by Alison Ridley), James Berger, Stephen Cipot, Michal Held Delaroza, Mike Frenkel, Annette Harchik, Sister Lou Ella Hickman, Amos Neufeld, Carine Topal, and Vanessa Waltz.

Finally, we pay tribute to the Israeli writer Nava Semel, z"l, with whom I had a warm, espitolary friendship; she is profiled by Smadar Falk-Perez. We memorialize as well the fine and gentle scholar David S. Wyman, z"l, with a profile by Rafael Medoff.

As always, we thank the dean of the Azrieli Graduate School, Rona Novick, for her ongoing support and praise for our work; Moshe Sokolow, for his skill, patience, ready ear, and sound advice about all things *PRISM*; Henry Rothman, and the Henry, Bertha, and Edward Rothman Foundation for their generous and long-term funding; AGS staff members Louisa Wolf and Eliezer Barany, for all that they do to ready and distribute this publication; our new graduate assistant, Julie Golding, for her eagerness and skill in helping with all necessary tasks; our art director, Emily Scherer Steinberg, whose keen eye makes each issue a work of great beauty; and our copy editor, David B. Greenberg, whose continued support, flexibility, and superb editing make each issue reliably perfect for teaching and learning around the world.

Karen Shawn

Jennifer Robertson, a frequent contributor, crafts literary narratives from moments in Holocaust history. She explains the historical facts undergirding "Landscape With Haystacks": "Before the war and throughout the occupation, Polish farmers Marian Mańkowski (1900–1988), his wife, Józefa; their son, Marian; and their daughter, Halina, were close friends with a Jewish family, Moshe and Szprinca Kominiarz and their 15-year-old daughter, Frinka. The men had served in the Polish army together in 1920–1922. In 1941, when Jews in the area were being forced into ghettos, Moshe asked Marian for help. Marian hesitated to agree because of the serious risk to his family, but the two daughters were such good friends that the Mańkowskis, in a moment of grace, decided to offer shelter. Marian fashioned a hiding place for the desperate family in a haystack; it would be entered through the dog kennel next to it. Each night when Marian brought food to the family, it looked to neighbors as though he were bringing it to his dog, so no one suspected that he was hiding Jews. In these difficult conditions, the Kominiarz family survived the Holocaust." [i]

Jennifer Robertson

Landscape With Haystacks

When nowhere on earth is safe—where do people hide? When you mustn't be seen by prying eyes, mustn't be heard . . . where do children go? They find it so hard to sit still, to stay in the dark, curled up without moving, because there's no space, curled up without sound because the slightest noise would bring death.

No matter how small you make yourself for days and weeks and months on end, things happen to your body. You need food and water, you need to empty bowels and bladder—and there is nowhere. You can't help it, you must. And in spite of everything, even when you never have enough to eat, you grow. Shoes that you had when you went into hiding are now too small, clothing too, but you have no mother to buy you new clothes. Other things happen: Lice infest your head and crawl into sores in your feet; bedbugs bite you, fleas; and if you hide outside in the forests or fields, mosquitoes eat you alive.

Your life is always in danger, and not just from enemy occupiers. No, you have to be careful of kids who can spot *one of you* a mile away—and would hand you over to the police for a laugh, as well as gangsters who would do it for money, or villagers and townspeople who betray because, in these hungry times, those who turn you in will get extra rations—while those who hide you will be executed on the spot.

So those adults and children who have found a place to hide stay there day in, day out without movement or sound: under beds; behind wardrobes; wedged in planks behind a privy; in lofts and attics; curled up in a drawer; shut away in holes or other hiding places underground; in beehives, barns, or pigsties; in kennels; even in silent graves beneath broken tombstones: The dead can't kill or betray.

In the village of Crooked Willow, Franek and Moshe had always been best of friends. They had gone to school together, and together had fought in the war that had put their country back on the map of Europe. They had fathered children in Crooked Willow and their families were great friends. So when Moshe, his wife, Regina, and their teenage daughter, Sara, were scheduled to be wiped off the map of the living, Moshe turned to Franek for help.

Franek hesitated. He had a wife and two children. Could he afford to risk all their lives for his friend?

"Help them," begged teenaged Halina. She and Sara were best friends.

It was the dog kennel that made it possible, and it was the positioning of the haystack right there behind the kennel that made Franek decide to take the risk. He cut an opening in the back of the kennel, just big enough for someone to crawl through, and concealed it carefully with the sawn-off wood, so when he or one of the children went to the garden every day with covered bowls that they put into the kennel—well, they were obviously just bringing the dog its dinner.

Moshe, Regina, and Sara spent winter and summer, day and night, hidden in the haystack that backed on to the kennel. They could crawl into the kennel to collect those precious bowls of food, and at night, under cover of

darkness, they could leave their hiding place to stretch their cramped muscles and tiptoe around the garden to empty the bucket that served as a toilet.

Halina would slip outside too, pretending to need "to go behind the barn," and there she would talk to her friend in whispers, telling her the latest news. Moshe and Franek often met in the darkness, while the mothers talked about domestic arrangements—for, even in a haystack, clothing needs to be laundered and elementary hygiene observed.

The conspiracy, cramped conditions, deprivation, and daily risk lasted for three years of the Holocaust while the dog kennel, the haystack, and a trusted and trusting friendship helped this innocent Jewish family to survive.

END NOTE

[i] The source for "Landscape With Haystacks" comes from Michał Grynberg's *Ksiega Sprawiedliwych* (*The Book of the Just*) (1993), Warsaw, PWN. Grynberg drew most of his material from the archives of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. AŻIH, SOYV, sign 630.

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Jennifer Robertson writes that she cannot recall the historical evidence for this story, based on an account found "in a book I'd borrowed or given back in Poland. I certainly didn't make it up; it's morally impossible for me to make up Holocaust stories. Besides, who could fabricate the vicious dog who terrified the Nazis, protecting and even nourishing the child; its uncaring owner, adding food to the dog's bowl but never attempting to help the little runaway? Who could contrive a child dying in the haystack, the farmer prodding the grieving, surviving brother, warning him to make no noise while never asking the reason for the boy's distress? Who could invent a tale of a boy digging a grave in hard, dry, summer soil with a flattened drinking tin? Such incidents beggar belief; but they are true, and reading them proved to be turning points in my understanding about the agony and the courage of those who endured this time." She adds, "From now on I shall make notes about my sources, I promise!"

Jakub and Shmuel

A dog kennel also saved Jakub's life: a dog kennel, yes, but firstly, his mother. Jakub and Shmuel ran through the streets of their home town. Mama couldn't keep up; she was thin and weak.

"Run," she gasped, "*Antlojft und bleibt leben!* Stay alive, my little ones, live!" She stood still and turned to face the soldiers.

Shots battered like hail on a tin roof. Jakub grabbed Shmuel's arm.

"Don't look! Just run, like Mamele said."

Shmuel raced towards the woods. Jakub dived into Mr. Demski's dog kennel. The German shepherd inside growled, but she allowed the child to creep in and curl sobbing at her side. The hunt drew close around the kennel. The dog, in a rage of barking, flew out at the soldiers. They scattered. Let the brat escape, he wasn't worth being bitten to bits . . . .

That night, Mr. Demski—a man Jakub knew because it was only a small town, after all, brought food for the dog, who nuzzled Jakub towards her bowl. Dog and child shared the portion.

Jakub spent all winter in the kennel, scavenging for food by day and curling up beside the dog each night, sharing warmth and food and fleas. Demski must have guessed a child was hiding there because he brought out extra food each evening—but he never brought clothes or covering and he never invited the child into his home.

One day in early spring, when Jakub was skulking in the frozen woods, he heard hoarse coughing, and found another child, as desperate as himself. It was Shmuel. He, too, had survived.

After that, the two brothers stuck together, half starved, ridden with lice and scabies—but alive. They couldn't go back to the kennel; Jakub couldn't be sure how the dog would react to another child, there was no room for them

both, and he couldn't trust the dog's owner.

A farmer called Mr. Lech let the boys shelter in his barn from March through to May but his wife told him not to be so soft-hearted, so the boys had to shift for themselves once again.

The hot summer sun ripened the grain. Whole families worked together to cut the corn, bind the sheaves, and gather the harvest into barns. Stray children helped, too—but only if they could recite their Paternosters and Ave Marias, remember their new Christian names and laugh when villagers joked about the latest round ups, how the Gestapo had strung *those others* up like hares or shot them like wild ducks, *paff, paff* and that was another one down!

Hey, and when old Farmer Stork and his half-wit son Harry got their sickles into the corn, out they all ran, scurrying for their lives from the middle of the crop like so many harvest mice. Half-wit Harry got free vodkas for the tale, but the laugh was against him because someone would say, "How many did you say there was, Harry?" And Harry wouldn't know because he couldn't add.

Jakub knew that five people had been startled out of their hiding place that August day. He knew because he and Shmuel had hidden in the cornfield, too, and as they had crawled through the ripe crop, they'd seen three pairs of eyes glitter between the bearded barley. They'd started to back out on all fours, but someone had called out, "*Bleibt!* Stay!" They found a girl a bit older than themselves, hiding in the middle of the barley field with her mother and a man—her uncle, they learned.

"We thought we were safe," this uncle said. "A villager made us a dug-out under his barn. We've been hiding there since last November, but yesterday an informer brought the police to the next village. They found 16 of our people hiding. They shot them all and hanged the father of the family who'd hid them, so our farmer told us we'd have to find somewhere else for a bit and then, perhaps he'd have us back, only he wasn't sure, his wife had a bad dream last night."

"We haven't seen daylight for months," the mother said. "I can't believe the feel of fresh air—it's too much, like a feast. What about you boys? Where are you hiding?"

"Just wherever we can," said Jakub. "A man sometimes gives us food. He let us sleep beside his cow in the barn all spring." He did not mention the dog kennel or Mr. Lech's name; he had learned to be wary. "We're going to stay here till after dark," the uncle said, "then head for the forest."

Jakub nodded. The sight of the girl with her mother made him angry and sad, but he shed no tears. He could see that Shmuel felt the same way, but he didn't cry either. His eyes were too hot and his body too fevered for tears.

"I'm thirsty," he whispered, and Jakub saw the girl's mother look searchingly at him. "We've had nothing to drink today," he explained quickly, in case she thought Shmuel was infectious or something.

She nodded, preoccupied. "You really don't think they'll cut this field today, do you?"

They cowered closer to the ground, trying not to flatten the barley. Bearded barley: It was luckier than our people, thought Jakub. The Gestapo didn't shave the barley. They had plucked his grandfather's beard out in handfuls. His *zeyde* had come home with his face bleeding between tufts of hair. But that was only the beginning. . . .

Voices! They stiffened. There was the rasp of a blade on leather, the swish of a blade through corn. They ran, ran without looking behind them, heading they didn't know where. There were shouts; they'd been spotted. The girl and her mother started to lag; months of hiding underground would make it hard for them to run. Jakub and Shmuel didn't wait to see what happened next. The main thing was to keep on running and put as big a distance as they could between themselves and the barley field. Shmuel coughed, but kept on running.

"We'll go back to Mr. Lech," Jakub panted. "His wife doesn't want us back but we'll ask if we can hide in his haystack. Maybe his wife will give us some milk like she did until she got scared. Milk will be good, Shmuel. It will cool you down all right."

Shmuel nodded and coughed, his shoulders hunched. He cupped his hand round his mouth. They slowed their pace. Shmuel stooped and surreptitiously smeared his hand over the grass at the side of the pathway. Jakub pretended he hadn't noticed, but his heart gave a lurch that tore him more than the running.

"He doesn't want me to see, so I won't let him know that I know," he told himself.

The village lay ahead, a cluster of wooden houses, crouched low to the ground beneath drooping eaves of thatch. Not a prosperous place, but the brothers felt it was almost like home because Mr. Lech had let them sleep in the byre with his cow as long as they sneaked out before dawn and came back only in the dark.

Now it was broad daylight, so they headed instead towards the river, its banks shaded by alders and willows. A kingfisher skimmed across the fast-flowing water. The boys paddled out into the river and drank the water, splashing it over their faces and itching heads. Jakub had a dented flask of chipped aluminium, his only possession. He filled it with river water for later, in case Shmuel needed a drink.

The long summer day seemed endless. Shmuel shivered and moaned. His body was burning, but Jakub had nothing to give him except brown river water.

At nightfall, when the village children brought the cows and geese home from the pastures, Jakub and Shmuel followed at a safe distance.

"We must look as though we're not hiding, as though we live here," he told Shmuel, and his younger brother nodded. "We've got to stay alive," Jakub added. "Remember what Mamele told us: Run away, boys, and stay alive. Come on, it's not far to Mr. Lech's cottage and a drink of milk."

When Lech opened the back door, though, Jakub saw that the man was scared.

"They shot three more of your lot today. They'd been hiding in the barley fields. It was a gang of armed bandits that did it. They set a whole village on fire last week, the people got away with whatever they could carry, but the chickens and geese roasted inside the burning homes."

Jakub trembled, but stood his ground.

"My brother is sick, Mr. Lech. Please give us something to eat and maybe we could hide in your haystack, so if the patrols or bandits come, you needn't know that we're here," he pleaded.

"In beside Daisy last winter, and now it's into the hay with you, is it?" said Lech, and Jakub watched his blue eyes soften in his sunburnt face. He pushed his cap back on his forehead, revealing pale skin beneath a shock of hair as yellow as his haystack. "Well, well, into the haystack you go. I'll bring you something to eat once it's dark."

So he did, but Shmuel didn't want anything to eat, no matter how much Jakub coaxed him.

If an artist had come from war-torn Warsaw that summer, she might have delighted to paint quaint country cottages, covered with thatch and visited by storks who came back year after year to the same large, untidy nests. She might have added clouds casting low shadows over the landscape, to give a hint of the rumble of gunfire, of the Front coming closer, of the swastika in retreat but, too used to ruin and destruction, she would probably have chosen instead to sketch sunflowers, cornflowers, poppies; trees whitened with lime whose gnarled boughs bore ripening apples; barefoot, sunburnt children; stubble fields; and haystacks like small, squat cottages.

However, she would not have painted the correct story. She would not have painted the two hidden brothers.

Jakub cradled Shmuel in his arms and moistened his cracked lips with river water, but Shmuel's tongue was swollen and his eyes were glazed. He died in his brother's arms and Jakub, who hadn't cried since . . . shuddered with grief.

We went through it all together; he was all I had left. Mama was shot to bits and Daddy was murdered, Granny Chaja and Granny Fela too, and Dora, who was so pretty. . . . and Uncle Marek and Auntie Pola and. . . and . . . and. . . . Too, too many, all his family. He'd seen them rounded up with too many others, beaten and shot at, loaded into trucks. The townspeople had watched in silence; no one had stretched out a helping hand.

But the boys had gotten away. They'd done what Mama had told them. Run away and stay alive. And now Shmuel . . . .

Crouched inside Mr. Lech's haystack, Jakub howled out his pain and his grief, howled and howled for hours so that Mr. Lech came out and thrust his pronged pitchfork inside the haystack.

"Stop your bawling, brat," he growled. "You'll start people talking, you will." Jakub flung himself down beside his dead brother and writhed and wept without sound.

Later that night, he stamped on his flask to flatten it into a makeshift spade. He buried his brother. When daylight dawned, he went away. He never returned to the squat haystack or the tranquil village that had no place in it for a boy with no right to be seen, a boy alone in the world, who would stay alive because that was the only thing he could still do for his mother, because he was the only one left.

Amos Neufeld comments: "I was born in Israel to survivors of the Shoah. From early on, I felt compelled to try to fathom and honor the difficult history of my family and community. Writing poems gave me a point of entry to a world of losses—and a way to begin to understand my parents and, somehow, to know and grow closer to all those family members who were murdered, to honor them by remembering them. The photo below was my inspiration for this poem." See p. 55 for another Neufeld poem.

Amos Neufeld

Family Album

My father stands in the picture
with his parents, brothers and sisters.
(The gas and sealed cattle-cars
are still two years away). They smile,
not knowing this is the last time
they will be gathered happily together,
that nothing guards their world,
that sky will be all that remains.

Their eyes rest peacefully
on one another and on the camera
while tomorrow already winds its arms
and twists tighter around their necks.
Yet it is still too early
to see the black boots coming:
smoke floats carelessly from a cigarette
and children depart for summer camp

We see them — not yet lost,
standing on the precipice of wind and fire,
their image of vanished innocence
captured and in our memory engraved.
Still they stand, unsuspecting,
composed, like any other happy family,
while their black-and-white world rushes toward —
is already on — the final page.

This photograph of my father's family was taken sometime in 1939 or 1940 in Selce, a village in eastern Czechoslovakia, on the morning that my father and two of the other young men in the photo began their journey to Palestine. They were ultimately unsuccessful and returned. My father, Ernest Neufeld, in suit and tie, stands in the front row. From left to right: a friend of his; the friend's father in the back row (wearing a cap); his younger sister, Itza; his mother, Perel; his younger brother, Patty (Nicholas); a cousin; and his father, Alexander (Shmuel). Ernest also had an older brother, Josie, and a younger sister, Ruchi, not shown. The brothers and sisters survived; his parents did not. His father was murdered in Birkenau; his mother died before the deportations. The fate of his cousin, his friend, and his friend's father is unknown. Courtesy of Amos Neufeld.

"This poem traces a long struggle to come to terms with a year that changed humanity forever," writes Michal Held Delaroza. "In the title, the numbers of the year 1939 are broken apart to convey the sense that this year is forever shattered, that after it, the world may never be completely whole again. My mother's observation that she was saved because she had the good fortune to be born in Jerusalem was something I took with me when embarking on the impossible journey to Auschwitz. Upon my return, we looked together at the pictures I had taken at the death camp and were shocked to discover a baby girl's garment identical to the one that my mother kept from her own infancy. That moment was pivotal for me."

Michal Held Delaroza

19
39

in most other places i probably wouldn't have
survived
my mother
born in Jerusalem
in 1939
often tells us

a little girl on the edge of poverty
she smiled at the flowers planted in dust-covered olive oil tins
taking pride in her simple dresses magically beautified
by my grandmother's embroidery

browsing through images on the Holocaust Museum's website
i think of them both while looking
at a pink embroidered Sabbath dress made from a flour sack
by Sarina and Dora Levy in postwar Athens

while gazing at a child's dress
embroidered with red and blue flowers with green leaves
by Lola Kaufman's mother in the Czortków Ghetto
Lola wore it hiding under a bed in the
house of the woman who used to deliver milk to the family

while staring at a pink dress with embroidery worn
by four-year-old Lela Altarac
who was killed
in a German bombing raid on Sarajevo

as more and more dresses blurred my vision
i remember recalling my mother's words
when I discovered in the vitrine
in Auschwitz a white embroidered infant's dress identical
to the one she still keeps in her wardrobe

as a reminder of the dust-covered smiling flowers
and of being born in the Jerusalem
that saved her
in
19
39.

The author's mother, circa 1942. Photo courtesy of Michal Held Delaroza.

The poems below are fragments of survivor testimony transcribed by interviewer Breindel Lieba Kasher. The close and trusting relationships she and the survivors developed over the years allowed these interviews to be unusually personal and specific.

"Dov Freiberg was a gentle man, born in Warsaw," Kasher tells us. "He had a soft light in his eye that would darken when he spoke of all he had been through. He was one of about 300 prisoners who escaped from the Sobibór death camp. He kept in touch with the few who survived, the only ones who could fully understand. When he spoke of home and his family, it was with great tenderness. Dov, his wife, also a survivor, and I sat at the kitchen table in their home in Ramla, Israel. The table had a flowered table cloth; our tears rolled off the plastic that covered it."

Breindel Lieba Kasher

The Radio Said: War

We went in the shelter
a cellar where we stored
milk and potatoes

After two days and nights
we returned home

Mother gave us tea and cookies
We sat around the table
Father said:
If the Germans go forward
toward Łódz
he and Motel,
my older brother,
would have to run

Not that he thought
Germans kill people
That was not in our minds yet

We were very serious
How could it be?
At a time like this
Father leaves?

Farlus nuch nish
(Don't fall apart)
Father said
Ich been nisht antlofen
(I will not abandon you)

But in the morning
the radio warning
War was beginning
Father and Motel
took small satchels
and left

Berele Shtei Oif

Berele, shtei oif
Siz gekumen a krieg!
(Berele, get up
(A war broke out!)

I run to the window
Looking for soldiers with swords

What do I see?
A beautiful day
Everywhere is quiet
I try to imagine
What war?

Later that day
Bombs fell
On Warsaw

Father Oh Father

A German soldier
with time to kill
lines up 10 Jewish men
with beards
and shoots every third one
like dolls at a carnival
for sport, for fun.
Father is dead.
September 1st
the war just began
and for our family
the tragedy is full
Our father is dead!

"I interviewed Marlite Wander in Jerusalem," recalls Breindel Lieba Kasher. "The owner of a jewelry store, she was one of very few who survived the camps with her mother and sister. Marlite is a very strong yet fragile woman: I do not think that is contradictory. She said, 'The Germans thought of every way to kill us, and they succeeded very well.' Marlite was broken in a million places and did not hide her wounds from me. We felt close to each other and met in a Jerusalem café, where she gave me a necklace."

Breindel Lieba Kasher

Knock, Knock

The Gestapo banged on our door.
My brothers were in pajamas
doing homework.
We sisters were in bed.
"Our parents won't be home
until very late,"
my brother said.

The Gestapo said:
We will wait.

They were taking
Jewish men
to Dachau.

All the lights were on
so my parents knew
something was wrong.
Father ran.
Mother came up alone.
"Dress the children.
Take your papers.
That is all you need.
You will be back shortly."
But we never returned.
We spent the night at the station
and in the morning
we were thrown over the border
to Zbąszyń.
We were *shtatlos.**
We traveled
with the clothes
on our backs
Mother with us
five children.
Germany no longer wanted us.
Poland didn't want us.

November, it was
bitter cold and we were homeless.

* *stateless.*

Natan Gross was a filmmaker who produced the first Yiddish film after the war, the heartbreaking *Undzere Kinder* (*Our Children*), set in Łódź and focusing on the orphans who survived. "I had heard of him and had seen his film," Kasher recalls, "and I looked forward to meeting him. I interviewed him in Tel Aviv. He told me that after the war, when he returned to Poland in search of his mother, he found his home inhabited by strangers. 'I wanted to go to Israel,' Natan told me, 'but I found work in the Łódź film school. The head of the school was Borchick Hass, an antisemite. Although the Holocaust was over, the few Jews who worked at the school kept their religion a secret.'"

Breindel Lieba Kasher

House of Glass

Father's family was Dzikov
Mother comes from Bobover Hassidim
They were kosher *Yidden**
We had a porcelain shop
on the Rynek #8

Father was the heart of the shop
Mother was the head

Kossak, a Polish painter, came
To decorate the window on
Polish holidays
How beautiful was
our House of Glass!
The shoppers were Polish aristocrats
Father gave the President of Poland
a gift for Wawel Castle

One night, a rock shattered our window
The Germans marched in and took over
our House of Glass

** Yiddish: "Jews"*

Preeminent Holocaust historian Israel Gutman was a fighter in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and a survivor of Auschwitz, where he was a member of the Jewish underground. He survived Majdanek, the Auschwitz death march, and Mauthausen. He helped create Yad Vashem, edited the *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, and was a key witness at the Eichmann trial and an advisor to the postwar Polish government.

"It was 1999," recalls interviewer Breindel Lieba Kasher. "I was showing my film, *Der Letzter Lubliner* (*The Last Jew From Lublin*), at Yad Vashem, where I taught at the International School. I heard Professor Gutman would be speaking on the Ringelblum diaries, so I went to hear him. His talk moved me so deeply that I asked him for an interview. He gave me his home phone number and said, 'Call me.'

"We met in a small, dusty room, filled with books, those Israel had written and those of other survivors. He devoted his life to the tragic memory of Polish Jewry. At first I was nervous. I wanted to impress him with my knowledge. Yet over the decade we spoke, our relationship moved from student and teacher, survivor and one from the generation after, to father and daughter, mother and child, head to heart. We became dear friends. He spoke about life, disappointments, Yad Vashem, the State of Israel, politicians.

"When we finished our interview, which was a work in progress and really never ended, I gave him the draft, left him, and held my breath. When he called, I sat down, not knowing what to expect. He was overflowing with gratitude, extremely impressed. 'It is perfect,' he said simply. Every Friday we spoke to say 'Good Shabbos!' He missed the dead, his family and friends.

"I miss him."

Breindel Lieba Kasher

Oral Torah From the Warsaw Ghetto: A Personal Interview With Professor Israel Gutman

IN THE BEGINNING

Where were you born?

I was born in Warsaw. My parents were from Warsaw. My grandparents were all born in Warsaw. I felt connected to Warsaw. I never left, except once, for several days, until the outbreak of the Second World War.

How old were you in 1939 when the war began?

I was 16. I was living with my parents. They were average Warsaw Jews, a family that struggled for existence. My father, Binyamin, had a little shop, some small working house [workshop], but in the last few years before the outbreak of the war, he was simply a worker for others. My mother, Sarah, was always at home. We were three children: two sisters, Rivka and Genya, and I.

When Hitler first came to power, did it affect the Jews of Warsaw? Were they fearful?

Yes, of course, we knew about what was happening. We read newspapers. The Jews were very engaged and knowledgeable about what was going on in political life, what was happening in Germany, who was Hitler, and what is the meaning of Hitler; yes, we knew. The question was how did we interpret this information. Were we able to absorb and understand what was the real meaning of Nazism? Well, this was another story.

Poland, in January, February, 1934, had a kind of an agreement with Nazi Germany. This greatly influenced the policies of the Polish government and the behavior of the Polish people in regard to the Jews. From this point, we, of course, felt a change. It was also a time of boycotting German products, and economic life was getting more and more difficult. So Hitler, in Germany, had some influence

on our day-by-day life, but still, Hitler was in Germany and we lived in Poland.

In 1935, when Germany enforced the Nuremberg Laws, did this affect the Jews in Poland?

Yes, but still, it was happening in another country.

And *Kristallnacht*, 1938?

Oh, yes, *Kristallnacht* was important from another point of view. First of all, I was older and more able to understand what was happening around me. I was a member of a youth movement in which we discussed these questions. We were more aware of what was happening. Information came with the Polish Jews who were expelled from Germany, over the Polish border to Zbąszyń. Suddenly, the destiny, what had happened to those Polish Jews, came very close to us. It touched us. Now, it became our problem.

These years before the outbreak of the war was a period of intense antisemitism. The Polish society, from an economic and political point of view, was in a situation of deep crisis. There was high unemployment. It was a very difficult situation for Polish people—so many disappointments and such deep disagreements with the government and the political parties, especially with the Polish peasants. They had no answers.

On the one hand, there were the Endeks. They were a very strong political party. They argued that the Jews did not belong to the Polish nation. They were guests, strangers. They had no right to live in Poland. On the other hand, there was a stream in Poland, a kind of movement, that was, perhaps, less concentrated, less organized. It was not deeply antisemitic, but from their viewpoint as Christians, the Jews were always strangers. As the situation worsened, more and more Poles agreed that the Jews should not have the same rights, in terms of economic life. They concluded that there were just too many Jews in Poland and the solution should be emigration or the expulsion of the Jews.

There were outbreaks of violence. The majority of Poles were perhaps against violence, but they did agree that the solution to Poland's economic problem was to force the Jews to leave, to go to Palestine or any other country, as long as they were out of Poland. Each Jew felt it, and for us, the children, it was painful.

The Endeks instituted antisemitic edicts and ghetto benches for Jews only in the universities.

Yes, in the universities it was very evident with the ghetto benches; it was extreme and that made things clear, but, in more subtle ways, it was spreading through the whole Polish society.

Because of this intense antisemitism, your family decided to move out of the mixed area to a Jewish neighborhood.

Yes. The street was Nowiniarska 11. It was in the heart of the Jewish Quarter. There were almost 300,000 Jewish people in a certain neighborhood. Every third person in Warsaw was Jewish. This created a very strong feeling that the Jews of Warsaw were deeply rooted.

BEFORE THE GHETTO

You were living in a neighborhood that was totally Jewish, and your life, despite the rising antisemitism, was not so drastically different from before, is that correct?

Yes, of course, my life was as before, with some changes, but it was the regular life as before.

But on September 1939, there is a complete change. Right away—it is after a week. Warsaw was a city under bombardment. It was the month of September. It was one of the most tragic months because a great part of the Jewish Quarter was completely ruined. It was an absolute change, a shock. This month was a turning point in our lives.

Where were you when the bombs began falling?

I returned home a day before the outbreak of the war. I was in a summer camp with my youth movement. The first thing my mother said was that I came back a different child. I had lost a lot of weight. We were always too busy to eat. The next day, the bombs began falling, and they didn't stop for a whole week.

I will tell you, the main problem in our day-to-day life, from the beginning, was how to spend a day, what to do, how to get food. There was no school, we were not free to go in the streets. These were the main problems. These were the worries. This is a year before the establishment of the ghetto. There was still a possibility to move about, to meet Poles, to have dealings with the Polish society, even professionally. It was war. The war destroyed a great part of the industry and all production of economic life in Poland. The majority of people had no way to make a living, especially the intelligentsia. The people working in industry, teachers, office workers, all these people were no longer working. It was the beginning of great struggle for them. There were many refugees, people who left the big cities like Łódz. They came in masses and had nothing. Buildings, a great part of them, were destroyed and tens of thousands of people remained without a place to live. This was a tremendous shock. This was the situation, from the very beginning, until the end of the war, the everyday struggle to stay alive.

What was crucial, I believe, was the essence of Jewish tradition and the depth of closeness in the Jewish family. The Jewish upbringing was deeply connected to the principles of Jewish life, religion, but not only religion; it was a mentality that was specifically Jewish. This was why the

Jewish family struggled to stay together. When I say "family," I am talking about the immediate family—father, mother, children, grandfather, grandmother, the extended family. This connection stayed very deep all the time.

The Polish Jews could never have imagined the extent of what would be Germany's policies regarding Jews. It was difficult to grasp the meaning of the ideology of National Socialism. They knew about the hatred the Nazis had toward German Jews, but Polish Jews—why would the Germans have any interest in them?

The Germans were an occupying force during the First World War, and during the First World War, relations between Germans and Jews were quite good, much better than with the Russian occupiers. This was only 20 years ago. The older generation remembered this. In some ways, they felt connected to German culture. The German Jews reflected a kind of free world with many possibilities for progressive development. So the Jews were not able to grasp what awaited them under German occupation. All too quickly, they found out, with the marking of the Jews and the taking of Jewish property. Jews were now unable to move about freely or work in any Polish establishment.

German soldiers did not look upon the Jew as a human being. One of the main changes was forced labor: gathering up Jews on the streets and in their homes to work for the Germans. It was not just the work, but the suffering and violence, the way the Germans looked at the Jew and the way it was forbidden for the Jew to look a German in the eye or speak to a German. It was impossible to explain something to him in a normal way. This is what happened from the beginning until the last days of the German occupation. Jews were suddenly in a world in which he, she, had no place at all. . . .

There was hunger. There was a problem of finding a place for people to live. There was a problem with what to do with the children. There were no schools. It was forbidden to pray in public. It was forbidden to gather together. There was no Jewish newspaper. There was no contact with the outside world, no contact with extended family. There was a feeling that the Jews were in a kind of prison with unbelievable conditions. This was the situation. The hunger was terrible. There were epidemics. Relationships began to suffer; people who lived under such hard conditions lost their tolerance. They were no longer polite. The situation was not easy before the war, but this was a time without any precedent.

The same was true in the political arena. The Jewish political parties, and this is a very, very important phenomenon, the Jewish youth organizations started working again. The Germans focused on Jewish money, Jewish property, and the Jewish connections outside, with the Poles, but what Jews did with their spiritual life, their political views, among themselves, this they did not care about. So what happened was the possibility to develop a kind of cultural, spiritual, and political life in this framework. We are speaking, of course, of this time before the ghetto, but it was even stronger during the ghetto period.

INSIDE THE GHETTO WALLS

Would it be correct to say that with the establishment of the ghetto, the Jews, at least in the beginning, may have felt less threatened by the Nazis? The Jews were closed in, but perhaps, for a time, the Nazis stayed out.

Yes, the truth was, we lived an underground life. Little by little, we had the feeling that in this closed Jewish area, we could go about, speak freely, discuss things, read books, and it was of no interest to the Germans. They were taking us to forced labor. They took everything we owned from our private houses; everything of worth was confiscated. We never knew what would happen tomorrow. It was the dynamic. Each day, German policies seemed to get worse than the day before. There was absolutely no security. The good thing was, for the time being, the Jews were together and the Germans stayed out of the ghetto.

When the ghetto was closed, were you already living in that area?

Yes. We didn't move.

Until the last moment, it was not clear whether the ghetto would be closed or open. The Germans said nothing. It was a decisive difference, because the meaning of an open ghetto was that the Jews would have the possibility of spending the day outside the ghetto, working. There were people who thought a closed ghetto could be a positive thing: There would be no more attacks from the Polish side. Not too many Germans entered the ghetto. It would be a place for the Jews to be among themselves.

Of course it was a great illusion. First of all, it was a closed ghetto. Jewish property, the shops, and the undertakings [the simple freedoms to be, to come and go, our work, our home], all this was gone in one day.

What did you do in the ghetto?

I did forced labor. Each Jew, everyone, was forced to work six, seven, eight days a month. My family was in such a bad situation that I worked for Jews who were in a better situation. I received some money for this work. I remember it was not enough for more than, maybe, half of a loaf of bread, and I worked full-time.

Did your father work, too?

My father was ill. He was not able to work. We were poor. The only possibility was for us to sell everything that we had. I lost my parents and my older sister a year and a half after the war began.

A year and a half after the war began, your parents and your sister died. Was that because of an epidemic?
Not exactly. My sister was ill before the war. My father was ill for a long time. My mother died from typhus. I remained with my small sister. It was a tragedy. They died because there was no possibility to help them. We were poorer than even most people in the ghetto.

A year and a half after the war began—you mean by 1940 you had lost most of your family?
Yes, by the end of 1940, I was alone with my . . .

With your little sister, Genya?
[Nods, unable to speak.]

Did you remain in the same apartment, the two of you?
Yes, for some time. By the end of 1940, the beginning of 1941, I left with my sister. We went to live in one small room with other people. I was not able to manage a flat by myself. After some time, my sister entered the house of Korczak [the orphanage run by Dr. Janusz Korczak].

And you, you remained alone?
I remained by myself, yes. I worked, thanks to the people my father worked for before the war. They took a great interest in what happened to my small sister and me. They were very wealthy people, well known in the ghetto, the family of Avraham Gepner; I don't know if you know the name. He was one of the most known people in the ghetto. He helped me. He got me work and he arranged for my sister to go to the children's house of Korczak.

It was not easy to get to stay at Korczak's orphanage, because the conditions there were better than any other place in the ghetto. Thanks to the sister of Avraham Gepner, my sister received a place in the orphanage.

Were you able to visit your sister in the orphanage?
Yes, it was natural for me to go every week. This was a special time for visitors, for families. I also came for special evenings, for special events. I thought that for my sister, it was the best that could happen. I wasn't able to help her much. I was a child myself. I was happy she was there. She was not happy. I visited her every week, two or three hours of the day. . . .

On August 5, 1942, all of the children from Korczak's orphanage were marched to the trains waiting to bring them to Treblinka. Did you have any prior knowledge of this?
Yes, at the beginning of the evacuation, they presented the children with the possibility of leaving the orphanage, going back to their families. I took my sister out for some time, but after being outside with me, two weeks, perhaps—it is impossible to describe what happened—she said she wanted to go back to the children. I don't really remember how long she was with me, perhaps only a few days, and she went back. I remember the day. Such a thing one cannot forget, when they took the children to the Umschlagplatz.

Your sister Genya was one of the children taken to Treblinka?
Yes. [We remain quiet.]

Look, the difference between the youth movement and the majority of the Jews was, we knew the expulsions were not just for some Jews. We knew the Germans planned to destroy all the Jewish people. We were preparing for a rebellion, and we knew that the rebellion would lead to our death, and we were ready. Still, it was impossible to grasp the infinite evil humans were capable of. It was so strange, so contradictory to our way of being that we, somehow, held on to a thought: Perhaps at some moment, things would change. This really could not be the end of us all, could it?

The entire interview is available at: https://writingtheholocaust.blogspot.com/2018/12/israel-gutman-interview-parts-1-3.html.

James Berger wrote this poem "in honor of Miriam Klein Kassenoff, Hank Klein, the late Judge Ted Klein, and their mother, Sara Klein, who escaped Nazi Europe in 1941, leaving her twin sister, Lili, behind, never to be found."

James Berger

Sara and Lili

She is one of two
she is half of one,
and the other has vanished
and keeps vanishing.
She has outlived everything
except that vanishing.

She is less than half
and more than all,
containing all who did not come with her.
Her memory follows their hands
waving, and shrinking faces,
and helplessly chases them,
screaming warnings,
along that other road.
She is still imploring them:
They never stop dying.

She is one of two,
half of one,
the one who could not survive,
who bolted recklessly
from safety, with toddler and infant
and fugitive husband,
from Hungary to Portugal — lived —
in Nashville, Cleveland, and Miami —
lived. And Tibor became Teddy,
Marika became Miriam,
and the new one, Hank, "our little Yankee."

One of two and half of one
and less than half and more than all.

Two stylish girls, identical,
in a very old photo,
arms around each other's waist.
Their eyes look into the camera
with such calm openness
such clear understanding
that the camera's moment
merely indicates its truth.

Everything except that separation
she has outlived.
Everything except that divergence
she has buried.

Millions have been born and have died,
entire spans of lives unfolded and expired,
since that photo was taken.

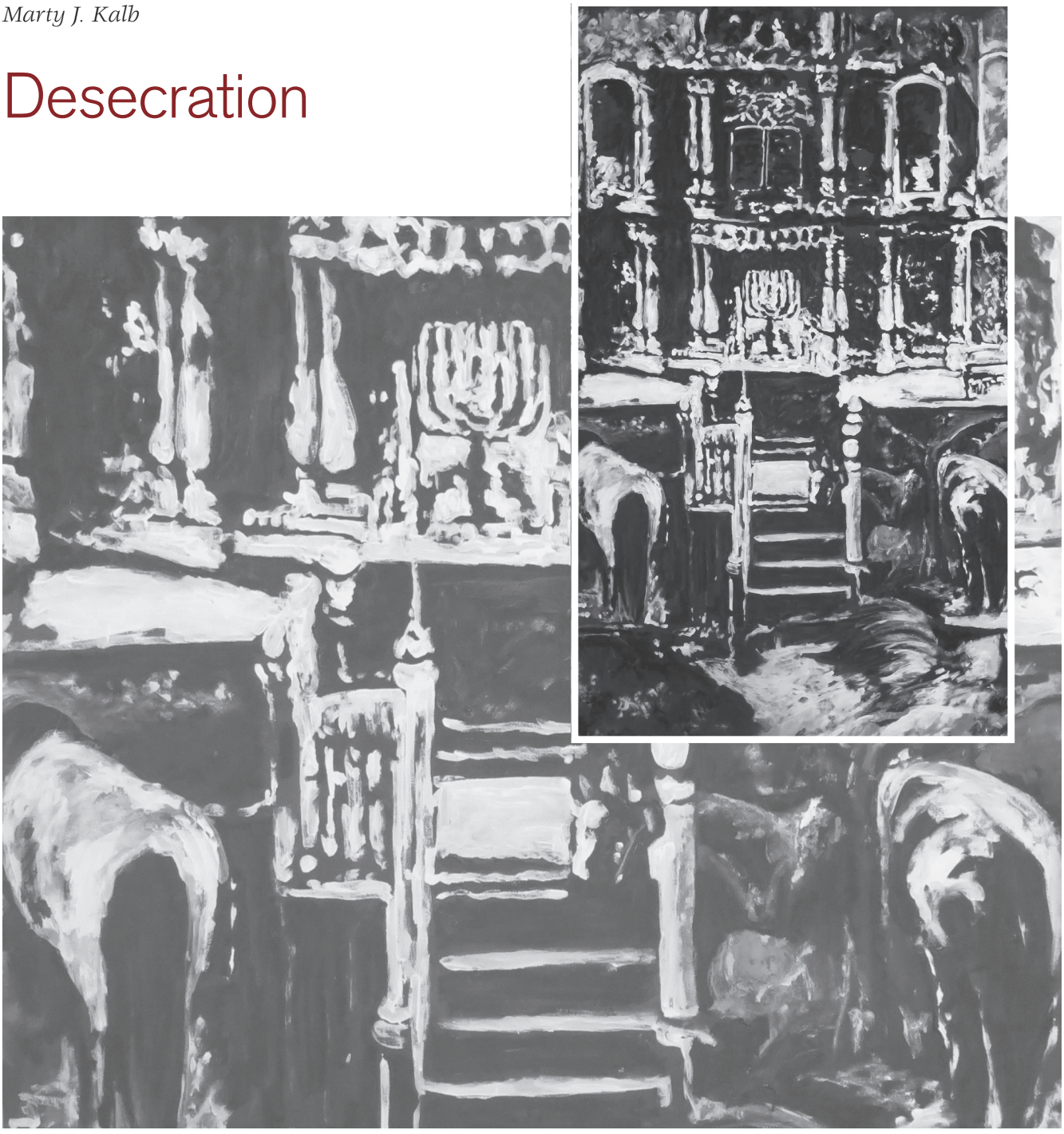
Ninety-one years old,
she holds the picture, and implores
the one, the half, the nothing, the all
who stands beside her:
"I told you, we have to go — now,
now, we have to go now!
We can't stay here.
Why didn't you
believe me?"

Sara and Lili Schwartz, twins from Munkács, probably 22 years old when this photo was taken in the early 1930s. Courtesy of Miriam Klein Kasenoff, Sara's daughter.

Artist Marty J. Kalb's artwork overlays a detail of his painting. He explains, "I was inspired to make this painting (media acrylic on canvas, 2000) after seeing a photograph of a synagogue that the Nazis had turned into a stable. What struck me was the obvious incongruity of stabling animals in a place of worship, an action with a purpose beyond just finding a secure place to keep and feed horses. The ark looks untouched, with everything still in place, ready for a service. The vandals did not steal or destroy anything of value; their true purpose of using the sanctuary as a stable was to desecrate this sacred place, to humiliate the Jews who valued it so greatly. We should not forget that the intent of the Nazis was not just to kill Jews but to eradicate Judaism. My use of a very active paint application and a reduction of detailed information is a deliberate attempt to express my anger at their actions."

Marty J. Kalb

Desecration



Karen Alkalay-Gut writes of the pivotal moment when her parents were able to jump on a bus leaving Danzig, thanks to luck and a small act of selflessness by German acquaintances. Compare to "The Lithuanian Rescuers " (p. 44) by Charles Adès Fishman.

Karen Alkalay-Gut

Night Travel

On that night in Danzig the trains did not run.
You sat in the bus station till almost dawn,
knowing that if you could not get out
the invaders would find you, grind you among the first
under their heels.
Toward morning a bus was announced
and without knowing where it would go
you raced to the stop.
But the Nazis were there first, and you watched
as they finished their search —
checking each traveler for papers,
jewelry, a Jewish nose.

Among the passengers, you recognized
a familiar face — a German woman sitting
with someone else you'd seen
in the neighborhood.
They winked a greeting,
waited for the soldiers to leave,
and jumped out,
pushing you up in their place.

Thus you escaped to Berlin, remaining alive
by keeping silent through the long train ride
from Berlin to Cologne in a car filled with
staring German soldiers

and arrived the next day in Holland,
black with fear and transportation.

Vanessa Waltz captures a turning point in Anne Frank's thinking and writing. Here, Anne writes about girlhood friend Lies and herself as being different "on the inside" from who they are "on the outside."

Vanessa Waltz

Anne on the Square, 1940

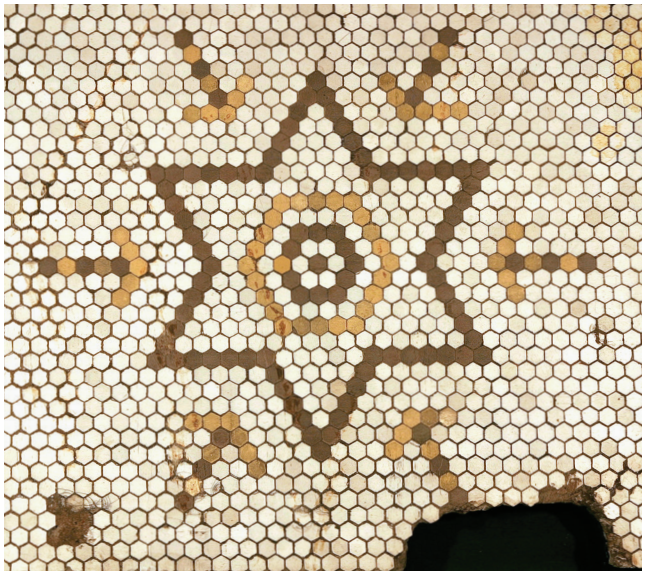
Squinting, Anne looks up.
She greets the camera with quick and happy smile.
In truth, Anne thinks of herself as *happy on the inside*
and other people think she's *happy on the outside.*
In truth, Anne thinks of herself as unlike
a frolicsome little goat tugging at its tether:
an outside image she pins to herself in critical contemplation.
Outside, for now, on the neighborhood square, she crouches,
revealing knobby knees.
She crouches close to girlhood friend Lies, who shyly brushes
hair from her face.
For her part, Anne finds Lies a bit on the strange side.
She is usually shy.
However, she says what she thinks, and lately Anne has come
to value her a great deal.
For her part, what Anne says is not what she feels.
By her own admission, though, she is trying very hard to
change herself.
She keeps trying to find a way to become what she'd like to be
and what she could be if — if only there were no other people
in the world.

Anne Frank (left) and her friend Hanneli Goslar on the Merwedeplein in Amsterdam. Goslar appears in the published *The Diary of Anne Frank* with the name Lies Goosens. Courtesy of Anne Frank Fonds — Basel via Getty Images.

The mikveh (plural: mikvaot), or ritual bath, is primarily used by Orthodox Jewish married women to maintain laws of family purity (*tahorat ha-mishpacha*). What dangers did Jewish women face as they sought to maintain family purity laws during the Holocaust? When the use of mikvaot was forbidden and when they were summarily destroyed by the Nazis and their sympathizers, what were the implications for the Jewish people? In this overview, Nathalie Ross examines the historical significance of ritual immersion to Jewish life during the Holocaust and its potential as a vehicle for the rebirth of the Jewish nation in the aftermath.

Nathalie Ross

Mikveh: Creation, Destruction, and Renewal



Star of David mosaic from a mikveh floor at Congregation Moscisker Chevra Gur Arye at 308 East 3rd Street, NYC, NY. Gift of UJA-Federation of New York, Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust.

The topic of mikveh (Hebrew: pool of water), or ritual bath, is often shrouded in secrecy, as it is historically associated with issues of menstruation, fertility, reproduction, and a couple's ritualized sexual activity. Mikveh use is deeply private and touches upon uniquely feminine subjects that are often off-limits in public discourse. The buildings that house mikvaot most often do not display prominent outward signs of their existence, which tends to further an appearance of discreetness and privacy. It is therefore not surprising that the topic has not been more widely examined in academic scholarship.

The mikveh is primarily used by Orthodox Jewish women after marriage to maintain the laws of family purity (*tahorat ha-mishpacha*) and has always been considered essential to their life, even in times of extreme duress and danger. However, mikveh use extends far beyond the needs of married women alone: Mikvaot serve both men and women in the rituals of conversion to Judaism, in death and burial, and in the observance of Shabbat and Yom Kippur. Further, the mikveh waters are used to render kosher metal pots, pans, dishes, and utensils manufactured by or purchased from a non-Jew. The focus of this paper, however, is primarily on the use of the mikveh for the observance of family purity laws during the Holocaust and will not address matters of conversion, kashering eating vessels, or the specific immersion rituals surrounding death and burial.

The mikveh is essential to religious Jewish life. During the Holocaust, however, mikvaot across Europe were shuttered and destroyed. What were the implications for their users? How significant is the mikveh as a redemptive trope for a collective Jewish future?

THE HISTORY AND USES OF THE MIKVEH

The rules and laws governing mikveh use have been handed down through talmudic tradition and have guided the strict adherence to customs relating to ritual purification. The mikveh, as such, is specifically mentioned in the Torah in Leviticus 11:36: "Only a spring and a pit, a gathering (mikveh) of water, shall be clean" (Kaplan, 1976, p. 49).

Examples of its use abound, both in the Torah and in midrash (homiletic exposition of the Hebrew Bible), such as when Adam was exiled from Eden and sat in a river that flowed from the garden in order to return to his original state of perfection (Slonim, 1969, p. 23). In addition, Miriam's legendary well, which accompanied the Israelites as they wandered the desert, served as a mikveh. Likewise, Aaron and his sons' initiation into the priesthood was begun by immersion in the mikveh. Most importantly, "before the revelation at Sinai, all Jews were commanded to immerse themselves in preparation for coming face to face with God" (p. 23). These events stress the substantial historical value placed on the transformational moment of immersion in the mikveh and on ritual purification.

In the Masada excavations of 1963–1965, King Herod's large fortress complex was found to contain two mikvaot (Kaplan, 1976, p. 3). As early as the first century BCE, Jewish zealots facing the full might and strength of Roman rule and tyranny took the time to build not one but two mikvaot in their mountaintop retreat. Such a discovery hints at the supreme importance of the mikveh in Jewish life, even when faced with one's own mortality.

While many might consider the synagogue the most important institution in a Jewish community, Jewish law affirms that building a mikveh must take priority over building a house of worship (Slonim, 1969, p. 26.) Synagogue services can be held in a residence, a church basement, or a commercial building, but a mikveh must be built according to stringent rules and regulations. Simply said,

> Jewish married life, and therefore the birth of future generations in accordance with Halachah, is possible only where there is accessibility to a mikveh. . . . The mikveh is the touchstone of Jewish life and the portal to a Jewish future. (Slonim, 1969, p. 26)

THE TRANSFORMATIVE NATURE OF THE MIKVEH

The power of the mikveh is in rendering the unholy holy—in changing and elevating the status of what it touches. Water is said to be one of the most transformational elements in the universe, "the one thing that existed before Creation itself" (Westheimer & Mark, 1996, p. 105). Mikveh waters are meant to be transformative. It can be said that the mikveh represents the waters of Eden, and thus immersing in the mikveh is a way to experience the holy state of being close to God.

Traditionally, the use of the mikveh has been informed by gender roles, in addition to being segregated by gender. A bride or groom visits the mikveh before a wedding to sanctify the holiness of the event. After the wedding, women maintain the laws of family purity according to their menstrual cycles, visiting the mikveh in the evening hours as required. Many religiously observant men visit the mikveh before the Sabbath, immersing on Friday afternoons "to sensitize themselves to the holiness of the day" (Kaplan, 1976, p. 6). Additionally, Jewish men immerse before Yom Kippur as a part of the process of repentance.

Overwhelmingly, however, the primary use of the mikveh is to maintain family purity laws—a responsibility that rests with women. While husbands are expected to encourage and help with this observance, the responsibility for the future of the Jewish people is the woman's.

> For not only is this mitzvah a holy foundation of family life . . . it also is something that has an effect on, and lasts throughout, all future generations, for through the observance of family purity, children are born who grow up to build their own Jewish homes—"eternal edifices"—themselves have children, and so on. (Likkutei Sichot XII, p. 258ff, in Loebenstein & Sholom, 1988, p. xii)

Violation of *tahorat ha-mishpacha* can rival other major Jewish transgressions such as eating leavened foods during Passover, intentionally violating the mandate to fast on Yom Kippur, and ignoring the Jewish covenant of *brit milah* (circumcision) (Slonim, 1969). Mikveh rituals sustained the spiritual purification and communal fortitude of the Jews throughout the centuries, regardless of the many conflicts, wars, pogroms, expulsions, and attempts at annihilation. As evidenced by the many mikvaot that are being found and excavated today throughout Israel and Europe, their longstanding presence is indisputable. "The Torah scroll was the source of daily Jewish identity and clarified boundaries of the Jewish community. But the mikveh gave the community a future" (Lax & Rubin, 2001, p. 15).

CHALLENGES DURING THE HOLOCAUST

As the Nazis occupied countries and ghettoized the Jews, mikveh immersion and observance of family purity laws presented a unique set of challenges. Nazi actions and laws intruded into the most intimate aspects of Jewish life. Jews in many major Eastern European cities with sizable observant Jewish communities were restricted from moving about freely. Increasingly, curfews were imposed and Jews were forbidden to travel on public transportation. Destruction of Jewish places of worship continued well after *Kristallnacht* and became commonplace. For example, in Vilnius, Lithuania, where half the city's citizens were Jewish, the Nazis destroyed the many synagogues and mikvaot—a task they replicated all over Europe as they looted and desecrated Jewish sacred sites. By all accounts, the Nazis understood the importance of the mikveh to Jewish life and used their destruction as a tool to further oppress, humiliate, and attempt to dehumanize the Jews.

Before the war, Warsaw, for instance, boasted eight privately owned functional mikvaot as well as the prestigious communal mikveh of Praga. However,

> during the bombing of Warsaw, none of the mikvehs were operational, since they served as bomb shelters. When the bombing ended and Warsaw's water supply was restored, the mikvehs immediately resumed service. . . . Attendance was very high, and it was a time of great prosperity for mikveh owners. (Huberband, 1985, p. 193)

But in December 1939, Dr. Schrempf, a well-known antisemite and the director of Warsaw's Health Department, ordered his staff to inspect all the mikvaot in the city on the pretext of assessing their sanitary conditions. After the inspections, Dr. Schempf published an article in the German-language *Krakauer Zeitung* where he decreed that mikvaot

> were breeding grounds for epidemic diseases, because the pools could be replenished only once every three months according to the Jewish religion. He claimed that the Jews bathed in these pools while clothed. He depicted the filthiness and uncleanliness of the mikvehs in horrifying terms. (p. 194)

While none of his claims were true, all the mikvaot in Warsaw were subsequently closed and ordered sealed and destroyed. Notices were posted at all entrances, alerting anyone who entered that it would be considered an act of sabotage—punishable by 10 years in prison or even death. Posters warned: "Whoever bathes in this mikveh will be shot immediately, and the mikveh owner will be shot as well" (p. 195). Thus Jews, especially married women wishing to continue to observe family purity laws, were faced with a great dilemma—to continue to fulfill the mitzvah of mikveh or to heed the biblical commandments to "take utmost care and guard yourself scrupulously" (Deuteronomy 4:9), because tragically, under Nazi rule, mikveh observance meant inviting great danger upon oneself.

Yet Jewish women went to great lengths to continue observing the religious obligation of mikveh immersion, and the Jewish communities where they lived rallied to support them as much as possible. For example, Varsovian women forbidden to immerse locally began traveling to nearby towns to use the mikvaot there. In the beginning of 1940, however, travel bans were put into effect in Warsaw and passengers riding trains had to provide "lice passes" certifying their holders had been vaccinated against the diseases carried by lice (Huberband, 1987, p. 195). Eventually, train travel by Jews was forbidden altogether, cutting off access even to out-of-town mikvaot. Women then concentrated their efforts on other means of reaching the nearby towns of Rembertów, Pruszków, Otwock, Falenica, and Growzisk. In his detailed notes on religious dilemmas and other issues in the Warsaw Ghetto, noted Jewish historian Rabbi Shimon Huberband chronicled how "primarily poor women traveled to Rembertow. A group of women would get together, hire a coachman, and travel there by wagon. They would leave Warsaw in the middle of the day in order to return before the nighttime curfew" (p. 195).

In early 1940, the majority of women were traveling to Pruszków, which could be reached by trolleys that, temporarily, did not require lice passes. When the requirement for such passes came into full effect for all modes of transportation, the Jewish community purchased a large quantity of the passes from the various government offices issuing them and distributed them to a group of Warsaw rabbis, who provided them to women at no charge (p. 195).

Traveling elsewhere, however, was impractical, and finding local solutions became another critical concern for the Jewish community of Warsaw. In the summer of 1940, several rabbis united to rent bathing areas along the Vistula River, and they provided two mikveh attendants for the women. The clandestine service was provided at no charge to the community and allowed men to immerse in the open river as well (p. 196). The practice was short-lived, however, due to the coldness of the water, a tragic drowning incident, and the very real and ever-present fear of being caught by the local police or Nazis after curfew.

In addition, the private owner of the mikveh located at 14 Grzybowska Street reached out to his local Polish police precinct and began providing monthly payments as a bribe for overlooking the reopening of his facility. The owner opened a hole in a nearby basement for access to the mikveh and kept it heated daily for men to immerse and in the evenings for women. Soon, other mikveh owners followed his example, and "before long there were four clandestine mikvehs functioning in Warsaw. Needless to say, the bathing was conducted in total secrecy" (p. 197). The owners of the mikvaot had to exercise a great deal of caution in heating them to avoid detection by Christian neighbors.

By October 1940, Jews were prohibited from riding the trolley, even with lice passes, so the Pruszków mikveh became inaccessible to the women of Warsaw. However, by November 1940, the Warsaw ghetto was sealed and the mikvaot could be heated daily without fear of exposure and reprisal, so women once again had a place to immerse.

Through the winter of 1941, mikveh attendance remained high until a typhus epidemic erupted through the ghetto and fuel shortages caused price increases. In the closed ghetto, where most Jews had limited access to funds, attending the mikveh at 10 zlotys per immersion became cost-prohibitive for many.

Other Jewish communities across Europe were affected differently. Records show that in Germany, for instance, access to the mikveh was far easier than in Poland, with "mikvaot in Berlin and Hamburg still in use as late as 1944" (Kirschner, 1985, p. 88). In the Łódz Ghetto, mikveh operations were centralized under the responsibilities of the rabbinical board of the *Judenrat* (Jewish council). Recognizing the primacy of the mikveh to the spiritual and physical well-being of their community, the rabbis ensured an adequate supply of coal to heat the water for men's and women's immersion [Fig. 1] (Berman, 2015).

While immersion practices and mikveh access differed by community, ethical considerations related to fulfilling the laws of family purity surfaced and decisions were often made on a case-by-case basis. Strict rules govern when a woman may immerse in ritual waters following her menses, including the number of days and the time of day. Such rules were extremely difficult to follow in the ghettos, where strict curfews were enforced and movements to and fro were restricted. Rabbis decreed that women could immerse pre-dusk, in order to travel safely back to their homes. However, when the time for mikveh immersion coincided with the eve of the Sabbath, rabbis were conflicted over whether early immersion was permissible. Rabbi Yitzchak Weiss of Vrbo, Slovakia, wrote in 1942 that one must do everything possible to promote mikveh use for women "so that [the people of] Israel will not be prevented from the duty of procreation" (Kirschner, 1985, p. 90). However, he ruled that women must also ensure that they return to their homes in time "to kindle the Sabbath candles" (p. 92).

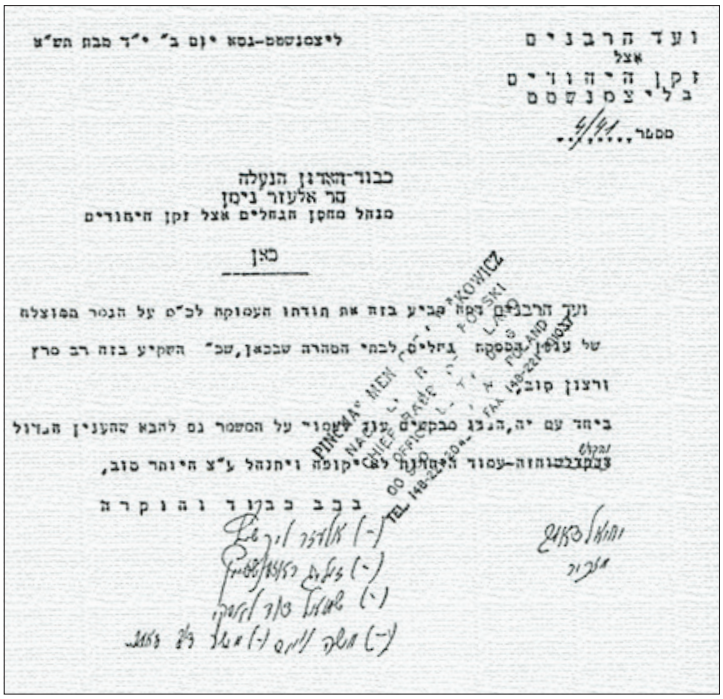


FIG. 1. Letter of thanks from the rabbis of Łódź for the heating of the water in the ritual bath, memo number 4/41. Courtesy of Rabbi David Skolski of the Ginzach Kiddush HaShem Archives.

Thus, even under the most difficult and dangerous circumstances, the laws of *tahorat ha-mishpacha* were strictly observed by many religiously observant women in the ghettos. They placed themselves directly in the path of danger and shouldered the burden of the continued survival of the Jewish people.

ETHICAL QUESTIONS

Family purity laws govern sex and procreation, but they are first used by religious Jewish couples to consecrate their marriages. During the Holocaust, many Jewish communities saw a dramatic increase in the number of weddings performed.

> Weddings became a mass phenomenon during the war. . . . The war caused many men to lose their wives and women to lose their husbands. This also led to more marriages. There was a special upshot of marriages at the time of resettlement in the ghetto. (Huberband, 1987, p. 202)

Several ethical difficulties arose from these marriages, as mikvaot were not always available for ritual immersion by the bride and groom as necessitated by Jewish law. In addition, rabbis struggled with whether to perform weddings and allow marriages to occur when it would be difficult or impossible for so many couples to observe the family purity laws. However, when Rabbi Avraham Dov-Ber Shapiro, chief rabbi of Kovno, learned that single women were being selected for deportation from the ghetto and were seeking civil marriages in the (vain) hope of preventing this, he "decided to perform halakhic weddings, even without mikveh, for *'pikuach nefesh'* (the Jewish obligation to save a life) reasons" (Berman, 2015, n.p.).

MIKVEH USE IN THE CAMPS

While the use of a mikveh in a concentration camp was impossible, it was also unnecessary, because women were separated from their husbands. Further, because food was so severely restricted, conditions so brutal, and inmates' health so compromised, many women ceased to menstruate. However, there are examples of women visiting the mikveh while interned in transit camps such as Westerbork, in the Netherlands. Pepi van Ryk, for instance, recalls obtaining permission from the camp commandant to use the closest mikveh—while under guard (Gurewitsch, 1998, p. 310).

The mikveh was also employed in pre-death rituals. Its significance is most profoundly exemplified in the stories of young women who, facing sexual defilement or imminent murder, requested a visit to the mikveh. Yaffa Eliach (1988) relates the account of a young woman in the

Bochnia Ghetto, located 28 miles east of Kraków, Poland, who asked the Nazi officer who was going to execute her to grant her one last wish—permission to visit the mikveh for ritual purification. According to Eliach, the officer answered, "You are a filthy race, the source of all disease and vermin in Europe. Suddenly, before your death, you wish to be clean. What spell did you cast in that ritual bath house of yours?" The young girl replied,

> Cleanliness and purity of body and mind are part of our tradition and way of life. God has brought our pure souls into this world in the pure homes of our parents, and we wish to return in purity to our Father in Heaven. (p. 161)

With that, the officer executed the young girl.

While this story may or may not be true, it resembles other Holocaust narratives, none more popular than the legend of 93 Bais Yaakov schoolgirls who chose suicide rather than sexual servitude and visited the mikveh for ritual purification before killing themselves. On January 8, 1943, a letter was published in the *New York Times* purporting to document the fate of these young women, who had been forcibly removed from their school and resettled in the Kraków Ghetto, eventually to serve as prostitutes to German soldiers. Chaya Feldman, the letter's author, writes:

> Yesterday and the day before we were given warm water to wash and we were told that German soldiers would visit us this evening. Yesterday we all swore to die. Today we are all taken out to a large apartment with four well-lit rooms and beautiful beds. The Germans don't know that this bath is our purification bath before death. (Kahn, 2017, n.p.)

Scholars have dismissed this story as fiction (Baumel & Schacter, 1992), but the tale offers insight into the importance of ritual immersion in the lives of observant Jews. Faced with the prospect of physical defilement and spiritual ruination, this account tells us, these young women preferred death. Immersion in the mikveh would precede their desperate act, reaffirming the importance of ritual purification for women even under extreme duress. Even "if it didn't happen to the 93 Bais Yaakov girls in Cracow," write Judith Taylor Baumel and Jacob J. Schacter (1992), "it undoubtedly did happen to other women, in other cities, under different circumstances, during the long dark years of the Holocaust" (p. 127). The tale typifies the threats to and vulnerabilities of young women in the ghettos and offers a model of female courage and dignity in the face of duress.

MIKVEH USE IN THE AFTERMATH

Halachically sound weddings and marriages were also a concern of those who survived the Holocaust and were now refugees in DP camps. Young couples were eager to marry, start families, and move forward from the horrors they had experienced during the Holocaust. "By the middle of 1946, mikvaot had been constructed at most major DP camps and cities with Jewish communities" (Baumel, 1998, p. 237) [Fig. 2], where weddings were occurring daily. For religiously observant couples, this construction signaled a return to normalcy and the possibility of a new life, with the hope that this entailed. In many ways, immersion in the mikveh acted as intended—as a vehicle for transformation and creation.

> Women's experiences in the DP camps were largely shaped by the logical consequences of marriage and sexual relations: motherhood. . . . Giving birth to a Jewish child . . . represented the new beginning of Jewish society in freedom and the triumph of the Jewish people over their oppressors. (Feinstein, 2006, pp. 72–73)

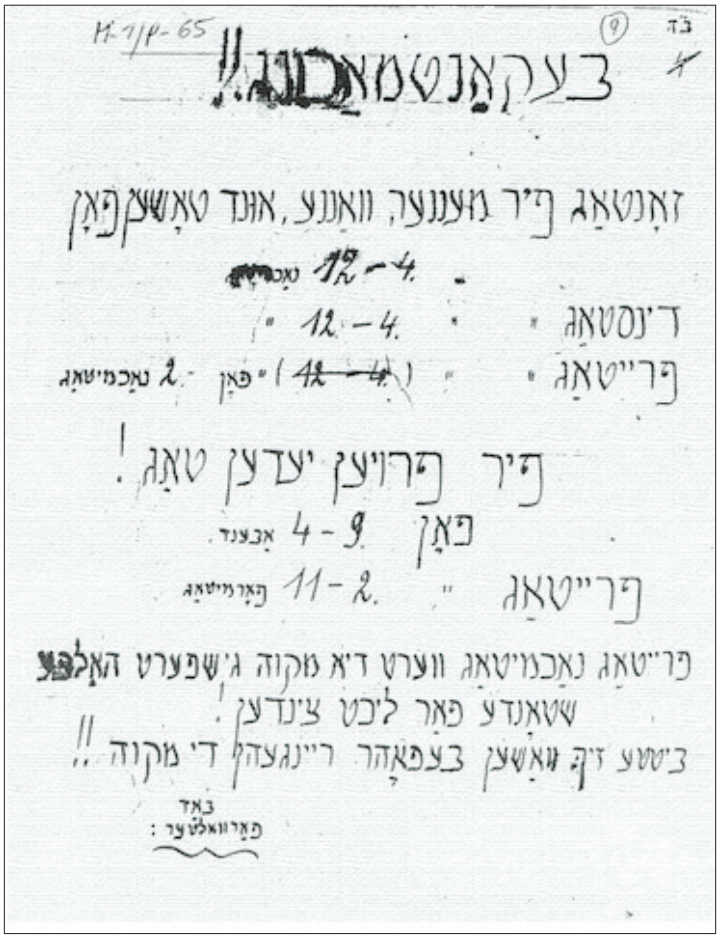


FIG. 2. Notice of the hours of the new ritual bath in Bergen-Belsen, ca. 1945. Bergen-Belsen Archives, Yad Vashem. Courtesy of Rabbi David Skolski of the Ginzach Kiddush HaShem Archives.

The water of the mikveh, by its very nature, changes the status of what it touches. As men and women emerged from the camps as victims, mikveh immersion could change their status to that of survivors.

Further, both men and women felt a profound need to bring children into the world again. Many survivors felt bound to start new families so they would "not contribute to the diminution of the Jewish people. Family size is an issue with implications that reach beyond the family itself" (Schneider, 1994, p. 381). What is more, for many women, adhering to the laws of *tahorat ha-mishpacha* was a way of honoring and memorializing those who did not survive.

MIKVEH IMMERSION AS A VEHICLE OF REBIRTH

Could it be that immersion in the mikveh offered a wounded and aggrieved post-Holocaust Jewish nation a vehicle for rebirth? One often emerges from the mikveh spiritually as well as physically renewed. In the two millennia since Herod built his fortress at Masada, the use and importance of the mikveh has remained unwavering. Throughout the centuries, the reliability of the mikveh as an agent of transformation—an instrument of reawakening and revolution—has been unfaltering. While privacy and secrecy may have moderated our understanding of mikveh use during the Holocaust and later, what we have learned about it exemplifies many experiences unique to married Jewish women under Nazi rule. While observing the laws of family purity is a personal act, its ramifications affect the entire community, and thus Orthodox Jewish women's steadfast observance of the mitzvah of *tahorat ha-mishpacha* has been, to their great credit, a source of redemption and restoration. As Warsaw Ghetto historian Ringelblum wrote,

> The future historian will have to dedicate an appropriate page to the Jewish woman in the war. She will take up an important page in Jewish history for her courage and steadfastness. By her merit, thousands of families have managed to surmount the terror of the times. (Berman, 2015, n.p.).

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Karen Alkalay-Gut explains: "I've been trying to find out about my mother's family for years. The only person I've found any evidence of so far is Malcah, my mother's youngest sister, a partisan who helped the family as long as she could, until she, with her mother, her two brothers, and her four sisters, along with their families, disappeared in the Holocaust."

Karen Alkalay-Gut

Her Story

I have never been able to tell her story
Sometimes it escapes me, sometimes I am not sure
it could really have happened, sometimes I read
different accounts of her demise, or a paragraph
from some testimony jogs my memory and the terrible days
when I first heard what happened to her return.

This much is in my blood:
I was conceived on the day she died.
This much is in my blood.
She blew up trains.
The courage came from her uplifted chin
and the two infants she watched
dashed against the wall of their home.
Avram twelve months old and Masha two years.
My first cousins.

They too — in my blood — all that is left.

If I can write of these babies,
I can manage the rest —
following her path as she escaped
the prison camp with her husband
and joined the Orlanski Otriade
Lenin Brigade, Lipichanski Forest.

I can feel her mouth, her narrow lips clamped
as she bends over the delicate mines,
solemn as in the photo when as a child
she sat with the rest of the choir
unsmiling amid the festive singers
unwilling perhaps to feel poetic joy
perhaps destined for so much more.

There are at least three accounts of her death:
The partisan Abba Kovner told me she
was caught
in a mission and hanged. He looked away
when he spoke,
not piercing me as always with his tragic eyes,
and I knew there was more he would not say.

Another book states she lagged behind
the platoon
escaping an attack, perhaps pregnant,
and was imprisoned in Zhetl.
The jail was ignited, perhaps by accident,
and she was just one of the victims.

When Mother first told me the story
she had just heard at the hairdresser's,
I was only a child, and outraged
that she was weeping, tears
rolling down her face. She knew
all I cared for was my own life,
and her latest discovery
of the fate of her youngest sister
was a disruption.
But who else could she tell?

The loft in the barn, she said,
hiding there were three women,
her sister and her husband. They came
and set the barn afire. He helped
the women first, and his wife came last
but didn't come, was burnt alive.

Malcah, Malcah, who saved all our lives
Malcah, who was waiting for them
when the ship brought them back to Danzig
after they were barred from the Holy Land,
who found them the agricultural visas to England
and saw them off the night that Hitler invaded.

But there is no real story.
All that remains is a faded snapshot
a few sentences in unread memorial tomes,
and me, who cannot tell any story for sure.

Pnina Rosenberg brings to light the fascinating connections among famed comics illustrator Joe Kubert, his counterfactual graphic novel *Yossel: April 19, 1943*, and Dina Gottliebová Babbitt, a Czech Jew whose paintings, commissioned by the Nazis, kept her and her mother alive. Rosenberg helps us understand how "Kubert's use of alternative reality enables him, as an artist, to be immersed in the tragic fate of European Jewry during the Holocaust, those who survived and those who were murdered."

Pnina Rosenberg

Yossel: April 19, 1943: The Counterfactual Graphic Novel of Joe Kubert

Creating works of art during the Holocaust was an act of *spiritual resistance,* a term coined by Miriam Novitch, who survived the Holocaust and curated the initial art collection of the Ghetto Fighters' House Museum in the early 1950s. While painting, imprisoned artists gained some control over a designated space, a control almost completely denied in other areas of life. Thus, with pencils and scraps of paper, they bore witness not only to the world of the Holocaust, but also to the human spirit, to the spark of humanity that was not extinguished.

However, alongside inmates' clandestine art, a substantial number of artists engaged in commissioned art produced on orders of ghetto or camp administrators. Dina Gottliebová (later Babbitt), for instance, was a 19-year-old Czech Jewish artist imprisoned in Auschwitz. Josef Mengele, who was aware of her talents, ordered her to draw ethnically accurate portraits of the Romany imprisoned there. He had been performing medical experiments on this population, attempting to offer scientific proof that the Romany were inferior in order to justify their annihilation. At the same time, Babbitt had been searching desperately for a way to save her mother, who, as an older woman, was a most likely candidate for immediate gassing, so she agreed to do these paintings, in effect bartering her talent for her mother's life. Mengele accepted her terms, and, according to historian Rafael Medoff (2009), in addition to depicting several Romany inmates and a few of his medical exams, she drew Mengele's likeness in several portraits. These moments of opportunity proved lifesaving for Dina and her mother, who both survived the Holocaust [Fig. 1].

During the 1970s, when Dina learned that eight of her Romany portraits had survived and were in the archives of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum, she asked that they be returned to her. The museum refused. Babbitt then began a long and exhausting battle with the museum to regain the portraits she had painted, which she believed were rightfully hers, and found help and support among an unlikely group of well-known comic book artists and a historian. Joe Kubert, illustrator of the adventures of Tarzan; Neal Adams, famed illustrator of heroes such as Batman and Green Arrow, from DC Comics; and Stan Lee, publisher emeritus of Marvel Comics and co-creator of comic book heroes Spider-Man, the X-Men, the Hulk, and the Fantastic Four, joined forces with historian Medoff and tried to help her regain her works. They drew and published a six-page comic describing Babbitt's life as an inmate in Terezin and Auschwitz and her just efforts to retrieve her paintings, releasing it as the combined work "The Last Outrage," a feature in one of the four issues of the comic-book miniseries *X-Men: Magneto—Testament* (Medoff, Adams, Kubert, & Lee, 2009). Despite the immense efforts of these supporters, which included several major petitions (one signed by over 400 comic book creators), a letter-writing campaign, and more, Babbitt, who passed away in 2009, never regained her works of art.

Why would comic book creators team up with a historian to rescue art produced for the Nazis? This essay will focus on what motivated Kubert, the author of the graphic novel *Yossel: April 19, 1943* (2003). As we will see, the artist, guised as his protagonist, felt a great affinity with Babbitt's forced role as an official artist in the service of the Nazis.

FIG. 1. A page from *The Last Outrage*, written by Rafael Medoff and illustrated by Neal Adams. It appears in Neal Adams, Rafael Medoff, and Craig Yoe, *We Spoke Out: Comic Books and the Holocaust.* San Diego, CA: Yoe Books / IDW Publishing, 2018, p.276. Reprinted by permission of the authors.

COUNTERFACTUAL HISTORY AND POSTMEMORY

Kubert's understanding of the importance of art to its creators during the Holocaust is manifested in Yossel, and his empathy for Babbitt's claim to her artwork is, in part, derived from this understanding. *Yossel* (a name that is the Yiddish equivalent of Joe, Kubert's first name) tells a story embedded in the Holocaust. It is structured as a counterfactual history—a historiography that speculates on how a different course of events might have affected the actual course of events.

Interestingly, while historians call such writing counterfactual, Medoff (2018) explains that "in the comic book world, there is an entire genre of storytelling called 'What If—?' stories, where writers ask questions along the lines of 'What if Superman never had super powers?' and 'What if Batman had been born in the 18th Century?' and the story begins from there" (personal communication, December 2018).

The British historian Niall Ferguson (1999) claims that the use of counterfactual history is plausible when the outcome in actual history "is one which no one expected—which was not actually thought about until it happened" (p. 87). Although the 20th-century persecution of European Jewry hardly can be qualified as unexpected, large-scale ghettoization and the rapidly escalating process of annihilation were not grasped as plausible "until it happened." Hence Kubert's use of alternative reality enables him, as an artist, to be immersed in part of the tragic fate of his murdered European family members.

The novel *Yossel*, as noted in its introduction, is based on dissimilarities between Kubert's actual biography and his fictional persona of Yossel, yet the story might well have been Kubert's own had his parents not emigrated from Poland to the United States in 1926, when he was an infant. He explains:

> If my parents had not come to America, we would have been caught in that maelstrom, sucked in and pulled down with the millions of others who were lost. . . . This book is the result of my "what-if?" thoughts. It is a work of fiction based on a nightmare that was fact. (Kubert, 2003, n.p.)

Though Kubert passed the war years away from Europe, news from the old country penetrated his American home: "During the early years of war, I recall some visitors my parents later told me had come from their hometown in Poland," he writes. "I remember discussions in hushed tones. Words I was not permitted to hear" (2003, n.p.). Affected by his relatives' hushed fate, he tries to incorporate himself among the victims by reviving and experiencing their past as a postmemory, a term coined by Marianne Hirsch (1997) that refers to "the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that precede their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (p. 22).

Kubert's use of counterfactual history allows him to represent an event that he did not experience through the persona of Yossel, the protagonist. Born in 1926 in Poland, the fictional Yossel is a gifted artist, who, like Kubert himself, created comic drawings and sketches even as a child. When the Nazis invade Poland, Yossel is interned in the Warsaw Ghetto with his family. Fortuitously, a German officer, impressed by Yossel's artistic talent, asks him to come regularly to the Security Office building to draw cartoons that please the Nazis. Yossel not only is given "paper, pencils, and even an eraser" but is also compensated with extra food—"cookies and bread" (p. 24)—that he shares with his family and comrades [Fig. 2, p. 34].

Later, because he has attained the status of a "privileged" artist, he is able to smuggle valuable information to the underground and to sabotage the Security Office. When many ghetto inmates, including his family, are deported, Yossel's Nazi "patrons" order him: "You are not included. You will stay" (pp. 27–28) in the ghetto, despite his wish to share his loved ones' fate.

Through the character of Yossel, Kubert reflects the phenomenon that commissioned artists during the Holocaust sometimes did indeed become privileged inmates, receiving art materials and other benefits, and a certain immunity. One such artist was Dina Gottliebová. Another was Jacques Gotko (Yakow Gothkowski), a French Jew of Russian origin who, while imprisoned in various French camps, aside from depicting daily life, also "did portraits that were commissioned by the Aryans. For these he would receive a scrap of bread or a little money that he consistently managed to smuggle to his wife" (Wellers, 1991, p. 148).

Yossel was saved from deportation, temporarily at least, because his artistic talent allowed him to become a valuable (if not indispensable) official artist for the Nazis. Babbitt, too, as an official artist, did what Dr. Mengele ordered her to do, and was spared. While the extra rations, privileges, and even immunity might be considered to form moments of grace or turning points that changed the fate of such artists, they are not turning points in the common understanding of the term, because artists' creativity gave them a sense of self-assurance and allowed them to feel some connection and continuity with their past lives as artists, as people, rather than as part of an anonymous mass destined to be murdered. This creativity lessened the abrupt rupture with their past and enabled them to retain a vital part of their identity. Yossel continued to draw comics in the ghetto, not only as a momentary escapist refuge, but also as a liaison with his past, which he recalls while drawing superheroes: "I have been drawing from the time I

FIG. 2. Joe Kubert, written and illustrated, from *Yossel: April 19, 1943: A Story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising*. New York: Ibooks, 2003, p. 24. YOSSEL © Joe Kubert. All characters, the distinctive likenesses thereof and all related elements are trademarks of Joe Kubert.

could hold a pencil, since I was two or three years old . . . especially cartoon strips" (p. 7). Later, he adds, "It felt good to draw again. To shut out the rest of the world. To feed my mind and my heart with that which makes me complete" (p. 119).

ALTERNATIVE CHRONOLOGY AND THE COMIC GRAPHIC NOVEL

Kubert's use of the comic graphic novel to form an alternative chronology enables him to juxtapose his counter-factual history with characters, places, and events in real history, such as correctly naming Mordecai Anielewicz as the leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and depicting life in the ghetto and concentration camp with the inspiration of well-known documentary photographs. The barrack in the camp (Kubert, 2003, p. 42), for instance, resembles that in the iconic photograph of Bergen-Belsen's liberation. These techniques lend credence to Kubert's alternate identity as Yossel.

Yossel continues to draw, officially for the Nazis, and

clandestinely for himself as a form of spiritual resistance: depictions of ghetto life and the activities of the Jewish underground, in which he takes part until his murder. Kubert, in his attempt to understand the Holocaust experience, or "as a response to a deficit experienced when one is faced with an absence of actual experience" (Prager, 2008, p. 115), identifies and empathizes with Holocaust victims, in particular Babbitt, as he writes in his rationale for his engagement with her efforts:

> The fact that she [Dina] could draw saved her life and her mother's life as well. That was the only thing that stood between her and going to the gas chamber. In my story, the fact that I could draw . . . intrigued the Nazis. . . . The only thing that had saved the kid, me—Yossel, in the book—was the fact that he could draw. (MacIntosh, 2009, n.p.)

No wonder that Kubert was so captivated by Babbitt's story: His protagonist also became an artist commissioned by the Nazis. Hence postmemory and counterfactual history serve as an artistic device for bridging the present to the Holocaust past.

What may have also motivated Kubert to reach out to help Babbitt is the fact that, according to Medoff (2018), "Later in his life, Kubert became much more interested in his Jewish roots than he had been in his younger years," and both Yossel and his outreach to Babbitt were means of reaffirming his personal identity as a Jew (personal communication, December 2018).

YOSSEL AS AN ARTIST DURING THE HOLOCAUST

Scraps of papers and pencils were treasured by the inmate-artists who painted during the Holocaust. Especially when creating clandestinely, they used all sorts of paper, such as newspapers and official forms, as well as stubs of pencils and other improvised tools. In the opening page of *Yossel*, the inmate-artist, hiding and fearful in a bombarded Warsaw Ghetto cellar, declares, "I am going to die." Yet he worries about his painting materials: "I feel for my valuables. My prized possessions. Did I lose them? No, thank God. My few scraps of paper. My pencil. I still have them" (Kubert, 2003, p. 2).

Another indication of the scarcity of drawing tools is given by noted artist Alexander Bogen (1916–2010), a survivor who had much in common with the fictive main character Yossel. Born in Vilnius, Bogen studied at the Academy of Art at the University of Vilnius until his studies were interrupted by the war. As part of the United Partisan Organization (FPO), he organized groups of Jewish youth and led them to the forests to join the *Nekama* (Vengeance) partisan brigade, which became famous for its exploits (Rosenberg, 2001). Reflecting on his time when, later, he commanded a partisan brigade in Narocz Forest of Belarus, Bogen attests:

> As a partisan I recorded in telegram style, so to say, while on my way to some action, leaning over my rifle or standing tensely in ambush. I sketched the forest, my brothers-in-arms, the battle itself. There was no table. There were no paints. There was no paper. I found packing paper. I burnt dry branches and prepared charcoal for my sketches. . . . Wherever I found myself, I collected scraps of paper and went on sketching [Fig. 3]. (Bogen, 1974, n.p.)

Kubert penetrates and brings to life the Holocaust artists' world by emphasizing not only the importance of every scrap of paper, but also the use of pencil drawing, contrary to standard practice in cartooning, as he explains in his introduction:

> The usual procedure in cartooning is to do the initial drawings with pencil, then to apply ink over the pencils with brush and pen; the pencil drawings are then erased, leaving only the ink rendering. . . . My drawings in the book are pencil rendering. My original intention was to first pencil them then ink my drawings. But with my first preliminary sketches I felt immediacy in my pencil drawings that I wanted to retain. (Kubert, 2003, n.p.)

Thus, consciously or unconsciously, Kubert's uninked alter ego follows in the footsteps of many artists who created during the Holocaust.

Brad Prager (2008), in his in-depth essay "The Holocaust Without Ink," while referring to Yossel's pencil drafts, proposes a fascinating insight by attributing Kubert's nonstandard practice to the fact that the artist had not experienced the Holocaust firsthand and therefore had never received "the identifying ink, the tattooed numbers that are the marks of the real victimhood" (p. 118). Hence Yossel's pencil drawings embed the graphic novel in a constant tension between the realm of Holocaust art and Kubert's post-Holocaust counterfactual history. Medoff (2018), however, offers an alternative—and simpler—insight: While "*Yossel* was a labor of love, it was very time-consuming. Doing it in pencil saved Kubert an enormous amount of time, and it also gave the story a 'period' look" (personal communication, December 2018).

ART AS TESTIMONY AND SPIRITUAL RESISTANCE

Yossel, who takes part in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, climbs down into the ghetto sewers to escape the heavy Nazi bombardment. While there, Yossel, who portrays himself drawing, surrounded by his fellow partisans as

FIG. 3. Alexander Bogen. *A Fighter Aiming his Rifle, Narocz Forest.* Charcoal on paper, 28x18cm., signed and dated: Bogen 10.II.1944. Ghetto Fighters' House Museum's Collection, donated by the artist.

they examine the creative process, writes: "I saved every scrap of paper I could find . . . every pencil stub, crayon, chalk . . . anything that *would make a mark* [emphasis added]. They meant to me more than ever before" [Fig. 4, p. 39] (Kubert, 2003, p. 7).

His explanation for the sense of urgency and the importance of his artistic activity while facing death is not surprising and is echoed in Bogen's real-life testimony: "We saw forsaken children. We saw people being taken for slaughter. I could not let my pencil fall. An artist doomed to death recording and so preserving those doomed to death" (Bogen, 1974, n.p.). Bogen also stated that, as an artist during the Holocaust, he "must *leave his mark* [emphasis added] as a *mensch* [human being] on mankind" (Costanza, 1982, XVIII), a notion reflected in Yossel's vocabulary. The shared need of the artists-partisans to "leave a mark" is further elaborated by Bogen when he discusses the role of the artist as a bearer of Holocaust memory:

> I asked myself why I was drawing, when I was fighting day and night. This is something similar to biological continuation. . . . Another motivation was to bring information to the so-named free world about the . . . cruel actions of the Germans—some documentation . . . . To be creative in the situation of the Holocaust, this is also a protest. Each man, when he is standing face to face with real danger, with death, reacts in his way. The artist reacts with his means. This is his protest! . . . This is his weapon. (Costanza, 1982, XVIII)

Yossel the comic artist not only documents his own experiences in the Warsaw Ghetto but also visually records and transmits the lengthy oral testimony of the atrocities in Auschwitz, which have been brought to his knowledge by a prisoner who escaped from a death camp. Hence the graphic novel enables the reader to be acquainted with two different spaces, the Warsaw Ghetto and Auschwitz, through the work of the young inmate who is committed to making a mark.

Even after Yossel's family is deported, he continues his commissioned drawings at the behest of the Nazis. Now they include "big, strong muscled men" (Kubert, 2003, p. 23) who are considered by the German to be "Reich supermen" (p. 24) and "true Nazis . . . rulers of the world" (p. 94) for their likeness to the colossal classical Greek and Roman sculptures that supposedly embodied Aryan racial superiority [Fig. 5, p. 40].

Yet, alongside his cartoons, a radically different artistic vision is formed. His "sketches gradually transform from fanciful depictions of supernatural creatures to grimly artistic realistic portraits of the ghetto's horrors" (p. 69). He writes:

> Every day I see starving children fighting others for a crust of bread . . . a starving woman held an ailing baby to breasts bereft of milk. . . . The things I saw scorched my eyes and pulled my pencil to paper. I had to draw them. But I did not show these sketches to the soldiers. These sketches would not please them [Fig. 6, p. 41]. (Kubert, 2003, pp. 31–32)

This dualism reflects the work of many artist-inmates who used their official access to painting materials to draw clandestine works that unveiled the true image of ghetto and camp life, and in doing so, risked their lives.

ART AS ESCAPISM

Even at the height of the Ghetto Uprising, in the midst of the fighting and casualties of the Jewish resistance, Yossel continues to draw: "When I was drawing, everything else disappeared; only my drawing existed, only the characters and the settings: Only they were real "(p. 7). And later: "I drew pictures all night, of alien and exotic lands. So my drawings once again pulled me away from my horrors that lay before me. If I could not draw, I could not survive (p. 104)."

Yossel's intense immersion in his art, as well as his choice of drawing "exotic lands," reveals another survival strategy employed during the Holocaust, summarized in the perceptive observation of the Jewish Austrian psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1984), who, as early as 1946, chronicled his Auschwitz experiences: "Artists, highly sensitive people used to a rich intellectual life, may have suffered

appallingly, but the harm to their inner being was less. They could retreat from their terrible surrounding to a rich inner life and spiritual freedom" (p. 51).

KUBERT'S *YOSSEL* AS HOMAGE TO HOLOCAUST ARTISTS

Kubert's "displaced autobiography" (Gonshak & Tech, 2009, p. 69) revolves around a what-if (hi)story in which the artist integrates himself into his fictional persona, even using phrases similar to those he uses when narrating his own biography and voicing his own thoughts through his protagonist. For example, in the introduction to his book, Kubert (2003) writes, "I started to draw as soon as I was old enough to hold anything that would make a mark" (n.p.), a phrase that his character Yossel later echoes (p. 7).

As we have seen, Kubert not only creates a counterfactual protagonist, but also portrays, though the character Yossel, the collective stories of Holocaust artists. The most tempting comparison is between the fictive Yossel and the real Alexander Bogen, both of whom were artists as well as partisans. Nonetheless, there are so many other common traits among Yossel, Dina, and other Holocaust artists, men and women, older and younger, that it is impossible to read the graphic novel and not see the larger expanse of the immeasurable legacy left by the artists who, despite everything, maintained their sparks of human spirit.

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FIG. 4: Joe Kubert, written and illustrated, from *Yossel: April 19, 1943: A Story of the Ghetto Warsaw Uprising.* New York: Ibooks, 2003, p. 7. YOSSEL © Joe Kubert. All characters, the distinctive likenesses thereof and all related elements are trademarks of Joe Kubert.

FIG. 5: Joe Kubert, written and illustrated, from *Yossel: April 19, 1943: A Story of the Ghetto Warsaw Uprising.* New York: Ibooks, 2003, p. 94. YOSSEL © Joe Kubert. All characters, the distinctive likenesses thereof and all related elements are trademarks of Joe Kubert.

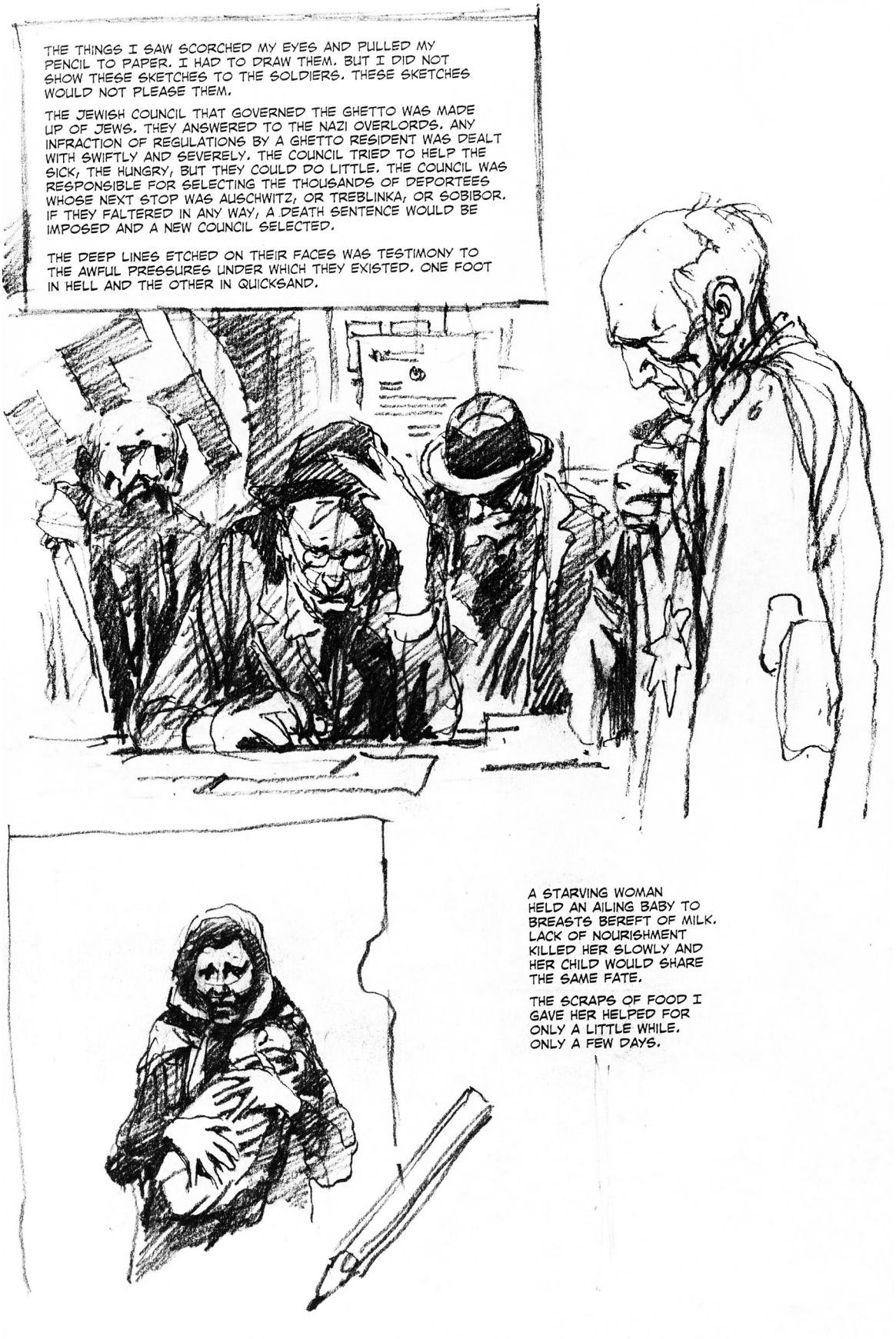

FIG. 6: Joe Kubert, written and illustrated, from *Yossel: April 19, 1943: A Story of the Ghetto Warsaw Uprising.* New York: Ibooks, 2003, p. 32. YOSSEL © Joe Kubert. All characters, the distinctive likenesses thereof and all related elements are trademarks of Joe Kubert.

Stephen J. Cipot credits Francine Mayran's haunting painting *Waiting for Humanity* (p. 43) as one that "cuts straight to the core of the utter destruction of the helpless" and inspired him to write about those who "understood how humanity fails utterly." Ask students to compare this poem to Karen Alkalay-Gut's "Night Travel," p. 21; Charles Adès Fishman's "The Lithuanian Rescuers," p. 44; and Lou Ella Hickman's "in memory of the white rose society martyrs," p. 86, and reflect on Mayran's painting.

Stephen J. Cipot

Oblivion II

They understood how humanity fails utterly
And how civility is abandoned.
How terror arrives well versed, on the footsteps
Of friends and neighbors.
How suffering settles under the eyelids
With an authority that never leaves.
How fear checks smiles and denies laughter.
How faces fade to a grave ashen pallor, and
How children are put in chains and led to their death.

They understood standing silently in the breathless summer
And winter's cruel cold, up against a blind black wall,
Facing bullets, truncheons, poison gas chambers,
Starvation, typhus — under these conditions
Meeting death, exhausted and alone.
The doors slammed shut, no one unbolted them.
How well they knew.

Francine Mayran's *Waiting for Humanity* (2009) is a very large (70x86 inches) oil painting. Of it, she writes:
"Our numbers vanish / We are asked for our names / Apparently free / but still insensate / The body is released / but the soul always elsewhere / by chance alive / when so many others are no longer."

Francine Mayran

Waiting for Humanity

"This poem," Charles Adès Fishman writes, "is dedicated to Vincis Antonitis, Albinas Zilevicius, Stase Brazauskieni, and the very few others like them. Ninety-four percent of Lithuanian Jews were murdered during the Holocaust, a greater percentage than in any other nation." As you compare this to Karen Alkalay-Gut's "Night Travel," p. 21, reflect on the various kinds of rescue possible.

Charles Adès Fishman

The Lithuanian Rescuers

The goodness of a few
has no ending:
their selfless acts of kindness
rekindle our belief in life

From their ordinary faces
something illuminated
shines forth

Their compassion did not flower
in the poor soil of their country
or flow from holy vessels
in village churches

Their parents had taught them
to shelter the vulnerable
to give them food and drink

and to ask for nothing in return

Blessings on their heads and on
the heads of their children for they
drive the darkness back for they
are like rays of an unextinguished sun.

"Imagine," suggests Rafael Medoff, "Lin-Manuel Miranda, Beyoncé, Tom Cruise, Taylor Swift, Andrew Lloyd Webber, George Clooney, and a dozen other entertainers of their stature volunteering to participate in a theatrical event to publicize an urgent humanitarian cause. That's the level of star power that screenwriter and playwright Ben Hecht mobilized in the 1940s, when he brought together the biggest stars of stage and screen of his era to promote the rescue of Jews from the Holocaust and to urge the establishment of a Jewish state."

Rafael Medoff

Ben Hecht and the Fight for Jewish Freedom

Ben Hecht, the son of Russian Jewish immigrants, grew up in turn-of-the-century Chicago, Illinois, and Racine, Wisconsin, in what he described as a "large, extended, nutty Jewish family of wild uncles and half-mad aunts" (Epstein, 1990, p. 41). One aunt in particular left her mark. As Hecht told it, one of his most vivid childhood memories was of his Aunt Chasha taking him to a play in which a policeman wrongly accused another character of theft. The excitable young Ben shouted in protest from the audience, prompting the theater manager to demand an apology for the child's disruptive behavior. Chasha responded by hitting the manager over the head with her umbrella.

"Remember what I tell you," she explained to her nephew. "That's the way to apologize" (Hecht, 1944, p. 237).

That attitude seems to have guided Hecht as he blazed his way through each challenge and cause that he took on. His first novel landed him in court on obscenity charges. With Clarence Darrow as his defense attorney, Hecht lost the case but won national notice. Five years later, he won the very first Academy Award for original screenplay (for *Underworld*); Hecht boasted that he used the Oscar statuette as a doorstop. A year after that, his play about the newspaper business, *The Front Page*, was a box office smash on Broadway.

Hecht arguably was the most celebrated screenwriter of his era. Surveying his lifetime *oeuvre* of 65 film scripts (including such blockbusters as *Gone with the Wind* and *Scarface*), 25 books, 20 plays, and hundreds of short stories and magazine articles, film critic Judith Crist (1990) dubbed him "the most prolific multimedia child of this century" (p. 21).

As a young man, Hecht showed no real interest in his Jewish heritage, but the rise of Nazism and the persecution of his coreligionists transformed him.

"The German mass murder of the Jews, recently begun, had brought my Jewishness to the surface," Hecht (1954) later recalled.

> I was too old to enlist in the battle in Europe. But I was not too old for anger. I went through the days holding my anger like a hot stove in my arms. . . . The anger led me to join an organization for the first time in my life. It was called "Fight for Freedom." (pp. 517–518)

DEFYING PUBLIC OPINION

The Fight for Freedom Committee advocated preemptive US military action to oust Adolf Hitler, a bold position to take at a time when American public opinion was overwhelmingly opposed to overseas interventions. Most Americans found Hitler's totalitarian ways distasteful, but saw no compelling reason to go to war against Nazi Germany, which seemed to be just one among many unsavory regimes. Gallup polls during 1940 and 1941 found only about one tenth of Americans were willing to go to war for any reason other than to fend off an invasion of the United States itself (Key, 1961, p. 277). Polls also found 71% of Americans thought the US was wrong to have entered World War I; many believed America had been tricked into the conflict by greedy weapons manufacturers (Cantril, 1951, pp. 1165–1166). The hardships of the Great Depression further intensified the view that domestic concerns required America's full attention, and that the country

This contribution is based on previous essays by the author in related areas of Holocaust history.

could not spare any resources for overseas matters.

Many in Hollywood, however, strongly disagreed. Numerous celebrities agreed with Fight for Freedom's campaign and joined the group's special Stage, Screen, Radio and Arts Division. In the autumn of 1941, the members of that division, Hecht foremost among them, pooled their many talents to undertake a dramatic pageant at Madison Square Garden that sought to convince public opinion of the necessity of war.

Hecht and his longtime collaborator Charles MacArthur wrote the script for *Fun to Be Free*, and an audience of over 17,000 packed Madison Square Garden on October 5, 1941, for the three-hour Mammoth Revue of patriotic songs; skits mocking Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo; and dramatic readings emphasizing the need for quick American military intervention against the Axis [Fig. 1].

FIG. 1. Two tickets for *Fun to Be Free*, 1941. Courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

The audience "came close to having the wits scared out of them" at the beginning of the show, the *New York Times* (1941) reported, when the darkened auditorium was rocked by a soundtrack of a bombing raid and crisscrossing searchlights that showed thousands of eight-inch cardboard soldiers drifting down from the ceiling with tiny parachutes. That was followed by Bill "Bojangles" Robinson tap-dancing on a coffin labeled "Hitler." Then Carmen Miranda "sang in her well-known South American style," as the *Times* put it, after which "Eddie Cantor, in a hoop-skirt, and Jack Benny put on an Easter Parade act" (p. 7).

Even Brooklyn Dodgers manager Leo Durocher took part. Earlier that day, in one of the most famous World Series games ever played, Dodgers catcher Mickey Owen famously dropped a third strike, with two outs in the ninth inning, opening the door to a Yankees rally and victory. According to the *Times*, Durocher, in his appearance at *Fun to Be Free*, "made a little speech to this effect: 'We don't want Hitlerism, we want Americanism. And the Yankees are a great ball club. Even if we lose, we'll be losing in a free country'" (p. 7).

The roster of those who appeared on stage that evening reads like a Who's Who of pre-World War II Hollywood: Tallulah Bankhead, Melvyn Douglas, Morton Downey, Helen Hayes, Burgess Meredith, George Jessel, Ethel Merman, Sophie Tucker, and many others. It was produced by Oscar Hammerstein (of Rodgers & Hammerstein fame), Moss Hart, and George Kaufman, with music and lyrics by, among others, Irving Berlin and Kurt Weill. The Radio City Ballet performed, as did the lesser-known but no less enthusiastic International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union Chorus. However, the real impact of Hecht's extravaganza and the committee's other activities on public opinion will never be known, because eight weeks later, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and, overnight, virtually all Americans became supporters of the fight for freedom.

WE WILL NEVER DIE

Two and a half years later, Hecht eagerly mixed art and politics once more.

Towards the end of November 1942, newspapers throughout the United States reported that Nazi Germany and its collaborators had already killed two million European Jews as part of its mass-murder campaign. Many Americans found it difficult to believe the information; a January 1943 poll showed that only 47% believed it to be true (Wyman, 1984, p. 77). Hecht, though, believed the information and sounded the alarm. In a February 1943 article in *The American Mercury* magazine titled "The Extermination of the Jews" (Wyman, 1984, p. 63), Hecht recounted Nazi terror from the victims' point of view. The piece was soon excerpted in *Reader's Digest* for a wider audience and retitled "Remember Us."

Hecht then set to work on a dramatic pageant to further raise awareness of the plight of European Jews. He called the show *We Will Never Die*. To produce the show, Hecht teamed up with Peter Bergson, a Zionist emissary from Palestine who had come to the United States to lobby for Jewish statehood and the rescue of Jewish refugees. Bergson had already been planning a rally at Madison Square Garden in early March, to be called "Action—Not Pity." After agreeing to work together, Bergson opted to stage Hecht's performance instead.

Hecht found eager partners in both the Hollywood and Broadway communities. Broadway director Moss Hart and producer Billy Rose signed on for *We Will Never Die.* German refugee composer Kurt Weill created a powerful score from original and pre-existing compositions. Actors Edward G. Robinson, Paul Muni, Sylvia Sydney, and Stella Adler assumed the lead roles, with other cinema and stage

stars performing when the show traveled to other cities. The program booklet featured cover artwork by the famous artist Arthur Szyk, himself a Jewish refugee from Nazi-overrun Poland.

Hecht found a less welcome reception among Jewish organizations. A meeting of representatives of several dozen Jewish groups, hosted by Hecht, deteriorated into shouting matches as ideological and personal rivalries overshadowed the massacres in Europe. It was an example of what the historian Henry Feingold (1995) has described as the sad tendency of some Jewish organizations to "allow themselves the luxury of fiddling while Jews burned" (p. 82).

The Roosevelt administration, too, looked askance at the project. Through White House adviser David Niles, Billy Rose asked President Franklin Roosevelt for a "brief message" that could be read aloud at the pageant. Nothing bold or controversial, of course, just something that would say "only that the Jews of Europe will be remembered when the time comes to make the peace" (Wyman, 1984, p. 90). Rose assured the White House, "There is no political color to our Memorial Service" (p. 90). Apparently, though, even the very mention of the Jews was "political" in the eyes of official Washington. White House aides warned the president that sending the requested message would be "a mistake" (p. 90). Despite Rose's assurance, "it is a fact that such a message would raise a political question" (p. 90), Henry Pringle of the Office of War Information advised.

What Pringle meant was that publicizing the slaughter could raise the "political question" of how America was going to respond to the Nazi genocide. Because President Roosevelt had decided the US was not going to take any specific steps to aid the Jews, raising that question would be embarrassing. Hence Rose was informed, by presidential secretary Stephen Early, that the "stress and pressure" (p. 90) of the president's schedule made it impossible for FDR to provide the few words of comfort and consolation that Hecht and his colleagues sought.

Hecht was not deterred. The pageant had a purpose that he pursued with single-minded determination. "Will it save the four million [Jews still alive in Europe]?" Hecht wrote on the eve of the opening. "I don't know. Maybe we can awaken some of the vacationing hearts in our government".[1]

"REMEMBER US"

We Will Never Die debuted at Madison Square Garden on Tuesday, March 9, 1943, to a sold-out crowd of 20,000. The large cast (newspapers claimed 1,000 participants) ultimately performed the entire show again that evening for another sold-out performance, this one beginning at 11:15 p.m., with the audio broadcast outside the theater to an overflow crowd.

The show opened with Yiddish stage actor Jacob Ben-Ami informing the audience: "We are here to say our prayers for the two million who have been killed in Europe." Twenty rabbis who, the audience was told, had escaped from Europe, recited the *Shema Yisrael* prayer as they stood on risers in front of two 40-ft.-high tablets representing the Ten Commandments [Fig. 2].

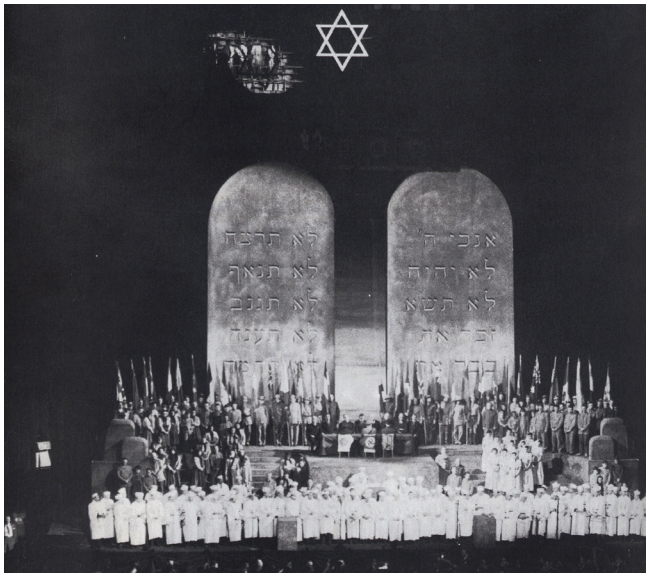

FIG. 2. Scene from Ben Hecht's *We Will Never Die*, March 9, 1943. Courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

Two narrators—Hollywood stars Paul Muni and Edward G. Robinson at the New York performances—listed the names of prominent Jews throughout history, from the biblical figures Moses and King David to Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis, psychologist Sigmund Freud, and 20 Jewish Nobel laureates.

In short skits, actors portrayed Jewish soldiers, illustrating that Jews were risking their lives in World War II under the flags of the Allied countries. The final scene of the pageant depicted a postwar peace conference, with actors portraying Jewish ghosts, describing their murders in the ghettos and death camps, as they implored the victorious Allies to "remember us." A narrator added: "There will be no Jews left in Europe for representation when peace comes. The four million left to be killed are being killed".[2]

As the end of the performance neared, the narrators informed the audience: "No voice is heard to cry halt to the slaughter, no government speaks to bid the murder of human millions end. But we here tonight have a voice. Let us raise it." The show concluded with the singing of *Kaddish,* a Jewish prayer for the dead.

Editor and children's book author Miriam Chaikin, who at the time was a member of the Bergson Group's office staff, attended the first performance. "The atmosphere was electric," she told me.

> People in the audience were stunned by the pageant—and by the whole idea of Jewish issues being presented in such a place. In those days, it just wasn't done. It really brought home the suffering of Europe's Jews in a very powerful way, which really shook people up. (personal interview, May 2, 2003)

"If there was a dry eye at Madison Square Garden Tuesday night, it wasn't mine," wrote reviewer Nick Kenny (1943) in the New York City daily *PM*.

> It was the most poignant pageant we have ever witnessed. It is a story that should be made into a moving picture, just as it was presented at the Garden, and shown in every city, town and hamlet in the country. (p. 18)

The next morning, March 10, 1943, the Bergson Group published a full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*, stating that the success of *We Will Never Die* showed that the "conspiracy of silence which surrounded the Jewish disaster in Europe is definitely broken. . . .It will be sinful if we do not agree upon a policy of action to save the millions who still survive" (p. 13).

In the months to follow, *We Will Never Die* was performed before sell-out crowds in Chicago Stadium, the Boston Garden, Philadelphia's Convention Hall, the Hollywood Bowl, and Washington, DC's Constitution Hall. The April 12, 1943, performance in the nation's capital was attended by a sell-out crowd that included six Supreme Court justices, two cabinet members, more than 200 members of Congress, diplomatic representatives of countries then under German occupation, and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt. With such a powerful audience in attendance, Hecht rewrote the final text to read:

> The challenge of war has called forth the righteous roar of our champions. The deeper and more powerful evil of massacre inspires no such outcry. On the field of battle soldiers die. On the field of massacre, civilization dies. We have come to the great and historic city of Washington to ask the question—what is our answer to this crime?[3]

In her "My Day" syndicated newspaper column, Mrs. Roosevelt wrote that the presentation was

> one of the most impressive and moving pageants I have ever seen. No one who heard each group come forward and give the story of what had happened to it at the hands of a ruthless German military will ever forget those haunting words: "Remember us."[4]

At least 100,000 Americans witnessed the pageant, and many more listened to it on the radio, saw newsreel coverage, or read news coverage of the performances or the First Lady's column. For millions of American newspaper readers, it was the first time they heard about the Nazi mass murders.

Shattering the wall of silence surrounding the Holocaust was the first crucial step in the process of mobilizing the American public against the slaughter. Throughout 1943, Bergson and Hecht organized a series of public rallies, full-page newspaper ads, and Capitol Hill lobbying efforts to rally public opinion and put pressure on the Roosevelt administration to rescue Jewish refugees.

A FLAG IS BORN

The war ended in 1945, but the fight for Jewish freedom did not. In the summer of 1946, Hecht began working on a play to dramatize the plight of Holocaust survivors in Europe and the need for a Jewish state. He called it *A Flag Is Born* [Fig. 3].

FIG. 3. Scene outside the Alvin Theater in New York City at the debut of Ben Hecht's *A Flag is Born*, 1946. Courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

Once again, Hecht recruited celebrities to volunteer their services for the cause. The Adlers, the "first family" of Yiddish theater, were central to *A Flag Is Born*. Luther Adler directed the play. His half-sister Celia and another Yiddish star, Paul Muni, costarred as elderly Holocaust survivors making their way across postwar Europe. Their sister Stella, the statuesque actress and acting coach, alternated in the role of narrator with journalist Quentin Reynolds. Stella's most promising student, 22-year-old Marlon Brando, was cast in the role of David, a passionate young Zionist who encounters the elderly couple in a cemetery [Fig. 4].

FIG. 4. Marlon Brando, Stella Adler, and Paul Muni in *A Flag Is Born*, 1946. Courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

Celia's son, Selwyn Freed, a self-described "backstage brat," attended some of the rehearsals and was struck by the "emotional fervor" that the actors brought to their roles. "Clearly this was not just an acting job, but a cause in which they believed," he pointed out. His mother, Celia, unlike Luther and Stella, had not been active in Jewish causes, "but she too was captivated by the play's powerful Zionist message, and she became much more active for Israel as a result," he said (personal interview, April 28).

On September 5, 1946, *Flag* debuted at Manhattan's Alvin Theater, today known as the Neil Simon Theater. Due to popular demand, the four-week opening run was extended to 10 weeks.

Exactly as Hecht hoped, his characters' sharp criticism of British rule in Palestine irked many in England. The *London Evening Standard* called it "the most virulent anti-British play ever staged in the United States." American reviewers were kinder. Walter Winchell said Flag was "worth seeing, worth hearing, and worth remembering. . . .It will wring your heart and eyes dry. . . .Bring at least 11 handkerchiefs" (American League for a Free Palestine, 1996, p. 5).

The play was set entirely in the cemetery. Through a series of emotion-laden conversations, primarily between Brando's character, David, and Muni's Tevye, Hecht recounts the travails of Jewish history, culminating in the Holocaust, and makes the case for Jewish statehood. At the end, Tevya dies. David takes the *talit* covering the body and fashions it into a Zionist flag, symbolizing the rebirth of Jewish nationhood after the Shoah [Fig. 5].

From his earliest days on the stage and screen, Marlon Brando was a heartthrob accustomed to young women responding emotionally to his performances. However, the frenzy Brando stirred with his role in *A Flag Is Born* was a different emotion from the one to which he was accustomed. Portraying a Holocaust survivor who at one point criticized American Jewry's response to the Holocaust, Brando's character shouted: "You Jews of America! Where was your cry of rage that could have filled the world and stopped the fires?"[5]

That accusation "sent chills through the audience," Brando (1994) later recalled. At some performances,

> Jewish girls got out of their seats and screamed and cried from the aisles in sadness, and at one, when I asked, "Where were you when six million Jews were being burned to death in the ovens of Auschwitz?," a woman was so overcome with anger and guilt that she rose and shouted back at me, "Where were YOU?" At the time, there was a great deal of soul-searching

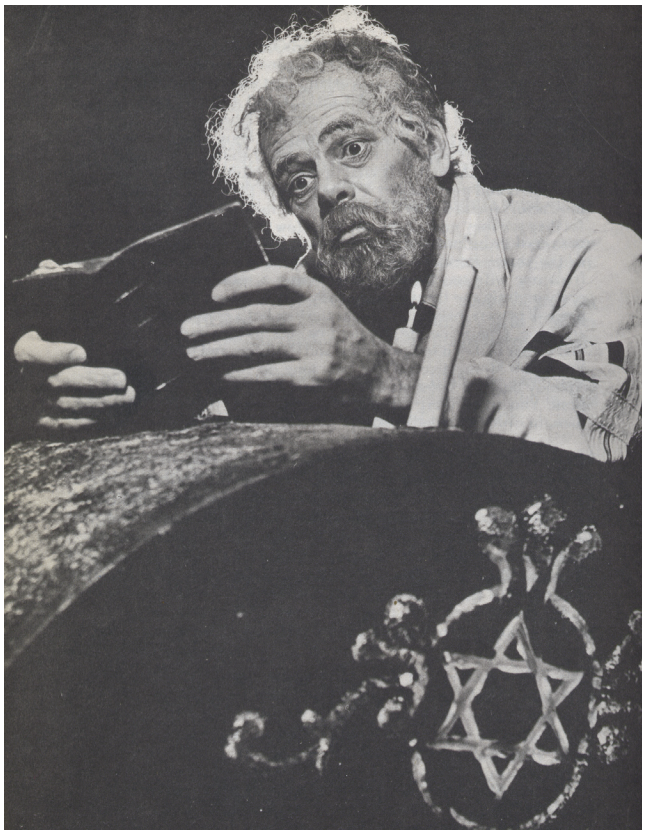

FIG. 5. Paul Muni as Tevye in Ben Hecht's *A Flag Is Born*, 1946. Courtesy of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.

> within the Jewish community over whether they had done enough to stop the slaughter of their people. . . . Some argued that they should have applied pressure on President Roosevelt to bomb Auschwitz, for example—so the speech touched a sensitive nerve. (p. 108)

Brando, who later became active in the civil rights struggles of African Americans and Native Americans, championed the Jewish cause offstage as well. He became, as he put it, "a kind of traveling salesman" for the Bergson Group, giving speeches around the country about the international community's abandonment of the Jews during the Holocaust and the need for a Jewish state.

"When the Zionist flag was raised in the final scene, with Kurt Weill's music in the background, it sent a chill through the audience," said Chaikin, the children's book author who worked for the Bergson Group. "It sounded a note of hope, it stirred feelings of pride and strength that had lain dormant in Jewish hearts for too long" (personal interview, May 2, 2003). Chaikin noted that her 10-year-old brother, Joseph, later the founder of New York City's famous Open Theater, was inspired to go into acting and directing after accompanying her to a performance of *Flag.*

Victor Navasky, publisher emeritus of the political weekly *The Nation,* was also inspired by *Flag*. Navasky (personal interview, May 4, 2003) was one of the teenage ushers who collected contributions in buckets after each performance. "The buckets were always full," he recalled. "The audiences were extremely enthusiastic about the play's message. For me, too, it was a political awakening about the right of the Jews to have their own state."

After its successful run in New York City, *Flag* was staged in Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and Baltimore. Brando had other acting commitments, so he was replaced in some of the out-of-town performances by young Sidney Lumet, who later became an Academy Award-winning director. "This is the only romantic thing left in the world" (Kirkley, 1947), Lumet told reporters before one performance. "The homecoming to Palestine, the conquest of a new frontier, against all obstacles" (p. 14).

The Baltimore engagement was the most controversial. A planned performance at the National Theater in Washington, DC, was relocated to Baltimore's Maryland Theater because Hecht would not permit his works to be staged at theaters, such as the National, that barred African Americans. However, Hecht discovered, just before the Baltimore showing, that the Maryland Theater restricted blacks to the balcony, which bigots nicknamed "nigger heaven" (Ashmore, 1982, p. 102). The Bergson Group and the NAACP then teamed up against the theater management, with the NAACP threatening to picket and a Bergson official announcing he would bring two black friends to sit with him at the play. The management gave in, and African Americans attending the opening-night performance on February 12, 1947—Lincoln's birthday—sat wherever they chose. Exuberant NAACP leaders hailed the "tradition-shattering victory"[6] and used it to facilitate the desegregation of other Baltimore theaters in the years to follow.

A Flag Is Born was a triumph. It influenced American public opinion by reaching large audiences with an inspiring message about the plight of Holocaust survivors and the need for a Jewish state. It raised enough funds to purchase a ship—renamed the *SS Ben Hecht*—that tried to bring 600 survivors to Palestine and focused international attention on the refugees when it was intercepted by the British. It scored an important victory over racial segregation in Baltimore, demonstrating that, as Hecht put it, "to fight injustice to one group of human beings affords protection to every other group" (American League for a Free Palestine, 1947). For Ben Hecht and the other Jewish activists who organized *A Flag Is Born*, the fight for justice in the Middle East was inseparable from the fight for justice at home.

Although each of Ben Hecht's political pageants ostensibly served a different cause, they were in fact closely interrelated. *Fun to Be Free* warned of the threat posed by Adolf Hitler at a time when the international community preferred to look away. *We Will Never Die* cried out against the Nazi massacres as they were taking place and sought to stir the conscience of an indifferent world. *A Flag Is Born* focused on the consequences of the Holocaust and the need for justice in the postwar era. Taken together, they form a trilogy of anguished protest, a before-during-and-after outcry against the dangers of complacency in the face of totalitarianism.

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[2] Script of *We Will Never Die*, Bergson Group Collection. The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, Washington, D.C.

[3] Script of *We Will Never Die*, Washington, D.C., version. Bergson Group Collection, The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, Washington, D.C.

[4] Eleanor Roosevelt, 1943, April 14. "My Day." New York: United Feature Syndicate, p. 1. Eleanor Roosevelt Papers, Box 248, File 30, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, N.Y.

[5] Script of *A Flag Is Born*, Bergson Group Collection. The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, Washington, D.C.

[6] "Color Bar Broken in Baltimore Theater" (News Release). February 14, 1947. Papers of the NAACP, Library of Congress. For a detailed account of the episode, see Rafael Medoff, *Militant Zionism in America: The Rise and Impact of the Jabotinsky Movement in the United States*, 1926–1948. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, pp. 159–160.

Marjorie Agosín, a frequent contributor to *PRISM*, composed this poem after her recent visit to Budapest, where she searched the archives for a trace of her great-aunt Estefanía.

Marjorie Agosín

You Are Here

You are here . . .
You have returned . . .
You visit me in a tangled dream . . .
We are in a dense forest.
Packs of men surround us.
The dream moves fast, like death,
Which stalks us . . .
Where the silence of fear dwells.

I dream you . . .
You are Estefanía, my great-aunt
From the majestic and dreadful
Vienna, and now Budapest.
No one utters names . . .
Only a horrified silence,
Only a memory without language.
You are here, Estefanía . . .
The silence leads me to your abode . . .
Death is the house of silence.

Budapest, 1944,
Near the small synagogue:
A piano,
Your pupils,
The sound like the wind between thresholds,
Like weeping roofs,
Silent instruments . . .

Suddenly they arrive.
They knock on the door.
They come for you.
They do not find you.
Where are you?
Who ambles amid those spaces?
The living?
The dead?
The blue ghosts
That arrive in cities famished and adrift?

Budapest, 1944,
Betrayed the Jews
With orchestrated obedience.
They say you walked towards Transylvania,
Where you knew they killed Jews as well.
Or perhaps you tried to reach the Danube,
Thinking of the salvation of water and time?

I return to the archives in your city,
Where there is nothing and everything . . .
Only absence,
Only memorials.
I want to learn about you . . .
I only feel your absence,
Which crosses tattered threads . . .
Only your house,
Your room,
The broken piano,
A universe amid the ash,
Your name, Estefanía.
Estefanía, crown of ash . . .
Those turbid times,
Budapest,
Where the silence of things plagues us,
Silences from a world that has disappeared,
A world without names . . .
The sadness of dead things:
Your piano, like a smoke-filled throat.
I cannot find you on the lists
Of those who returned,
But you are here . . .
You wait for me in the café on the corner
With your cigarette
And Listz's piano score.
You are here . . .
A rhapsody of light traverses your fingers.

Budapest, 2018

Translated from the Spanish by Alison Ridley.

My family, Beregszasz (Czech: Berehovo), Czechoslovakia, 1924. At rear: my aunt Lenke; my grandmother Sarah (Zali); my aunt Dora; my grandfather Yitzhak (Ignac), seated, holding my uncle Erno; my uncle Moritz. In front: Charlotte Iczkovics (my mother, approximately 5 years old); my aunt Iren (Irenka); my aunt Berta; my uncle Lajcsi (seated). In April 1944, most of the family, including 10 of my mother's nephews and nieces, were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Amos Neufeld's poem helps us understand the "dark lanscape of losses" suffered by his father. His photo of his mother's lost family and his note that only "my mother, four of her siblings, and her oldest nephew, Shanyi (Alexander), survived; her parents, her sisters Lenke and Berta, all their children and spouses, Moritz, his wife, and all but one of their sons, were killed at Birkenau," underscore the depth of the tragedy of the Shoah.

Amos Neufeld

The Burning Sun

For my father, Ernest Neufeld

I think of all the conversations we
never had — a sunless void waiting to be
filled — a hurt that did not heal — just your silence
and a boy trying to understand that distance —

a hard place I could not enter. A dark
landscape of losses — never lit by you — the stark
difficult years we crossed alone — longing
to feel your arm on my shoulder, going

back home together to where everything once was —
a paradise of sunlight on olive trees,
Jerusalem at night in starlight — not left behind —
your dreams not ended — there was more to find.

I would wait forever to feel your arm around
me, walking back into the burning sun.

Gloria Garfunkel, striving "to be a living diary," recounts moments of her parents' Holocaust experiences that changed—and saved—their lives. Compare this personal narrative to Joanie Holzer Schirm's "The Letter That Changed Everything" (pp. 66-69).

Gloria Garfunkel

No Sanctuary: Turning Points in a Childhood Shadowed by the Holocaust

Three linked tales from a memoir in progress

1. ASH

Ash covered everything in Auschwitz. At night, sparks flew up from the chimneys of the crematoria, filling the universe with more stars. But there were also sparks that circled like fireflies until they each found a lucky prisoner and hid deep in her ear as a speck of ash. This ash would eventually become a part of the prisoner's firstborn child. I am one of those children. Whenever my mother's will to live wavered and her hand reached out for the electric fence, my ash would whisper, "Live, live."

2. THE MIRACLE OF MY FATHER'S HAT

My father was from Poland, where he suffered under the Nazis for four years. For most of the first two years he dug up Jewish gravestones in a labor camp where he was sent after Auschwitz. He dug up the gravestones of Polish Jews who watched him from the sky, crying at his labors, his watery soup, his bones scraping together, never imagining such a thing could happen to their sons and daughters, neighbors and friends, mothers and fathers, begging to a hidden God to intercede.

My father's father, one brother, and a cousin were in hiding. His other brother and sister-in-law, along with their two small children, had disappeared. My father never knew for sure who was dead and who alive, except, of course, for his mother, who'd died of tuberculosis when he was 12. He prayed to God to save them all as, stooped, with stomach and skin-and-bones arms aching, he lifted, hauled, crushed the tombstones, slaving for the well-fed Gestapo bosses who were laughing, apparently with God, who seemed to be on their side.

My father dug up the gravestones for two years, until he could carry them no more. As he walked one day to the edge of the cemetery to meet the Jewish couple disguised as Christians who had arranged to bring him some bread now and again, a Nazi guard shot at him, the bullet going through his hat.

"I never miss," the guard shouted to my father. "That I missed means you will live."

(Years later, my father told me, "There is a Yiddish saying that 'prophecy is often given to fools.'")

This prophecy gave him courage to plan an escape. So that night, after everyone else had left their work at the graveyard, he hid in a mausoleum. In the dark, he ran to the hiding place of his brother, who was still in hiding with my grandfather and a cousin. This brother arranged somehow for my father to hide in a hayloft. He hid there alone, studying Torah and writing poetry in dim light, with long days to think about missing faces, voices, smiles. His brother visited some nights, bringing gold to pay the farmer. Their family had been wealthy, and the gold coins they had managed to take with them when they were running saved their lives. My father would ask about his married brother's family: Who is dead? Who is alive? But his brother said he didn't know. For two years my father hid there, until, at the end of the war, the farmer discovered the gold coins still left and, no longer needing to keep my grandfather alive, shot and killed him.

In the confusion of liberation, my father lost all his poems, notebooks of a young man's thoughts about losing everything. Then he lost the ability to speak his native tongue, Polish. He lost his faith in human beings but never in God, who had spoken to him through the guard in the camp and in the hayloft.

During the liberation, Russian Jews in the army asked the Jews they found to identify those who had been the most vicious and cruel to them. My father gave them the name of the farmer who had murdered his father. The farmer's son

was sent straight to the Russian front and killed.

Years later, when I wanted to visit Eastern Europe, my father wouldn't let me. He said there was still a contract out on him and I wouldn't be safe. How much of what he said was paranoia? How does one know with the Holocaust? In the end, I didn't go.

My father's brother revealed, in the intervening years, gradually, not all at once, the truth. They were all gone: their older brother, his wife, and the two golden-blond children—all the relatives. Gone as well were the mills and everything else they owned. For my father, the turning point was the loss of his poems. That loss killed his soul, his memories, and his ability to speak Polish, the language of the friends who betrayed him. The lost shards of his heart are embedded in my own, in my need to write.

"You have no idea what freedom is until you don't have it," he often said to me. But in fact, reliving my parents' Holocaust stories over and over, all of my life, I have never felt free.

3. MY MOTHER'S HAGGADAH

The word *Holocaust* did not exist in my childhood. My father referred to "the 6 million" if he talked about it much at all. I knew very little of his experiences, though he had been in camps longer than my mother, who, on the other hand, spoke to me about it whenever we were alone. She told me her own private Holocaust story—her personal Haggadah—in bits and pieces throughout my life beginning when I was very small, and I memorized every detail.

She told me about her loving childhood and the torments and deaths that began when the Nazis seized her family when she was 16. We would garden and iron together or sit in the dim light of the living room on Friday nights waiting for my brother and father to return from shul, and she would fill me with her tales. I was the oldest of three, and it was my job to hold her memories.

My mother's Haggadah described her lost childhood and then a year-long journey into slavery that began the last night of Passover in 1944 and ended a full year later. "We had faith our government would protect us," she used to say, as Hungary was the last country invaded by the Nazis. "We heard stories, but we never thought it would happen there."

She spoke about the camps with the few fellow survivors left in our extended family, but never to any of her Jewish friends who grew up in America. She felt, and I agreed, they would never understand her. They seemed superficial to me compared to her depth.

"I don't want them to feel sorry for me," she would tell me. She kept her experiences within the family, mostly with me. I remember my mother saying more than once, "I am telling you this story not to upset you or make you sad or to hurt you. Why should I do that? So Hitler can still hurt people I love all these years later? That would mean that Hitler succeeded twice! He destroyed our first family, but he will not ruin my life now, or my children's. No, I am telling you these things so that you will never forget what they did to us just because we were Jews. So you can help to make sure such things never happen again to anyone who is different from anyone else.

"I'm also telling you this story to remind you that it is possible to find strength inside of yourself that you did not even realize you had. It is true that the losses of loved ones stay with you forever. You never stop missing them. But you can survive terrible things, much worse than you ever thought possible, and still go on to live a good and happy life. I don't understand why it all happened, what it all means. Only God knows that. But I am very thankful every day for what I still have" [Fig. 1].

FIG. 1. I took this photo of my parents when they were in their early 50s, settled in an Orthodox community in New Jersey. They seemed happy; only I knew of their pain.

My parents may have been grateful, but they were also incredibly sad, and I carried that grief inside of me. They appeared happy to everyone else, except on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when my mother sobbed into her *siddur* as I sat next to her in shul, feeling guilty, as if it were my fault. Other than that, they put up a good front; only I was chosen to witness their pain.

I was also angry; I spent my entire childhood enraged at God for not stopping the Holocaust. I could never understand my parents' gratitude to Him for saving their lives. He did, but that wasn't enough. He should have saved everyone's life, I thought. He had the power.

Here is my mother's story retold as closely as possible in her words:

"I was born in September 1927 in Nyírbéltek, a small village near Debrecen in Hungary. My mother was Gisella Berger and my father was Herman Klein. I was named, in Yiddish, Feiga Rifka, but everyone called me by my Hungar-

ian name, Ilonka. Most of us were known by our Yiddish names, my mother Gittel and my father Hayim. I was the oldest of their six children.

"There was always antisemitism, with two churches and one shul in town.

"In 1942, when I was 14, my father was drafted into the Jewish labor force of the Hungarian army. The Germans were occupying the countries all around us, Poland and Czechoslovakia, closing in on Hungary. The Hungarian army took Jewish men to the Russian front. They would send the Jews ahead of their troops so if there were land mines, the Jews would blow up instead of their soldiers. Other Jews emptied trains of food and cleaned the kitchens. Daddy was gone for one year, then returned home only briefly before he left for another year.

"While my father was away, my younger sister, Ibika, 13, and I, 14, ran the house as best we could. There was no one else to help. My mother was busy caring for the children. Besides Ibika, my siblings were 12, 10, 7, and 5 years old. Flour, rice, and sugar were being rationed in Hungary. Money was scarce. My father's partners refused to help us. Daddy sent us some money, and your Zeidika, your grandfather, would steal some chocolates while unloading the food trucks for the Germans and sell them for money to send home to us. Ibika and I continued going to school during the week and made and delivered seltzer after school and on Sundays to help support the family.

"Early in 1944, right after Purim, we were ordered to wear Jewish stars on our clothes. We should have recognized this as a turning point. But it was an especially lovely spring after such a harsh winter in our village of Nyírbéltek, and we were all ecstatic because my father, who had been away for two years, was finally coming home, so it would be a very special Pesach. I helped my mother do her usual thorough cleaning, washing the bedding, furniture, and floors. The night before Pesach, we followed Daddy around for *bedikas chametz*, searching for any remaining crumbs of bread in the house, which we children loved to do because we hid the crumbs in such obvious places. He would gather them with a goose feather into a handkerchief and then burn them on the stove to make our home officially free of *chametz*.

"At the Seder, your Zeidika sat at the head of the table, looking so handsome in his white kittel, reading from the Haggadah. My brother Aaron was 12, almost a bar mitzvah, and he told us of different interpretations of the Haggadah stories he had studied with his rebbes. Avrohom, who was 10, made mischief to keep 7-year-old Hava and 5-year-old Lazer from falling asleep. We didn't know it at the time, but this was to be our last Pesach together. We didn't see it coming. We heard rumors about the camps, but we didn't believe it. We had faith in our government. They would protect the Jews of Hungary. The war had been going on for three years and we were still safe from the Nazis; we did not know that the Jews in the countries all around us were not so lucky.

"When it was time to put the Pesach dishes away and bake bread again, Daddy was called again to the labor force. The minute three stars were out, I drove him with the horse and buggy, though it was so dark I could hardly see. My little cousin was with me. When we got to that town, a policeman stopped us, saying, 'You can't go any farther. You have to go to the shul.'

"The whole yard of the shul was crowded with the Jews of that village. There were rumors that all of the Jews in surrounding towns had also been rounded up in their shul yards as well. We were there all night, knowing that my mother must be worried. The next morning, we recognized one of the policemen, a neighbor of ours, and asked him to let us go home. He let my cousin and me go, but my father had to remain.

"So we went home, where Nazis were rounding up Jews in our shul yard, too—another life-changing moment. I helped my mother to pack, though we didn't know where we were going or for how long, nor what to pack that we could carry. We gathered some bundles of warm clothes for everyone and food for the little ones. They didn't give us much time to think or plan. We closed up the house and left all the animals behind, asking our neighbors to feed them for us. My mother slipped off her wedding ring, rose gold, her only piece of jewelry, and handed it to her Christian friend next door for safekeeping.

"As we gathered at the shul, policemen loaded us onto horse-drawn wagons that took us to a big town, Nyíregyháza. The police had moved the occupants out of one section of town and moved us in there, 10 families to a house. We slept on the floor or in the yard, wherever we could find a corner. We were there for two weeks.

"From there, they herded hundreds of us to a big tobacco farm. They crowded us into a large shed where we slept on the floor like animals for another three weeks. By then we realized we were never going home.

"Finally, we were forced to walk to a freight train. I will never forget that, old people and my little brothers and sisters carrying bundles and walking to the train. We were packed so tightly into freight cars, we had to stand. When they closed the doors, it was so dark we could not even see. There was no room to sit down, no food, water, or toilets. The smell was so horrible, we could hardly breathe. People were screaming and moaning and crying, grown-ups and children and babies. We were on that train for three days and nights. When they unloaded us in Auschwitz, many people had died. My grandmother Clairel, your Zeidika's mother, was one of them.

"As we got off the train, the guards told the women and children to get on trucks. Some of the mothers tried to take their older children with them, and Ibika and I ran after our mother, wanting to stay with her and the little

ones, but a German soldier dragged both of us back. We were crying and screaming, and a Hungarian soldier yelled: 'You foolish girls! Don't you know that if you go with them, you will die, too? They are going to the gas chambers to be killed! Only you will be left alive!'

"I thought: How could that be? How could he say such a stupid thing? But it was true. I remember seeing them walk to the trucks, my little sister and three brothers. My youngest brother, Lazer, had lost a shoe. He was walking on the stones, limping, with just one shoe. I'll never forget that, the last moment I saw them.

"Even in the days and weeks and months after that, as Ibika and I clung to life in Auschwitz, we didn't want to believe that the women and children had been killed. We wanted to believe that they had somehow been saved, that our mother and Aaron, Avrohom, Hava, and Lazer were all still alive and safe somewhere. Even though every time new trainloads of people came, more smoke poured out of the chimneys. Even though everyone said that the women and children were being gassed and cremated, we didn't believe it. We couldn't believe it. We kept hoping that it wasn't true.

"After a while, though, despair set in, with the understanding that not only had they all been murdered, but that they were, in fact, the lucky ones. The daily routine of Auschwitz became too much to bear. Eventually I stopped thinking altogether. I thought the whole world had turned into one big concentration camp, that we would never get out of there, that there would never be any freedom again anywhere in the world.

"Yet a spark of defiance remained. I would not give the Germans what they wanted. They wanted us to feel abandoned, without family, without God, alone in a universe ruled by Nazis. They tried to separate family members, but Ibika and I were two of the very few sisters who were able to stay together. Each of us knew that if the other one died, life would be over for both of us.

"My cousin Yolika worked in the kitchen and would sometimes throw a bit of butter over the electric fence when she saw us. One day, I don't know, I must have been sick, because when I went to get the butter, I reached out my hand to touch the fence. I don't know what I was thinking. Ibika cried out, 'Ilonka, don't leave me here alone!' I pulled my hand back. In that moment, she saved our lives."

Selections, a Death March, and Freedom

"After three months, there was a selection to go to a small work camp in Frankfurt. We were not strong, but Ibika and I stood up as straight as possible and pinched our cheeks to look healthy. We were very lucky; we were both chosen.

"The work camp in Frankfurt was not as bad as Auschwitz. We got better food so we could carry heavy stones to build railroad tracks. We were there for three months, from September to December. Somehow, we survived, even in the icy rains, and were transferred nearby to Ravensbrück, a Siemens factory camp just for women, where we built electrical parts for rockets.

"In April, when the Germans knew the war was ending, they woke us up in the middle of the night and made us start walking. I don't know how long we walked, how far we went. We just walked day and night, a death march, and whoever was not strong enough to continue was shot. There were bodies all over the sides of the road. So we walked, holding on to each other to keep going. If one of us was so weak and tired she wanted to sit down, the other would just drag her, no matter what. We had a few close friends, and we helped each other.

"One night, the guards herded us into a big barn, where we slept on the floor, and in the morning when we awoke, there were no more Germans. All of them had vanished. We heard shooting. The Americans and Russians were coming from two sides and shooting the Germans they found. We saw the American soldiers first, and then the Russians took over and liberated us.

"Little by little, train tracks were repaired, and we were transported back to Hungary. We rode in big cattle cars, but not like the ones that took us from our homes. These were open; we were free.

"Once in Hungary, we tried to find out if anyone we knew was alive. Ibika and I met a woman and asked whether she knew the Wertheimers, my grandmother's family. She said yes, and started screaming, 'You are Hayim's two daughters! When your father finds out you are alive, he will be so happy!'

"I fainted. When I regained consciousness, she told me that my cousins Yolika, Abie, and Ezhikeh were also alive, and that my father was at home.

"Eventually, my father was able to get us to Austria, where we got papers to be students at a Jewish teachers' seminary in Paris. Ibika and I ended up living in Paris for two years while my father came to America to earn money and get us visas to join him. We were finally free.

"Why and how did we survive? God had a plan for us. And that is the story of my life before America," my mother told me. "The Germans didn't get to wipe out all of the Jews in Europe."

SPARKS FROM AUSCHWITZ

As much as I have tried to be a living diary of my mother's life, I have failed. But whenever my own will to live wavers, I twirl my grandmother's rose gold ring that I inherited, and the spark in the ash that found my mother in Auschwitz finds me, her firstborn child, and the spark whispers to me everything I need to remember: "Live, live."

Marjorie Agosín wrote this poem after her recent visit to Vienna, where she went to search for her great-grandfather's tomb. This, and her visit to Budapest, described in "You Are Here" (p. 52), were turning points in her understanding of the fate of her family.

Marjorie Agosín

Isidoro Halpern, 1932

Have you walked through the Jewish cemetery in Vienna?
Have you noticed its state of disrepair?
The neglect endured by all Jewish cemeteries in Europe?
They are all alike; they have all been plundered.
Or have you visited the Jewish cemetery in Prague,
Where the tombs are stacked on top of one another,
Gasping, moaning, heaped together,
As though aboard the trains of death?
I search among the dead leaves
For the tomb of my great-grandfather,
Isidoro Halpern, 1932.

All around me the solitary tombs,
The weeping tombs,
Implore me to remember those interred below,
To caress their graves with the stones I have brought with me,
Stones of permanence in the impermanence of life.
Suddenly the wind glides between my feet.
Each leaf has a story,
Each story has a name.

The poems on these two pages have been translated from the Spanish by Alison Ridley.

"Vienna before the Nazis was the city of my great-grandmother Helena Broder," writes Marjorie Agosín. "She had family and friends and loved to stroll the great avenues of this regal city—until it became a place of danger, intolerance, and prohibitions for the Jews. In 1939, when she was 60, she escaped to Valparaiso, Chile, with her son Mauricio. Her son Joseph, my grandfather, had emigrated there in 1926, well before the Holocaust, and was able to secure their visas. I wrote this poem thinking how tragic it is that a place of such great elegance and culture turned into a place of barbarism and cruelty."

Marjorie Agosín

Treacherous Vienna

Treacherous Vienna,
Dark Vienna,
Somber Vienna,
Vienna where the dead howl,
Vienna where at night you can still hear
Echoes of the deceased, of the living.
Vienna where they pounded on your door,
Stole your voice,
Took your son away.
He scoured the dark sidewalks with acid.
Everyone laughed at the laboring Jews,
At the Jews in that city, which robbed
them of their name and their light.
Vienna with its murderous hands,
With its eyes blind to the pain of others.
Repressive Vienna,
Adeptly deceitful Vienna,
Elegant and vulgar Vienna,
Somber Vienna.
You sewed stars of David.
Your hands, stars

Photographer Samuel Shats, a collaborator and friend of the poet, recalls: "I was walking through the center of Vienna at dusk, thinking how to express fear and threat, when I realized that the chimneys emerging from the roof of the building seemed to be observing everyone." Photo: "Vienna"

Mieczyslaw "Kas" Kasprzyk was born in England to Polish parents and raised "among survivors of the great horror that was the war," he relates. "My mother survived labor camps and saw some of her family deported by the Soviets to almost certain death in Kazakhstan and discovered the rest in a mass grave, shot by the Nazis. Her best friend survived Auschwitz. My father escaped from slave labor in the Sudetenland, became a partisan, escaped when captured, and hid in plain sight of the Gestapo by volunteering to work in Germany. Their stories have had an influential impact on my life. These two brief reflections grew out of notes I made when traveling by bus through Poland with my son, Alex, in the mid-1990s."

Mieczyslaw "Kas" Kasprzyk

On the Road to Chrzanów

As the bus leaves behind the great conurbation of Katowice, Poland, and travels down the long, straight two-lane highway called the A4, the landscape changes. The terrain is more varied; one becomes aware of looking beyond gently sloping fields across to other hills in the near distance. There is also evidence of rain, a sort of untidiness where the weeds and greens have taken over bare patches, rusty corrugated sheets, cabbage leaves, potatoes, and mildew in a mini-riot of growth. In all this landscape there is nothing to focus on . . . too much is happening.

The flat fields of Greater Poland, though timeless, monotonous, let the small villages and the onion-domed or baroque churches act as focal points. Here, however, the buildings appear more spread out. Many are just grey breezeblock on red brick bases, while others, earthen-colored, blend into the landscape, a general almost-chaos.

For me, this riot of imagery changes about 20 miles down the road, at the town called Chrzanów. I look around at the passengers, all absorbed in their own activities: reading, talking quietly among themselves, seemingly unaware. I want to grab their attention, stop them and say "Hey, you, do you know where you are? Do you know where this is?" I feel it's important that they know, yet I fear their ignorance or lack of concern and I worry that they may turn around and say, "So what?" or simply ignore me, thinking, "He's just trying to be the center of attention. You know what these over-emotional foreigners are like!" So I bottle up my need to say something, stay silent, accept their apparent ignorance, and think to myself, "It's not the first time I've felt this lack of awareness on the part of others, and it won't be the last," and bite on the bile that rises in my throat. All this at Chrzanów: for over there, across that valley, is another place, another village—Oświécim.

Chrzanów is probably named after the horseradish (*chrzan*), but with a little bit of British imagination and our love of playing with words and sounds, it can easily be twisted into the quite ironic meaning *preserved*, just as Oświécim, as I am fond of telling people, can easily be mistranslated into meaning *I will bless you*. To an outsider, Oświécim probably means nothing, yet all Poles are aware of the place, and most Polish schoolchildren have visited it as part of their education. You'll know the place better as Auschwitz.

For most people, reality is another world. Auschwitz, Buchenwald, Belsen: starved faces behind barbed wire in grey and off-white. Vietnam, Cambodia, Sarajevo: all harsh nightmare moments of twisted butchery and frail, skeletal figures living on frayed nerves, images that interrupt our comfortable TV dinners with their uncompromising, unforgiving presence. Most of us are just lucky: We've occupied a sort of no-man's-land in which it all passes over our heads. Our reality is comfortable, safe, and uneventful. Our reality is no reality.

Occasionally, in our wanderings, we meet refugees or survivors from that bubble of brutality who pass on a touch, an electric shock of what it's really about—no, not a shock, but static, static coming from the faded carpets of history. They are lepers whose touch is not contagious but whose breath can upset our comfort with the way it threatens to corrupt the whole of our existence and give meaning to the staleness of our lives, if only for a few moments . . . and then we return to the illusory safety of our normality.

But there are places in this world that always teeter on the edge of nightmare.

There are people who live there, in those towns, people who know the history of the place but accept it because . . . because it's home, and home always has had a history full

of aunts and uncles, grandparents and friends, things that happened or didn't or might have, and anyway, we can't live each day as if we're in a museum or a shrine or a cemetery. It's home, and home is streets and houses and familiar things; it's friends and neighbors and lovers and hope—it isn't holocaust and genocide.

In a way, to live as if your home were the apocalypse would be to let an alien power dictate eternity, to let an alien force tell us how to live tomorrow, how to live today . . . how to live.

The butchers did that to my mother's friend, Stefa Czerwonka, and millions like her. The tattooed arms of the survivors are a living testament. She can't escape from her past when it's written in her skin. Every time she washes the dishes, or takes her blouse off, the numbers are there in their slightly faded grey-blue. Memories flood in, fears and tears and the knowledge of what she had to do to survive. Isn't that also part of the punishment, remembering how she became almost oblivious to the sufferings of others as long as she could survive? What sort of evil force was it that dictates the memories of these people even from its own grave? What sort of evil manages to make the victims feel part of the crime?

How many are touched by these ghosts? Does the static shake them, at least for just a moment? When they say "filthy Jew," are they aware of the corpses of the babies they are throwing onto the fire?

Sometimes I am reminded that there are other villages in the world, other villagers lost and confused. Perhaps most of the world is in this state. Who made it so?

My son, Alex, at 13, realized that it's not history, it's his life. When he was born, genocide was taking place in the killing fields of Cambodia. It took place in the villages of Bosnia not that long after, and some time later, a Hutu machete cut into the flesh of a Tutsi in Rwanda. In a sense, this awareness of the horrors turned him into a villager like all those victims: lost and confused, a wanderer in a world where the past is irrelevant and only nightmares exist.

Stefa Czerwonka was taken with her whole family: mother, father, brothers, and sisters. I have heard glimpses of her story; images, captured at random by the camera of conversation rather than memory, flashed into my mind: how they were pushed and beaten out of her wood-and-plaster house with its dirt floor and huge oven; butts of rifles merciless and indifferent; how they were treated as just another bunch of pigs; how they literally fell out of the cattle trucks when the doors were opened, stumbling over the corpses of those who died in the crush; how they lined up, confused, afraid, aware, the German shepherds and the guards walking down the line. . . . She spoke of a baby ripped out of a mother's arms, the dog biting at her as she tried to stop it, the body flung aside . . . nightmares.

They were all forced to strip before strangers and run naked between lines of laughing savage faces. "*Nach rechts, links*" . . . Life, Death. Her whole family was taken to the chambers and the ovens, flesh charred beyond recognition. Only she survived (survived! what a mockery in that word!), at times by stealing others' moldy bread. She shudders, recalling the punishments, the torment, the day-to-day existence.

When she walks the streets back home, to the market, in the shops, how many realize as they brush against her? As she walks among us, is she really *there*, surrounded by the wire, breathing in the smell of human flesh? Are the two realities superimposed?

The sign for Chrzanów is long behind us. The passengers, each absorbed in his own activities, read or talk quietly among themselves. They show no sign that they are aware that over there, across that valley, is another place, another village, another world.

Passengers

The bus stopped in a large car park somewhere on the Belgian border. It could have been anywhere, but there was something Continental about the stop, perhaps the color of the tarmac or the slightly different shape of the red bricks of the restrooms. The morning was cold and refreshing. It was a relief to stretch one's legs and breathe in the crisp air, even as it mingled with diesel and exhaust fumes.

Sometimes I'm reminded that we are all passengers in this world, sharing the same space as someone who carved the date "23/4/95" on the doorframe of the restroom, or the lad who graffitied its green wall tiles with a felt-tip marker.

While we stood in the parking lot, waiting to get back on the bus, I overheard two of my fellow passengers speaking. They were both old, with what I thought were typically

Polish features, wearing jumpers and jackets just like my dad does. They were talking, in Polish, about visiting their relatives. This had been their first visit since the war, and it was quite obvious that they had lost touch with their families. Their conversation was animated; they breathed the Polish air that seemed to revitalize their souls. One of them asked the other in a caring, sensitive manner that touched me deeply, "Did you find your mother and sister?" The other described his complex search through a bureaucratic jungle in order to locate them.

I listened, imagining their frustrations of searching as I remembered those impossible queues in the Polish banks and the ridiculous layers of bureaucracy imposed, I felt, just so that everyone could maintain his status and feel important. I could imagine the man hoping (don't we always hope?), perhaps even going from house to house, knocking on doors and asking, "Excuse me, I know you don't know me, but I'm looking for someone who used to live here . . .," spending hours on his feet, trudging the streets, hoping . . .

It suddenly dawned on me, as I listened, that they were talking not about searching streets for a particular house but about searching cemeteries for particular graves, and then I realized that the search had been not to find where his mother and sister lived, but where they were buried.

"Of course," I thought, "after all this time, it's hardly likely that his mum would be alive."

Drawn in by the poignancy of the conversation, I continued to listen. The man had found his sister's grave after a long search, but added, in a voice that cut to my soul, "I couldn't find my mother." As he continued to explain and discuss the search, I mistakenly thought he was talking about documents buried or lost in the chaotic aftermath of war, but slowly, to my horror, I realized that he was talking about the Holocaust, his Jewish family, and a mass grave where their bodies had been thrown in, one on top of the other "in Białucki Forest, somewhere near Soldau."

We might all be passengers together, but our journeys are not the same.

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The artist Mieczyslaw "Kas" Kasprzyk writes, "I very much agree with the statement by Otto Dix that 'all art is exorcism.' Most of my art is based on observation and is a response to our times. I am working on a series of responses to *Dante's Inferno*. Dante drew on his own experiences to depict the horrors of Hell; I draw mainly on the history of my times."

As a Pole, I was a Holocaust witness, and as a teacher, I tried to make my students aware of the horrors of Auschwitz, drawing on the experiences of my mother's best friend, Mrs. Czerwonka, and of the genocidal nature of the war in Eastern Europe as experienced by my family. I stressed that its roots lay in human nature and in racist intolerance, that ethnic cleansing and genocide are continuing to this day, all over the world.

This piece, "Inferno VI Cerberus," involved a number of different processes, including ink-staining, block-printing and my "painting-cum-stenciling-cum-drawing." I started on it when Mrs. Czerwonka died. She had survived Auschwitz as a young teenage inmate and all her life had a fear of German shepherds, the guard dogs at the camp. My Cerberus is a guard dog almost rabid with fury; it appears to have many heads because of the effect that that fury has on those to whom it is directed. My father's sudden death, close on the heels of Mrs. Czerwonka's passing, gave me pause: Could this very well be what awaits us all after death?

"Inferno VI Cerberus." Painting courtesy of the artist.

The following has been adapted from Joanie Holzer Schirm's *My Dear Boy: A World War II Story of Escape, Exile, and Revelation* (2019, Potomac Books), based on revelations from 400 World War II letters by 78 correspondents, discovered after the death of Schirm's father in 2000. Schirm writes, "What you're about to read is a moment of Valdik's story—in his voice, as I heard and discovered it. Much of the story is drawn from my father's own carbon-copied letters and a taped interview. To fill in the gaps, I mined the trove of letters, journals, and photographs he left behind, and interviewed people across five continents." Compare this Second Generation reflection to Gloria Garfunkel's "No Sanctuary: Turning Points in a Childhood Shadowed by the Holocaust," pp. 56-59.

Joanie Holzer Schirm

The Letter That Changed Everything

In the words of Osvald "Valdik" Holzer, M.D.

As the Second World War came to a close in the reborn Czechoslovakia, the transition period from war to peace was complicated. The people of western Czechoslovakia, those whose lives hadn't been cut down, had lived under Nazi tyranny the longest of any in occupied Europe. I wished I could have been in the Sudetenland region when they greeted US General George Patton, Jr.'s, Third Army. Patton's soldiers put an end to the misery I'd first witnessed in late 1938 as a Czechoslovak soldier.

Newscasts in Ecuador, where I was at this time, informed me of chaotic conditions. Images of German soldiers retreating on foot, bicycle, and horseback gave me hope. Retribution soon began, with Czechoslovakia indiscriminately expelling ethnic German populations. I felt irresolvable anger for what the Germans had done, so when I heard of the brutal treatment of those who'd endorsed such horrific actions against us, I felt little remorse.

What I wanted most was news from home, even details of the tragic face of war. The day the first letter arrived was a day like most, a workday with the end signaled by a siren screeching through the humid air. Alerted by the sound, the few remaining workers streamed through the oilfield gates on their way home after a shift. The need to produce oil in support of the American war effort had at last ended, numbering my days as the chief surgeon for Anglo-Ecuadorian Oilfields.

Ruth, my wife, took the envelope from her pocket, showing me the familiar handwriting of my Aunt Valda. I felt my stomach lurch. My chest hammered with anxiety as I walked outside, took a deep breath, and sat on a bleached wicker chair facing the wild waves of the Pacific. My eyes went back and forth from the vast space stretching into the horizon to the envelope. My index finger slid little by little across Aunt Valda's name, written above the return address. I waited several minutes before slicing the envelope open. It held five handwritten pages from Aunt Valda and a sealed envelope with my father, Arnošt's, recognizable script: "*Mu˚j drahý Valdíku*" ("My dear Valdik"). Seeing dad's writing made my heart beat fiercely.

Aunt Valda's envelope bore a newly issued Czechoslovak stamp; my father's envelope was tan and plain, without any stamps or marks. I'm not sure why, but I chose to read Aunt Valda's letter first. The last time I'd seen my aunt, her husband, Jaroslav, and their two sons, Jiří and Pavel, had been in May 1939 at their home in Neveklov, days before I'd escaped to China. [Fig. 1]

I'd walked the entire way from Prague along winding roads, through spruce forests, and across potato fields to see her and say goodbye. She'd fed me a sumptuous meal, a memory that stayed with me everywhere I went over the following years.

With eyes beginning to mist, I read Valda's words aloud, welcoming the longed-for sound of my native Czech.

August 5, 1945
Dear Valdík!

I was tremendously happy when dear Hanicka wrote about how well you are doing and that you are already even a father of a 1-year-old. It seems unbelievable when I realize that this makes me a grand-aunt already. I am looking forward to your sending, on the first occasion possible, photos. I already know your dear wife a little bit from a picture, but some newer pictures would please me very much. As soon

as I have pictures of our boys, I too will send them to you. Jaroslav and I prefer not to let ourselves be immortalized. The war has taken a number of years off our lives, and the sorrows did not contribute to our beauty. But nothing can be done. Even if one worried to death, one couldn't change the reality, and so one cannot but reconcile with fate. I imagined the end of the war would be completely different. Even though I was trembling for the lives of my loved ones, I nonetheless never allowed myself to think that something could happen to them. I am using the first opportunity to report some news about us, which you probably must be awaiting with great anticipation. . . . I want to brief you shortly on what transpired here in those six years of war.

Your parents left in April of 1942 for the Theresienstadt [Terezin] Ghetto, but shortly after that they were deported to no-one-knows-where. We received a single card from them, from their journey to the east. They went to the transport bravely. Unfortunately, I couldn't even say goodbye to them, since by that time Hitler already had banned us from traveling, but I heard this from several acquaintances. Your father was allegedly in a good mood. Maybe that's why I was deluding myself that surely nothing could happen to him, a man of such life experience, and both he and your mother would succeed in escaping. This fixed idea accompanies me constantly, and I can't stop hoping that they will contact us from somewhere far away.

FIG. 1. The author's father, Osvald "Valdik" Holzer, 1939, in the photo used in the passport for his journey to China. Courtesy of the Holzer collection.

Aunt Valda continued to share everything she knew of what had happened to our family throughout the war. My grandmother Marie had perished, and Valda had been separated from her family for many long years—I'd had no idea. All the while, I yearned for more about my parents. It was still a mystery to me how she'd received the letter she'd enclosed from my father. At last, I saw the reference I'd been waiting for.

Before his departure for the transport, your daddy left an envelope with us. Written on it was: "Open only if I do not return." Jaroslav did not want to allow me to open the envelope, but a few weeks ago I did so anyway. Inside there was a letter for you and another one for your mother, which naturally I left unopened. I'm sending your father's letter to you. Enclosed in his envelope, there was a list of your parents' things and where they are stored away. Almost everything is with a Miss Nenadálová, daughter of the janitor of the apartment house where they last lived. I didn't know her at all, but still sought her out and told her that you wish that I gradually send you the things and therefore I have to take them. She was making all kinds of excuses . . .

I cared nothing about things, so I stopped reading my aunt's letter. Taking care not to disturb the seal with my father's cursive handwriting, I gently opened the top of the second envelope to remove a single sheet of paper dated April 21, 1942. Clearing my throat, I read aloud the first words I'd received from my father in over three years:

My dear boy!

Today we are leaving for an assembly point so that in 3 or 4 days we can follow the fate of those unfortunate people who have been, since last October, gradually chased out of their homes and sent to concentration camps, robbed of everything they had. This happened to us as well, and we had to leave the ground floor and its furnishings, the flat that had always been such a cozy home to us.

Carrying only the necessary clothes, we are setting out on a journey, not knowing the day of our return or when and where we might be united again. I am not

certain whether I will get to see you again, so I decided to write these lines as my goodbye to you.

I deeply regret that I wasn't able to know Ruth and your family life. I wish both of you much, much happiness.

I had a lot of failures in my life. However, I have tried, when possible, to spare you from my shortcomings and help you to become a doctor, a profession you always sought. You have always been a good boy, and we are proud of you. I wish for you to find full satisfaction in your profession. I also wish that your profession of curing won't just become a source of wealth for you, but that you yourself become a benefactor to suffering humanity. . . .

With warm kisses and greetings, I bid you both, you and Ruth, farewell. I remain,

Your loving Dad.

While I read my father's words, I could hear his deep, calming voice and see the downturned corners of his mouth. Even in the face of what might have been an unknown fate to some, I knew that when Dad, the old World War I soldier, wrote this, he envisioned the worst. He would not survive. Then, when he and my mother went to the transport, my protective dad put on his happy "all will be fine" face that he'd tried to maintain throughout his journey while I was on mine.

Once I stopped reading, the sound of his voice vanished, and my pulse raced. The images I'd seen of Eisenhower's soldiers walking past emaciated corpses in abandoned concentration camps flooded my mind. Overcome with surging nausea, I tried to recall his voice by reading the first lines, but all I heard was my own. My hand wiped away a tear that crept down my cheek. I'd found the answer I so desperately needed but feared.

I returned to his final wish: "that your profession of curing won't just become a source of wealth for you, but that you yourself become a benefactor to suffering humanity" and read and reread it several times. These were the words of my decent and principled father. No one else in the face of sure death except my irreproachable, self-sacrificing dad would choose to sit down to write an altruistic wish for suffering humanity—those who would remain on this earth long after he was gone. It was Dad's wish for the kind of man I would become.

AUTHOR SCHIRM ADDS:

It is clear that my father, Valdik, took his father's last wish to heart and breathed life into it. My dad never revisited the choices he made and didn't let guilt drag him down. He devoted his life to being "a benefactor to suffering humanity." Much of his devoted service was pro bono for the most vulnerable in our community—the poor, the frail, and the elderly. Dad understood the socioeconomic aspects of disease. He sought out the poor and gave them free medical care. For all this warmheartedness, I greatly admired my dad. Yet growing up, I knew little of what propelled him to channel emotions into such a positive endeavor. Then, when I was 45, things changed.

During a 1993 visit to my parents in their condo, I overstepped the bounds of our special father–daughter rapport. Like nearly everyone else in America, I'd read about a new Steven Spielberg film called *Schindler's List*. Schindler, an ethnic German Catholic, came from Svitavy, in Moravia, and served in the Czechoslovak Army, attaining in 1938 the rank of lance corporal in the reserves. Perhaps my father had met him in the army. I thought he would identify with the film's theme and hoped that seeing it would encourage him to talk about his family's experience, so I invited him to go to the movie with me. As I did, I saw the pain in his 82-year-old face and in those eyes that had seen so many things. At a snail's pace, he rose from his seat across the dining table from my mother and me. When he reached his full height, with a pale and troubled gaze, he cried out in a deep voice with its still-resonant Czech accent: "No. I will not go with you. It is not a movie that I intend to see . . . ever!"

The memory of my white-haired father, his gray eyes welling with tears, will remain with me always. I felt an overwhelming sorrow and realized I should say nothing more. In that moment, my childhood bond was transformed into a grown-up one, and I began to discover my real father. That evening, we sat together—just the two of us—as he pried from his heart the memories of the most painful time in his life. I stayed by his side as he used his old Voss typewriter to record, slowly, the names of the 44 relatives murdered in the Holocaust. He also painstakingly listed the names of those who had survived and spent the war in Nazi slave labor camps. I call it Valdik's List.

Valdik's List

Name after name appeared in black letters before my eyes. I was stunned. I knew my father had lost family in the Holocaust, but I'd never understood the scope or the details. These were secrets he'd guarded for a half-century. He might never have shared them if I hadn't been foolish enough to ask whether he wanted to see a movie that featured a scene in which ash of the incinerated dead falls like snow from the sky.

As he typed, Dad created a code to explain relationships: A for an aunt, O for an uncle, GA for great-aunt, and so on. With the surnames grouped together, it became clear the victims had disappeared from his father's and his mother's families in equal numbers. If he believed he knew how and where someone had died, he wrote the name of the concentration camp—TZ for Terezín or A for

Auschwitz—and added the year of death, almost always 1942. (From research conducted in 2008, I learned that my father had the place of death wrong only for two people on his list—his own parents. He thought they had been killed at Auschwitz, but it's likely they were murdered at Sobibor.

On Valdik's List, next to the names of some of the aunts and uncles, he added a notation such as "Family of four, A" indicating the entire family had been murdered at Auschwitz. For survivors, such as his aunt Valerie "Valda" Marík and several cousins, he wrote what he knew of their circumstances. Under the heading "3rd Generation," he added his own name: "Oswald Holzer left Prague May 21, 1939, for China & USA."

My father never revealed how he had gathered all this information, or how he felt about this incredible tragedy. We didn't speak; he typed with two fingers as I watched and swallowed tears. When he finished the list, he penciled in a few Czech diacritics on appropriate letters as if an ultimate sign of respect.

Most of Us Have No Idea

That was as far as my father could go with his meticulous list, because he was scarred by the past, his double life, in a way that I had never known and could not have then comprehended. Say this aloud: "Forty-four of my relatives were murdered. My grandpa, my grandma, my great-grandma, great-aunts, great-uncles, cousins . . ." Imagine how that feels. Most of us have no idea.

My dad knew that reading the letters from his father, his aunt, and many other relatives would bring closure to a story he could never bring himself to tell or write. These missives that, after his death, I stumbled upon, in beautiful Chinese red lacquer boxes, became my most treasured inheritance, changing my view of reality forever.

These and a resilient character are the greatest offerings he gave me beyond his own stories and moral integrity.

Words cannot protect us from harsh realities—lives shattered, or worse, by atrocities and war—but when I read them, I am with my parents, then and now. Their lives were filled with sorrow and joy, and they consciously chose to live with the light, not darkness. The finest bequest they left their children was the lens they provided to look at the world—a hopeful vision that illuminates the oneness of the human family.

This poem, writes Annette Bialik Harchik, "commemorates the fighters who planned and staged the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943. They were led by three political groups: Hashomer Hatzair, the Jewish Labor Bund, and Jewish members of the Communist Party. My father was a lifetime member of the Bund, the largest Jewish political movement in prewar Poland. His associates, many of whom were partisans, survivors of camps and ghettos, or survivors of the Uprising itself, were instrumental in establishing a memorial site in Riverside Park, at 83rd Street in New York City, to commemorate the Uprising and the martyred Jews whose lives were taken by the Nazis. They gathered there for a memorial service in 1948, long before it was fashionable to remember or discuss the Shoah. Each year, on April 19th, they meet at this site to honor the heroes of the Uprising and the memory of the Jewish people murdered."

Annette Bialik Harchik

Commemoration

Read at the Memorial Site, 83rd Street in Riverside Park: A poem to honor the fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, April 19, 1943

"To die with honor"
urged the motto
of the Jewish Fighting Organization (ŻOB).
To die with honor —
on the thresholds of Warsaw apartment buildings,
using Molotov cocktails instead of munition;
on the rooftops of Ghetto factories;
on the landings of courtyard stairwells.

Insurgents in sewer grottoes
festered throughout their network of bunkers.
Miła Street prepared for Pesach
with armed resistance.
When the Uprising began
all Israel fought.

And we who gather here today
remember them, all,
every Jew massacred —
We remember with love and with honor.
"Koved zeyer ondenk." *

* *Yiddish: "Honor their memory."*

Discovering that the apartment she and her husband were renting in the center of Warsaw had once been occupied by the Gestapo and, later, the Communist secret police, prompted Jennifer Robertson to learn more about the historic Jewish community of Poland.

Jennifer Robertson

Turning Points: A Reflection on Jewish Warsaw and Lublin

A city-center apartment for rent on Sienna Street, Warsaw—and in a prewar building? We must find out its story!

And what a story it turned out to be! Because few prewar buildings in Warsaw remain, the first question we ask is "How did it survive?" The answer came from neighbors who told us that the house had been occupied by the Gestapo and then by the notorious NKVD, the Communist secret police.

That information, coming just at the start of my Warsaw sojourn, was a turning point, encouraging me to focus all my attention on finding out more about Jewish Warsaw in particular and Jewish life in Poland in general.

I discovered that before the Gestapo had taken it over, this apartment, in which I now lived with my husband, had been inside the Warsaw Ghetto. Underlining that truth, I discovered that the red-brick wall in the courtyard below was in fact the only surviving remnant of the ghetto wall. I often looked over that wall and tried to imagine myself imprisoned within its confines. Those red bricks became a silent witness to the horrors of the Holocaust as I began to dig more deeply into the story of Jewish Warsaw.

I learned that the Jewish families in this building had found a good friend in a Polish woman, Józefa Stałkowska, a widow who lived on Złota Street, across the guarded ghetto wall. Józefa smuggled food parcels to her former neighbors. This mother with two young daughters risked being shot if her kindnesses were discovered by the Nazis. Yet, before long, Mrs. Stałkowska took even more risks. The single room she occupied with her daughters in a sublet apartment on Złota Street became a place of refuge for several Jewish escapees. Józefa housed them, organized safer hiding places for them, and guided these hunted people through streets to safe houses. Józefa Stałkowska is known to have helped at least 16 people, including children, and for these actions, she was honored by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations (Grynberg, 1993, p. 509).

The chance location of my Warsaw apartment allowed me to uncover stories I would otherwise have never known. Simple, everyday events offered glimpses of a vanished world. For example, our landlady warned us that there was a high lead content in the water in the apartment. So from time to time we would collect water from the communal well, a small red-brick building with a row of taps, one of many such water points in Warsaw. They are much patronized, and we always wished we had one closer to home, especially on the homeward trek.

The route to the well lay along a lane between a new block of flats and a children's hospital, a four-story honey-color building fronted by a line of trees. This famous Jewish children's hospital had been founded in 1878 by Meir Berson, a protoplasma specialist, and his wife, Chaja. Janusz Korczak, the "Good Doctor" of the Warsaw Ghetto, spent seven years working here.

Janusz Korczak was born Henryk Goldszmit. He was forever faithful to both of his names and identities—a Polish Jew, a Jewish Pole—and felt himself to be Varsovian to the core. The city, especially its poorer parts, was woven into his life story. Here he worked as a doctor, fighting for sunlit play spaces for poor Jewish and Polish children. Here he founded his orphanages and, ultimately, here, enclosed within the ghetto, Korczak begged for food for the children for whom he cared. When his orphanage was full, he lifted dying children from filthy pavements and carried them into abandoned shops so that they might die in a place of relative calm and feel cared-for in their final moments. He wrote: "Warsaw is mine, and I am hers. What's more, I *am* she. . . . Warsaw was both the location of my life and my place of work" (Korczak, 1942, p. 37, author's translation).

In August 1942, Korczak led his orphaned children for the last time through the streets of the city he loved. They were transported to Treblinka and murdered.

The street names of central Warsaw are full of stories and memories. The route on the way to the well for lead-free water went along Pereca Street, named after a great Yiddish writer, Yitzchak Leibush Peretz, born in the town of Zamość in 1852. Before the war, this street was called Ceglana (brick). Much of old Warsaw has streets with short, descriptive names: Sienna (hay), Śliska (slippery), Piekna (beautiful), Krochmalna (starch), Krucza (crow), Wilcza (wolf), Prosta (straight), Twarda (hard), Bagno (marsh), Długa (long), and so on, and all of them are bound up in the story of Jewish Warsaw. Everyone familiar with the work of the Nobel Prize-winning writer Isaac Bashevis Singer (1902–1991) will recognize these street names; he lived at 10 Krochmalna Street and wove the topography of old Warsaw into his stories.

Nowadays, half-ruined prewar buildings of bare, unpainted brick are found alongside concrete housing blocks. Old walls reveal scars where bombing once tore part of the house away. The section of the city that served as the Jewish ghetto was destroyed by the Nazis during the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943; afterward, in 1944, as the Russian front drew closer, the Nazis razed the city almost to the ground. On Stalin's orders, the Red Army halted on the opposite bank of the River Vistula and watched Poland's capital burn before marching in and declaring themselves liberators. Photographs, memoirs, and film recapture the life of Jewish ghetto fighters, Polish resistance fighters, and a city itself defiant to the end—and the story is written in the red-brick walls that, jagged and ruined, still are visible among the facades of rebuilt homes.

This simple walk to the well took me more deeply into the story of Warsaw and encouraged me to explore Poland further. What better place to continue than Lublin, the setting of Singer's novel *The Magician of Lublin?*

LUBLIN AND ZAMOŚĆ

The Old Town is guarded by *Krakowska Brama* (Krakowska Gate), a small, castle-like construction of red brick, part of the city's 14th-century defenses. An archway leads to Old Market Square. In the 16th century, when Poland enjoyed peace and prosperity, this market square was a bustling hub of business. Goods of French, German, and Italian workmanship were on sale, along with carpets from Persia and Turkey; silk and satin; linen from the Netherlands; spices and dyes from the East; Lithuanian furs; wines from Hungary, Moldavia, and Cyprus; and salt from the Wielickza mines, near Krakow, and Russia.

East and West traded, cheated, and shook hands in Lublin. Poles, Germans, Scotsmen, Frenchmen, Italians, Persians, Turks, Tartars, Armenians, Lithuanians, and Russians met and mingled among the market stalls. Jewish traders, afforded tax privileges by the Polish kings, appeared as well—but not with the same free-trade rights. Jews, who had lived in Lublin since the 14th century, had to live outside the city among the marshes and swamps beyond the walls.

Yet, in spite of constant pressures and burdensome taxes, the Jewish community grew in number. Called the Jewish Oxford, Lublin was famous worldwide for talmudic and kabbalistic schools. A 16th-century rector of one of these was Rabbi Salomon Luria, described as the most distinguished talmudist of his day. Almost every new generation in Jewish Lublin could boast of its doctors, lawyers, scholars, theologians, and charismatic mystics, most notably the Seer of Lublin, Yaakov Yitzchak Horowitz (1745–1815), whose grave can still be seen in the Old Jewish Cemetery; visitors from all over the world come to pray there.

Old Lublin is still full of atmosphere. The main street, Grodzka Street, curves past art shops and hostelries of all types, including one offering Jewish food and klezmer music. Picturesque narrow streets slant away to the right. All along Grodzka Street, signs point out the tourist route: red-and-white for the Polish Royal Way; blue-and-white for the Jewish Walk of Memory. The two signs, side by side, reminded me that Jewish life was lived alongside Polish life, often merging but always distinct. So I read with interest a history of Jewish Lublin by the outstanding historian Majer Bałaban (1877–1942), written in German during the First World War and reissued in Polish in 1991.

Bałaban writes that in its heyday, Lublin Town Hall boasted a beautiful tower. The Russians who ruled over Eastern Poland from the end of the 18th century removed the tower; without it, the remodelled building lost much of its former charm. The Jews of Lublin, wrote Bałaban, always gave this building a wide berth, because cruel trials for supposed ritual murder were carried out here (Bałaban, 1991).

From Lublin, my tour of memory took me to the nearby town of Zamość, whose splendid town hall rises three stories high and, with its imposing tower, is said to be the most photographed building in Poland. It was built in 1580 by Count Jan Zamoyski, founder of the town. Elegant steps swept up to the front door, giving a panoramic view over Market Square. Great wealth and a love of the good things of life went into the architecture of the houses around the square, with their ornate carvings and bright blue, yellow, and pink paint. Armenian merchants and Sephardic Jews brought southern warmth to Zamość, close to the present-day border with Ukraine.

In its long history, the town of Zamość has belonged to the Republic of Poland, the Duchy of Warsaw (1807–1815), the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1815–1939), and pre-war Poland, until 1939, when the Soviet Army pushed into Zamość and set up a brief reign of terror before almost as quickly withdrawing. About 5,000 Jewish families, half the total community, tried to flee, along with the departing

Soviet Army. An eyewitness of the chaotic evacuation of panic-stricken families described frantic cries as people clung on to the army trucks, having bundled their children into big feather duvets and flung them on board.

There was a brief breathing space for the Jews of Zamość before the Nazis marched in and deported the remaining members of the Jewish community to Bełżec (Dylewski, 2002, p. 190). The Nazi warlords spared the beautiful city, though. They intended to live in it themselves, and so Zamość remains one of the best preserved Renaissance cities in Europe. Like Lublin, it has been left stranded, beached by history's passing tides. Yet with its narrow, winding streets, Lublin hints at mystery, while Zamość turns to its visitors with a smile. Its square is perfectly square, its buildings are perfectly proportioned. It is sometimes suggested that this difference explains why Lublin was a home of Hasidism, a mystical branch of Judaism, while Zamość (whose beautiful 17th-century synagogue has been turned into a public library) looked firmly towards the Enlightenment, to emancipation, and to Europe —the Europe from which emerged unbelievable crimes that brought destruction and death.

MAJDANEK

The death camp Majdanek is just a bus ride away from Lublin, visible from the road, hard by the outskirts of town. Indeed, that's the first shock: how obvious the whole place is, not tucked away and concealed in forests, like Treblinka and other places of mass murder. As then, even today ordinary life goes on just beyond the perimeter fence of the camp, now a national memorial.

I climbed a flight of steps to a post-Holocaust memorial. A road leads from the memorial to a round pavilion in the distance. It had once been paved with gravestones torn from the centuries-old Jewish cemetery in Lublin, so whole communities were driven to their death over the broken tombstones. The Jews from those communities would have no grave. Their ashes would be mixed with earth to fertilize the fields on which starved prisoners, men, women, and children, toiled in unspeakable conditions. Secretly, some prisoners collected some of these ashes in an urn. Ironically, the Nazis encouraged some artistic expression, but the artwork the prisoners created was always a symbol of protest that carried a message of hope and encouragement. For example, one artist-prisoner designed a sculpture in which three eagles spread interlocking wings on the top of a pillar. The eagles symbolized freedom, but unknown to the Nazi overlords, the artist hid the small urn of gathered human ash within the pillar as a way of honoring murdered people who had no other memorial (Wiśniewska, 1999, p. 57). Secretly, too, during those years of terror, prisoners kept hope alive by artwork that included drawings of loved ones, embroidery, and woodcuts, all on display now in the museum (p. 56).

More than 300,000 prisoners of 50 nationalities entered Majdanek in the three years of the camp's existence. Men, women, and children—there were more children and babies in Majdanek than in any other death camp—came from France and Kirghizia; Italy and Norway; Armenia, Lithuania, Latvia, Greece, and Yakutia; Luxemburg and Denmark; Switzerland and Turkmenistan; America, Albania, the United Kingdom, and Azerbaijan; Karelia and Kazakhstan; Czechoslovakia, Serbia, Bulgaria—the list seems endless. There were Hungarians and Chinese, Uzbeks and Belgians, Jews from everywhere in Europe, and Romany. Of the 300,000 deported to Majdanek, more than 235,000 were murdered (p. 23).

Peasant families were deported to Majdanek as Polish villages were ruthlessly cleared to make room for pure-blooded Aryans. Priests and rabbis, cantors and pastors were murdered here. When prisoners were executed, the others prayed, regardless of nationality or religion: Catholic Poles, Jews, Russian Orthodox, Lutherans, and Baptists. There were Jehovah's Witnesses in the camp, too, and Muslims and Buddhists (p. 54). In spite of the brutality within Majdanek, some prisoners worked alongside one another in underground movements of protest and resistance. Closely printed Torah scrolls, prayer books, and toys for captive children, all on display now in the Museum, were precious tokens to keep hope alive in conditions beyond hope.

It takes about two hours to walk around the camp. Low wooden barracks held dimly lit exhibits that had their own silent story to tell. SS uniforms were displayed on dummies with heads of straw. There was one barrack hut full of shoes [see Elizabeth Spalding's "Majdanek," pp. 103–104, in *PRISM*, spring 2012—Ed.].

Flowers and wreaths are now placed in the open doorways of the metal ovens, a token of memory and protest at the terrible truth to which those empty ovens bear witness. Ovens—and, incredibly, a large bathtub in which the Nazi official in charge of the crematorium bathed, an action both callous and blasphemous—are among the exhibits of horror, a statement as stark as the heartless faces of the SS commanders whose photographs in a barrack hut still strike chill.

The tour finishes beside a round pavilion containing a huge mound of ash. Here, in an operation code-named Harvest Festival, the SS, working in shifts, murdered the last Jews of Lublin on November 3, 1943, to the accompaniment of loud music from the camp radio. That brutal day's work extinguished five centuries of Jewish life and culture in the city of Lublin. The 18,000 bodies were lifted from the pit and burned (Trzciński, 1996, p. 34).

On July 22, 1944, the Nazis evacuated Majdanek. Preparations for liquidating the camp had begun in March,

with the first transports of prisoners leaving in April. Some 12,000 to 15,000 prisoners were moved to other camps, but some were still languishing there when the Red Army unlocked the camp gates and freed those remaining ("Liquidation of the Camp," n.d.).

I had walked through Majdanek in silence and left without words. The bus stop back into town was just across the road. Local townspeople travel this route constantly. The silent expanse that had held so much suffering and death is part of their route into town as they go about their everyday lives.

Majdanek, like Auschwitz, belongs to us all. A message is inscribed above the heap of human ash: "Our fate is a warning to you." As I read those words, I recognized that uncountable moments and places from the Holocaust represent turning points after which nothing has ever been the same.

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"After surviving Romanian death camps, my parents moved to Paris, where I was born," writes Mike Frenkel. In this ode to his aunt and uncle, who survived the Nazi occupation in Paris, he captures a moment of great love during the Holocaust. Its echoes remain.

Mike Frenkel

Rust

One could hardly suspect
that this man
now buttering toast
once drove his motorcycle
through Nazi terrain
from a meeting
of the French resistance fighters
with a birthday present
(a cold-forged iron Jewish star)
concealed in his knapsack.

One could hardly suspect
that this man
now shoving plates into
a dishwasher
once published poems
in underground magazines
and passed out
socialist leaflets
on the Boulevard St. Michel.

One could hardly suspect
that the woman
now jabbing him with words
on her way to the beauty parlor
still wears that iron star
sprinkled with rust.

Leonard Fuld's personal narrative about his unexpected search for his maternal grandmother may prompt readers to examine the resources offered by the Holocaust and War Victims Tracing and Information Center in Baltimore, MD, and the International Tracing Service in Arolsen, Germany, the repository of over 46 million Holocaust-related documents.

Leonard Fuld

Revenant Oma

The shockwave from the fall of the Berlin Wall was felt far beyond the national borders of Germany. It led to the phone call I received in my Manhattan office in December of 1994, a call that stunned me. Like most everyone else, I had read about and heard of the resurrection of the dead, although in my mind it had always been associated with the arrival of the messiah in the wake of some cataclysmic, world-altering event, along with psychedelic lightning and deafening thunderclaps—not with a simple phone call.

FIG. 1. My Oma, Lina Frankfurter Katz, and my Opa, Moritz Katz, ca. 1934. Courtesy of the author.

Let me start at the beginning. The child of two survivors, I grew up in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan, the bastion of German Jewry in the US, fittingly nicknamed Frankfurt on the Hudson. Both of my parents were born and raised near Frankfurt-am-Main, Germany, in relatively observant Jewish homes. My father left Germany with his brother in early 1938 on a ship, aptly named the SS New York, and, with only $24 in his pocket, moved in with relatives living in Washington Heights.

My mother, at 17, also left Germany in 1938, shortly after *Kristallnacht*. My grandparents [Fig. 1] had applied for US visas for her and her sister [Fig. 2], but applications greatly exceeded the quota for that year.

Thus, my mother, followed by her sister a month later, entered England, working as a maid in Birmingham for a year before coming to New York. During that time, she corresponded with her parents through the Red Cross, but the letters between them were few, far between, and heavily censored, and, after the middle of 1942, she heard nothing at all from her parents. Tragically, like so many others, they had realized too late that the persecution of the Jews in their beloved Fatherland was not just a temporary madness, and when they finally had no choice but to leave, could find no country willing to admit them.

My father's father had been arrested by the Nazis and had died, or more than likely had been killed, in a prison camp. Of my four grandparents, only my father's mother survived. She came to America; she died when I was 2.

My parents met at a get-together in New York City, lived a simple life, and apparently were able to put the horrors of the Holocaust behind them, exhibiting no real bitterness and always willing to tell stories about life before and during those dreadful years, even sharing some sparse details of their own parents' murders, the few contained in the Red Cross notices. They told of the escape of Mom's Uncle Bruno, who upped and left with his dog in the middle of the night, never to be heard or seen from again, and the cousin whose parents spent all their money on a new wardrobe for her to flee with, and then kept her from leaving when the Nazis did not permit her to take more than one small suitcase.

My sister, Linda, was born in 1948. She was named Leah in Hebrew, after my mother's mother, our Oma Lina Katz (née Frankfurter) [Fig. 3]. I was born a few years later

FIG. 2. My mother, Beatrice ("Beate," right), and her sister, Dorethea ("Thea"), in happier times (ca. 1926). Courtesy of the author.

FIG. 3. Aunt Thea, Oma Lina, and my mother, Beate, ca. 1921. Courtesy of the author.

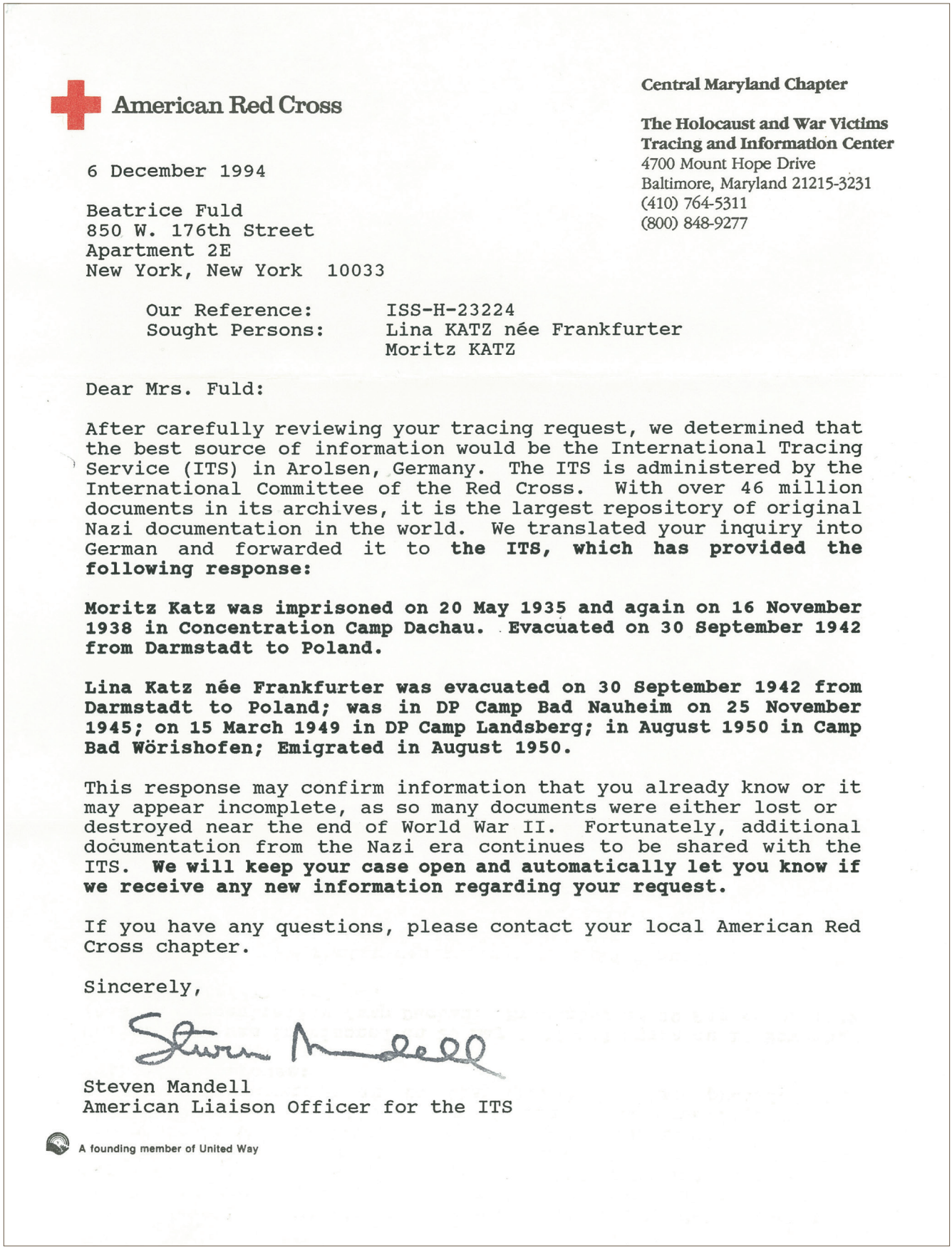
and was named Leonard Mark after my grandfathers, Leopold and Moritz.

We attended public and Hebrew schools in Washington Heights, played with other children of immigrants, attended an Orthodox synagogue that my father helped found, and had normal childhoods. I went on to get my MBA and CPA and was working as a deputy tax director at the largest oil and gas exploration company in the world when I chanced upon an article in the *Los Angeles Times* (Jones, 1992). The piece reported that, with the fall of the Soviet Union, hundreds of thousands of Holocaust records and documents had become available, and the International Red Cross (IRC) was accepting tracing inquiries about those lost in the Holocaust. Although we were all certain that my mother's parents had been murdered in 1942, I thought that obtaining details as to exactly where, when, and how they had been killed would, perhaps, lessen the flame of anger that I had harbored since childhood about my parents' losses. I mentioned to my parents my intention to pursue this; they were laconic, the conclusion, they knew, foregone.

I filled out and sent the requisite forms to the Holocaust and War Victims Tracing and Information Center in Baltimore, which forwarded them to the International Tracing Service in Arolsen, Germany, the repository of over 46 million Holocaust-related documents. Then, I waited. At some point, I received a letter acknowledging my request, apologizing for the extended time a response was taking, and explaining that the center had been inundated with tracing requests but the staff were doing their best.

Finally, in December, 1994, four years after my initial submission, I received the call that shook me to the core. The American Red Cross first confirmed what we already knew: My mother's father had first been imprisoned on May 20, 1935, for 11 months; once again on November 16, 1938, for a month, and finally had been sent on September 30, 1942, to Poland, where he was murdered. Then came the shock: Records showed that my mother's mother, Lina Frankfurter Katz, had been sent to Poland on the same day as her husband, but there was no record of her murder. Instead, the reports indicated that she resurfaced after the war in various displaced persons camps in Germany: Bad Nauheim on November 25, 1945; Landsberg on March 15, 1949; and finally, Bad Wörishofen in August 1950, when she emigrated [Fig. 4].

Stunned and shaking, I asked the Red Cross caller to repeat the dates and the report of her emigration and then asked whether there was any information as to where she went from Germany. There was no further information, but when I explained that we were certain that our grandmother Lina had been murdered in 1942 and that my sister was named for her, the caller agreed to submit a request for further inquiry.



American Red Cross

Central Maryland Chapter

The Holocaust and War Victims
Tracing and Information Center
4700 Mount Hope Drive
Baltimore, Maryland 21215-3231
(410) 764-5311
(800) 848-9277

6 December 1994

Beatrice Fuld
850 W. 176th Street
Apartment 2E
New York, New York 10033

Our Reference: ISS-H-23224
Sought Persons: Lina KATZ née Frankfurter
Moritz KATZ

Dear Mrs. Fuld:

After carefully reviewing your tracing request, we determined that the best source of information would be the International Tracing Service (ITS) in Arolsen, Germany. The ITS is administered by the International Committee of the Red Cross. With over 46 million documents in its archives, it is the largest repository of original Nazi documentation in the world. We translated your inquiry into German and forwarded it to **the ITS, which has provided the following response:**

Moritz Katz was imprisoned on 20 May 1935 and again on 16 November 1938 in Concentration Camp Dachau. Evacuated on 30 September 1942 from Darmstadt to Poland.

Lina Katz née Frankfurter was evacuated on 30 September 1942 from Darmstadt to Poland; was in DP Camp Bad Nauheim on 25 November 1945; on 15 March 1949 in DP Camp Landsberg; in August 1950 in Camp Bad Wörishofen; Emigrated in August 1950.

This response may confirm information that you already know or it may appear incomplete, as so many documents were either lost or destroyed near the end of World War II. Fortunately, additional documentation from the Nazi era continues to be shared with the ITS. **We will keep your case open and automatically let you know if we receive any new information regarding your request.**

If you have any questions, please contact your local American Red Cross chapter.

Sincerely,

Steven Mandell
American Liaison Officer for the ITS

A founding member of United Way

FIG. 4. Letter from the American Red Cross, December 6, 1994, detailing what I had been told on the phone days earlier.

I sat where I was, shivering in astonishment. My Oma, presumed dead in 1942, left a paper trail indicating that she had emigrated in 1950. She could conceivably still be alive, even in her late 90s. I certainly could not tell my parents about this incredible development, but, needing to share the news with someone, I called my sister, my brother-in-law, and my two first cousins, who were Oma's grandchildren, too. Questions swirled: Why hadn't she searched for her two daughters? Where had she gone? How had she managed to survive those horrible years on her own? How could we find out more?

Because I had begun the initial inquiry, it fell to me to scour the world for any possible nugget of information. I posted on all the relevant electronic bulletin boards and corresponded with scores of researchers, organizations, government agencies, Nazi hunters—anyone throughout the world who might have had a lead on what became of Lina Katz. I began each letter with a summary of the background information provided by the Red Cross and our interest in locating any records that would help uncover her destination after she emigrated in 1950. Every letter sent received a sympathetic response expressing amazement at the story and offering advice and leads, but no one had a single real clue that would help solve our enigma.

To protect my mother from the extreme emotions this research could prompt, I had given the American Red Cross clear instructions not to contact her. One day, though, she received a courtesy call from the International Red Cross informing her that the search for her missing mother was continuing. My mother called me crying, asking me to explain. Taken by surprise, I hesitantly explained that it was merely an administrative follow-up relating to my original information request, and my mother accepted, perhaps too willingly, my somewhat less-than-convincing white lie.

The first breakthrough in our quest to uncover what had happened to Oma came not from the Red Cross but from a senior Israeli government official who was responding to further inquiries from my brother-in-law, with whom he had a business connection. He told us that a Lina Katz née Frankfurter, with exactly the same birthdate and birth city as my Oma, had immigrated to Israel in 1950 and entered a nursing home in the city of Hadera in 1963. This was astounding. These new details picked up exactly where the Red Cross lead had run cold! Now we had some answers, but they raised more and more questions. Could she still be alive? What had she been doing all those postwar years? Why hadn't she looked for her daughters? Could this really be true? If so, what would it mean to my mother, to all of us?

Within the week, I was planning a flight to Israel to visit the nursing home to see whether Oma—who would have been 100 years old by that time—was improbably alive. If she was not, I thought at least I would be able to locate records that might answer some of our many questions. Then, however, another call came. The same government source informed us, in an unemotional, straightforward tone, that the Lina Katz I was hoping to visit was not, in fact, our grandmother, but a woman who had taken her identity. This woman had sworn on an affidavit during her first year in Israel that her name was Penny Gross and that she was from Romania. She had never, for reasons unknown, changed her name back to Penny Gross, but she was not Lina Frankfurter Katz from Germany; she was not our Oma Lina. There would be no impromptu flight to Israel, no reunion, no sharing joyous news with my mother, after all.

The search for answers, this time to new questions, continued nonetheless. A few months later, I received correspondence from the most helpful Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld that included a cryptic letter marked as confidential, which partially explained what had happened. Penny Gross had destroyed her own papers after the Holocaust to avoid being sent back to Romania, and the Jewish Committee in Bad Nauheim, apparently wishing to help her, provided her with the papers and identity of Lina Frankfurter Katz, although why they chose that particular identity and how they got it is unknown. Mr. Klarsfeld suggested that it probably would have been easier for Gross to get to Israel with German papers than with Romanian ones, and her assumption and retention of this new identity also prevented her repatriation to Communist Romania. Another letter, which had no letterhead, requested that no further investigation of the story take place, to protect those who had provided the information, puzzling and frustrating all of us. But there was no more to be done.

That very first phone call in my office had reopened the old wounds of my Oma's murder. From then until the receipt of this last letter, I was awash with shock, insatiable curiosity, sorrow, anger, eagerness, excitement, and gratitude to those all around the world who had tried to help. Now I felt some relief at this modicum of closure, and also a profound sadness. The world had brightened, if only for a moment, with my grandmother's resurrection from the Nazi ovens and the possibilities that such news held, until, even as we reached out to grasp the miracle, she was taken from us one final time.

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"I wrote this poem," Charles Adès Fishman writes, "in response to articles that have appeared in local Jewish newspapers as well as other periodicals and scholarly journals that described the ongoing desecration and destruction of Jewish cemeteries since the end of World War II, especially in Eastern Europe."

Charles Adès Fishman

Late Report on the Jewish Communities

The hundreds of small Jewish cemeteries — the stones
should be gathered and preserved in one huge museum . . .

– WŁADYSŁAW BARTOSZEWSKI

1. Estonia
The red brick wall that enclosed the cemetery
was toppled with a maul gravestones
were shattered and trees sawn in half

Later, prisoners smashed the gravestones
into gravel-size shards During the night,
the synagogue was burned: a charred

funeral hearse stood near the ruins.

2. Latvia
It was impossible to find the cemetery:
trees had migrated and the synagogue
stood abandoned: it was no longer clear

if a Jewish population had existed
What is left is an unkempt meadow shreds
of history slivers of bone Flames shoot up

from the ghost-harrowed plain.

3. Lithuania

Traces of the cemetery still adorn the brick
power plant's front walk This was after
they leveled the cemetery after the highway
bypass was put through after hedges
were ripped out and embracing walls torn down
after the mikvah was drained the library burned
the synagogue bombed

4. Poland

Chains were wrapped around the synagogue:
a tractor pulled it down This is how the cemetery
became neglected how, one by one, the Jews
disappeared Later, weeds grew over the ruins
though beams were still smoldering The cemetery
was now a Polish cemetery yet, between the weeds,
a few Yiddish names could be deciphered.

5. Russia and Ukraine

These are the best preserved of the Jewish cemeteries
for today they are surrounded by forests gravestones
have been numbered new inscriptions written in chalk

and old evergreens and jasmine bushes flourish
As for the Jewish villages: no one has located them,
but now there is a plaque: *Here once worshipped . . .*

Here once dwelled . . .

The tilted headstones of Florence Weisz's collages of the old Jewish Cemetery are evocative illustrations of Charles Adès Fishman's mournful "Late Report on the Jewish Communities," p. 80.

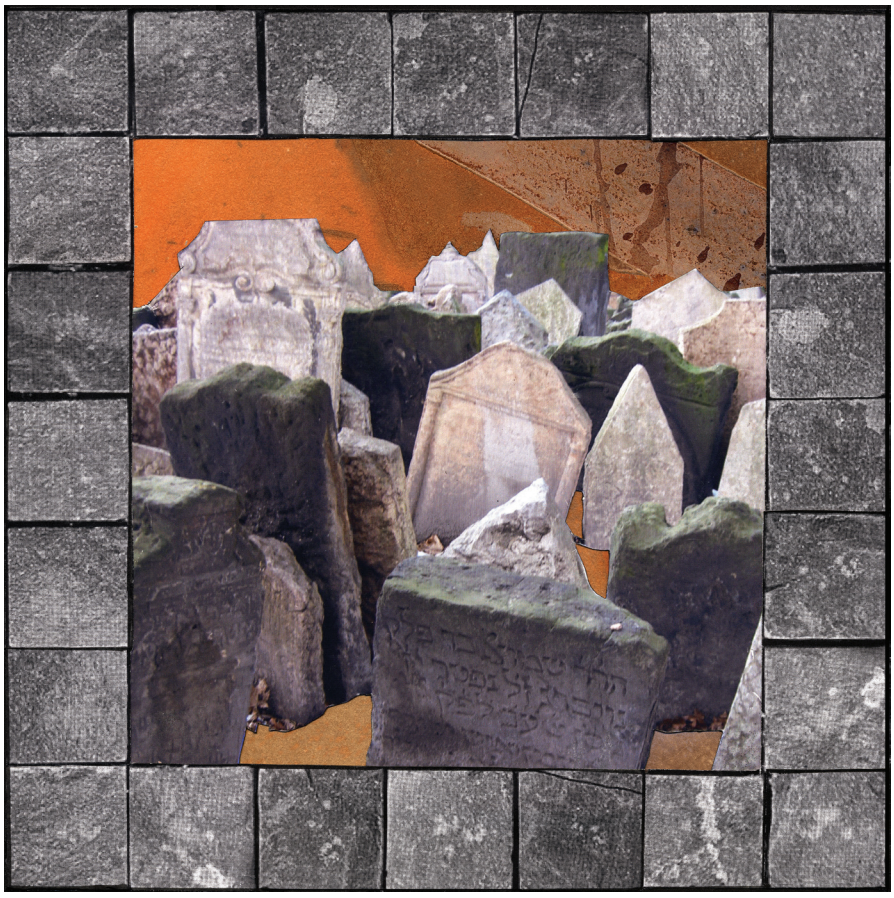
Florence Weisz

Josefov Markers

My search for a meaningful way to portray the stones of Prague evolved from my photographs of charming cobblestone streets into a more profound depiction of the stones in the Old Jewish Cemetery, recalls Florence Weisz. "I was fascinated by the multitude of gravestones crammed in one upon the other—as many as 12,000—representing generations of Jews from the 15th through the 18th century whose burial was restricted to this small area of the Ghetto Josefov. I looked for a way to express the stones' deeper significance.

"In *Josefov Markers*, I combine the poetry of tilted headstones with my alcohol ink-infused papers, all within a surrounding gray grid of granite and slate images.

"During World War II, Hitler ordered that this particular Jewish cemetery be left intact. He wanted it to be the centerpiece of a Jewish museum planned for Prague after all the Jews in Europe had been murdered. It is ironic that this oldest existing Jewish cemetery in Europe survived even during the German occupation of Czechoslovakia and despite the Nazi policy to destroy all Jewish landmarks. My experience of Prague's Old Jewish Cemetery was both harrowing and inspiring. Even in the presence of so many markers of death, I remained aware of the remarkable legacy of Jewish survival."



What is the moment that sets one on the path to teaching about the Holocaust? What brings an educator to the point of conviction that research on such teaching is the necessary next step? In this highly personal essay adapted from the preface to their book, *Meaningful Encounters: Preparing Educators to Teach Holocaust Literature* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), authors Paula Ressler and Becca Chase reflect on the turning points and pivotal moments that led them first to learn and then to teach about this subject and, eventually, to write a case study of Paula's English education methods course in which preservice education students prepared to teach Holocaust literature in secondary schools. Unlike most literature methods courses, which include many genres covering a variety of topics, her curriculum featured only one body of work: Holocaust literature. This short narrative takes us on their journeys.

Paula Ressler and *Becca Chase*

Meaningful Encounters: A Process of Discovery

PAULA: Teaching about the Holocaust never crossed my mind when I began my teaching career. In fact, many years passed before I decided to include even one Holocaust-related book in my syllabus. Looking back, I can pinpoint a number of experiences that led me to begin incorporating Holocaust literature into my teaching. Two stand out especially.

While I was still a graduate student at New York University, Professor Irene Shigaki sparked my desire to create a closer link between my life and my teaching when I attended a class in which she courageously shared with her students, for the first time, the story of her Japanese-American family's incarceration in the Minidoka internment camp during World War II. Subsequent conversations we had about the experience and the impact of the incarceration on future generations got me thinking about my own family history.

What finally motivated me to research that history was a conversation in which my 80-year-old maternal cousin Herta Seiden Gutfreund asked me to investigate what happened to the family she left behind in Vienna when she was 15. My cousin had not heard from or about her mother, father, or sister since 1938, when my father sponsored her and her brother, Artur, as immigrants to the United States. Herta and Artur had Austrian passports, but the other family members had Polish passports, which meant my father was unable to sponsor them. Whether this roadblock had to do with US immigration quotas or Austrian emigration restrictions, or both, I do not know.

My parents also were refugees: my mother, Hilda Seiden Planer, from Vienna, and my father, Karl Ressler (originally Rössler), from Czernowitz, Romania (now Chernivtsi, in Ukraine.) Both parents emigrated to the US in the late 1920s, before Nazism clenched in its hateful jaws so many Jews in Eastern and Central Europe. My mother's mother, Debora Planer, and my mother's brother, Arnold Planer, finally were able to leave Vienna in 1935.

Like many other Jewish survivors and escapees from European fascism in those years, my parents did not talk with their children about what their lives had been like in Europe, how they had found their way to America, or their tribulations as displaced persons. They did not discuss the families they left behind, those who did not survive—and I never thought to ask. Psychologist Dan Bar-On (1996) calls this a "double wall" of silence in which "parents do not tell, and children do not ask" (p. 168).

Contributing to my evident lack of curiosity about the Holocaust and my parents' lives in Europe was my own insecurity as the child of emotionally troubled parents, whose marriage was disintegrating even prior to my birth. I also shrank from seeing the nightmarish images of emaciated concentration camp survivors and mass graves shown on television when I was a child.

However, after my cousin Herta asked me to find out what happened to her family, I faced the fact that I knew nothing about the rest of my mother's or father's extended family members who remained in Europe, and eagerly, albeit with some trepidation, I accepted the challenge.

With the assistance of a paternal cousin, Jane Reifer, I contacted Gisela Wibihail, an archivist working with the Documentation Centre of Austrian Resistance in Vienna, which, as part of its mission, collects and reproduces records documenting the fate of Austria's Jews during the Holocaust. She sent me a letter and documents explaining what happened to my extended family.

My cousin's parents and sister were among those deported from Vienna to Minsk between May and October of 1942 in response to the Nazi order of April 1942 to kill the remaining Viennese Jews. Her relatives were put on a train that left Vienna for Minsk on August 17, 1942. The order was to kill the deportees upon their arrival at the Maly Trostenets estate, near Minsk. Only 17 were known to have survived these transports, Herta's family not among them.

The news was terribly painful for my cousin to receive and evoked profound feelings of grief. She was relieved, however, finally to know what had happened, and when she passed away a year later, I was grateful that I had been able to share with her the results of my research.

Troubled by what I was learning and recognizing that being isolated and separated from our roots had harmed our whole extended family, I was compelled to learn more. Over the next decade, I read about the Holocaust through history, trauma and psychoanalytic studies, and literary texts. I attended conferences, seminars, and workshops, including ones sponsored by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM); the Holocaust Educational Foundation; and the Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies Program at the University of Illinois Urbana–Champaign. I traveled to Europe with a group of educators to visit concentration camps, ghettos, and cemeteries.

As the years passed, and as I learned more about my extended family's troubled history—the high incidence of drug addiction, suicide, and other mental health issues, which some family members consider Holocaust-related—I found it increasingly difficult and onerous to put aside my personal life in professional settings. Uncovering my family history, and writing an essay for the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative* that links my personal life with my teaching (Ressler, 2010), set me on the path I continue to follow, striving to integrate more completely all that I am into all that I do.

When I observed my student teachers who were interning in schools as they taught Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night* and Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl,* I could see that they were unprepared to teach these texts. Their ignorance about the Holocaust, as well as Jewish lives and culture, sometimes even led them inadvertently to reinforce stereotypes and perpetuate antisemitism.

Realizing that my desire to prepare my students to teach Holocaust literature dovetailed with my commitment to teach them how to develop theme-based curriculum units founded upon personally and socially meaningful ideas, I made a radical decision in 2010 to revamp my entire teacher education course. The literature curriculum would be comprised exclusively of Holocaust literature, while the methods curriculum would incorporate pedagogic and curriculum development strategies that education students could apply to teaching any literary text.

Through my new curriculum, I responded to several important lacunae in my students' education. They lacked general knowledge about the Holocaust and Jewish life. They did not recognize that it is necessary to situate Holocaust literature in its historical context. They could not easily link historical to contemporary events. Pedagogically, they did not know how to develop curricula that embraced the complexity and the emotional and philosophical dimensions of any challenging subject matter. Most were not familiar with the inquiry-based, learner-centered, social justice-oriented pedagogies that are core parts of my teaching philosophy.

In this course, then, Holocaust literature would be taught interdisciplinarily, attending to historical, philosophical, psychological, and political contexts; literacy development theories and strategies; and literary criticism. Our student teachers would experiment with pedagogies that emphasized student engagement, critical thinking, and ethical questioning. They would help each other think critically about the texts, their contexts, and their relevance.

The personal and professional realizations described above inspired me to transform my teaching and scholarship, leading me to design, teach, and research my methods course on teaching Holocaust literature. This, in turn, led me to co-write, with Becca Chase, *Meaningful Encounters: Preparing Educators to Teach Holocaust Literature*. Its intent is to help readers understand why teaching Holocaust literature is important today, how to teach it responsibly and ethically, and how to teach it in a way that maximizes student learning, personal development, and civic engagement. By following along in our case study as we recount the path these novice teachers took, readers, hopefully, will think about, problematize, discuss, and begin to understand how to work together with their current or future students to explore the most meaningful ways to teach this literature today, and consider whether and in what ways learning from this catastrophe might help us create a more humane and just world.

BECCA: The path I took and the moments that led me to this project are quite different from Paula's. I grew up as a Christian and had only two Jewish friends until I reached college. Learning about the Holocaust, especially by viewing newsreels about the liberation of Jews in the death camps, profoundly unsettled me. Still, the Holocaust did not impact me directly, and I was not motivated to learn more about it.

However, from an early age I did develop a strong commitment to social justice. From the Civil Rights Era to the Vietnam War, the LGBTQ and feminist movements, and intersectional movements for equal rights, this commitment, and my active involvement, grew stronger. While I was studying English education with Paula when we were doctoral students at New York University and later as faculty members at a midwest college, we collaborated on several research and writing projects, all of which had social justice orientations.

So when Paula asked me to join her Holocaust education research, I agreed, if reluctantly. My ignorance about the subject gave me little confidence that I was qualified to act as co-investigator. As we got further into the work, however, I realized that my inexperience actually could be an asset, and I warmed to the project. I followed a path similar to the one Paula's students took and our potential readers might take, alternately defensive and enlightened when Paula, the data, the literature, and the resources challenged me to confront my biases and rethink my ideas. At the same time, I pushed Paula to clarify, strengthen, and, at times, revise, her thinking.

To educate myself, I read the Holocaust literary texts we would feature in our book, as well as numerous others. As our work progressed, I studied the history, culture, philosophy, literary criticism, education theory, and other texts that figured prominently in our research. When I could, I accompanied Paula to conferences and museums, including a four-day intensive visit to the USHMM, where we met with and learned from educators who worked with students and teachers nationwide.

One of the biggest challenges for me was to sustain such deep concentration on the Holocaust over time. It was often difficult to remain both passionately connected and sufficiently distanced to withstand the subject's emotional impact. Because I have experienced personal trauma due to abuse as well as illness, there were moments of despair; the work did take a psychic toll. Yet contributing to Holocaust education, continuing in this way the exhilarating though never-ending struggle toward justice and compassionate living, also has been healing and immensely satisfying, both intellectually and spiritually.

Over the several years it took to complete our book, I became more and more committed to Holocaust studies. Perhaps the strongest impact this research has had on me has been from studying ethics. How to live a moral life is a question I have pondered for many years but never conscientiously studied. In this critical time of great need to understand the struggle between progressive and reactionary forces in this country and the world, studying ethics and morality during the Holocaust seems particularly relevant.

I hope the readers of this essay find their work as Holocaust educators to be equally gratifying. May our efforts serve teachers well as they, too, reflect on the moments that brought them to take on this complicated and demanding endeavor.

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"When I read your call for submissions," writes Sister Lou Ella Hickman, "I decided to write a poem about the members of the White Rose Society, whom I discovered while doing research for a book. This poem is to honor their memory, as they are my heroes." Compare to Karen Alkalay–Gut's "Night Travel," p. 21, and Charles Adès Fishman's "The Lithuanian Rescuers" on p. 44.

Lou Ella Hickman

in memory of the white rose society martyrs

. . . a little candle burns itself out just like a flaming torch does.
I choose my own way to burn.

– SOPHIE SCHOLL

sadly
their deaths changed nothing
as if falling white petals
could turn summer to autumn
or more so brutality to peace
yet there are times
like theirs and ours when
changing nothing changes everything
for courage is its own weapon:
the choice the heart makes
in beating to its own drummer

"What moved me to write this poem," Carine Topal muses, "was the idea of keeping alive a community and a generation now lost to us. Many of the destroyed Eastern European communities were home to Jewish actors, musicians, opera singers, and a plethora of other creative people. Once systematic oppression touched their lives, none were able to continue their art openly. Beauty and horror coexisted. Art was created in secret during the onslaught while the artists who created it were prohibited from enjoying the fruits of their labor, one of the many tragic ironies of the Holocaust."

Carine Topal

Some World

Outside the walls of the world the stone steps
are softened by the hobbled pace of the worried,
their heads bowed in consideration of the ground,
the flat light of the evening's fog coming on —
what light the grudging fog lets through.

A man, a man you may know from Będzin, walks north
toward a theater once open to the Jews who built it,
who hung the curtains, who worked the lights and made the music.
Now he is a witness guided by habit, overhearing something,
or paying attention to what's been made of it. For instance,

this man heading north hears a woman sing a tune he wrote —
an aria in her throat, her throat of starlings, a sky above
the birdsong. Above them both, some world. Some world.

"I had the privilege and the pleasure to participate in Nava's writing workshop," reminisces Smadar Falk-Perez in her tribute to Nava Semel, the acclaimed Israeli writer whose works reflected her understanding of the Holocaust as a child of survivors. Nava passed away last year. She will be missed.

Smadar Falk-Perez

Lights in the Darkness: In Memory of Nava Semel

Nava Semel: Courtesy of the Semel family and Hemdi Kfir.

Nava Semel, one of the great modern Israeli writers, succumbed to cancer in 2018 at the age of 63. A prize-winning author, playwright, poet, and translator, she was the recipient of the American National Jewish Book Award for Children's Literature, the Women Writers of the Mediterranean Award, and the Israeli Prime Minister's Prize.

Nava was a prolific writer, producing more than 20 works of poetry, short stories, novels, and drama for adults, teens, and children. She carried inside her a wealth of stories. They were like birds stretching their wings within her soul, from which they took flight, that she might share them with the wide world.

I had the privilege and the pleasure to participate in Nava's writing workshop. On the day of the first class, I was prepared to meet a great author set apart by an aura of success and great achievements. Yet I was surprised to meet a warm, open, unassuming artist who longed to listen to people and to share her world with them.

Nava Semel was recognized mostly as a second-generation author who commemorated the tragedy of the Holocaust by drawing on her parents' experiences and memories. Her literary collection *A Hat of Glass: Stories of the Second Generation* (1985), based on her mother's experiences, was the first to focus on the burdens borne by children of survivors, expressed succinctly by a survivor in "A Hat of Glass," the first story in the collection. Muses the character: "They say time heals. They say I will be healed. I am grateful for the sun and for the new light, but on the heads of my children, my anguish and torment sit like a hat of glass" (p. 23). The main characters in those stories are children

of Holocaust survivors in Israel, who are described as bearers of the horrific memory of that atrocity.

One of the recurring themes in her narratives is the effects of trauma—the term for *wound* in ancient Greek. "Towards this deep opening in the soul the writer is drawn," Semel argued, "whether he wants to or unwittingly."

> The Holocaust is the black hole in my soul. Writing literature exposed that hole and pushed me closer to its edges. First, without being aware. Later, out of my free will. Writing is always one step ahead before the writer. It leads—too often forces him—to reach the very same places he is reluctant to go. Thus, it bears resemblance to the psychological process. (Semel, 2003, n.p.)

HAUNTEDNESS AND REACHING OUT FOR HELP: DIFFERENT RESPONSES TO TRAUMA

Semel described herself as influenced by the trauma that the Holocaust inflicted on her parents, so it is not surprising that trauma is the central theme of Semel's narratives for both adults and children. In her writings for adults, the reader repeatedly encounters literary characters who are haunted by traumatic memories from the past, while her narratives for children, such as *Flying Lessons* (1988) and *Becoming Gershona* (1990), proffer a variety of ways to cope with the traumatic experience, which itself is acknowledged only obliquely. In these narratives, the main characters go through a unique voyage in which they experience loss and pain, but they are also given the opportunity to transcend the traumatic experience, to reach out for help and rewrite the end of the story, giving them the potential to heal.

Semel's narratives about traumatic experiences also include descriptions of violence, as in *A Hat of Glass* and the novel *And the Rat Laughed* (2001). In those written for adults, the characters are drawn into situations where cruelty invasively haunts their lives. In her narratives for children, however, condolence is offered and there is a sense of healing.

Semel's last book for children, *Our Candles* (2018), unfolds a personal story. It is an autobiographical tale of a treasure that was kept in Semel's family for years and survived the Holocaust: a pair of crooked candlesticks that were made by a blacksmith; kept by his daughter, Sheindel; and eventually given as a special present to her daughter, Rochele, Nava's grandmother. The candlesticks are witnesses to the hardship and horrors that the family experienced, and eventually come to stand on Nava's shelf in Israel as a memorial to the Jewish people's dark past, but also as a symbol of commitment to continuity and hope. The candlesticks also represent Nava's unique perception of life, one in which opposing aspects of human existence are acknowledged: where beauty is found in the crooked, and joy is sought in spite of gloom.

This was Nava's unique approach to perceiving the world and to living in it: commemorating the life force that remained strong even during dark times, seeking lights amidst the darkness.

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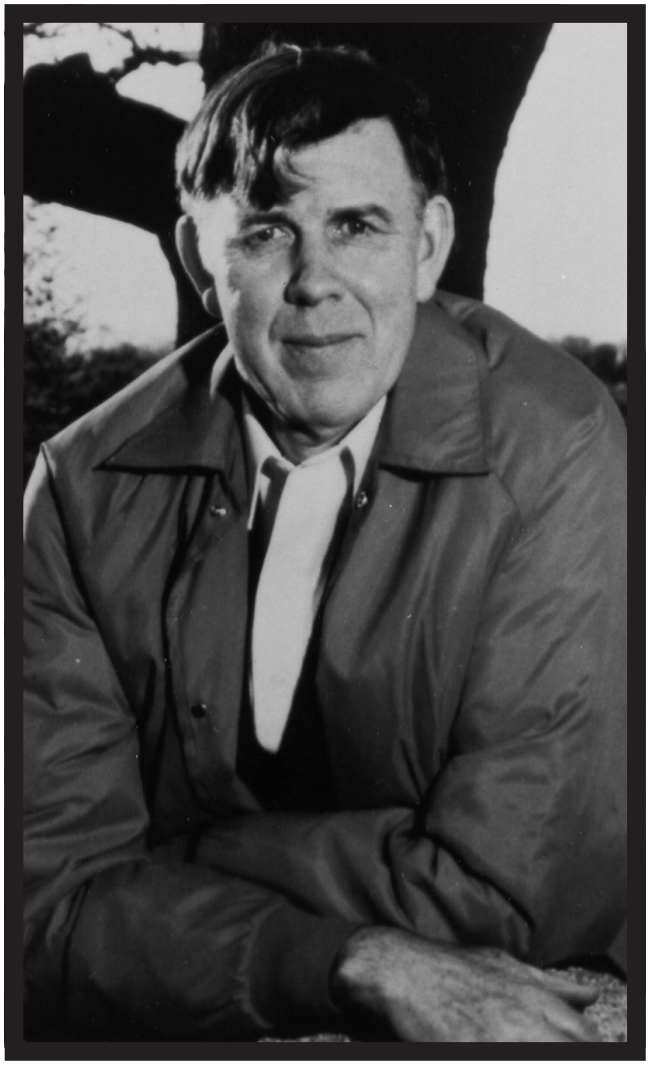
In Memoriam

Rafael Medoff writes, "Professor David S. Wyman, author of *The Abandonment of the Jews*, the groundbreaking and definitive study of America's response to the Holocaust, passed away on March 14, 2018, in his home in Amherst, Massachusetts, after a lengthy illness. He was 89." Medoff, Wyman's dear friend and colleague, shares some of the extraordinary accomplishments of this fine and gentle scholar.

Rafael Medoff

Professor David S. Wyman



Professor David S. Wyman

David was a brilliant scholar, a gifted speaker, an exceptional teacher, and my devoted friend. Above all, he was a person of extraordinarily fine character—a true mensch. Deborah Lipstadt wrote that she was "convinced that had there been more Christians like David Wyman in the 1930s and 1940s, the history of this period would have been very different. He strikes me as one of the *tzadikei umot ha'olam* [righteous of the nations]."[1]

David, the grandson of two Protestant ministers, was born in Weymouth, Massachusetts, in 1929, and raised in Auburndale, Massachusetts. He graduated from Boston University with a bachelor's degree in history, and from Harvard University with a Ph.D. in history. From 1966 until his retirement in 1991, he taught at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where he was the Josiah E. DuBois, Jr., professor of history and twice served as chairman of the Judaic Studies program. DuBois was a Treasury Department official who, in 1943, played a key role in exposing the State Department's sabotage of opportunities to rescue Jews from the Nazis. When the university honored David by allowing him to select the name of his professorship, he chose Josiah DuBois.

David's first book was the critically acclaimed *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938–1941* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1968). He spent the next 15 years researching and writing the sequel, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (Pantheon, 1984). He spoke often about how difficult it was for him, as a Christian, to be confronted with the evidence of the meagre response by American Christians to news of the Holocaust; sometimes he "cried for days" (Winkler, 1984, pp. 5) and had to take a break from his research. As he

explained, he "had been brought up with the belief that at the heart of Christianity is the precept that, when people need help, you should provide it" (p. 12).

Prior to the publication of *The Abandonment of the Jews,* the widespread assumption among the American public was that there was little or nothing the Roosevelt administration could have done to save Jews from the Holocaust. David's meticulous research demonstrated that there were, in fact, many ways the government could have aided European Jewish refugees without interfering with the war effort or undermining America's immigration laws. His book quickly rose to *The New York Times's* best-seller list. "We will not see a better book on this subject in our lifetime" (p. 187), Leonard Dinnerstein (1985) concluded. Hasia Diner (1985) wrote that the book "systematically demolishes often repeated excuses for inaction" (p. 31). Senator Paul Simon (D-Illinois) (1985) characterized it as "one of the most powerful books I have ever read."[2]

The book won the Bernath Prize of the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, the Saloutos Award of the Immigration History Society, the Ansfield–Wolf Award, and the National Jewish Book Award, among others. It has gone through seven hardcover printings and multiple paperback editions and has been translated into German, French, Hebrew, and Polish, selling a total of more than 150,000 copies worldwide. Today, 35 years after its publication, *The Abandonment of the Jews* remains the gold standard in its field.

David delivered more than 400 lectures, representing only the fraction of the invitations that his teaching load allowed him to accept. In his lectures, he often would unfurl, accordion-like, the 4-ft.-long government form that a would-be immigrant was required to fill out in order to be considered for a visa to enter the United States in the 1930s and 1940s.

It is testimony to David's greatness that the achievement of which he was proudest was not any of the numerous awards he received for his pioneering scholarship, or the many laudatory reviews of his books, but the fact that *The Abandonment of the Jews* contributed directly to the rescue of more than 800 Ethiopian Jewish refugees. The refugees had been left stranded and starving along the Ethiopian–Sudanese border in early 1985, when an Israeli airlift operation was interrupted. Jewish activists, together with Congressman John Miller, gave copies of *The Abandonment of the Jews* to Vice President George H. W. Bush and his aides, pleading with them to "do now what we didn't do then" (Seidner, 1985, p. 1). As a result, the US sent a fleet of C-130 Hercules transport planes to rescue the refugees and bring them to Israel.

David was deeply gratified that his book not only educated Americans about their country's response to the Holocaust but also helped ensure that another persecuted Jewish community would not be abandoned. The role that the book played in the airlift was widely acknowledged. Wolf Blitzer (1985), then the Washington correspondent for the *Jerusalem Post*, wrote:

> Today's direct and very active cooperation by the US government in helping to rescue Ethiopian Jews is in marked contrast to the documented abandonment of European Jewish refugees before and during World War II, which is well documented in David S. Wyman's recently published book *The Abandonment of the Jews*. (p. 11)

During a visit to Israel in 1988, David visited an orphanage and met some of the children who had been rescued in the airlift; he described it as one of the most moving experiences in his life. In 2008, he visited an Israeli Air Force base and met Major-General Amir Eshel, who was involved in the 1985 airlift operation, and Moshe Gadaf and Ami Farradah, who, as 8-year-olds, were among the rescued Ethiopian Jewish children. The poignant reunion of the former child refugees, the Israeli general who helped save them, and the American historian whose book made the rescue possible was unforgettable.

In 2003, my colleagues and I established the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, a research and education institute based in Washington, DC, and chaired by the noted businessman and philanthropist Sigmund A. Rolat. The institute carries on the legacy of David's scholarship through educational programs, research, and publications focusing on the history of America's response to the Holocaust and the important moral lessons to be learned from it.

David was editor of *America and the Holocaust* (13 volumes of the documents used in *The Abandonment of the Jews,* published by Garland in 1990) and editor of *The World Reacts to the Holocaust* (John Hopkins University Press, 1996). I was priviledged to work with him as coauthor of *A Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America, and the Holocaust* (New Press, 2000), and honored that he contributed a chapter to my 2018 book, *Too Little and Almost Too Late: The War Refugee Board and America's Response to the Holocaust.*

David's wife, Midge, who assisted him in his scholarly work, passed away in 2003. The Wyman Institute and I join their children, Teresa and Jim, and the other members of their family in mourning his passing.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Lipstadt to Breger, June 11, 1985. File: Ethiopian Jewry Airlift, David S. Wyman Papers, The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, Washington, D.C.

[2] Paul Simon, August 18–24, 1985. P.S./Washington. Office of US Senator Paul Simon.

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About the Contributors

Editor

KAREN SHAWN

shawn@yu.edu

Karen Shawn, Ph.D., is visiting associate professor of Jewish education at the Azrieli Graduate School and founding editor of this journal. She is a recipient of the Covenant Foundation Award for Excellence in Jewish Education (2000) and a co-editor of *The Call of Memory: Learning About the Holocaust Through Narrative, An Anthology* (2008). Shawn has spoken and written extensively on Holocaust education. Her current research focuses on testimonial literature, which she presented at the Future of Holocaust Testimonies V conference in Akko, Israel.

Associate Editor

MOSHE SOKOLOW

msokolow@yu.edu

Moshe Sokolow, Ph.D., is Fanya Gottesfeld-Heller professor and associate dean of the Azrieli Graduate School of Education and Administration, specializing in the history and philosophy of Jewish education and curriculum development in Judaic studies. He is the author of *Studies in the Weekly Parasha, Based on the Lessons of Nechama Leibowitz* (2008, Urim) and, most recently, of *Tanakh, an Owner's Manual: Authorship, Canonization, Masoretic Text, Exegesis, Modern Scholarship, and Pedagogy* (2015, Urim).

Authors

KAREN ALKALAY-GUT

gut22@tauex.tau.ac.il
www.karenalkalay-gut.com/

Karen Alkalay-Gut has been teaching poetry for over 50 years and stopped counting the books she has written after the 30th was published. Born in London, England, to refugee parents, she was educated in the United States and moved in 1978 to Israel, where she works with writers and poets. Her most recent books (2018) are a dual-language collection in Yiddish and Hebrew: *Yerusha* (*Inheritance*) (Leyvick Press), and *Hanging Around the House* (Simple Conundrum Press).

MARJORIE AGOSÍN

magosin@wellesley.edu

Marjorie Agosín, poet, novelist, and human rights activist, is a professor of Latin American literature at Wellesley College, in Massachusetts. She has been recognized by the United Nations with the Human Rights Leadership Award, and by the Chilean government with the Gabriela Mistral Prize. She is also a poet laureate of the Harvard Refugee Trauma Program and the author of more than 50 books, including her most recent collection, *Las Islas Blancas (The White Islands)*; drama; and memoirs. Her novel *I Lived on Butterfly Hill* won the Pura Belpré Prize.

JAMES BERGER

james.berger@yale.edu

James Berger is senior lecturer in American studies and English at Yale University. He is the author of two scholarly books, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (1999) and *The Disarticulate: Language, Disability and the Narratives of Modernity* (2014), and a book of poems, *Prior* (2013). He also is conduit and midwife of *The OBU Manifestos* (2017).

BECCA CHASE

dr.becca.chase@gmail.com

Becca Chase, Ph.D., is a former assistant director and academic advisor of Women's and Gender Studies at Illinois State University, where she taught English education and women's, gender, and queer studies. As a writer and editor, she served on the staffs of the feminist journals *Sojourner, Women's Review of Books,* and *woman of power,* and is a longtime social justice activist. With Paula Ressler, she guest-co-edited a special issue of *English Journal* on sexual identity and gender variance.

STEPHEN J. CIPOT

stephenjcipot@hotmail.com

Stephen J. Cipot is a scientist, writer, runner, and poet. He received an Edward F. Albee Foundation residency and assisted the first Dylan Thomas Tribute Tour, featuring Aeronwy Thomas and Peter Thabit Jones. His poems and articles have appeared in *Veils, Halos & Shackles: International Poetry on the Oppression and Empowerment of Women; PRISM: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Holocaust Educators; the Paterson Literary Review; The Seventh Quarry; Korean Expatriate Literature; New Works Review,* and elsewhere. He read his poem "Joanna" (*PRISM* 2014, p. 119) at New York City's Holocaust commemoration in the US Court of International Trade.

MICHAL HELD DELAROZA

mheld@mail.huji.ac.il

Michal Held Delaroza, Ph.D., teaches Judeo-Spanish (Ladino) literature, history, and culture, with an emphasis on the Sephardic Holocaust, at the Hebrew University, and is a member of the Israeli Parliamentary Association for Holocaust Remembrance and Aid to Survivors. She has written extensively on varied issues of Judeo-Spanish studies, Hebrew literature, and Jewish identity, and is presently co-editing the volume about the Sephardic community of Eretz Israel in the Ben Zvi Institute series on Jewish communities in the East. Her third book of Hebrew poetry is *On the Dreamseal* (2018).

SMADAR FALK-PERETZ

smadarpe@bezeqint.net.il

Smadar Falk-Peretz, Ph.D., is a lecturer in the English and literature departments of Orot College in Elkana, Israel, and in the literature department at the David Yellin Academic College of Education in Jerusalem. A prolific writer of prose and poetry, she has been awarded The Dafna Yizraeli Award in Gender Studies; The President's Fellowship; and The Rector Award, all granted by Bar-Ilan University. Her most recent publication is "Beyond the Sadness Rhetoric: Representations of Autism in Current Israeli Children's Literature" in *Bein Hashurot (Between the Lines): Journal of Research and Creation in Children's Literature* 2, Shaanan Publications, 2017.

CHARLES ADÈS FISHMAN

carolus@optimum.net

Charles Adès Fishman is poetry editor of *PRISM*. His books include *The Death Mazurka* (1989), an American Library Association outstanding book of the year; *Chopin's Piano* (2006); *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust* (2007), his world-renowned anthology; *In the Path of Lightning: Selected Poems* (2012); and *Veils, Halos & Shackles: International Poetry on the Oppression and Empowerment of Women* (2016). He is emeritus distinguished professor of English and humanities in the State University of New York.

MIKE FRENKEL

MFwriter@aol.com

Mike Frenkel, born in Paris, lives today in New York City. His writings have appeared in various publications, including *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust, Beyond Lament: Poets of the World Bearing Witness to the Holocaust*, the satirical journal *Defenestration,* and the *Huffington Post.* His unpublished novel, *We See Things as We Are*, was a semifinalist in the 2017 Elixir Press Fiction Award contest.

LEONARD FULD
lenfuld@gmail.com
Leonard Fuld, CPA/MBA, is a clinical associate professor of accounting and the director of the Master's program in taxation at the Sy Syms School of Business of Yeshiva University and is currently pursuing his doctorate at the Azrieli Graduate School. Leonard spent over 38 years in major global businesses, including PwC, Schlumberger Ltd., Citigroup, and, most recently, NYSE conglomerate Griffon Corp., where he was the vice president of taxes.

GLORIA GARFUNKEL
garfunkelgloria@gmail.com
Gloria Garfunkel, Ph.D., has a doctorate in Psychology and Social Relations from Harvard University. A retired psychologist, she has treated children, adolescents, and families for trauma and related issues for over 35 years, drawing on her own experiences for strength and wisdom. She is now writing and publishing flash-fiction pieces as well as longer works about her family's relationship to the Holocaust.

ANNETTE BIALIK HARCHIK
aharchik@dwight.edu
Annette Bialik Harchik is an educator, poet, and translator. Her poetry focuses on personal loss in the Holocaust, among other themes. She is a life member of the Jewish Women's Poetry Project of the National Council of Jewish Women in New York City and a former poetry editor of *Response* magazine. Her poems have appeared in many publications, including *Sarah's Daughters Sing: A Sampler of Poems by Jewish Women; Ghosts of the Holocaust: An Anthology of Poetry by the Second Generation*; and *PRISM*.

LOU ELLA HICKMAN
slehickman@iwbscc.org
Sister Lou Ella Hickman, I.W.B.S., is a former teacher and librarian. She is a certified spiritual director, a poet, and a writer. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines, including *First Things, Emmanuel, Third Wednesday*, and the *New Verse News*, and in several anthologies, among them *The Night's Magician: Poems About the Moon, Down to the Dark River*, and *After Shocks: The Poetry of Recovery for Life-Shattering Events.* Her first book of poetry, *she: robed and wordless*, was published by Press 53 in 2015.

MARTY J. KALB
mjkalb@owu.edu
Marty J. Kalb, retired, was a professor of fine art at Ohio Wesleyan University for 40 years. His artwork has been exhibited in various media over more than 50 years. Kalb's *Holocaust Series* artworks and others are included in collections at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Detroit Institute of Art, the Cleveland Museum of Art, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, the Library of Congress, the Mechelen Museum of Deportation and Resistance in Belgium, and the Museo del Holocaust in Buenos Aires, among other venues.

BREINDEL LIEBA KASHER
kasherbreindel@gmail.com
Breindel Lieba Kasher was born in New York City and has lived more than half her life in Israel. She is a documentary film maker and poet. Her work has been translated into Hebrew, Polish, and German and can be found in *Midstream, Cyclamens and Swords*, the *International Poetry Journal, Poets West, Seventh Quarry, Palabras*, and *PRISM*. She has twice been a winner of the Reuben Rose Prize from Voices Israel.

MIECZYSLAW KASPRZYK
m.kasprzyk@me.com
Mieczyslaw (Kas) Kasprzyk is a retired teacher of art and has been a writer and poet since his teens. Born in Oldham, England, to Polish parents, he was raised among survivors of forced labor and death camps and of the war itself. Almost the whole of his mother's family was either sent to Kazakhstan or shot by the Nazis and buried in a mass grave.

FRANCINE MAYRAN
francine.mayran@gmail.com
www.fmayran.com/
Francine Mayran, a French painter, ceramics artist, and psychiatrist, gives expression to the memory of the Holocaust and other genocides in her creations, bringing together art, remembrance, and history. Since 2008, her exhibition *Témoigner de ces vies (Witnessing These Lives)* has built a path of remembrance with more than 65 showings in France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg, Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, and Poland, as well as at a meeting of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance in London. She works with teachers from all over the Continent to help awaken the consciousness of the next generation and fight against racism and antisemitism.

RAFAEL MEDOFF
rafaelmedoff@aol.com
Rafael Medoff, Ph.D., is founding director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies in Washington, DC. He is the author or editor of 19 books about the Holocaust, Zionism, and American Jewish history and has contributed to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* and other reference volumes. Dr. Medoff has taught Jewish history at Ohio State University, SUNY–Purchase College, and elsewhere, and served as associate editor of the scholarly journal *American Jewish History.*

AMOS NEUFELD
amosneufeld18@gmail.com
Amos Neufeld, an attorney, film critic, and former journalist, was born in Israel to survivors of the Shoah. His poems and film reviews have appeared in literary journals, newspapers, and poetry and film anthologies, including *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust* and *Ghosts of the Holocaust*; a school textbook, *Voices of the Holocaust*; and the film anthology *Celluloid Power.*

PAULA RESSLER
pressle@ilstu.edu
Paula Ressler, Ph.D., is associate professor emerita and former director of English Education at Illinois State University, where she taught English teaching methods; women's, queer, and Holocaust literature; and playwriting. Previously, she taught high-school and middle-school English and drama. Her scholarship emphasizes social justice themes in teacher education. She is a lifelong activist for social justice, and is the author of *Dramatic Changes: Talking About Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity With High School Students Through Drama.*

ALISON RIDLEY
aridley@hollins.edu
Alison Ridley, Ph.D., the translator of poet Marjorie Agosín, teaches Spanish at Hollins University in Roanoke, Virginia. She has published translations in three books edited by Agosín and is currently translating two of Agosín's newest works: a collection of poetry and the sequel to the novel *I Lived on Butterfly Hill.*

JENNIFER ROBERTSON
jsr.juniper3@gmail.com
Jennifer Robertson is a writer and teacher, authoring books for adults and children and teaching creative writing. She has lived in Russia, Poland, and Ukraine. As a member of the Scottish Book Trust, Jenny gives readings in schools and other venues. Through her study of Polish, she became immersed in the story of the Holocaust with all its implications for educators and students. Her biography of Zofia Nałkowska, author of *Medallions*, will be published in April 2019.

PNINA ROSENBERG
pninarose@gmail.com
Pnina Rosenberg, Ph.D., is an art historian specializing in the art and legacy of the Holocaust. She lectures on these subjects at the Technion—Israel Institute of Technology. Her research on the art and memory of the Holocaust has been published in books, articles, and exhibition catalogues. She is the art editor of *PRISM* and an advisory board member of the project Courtroom 600: An Educational Virtual Reality Encounter With the History and Legacies of the Nuremberg Trials, University of Connecticut (UCONN).

NATHALIE ROSS
citymama@mac.com
Nathalie Ross completed her 1st year of doctoral studies in the Holocaust and Genocide Studies program at Gratz College (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). Her research interests include women's ritual practices during the Holocaust as well as the exclusion of the female voice in the Greek Holocaust experience. Ms. Ross is a certified yoga teacher who specializes in women's pelvic health.

JOANIE HOLZER SCHIRM
jschirm@cfl.rr.com
www.joanieschirm.com/
Joanie Holzer Schirm is the author of *Adventurers Against Their Will* (2013), a Global Ebook Award winner for best biography, and was referenced in *Essentials of Holocaust Education* (2018). A frequent lecturer and a contributor to the *Orlando Sentinel*, she serves as campaign cochair for Orlando's new Holocaust Museum for Hope and Humanity, where she was honored this year.

SAMUEL SHATS
sshats@gmail.com
Samuel Shats, Ph.D., is a Chilean photographer who graduated from Tel Aviv University. His work has been shown in group and individual exhibits in Chile, Argentina, Brazil, the US, and Israel. His latest work, *En el Umbral del Olvido* (*On the Threshold of Oblivion*), has been awarded a National Grant for the Arts. He is currently working with the poet Marjorie Agosín on projects related to memory and identity.

CARINE TOPAL
carine515@yahoo.com
Carine Topal, a native New Yorker, lives in La Quinta, California, and teaches poetry and memoir workshops in Redondo Beach and the Palm Springs area. *Bed of Want*, her second collection, won the 2007 Robert G. Cohen Prose Poetry Award. She is the recipient of the 2015 Briar Cliff Review Award for Poetry, and her third book, *Tattooed* (2015), won the fourth biennial Palettes and Quills Chapbook Contest. Topal's new collection, *In Order of Disappearance* (2017), was published by Pacific Coast Poetry Series.

VANESSA WALTZ
v.waltz@outlook.com
Vanessa Waltz serves on the judging committee for the New England Holocaust Memorial essay contest in Boston, Massachusetts. Her poems have been published by the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam, *Jewish Currents,* the Kindertransport Association in New York, the *Fortnightly Review* in France, and *PRISM*. She holds an MA in English from Middlebury College in Vermont and completed her studies at Lincoln College, Oxford.

FLORENCE WEISZ
florence.weisz@gmail.com
www.florenceweisz.com/
Florence Weisz studied in Paris and Jerusalem after earning a degree in fine art from Douglass College, Rutgers University, and has exhibited her art in the US and abroad. Her one-person shows and her works included in group exhibitions have been featured at museums, galleries, arts centers, universities, and corporate headquarters. Her paintings can be found in the collections of museums, corporations, and banks, as well as private homes and public spaces, including the City of Beer Sheva, Israel. She is a recipient of a New Jersey State Council on the Arts Fellowship Award.

Azrieli

Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration

2495 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10033

www.yu.edu/azrieli