

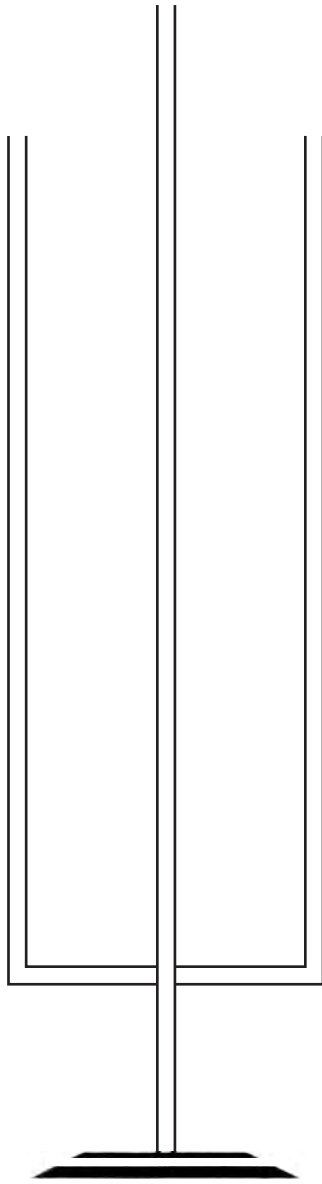
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATORS • A ROTHMAN FOUNDATION PUBLICATION

# PRISM

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY • AZRIELI GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JEWISH EDUCATION AND ADMINISTRATION



SPRING 2016  
VOLUME 8  
ISSN 1949-2707



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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**The quest for knowledge / The knowing / The end of innocence / What was known and how and when was it known?**

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- Submissions must be emailed to [prism@yu.edu](mailto: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](mailto: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 TIF files and accompanied by permissions and captions. 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.
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# Contents

- Cover** *Wall of Hope*  
LYN ROBINSON
- 1** **Introduction**  
KAREN SHAWN
- 3** **The Tomatoes (poetry)**  
TERESA MOSZKOWICZ-SYROP
- 4** **The Apple (short story)**  
JENNIFER ROBERTSON
- 6** **Name Tag (poetry)**  
NORITA DITTBERNER-JAX
- 8** **Zofia Nałkowska: Medallions and the Bonds of Life (historical research)**  
JENNIFER ROBERTSON
- 14** **In the Darkness (short story)**  
ZOFIA NAŁKOWSKA
- 16** **Shimon and Lily; Marlite (testimony poetry)**  
BREINDEL LIEBA KASHER
- 18** **Janusz Korczak, Educator: Teaching Humanity in the Face of Evil (historical research)**  
SARA EFRAT EFRON
- 24** **Moments: Early Memories (memoir)**  
MYRA HERBST GENN
- 26** **Portraits: The Last Transport From the Bedzin-Sosnowiec Ghetto, 1943 (photo essay)**  
ANN WEISS
- 41** **A Portrait of a Student in a Hebrew Preschool in Bedzin, Poland (historical research)**  
GALIA SHENBERG and MIRIAM YESHAYA
- 46** **Moments: Memories of Hiding in France (memoir)**  
CLAIRE SCHUSCHNY
- 48** **Helena's Haggadah (poetry)**  
MARJORIE AGOSÍN
- 50** **The Sternbuchs: Portrait of a Rescue Team (historical research)**  
BRANA GUREWITSCH
- 56** **The Yiddish I Know (poetry)**  
CHAIA HELLER
- 57** **Yiddish (poetry)**  
SEYMOUR MAYNE
- 58** **Rajzel Zychlinsky: Writing in Her Mother's Tongue (literary research)**  
KARINA VON TIPPELSKIRCH
- 63** **Cissi Klein's Memorial: A Portrait in Bronze (art history)**  
PNINA ROSENBERG
- 68** **Anne (personal narrative)**  
VANESSA WALTZ
- 70** **Moments: Separation and Return (memoir)**  
LORE BAER
- 72** **My Father's First Day in America (poetry)**  
JOHN GUZLOWSKI
- 74** **A Portrait in Poetry: Writing From the Testimony of Roman Kent (pedagogy)**  
HOLLY MANDELKERN
- 80** **Life: Survivor Portraits (photo essay)**  
KELLY LEE WEBECK
- 87** **Chocolate (poetry)**  
ELIZABETH ROSNER
- 88** **Moments: Hunger (memoir)**  
FREIDA HARRIS
- 89** **My Mother Doesn't Know Who Allen Ginsberg Is (poetry)**  
ALAN KAUFMAN
- 92** **Freedom Dancers (poetry)**  
GAIL FISHMAN GERWIN
- 94** **"Is the Holocaust Even My Story to Tell?" Portrait of Thandeka, a Black South African Holocaust Educator (biography)**  
BRENDA GOUWS  
with JOHAN WASSERMANN
- 102** **My Son Returns From Auschwitz (poetry)**  
STEPHEN HERZ
- 103** **Majdanek (poetry)**  
ELIZABETH SPALDING
- 105** **The Earth Has Not Forgotten: A Journey to Poland (photo essay)**  
DEBBIE TEICHOLZ GUEDALIA
- 111** **The Undarkened Window (poetry)**  
RAJZEL ZYCHLINSKY
- 112** **Settings (poetry)**  
ARNO ROLAND
- 114** **About the Contributors**
- 117** **Acknowledgements, Credits, Permissions**



## Introduction

Though the Holocaust is taught as a progression of events spanning 12 years, the Jews in its grip lived it as a sequence of moments. It is these moments—the unfolding of individual thoughts, reflections, feelings, conversations, and actions during the Holocaust and in its aftermath—that this issue of *PRISM* endeavors to capture.

We believe that learners too often are asked to look only at the big picture, to see the extent and the reach of the destruction, as if peering through a telescope from a place impossibly distant from its details. Yet we are obliged as well to look at the myriad intimate scenes that comprise that picture, to learn about the Holocaust by closely studying the individuals involved, to examine the moments of their experience as if through a microscope, scrutinizing these details so that we can see the scar on one person, the tear on the cheek of another, and the shy smile, lined face, and bright eyes of one who survived. We need to examine as well the detritus of the places of destruction, and the objects, remnants of Jewish lives, left behind.

Photography, of course, uniquely helps us see these details. Our cover, brilliantly designed by our art director, Emily Scherer Steinberg, is graced with recent portraits of vibrant, resilient survivors from Las Vegas, Nevada. These portraits, captured by new contributor Lyn Robinson over a series of sittings, hang in the Las Vegas Holocaust Center in an exhibit called *Wall of Hope*, a focal point for visitors.

Ann Weiss's collection of photographs and her accompanying text introduce us to people whose images were carried with the Jews on the final transport from the Bedzin-Sosnowiec Ghetto to Auschwitz. These doomed people chose and carefully packed these pictures of relatives and friends when they thought they were to be resettled in the East.

New contributor Kelly Lee Webeck's photo essay introduces us to survivors now living in Houston, Texas, and ushers us into their homes. Debbie Teicholz Guedalia, also new to these pages, takes us with her on a journey through Poland by means of her photos and spare text. Art editor Pnina Rosenberg, meanwhile, introduces us to "the Norwegian Anne Frank" through sculpture as well as words.

Testimony, too, brings us intimacy with its subjects. Memoirs from new contributors Lore Baer, Myra Herbst Genn, and Claire Schuschny offer personal accounts of moments during the time they spent in hiding and after, while Freida Harris, a child of a survivor, offers a moment of reflection about her mother.



The short story also offers a close-up perspective on an event or individual. This issue boasts two poignant, haunting short stories. One, by the late Polish writer Zofia Nałkowska, highlights a tragic moment during the Holocaust; the other, by Jennifer Robertson, is a reflection on a memory that time. Robertson also contributes a portrait of Nałkowska, author of the literary masterpiece *Medallions*.

"To look at any thing," writes John Moffitt, "if you would know that thing, / you must look at it long: / . . . you must / be the thing you see: / . . . You must enter in / to the small silences / . . . You must take your time. . . ." What better genre than poetry permits us such deep looking? Thanks to our poetry editor, Charles Adès Fishman, we have a record 15 poems, including eight from poets new to us: Norita Dittberner-Jax, Gail Fishman Gerwin, Chaia Heller, Alan Kaufman, Teresa Moszkowicz-Syrop, Arno Roland, Elizabeth Spalding, and the late poet Rajzel Zychlinsky, considered one of the greatest Yiddish poets of the 20th century. Each paints a vivid picture of one unforgettable person, event, place, or image, or, in the poems of Heller and frequent contributor Seymour Mayne, even the language of Yiddish!

This issue sets another record, as well, as we proudly welcome 21 new contributors hailing from the US, Israel, and South Africa. In addition to those named above, these include eight scholars (Sara Efrat Efron, Brenda Gouws, Holly Mandelkern, co-authors Galia Shenberg and Miriam Yeshaya, Vanessa Waltz, Johan Wassermann, and Karina von Tippelskirch) whose essays expand our understanding of the individuals portrayed and paint portraits appropriate for classroom examination.

This issue is our eighth, and we are delighted to announce that we are now offering opportunities for special, donor-supported themed issues. We welcome and encourage like-minded institutions, organizations, and individual sponsors to discuss with us proposals for underwriting issues that will examine themes and subjects we have not yet explored.

We also boast a new online feature: an organized Genre Index that will allow readers to find, easily and quickly, all of the writing in each particular category or genre that best meets their needs and interests. English teachers, for example, can find and select all the poetry and short stories published since 2008; history professors can do the same for all of the history and social sciences essays; and Holocaust educators can access the many essays on pedagogy with just a few clicks. This index, divided into 10 genres,

can be found on the *PRISM* page web site at <http://yu.edu/azrieli/faculty/prism-journal/>. We thank Susan Rosenberg, Vickey Edge, and MA student Tamar Annenberg for setting up this helpful guide.

Mr. Henry Rothman and the Henry, Bertha, and Edward Rothman Foundation merit a special thank you and an acknowledgment. The 2,500 in 36 countries who read hard copies of this journal and our countless online readers in an additional 15 countries have been able to use this educational gift in their classrooms, resource centers, and houses of worship because of the Rothmans' remarkable and unstinting generosity. Their financial support over these many years has enabled us to produce and disseminate this journal at no cost to recipients; they have our profound appreciation and gratitude. We are joined in thanking them by the many who have written about the ways in which the Rothmans' contributions have enabled this journal to enlighten, enrich, and sensitize them, their colleagues, and their students.

Our contributors are, of course, the foundation of this peer-reviewed publication. We have now published 191 authors and artists from across the globe, whose perspectives on history, pedagogy, art, research, psychology, sociology, testimony, memoir, literature, photography, philosophy, technology, and religious studies have enriched and enhanced the field of Holocaust education. We thank you for your gifts and look forward to your continued support and contributions.

We continue to be grateful to our talented, dedicated, and delightful staff: Steven Schloss, our project manager; Emily Scherer Steinberg, our art director; and David B. Greenberg, our copy editor. The journal could not be produced without them.

We trust you will find this issue of interest and value. As always, we look forward to hearing from you.

—Karen Shawn, PhD



What were they thinking when they were "taken from the hiding places / by the Gestapo"? Teresa Moszkowicz-Syrop's poem helps us understand the throes of hunger that engulfed her at that time: She "longed for — / . . . juicy red tomatoes / shining in the sun." Pair this image with the sketches by Elizabeth Rosner (p. 87) and Freida Harris (p. 88).

*Teresa Moszkowicz-Syrop*

## *The Tomatoes*

Is it possible,  
Do they still exist?  
The real, red tomatoes  
Which were shining in the sun  
On some broken stands  
In the corners  
of the ruined streets  
In Warsaw.  
I still remember,  
When we were marching by  
After the uproar,  
Taken from the hiding places  
By the Gestapo,  
To be sent away  
To the unknown.  
We were so hungry —  
Many days without food.  
The houses were ruined,  
The streets smashed in disorder.  
But,  
Mostly what I noticed —  
What I longed for —  
Were the juicy, red tomatoes  
Shining in the sun.



"After I became involved with the Polish-Israel Friendship Society, its president, art historian Dr. Joanna Brańska, told me this story," writes Jennifer Robertson. "Dr. Brańska had been told it by an elderly lady, who could hardly speak, as the memory distressed her so much. I have written it very much as I heard it from her."

*Jennifer Robertson*

## The Apple

She was in the autumn of her life, but her skin had a sheen that hinted at youthful good looks. Old Karol, watching from his ground-floor window, was reminded (and he was quite a connoisseur) of an apple a little past its sell-by date, but crisp around the core.

Karol lived on Hay Street, right beside the one remaining fragment of the wall that had surrounded the Warsaw Ghetto. As a youngster, Karol had watched the red brick wall rise ever higher. He had seen Jewish boys his age, or younger, carry bricks for their own prison. When the war and destruction were over, new buildings rose on rubble and bones; the ghetto wall became a silent ghost. Karol decided to commemorate those thousands turned to ash.

He fixed a map of the whole ghetto area to the wall. He put up a plaque, explaining what had happened there, and then he created a little garden, shut off by a low swinging gate. As the years went on, Karol, self-appointed guardian of memory, planted flowers and bushes in the little garden and kept an eye open for visitors to his shrine.

The woman had hesitated outside the gate, pushed it open, and walked slowly up the path towards the wall. She pulled off her gloves and unfastened her coat. It was warm in the shelter of the wall. Karol opened his back door and crossed his garden with remarkable agility. "Good morning, madam."

She swung around, startled. His blue eyes were friendly and his open manner invited confidences. She let him seat her on a wooden bench with her back to the red brick edifice. They chatted of this and that while traffic roared by the other side of the wall and the city got on with its

normal business of living.

Their talk turned to her girlhood. There was something she wanted to say, but she found it hard to begin. She shifted position on the wooden bench, crossed and uncrossed her legs—nicely shaped, Karol noted with approval. She lifted her crinkled hand to her mouth. Her nails were painted faintly pink.

"I'll never forget it," she began.

Karol waited.

"A little girl, you know, sent away to Granny in the country to be safe. It was autumn, so sunny and warm. Granny sent me to the farm for milk. She gave me an apple in case I felt thirsty on the way."

She paused. Again her hand went up to her mouth, covering her thin lips.

"I had to cross the railway line. A train had stopped just ahead of me, a long line of closed-goods trucks, and all along the wagons little things fluttered like flags. But they weren't flags. They were hands, lots and lots of little hands, fingers jerking up and down like puppets dancing. Children's hands. And voices crying: 'Mummy! Let us out! . . . Help! . . . Water!' That's what they shouted most: Water. Only it wasn't really shouting, just a kind of animal howling from inside those sealed trucks."

She paused. Her faded eyes misted, looked deeply within.

"I pulled my apple out of my pocket. It was so red and shiny, so good to eat. I ran up to the train, right close up. I had to stretch up really high. I pressed the apple into one of the hands. It was probably a boy's hand. The boys would be the strong ones, wouldn't they? They'd be the ones



who would force their way through the crush to get close to the cracks to get air. The boy took the apple, his fingers curled round it just as the train jerked and started to move away.

"But he couldn't pull the apple inside. The crack was too narrow, large enough for his hand to go through, but not wide enough for the apple. I hadn't thought about that, hadn't thought that the apple would be too big, but then the train started up again. It gave a big jerk and pulled away. I watched it go with all those little hands waving like flags and one of them holding my apple and struggling, struggling to get it through the crack."

She fell silent and Karol waited. They had plenty of time. It was pleasant here, sheltered by the wall.

"I'll never forget it. It haunts me, the child's hand holding the apple, his very last apple, and me standing there, so helpless. I suppose he dropped it, just opened his fingers and let it fall. It would have been better not to have given the apple at all. It just made it worse for him. I shouldn't have done it. It wasn't right . . ."

Karol pressed her hand. "Dear lady, when everything is wrong, can anything be right? Would you like to take a closer look at the wall?"

She looked around her as if she'd only just noticed the wall, the garden, and Karol himself. "The wall? Oh, yes."

They stood up. Karol led her closer to the wall.

"This is all that's left of the Warsaw Ghetto wall," he explained.

She pointed to the map. "And you did this . . . and made the garden, too?"

"It is necessary to remember," Karol said.

She nodded. "Do many people visit the wall?"

"Very many. Some take pictures, others light candles or lay stones or formal wreaths—but you, madam, have brought your story."

He bent over her hand, raised it to his lips, and kissed it. The red brick wall towered above them, while beyond the wall, trams rattled over their tracks like departing trains.

#### Post-Script from Jennifer Roberston

My husband, Stuart Robertson, and I moved in 1998 from St. Petersburg, Russia, to live and work in Warsaw. We knew the city quite well, having spent a post-graduate year there, and had visited several times since. Three weeks into our stay, one sunny morning, I felt struck with a deep sense of sorrow. I turned to my husband and said, "One can't be happy in Warsaw, there are too many ghosts."

I understood the reason for my feeling later that day, when a group of Jewish young people, visiting the courtyard as part of the annual March of the Living, told us that the high red brick wall that bounded our yard was a remnant of the Warsaw Ghetto. Examining it for the first time, we read the commemorative plaque on the part of the wall closest to our apartment. Further down the yard, we saw that a large map of the ghetto area had been placed on the wall, and a low metal fence surrounded a small garden in front of the wall.

As we took it all in, a neighbor came out from the ground floor apartment. Mr. M., whom I call Karol in the story, told us that as a youngster, he had seen young Jewish boys being forced to build the wall, so he had created this memorial—because "it is necessary to remember." Mr. M. had worked on this project in the 1970s, a difficult time for Poland and also a time when the only other monument to the Holocaust was the imposing Ghetto Heroes Monument, which had been designed by Nathan Rapoport and erected in 1948. Mr. M. kept a visitors' book signed by people from all over the world. Many had stories to tell, so I located the story of the apple within his little garden of memory.

Since that time, the garden has changed a bit, but I have described it all as I knew it.



Norita Dittberner-Jax brings to life Fanny Klinger, murdered and until now known only as a name on a suitcase "in the mountain of suitcases behind glass." "The name sings," writes the poet, "a name as bright as a poppy," and we will not forget it—or the woman she might have been.

*Norita Dittberner-Jax*

## *Name Tag*

As instructed, she brought only one  
suitcase weighing no more than fifty kilograms  
and wrote her name on it  
in large block letters:  
FANNY KLINGER

In the mountain of suitcases behind glass  
other names are visible —  
*Bertha Eppinghausen*  
*Franz Engler* —  
but the name *Fanny Klinger*  
lodges like a splinter of bright glass  
in my skin.

That name sings, even written  
on a suitcase of brown cardboard.  
Her parents must have practiced  
saying it before she was born.  
*If the baby is a girl*  
*we'll call her Fanny.*  
*Fanny Klinger.*  
*Das ist gutt.*



She was someone's  
childhood friend,  
a shy schoolgirl, a young  
woman of surprising passion  
and long, dark hair.  
When she packed the suitcase,  
did she think, *Now at least  
the harassment  
will stop?* They would live  
together in the labor camp,  
her aunts and uncles,  
her noisy cousins.

When the train stopped  
and they piled out,  
she walked with the others  
down the *Lagerstrasse*.  
She saw the SS men in their spotless  
uniforms toss the suitcases  
in the back of a truck and, ahead,  
the leader, with a quick  
glance, direct each prisoner  
with a flick of his index finger:  
left or right.

What good was her name then,  
even a name as bright as a poppy,  
against all the apparatus of death?



At the age of 60, in 1945, the Polish writer Zofia Nałkowska was appointed “president of the Commission for Investigating Crimes in Auschwitz,” notes Jennifer Robertson. “Out of that new undertaking, out of the piles of ash and the grimmest of grim discoveries, would come her literary masterpiece, which still remains unsurpassed and unforgettable: the short stories known collectively as *Medallions*.”

Jennifer Robertson

## Zofia Nałkowska: *Medallions* and the Bonds of Life

February 1944. It is winter in Poland and the long years of war are still dragging on. In the attic room where Zofia Nałkowska [Fig. 1] has taken refuge, there are no candles, no matches. Darkness falls at 4 p.m. and Zofia cannot see well enough to read or write; nevertheless, she has a library book in her hands. The book has been well used: She notices pencilled comments made by previous readers and realizes that this book came from a reading room located in the Warsaw Ghetto, now completely destroyed. Filled with sorrow, she writes:

They loved to read, those girls from the stockrooms, the boys from the stores—they were all readers. . . . I am still tortured by the loss of my notebook, which I burned one evil night. And so I lost those four months . . . everything about those people behind the wall, about their fate, truly the most frightful fate in the midst of this frightful world. (Nałkowska, 1970, p. 323)

The “most frightful fate” of the murdered Jewish people haunted Nałkowska, one of Poland’s leading writers between the two world wars. Her novels and stage plays were translated into all the major European languages, but during the Second World War, the German occupiers closed all Polish publishing houses, and by the time she wrote the diary entry quoted above, Zofia had no money, not even enough to buy some porridge oats. Zofia was a tall woman, known for her ample proportions as well as for her generous heart. The long years of war reduced her weight and added to her sorrows.

In 1945, the Red Army marched into the ruins of Warsaw. What would the new regime bring Poland? Nałkowska was 60 years old. Recalling the social and political upheaval at the end of the First World War, she now felt some apprehension about the future but also a huge relief,

“that things are happening and people are necessary. . . . I have been asked to be president of the Commission for Investigating Crimes in Auschwitz” (Nałkowska, 2000, p. 40).

Out of that new undertaking, out of the piles of ash and the grimmest of grim discoveries, would come her literary masterpiece, which still remains unsurpassed and unforgettable: the short stories known collectively as *Medallions*.<sup>1</sup>

Born in November 1884 in Warsaw—at that time a city under Tsarist Russia with strict censorship and secret police—Nałkowska was the eldest daughter of a highly esteemed geographer and writer, Waclaw Nałkowski, and his wife, Anna, of Czech parentage. The family belonged to the intellectual elite, desperately poor, but rich in the company of friends who were all writers and thinkers. Many were Jewish. Close family friends included Janusz Korczak (pseudonym of Hersz/Henryk Goldszmit), the legendary Jewish author, radio personality, and pediatrician, who later refused offers from Polish friends to escape from the Warsaw Ghetto, choosing instead to die in Treblinka with the children of his orphanages in August 1942 [see pp. 18–23—Ed.]. Zofia’s father regarded Korczak as his closest mentor and guide. Two other close friends were Cezary Jellenta (pseudonym of Napoleon Hirs, 1861–1935), with whom teenage Zofia believed herself passionately in love, and Leo Belmont (Leopold Blumental), who died in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1941.

Surrounded by these men of learning and of progressive, left-wing views, Zofia expressed her thoughts with a maturity beyond her years. She was 14 when she learned of the trial in France of the Jewish Alfred Dreyfus (1859–1935), who was falsely charged with treason in a time of

**FIG. 1.** Zofia Nałkowska before 1913. Photograph from the Nałkowska Museum, courtesy of the director, Dr. Marzena Kubacz.







fierce antisemitism and condemned to 10 years in prison; she confided to her diary: "Ten years! A waste of life—the only life a person has. . . . I feel fearfully outraged, just as if it were my own injury" (1975, p. 21).

These two ideas are embedded in all of Nałkowska's writing and find their fullest expression in *Medallions*. Life is precious precisely because it is "the only life a person has," and Zofia is outraged by someone else's suffering "just as if it were my own injury." Nałkowska will never lose her passion for people, nor her sensitivity to another's pain.

Now we see her in May 1945. Peace has come at last, and with it, the spring. Zofia is wearing a small hat perched on top of her carefully curled hair, which falls over her brow to conceal her rather high forehead. She is travelling from Łódź with other members of the War Crimes Commission in an old army truck so broken down that the short journey of 31 miles takes several hours. They have already visited Auschwitz, Majdanek, and other Nazi death camps. Nałkowska has just returned from Gdańsk, where she investigated the appalling factory in which human corpses were said to have been made into soap—but what can await her in this quiet countryside on the banks of the River Ner? Villagers hang back, reluctant to talk: They are terrified that the Germans will return and the war will begin all over again.

Nałkowska pulls out her notebook and her pen. Her horn-rimmed reading glasses magnify her startlingly blue eyes. Troubled by tinnitus, a constant buzzing noise in her head, and by deafness in her right ear, she concentrates hard to hear testimony from the villagers, who tell her about the church where the Nazis herded hundreds of Jews before loading them into trucks to be gassed.

"How dreadful, how dreadful," she exclaims as she writes furiously. Now a young Jewish survivor, Michael Podchlebnik, to whom Nałkowska refers as Michael P., takes the group through imposing gates into a park where, in total secrecy, over 35,000 Jews had been gassed in specially equipped trucks in the courtyard of "the palace which is no longer there now" (Nałkowska, 1965, p. 55). These simple words form the opening sentence of "The Man Is Strong," the seventh story in *Medallions*. Indeed, the palace is no longer there—the Germans destroyed it in an attempt to erase evidence of their immense crime—but Zofia's feet crunch through white dust filled with a gritty substance like sand. Podchlebnik tells the group that they are walking through ash and crushed bones from the last victims.

"This made a shocking impression. We stood in utter silence. No one was able to speak." Nałkowska covers her face with her hands. "Monstrous, monstrous. People just can't do things like that" (Barcikowski, 1965, p. 23). She asks Podchlebnik to scoop some of the dust and ground-up bones into a small tin as proof of this monstrous crime.

She will tell Podchlebnik's story, making an everlasting memorial to the "Jews from Ugaj, the Jews from Izbica, the Jews from Koło, the Jews and Roma people from Łódź" (Nałkowska, 1965, p. 60).

As the first to publicize these crimes to the world, Nałkowska feels a huge sense of responsibility—and of guilt.

"She returned from these visits morally devastated. . . . I witnessed her return, her silence, her horror," wrote the Polish dramatist and writer Jerzy Zawieyski (1965, p. 320), a close friend in Zofia's declining years.

She didn't say much about the camps she had visited. Only once she said firmly that we are all responsible for what happened. And that only those who perished there are morally in order. Each one of us bears the weight of guilt, even if it's only the guilt that we are still alive. (p. 321)

Yet that despair and guilt now fills the ageing writer with new creative energy.

Zofia is incredible. . . . Today amongst the ruins [of Warsaw] she buttonholed an elderly Jewish lady, Dwojra Zielona, and had a long talk to her about the Ghetto, about Majdanek and so on. I told Zofia that she must definitely write that conversation down. (Kornacki in Nałkowska, 2000, p. 69)

The story of Dwojra, "who was not tall and wore a black bandage over her eye" (Nałkowska, 1965, p. 42), is told in "Dwora Zielona," the fifth chapter of *Medallions*, where Zofia also notes, "This interest in the Crime [Commission] constantly gives me unusual people. Just now it's a charming woman cleaning the stairs and the bathroom here." ("Here" refers to a Warsaw hotel where Nałkowska was staying, sleeping on a straw mattress in an unheated room overlooking the ruined city.) "I shall write her story. . . . Today I talked to the director here and asked him to give her lighter work—but in vain (Nałkowska, 2000, p. 101)."

Too poor to go to university as a teenager, Nałkowska will never cease to study and learn, reading in Russian, French, German, and Italian as well as Polish, and writing novels and plays that take their place among the best of European literature. She will reach the heights of literary fame, be a guest at receptions and balls in palaces and embassies, in mansions and in the best hotels, but she will never lose her interest in simple, uneducated people, and it is their voices that her writing skills, honed over a lifetime's work, allow us to hear so precisely in *Medallions*.

Nałkowska was also always ready to help young, aspiring writers. Bruno Schulz (1892–1942), now acknowledged as one of Poland's greatest writers, owes his break-

through to Nałkowska, who recognized his genius and encouraged his work. In 1942 Nałkowska set up an underground network to rescue Schulz from the ghetto in his native Drohobycz—and was devastated by the news that he had been shot as he crossed the road carrying a loaf of bread (Nałkowska, 2011).

War in Warsaw meant devastation, poverty, and fear. All Jews were to be murdered and all Slavs were to be slaves; a prominent writer like Nałkowska and her sister, Hania, an award-winning sculptor, were at risk every day of their lives—and had no means of making a living to support themselves and their elderly mother, who was plunging ever deeper into dementia. The three women were repeatedly evicted and forced to move from one apartment to another, each one worse than the last. In addition, both sisters were deeply concerned for the fate of Hania's Jewish husband, Maximilian Bick, who had fled Poland. The news that reached Zofia (she kept the truth from her sister) was heartbreaking: Bick had committed suicide in France as the German noose tightened ever more closely around the Jews. Thus the tragic fate of Jews everywhere reached right into the home and the heart of the two Nałkowska sisters, who also grieved for close friends, including Janusz Korczak, closed within the walls of the Warsaw Ghetto (Kirchner, 2011).

Nałkowska glimpses the ghetto from a tramcar and records her shock and sadness: "Frightful streets, overcrowded in spite of the severe cold, broken-down shops and burnt-out houses. . . . Guards stand at the entrance and exit and the tramcar doesn't stop at all, not even once" (2000, p. 158).

She made these tram journeys because, thanks to her Jewish brother-in-law's connections with the tobacco industry, the two sisters were able to open a small store and sell cigarettes. Zofia's friends were amazed at the way in which she rose before dawn, even in winter, to collect cartons of cigarettes from a warehouse and heft them back to her store, where she patiently listened to people's hard-luck stories and sold the cigarettes cheaply, or simply gave them away. Through a young Polish contact, Nałkowska smuggled cigarettes into the ghetto to Dr. Korczak, perhaps for his own use but also, undoubtedly, to sell: Cigarettes were as good as hard currency in those wartime years (Kirchner, 2011).

From the age of 12, Nałkowska kept diaries as a means of self-affirmation, of heart-searching and self-analysis, exploring her own complex personality. Later, though, and especially in the war years, her faithful diary-writing was a way of keeping herself emotionally alive and of being true to her deepest identity as a writer and a woman. She deeply regretted the rash moment when, full of fear as the Gestapo carried out a search in the neighboring apartments, she burned a number of papers, including her diary

written during the last three months of 1942. This notebook contained her reflections on the fate of Jews in the ghetto, and she never ceased to regret the loss. In 1943, though, she picked up her pen again, "shattered by their fate, always ready to put myself in the bonds of their immeasurable suffering" (Nałkowska, 2000, p. 269).

In April that year, as she visited her mother's grave in a cemetery outside of the walls of the Warsaw Ghetto, where the uprising was ongoing, Zofia saw

beyond the cemetery walls, above the tiny buds of freshest green on the trees, black clouds, like puffs of smoke, rising upwards. Sometimes you can see flames—like a red scarf waving in the air. And to listen to this . . . and think about it—and live. . . . The solemn procession of resigned people, jumping into the flames, jumping into the abyss . . . the little boy in the window, small children in their parents' arms. I can't bear the thought of it. I am being changed by them [i.e., the Jewish inmates of the ghetto]. (1970, p. 279.)

These appalling scenes were all the more terrible against the stillness of the graveyard beyond the ghetto wall. Nałkowska recreated them in "The Cemetery Lady," the third story in *Medallions*.

She almost certainly relived these tragic experiences of the ghetto in November 1945, when a self-effacing young man, Marek Edelman, the youngest member of the leadership of the Jewish Fighting Brigade, brought his manuscript *Ghetto Uprising* to her in her apartment in Łódź. She wrote a forward to the piece:

The manuscript of this little book was brought to me by a young author not previously known to me. I read it at one sitting, not even looking up for a moment. "I am not a writer," he said. "This hasn't got any literary merit." Just the same, his "unliterary" account achieves something that not all masterpieces succeed in doing. In words that are serious, purposeful, restrained, free from platitude, it gives the minutes of collective martyrdom and perpetuates the mechanism of its course. It is also an authentic document of collective spiritual strength—power rescued from the biggest disaster that the history of nations has ever known. (Edelman, 1988, p. 19)

Towards the end of his long life, Marek, by then Dr. Edelman, said, "*Medallions* . . . made a huge impression on me. . . . Oy, she was a beautiful woman. Incredible. She was a real lady. And brave. . . . When you know someone like her, you have to bow to her (Bereś & Burnetko, 2008, p. 241).

*Medallions* is above all about people who endured a



FIG. 1. Museum dedicated to Zofia Nałkowska and her father, Wacław, in Wołomin, near Warsaw, Poland. Photo courtesy of the author.

terrible fate at the hands of their fellow human beings in a crime that must never be forgotten or denied. Nałkowska looked beyond the statistics of mass murder and saw the human story—and this is what gives this little book such lasting importance. Nałkowska always saw people in terms of their human stories. The enormity of the Nazi war crimes made an indelible impression on her and, as she said herself, began to change her. In her slim collection of stories, the murderers are faceless and nameless: She makes them into mere objects. The Jews, however, take center stage, given an identity as she recreates their lives and sufferings.

The title of her book is carefully chosen. *Medallions* refers to the lockets that people sometimes wear with a tiny memento of a loved one: a photograph or a fragment of hair. It also is the name given to the photographs on Polish gravestones. Thus the slim collection of stories becomes a memorial for murdered people who had no grave.

Nałkowska was always fascinated by gravestones, both because of the stories they tell of lives that have gone and because they seemed to her to be a sign that life is more lasting than death. In her first published novel, *Lodowe pola* (*Icy Fields*, 1904), 22-year-old Nałkowska wrote:

Marta and I often go for a walk to the forest a couple of miles away, where there is a Jewish cemetery, known as a *kirkut*. The carved stone grave slabs stand in long straight rows; some strange Kabbalistic signs are carved on them, lions, broken candles, book-

shelves, some kind of secret decoration. Moss, heather, and thyme cover the almost invisible hillock of graves; the wooden fence we have to crawl through is lost among the trunks of the pine trees. Thus, symmetrical rows of gravestones rise in the midst of a forest seemingly untouched by human hands. I feel as if I've gone back into some sort of remote past.

I like graveyards, I like to look at the triumph of life over death. (p. 26)

Words in Polish on a Jewish gravestone captured her attention when she was still a teenager. She used the phrase in one of her first-ever published stories, “*Powrót do domu swego*” (“Return Home,” 1913): “It’s interesting to affirm that . . . everything that exists is woven into the knot of life” (p. 8).

Zofia Nałkowska died in 1954. Her novels span key moments in Polish and Jewish history and are still studied in Polish schools, as is *Medallions*, the work with which her name is now most closely remembered. The modest wooden house where the Nałkowski family lived, a half-hour’s drive from Warsaw, is now a small museum, used for concerts and other cultural events [Fig. 2]. Recently, a group of high school students met there to learn letter-writing skills. Nałkowska would be delighted to know of all this, and above all to know that the masterpiece she crafted in utmost simplicity has reached a wider readership than she could ever have imagined, as well as that her name is securely bound into the bonds of life.



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## END NOTES

[1] *Medaliony* (*Medallions*) was first published in Warsaw in 1946. The edition referred to by page number in this article is the Polish language edition, reprinted in 1965 to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. Chapter titles are from the English edition (2000).

[2] The woman in question is the narrator of “The Hole,” the second story in *Medallions*.

Jennifer Robertson, the translator of "In the Darkness," recounts, "When this story appeared in print in 1952 in the Polish journal *Nowa Kultura* (no. 22), Zofia Nałkowska (1884–1954) prefaced it with a short introduction: 'I offer this little note, found among my papers, written long ago during the fearful time of the Occupation, as a small contribution to knowledge about the fate that war prepares for children.' This last phrase, a deliberate echo of Nałkowska's classic work *Medallions*, shows that responsibility for evil is borne by war, not by the women in the story, who are its victims." Read more about Nałkowska on pp. 8–13.

Zofia Nałkowska

## In the Darkness<sup>1</sup>

It's true that it was completely dark, and that the darkness lasted many long days, which were no different from night. Darkness and complete silence. It is difficult today to say for certain but it may be that the thing that happened was possible only in the darkness. Perhaps it happened only because it was dark and the women couldn't endure any more.

The room had no window and that was just right. Once it would have been called an alcove, but not now. Food had to be taken in the dark, seeing nothing. The women had to feel with their fingers for small pieces of cut bread, scraps of cooked meat spread out on a paper on a crate beside the wall, and they had to be careful that the paper didn't rustle. They drank water from a single pitcher. They sat on the only two chairs, on another, smaller crate, and on the floor. They had to keep completely quiet.

The point was that since morning, no-one had opened the door on the other side of which was the closet. An unknown person was in the apartment, someone unknown or someone who couldn't be trusted. Perhaps even THEM. They all listened for the agreed sign, and they kept quiet.

The same thing had already happened twice during those days, but it had never lasted so long. It was hot and stuffy. The bucket covered with a suitcase was full and stank.

There were seven of them, eight with that one little girl who didn't understand. She was scared, too, but she didn't want to keep quiet. Her

mother whispered in her ear that she would be the death of them, that she should be good and clever, that she would be the death of herself and Mommy and these ladies, that she would be the death of those people on the other side of the door who had given them this shelter.

At first the child obeyed, coaxed by a piece of sugar. Then the sugar was finished, and there wasn't even any more water in the pitcher. At some point, the little girl began to scream.

At first it was just a normal child's cry. Later, it became a moaning from fear or pain. Later there was just nothing to be done about it: The little girl screamed.

Her mother covered her mouth; she wrapped her head in someone's coat but it was no good. She screamed even more loudly. In the total darkness they could only see a little strip of light from under the door behind which stood the closet. Something was happening there. They heard the sounds of rustling and knocking and couldn't work out what was happening. There were some voices but they had died down as if they had moved away. No one understood the words.

The child had stopped screaming and was crying very quietly. Her mother stroked her and rubbed her hand over her little thin neck. She no longer said "be good and clever." The enclosed women did not allow themselves even to whisper. They listened hard to hear what was happening behind the door and the closet. Were they still there? Was anyone there at all?

The thing happened not in this nearest room beyond the closet but further away in the apartment. Chairs were being moved, footsteps, enemy voices.

The little girl was too small to understand. She screamed again. This wasn't weeping, but a cry of horror. This time the other women covered her mouth; later, they even pressed her throat a little. When she fell silent, her mother still held her hands on the child's little neck, stroking her lightly. It was quiet. In the room next door they clearly heard slow footsteps. Then silence fell once more. The little girl was too small to understand. She screamed again.

The little girl screamed. They stroked her head and her arms, cuddled her close, and covered her mouth. But it didn't help. The mother felt someone's hands on her child's neck. She understood. Hands, invisible in the darkness, pressed strongly together. The mother said nothing. Did she herself help in the thing that happened?

There was no other way out. Already several hands with curved fingers pressed on the small throat. The child quietened, snorted, but she still held out, defending herself with her little hands. They held her hard but she kept moving, struggling. There was no other way out. They pressed on her throat with all their strength and held on. The child weakened; she fell on to someone's lap. Silence fell. Nothing more was heard behind the door.

They were saved.

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**END NOTE**

[1] This story is published with permission of Joanna Wróblewska-Kujawska, the great-niece of Zofia Nalkowska.

**Postscript from Jennifer Robertson:**

**"In the Darkness"—A Portrait Obscured**

Nałkowska paints on a dark canvas a scene that we cannot see. Her precise prose locates exactly the room with no windows, the scraps of food spread on paper that must not rustle, the pitcher, the two chairs, and the stinking bucket covered with a suitcase.

In this darkness we see no faces. We hear sounds outside the room where these invisible people are enclosed. Inside we hear the crying of a little girl too small to understand. We are told that there are eight people in the unlit alcove. These nameless women grow ever larger on that dark canvas, but remain featureless—except for their hands, which at first try vainly to hush the crying child, then press ever more closely about her little neck.

This portrait whose figures are invisible is a portrait of a crime. Yet as tension mounts, as the child continues to scream and those hands press more strongly, we know that the real crime, which has forced these women to hide in a windowless alcove with a small child, is the Holocaust. The real perpetrators are the unseen THEM, present to us by the search they make. It is a crime too monstrous and vast for one small canvas—and yet the very smallness of the portrait, its precision, and its darkness reveal the enormity of that crime.



These three testimony poems by Breindel Lieba Kasher come from her interviews with three survivors. About the first two, Kasher writes, "Lily Milstein was born in Amsterdam and survived Auschwitz. She is an artist and a singer. Delicate and angelic, she kept her innocence even after all she experienced. Shimon Milstein, her husband, was born in Lodz and survived Auschwitz. A retired businessman, he had never been interviewed and was not planning to be; he kept that side of him guarded. He had lost everyone. They both had." These interviews are taken from Kasher's not yet-published book, *Who Robbed the Moon*.

*Breindel Lieba Kasher*

## *Shimon and Lily*

### SHIMON

They called it "No Man's Land" between Lodz Ghetto and the city.  
The Germans forced us to work demolishing houses and gathering Jewish belongings.  
I was half dead in No Man's Land.  
We ate spinach. Jewish women made spinach bread, spinach meat, spinach soup,  
Spinach compote. Night after night we were hungry.

In '44, the Germans gave orders:  
*Tomorrow morning, everyone outside. Take a few belongings.*  
We were going to "a better place." We knew what that meant.

We could do nothing. We were people with no strength, no will to live.  
We were people starving — four years in the Lodz Ghetto.

*The night before, what did you say to each other?*  
Goodbye. We knew this was the end.

*Did anyone sleep?*  
Everyone.  
In the morning, they called us by groups, first those in their 50s and 60s.  
Two hours later, those in their 30s and 40s. Trucks kept on coming.  
I asked a German to let me go with my parents.  
He whipped me. He said *It's not your turn yet. We will be back for you.*  
I stood waiting.

*Did you see your brothers again?*  
No.

*Did you see your sisters again?*  
No.

*And your parents?*  
I saw them for a moment, on their way to the crematorium.



## LILY ARRIVING IN AUSCHWITZ

They kill people here. They burn them. It was night —  
Bright lights, electric fences, sand, sand, sand.  
Did your mother say something to you?  
Yes, she said: "We are all going to be killed."  
I said: "Mother, don't talk that way."  
Then the SS took her away.

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About Marlite, Kasher explains, "Marlite Wander, born in Recklinghausen, Germany, survived Ravensbruck and Buchenwald with her mother and sister. She said it was rare: three consecutive tattooed numbers, three who survived from one family. A jeweler today, she is like an ancient vase glued back together so many times, more beautiful than ever."

## *Marlite*

### MARLITE: SHABBOS

We were religious. *Shabbos* was lovely, all of us together.  
Father loved *shul* politics.  
My sister and I had *Shabbos* dresses we washed on Wednesday  
And hung on the roof to dry.  
The *Shabbos* fish, a huge carp, swam in our bathtub all week.  
Chicken came from Berlin.  
*Shoichets*, kosher butchers, were now forbidden.  
Synagogues were destroyed.

Teachers were mean. They did not protect us from Nazi youths.  
My brothers were beaten every day, on their way to school and back again.

One night, the Gestapo banged on our door.  
My brothers were in pajamas doing homework. My sister and I were in bed.  
"Our parents won't be home until late," my brother said.  
They said: "We will wait."

They were looking for Jewish men to take to Dachau.  
All the lights were turned on. My parents knew something was wrong.  
Father ran. Mother came upstairs.  
"Dress the children," the Gestapo ordered; "take only your papers.  
You will return shortly," but that didn't happen. We spent the night in prison.  
In the morning, we were thrown over the German border into Poland.  
Mother and her five children, with only the clothes on our backs.  
Germany didn't want us. Poland didn't want us.  
It was November, bitter cold, and we were homeless.

We never saw father again.



"One of the lasting symbols of the Holocaust," writes Sara Efrat Efron, "is the image of a man leading more than 190 children through the Warsaw Ghetto streets on a march to the train that will take them to the gas chambers of Treblinka. This man was Janusz Korczak, an educator, a gifted author, a pediatrician, and a children's rights activist. At a time when the surrounding society gave in to fascism, antisemitism, and mass murder, this tragic march was a declaration of humanity's victory in the face of evil. The image of Korczak's march, as well as his life and work, serves as an example that "illuminates the limits of justice in a world of tragedy and the strength of a sense of justice for living in such a world" (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 407).

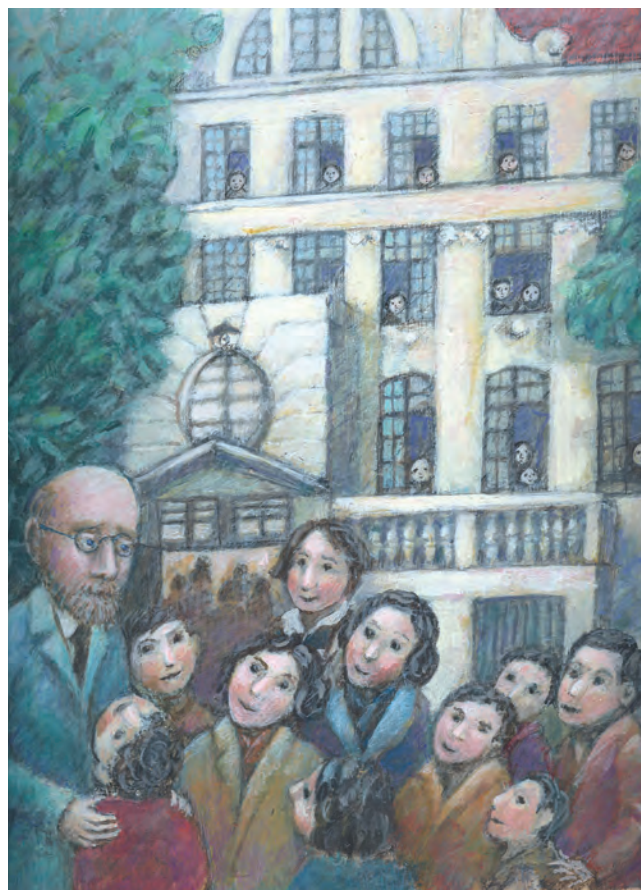
*Sara Efrat Efron*

## Janusz Korczak, Educator: Teaching Humanity in the Face of Evil

In one of his children's books, Janusz Korczak wrote, "The life story of a great man reads like a legend, like a painful legend" (1969, p. 5). This statement can be seen as a portrayal of Korczak's remarkable life and death. Korczak was born as Henryk Goldszmit in Warsaw, Poland, on July 22, 1878 or 1879 (the exact year is not known); Janusz Korczak was his adopted pen name. From a very young age, Korczak developed sensitivity to impoverished children who, he felt, suffered the most from inequality.

As a medical student, he spent long hours in educational activities aimed at introducing poor children to the power of reading. At the age of 33, a literary success and established as a pediatrician, Korczak left his clinical practice, feeling that the medical profession was helpless to deal with the emotional and social needs of neglected or parentless children. He accepted the position of director of the Orphans' Home [Fig. 1], an orphanage for Jewish children, and several years later, he became co-director of a Christian orphanage, Our Home. He divided his time between the two institutions, both of which were operated according to his unique educational methods. In each institution, Korczak was aided by a female co-director, Stefania Wilczynska in the Children's Home and Maria Falska in Our Home. They were the direct caretakers of the children, basing their work on Korczak's ideas.

For more than 30 years, Korczak, who never had a family of his own, dedicated his life to disadvantaged children aged 7–14 from Warsaw's poorer neighborhoods. He lived with the children, worked with them, taught them, and learned from them. While the children's formal education took place in the local schools, Korczak felt that the responsibility for stimulating their social, emotional, and



**FIG. 1.** *Orphans' Home.* Painting courtesy of Tomek Bogacki.

moral growth lay with him and the institutions' educators.

Outside of the orphanages, as well, Korczak's focus was on children and education. He founded the first national children's newspaper written and edited solely by



children, defended young delinquents' rights in juvenile courts, and instructed student teachers in universities and workshops. In addition, Korczak had a very popular radio show in which, under the persona of the "Old Doctor," he broadcast weekly conversations with the young. Concomitant with his educational work, Korczak continued to write. A very popular and prolific writer, he wrote more than 24 books of fiction and nonfiction, mostly for or about children, as well as over a thousand newspaper and journal articles.

### **KORCZAK AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL**

Korczak grew up in an assimilated Jewish family. His education was rooted in Polish culture and his upbringing lacked any trace of Jewish tradition or heritage. Only at the age of five, and to his great surprise, did Korczak learn that he was Jewish. It happened, as Korczak reminisced, when his beloved canary died. As he was about to place a cross on the bird's grave, the janitor's son told him that the canary, like him, was Jewish. Moreover, the janitor's son added, while he himself, a Catholic Pole, would surely go to paradise, little Henryk, being a Jew, would end up in a place "which though not hell, was nevertheless dark" (2003, p. 11).

As a director of the Jewish orphanage, Korczak recognized and respected the Judaic needs of his charges. Every Friday night he provided a special Shabbat meal, and all Jewish holidays were celebrated with festive meals and plays. Korczak became closer to Judaism, Zionism, and the Land of Israel through his students who immigrated to Eretz Israel (the Land of Israel) and enthusiastically described their experience there. The rising waves of antisemitism in Poland reinforced his interest in Eretz Israel and he decided to visit there, which he did twice, in 1934 and 1936. Accepting his former students' invitation, he stayed at the collective settlement Kibbutz Ein Harod and spent his time touring the countryside, visiting kibbutzim, meeting children and educators during the days and lecturing about his educational methods during the evenings. Returning from the second visit, he wrote with pride, "No one, not even one of my ancestors, I am the first one to answer the prayer that we repeat each year: 'Next year in Jerusalem!'" (1978, p. 86).

The Poland to which Korczak returned was awash in antisemitism. As a result of this hate, Korczak was removed from his popular radio show and forced to resign as co-director of the Christian orphanage. He felt that there was no future for Jews in Poland and dreamed of returning to the Land of Israel, where he visualized himself living in Jerusalem, studying Hebrew, and then settling on a kibbutz. Korczak would never fulfill his dream. How could he? Leaving the orphans behind would have been, for him, a betrayal.

### **KORCZAK'S EDUCATIONAL IDEAS AND PRACTICE: EVERY CHILD IS UNIQUE**

Korczak's pedagogical work integrates vision and practical experiential knowledge. His far-sighted educational ideas and actions have a timeless importance and have inspired educators throughout the world. Korczak was moved by a universal cause: the children, all the world's children. At the heart of his pedagogical vision was the belief that "mending the world means mending education" (Korczak, 1991, p. 50) and that the children are humanity's only hope. Every child, Korczak argued, is unique, with unique potential of her own. As are all human beings, a child is complex and far from perfection, and yet deserves respect and kindness for his dignity, individuality, and uniqueness. "Respect for his lack of knowledge! Respect for the effort of learning! Respect for their efforts and tears!" Only an educator "who dislikes thought will be disappointed by differences and angered by variety" (Korczak, 1978, p. 298).

The child, maintains Korczak, has a "primary and irrefutable right . . . to voice his thoughts, to actively participate in considerations and verdicts concerning him" (1967, p. 129). The teacher's guidance is valuable only when the educator "does not speak to the child but with the child" (p. 354). A good educator "does not enforce but sets free, does not drag but uplifts" (p. 196). On the other hand, the teacher should not relinquish his or her responsibility to guide the child. Giving the child a free hand, warned Korczak, "would . . . turn a bored slave into a bored tyrant. . . . For we either weaken [the child's] willpower or poison it" (p. 135).

### **SENTIMENTAL LOVE VERSUS PEDAGOGICAL LOVE**

Korczak differentiated between a teacher's "sentimental love," which sees the child in a romantic, glorified way, and more mature and realistic "pedagogical love," which respects the child for who she or he is and recognizes that the child's world is "not trifling, but significant, not innocent, but human" (1967, p. 254). Pedagogical love acknowledges that for educational work to be successful, order must be preserved. However, rules and regulations are there to support the child, and not the other way around. Finding the balance between children's autonomy and discipline is the clue for a fitting educational environment. Comparing the child to a butterfly flying "above the turbid torrent of life" (p. 88), he challenges the teacher: "How can you provide him with steadfastness without lowering his flight, to temper him without fatiguing the wing?" (p. 88).

### **BUILDING A DEMOCRATIC EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION**

In the orphanages, children were invited to participate in personal and communal affairs, because "without the par-

tipication of experts, we won't be successful. And the expert is the child" (1992, p. 174). The responsibility for administering community affairs—what Korczak called the "Children's Republic"—was shared between the adults and the students. Clear regulations and rules, determined jointly by the teachers and children in a democratic discourse, obligated both equally and were the basis for the community's social and moral norms. Institutions in the orphanage that were instruments of the children's self-government included the Children Council, Parliament, the Children's Court of Law, and their own newspaper.

The Children's Court was characteristic of the autonomous institutions. It was made up of five children chosen weekly to serve as judges. The verdicts were given on the basis of a legal code, a "codex," that included dozens of sections and subsections of rules of law that emphasized the need to protect "the timid against the bullies, the conscientious against the careless and idle" (1967, p. 404). Korczak believed that the court was a powerful tool of moral education as it taught the child judges the values of just and ethical community life, of forgiveness, and of respect for the unique needs of individuals.

As the children engaged in democratic decision-making regarding issues of collective concerns that carried real consequences, they were able to develop their moral imagination and critical thinking. The experience taught the children the complexities and the possibility of living together in harmony with a sense of common ethical ground while recognizing and respecting individuality and differences.

### HOPE IN THE FACE OF HOPELESSNESS

A critical question inherent to understanding Korczak's legacy remains: How did he reconcile the disparity between the ethical world he created in the Orphans' Home and the surrounding immoral society?

Antisemitism in Poland between the two world wars was gaining increasing strength. Political power was in the hands of openly antisemitic leaders who inflicted severe social and economic restrictions on the Jews. Korczak was painfully aware of what was happening in the surrounding society and of the ever-spreading wickedness and oppression. Moreover, in the play *The Senate of Madmen* (1931/1989), which he wrote eight years before the Nazi invasion, he predicted the approaching dark sea of evil that was about to flood Europe. He warned sorrowfully in another book, *The Child's Right to Respect* (1929/1992), that society would be shaped by "a powerful brute, a homo rapax; it is he who dictates the mode of living" (p. 185). How could Korczak, then, continue to teach the values of truth, justice, and acceptance of the Other when the world around him was awash in injustice and hate?

Igor Newerly (1980), who worked with and was a

friend of Korczak for over 16 years, relates that Korczak perceived society with "merciful skepticism" and "optimistic toughness" (p. 16). Korczak's inner debate between skeptical pragmatism and humanistic hopefulness is reflected in his classic children's book *King Matt the First* (2004). The young, idealistic King Matt dreams of reforming society and creating a better world for children, while the realistic Sad King recognizes that one always falls short of attaining one's dreams. Nevertheless, explains the young king, one should never stop trying. Similarly, Korczak had no illusion about the immoral society surrounding him, but was not ready to give up his humanistic ideals. "I will not let them slow my flight" he insisted. "My dreams guard me from a deep slumber" (Korczak, 1991, p. 60).

Knowing the harsh reality of hatred, discrimination, and racism that awaited the children in the external world, Korczak felt that educators did not have the luxury of deluding the young by presenting a rosy picture. Moreover, efforts to hide reality, he felt, were useless: "You will not be able . . . to shut out the unfiltered and cruel voices, which no rosary of moral teaching can silence" (1967, p. 251).

At the same time, he was not ready to disown his hopes for a better tomorrow. Human beings still had a choice—the ultimate choice between giving up and the possibility of making a difference. The source of hope was the child, the eternal hope for a new beginning. The child's hopeful gaze confronted the tragic world and the child dreamed of an ethical revival: "Into the vision of desolation, destruction, and ruin, hopelessness and even lack of expectation, children's laughter, boisterous, joyful, bursts in. A laughter that summons the future, beckons the spring, and heralds tomorrow" (1978, pp. 232–233).

Korczak's clinging to hope did not stem from naivety or blindness, but from a calculated choice, an existential understanding that despair means giving up on change, thus conceding the future. Even, or especially, in a time "when tyranny and spiritual enslavement rule the world," he explained that children should "be exposed to the beauty and the sublime which they carry within their heart" (Gilad, 1961, p. 191).

To those who criticized him for being overly optimistic and questioned the reasonability of his hopes, the Old Doctor responded, "One has to soar high, so that the slow descent, the way back will be long. For those who feel that our plans seem imaginary, it seems worthy to remind that towering to heights requires wings" (Perlis, 1986, p. 46).

Wings he had. However, the Nazi invasion of Poland in 1939 subjected Korczak's belief in humanity and in education to its cruelest test.

### THE CHILDREN'S REPUBLIC IN THE WARSAW GHETTO

With the occupation of Poland, the Nazis established the Warsaw Ghetto and forced Korczak to move the Jewish



orphanage into the ghetto, a living hell with hunger, death, and despair everywhere [Fig. 2]. Korczak describes the walled Jewish quarter as a district that “is changing from day to day: 1. A prison / 2. A plague-stricken area / 3. A mating ground / 4. A lunatic asylum / 5. A casino. Monaco. The stake—your head” (2003, p. 111).

Korczak focused his energy on protecting the children from the atrocities of the “powerful brute,” keeping them alive, and defending the orphanage. To ensure the children’s survival, Korczak, tired, weak, and in ill health, dragged himself on his swollen legs to the houses of those Jews who still had some money, begging for food and other

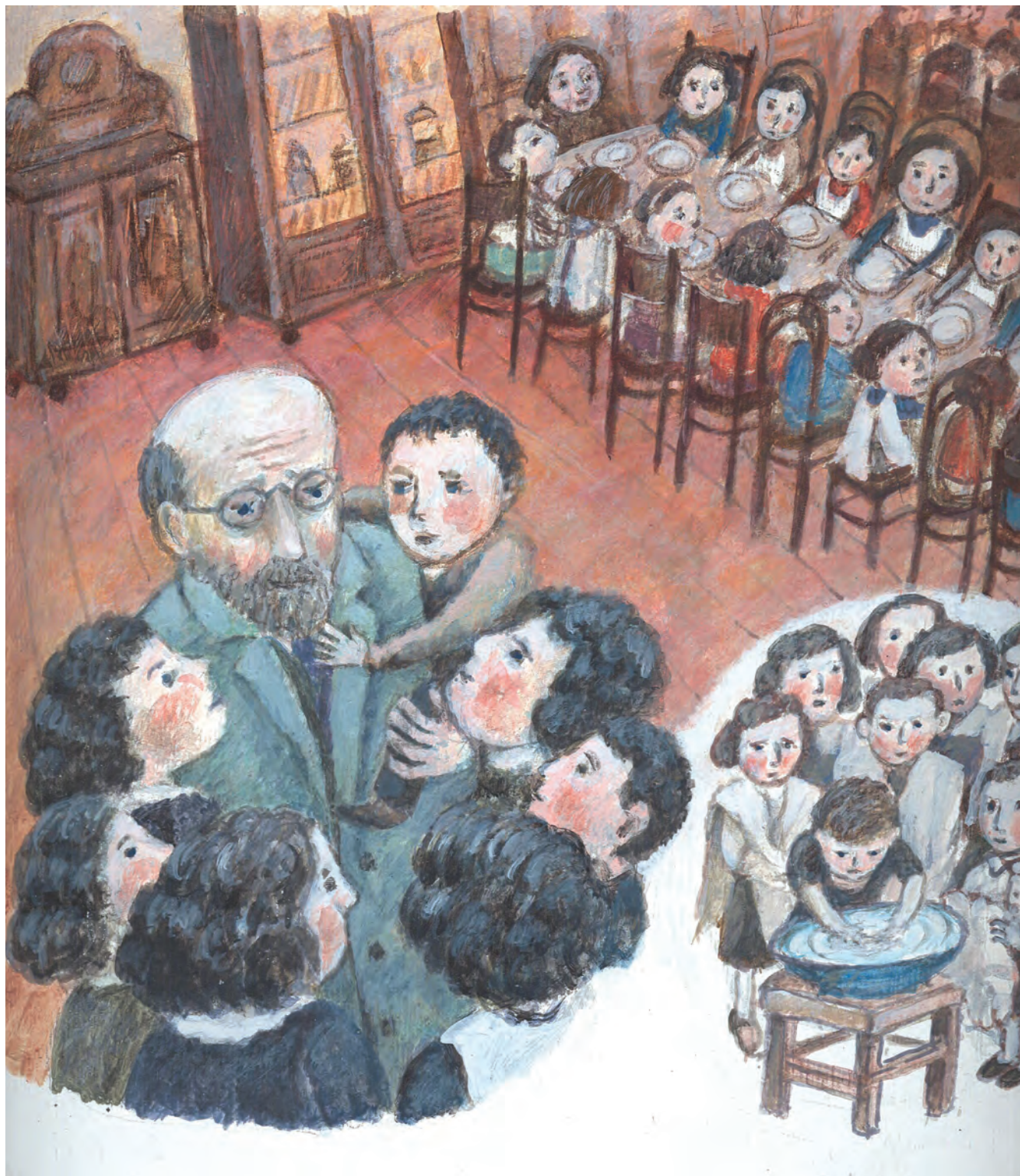


FIG. 2. *In the Ghetto*. Painting courtesy of Tomek Bogacki.



donations. He struggled also to secure the children's emotional health, to preserve their hope, humanity, trust, and self-respect. Korczak's response to the murderous reality, evil, and turmoil was to create in the orphanage an alternative experience that countered the chaos and immorality and instead directed the imagination toward human possibilities.

Life in the Jewish orphanage was orderly; the place was clean and structured routines were kept. As in the pre-war days, Korczak held High Holiday services for the children. He organized Hanukah and Purim celebrations and prepared Passover seders. Jewish scholars and artists came and talked with the children, and Jewish singers and musicians taught them Yiddish songs. The children continued holding their assemblies and committee meetings; they held their own parliamentary meetings and wrote their weekly newspaper, and their court of peers convened and reached its verdicts.

Korczak understood that for the children, "the first thing is not to despair!" (1967, p. 309). His aim was to enable children to overcome their daunting and cruel surroundings by living in and dreaming about another, brighter social reality. In the midst of the terrifying circumstances, Korczak assured himself and others, "It will be better, not immediately, not at once, not everything. . . . Do what is possible, what is possible" (1987, p. 173).

However, conditions in the ghetto kept deteriorating, and the attempts to maintain an illusion of normalcy became harder with every passing day. How long could he withstand the waves of hatred, deaths, and torments that threatened to infiltrate the Orphans' Home? He was not sure. "In spite of the difficult conditions," he wrote, "this is an oasis; but sadly, today even this oasis is being covered by the surrounding desert's evil dust" (1978, p. 209). In one of the last entries in his *Ghetto Diary* (2003), Korczak wrote a prayer: "Our Father who art in heaven. . . . / This prayer was carved out of hunger and misery. / Our daily bread. / Bread" (p. 114). Korczak felt that he had failed the children because he was unable to protect them from the cruel and bloodthirsty Nazis and their murderous minions. He felt defeated by the powers of evil. "Seemingly, I have lost. They have the control and I have justice, they own the power, own the day" (1978, p. 198). However, immediately, he defied the misery and despair that loomed around him. With the same breath of air, he declared, "In spite of it all, I believe in the future" (p. 199).

On August 5, 1942, this hope was crushed as the "homo rapax" dealt its final, brutal blow. The surrounding desert's evil dust choked the Children's Republic as Nazi soldiers surrounded the orphanage. Korczak refused many offers by his friends to escape the ghetto to a safe place on the Aryan side of the city. He would not abandon his children. Now, heading a procession, a washed and neatly dressed

child in each hand, Korczak led the more than 190 Jewish children and staff members through the streets of Warsaw. They marched in a quiet dignity to the train that took them to the death camp of Treblinka. None survived.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

It seemed that evil had won and put an end to Korczak's voice of hope [Fig. 3].



FIG. 3. Janusz Korczak. From the collection of Daniel L. Berek.

His educational vision, ideas, actions, and trust in humanity, however, rose out of Treblinka's ashes and inspired people throughout the world. Korczak's declaration of the ethical postulate of love for the child and his call to educators to struggle for goodness wax stronger with the passing years. His greatest ethical heritage is his encouragement not to give up on the future. His humanistic vision guides us on a path that overcomes the temptation to sink into the deep malaise of doubt and the paralysis of cynicism. We must operate in the belief that there are hope and moral purpose even as we are faced with multiple contrary items of evidence. We have to be critically aware and honest with ourselves and our students in facing reality, yet at the same time we must cling to hope and offer firm foundations for possible future change. We, as educators, have no other choice. This is our moral obligation.

Shouldering the responsibility of transforming society without guarantee of success or ability to foresee the results requires faith when it is hard to believe, patience when everyone expects immediate results. Our rabbis taught us: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, but neither are you at liberty to desist from it" (*Avot* 2:21). Following this dictum requires humility in the face



of the enormity of the goal and endurance when confronting hurdles. We can draw strength by seeing ourselves as part of a long chain that connects us with those who came before us and those who will follow. The inspiring ethical message of Janusz Korczak, an educator who lived his values, empowers all of us to be committed to his trust in the dignity of humanity and the ability of children to regenerate hope of a better future. We owe it to the young, we owe it to the future, we owe it to ourselves, and we owe it to the memory of a moral visionary to listen to his voice and undying hope:

And the hour shall come when a man will know himself, respect, and love. And the hour shall come in history's clock when man shall know the place of good, the place of evil, the place of pleasure, and the place of pain. (Korczak, 1978, p. 237)

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"I had put my early childhood Holocaust experiences behind me," writes Myra Genn. "I wanted no part of that past. At the encouragement of my husband and daughters, though, I attended the First International Gathering of Hidden Children in New York in 1991. Here, for the first time, with others like me, I began to face my memories. It was both comforting and liberating to meet others who also had been children during the war, with whom I could talk and who would understand. The following moments are among my early memories."

*Myra Herbst Genn*

## Moments: Early Memories



**FIG. 1.** Myra Genn, circa 1946, wearing a dress made by her mother. Photo courtesy of the author.

### FLOWERS IN THE GHETTO

I was four years old. My mother woke me suddenly, in the middle of the night, from a deep sleep. It was another *aksia*,

a systematic round-up and deportation of the ghetto Jews by the Nazis.

I could see the urgency in my mother's face and hear it in her voice as she told me we must run and hide. I knew there was no time for my usual "But why?" She helped me to dress quickly and grabbed my hand to run—and I grabbed the flowers that lay in a bunch on the floor next to my bed.

I hardly remember those flowers, or how I got them that day in a ghetto bereft of beauty. They were probably wildflowers, probably more weeds than anything else. But they were mine in a world where nothing was mine, and I remember my determination to hold onto them. Everything was being taken away from me—my home, my father, my toys—but I would hold onto these flowers no matter what. They, at least, were mine, and I would not leave them. They wouldn't take up much space in the hiding place, a cellar underneath a neighboring house; they did not make any noise; they would not hurt anyone.

I held my mother's hand, silently following her every cue and running with her out into the street, into the safer place, down the stairs—all the while clutching my flowers.

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### THROUGH A HOLE IN THE ATTIC

The sky is so high! A powder-blue sky over infinite space in the vast outdoors. The farm is bathed in sunlight. The birds are chirping and some chickens roam the grassy paths. I see it all through the tiny hole in the straw roof of the attic, over the barn, where we are hiding from death. The quarters are cramped because we are behind the false straw wall of the attic. Here there is more protection from eyes that must not see us. The hiding place is small; I can touch the walls; I can touch the slope of the roof. If I



reached through the hole, would I be able to touch space? We talk in whispers, because my voice is too big for the space and we might be discovered.

I want to soar in the sky, feel the freedom of space, away from small places and whispers. I ask my mother, who is beside me, why the chickens can roam free and we must hide. Her eyes fill with tears—and I know. I wish I were a chicken, roaming freely on grassy paths.

• • • • •

### WILD STRAWBERRIES

Sometimes, under cover of darkness, Mr. Rajski would visit. I would see my mother's silhouette, her long hair down her back, and, in the dark, the outline of Mr. Rajski's powerful shoulders as he sat opposite her on the straw-covered attic floor. He would talk in hushed tones. I sat beside my mother but apart from them, feeling a vague excitement mingled with fear. He would bring sweet, wild strawberries in the night.

• • • • •

### AFTERWARDS: LOST

I am six years old and the world is not a friendly place.

Today is a gray day: A gray sky over gray buildings, on gray streets—and it's my first day of school. I don't remember how I got to school that day; probably, my mother took me, but I am feeling very much alone. I file into the classroom with the others, not looking at anyone. The wooden desks are lined up in straight rows, one behind the other. Now the others stand. I stand, too. They recite their prayers. I continue standing, hearing the drone of their voices as they pray. The drone is buzzing in my head and I remember another drone—the sound of a train.

I remember a train filled with noise, and people and baggage. I feel almost crushed in the mob. I don't know where we are going: somewhere safer, or are we running again? My mother and I have been separated by the mobs of people on the train. I see her standing between two railway cars, but she can't get to me. I try to reach her but am lost between elbows. What if she falls between the railway cars? What if she is pushed out of the car by the crowd at the next stop? What if, after losing my father, I lose her, too? What if . . . I try to keep eye contact with her as I am crying, and I see my pain reflected in her face.

The others now sit down. I sit, too. The teacher walks up and down the rows of desks. He carries a ruler in his hand and smacks it on the palm of the hand of anyone who steps out of line. I try to be invisible; I keep my head down. I peek out of the window, sideways, trying to catch a glimpse of the sky, even though it's gray. There is a shape on the roof of the next house. It looks like a man, a man

with a gun. What if he is waiting for me to leave the classroom and kill me? He doesn't move—like someone standing guard, waiting. Is it safer in the classroom or safer outdoors? The teacher walks up and down the rows of desks. I hear the voices of the others but not their words.

The day is finally over and I leave the classroom, glancing at the shape on the roof. It is not a man with a gun. It is part of the roof of the house. I don't know which way is home. The streets all look alike—gray. I feel all alone in a great, big world and am filled with terror because I know—and I feel it in the pit of my stomach—that all the what ifs have now come true. I will never see my mother again.

I hear a woman's kind voice and am taken by the hand. She leads me to the house where I live. I don't know how. She walks me into the hallway to make sure that I am really home. I don't remember if I ever told my mother how lost I had gotten—maybe I didn't want to see again my pain reflected in her face.



**FIG. 2.** Myra Genn and her mother at the Displaced Persons (DP) camp in Ansbach, Germany (in the American zone), circa 1947. Photo courtesy of the author.

Ann Weiss writes, “On a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1986, I accidentally saw a group of photos that Hitler never wanted anyone to see. They were the photos Jews brought with them when they thought they were going to be worked, not killed—their last sacred photos carried into the bowels of Auschwitz. In them, we see an intimate view of who these people were, whom they loved, and what mattered to them at a time when they were living normal lives, much like our own. I’ve been researching these photos and stories for over 30 years, and they are now collected in my book, *The Last Album: Eyes from the Ashes of Auschwitz-Birkenau*; in a film; and in a traveling exhibition. From the moment I first saw these photos, I have been haunted by them, inspired by them, shattered by them, and, ultimately, humbled by them. Now I share them with you.”

Ann Weiss

## Portraits: The Last Transport From the Bedzin-Sosnowiec Ghetto, 1943

The pictures could have been found in almost any family album: a baby on a soft rug [Fig. 1], a best friend [Fig. 2], sweethearts falling in love [Fig. 3], and a loving grandfather [Fig. 4]. Although these quotidian scenes are intermingled with momentous events, like images in anyone’s family album, there is a significant difference: Most of these photos are of Jewish people and those whom they loved, murdered in the Holocaust.

This collection celebrates life’s big and small moments, and although the photos differ in setting, mood, and subject and come from different homes and family albums, they share two commonalities: Each illustrates a cherished memory, and each was carried to Auschwitz by someone who wanted to remember the people they loved most and the moments they most deeply cherished.

When Jews were deported, they were ordered to bring items needed for a new life. Told they were going to the East to work, they brought tools of their trades, pots in which to prepare food, religious items, jewelry, musical instruments, everyday items such as toothbrushes and hairbrushes, and, of course, the photos they could not leave behind [see “Whatever You Can Carry,” pp. 63–64, *PRISM*, Spring 2015—Ed.].

When they arrived at their destination, however, they did not find the new life they expected. Rather, they were confronted by Auschwitz. Some were murdered immediately upon arrival; some were worked or starved to death; some survived. In every case, regardless of the individual’s fate, his or her possessions were confiscated, sorted, orga-

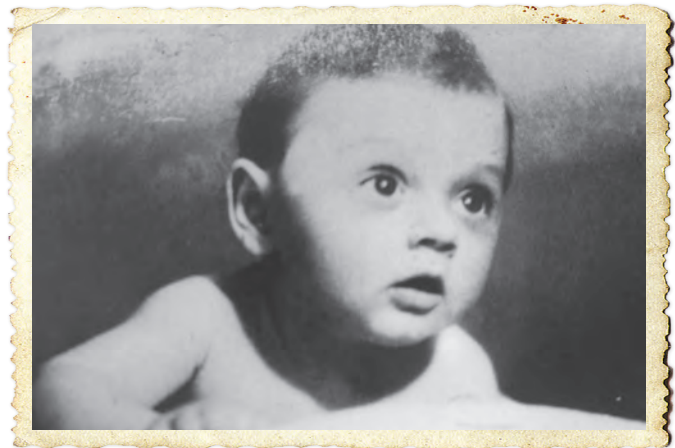


FIG. 1. An unidentified baby.

nized, and sent to Germany for the war effort—all but the photographs, which were intentionally destroyed, as per a secret Nazi edict.<sup>1</sup> Millions of personal photos were carried into slave labor and death camps throughout Nazi-occupied Europe, and millions were destroyed, together with most of their Jewish owners. As far as I’ve been able to discern, based on discussions with historians over these past 30 years, this intact group of photos, nearly all personal photos from a 1943 transport to Auschwitz-Birkenau, seems to be the only one of its kind to have survived.<sup>2</sup>

Why? How? After interviewing many survivors, I uncovered several reasons. The transport of Jews from the the Bedzin-Sosnowiec area at the beginning of August 1943, a time when most Polish ghettos had already been





**FIG. 2.** Identified on back of photo in German only as "Miss Schöneich."



**FIG. 3.** Manya Fuchs and Viktor Goldman, May 6, 1940.



**FIG. 4.** An elderly Jew, as yet unidentified.

liquidated,<sup>3</sup> was one of the last large transports of Polish Jews to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Because so many Polish Jews were already dead by this time, a Jewish Underground leader at Auschwitz decided that the photos from this Bedzin/Sosnowiec transport must be hidden and saved.

### THE END OF THE GHETTO

To understand why this group of photos remained, it is helpful to look at the last days of the Bedzin-Sosnowiec Ghetto. As conditions there worsened, options for survival decreased. Ghetto youth, who had been in Zionist groups before the war, preparing for life in pre-state Israel, were now meeting secretly to plan life-saving actions as the Nazi noose tightened. Avram Manela, a teenager at the time, remembered the agonizing, almost paralyzing, discussions among his friends:

We had discussions, day and night, what to do. This friend said to run away from the ghetto. That friend said to stay and fight the Nazis. . . . We could think of nothing else. . . . At the end, what was the choice? We did not have weapons to fight, and we did not have any place to go. If we escaped, the local population would kill us themselves. (Weiss, 2005, p. 35)

To make matters worse, overcrowding in the ghetto became unbearable. As Solomon Gitler remembers,

During the war, the Germans brought in many people from neighboring towns. A lot of other Jews ran to us because they thought it would be better.<sup>4</sup> The Jewish population was about 48,000. Maybe it swelled to 60,000, with all the outside Jews.<sup>5</sup> We lived on top of each other, three or four families—maybe 18–20—in one little room. . . . That was the German plan to get the Jews concentrated in one area, so it would be easier to find us later. (p. 32)

Conditions continued to deteriorate until June 1943, when liquidation of the ghetto began. The process ended in the beginning of August, when the remainder of the Bedzin ghetto population was sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

### HOW THE PHOTOS WERE SAVED, 1943

The photos were saved by the directive of one man and the efforts of several teenagers. David Szmulewicz<sup>6</sup> was a leader of the Jewish Underground at Auschwitz-Birkenau. One of the first prisoners at Auschwitz, he was originally imprisoned not as a Jew but as a political prisoner because of his anti-Fascist activities. Shortly after the camp opened in spring 1940, Szmulewicz was sent there with other revolutionaries who had opposed Franco in Spain's 1936 Civil War. Several Auschwitz survivors speculated that Szmule-

wicz was the first Jewish prisoner of that camp.

Because of his longevity and position at Auschwitz, Szmulewicz had secured a great deal of influence. He worked as a roofer there, and so had freedom to move around the camp. In August 1943, having begun to understand the inevitability of the destruction of Polish Jewry, he instructed young people working in the sorting warehouse at Auschwitz to save the personal photographs brought with this most recent large transport from Bedzin-Sosnowiec. A survivor of the Auschwitz Jewish Underground explains:

The girls from Bedzin started collecting the pictures from the transport. . . . I don't know exactly where they found a place to conceal so many pictures. Maybe they put them in a lot of places, I don't know. To save the pictures, someone had to smuggle the pictures out of Canada—that's what prisoners called the sorting warehouses—and put them in a safe place. It was a very dangerous operation. Even if you looked the wrong way in Auschwitz, you could be killed. For saving the pictures, don't ask!<sup>7</sup> So they were given to a very brave leader in the Underground [Szmulewicz]. (p. 37)

Szmulewicz is reputed to have said, "If we can't save the people, let us at least save their memories," which clearly he did. In this way, these photos, slated for destruction, were hidden somewhere in Auschwitz-Birkenau for the duration of the war, from late summer 1943, when their owners were deported there, until January 1945, when Auschwitz ceased to function.

### HOW THE PHOTOS WERE FOUND, 1945

Neither where nor how the 2,400 personal photos were hidden for the year-and-a-half from the liquidation of the Bedzin-Sosnowiec Ghetto until liberation is known. What is known, however, is when and how they were found.

When the Russians liberated Auschwitz-Birkenau on January 27, 1945, most of the Jews were already gone: murdered or forced on a Death March. Remaining in the camp were only those prisoners too weak to endure the frigid forced march to Germany, and those who no longer cared about what happened. Most believed at this point that their immediate deaths would follow.

However, when the liberating army arrived, there was someone among those weak and dying Jews who knew about the photos, both their existence and their location. This anonymous person gave the cache to a liberating Russian soldier, who then brought them to the Soviet Union. Only in the 1950s, after the Auschwitz State Museum and its archives had been established, were the photos finally returned to Poland.<sup>8</sup> When I toured Auschwitz in 1986, the photos remained unidentified, and the staff knew only that these were photos of dead Jews.



## HOW THE PHOTOS FOUND ME, 1986

My part in this story begins in 1986, when I was invited to participate in a then-rare trip to Eastern Europe, which was still under Communist domination. Part of a VIP Jewish group, we were led through Czechoslovakia and Poland, visiting sites of Jewish interest. Throughout this trip, which was partly cultural, partly historical, and partly diplomatic, we were feted at elegant soirees, briefed by government officials, and shown a side of Eastern Europe not widely known. We met with people who had lived there before the war and we visited places where we saw only the vestige of Jewish lives that once had existed—indentations on doorposts where *mezuzot* once had hung, synagogues no longer functioning as places of worship, and the like. We went to many places and saw much, but it was only when we arrived in Auschwitz-Birkenau that the enormity of the destruction became profoundly clear.

Auschwitz had already closed to the public on the afternoon we arrived, but it was kept open for our small group. The series of brick buildings that were Auschwitz I, a facility used principally for political prisoners during the war, had become a museum. There, we were given one of the museum's best English-speaking tour guides, who described unbearable truths of that unbearable place. Horror after horror was ticked off, as if he were reading items from a grocery list. It was too much to hear, and too much to absorb.

I drifted to the back of the group, wanting time to process what we were seeing and wishing for silence in this place that reverberated with death. Coming upon piles of simple gold wedding bands, wire-rimmed eyeglasses, mounds of hair—some long braids still beribboned with satin—and even baby clothes, we were told that all confiscated goods had been sent to Germany for the war effort. I found myself wondering, “But who needs baby booties for the war effort?”

For me, time stopped when we got to an enormous gallery of shoes. Old shoes, broken shoes, shoes filled with holes—from floor to ceiling, this huge space was filled with bent and broken shoes. The tour guide told us, “This is what was left from the last few days of killing—60,000 shoes—when the Nazis had no time to destroy the evidence.” The shoes possessed me, and I remained in that room, studying the broken forms and thinking only of the people who had once worn them. They had managed to survive the entire war and now, only days before liberation, these Jews became the last group gassed at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Their 30,000 pairs of broken shoes told a sorrowful story of their suffering before their tragic end.

I don't know how long I remained in that room filled with shoes. I know only that at some point, I heard no sounds and realized that I was alone. My group had moved on, and I had not. I was completely alone in Auschwitz.

I began to run, from gallery to gallery, floor to floor, building to building. With Auschwitz silent except for my own pounding heartbeat, I was trying to find anyone alive. Instead, I was surrounded only by the aftermath of death. As I ran through a distant building, an Auschwitz employee turned a corner and, recognizing that I was part of that last Jewish tour group of the day, greeted me and, as he walked with me, asked in broken English, “Want see what is inside room?” I nodded yes, more curious than afraid, and a locked door was unlocked. Pasted in large ledger books, like what an accountant might use, I saw the most beautiful photos I had ever seen—the photos Jews chose to bring to Auschwitz when they believed they were going to be resettled.

## RESEARCH METHODS: THEORY, PRAXIS, AND LUCKY BREAKS

From my first view of these cherished photos until today, after hundreds of interviews and decades of research, I am almost as familiar with these photos as I am with those of my own family. All of my research can be reduced to four questions that I raised initially and that continue to haunt me: Who are you? What mattered to you? Who brought this photo to Auschwitz? Is anyone alive?

Because one of my graduate degrees involved advanced research techniques, and because much historical research is archive-based, I was in a unique position. Quite familiar with traditional research methods, I knew how to search monographs, journals, and archives, using both print and non-print sources. As the daughter of survivors, I had been born into a family for whom this history was intensely personal [see Weiss, pp. 20–27, in *PRISM*, Spring 2014—Ed.]. Although I gleaned basic historical background from traditional research sources, it soon became clear to me that in order to research these pre-war photos, other techniques would be needed. Toward that end, I developed a non-traditional approach that I glibly dubbed the Needle-in-the-Haystack/Accident/Heartbreak/Just-Plain-Luck Approach. Inelegant though it sounds, it precisely describes the reality of the methods by which a majority of the photos were identified.

## READING PHOTOGRAPHS: A WAY OF LOOKING

It is common to find old photographs in drawers and attics, as when cleaning out a home, and equally common to know virtually nothing about them except the fact that someone deemed these pictures important enough to save. Although they may be a mystery to those who uncover them, one can assume that there once existed a relationship—social or familial—between the people in the home and those in the photos, and that, at least, is a beginning. When I accidentally discovered these photographs at Auschwitz-Birkenau, neither those who worked there nor I knew any-

thing about the people who peered out from the images, except that they were murdered Jews—and even that turned out to be not entirely accurate.

As a way to begin organizing the photos—not with definitive names, of course, but with some semblance of order, so as to group photos of similar types—I needed to develop a way to begin, a way of reading photographs.

Because I knew nothing about the people in those thousands of photos, I had to do the most obvious things first: Study the faces, the clothing, the setting; look at the context to learn about that world; and sleuth out possible narratives implicit in the photos, keeping in mind that the scenarios were only *possible*. I followed these guidelines and made plausible assumptions only to learn, on occasion, that I was completely mistaken. For instance, I thought the boy in Fig. 5 was holding a cone filled with flowers to be given on Shabbat; research revealed, however, that the cone carried by 6-year old Adolf Landon is filled with candy.



FIG. 5. Adolf Landon on his first day of school.

On the first day of school throughout Germany and Austria, such a cone, called *Schultüte*, is given to each child, filled with sweet treats so that the child will come to identify the sweetness of the candy with the sweetness of learning. Adolf's father gave this photo to his niece Blimche, Adolf's first cousin, on May 10, 1928. She, most likely carried it to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Until I had concrete identifications from people who actually remembered those pictured, all narratives were just possibilities. Nothing is known until



FIG. 6. Rożka Monka, studio portrait, Bedzin, Poland.

it is certain—and the majority of the photos will remain unknown, because the people who could make the identifications are themselves dead. Yet even though the opportunity to identify many old photographs with certainty has passed, there are ways of looking at them that can help us begin to understand them even in the absence of concrete research data.

As I studied each photo, I looked for *familial relationships*. From facial characteristics (eyes, lips, forehead, ears, hairline, etc.), I tried to determine who were members of the nuclear family, who close or distant relatives, and who might be friends or just random passers-by who had happened to be included in the photo. Some characteristics repeated, sometimes in astounding ways, as I began to notice virtually the same face on individuals of different genders and ages. In such cases, one can be fairly certain that there is a close familial relationship among people in a group shot.

I looked for *emotional relationships*. By studying body language—whether and how people touch, who stands near whom, how they look at each other—one can get a sense of who is emotionally connected to whom and some degree of the closeness of the relationship. Gaze, including its directionality and intensity, also is a significant indicator in gauging emotional relationships—especially in candid photos, where people tend to look in the direction of their strongest interest or connection. Directionality of gaze is



not a factor in formal studio portraits, however, because subjects usually are instructed to look at the camera [Fig. 6].

I looked for *class relationships*. From external clues, such as clothing and furniture, to more subtle cues, such as deferential attitudes between or among individuals exhibited in poses, one can make preliminary assumptions about people and their station in life with respect to one another. The elegance of the furniture, the cut of the collar, or unusually distinct pieces, such as a samovar or china closet, all give some indication of a family's wealth or societal position. In some groups of photos, however, clothing is not a reliable determinant of class, since a mother might dress quite casually at times, a city girl might dress for a day in the country [Fig. 7], or a nanny might dress as elegantly as her employer.



FIG. 7. Sala Bugaj on vacation, July 29, 1917.

I looked for *geographical clues*. By looking at the photos' diverse settings, especially when they include distinctive features such as recognizable buildings or statues, or geographical features such as mountains and rivers, one can make certain deductions, although these cannot be verified until and unless someone recognizes the specific building, statue, or particular place. Occasionally, I was lucky enough to find a legible street sign or resort name in a photo. In those rare cases, I could be certain of the geographical location.

I looked for the *time frame* and other clues. One can

locate a photo, generally, within some specific time parameter with relative accuracy by paying attention to clothing, hair styles—especially of women and girls—and similar details. Automobiles, baby carriages, and toys each give information about the lives of individuals and the time frame of a photo—as do the armbands worn by the couple in Fig. 8.



FIG. 8. Edzia and Binim Cukierman.

These rubrics are a way to note the details—both those that make one photograph similar to others and the points of dissimilarity that make a particular photo unique. In this way, photos can speak to us and help us learn something about the subjects and their lives, albeit in a very preliminary way. Although I knew it would be crucial to probe additional sources, this simple and straightforward method of reading photographs helped me to begin to identify the individuals in this unique collection.

### LEARNING THE STORIES

Once I had succeeded in securing permission to copy the original photos found at Auschwitz-Birkenau,<sup>9</sup> I began traveling throughout the United States, Canada, Europe, and Israel, meeting with survivors, showing them the photographs, and listening to their stories in an effort to learn as much as possible about the photos and their cultural milieu. When meeting with survivors, I heard about peo-

ple in the photos or people whom they hoped to find, and also about the moments they cherished most, the people they loved most dearly, and the memories most deeply ingrained that they wished to share.

We would sit together for hours—looking at photos, talking, sharing—until their strength was exhausted. One survivor sat looking at photos for 12 hours, and then asked me to return the next day. Others could endure the process for only an hour or two. Regardless of time spent, approaching these photos required great courage on the part of each survivor. Having lost whole universes of loved ones and their entire pre-war world and way of life, virtually each survivor who met with me approached the photos with anticipation, fear, and hope.

Survivors shared with me both the best that they had experienced and the worst that they had endured—their memories, secrets, dreams, and nightmares. At times, what they could not bear to tell their own children, they told me, as I became a surrogate child or lost friend. As their listener, I considered it both a grave responsibility and a sacred honor to try to be worthy of their trust and their memories.

I would meet with survivors individually—either one by one or, occasionally, with a husband and wife together. Very rarely, I would meet with groups of survivors. It is much more difficult to work with a group, where the needs of multiple people must be met—helping ease them through the difficult emotional process of recalling and sharing the past and documenting what they are saying about specific photos, especially difficult when more than one individual is speaking. Sometimes the results of these meetings were stunning; most often, however, they were not, and disappointment was great when no one recognized any acquaintance among the many photos they examined so carefully. When they failed to find photos of their loved ones, their emotional scabs, covered over by the distance of many years, were ripped open.

This issue of *PRISM* presents specific stories of individual photos. At first glance, some may seem rather ordinary. Their narratives, however, are not. In other cases, the photo is quite extraordinary, and yet we know no specifics about the person pictured or the person who chose to bring it. Even then, the photos themselves tell their own unique story. Of the hundreds of survivors I have interviewed, today, sadly, only a handful are still alive. Nevertheless, through their memories and the stories they have shared with me, and now with you, too, not only will we remember them but, in the words of Leon Wieseltier (2005), “In the memory of their memory, they live” (p. 15).

## REFERENCES

Weiss, A. (2005). *The Last Album: Eyes from the Ashes of Auschwitz-Birkenau*. New York: W. W. Norton; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

Wieseltier, L. (2005). Foreword. In A. Weiss, *The Last Album: Eyes from the Ashes of Auschwitz-Birkenau*.

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## END NOTES

- [1] I learned about this Nazi practice of separating and destroying personal photos, drawings, and letters of deported Jews from James E. Young, who describes it in his introduction to *The Last Album: Eyes from the Ashes of Auschwitz-Birkenau*.
- [2] I have discussed the rarity of this collection with senior historians at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Yad Vashem, and the Wiesenthal Center. The photos of an entire transport had not, to anyone's knowledge, ever before been hidden and saved to the extent that this collection was.
- [3] Significantly, an important exception was the Lodz Ghetto, the last in existence.
- [4] Because Bedzin-Sosnowiec (called Kamionka-Strodula during war) was one of the last sizable Polish cities without a sealed ghetto, many Jews from other cities fled there, believing that they would be safer.
- [5] The late British historian Sir Martin Gilbert lists the Jewish population of Sosnowiec in 1939 as 20,805 (22% of the population) and of Bedzin as 21,625 (45% of the population). However, a number of survivors maintain that Sosnowiec had 28,000 Jews, and Bedzin 30,000.
- [6] David Szmulewicz survived and lived out his life in Paris. This and other information about him come from interviews with survivor Arnold Shay in 1988.
- [7] The names of three teens who saved the photos were remembered by survivor Morris Rosen of Dabrowa, Poland, now living in Baltimore: Lola Drexler, Dvora Oks, and Miriam Beidner. By the time I learned their names, two had died and the third had forgotten her feat.
- [8] Kazimierz Smolen, the first (and then current) director of the Auschwitz State Museum and a former Polish prisoner who helped found the museum, described this to me in 1988. It was further clarified by the second (then current) archive director, Tadeusz Iwaszko, who had learned about it from his predecessor, the Auschwitz Museum's first archive director, who had personally received these 2,400 photos sent by the Russian soldier.
- [9] This required multiple trips and agreements over the years with representatives of the Communist and the subsequently post-Communist, democratic government.



The following photos are among those 2,400 found at Auschwitz-Birkenau by Ann Weiss. The accompanying texts are the results of her years of detective work as described in the previous essay.

■ **Rozka Sztajnbok and Lolek Zmigrod in Tel Aviv, 1937**

It is a classic wedding photo: bride and groom toasting life with a glass of wine. The smiles are happy; this couple is emblematic of many others on the brink of a new life together [Fig. 1]. The caption on the back reads simply: “*L’Chaim* [To Life] to our parents.” Unlike the people seen in many other photos found at Auschwitz, this young couple did not die there. Instead, it was the groom’s parents who carried this joyous photo with them when they were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1943. It was they who never left.

Rozka Sztajnbok, born in 1904 in Lodz, Poland, emigrated to pre-state Israel in the early 1930s with her entire nuclear family. The Sztajnbocks were already well-established there when Rozka and Lolek met some years later. Unlike Rozka, who made aliyah with her family, Lolek, born in 1901, came alone, having made the difficult decision to leave his parents and siblings behind in Bedzin, Poland. Lolek’s wish to build a Jewish homeland surpassed virtually everything else in his life—that is, until he met Rozka; then they combined their dreams.

The Zmigrod family, well known in Bedzin, owned one of the oldest, largest, and most respected book and stationery supply stores in the Zagłębia region. They sent their serious and gifted son, Lolek, out of Poland to pursue his mechanical engineering studies. Lolek, who was always



FIG. 1. Wedding photo of Rozka Sztajnbok and Lolek Zmigrod, 1937.

an analytical man, chose to study in Liege, Belgium, because of both the high quality of education there and the rampant antisemitism that existed in Poland. It was his wish for a better life and his commitment to build a Jewish homeland that prompted Lolek’s decision, after his studies, to move to pre-state Israel, instead of returning to his family in Poland.



FIG. 2. Wedding reception of Rozka and Lolek, 1937

Lolek and Rozka were married in 1937 in Tel Aviv. From the photographs that document their wedding, it seems obvious that it was photographed by an amateur. In their classic *L'Chaim* photo [Fig. 1, p. 33], Lolek seems almost incidental to the shot, with much of his face cut out of the frame; it is clear that the main focus of interest to the photographer is beautiful Rozka. In the second photo, a post-wedding table shot [Fig. 2, p. 33] with friends and family seated and Rozka and Lolek at the head, again Lolek's face is partially obscured by a vase of flowers. Nothing, however, obscures Rozka's radiant smile.

Lolek and Rozka had only one child, a son named Rame, and it is Rame, together with his wife, Dwora, who supplied additional perspectives about Rozka and Lolek and the life they spent together. Rame explains:

It was a marriage of contrasts! Lolek was a serious man, very quiet and prone to much reflection. Rozka,

in contrast, was very social. She loved coffee houses and meeting with friends, and had a great flair for the European way of life.

Dwora adds:

Rozka was a beautiful and unconventional woman. She held the family together. Lolek remained in good mental and physical shape until the last days of his life. Even well into his 80s, Lolek was still very creative and, for sport, would regularly walk from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem!

Rozka died in 1960, at the age of 56, surrounded by family. Lolek lived until 1994, when he was 93. Rozka's family, most of whom had emigrated to Israel, lived out their lives in relative peace. However, all of Lolek's family remained in Poland and were murdered during the Holocaust.



■ **Artur and Grete Huppert and Little Peterle, of Czechoslovakia**

Artur Huppert's photos have a certain star quality about them. A good-looking man from a comfortable and elegant Czechoslovakian family, Artur, born September 7, 1909, had many dramatic and stylized photographs taken of himself as a young bachelor. Fig. 1, for example, shows him leaning over a book, dapper in a dark suit with a pocket handkerchief arranged just so. The evocative portrait in Fig. 2 features Artur, stylishly attired, in a dramatic pose.

He met Grete, and their relationship blossomed, as we can infer from a tender photo inscription written by Grete

to Artur: "This picture is only for you, from the deep feelings we share... With big affection and dedication from Grete, Troppau, December 10, 1935."



FIG. 1. Artur with book, dapper in suit and pocket handkerchief.



FIG. 2. Artur Huppert, c. 1933.





**FIG. 3.** Artur and Grete Huppert, formal wedding portrait by photographer Robert Spurny of Opava Troppau, Czechoslovakia. Inscribed in German on verso by Artur to sibling: “Wedding Day, January 9, 1938. From the beginning of a new life, our wedding day, as a token of memory from your brother and sister-in-law, who love you. Artur and Grete.”

On January 9, 1938, when they were 28, they married. Their classic wedding portrait [Fig. 3] is complete with embroidered flowers on a cascading veil, a lush bouquet held by the bride, and stylish white gloves held by the groom. The wedding was not only the start of their life as husband and wife but also the beginning of a new style of photography for Artur, who shed his formal studio portraits in favor of simple candid shots. Then, once their son, Peterle, was born, on October 26, 1938, all photos spotlight nothing but the baby, who becomes the focus of his parents’ inscriptions and lives.



**FIG. 4.** Peterle at six months.

In April 1939, Artur writes a note on the side of the photo that is both joyous and innocent [Fig. 4]: “My Peterle [aged 6 months] is laughing at the world. He thinks it all belongs to him. He should be [laughing] and healthy until 120 [years].” In virtually every photo featuring Peterle, Artur gives the baby’s age and the traditional Jewish wish for a long life—“bis 120” (to 120).

Five months later, World War II begins. Artur continues to send photos to his parents and tries to keep his inscriptions as buoyant as possible for as long as possible, focusing especially on Peterle and on his love for family. By 1940, the realities of war have become quite evident, and they start to seep into Artur’s inscriptions—which he writes as if little Peterle were speaking to his grandparents. One poignant inscription reads, “As pretty as the moon and we will all see each other again very soon, in freedom, in healthy, when all this is behind us. Love, your grandchild, until 120 [years old]. Olmutz, February 4, 1940.”



**FIG. 5.** Peterle Huppert, 16 months, and his parents. Olmutz, February 4, 1940.

These are the only photos in the collection where all identifications came solely from inscriptions, words whose messages become increasingly urgent as the Nazi stranglehold tightens. Most of them were written by Artur to his parents, in Silesia, in particular to his mother, Rosinka (Rose). These photos and inscriptions unfold the Huppert story—both the joy and the sorrow [Fig. 5].

On June 30, 1940, Artur sent a number of photos to his parents. His inscriptions convey his concern about the growing terror—and his love for his family. He writes about Peterle, 20 months old, “My poor child doesn’t know what a bitter, different world he was born into, nor ought he to know that” [Fig. 6]; and on another photo, “Your loving children send you warmest greeting and kisses.” Yet

Artur still smiles in this clever family photo [Fig. 7], taken in 1941, in which he holds Peterle and a photo of his parents, Rose and Jusekl, creating a family portrait despite the geographical distance. It is likely that Rose and Jusekl took this trove of photos when they were deported to Auschwitz.

On May 3, 1941, Artur sent a photo of Grete and Peterle taken as they were on their way to the barber [Fig. 8]; on May 7, 1941, he wrote his last inscription: "Artur, your good child, is looking very well [implying that he looks better than expected] and laughs and lives only for you, my always much beloved Mamuschka!"

From *Terezinska Pametni Kniha*, a Czech-language remembrance book detailing the fate of Czechoslovakian Jews in general and particularly those sent to the transit camp Terezin, Czech survivor Dr. George Horner discovered that Grete Huppert and baby Peterle had been deported to Terezin on June 28, 1942. Two days later, Artur, too, was deported there. It is likely that in the chaos and cruelty of the deportation process, Artur was separated from his family and sent on the transport alone.

Artur and Grete were part of the Olomouc regional transport, which forcibly consolidated Jews from Olomouc and surrounding cities and towns in Moravia so that they might be more efficiently murdered. The Huppert family was deported to Baranawicz on July 30, 1942. Grete, Artur, and Peterle were sent on Transport no. AAy with 900 Jews, of whom only 56 survived.

Artur and Grete were murdered at age 33. Little Peterle, the child whose father had hoped he would live "until 120," was murdered at age 3 years, 8 months.



**FIG. 7.** Artur Huppert holding Peterle and displaying a photo of his parents, Rosinka and Jusekl, 1941.



**FIG. 6.** "My child, Peterle, 20 months, and I turned 31 years on July 9, 1940."



**FIG. 8.** Grete and Peterle. "Peterle sends greetings . . . for the dear Grandma Rosa, the aunts and uncles. Olmutz, 3 May, 1941."



■ **Dr. and Mrs. Taranczewski: Angels of the Bedzin Orphanage**

This photo could easily be mistaken for a family—proud parents with their sweet newborn [Fig. 1]. Yet it is a doctor and his wife who hold newborn Abraham Malach, inscribing the photo simply: “As a memento to dear Mrs. Malach from Dr. B. Taran.”



**FIG. 1.** Dr. and Mrs. Taranczewski holding baby boy Malach, shortly after his birth.

Dr. Taranczewski, the obstetrician who delivered the baby, and his wife were family friends of the Malachs. Most babies at this time were delivered at home by midwives; it was a rare delivery that took place at the hospital with a bona fide physician. Fig. 2 shows Dr. Taranczewski's nurse Esther Kalikov presenting the newborn to his mother, Sara Ruda Malach. Dr. and Mrs. Taranczewski gave this photo to Sara and her husband, Yitzhak Malach. The people in the photo were identified by survivor Izzy Hollander, who explains:

This is Dr. Taranczewski and his wife. He was the only Jewish obstetrician in Bedzin, Poland. Their tragedy was [that] even though he delivered babies for other people . . . they could never have a baby of their own. Maybe she came to the hospital to hold the babies her husband delivered. All I know is that they had no baby! (Weiss, 2005, interview)

Although only a child himself at the time, Izzy was certain of their identity because he saw them nearly every day:

I was an orphan in the Bedzin Orphanage.<sup>1</sup> I saw them both all the time! They came to the orphanage almost every day, to help [us] with our homework, to see how we were feeling, to talk to us and make us feel a family feeling. Mrs. Taranczewski came every single day and her husband came whenever he wasn't delivering a baby. On *Shabbes* [the Sabbath], they always invited some orphans home with them for special dinners, and of this there is no doubt: She made the best chocolate cake ever! (Weiss, 2005, interview)

From this photo and this survivor's description, we see how, even without the biological children for whom they so desperately yearned, Dr. and Mrs. Taranczewski succeeded in making a family with all the orphans—thanks to their care, their attention, and most of all, their love. Although they did not survive, their goodness lives on, thanks to the memories of one orphan who did.

**END NOTE**

[1] The Bedzin Orphanage was based upon the principles of Janusz Korczak (1878–1942) [see pp. 18–23—Ed.]. Hollander lived at the orphanage from 1927 to 1935 (ages 7–15).



**FIG. 2.** Sara Ruda Malach is presented with her newborn baby by nurse Esther Kalikov. The inscription on the back reads: “September 7, 1937, Maternity Ward.”

## ■ Genya Gutfreund Manela

The woman with a captivating smile, her head tilted toward the camera, was a mystery. She remained so until one winter Sunday morning in 1996, when a group of survivors born in Bedzin, Sosnowiec, and its environs gathered at the Detroit Jewish Community Center to search for images of loved ones. Because the majority of the photos in the *Eyes From the Ashes* collection originated in Bedzin, we had high hopes for identifications and reunions.

A hushed silence fell over the group as elderly survivors each took stacks of photos and carefully began to study each one. No one spoke for quite a while: There was just the rustling of pictures being turned, and the occasional sigh. Suddenly, tiny 4'10" Tola Gilbert began to squeal with excitement, "Oy, look! Look! Look who it is!"

Tola Gilbert, born in Sosnowiec, Poland, was a lively, enthusiastic, friendly woman. Even when afflicted with such advanced Alzheimer's that she could barely recall her own name, the sweetness of this kind woman never waned. Now, in the pile of photos, Tola had found her Zionist youth movement leader, Genya Gutfreund Manela [Fig. 1]. As Tola explained to me in 1996:



**FIG. 1.** The inscription on the photo reads: "From Genya, in memory of our English waltz, February 22, 1936, Sosnowiec."

This is my leader, Genya. This is the very picture she gave to us when she left Poland. Someone brought it to Auschwitz to remember her and to be inspired. Isn't she beautiful? And she was just as beautiful on the inside as on the outside! Genya was our leader in *HaNoar HaTzioni*, our Jewish Zionist youth group. I

was 13 or 14; she was 20, maybe 21. She was such a good leader and provided for us younger ones such a good example! She taught us about philosophy. We had discussions about great literature. I remember our discussion about Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, and many others. She asked us to learn about ourselves and how to always try to be better people. She encouraged us most of all to find ways to improve the world by improving ourselves, and always to be involved in the world.

Genya was in love with David Manela, and he was in love with her. David was the leader of the whole Zionist group of *HaNoar HaTzioni*, and Genya was the leader of the girls' division. She gave to each of us this picture on the occasion of fulfilling her lifelong dream of going to Israel. Genya married David and they went together to build the Land [of Israel]. When we were suffering in Auschwitz, we used to think about Genya and it brought us comfort to know she was safe in Israel. I was happy that Genya and David got out before the trouble with Hitler began. Then I learned about her son being killed by Arabs. Poor Genya. You can escape Auschwitz, but you can't escape your fate!

When I interviewed David and Genya's daughter and the sole survivor of the family, Noa, she gave a more detailed account of her parents' lives and dedication:

My parents left Poland for Israel around 1939, dedicated to building a new homeland and a new life. They devoted their efforts to the kibbutz and never lost their idealism. They gave their whole lives to the kibbutz. In fact, my father came to Israel to study at the Technion [the MIT of Israel] for engineering, but it was not to be. His bigger dream was building the Land of Israel, which was true for both my parents. When the kibbutz was failing and looked like it might not survive, my father took the tuition money that his mother had given him and gave it all to the kibbutz. He studied on his own at night and worked all day for the kibbutz. With his special talent, he was able to fix everything—even without an engineering degree!

Genya studied child care in Jerusalem. Noa concludes her parents' story with these simple words of tribute:

My parents gave their lives to Israel and they had a good life here. They left Poland to build a country and they built this country with their own two hands. My father worked until the last day of his life. My parents thought only about Israel, never about themselves. It is how they died [Genya in 1995, David in 1996]. It is how they lived. (Weiss, 2005, interview)



### ■ Leibl Henesh Cradling His Child in Pre-War Poland

A 2001 article published in the *Baltimore Sun* discussed my research and upcoming speeches in that city, and it featured this photo of an unidentified man protectively cradling his child<sup>1</sup> [Fig. 1]. As I approached the microphone that evening to begin my talk, an employee rushed to me to say I



**FIG. 1.** Leibl Henesh and one of his children from his first marriage.

had an urgent call. When I answered the phone, a stranger explained that she had seen the man's photo in the newspaper and then blurted out, "This is my Daddy!" Stunned, I asked whether she was the child in his arms. "No," she replied, and quickly recounted the story of her father, Leibl Henesh. This paraphrased synopsis comes from the stranger on the phone, his daughter, Miriam:

When Leibl Henesh was taken to a slave labor camp, his wife, Rosa, and their two children, a two-year-old boy and three-year-old girl, were left at home. It was still early in the war, and only men were being taken at that time.

Once at the camp, Leibl believed that his family was safe, but he was desperate to reunite with them. With great difficulty, he managed to escape, and for months tried unsuccessfully to reach his wife and children. Leibl could not contact them in person, knowing he would be rearrested or killed, so rather than coming directly home, he left message after message for Rosa, but there was no response. There was never again any response.

Finally, when he knew there was no possible hope of finding them, Leibl somehow made his way from Poland through Nazi-occupied Europe until he reached Portugal, managing to board a ship bound for Cuba, where he remained for a period of time. Sometime between 1946 and 1947, Leibl succeeded in entering the United States through Florida and made his way north to New York City. Like thousands of other immigrants, he enrolled in night school to learn English. There, he met a woman and, only four weeks later, they married. The couple had two children, and again Leibl had a little girl and a little boy.

It is now clear that Rosa Henesh carried this photo of her husband, Leibl, to Auschwitz-Birkenau when she was deported, together with their two small children. It is also very likely that almost immediately upon arrival, Rosa and the children were murdered.

Miriam, the woman on the phone, was Leibl's second daughter. She described her father with three simple words: Gentle, loving, wonderful. She explained:

My father never spoke of his first family to us, his second children. Perhaps he did not want to upset us. But there was a photo in my parents' home of two little

children that my father always said were his little cousins. Only after his death did my mother tell me the truth: "These are your father's first children." (Weiss, 2005, interview)

This is how the child of the second family identified the child of the first.

#### END NOTE

[1] The full-page article appeared on page 1 of the Baltimore Arts and Culture section of *The Sun* on Sunday, April 8, 2001.

■ **Sonia Jaglom Huberman, Her Friend Lunia Frydman, and Her Children, Lucia and David**

Ken Price and his wife, Gloria, were having Shabbat dinner with friends who showed them *The Last Album: Eyes From the Ashes of Auschwitz-Birkenau* when Ken recognized his mother-in-law, Sonia Jaglom Huberman, featured in the book [Fig. 1]. In a few spare sentences, Ken synopsisizes Sonia's life in Poland before and during the war:



**FIG. 1.** Sonia Huberman, Lunia Frydman, and Lucia and David Huberman.

My mother-in-law grew up in Pruzhana, went to a teachers' college in Warsaw, met my father-in-law, Abraham Huberman, married him, and then stopped teaching. She survived the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in April 1943, barely survived the murder of her two children, Lucia and David, in Majdanek, and volunteered to go to Auschwitz because she couldn't bear to remain in Majdanek after her children were murdered.

Despite terrible hardships, she managed to survive Auschwitz and the Death March in December 1944, and while working as a slave laborer at Neustadt-Gleben, a Nazi aircraft factory, she was liberated by the Red Army in January 1945.

In 1946, Sonia was reunited with her husband. Remarkably, Abe had traveled to the US in August 1939 to attend the New York World's Fair. He was due to return to Poland in September, but with the outbreak of World War II, it was neither feasible nor safe for him to return. He stayed, anguished throughout the war, worrying about his family. After a seven-year separation, he and Sonia were finally reunited. Neither one ever set foot in Poland again. . . .

Sonia and Abe had two children in America, one of whom, Gloria, became my wife. We named our two children after my wife's murdered siblings, Sarah Lucia and David.

Gloria explains the relationship between the two women in the photo:

My mother is the taller woman on the left. Her nanny was, indeed, her close girlfriend, Lunia Frydman, with whom she went to school and whom she later employed to help her with her two little children. Lunia also survived Auschwitz, and later went to Israel and worked as a nurse. Lunia never married or had her own children. She always considered my mother's first children and, later, my brother Mark and me, whom she met when we were young teenagers, to be her children also.

There is another remarkable twist to this discovery. Gloria goes on:

Finding that photo in your book was like finding a treasure, one more photo that I had never seen—but there is more to the story: I saw it on a Friday night; the next day, I brought it to my mother to confirm that it was, indeed, a picture of her and her children in the photo. Identifying herself in the photo was my mother's last precious gift to me. She died later that same evening. (Weiss, 2005, interview)



Henia Szenberg was a 5-year-old preschool student in Bedzin, Poland, whose growth and development were lovingly chronicled in a journal kept by her teacher, Ora Glinka. Researchers Galia Shenberg and Miriam Yeshaya, the latter Glinka's daughter, note that Glinka's journal "is among the last traces" of Henia and the other Jewish children from this Hebrew Zionist pre-school and serves as a "vivid memorial" to those who were murdered in the Holocaust. Layer this essay with the photos curated by Ann Weiss (pp. 26–40), also artifacts from Bedzin.

*Galia Shenberg and Miriam Yeshaya*

## A Portrait of a Student in a Hebrew Preschool in Bedzin, Poland

In 1931, after graduating from Warsaw's Teaching College, the young Ora (Yora) Glinka opened a WIZO (Women's International Zionist Organization) Hebrew preschool in Bedzin, Poland. During this year, she kept a journal in which she wrote a detailed account of the daily routine of the preschool children and described each child's individual physical and mental development. In describing her first year as a preschool teacher, she did not mean to write artistic prose but rather a factual account of the everyday activities in the school, with the objective of documenting the growth of each child and of herself as a teacher. Being human, she could not avoid augmenting facts with her feelings, reflections, and evaluations, both on the children's behavior and character and on the success of the educational process.

When reading the journal, one can picture daily life in Hebrew Zionist preschools everywhere. The routine activities consisted of free and guided playtime, storytelling and sing-a-longs in Hebrew, gymnastics, yard games, field trips, celebration of Jewish holidays and birthdays, and collection of money for the KKL (*Keren Kayemeth LeIsrael*—the Jewish National Fund). Also, the teacher measured the children's height and weight several times during the school year. Ora Glinka's journal, which reflects the young educator's love for her students as well as her enthusiasm for teaching them Hebrew language and culture using various innovative pedagogical methods, is a vivid memorial to the Jewish children of Bedzin who never grew up to become adults: Most were murdered in the Holocaust. The journal is the last, if not the only, testimony of their childhood, which was to be shattered in 1939 with the outbreak of the war. Glinka's moving journal is among the last

traces and perhaps the only artifact of those young Jewish children left behind. [In fact, this teacher's journal is augmented by photos of children from this same community, which were carried by their parents, friends, even teachers, to Auschwitz-Birkenau. See pp. 26–40—Ed.]

By analyzing the journal, which Glinka carried with her when she immigrated to Palestine in the late 1930s to pursue her career as an educator, and which was later kept by her daughter, Miriam Yeshaya, an author of this essay, one not only can reconstruct aspects of Jewish preschool education that flourished in pre-war Bedzin but also can paint a portrait of the young Jewish children in this school. We have chosen to focus on one of these children, a 4- and then 5-year-old girl named Henia Szenberg, who could not have imagined at that time what the future held in store for her.

### WRITTEN LIFE

In her book *Written Lives* (2011), Nitza Ben Dov argues that the difference between experiencing life and writing about it is that the life one lives has only one version, while the life about which one writes has many, each focusing on a different subject or period and told from a different point of view. We can apply Ben Dov's insight to painting portraits. A person, the human being, is but one; nevertheless, this certain person can inspire many portraits: written, painted, drawn, or photographed. In this essay, we try to portray one year in a child's life, which is but a glimpse into a young girl's whole portrait.

In the same book, Ben Dov emphasizes the importance of an author's home in his writings, positing that an author cannot free himself from his childhood home. This is cer-

tainly true, for example, of S. Y. Agnon, whose hometown of Buczacz was totally destroyed in the Holocaust:

The home is an important theme in every autobiography. Therefore, Agnon's house in Talpiot, and the agonizing process of its building . . . is portrayed in his story "The Sign." His home and the nearby synagogue in Jerusalem were compared to his childhood home in his hometown, Buczacz. (p. 27; authors' translation)

The same might be said of the author of a journal. In Glinka's writings, she referred to her preschool as a true home for the children, a place where they felt love and were loved, where nobody cried when left by his or her parent, where there was no need to monitor the children every minute, where they could be left to play freely. After two months, she noted, at the end of the day, many children did not want to go back to their real homes from school: Their parents had to plead with them to come. Parents understood and also saw the school as a home for their children. Jewish holidays and each child's birthday were celebrated at school, and the parents helped with the celebrations, taking part in them enthusiastically, and accompanied their children on field trips.

One of the parents was Rachel Szenberg, Henia's mother. She took an active part in her daughter's life at school and in the family home. We believe that she taught Henia reading and writing, since Glinka mentions that the child knew how to write and read not only her own name but also the names of the other children. From the journal, we learn a little about the mother, but we learn more about the child. So who was Henia at the age of five?

#### A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF 5-YEAR-OLD HENIA SZENBERG

Henia was born on March 14, 1926, the same day of the year, coincidentally, on which Glinka was born. On that date in 1931, Henia and her teacher celebrated their mutual birthday in their new school by lighting candles, singing with all the other children, dancing, and enjoying chocolate and cookies brought by Henia's mother. For both birthday celebrants, the children played music on their orchestra's instruments, which included cymbals, triangles, and tambourines, and then the children gave Henia a present they had prepared for her—an embroidered picture (Glinka does not specify the picture's theme). Glinka's present was a box containing a tablespoon, a teaspoon, a fork, and a knife bought by the parents. Celebrating children's birthdays was one of the routine activities in preschools then as now, but celebrating both a child's and a teacher's birthday was quite special, and Glinka notes that it took all day rather than the usual half-day.

At the beginning of the journal, Glinka wrote about registration day and the first day of school (September 17,

1931), mentioning Henia specifically: [Fig. 1]

All the mothers left their children in school, but Henia's mother stayed, because I had told the children that in school they have to eat everything, [and] therefore she was afraid, because she was not a great eater. After an hour she told her mother she could go and come [back] after school because nobody made her do a thing she was not willing to do.

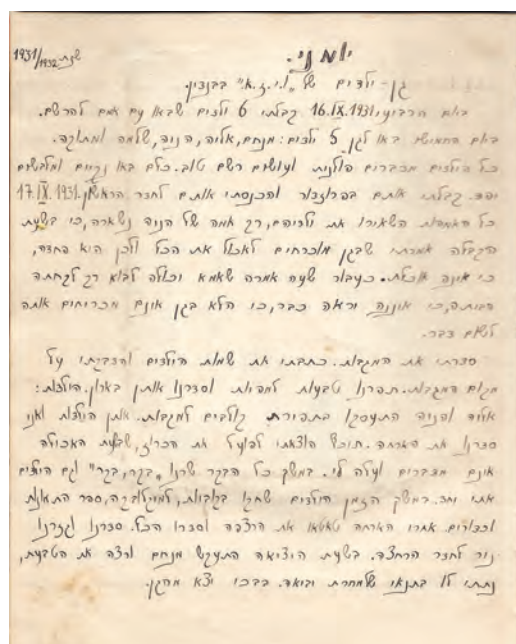


FIG. 1. The first page of Ora's journal.



FIG. 2. The sixth page of the journal, with Henia's photo at the age of 4.



Immediately after her first-day notes, she devoted a special page to the portrayal of each child, to which she attached a photo. The first child was Metuka, the second was Eliya, and the third was Henia. The special page devoted to Henia consists of a current photo centered at the top of the page and a written text [Fig. 2]. On the left-hand side of the photo, she wrote, "Born 14. III. 1931." This is a mistake: Henia was born in 1926. On the right-hand side, she wrote a short physical description of Henia: "Short dark-blond hair, taller than the average for her age. Also, she weighs more than is necessary for her age." Under the photo, she wrote the name Henia Szenberg and added five full lines with a detailed depiction of Henia's emotional and cognitive condition. We think that this depiction was begun after Glinka interviewed her and her mother before the beginning of school, and then completed a few days after school began:

A quiet girl. Does not eat. Knows the colors very well. Well developed. Is clever. Likes to work. Is disciplined. Needs encouragement, otherwise she is sad. Feels good when she is by herself, but when someone is coming to pick her up from school she clings to him. Very attached to her family. Very serious, more than appropriate for her age. Conveys her feelings aloud: Repeats that [she] loves me.

Glinka's first language was Polish; her written Hebrew was not as rich and versatile as the Hebrew of native speakers. Hence, a few of the adjectives are not accurate, and it is sometimes difficult to understand what she actually meant. For example, when Glinka writes "She needs encouragement, because otherwise she is sad," it sounds strange, because the adjective "sad" has a meaning that pertains to emotions and not behavior; yet the teacher does not console the child or humor her, as one would a sad child, but rather encourages her to change her behavior and try to be more independent. Later in her notes, Glinka tried to be more accurate with her adjectives and noted that Henia was too serious for her age.

Then, with a different pen, which makes us think it is from a later date, she writes more about Henia's cognitive and emotional development:

Got used to the school and its atmosphere. Likes this atmosphere. Very clean and all her projects are also clean and neatly organized. Very emotional, but the situation has improved. Has many talents. Already knows reading and writing. Influenced both by her home and by me.

In the beginning of the journal, Glinka mentions Henia often, because she was one of the first six children

to register for this new school; at the end of the year, there were 24 students, a tribute to Glinka's success. During the first three months, Henia was the *toranit*, the child in the class who helped to prepare lunch and then cleaned the room and the yard, almost every day. She was not talkative, but very practical and responsible. She helped the teacher, but she was not her pet. We infer this because when Glinka let the children choose their own classroom representatives, they chose Henia again and again, which would not usually happen with someone perceived to be a teacher's pet. Even if she was not chosen, she helped the others. For instance, on Day 19 (October 13, 1931), she helped clean the yard, as she did on Day 20, while on Day 21, she was chosen to be *toranit*, and on Day 22 she helped paint a shelf. On Day 23 (October 18), she helped class representatives Hanna and Metuka.

Another example that teaches us about Henia's popularity with her peers is an incident that happened on Day 61 (December 2), when Glinka let one of the boys conduct the orchestra and he was laughed at by the other children. Then she let Henia do so with two other girls, and it went smoothly: "I called Shlomo to conduct, but he began to cry, because children laughed at him. Then Henia conducted nicely with Metuka and Elia." Indeed, Henia excelled in musical activities: She played the cymbals, she sang solos, and when a piano was brought to the school, on Day 104 (March 2, 1932), she played it beautifully:

After we ate, the children painted for a while, and then we prepared for the orchestra. . . . It went wonderfully. . . . A remark: Henia played the song "Big Clock" on the piano, and I sang twice.

Although Henia was not her pet, Glinka was very attentive to her. We can see this, for example, in the attendance lists. When Henia was absent from school, Glinka wrote her name first or second in the list, which usually contained a number of names. Also, Glinka often mentioned Henia's gift for managing a game, a dance, or a sing-along, especially during the Hanukah celebration and at Purim.

Soon Henia began to show signs of what we think might be considered perfectionism. Of the Hanukah celebration, which included an audience of attentive parents, Glinka wrote:

And then Henia conducted. She conducted very nicely and the children played nicely. . . . The orchestra was very good. . . . We danced in a circle. . . . The first one who entered it was Henia, who sang "*Sevivon*" (Dreidel) . . . Because Henia's [Hanukah] present fell down while [she was] walking, she began to cry. Immediately she got it back.



**FIG. 3.** The extended Szenberg family in Bedzin, 1942. Third from left on top is Henia; next to her on the right is her mother, Rachel. Her father, Joseph, is fourth from right on top.

Henia participated successfully in the celebration, but when one minor, single thing did not go well, she cried. However, there is no mention of her as a crybaby beyond this case, and thus we think it implies that she held high standards for her conduct in front of the parents and the other children.

### **HENIA'S FATE**

Because the journal was written by the teacher, we do not know what Henia felt about the school and teacher. We looked for other sources, but found little. In *Pinkes Bendin: A Memorial to the Jewish Community of Bendin (Poland)* (Stein, 1959), the Hebrew preschool is mentioned briefly (p. 2740), but there is nothing about Henia or the other members of her immediate family. We do not know what elementary school she attended. When we visited Bedzin in 2013, we found out that she had attended the Furstenberg Yavne Gymnasium, a Hebrew-Polish bilingual school. From the late Hellen Stone, her cousin who passed away in 2012, we know that Henia was a very good student and excelled in math. Beyond that, we know nothing of the remainder of her life. Henia, along with her mother, father, and younger sister, was deported in 1943 to the lo-

cal ghetto, where she was photographed with her extended family at age 16 [Fig. 3].

We cannot be sure of Henia's ultimate fate. According to the oral testimony of her cousin Hellen, sometime in 1943 Henia was shot dead by the Gestapo in Bedzin for breaking curfew. However, in Yad Vashem, a page of testimony written by Freida Szenberg, the second wife of Henia's father, Joseph, notes that she was murdered in Auschwitz. We do know that her mother and her younger sister, Miriam, were deported to Auschwitz, from which neither returned.

Henia's father, Joseph, had been deported earlier to the Blechhammer camp near Auschwitz and subsequently survived the Death March from Auschwitz to Buchenwald. After the war, he returned to Bedzin, but nobody was waiting for him. In 1949, he married a woman named Freida Roth in Krakow and they immigrated to Israel. His only son, Isaac, was born in Israel in 1950 and is the husband of Galia, one of the authors of this essay. Isaac did not know he had half-sisters until he was in his early twenties: neither his father nor his mother had ever spoken to him about them, and there is no written or oral testimony in which Joseph mentions his daughters.



However, after Joseph moved to Israel in 1950, he and his second wife searched for and found Glinka and her husband and became very good friends with them. Isaac remembers that although Glinka lived in Raanana, which at that time was considered very far from Tel Aviv because public transportation was not frequent and there was no direct line, Joseph and his wife visited Glinka and her husband quite often. This post-war friendship hints at an appreciative and warm relationship between Henia's father and her pre-school teacher from pre-war Bedzin.

## CONCLUSION

Henia's portrait is far from complete. More is unknown than is known, and perhaps the puzzle of who she actually was and who she grew to become will never be solved. However, we are thankful for the discovery of the journal, which helped us search out more information and remind us of the child she was.

We began to look for Joseph Szenberg's former family, who perished in the Holocaust, only after his second wife, Freida, passed away in 2003. Why did we not look for that information earlier? We don't know. Perhaps we did not want to offend Freida or, because we were younger, we had at that time more pressing interests, such as establishing our own families and careers. Only in the last five years, as our grown children have begun to ask questions we cannot answer, have we begun to search for more information about this family.

This essay is but a preliminary attempt to create what Pnina Rosenberg (2011) describes as a portrait of and a dialogue with and between our known and unknown family members murdered in the Holocaust. The preschool journal let us view Henia at the ages of 4 and 5 and identify fascinating similarities between her and her younger brother, Isaac, who is 24 years her junior. Very much like Henia, he was a quiet child, serious, intelligent, and practical. Like her, he played the piano as a child: His rendition of Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" was the main attraction at his bar mitzva. He also was close to his parents and loved by his peers, and until today he is a perfectionist.

What would have become of Henia had she survived? There is only a speculative answer to this haunting question, but knowing her father and her brother, we believe that her murder, like those of all the others murdered in the Holocaust, left the world bereft.

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Claire Schuschny wrote about these moments after meeting a group of seventh graders who urged her to tell them her story. These vivid sketches bring to light the goodness of a school principal and a farm family, Christians who hid and protected Claire and her sister.

*Claire Schuschny*

## Moments: Memories of Hiding in France

### **STILL WE WERE CHILDREN IN THOSE DARK AND PUZZLING DAYS**

In September of 1943, my parents realized that my sister and I could no longer be assured of safety if we stayed at home with them in our apartment. Jews throughout France were being rounded up and deported with greater and greater frequency, and we lived in constant, daily fear of being taken. My parents reluctantly decided that it would be safer for us to board at the town's only school.

The thought of separation from our parents and the rest of our family totally petrified us. What if we would not see them again? What if, while we were sleeping at the school, our parents would be caught and taken away by the Germans? Just by looking into each other's eyes, my sister and I knew what was going on in each other's mind. My sister was 12 and I was 11, and we comprehended the danger of our situation, a danger present each and every minute of the day and night, with a maturity far beyond our tender years. Yet the thought of this separation from our parents caused us almost unbearable fright.

There was one comforting aspect of the decision: The school where we were to live was the same one we had attended on and off for the past two years, as times permitted, as day students, and we knew the teachers and some of our classmates. Still, on the first night in the school dormitory, with its rows of identical small white iron beds, away from home and our family for the first time in our lives, my sister and I were in a state of panic.

The school principal, Mlle. Porte, was a Christian, a kind and sensitive woman who understood our fear and loneliness. She procured a length of rough rope and instructed the dormitory monitor to push two of the white iron beds as close together as possible.

"We will tie the beds together," she announced, "so that not even the smallest space will separate the two of you!" The women bent down and fastened the bed legs tightly to each other while my sister and I clung together in silent gratitude. In tears and in unison we thanked Mlle. Porte, climbed into bed, and tried to fall asleep, weary

from the day and especially from the apprehensions that had so overwhelmed us.

How important such a simple gesture of sensitivity was to us at that difficult time, and how necessary to our survival was the help that so many French Christians offered us!

At school that year we met Helene Reitz, who was 17, and her sister Marguerite, who was 15. Despite the differences in our ages and our religions, we became four inseparable friends: "War Sisters."

By the spring of 1944, the situation for the Jews became uncertain even at our school. Aware that we were going to have to leave the school and go into hiding, Helen and Marguerite introduced us to their father and grandmother and suggested that we hide with them. And so it was. This was how we arrived in April of 1944 in Chignat, a tiny French village of nine farms and a castle. Still separated from our parents, unable to attend school, and facing grave danger every time we left the safety of our new home for more than a breath of fresh air, my sister and I found warmth, compassion, and understanding with our new hiding family.

After June 6, 1944, the day of the Allied landing in Normandy, the SS German soldiers who patrolled the surrounding area became even more ruthless, fierce, merciless, and savage than ever before, shooting at anyone and everyone whom they caught, Jews and Resistance fighters alike, burning entire villages with the population locked inside the churches....

Everyone in our village was helping the Resistance fighters, men from the French Underground who were hiding in the woods that surrounded our village. A few young partisans, when not fighting the Germans, would use their moments of respite to come to talk to the young girls of the village and to take back to their comrades the food supplies that we all shared with them from our allotted portions. At times, some of these young men came to our house at night to listen, along with Mr. Reitz, to the family's clandestine radio. They listened to the news and



to the “Personal Messages” of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), which were messages broadcast in code to certain groups of the Underground. There was a feeling of kinship among us, because we knew we were all doomed if the Nazis discovered us: the men because they were part of the Resistance movement fighting the Nazis; the Reitz family because they were helping the Resistance, as well as hiding “enemies of the Third Reich”; and my sister and I because we were those hidden enemies—the Jews.

• • • • •

### AN INDELIBLE MARK

On a summer night in late July, our young partisans came again to listen to the BBC’s *Personal Messages*. They decoded a message informing them that the Underground had parachuted a supply of ammunition into the woods near our village. A couple of villagers later that night claimed to have witnessed the sight.

The next morning, a few men came to our house [where the author and her sister were hidden by the Reitzes, a French Christian family with two daughters, classmates of theirs from their boarding school—Ed.], happily bringing a huge nylon parachute as a gift to Helene, Marguerite, my sister, and me. It was precious to us because we could make beautiful blouses out of it. We all chatted for a while, and the men left, taking along their usual food supply.

We were already evaluating the best patterns for cutting the parachute into four blouses when we heard, just minutes later, the distant but distinct roaring sound of the

German motorcycles with sidecars. Intense fear and trembling came upon us. Here we were with a parachute in our hands, obvious and unmistakable evidence of collaboration with the Resistance, and the Germans were approaching. Would our end come because of the parachute, or because they would discover that my sister and I were Jewish?

M. Reitz promptly urged all of us to fold the parachute into as compact a square as possible. He took it from us and slid it under the table top in an empty space between the top and the table frame. As the noise of the approaching Germans became louder and louder, we busied ourselves with household chores. M. Reitz took out a shoe last and a hammer and began repairing a shoe. Madame Reitz hurried to the stove to resume her cooking. One of the girls grabbed a potato and began to peel it, another opened pea pods. We were all scared to death.

Suddenly the entrance door was knocked open. Half a dozen German soldiers faced us with their guns drawn and pointed. The soldiers walked to each one of us. They pulled at our hair and at our faces to make sure that none of us was really a partisan disguised as a French peasant. They looked around, poking in corners and under beds, and exited.

Our hearts were pounding. Little did these soldiers know that in front of their eyes were two Jewish children, and that under the tabletop nearby was a parachute from the French Underground.

This was the closest contact my sister and I had with the German occupiers of France. On all of us, it left an indelible mark.





This portrait of the mother of the poet Marjorie Agosín captures her character in the poem's final lines: "The bag of joy / is always fuller / than the bag of sadness."

*Marjorie Agosín*

## *Helena's Haggadah*

My mother was wise  
in the art  
of losing things.  
She lost beloved objects,  
nocturnal gardens,  
trees planted in plentitude.

She also lost a country  
and a language  
and, once they had gone,  
she never looked for what remained  
nor did she invent nomad stories  
out of absences.

She treasured packing light,  
living in the certainty of chance.

She taught us to see and touch  
the abundance of an imaginary bag,  
which she called the bag of joy.  
The bag could be empty or full  
of talismans and magic mirrors  
in which we could envision futures  
and invent another life.



Thus we made friends with pain  
and joy, with sadness sometimes  
grey like the overcast days  
in cities that were never ours.

Grateful for the unexpected,  
for the everyday uncertainties,  
we lived in a time called now.

My mother was wise in the art  
of losing and finding.  
One day we found a suitcase,  
carrying the lost Haggadah  
of great-grandmother Helena,  
Helena who traveled with the dragon  
brooch, hidden in her fur stole.

The Haggadah was ancient and thick  
with thin pages like Helena's hands.

That day we understood  
the wonders that exist  
between what is lost  
and what is found,  
and that the bag of joy  
is always fuller  
than the bag of sadness.

*Translated from the Spanish by E.M. O'Connor*



“The actions of three members of the Sternbuch family tell a little-known Holocaust story that deserves attention,” writes Brana Gurewitsch. “The Sternbuchs consciously acted on the principle of *Kol Yisrael areivin zeh bazeh* [all Jews are responsible for each other], disregarding legalities, personal safety, and the needs of their own family to fulfill the moral imperative of rescue.”

Brana Gurewitsch

## The Sternbuchs: Portrait of a Rescue Team

Recha and Isaac Sternbuch and Isaac's younger brother, Elias (Eli), rescued several thousand Jews during and after the Holocaust. Yet they are hardly known. Sources of information about them are sparse. Historical details must be gleaned from the one biography of Recha, *Heroine of Rescue*, by Joseph Friedenson and David Kranzler (1984),<sup>1</sup> and from personal memoirs written by family members. Much of this material is hagiographic, yielding few historical particulars. To paint this portrait, I searched historians' studies of Jewish rescue efforts, which yielded insights and details that helped to document the story, and members of the Sternbuch family generously shared with me their personal memories.

Recha grew up in a rabbinic family, a daughter of the chief rabbi of Antwerp, Mordechai Rotenberg, who was a member of *Moetzet Gedolai HaTorah*, the Council of Great Torah Sages, and a leader of Agudath Israel. Through her father, she became acquainted with leaders of Viennese Orthodox Jewry. She received her Jewish education at home and attained a high level of Torah learning; she was fluent in several languages, as well. Isaac Sternbuch [Fig.1], whom she would marry, and his brother, Eli, grew up in an Orthodox family that shared similar values of involvement in the Jewish community and respect for Torah. Isaac became a dress manufacturer; Eli manufactured raincoats. After Recha and Isaac married, they lived comfortably in Montreux, Switzerland, near the French border. Eli lived in St. Gallen, near the German border, but they remained in close touch.

The Sternbuchs became involved with rescue efforts after the *Anschluss* [annexation] of Austria in March 1938, when Recha was 33 and the mother of three children. A growing stream of Jewish refugees was fleeing Germany and Austria. Recha, acting on the sense of communal

responsibility learned in her childhood home, networked with those she knew in the Viennese Orthodox community to recruit individual farmers, taxi drivers, and sympathetic policemen, who helped refugees cross the Swiss border, where the Sternbuchs had already begun to bribe the guards. Recha befriended Paul Gruninger, the chief of police in St. Gallen, who facilitated this work and issued Swiss residency permits to refugees to allow them to live in Swiss cities rather than in refugee camps, where they would be sent if caught without such a document.



FIG. 1. Isaac Sternbuch.



By May 1938, the Sternbuchs had helped some 800 Jews reach Switzerland (Friedenson & Kranzler, 1984). Recha, however, was arrested for her activities, and Gruninger lost his position.<sup>2</sup> Recha took full responsibility for smuggling refugees but refused the court's demand that she inform on the people in her network. Given her social standing, she was probably bailed out of prison rather quickly, but her case dragged on for three years, after which it was finally dismissed for lack of evidence.

In the winter of 1940, Isaac and Recha Sternbuch celebrated the bar-mitzva of their son, Avraham. The festivities were interrupted by the sudden arrival of three boys, fugitives from Nazi-occupied Europe, who, having heard of the compassion and resources of the Sternbuchs, sought refuge with them. Soon, however, the police arrived and arrested the boys, giving the Sternbuchs misleading information about where they were taking them. Disregarding both the Sabbath restrictions and the bar-mitzva celebration, Isaac and his brother, Eli, immediately started making phone calls to determine where the boys had been taken so they could be rescued before the police sent them back to the Nazis.<sup>3</sup> Eli contacted a high-ranking police officer, the husband of a woman for whom he had once done an act of kindness. The officer informed Eli that the three "illegals" were in his police station. Because of that act of kindness, the policeman saw to it that the boys were not deported.

#### **THE STERNBUCHS AND THE VAAD HATZALAH**

The Sternbuchs' work continued. They used forged Swiss visas and, using their many personal connections, smuggled them to Jews in Germany and Austria (Friedenson & Kranzler, 1984). They established relationships with key people in the diplomatic service, whose help became indispensable. In 1941, Recha and Isaac became the Swiss representatives of the American Vaad Hatzalah (Rescue Committee), which helped the heads of Jewish yeshivas and their students leave occupied Europe. As emigration became more and more difficult, the Vaad Hatzalah shifted its focus to alleviating the plight of Jews under occupation. Because American law forbade the transfer of funds to Axis territory, the Sternbuchs in 1941 created an organization, *Hilfsverein für Jüdische Flüchtlinge* in Shanghai (Relief Organization for Jewish Refugees in Shanghai, HIJFS), to facilitate the transfer of funds to pay for refugee transportation and maintenance expenses. HIJFS, as a neutral Swiss charitable organization, became the conduit for the Vaad Hatzalah funds raised and transmitted by concerned Jews in the United States. Ephraim Zuroff (2000) explains, "As new opportunities for rescue from Nazi-occupied territories developed, the Vaad ha-Hatzalah increasingly concentrated its efforts on the activities of its Swiss branch, headed by Isaac and Recha Sternbuch"

(p. 274). With the help of others, the Sternbuchs used these funds to pursue the varied aspects of their rescue and relief activities.

One of the helpful non-Jews they befriended was the Polish ambassador to Switzerland, Alexander Lados, who allowed the Sternbuchs to use the Polish diplomatic pouch and Polish diplomatic codes to communicate with Jews in Poland and with the Vaad in the US. This enabled them to evade Allied censorship, allowed first-hand reports from Poland to reach them directly, and made it possible for them to receive funds from the Vaad in New York to use for rescue activities. As Zuroff (2000) notes,

By the end of October 1944, the Vaad ha-Hatzalah had sent Isaac and Recha Sternbuch slightly more than \$420,000, with the overwhelming majority of these funds spent to finance rescue activities in, from, or through Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, and Rumania. (p. 279)

These activities, according to Zuroff, included funding "the operations headed by Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel to smuggle Jews to relative safety" from Poland and Hungary to Slovakia, paying maintenance costs for Jews in hiding in Slovakia or in Slovakian labor camps, and providing Jewish refugees with false papers (pp. 278–279).

With passports, these Jews had a chance to emigrate to other countries, or at least remain in Switzerland without the threat of deportation. Here Lados and Dr. Julius Kuhl, the specialist in Jewish matters in the Polish Embassy, proved helpful as well, according to Friedenson and Kranzler (1984). "With the backing of . . . [Ambassador] Lados, many hundreds of passports were issued by . . . Kuhl to people [without valid documents], including many Jews sent to him by the Sternbuchs" (p. 60). Dr. Kuhl also helped Eli to obtain Paraguayan passports for a number of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto, which protected them from deportation to death camps. One of the recipients was a young woman named Gutta Einsenzweig, whom Eli had courted in 1939 and with whom he kept in touch.

The second key person who assisted the Sternbuchs in their rescue work was Msgr. Phillippe Bernardini, the papal nuncio and head of the Vatican's diplomatic corps in Switzerland, whom the Sternbuchs met through his friend Dr. Kuhl. Msgr. Bernardini was invaluable. Dr. Kuhl sent hundreds of South American passports to Jews in occupied countries with Catholic clergy who were Msgr. Bernardini's personal messengers. When the Nazis questioned the validity of the passports, Bernardini convinced the Vatican to intercede with Latin American countries to recognize their validity (Friedenson & Kranzler, 1984). He intervened personally on behalf of the Jews of Slovakia during

the efforts to stop the transports. Beyond Bernardini's genuine sympathy for the Jews of Europe, as a deeply religious man, he respected Recha's knowledge of the Bible and her piety. At Recha's request, he even spoke on Swiss radio and successfully influenced public opinion to allow Jewish refugees to remain in Switzerland (Friedenson & Kranzler, 1984, p. 71).

Use of the diplomatic pouch and codes also enabled the Sternbuchs to exchange telegrams with the US and other countries directly, avoiding censorship. Cables they received in the summer of 1942, including the Riegner Telegram of August 8, brought the first authoritative news of the Final Solution. In September 1942, the Sternbuchs' correspondence with Jewish leaders in Poland, in coded Hebrew, revealed that the true purpose and destination of the deportations from Warsaw was mass murder in Treblinka. This news was quickly disseminated in Jewish and diplomatic circles; it reached President Roosevelt and confirmed previous reports of the Final Solution that had been sent in early August. On November 24, 1942, the report and the Riegner Telegram were confirmed by the State Department and announced at a press conference: Two million European Jews had been murdered by the Nazis.

Throughout 1943 and part of 1944, with the help of Vaad funds and Jewish resistance groups, the Sternbuchs facilitated the smuggling of Jews to Slovakia, Hungary, and Rumania, areas not yet under Nazi occupation. According to Zuroff (2000), "During the latter months of 1943, the Vaad sent almost \$47,000 to Switzerland for this purpose and, in the process, assisted in the [temporary] rescue of as many as 1000 Jews" (p. 266).

On Friday, May 19, 1944, the Sternbuchs received a copy of the *Auschwitz Protocols*, the first definitive report, by eyewitnesses Rudolf Vrba and Alfred Wetzler, of the extent of mass murder in Auschwitz and the beginning of the deportation of Hungarian Jewry. Despite the fact that it was the Sabbath, Isaac travelled from Montreux to Berne and woke up the British military attaché to plead for the bombing of the Presov-Kosice rail line to Auschwitz, which would at least delay the deportations. He also asked this of the American attaché, who wired Washington. Subsequent frantic cables were relayed to Allied governments by both Recha and Isaac. Although the consensus of opinion among diplomats was that bombing vital stretches of railroads and bridges was "the only possible means of slowing down or stopping future deportations" (Penkower, 1983, pp. 191–192), the British disagreed. The Americans were focused on the impending Allied invasion of Europe and rejected the idea of diverting resources to bomb rail lines.

Throughout the spring of 1944, the Sternbuchs had been deeply involved in several separate but interrelated efforts to rescue the Jews in Hungary and those still in the concentration camps. They had been sending Vaad funds

into Slovakia to support the Jews in slave labor camps there and to support other rescue operations as well, such as those of Rabbi Michael Dov Weissmandel.

Zuroff's (2000) research shows that Vaad funds and trucks that were sent in March 1944 "were able to take out two groups totaling 460 Slovak Jews to safety in Switzerland, and . . . Sternbuch was able to send truckloads of food to the Jews in various concentration camps during the final weeks of the war" (p. 282).

In early fall 1944, Recha learned from a friend of Msgr. Bernardini that Dr. Jean Marie Musy, the former pro-Nazi president of Switzerland, who had interceded previously for a prisoner in a French detention camp, might be helpful, and enlisted him as an intermediary. With the Nazi defeat in sight, the Sternbuchs thought that Musy might welcome an opportunity to improve his image by being helpful to Jews—and indeed, they were right. As Yehuda Bauer (1994) explains, Musy became the Sternbuchs'

go-between with the Nazis. . . . Sternbuch asked him to negotiate with Himmler . . . and gave him a document saying that the Americans were ready to let Jews into the United States. . . . On November 18 [1944], Musy wrote to Himmler, promising—in the name of the VH [Vaad Hatzalah]—SFR 20 million to pay for the release of Jews in Germany or the occupied territories; the VH would also see to it, Musy wrote, that goods would be available to be bought for Germany with the ransom paid. (p. 225)

According to Sara Shapira (2012), Musy traveled to Germany in a new Mercedes marked with a Red Cross and filled with liquor and other valuable commodities for bribes, all purchased by Sternbuch with money from the Vaad. With Musy as intermediary, Sternbuch facilitated subsequent negotiations with Himmler in the spring and summer of 1944. Ransom funds were supplied by the Vaad, and Isaac shipped "at least 10 and possibly as many as 43 tractors into Axis territory" (Wyman, 1984, p. 248). David Wyman (1984) explains that

on December 6, 1944, Sternbuch informed the Vaad that, as a result of these negotiations [between Musy and Himmler], a train with 1400 Jews from Bergen-Belsen would soon reach Switzerland. The transport, carrying 1368 Hungarian Jews, arrived that night. Historians have generally agreed with [JDC representative] Saly Mayer's assertion that his negotiations brought this convoy out. But Sternbuch's work, possibly the tractor deliveries, might have been a factor. (p. 249)

While Bauer (1994) asserts that "the tractors were shipped without any noticeable effect on Nazi policy" (p. 223), relying



on a JDC document that reflects the JDC view of the negotiations, Wyman's more measured statement does not deny the possibility of Sternbuch's influence.

On January 21, 1945, the Sternbuchs provided Musy with access to \$250,000 previously sent by the Vaad, deposited in a Swiss bank. Musy returned to Germany and resumed his talks, and "on February 7, the Theresienstadt Jews—1210 of them—arrived in Switzerland as a result of his negotiations" (Bauer, 1994, p. 230).

### THE STERNBUCHS' WORK WITH SURVIVORS

Even before Germany's surrender, on May 8, 1945, Recha began to provide material and spiritual assistance to survivors all over Europe. On April 10, 1945, Recha crossed the German-Swiss border with Dr. Musy, hoping to locate her parents. Thanks to the Paraguayan passports that had been provided to them through the efforts of Eli and Dr. Kuhl, her parents had been sent to a detention camp in Vittel, France, which had been liberated on September 1, 1944. This time, Dr. Musy's car was packed with food and other commodities that survivors would need. Recha was too late for her father, who had been deported from Vittel

in the spring of 1944 to Auschwitz, but she did find her mother and a few other Jews, including Eli's old friend Gutta, the young woman from Warsaw to whom he had sent a Paraguayan passport. Eventually, the survivors joined a small Jewish community in Aix-les-Bains. Eli, now working for the Red Cross there, paid special attention to their needs. He and Gutta were soon married.

Recha had been receiving letters from survivors about shortages of food, medicines, and other necessities, but her initial efforts to assist survivors in Displaced Persons (DP) camps were rebuffed by the military occupation authorities, who denied her permission to enter the camps, claiming that all needs were being met (Friedenson & Kranzler, 1984, p. 153). In July 1945, after more than two months of negotiations, Recha received credentials, as well as periodic transportation from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (p. 155). She set out on a four-week tour of DP camps with a physician representing the Vaad and a rabbi who was the head of the Aix-les-Bains Jewish children's home, a haven known as the Sternbuch home that Recha had established [Fig. 2]. They traveled to survey the situation of the Jewish DPs



**FIG. 2.** The "Sternbuch Home." Established by Recha Sternbuch, in foreground, left, holding child. Isaac Sternbuch is in the back row, 2nd from right.

and identify their needs. To better understand the situation, Recha did not use accommodations in UNRRA hotels, but stayed in DP camp dormitories with survivors. She also involved sympathetic Jewish military chaplains, who had freedom of movement and, as officers, some authority, and could send and receive mail and packages for survivors. She returned to Switzerland with a good idea of survivor needs, to which she dedicated all her energies in the next few years.

Rabbi Abraham Ziemba, working in the Feldafing DP camp, described the impact of Recha's visit:

We had thought that the entire Jewish world, and surely Judaism itself, was gone. . . . Her appearance in the camps, her deep interest in reviving Judaism among the survivors, kindled fires of faith . . . let us know that we were not alone, that world Jewry had not forgotten us, G-d forbid. (p. 156)

Friedenson and Kranzler (1984) note that Recha paid special attention to the physical and spiritual needs of Jewish women. She gave lectures on Judaism, inspiring them with her own strong faith, and encouraged them with kindness and words of Torah wisdom. She left her clothes with them, returning home with empty suitcases.

Recha traveled throughout liberated Europe in the post-war years. In Poland, her initial efforts were aimed at enabling a revival of Jewish life. However, she soon realized that it was more important to get Jews out of that country. In Lodz, in 1946, she obtained forged Greek passports and bribed Polish border guards so that Jews could leave. She brought survivors who needed medical treatment and rehabilitation to Switzerland at her own expense. She established children's homes for orphaned Jewish children in Poland, France, and Belgium, and visited them regularly to ensure the children's proper care. She made special efforts to convince the Polish government and churches to release Jewish children, using letters of introduction from the papal nuncio, Msgr. Bernadini.

When Isaac Herzog, the chief rabbi of Palestine, visited children's homes in Poland in 1946, with permission to take children with him to Palestine, Recha sent some of the children from her homes with him. Friends worried that if Recha did not bring the children herself, she would not be credited with rescuing them. She was not concerned: "What does it matter who is credited with rescuing the children? Why should I travel with them? I must stay here because there are so many more Jews who need rescuing!" (Shapira, 2012, p. 178; trans. by author). She again bribed border guards in 1946 to allow 100 children and their teachers from an orphanage in Zakopane, Poland, to cross the border into Czechoslovakia. From there, according to her biographers, they went to one of Recha's children's

homes in Paris and, ultimately, to Israel (Friedenson & Kranzler, 1984).<sup>4</sup>

The Sternbuchs' post-war rescue and relief activities affected communities all over Europe. They utilized Vaad funds and the framework of the HIJEFS to provide food, clothing, and medicines, and to fund community activities in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania, Sweden, Austria, and Italy. The Rebbe of Bobov explained in Bucharest on January 2, 1945, that the Sternbuchs were

the only address we knew which we could rely upon to deliver our messages to our relatives in the US and Britain, and through whom we also hoped to get, and in fact did receive, very necessary assistance. (Friedenson & Kranzler, 1984, pp. 220–221)

The Sternbuchs worked as a team to rescue Jews physically and spiritually from the ravages of the Holocaust and the challenges of its aftermath. Recha, fearless and determined, was tireless and inventive in the ways she tried to rescue Jews. A personable woman who spoke several languages, she dressed modestly but well, covering her hair with a turban; her appearance was attractive and pleasant. Yechiel Granatstein, who administered Agudath Israel and Poalei Agudath Israel in Poland, describes her visit to him in the winter of 1946:

Dressed in a fur coat and a fur hat, a pair of gloves in her hands. . . . She related who she was and that she came from the Vaad Hatzalah . . . she was ready to finance the emigration passports [from Poland]. . . . This religiously observant, elegant European lady risked her life, and labored day and night. . . . She was filled with Jewish pathos and strong faith. (pp. 163–165)

The nature and impact of her visits, however, are not reflected in the reports to the Vaad—only her results. In her own communications to the body, she recorded only bare facts, such as "400 Jews taken to Czechoslovakia," "300 Jews taken to France," and no more (pp. 163–165). Isaac and Eli sent the official communications to government officials and Jewish leaders; most telegrams were sent in their names only, but they reflect teamwork. Recha constantly had new ideas for making more personal contacts and for rescue possibilities. She was the idea person, the creative one, charismatic but willing to stay in the background, uninterested in glory while providing motivation and physical and spiritual sustenance. Isaac and Eli did the planning and implementation, providing financing and practical backup for the work that Recha did, Isaac sometimes rushing to catch up with her on her trips, bringing along necessities that she had neglected to provide for herself. The fact that only Isaac and Eli's names



appear on communications with the State Department is an indicator of Recha's focus on her personal contacts and individual actions, as well as her savvy evaluation that a woman's name on political communications would be less effective and easier to ignore than would a man's. The men facilitated her projects by working on the practical details, communicating with the State Department when it was necessary for the success of the work.

### THE STERNBUCHS: QUIET HEROES

The fact that the work of the Sternbuchs is not well known is a function of its origin in the American Orthodox community, with people who were careful to work without attracting attention to themselves and what they were accomplishing. While most of what they did was technically legal, it was certainly not consistent with official American policy. The Vaad Hatzalah, and members of the Orthodox community who funded it, were not part of what was considered the American Jewish establishment and had different priorities. The establishment, represented by Rabbi Stephen S. Wise and the major Jewish organizations, was hesitant to risk losing access to the non-Jewish political system, which it hoped to utilize to influence major policy decisions that might help the European Jews during the crisis of the Holocaust. The Orthodox community, a small minority with no standing or status within the larger Jewish community, was unable to put Jewish rescue on the American agenda, and so it did what it could on its own, raising its own funds and sending the money directly to the HIJEFS and to the Vaad for the Sternbuchs to use for rescue and relief.

*Tzniut*—modesty—is another reason that the work of the Sternbuchs is not well known. Recha, especially, in her dress and manner, was modest, and the Sternbuchs did not seek the limelight, knowing that publicity would be counterproductive.

The words of John Pehle (1909–1999), head of the American War Refugee Board, describe the work of the Vaad Hatzalah and complete the portrait of the Sternbuchs well: “For imagination and constructive ideas, for courageous programs, for ingenuity and singleness of purpose, [they] need bow to no one” (Penkower, 1983, p. 286).

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### END NOTES

[1] Source notes in the biography by Friedenson and Kranzler are general references to unnamed interviews rather than to specific statements or documents.

[2] Eli Sternbuch supported Gruninger until the end of his life, according to Chani Sternbuch, Eli's daughter-in-law, in a conversation I had with her on June 21, 2015.

[3] Additional details supplied by Rebbetzin Nettie Segal, daughter of Recha and Isaac Sternbuch, April 5, 2015.

[4] This dramatic story is told by the head of the orphanage, Lena Kuchler-Silberman, in her memoir, *My One Hundred Children*, 1961, New York: Doubleday. A film by the same name was produced in Israel in 2003, with English subtitles; it is available from the National Center for Jewish Film.



These two portraits of Yiddish, by Chaia Heller and Seymour Mayne, respectively, show us a language as flexible, durable, and resilient as the Jews who spoke it "fluently, / So that Yiddish poured like tea." Read these poems along with the essay on the Yiddish poet Rajzel Zychlinsky, pp. 58–62.

*Chaia Heller*

## *The Yiddish I Know*

1

The Yiddish I know is sugar-water  
boiled down to a hard glaze  
at the bottom of an iron pan.  
The water burned away, twisted up  
in six million puffs through a maze of cracks  
in the ceiling. In my hand, chips of burnt sugar  
glitter like diamonds.

My grandparents spoke fluently,  
so that Yiddish poured like tea,  
a gold stream eased down into tall glasses  
they raised, laughing, a sugar cube blazing  
between their teeth.

2

What couldn't be translated slipped through:  
insults and irony, idioms that meant too many joys  
or pain to coax into English.  
These words my parents learned,  
just a bit of colored glass  
cut from the old country. Each facet,  
a tiny window to a world of crooked streets  
packed with houses bursting  
with bowls of golden soup,  
challah twisted into fat yellow braids  
by a strong woman's hands  
and oh, the sideways smiles, the endurance.



These words, a handful of stars plucked out  
of a constellation, thrown across a kitchen table  
like dice, thrown down to me.  
What luck to know them.  
I roll them in my hand, such a sweet light weight.  
They tumble down in doubles.

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*Seymour Mayne*

## *Yiddish*

Echo  
of  
whisper  
as  
distant  
ghosts  
in  
their  
millions  
dream  
the  
living  
into  
speech.



"Despite its minimalism and simplicity of language," writes Karina von Tippelskirch, "Rajzel Zychlinsky's poetry possesses existential depth and the ability to capture the world in its smallest details." This portrait introduces us to "one of the greatest Yiddish poets of the 20th century." Follow this reading with Chaia Heller's "The Yiddish I Know" (p. 56), Seymour Mayne's "Yiddish" (p. 57), and Zychlinsky's "The Undarkened Window" (p. 111).

Karina von Tippelskirch

## Rajzel Zychlinsky: Writing in Her Mother's Tongue

Rajzel Zychlinsky (1910–2001) is considered one of the greatest Yiddish poets of the 20th century and a master of the small poetic form. When the 18-year-old poet made her debut with a poem in the Yiddish newspaper *Folks-tsaytung* in 1928, no one could have imagined that she would become one of the few surviving Jewish poets of Poland. In the five books of poetry she published after the Holocaust, Zychlinsky paid tribute to Eastern Europe's destroyed Yiddish culture and memorialized the murder of many of the Jewish people and of her own family, which haunted the poet for the rest of her life.

In the foreword to her first book, *Lider (Poems)*, published in Warsaw in 1936, Itzik Manger (1936) recalls how Zychlinsky arrived on the poetry scene like "a flurry smelling of plum blossoms and birds flapping with their wings over autumnal scenery" (p. 3). Manger, by that time one of the most influential modern Yiddish writers, compared her poems to Japanese *utas* and *tankas*, short poems written in free verse. He then offered a sparse inventory of the tropes used in Zychlinsky's poems: "The mother, the cat, the willow, the cloud, the poplar, the beggar, the child, the well" (p. 3). One of her most often-quoted poems, "Mother" (in Yiddish, "Mame"), illustrates how the author, with just a few images, evokes the intimate relationship between mother and daughter:

Mother, / you have made a fire. / Little pieces of wood  
/ you have blown into a sun. / You hear my hair  
thanking you: / Thank you, thank you. / But outside,  
the wind still wails. / Take it, mother, into your apron  
/ and rock it to sleep. / The wind will believe you, /  
and like a lamb / will close its eyes.

(Zychlinsky, 1997, p. 177)<sup>1</sup>

Zychlinsky's early poetic imagery originates in the familiar world around her. The intimacy of the domestic scene, however, contrasts with the modernist austerity of the poem. Indeed, Yiddish literary critics noted Zychlinsky's proximity to both French surrealism and the Introspectivist movement in American Yiddish poetry, *In-Zikh* (Groezinger, 2015, p. 272; von Tippelskirch, 2000, pp. 29–31, 39–40).

"Mother" is one of the only two poems in *Lider* that directly address another person: All of the others are lyrical monologues. This speaks to the fact that Zychlinsky was, from the beginning, a solitary writer. Throughout her life, she joined no literary, social, or political group. Spending much of her time alone, she was an ardent reader of Yiddish, Polish, French, German, and, later, Russian and English. As a young author, she was aware of the literary currents of her time, but in poetry, as in life, she insisted on forging her own way. Her poetic style was simple and unadorned, her voice clear and distinctly feminine. Zychlinsky nevertheless shares the characteristics of many a "New Woman" in the era between the fin-de-siècle and the 1930s, about which Linda Nochlin (2012) writes in her introduction to *The New Woman International*:

What all New Images of the New Woman do have in common, flapper or vamp, political revolutionary or suffragette, is a heartfelt rejection of woman's traditional role as it was defined by every society in the world: rebellion against oppressive notions of the "womanly" understood to be a life devoted to subordinating one's own needs and desires to those of men, family, and children. (p. vii)

Zychlinsky's lyrical miniatures often return to the



same images and themes, finely depicting them from ever-new perspectives. The image of her mother is a leitmotif in her work. Yet, as this essay will show, it shifted dramatically during and after the Holocaust.

### ZYCHLINSKY'S CHILDHOOD INFLUENCES

Rajzel Zychlinsky grew up in Gabin, a small town of almost 6,000 inhabitants in central Poland, 77 miles northwest of Warsaw. In 1921, according to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (2007), almost half of the town's population was Jewish. Dvoyre (Deborah) Zychlinsky, the poet's mother, was deeply religious; for generations, her family had produced respected rabbis. She chose to remain in Poland while her husband, a tanner, emigrated, like many other Eastern European Jews, to the United States to build a new life for the family. The reason for the prolonged separations that followed was, according to the poet, that her mother did not want to bring her children to a country where they would have to work on the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup> Although Zychlinsky's father returned several times to Gabin, he died in Chicago in 1928, leaving his wife in charge of the tannery. In many of her later poems, Zychlinsky remonstrates with her absent father and against the abandonment that her mother endured for many years (Groezinger, 2015, pp. 272–273).

The absence of her father and the loneliness of her mother raising five children may be two of the reasons behind Zychlinsky's insistence on independence and her refusal to follow the traditional path for Eastern European Jewish women. After her formal education in a Polish public school, she received private lessons and studied French in order to read Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* in the original. She also began to write and publish poetry, and she left Gabin in the mid-1930s to work as an administrator for a Jewish orphanage in Włocławek (von Tippelskirch, 2009). Many of the children there came from families whose fathers had emigrated to America and whose mothers had died in their absence. The sequence "Poems From the Orphanage" (Zychlinsky, 1997) compassionately describes a little girl called Tobshe and asks, "How many wives had Tobshe's father now somewhere in the world?" (pp. 200–201).

In 1936, Zychlinsky moved to Warsaw, by then a major cultural center of modern Yiddish literature, and not yet under the rule of the Nazis. Like her mentor, the Yiddish writer and critic Melech Ravitch, she worked as a bank clerk. In addition to Ravitch, she met other literati, among them Itzik Manger and his wife, the poet Rokhl Auerbakh, as well as Rokhl Korn. [See Korn's short story "The Road of No Return" in the Spring 2011 edition of *PRISM*, pp. 7–11—Ed.] She read intensely, not only Yiddish poetry but also Chinese, Japanese, and German poets, especially Rilke and Else Lasker-Schüler (von Tippelskirch 2000, pp. 46–47, 205).

During this period, it was Manger's *Khumesh-lider* (*Bible Songs*; Roskies, 2011) that inspired her to read the Torah. Although the motive for her bible studies was a literary one, it provided a secular way for her to stay close to the religious world of her mother. The fruits of Zychlinsky's Torah reading surface in her second book, *Der regn zingt* (*The Rain Sings*), published in Warsaw in 1939, on the eve of World War II; of the 37 poems, a substantial portion have biblical themes. Following Manger's example, these poems empathetically explore several overlooked and destitute women, such as Leah, Hagar, and Tamar. The last poem, however, foreshadows the violent expulsion that would soon become the author's own fate. The English translation names it as "*Ibn Dagan of Andalusia*" (Zychlinsky, 1997, pp. 54–55), while the original Yiddish title is "*Vegn vos hot gezungen der letster yidisher dikhter af shpanisher erd?*" ("About what did the last Jewish poet on Spanish soil sing?").

Ibn Dagan of Andalusia, / the last Jewish poet / in the  
Spanish land, / in deep, blooming orchards / he kissed  
the face of his beloved. / He sang: / Flowers grow  
beneath your feet, / you are beautiful like the sun, /  
and like the morning star, / you are the light of my  
eyes. // — Came the expulsion. / All the Jews were  
driven out of Castille / and Aragon. / About what did  
he sing then, / Ibn Dagan? / Here history is silent. /  
We know only / that thousands set off wandering /  
into the unknown distance. / Thousands died of hun-  
ger, / thousands — of cold. / Murderers slaughtered  
them / and robbed them of their money. / And those  
who survived / sat down by the road, / on the bare  
earth, / and waited for the Messiah: / He was expected  
to come / in the year fifteen hundred and three.

What begins as a love poem ends with the aftermath of the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492, a reflection possibly of the deportation of nearly 12,000 stateless Polish Jews from Germany to Poland in October 1938, a precursor to *Kristallnacht*.

### THE INVASION OF POLAND

As the Nazis occupied Poland, the heyday of Yiddish culture there ended, and with it the ascending literary career of the aspiring poet. Warsaw was devastated by the German bombardment and the subsequent siege in September 1939. After the surrender of the Polish army, Zychlinsky witnessed the first German atrocities against the Jewish population and fled eastward across the Bug River, which had become the border between German-occupied Poland and the eastern part of Poland, annexed by the Soviet Union in the fall of 1939. For their flight, Zychlinsky and three other Jews paid 400 zloty each to a Polish taxi driver, a stately sum at the time. The four refugees were lucky

and made it across the border. Others trying to escape were betrayed, robbed of their money and belongings, or even murdered (von Tippelskirch, 2000, pp. 15, 18–19).

Initially, Zychlinsky stayed in Lvov, another Jewish cultural center. With the war raging, the poet moved further east to the city of Kolomyia, the home town of her future parents-in-law. She and Izaak Kanter, a physician, psychiatrist, and writer, married there and subsequently survived the war in the Soviet Union. With the help of Russian Yiddish poets, Zychlinsky became a member of the Soviet Writers' Union, and her husband served as a doctor in the Red Army. To escape the German advance, the couple moved as far east as Kazan, where in 1943 her only son, Marek, was born. By that time, she had learned about the murder of her family and the Jewish population of Gabin. She mourned them in a cycle of poems called "*Lider fun mayn haym*" ("I want to walk here once more"; 1997, pp. 39–41). Another poem, titled "My Mother Looks at Me" (p. 25), continues an earlier trope, but now it expresses the anguish over the loss of her family:

My mother looks at me with bloodied / eyes, out of a cloud: / Daughter, bind up my wounds. / Her grey head is bowed. // Amid the leaves of each green tree / my sister moans. / *My little daughter, where is she? / Rajzel, gather her bones.* // My brother swims in the waters — / days, weeks, years — / dragged forward by the rivers, / flung back by the seas. // My neighbor wakes me in the night; / he makes a woeful sound: / *Take me from the gallows — / put me in the ground.* // May. With my son in my arms I wander / amid shadows. I greet them all. / So many severed lives are clinging / to me, to my corners, to my walls. // So many severed lives are trembling / on the long lashes of my son. / So many severed lives are sobbing / in May, when the spring winds come.

In the poem, the dead are alive and omnipresent, looking at the survivor and her child, speaking and clinging to them. The mother calls from a cloud high in the air, the sister from the green trees, and her brother from the waters. The laments can be heard night and day, the shadows they cast are everywhere. Even the sight of the eyelashes of her infant child provides no comfort, because they too tremble from the many lives cut short, and the May wind arrives not with spring and hope for a new beginning—but with a moan. Like other survivors, Zychlinsky [Fig. 1], pictured here in 1994, carried a heavy burden for the rest of her life. She assumed the weight of remembering the lives and the fate of her murdered family and other Jews. Every poem she wrote after the Holocaust reflects this experience. While she continued writing modernist poetry, using free verse, and poeticizing everyday encounters, the familiar

tropes and those of her new home, New York, mourn the losses endured and the absence of the once familiar shtetl world.

In "My Mother Looks at Me," the author speaks of only one brother, in the singular. In the Yiddish edition (1948, p. 8), the poem is dated "Kazan, 1943," revealing that the author had learned by then about the ghettoization of Gabin's Jewish population as well as its deportation and murder in the death camps in May 1942.

If she had any hope that one of her brothers had survived, it was shattered after her return to Poland. When the war was over, the family decided to go back to Poland, hoping to find surviving family members or friends. In September 1946, while in Lodz, she wrote "The Grass Grew Pale," a poem about the death of her brother David (1948, p. 11). It is included in *To Bright Shores*, the last book she published in Poland. The first page in the book carries the dedication: "To the holy memory of my mother Deborah, my sister Chanah, my brothers Jacob and David, and their children, my mother's grandchildren—victims of Chełmno and Treblinka" (n.p.).

*To Bright Shores* opens with the poem "My Jewish Eyes" (pp. 5–6). Its first lines evoke Zychlinsky's early imagery, creating and at the same questioning a sense of being *heymish*, the Yiddish expression for feeling at home. Without transition, the domestic scenery suddenly reverts to the death of the speaker:

Did I bring this flowerpot home / and wait, / its blossom should open? / Yet I have been buried alive! // I myself dug the grave, / the soil was hard / and frozen, / . . . / Only my head sticks out from the grave, / a cursed plant, that cannot die.



FIG. 1. The poet Rajzel Zychlinsky. © Karina von Tippelskirch.



The narrator in this poem, though still alive, shares the death of the murdered victims. She feels buried alive, left only to observe the world around her, a witness to the recent past and the present, from which she is cut off. Yet her open eyes express, at the end of the poem, the wish to live: “My Jewish eyes / drink all colors. / My Jewish eyes, / open / look out from the grave / and don’t want to die.” Although Zychlinsky employs an individual voice, a signifier for modernism in Yiddish pre-war poetry according to Roskies (1980, pp. 354–355), she no longer speaks only for herself but from a distinctly Jewish perspective.

### ZYCHLINSKY AS SURVIVOR

The poems written immediately after the war address the void left by those who were murdered and by the destruction of the once-vibrant Jewish life of Poland. They reveal the distance between the Jewish survivors and those who can go on with their lives. Her resentment towards gentile Poles becomes apparent in “Dear Neighbors” (1997), a bitter poem about selling her parents’ house before leaving the country (p. 17). The impossibility of creating normalcy and a home among the ruins was amplified by continued acts of antisemitism after the war, with the Kielce Pogrom, on July 4, 1946, being the worst of several violent outbursts in Poland. Like the majority of returning survivors, Zychlinsky and her husband decided to leave her birthplace again, this time for good. They moved in 1948 to Paris, where her brother Abraham lived, and from there immigrated to the United States in 1951. Looking back, in 1969 she writes a poem called “How Cool, How Velvet Green”:

How cool, how velvet green / was the moss in the Polish woods / where, amid pine trees, / I dreamt in the days of my youth. / How pearl-white were the clouds / in the blue heavens — / the green, plush moss / was only a thin cloak / over the open graves / awaiting me; / the silver clouds — no more than cataracts / on the blind eyes of God. (p. 20)

In a 1934 photograph [Fig. 2], the young poet can be seen in a flowery dress and fashionable shoes, dreamily stretched out in the forest near Gombin (Zchor, n.d., n.p.). Nothing in this picture hints at the destruction that will begin just five years later. “How Cool, How Velvet Green” recalls this scene but unveils it as a delusion. Thirty years after the outbreak of the war, the Shoah had extended its reach even into the past and erased the sense of security and ease that the poet had felt in the Polish forests she loved so much.

Like many writers after the Holocaust, among them Itzik Manger and Zvi Kolitz (1946) in his famous *Yosl Rakover Talks to God*, Zychlinsky struggles with faith, often referring to God as blind or absent. The title poem for the English

edition of her selected poetry is one of her most famous and disconsolate: *God Hid His Face* (1997). Notably, in her continued dispute with God, Zychlinsky is able to hold on to Him, if now as an unknowing, rather than all-knowing, deity, as in “The September Wind”:

The September Wind repeats my brother Yukev’s / last request: / *Yashek, I’ll hide at your place / in the empty shack; / just bring me, sometimes, / a little water, / a piece of bread, / and I’ll survive.* // But Yashek, our Polish neighbor, did not answer. / The yellow leaves are falling, falling from the trees — / My brother Yukev’s last words. / All the empty shacks in the world / are now / wide open and wait — / wait for my dead brother Yukev / to come drink water / and eat bread. (p. 14)

Zychlinsky loved the fall season and wrote many autumnal poems before and after the Holocaust. After it, we cannot think of September without remembering that it was also the month of the outbreak of World War II and, for her and all Polish Jews, the beginning of the Holocaust in Poland. The poems Zychlinsky wrote during the Holocaust often give a place and a date, approximating her works to historiography. The first poem she dated is marked “Warsaw 1939” (1948, pp. 27–28). “The Grass Grew Pale,” marked “Łódź, 1948” (p. 11), bears witness to her brother’s death and to the time and place the poet learned of it, thus emphasizing the reality of his murder. “The September Wind” speaks again of people the poet knew personally and gives the names of the brother, Jacob (in Yiddish, Yukev), and his Polish neighbor, Yashek. The poem, however, transcends the actuality of the event and its historical time. The September wind repeats year after year what the brother asked of his neighbor, perpetuating his distress. Every fall, when the foliage turns yellow, the color of the star Jews had to wear under the Nazis, the author is reminded of her brother’s last request, for shelter, water, and bread.



**FIG. 2.** Rajzel Zychlinsky, 1934. Photographer unknown. Courtesy Marek Kanter.

Jacob's request remained unanswered. The poem's readers share the author's knowledge that he will not return from the gas chambers. The pain Jacob felt when his neighbor turned away from him, and his sister's pain knowing of it, reverberate within us. The paradox of the now wide-open doors of every shack in the world, awaiting Jacob, makes us recognize that nothing will ever remedy his death—or that of any Jew in the Holocaust.

A different reading focuses on the present, into which Jacob's suffering is carried by the poem. It is as if the September wind addresses the readers, demanding from us that we not turn away wordlessly from those who need help.

Despite its minimalism and simplicity of language, Zychlinsky's poetry possesses existential depth and the ability to capture the world in its smallest details. Her writing about individual family members is no longer restricted to the familiar: It has evolved from the personal to a metaphorical representation of the Holocaust and its victims. If Zychlinsky writes about her brother, she speaks of all brothers lost to human indifference and war. If she writes about her *mame*, she speaks of all Jewish mothers. It is the mother's image that appears most throughout the poet's work, evoking all who perished in the Holocaust.

Zychlinsky's seven books of poetry were published in four of the countries where she lived: Poland, the United States, France, and Israel. In Israel, in 1975, she received the Itzik Manger Prize, the highest recognition in Yiddish literature. Although she spoke and read in several languages, Zychlinsky wrote poems only in Yiddish, the *mameloshn*—her mother tongue. It linked the poet and her mother, and it remains the language that can carry the Eastern European Jewish world beyond its destruction by the Holocaust into the present.

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#### END NOTES

[1] I thank Rajzel Zychlinsky's son, Marek Kanter, for permission to reprint the English translations of the poems from *God Hid His Face* (Zychlinsky, 1997). Translations from the Yiddish that are not from *God Hid His Face* are my own.

[2] I visited the poet several times in Brooklyn when working on my doctoral thesis between 1991 and 1997. The results of our conversations went into my dissertation, "*Also das Alphabet vergessen?*" *Die jiddische Dichterin Rajzel Zychlinsky*.



“Cissi Klein’s Memorial in Trondheim, Norway,” explains Pnina Rosenberg, “stands as a portrait of a 13-year-old Jewish girl, a symbol of abused power, loss of dignity, and loss of life. Her little-known story is intertwined with the collective Jewish Norwegian community narrative and represents the tragedy of the Jews shipped from Oslo harbor to their deaths.”

*Pnina Rosenberg*

## Cissi Klein’s Memorial: A Portrait in Bronze

Outside the walls of Akershus Fortress, looking out across the fjord, stand eight cast-iron seat-less chairs commemorating the deportation of Norwegian Jewry. The *Oslo Holocaust Memorial* [Fig. 1], done by the British artist Antony Gormley (2000), faces the harbor from which about 750 Norwegian Jews were deported in October and November 1942, to Stettin and then to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The the fjord and Akershus Castle, which delimit



**FIG. 1.** The Oslo Holocaust Memorial. Photo courtesy of Samantha Fox/Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities, Norway.

the memorial’s space, mark the two crucial points in the tragedy of Norwegian Jewry: One represents the steamers that transported the deportees (November 1942–March 1943); the other calls attention to the fact that in this medieval castle, Norwegian Nazi Party leader Vidkun Quisling, who accelerated the process of Norwegian Jewry’s annihilation, was appointed on February 1, 1942, as Minister President.<sup>1</sup> Thus the Oslo memorial tangibly represents the space and time of the brutal process from its initiation till its completion.

The empty chairs resemble the type common in Norwegian homes in the 1940s. However, as they have no seats, they afford no rest; arranged singly or in pairs, they represent individuals, couples, and families—the whole spectrum of the Jewish population marked for murder. In his proposal for the memorial space, the artist presents his objective:

I want . . . to make a bridge between the living and the dead in order that these events and their implication should not be lost. The site is very evocative with the most minimal intervention. The presence of the excluding walls of the fort and the sea are already very powerful imaginative catalysts. The trees act as a witness to time and its passing. (Gormley, in Holocaust Center in Oslo, n.d., n.p.)

Both contrary and complementary to the collective commemoration in Oslo is the haunting and captivating *Cissi Klein Memorial* (1997), situated in the Norwegian city Trondheim, some 400 km north of Oslo [Fig. 2].



**FIG. 2.** *Cissi Klein Memorial*. Photo courtesy of Stein Adler Bernhoft, Trondheim.

The bronze sculpture, depicting a young girl seated on a bench, holding her school bag, represents the tragedy of Cissi Klein, a 13-year-old Jewish Norwegian girl of Trondheim, who was among those Jews shipped from Oslo harbor to their deaths. Klein is seated on a bronze bench amidst contemporary wooden benches in the Museum Park, facing her family home—a portrait that creates a continuous past-present dialogue.

### CISSI KLEIN'S MEMORIAL

The unexpected and abrupt interruption of Cissi Klein's schoolday routine marked a crucial stage in her ordeal. When she left home on the morning of October 26, 1942, she could not have imagined that it would be her last day of freedom; she would be arrested in her classroom at the Trondheim School of Domestic Science (Husmorskolen), in front of her teacher and her classmates. She was brought back home that, due to the Nazi occupiers' instructions, no more was her own familial shelter, but had become a collective-communal place of confinement shared by other suffering Jewish women and children, the starting point of their wretched odyssey, which would culminate in the Auschwitz gas chambers (Paltiel, personal correspondence, 2014).

Cissi's brutal arrest in her classroom may have been the source of inspiration for the Norwegian artists Tore Bjørn Skjølsvik and Tone Ekwas, who were chosen by members of the Cissi Klein Committee to create the memorial (Paltiel, personal correspondence, 2014), which would be sponsored by individuals, companies, and the municipality. The committee's objective was to pay homage, through Klein's commemoration, to the murdered Jewish youth of Trondheim, as inscribed on the plaque on the left side of the memorial bench [Fig. 3]:



FIG. 3. Photo courtesy of Stein Adler Bernhoft, Trondheim.

In memory of our Jewish children and teenagers murdered in Auschwitz in March 1943. Donated by the people in Trondheim during the city's 1000-year anniversary in 1997. Created by the artists Tore Bjørn Skjølsvik and Tone Ek.



FIG. 4. Photo courtesy of Stein Adler Bernhoft, Trondheim.



FIG. 5. Photo courtesy of Stein Adler Bernhoft, Trondheim.

The monument depicts a seemingly harmless, innocent scene [Figs. 4, 5]. The girl, dressed and coifed in the fashion of early 1940s, looks quite ordinary; she is seated in front of her home, clutching her school-bag. Yet her gaze is forlorn, enhancing not only her solitude but also the uncertainty about what the future holds for her after her sudden arrest in school. An atmosphere of vulnerability, statelessness, and instability is depicted by the girl's legs, which dangle in the air, being too short to reach stable soil, a minute and trivial detail through which the artists delicately convey a moving image of detachment and displacement. The juxtaposition of the girl to her home, a place that no longer offered any solace or shelter, adds to the tension and creates a stark contrast between the innocent youngster and the brutal Nazified Norwegian regime.



Out of some 260 Trondheim Jewish community members, 135 were murdered in Auschwitz; only five survived the death camp. Already in 1947, the survivors who had returned to Trondheim erected a monument in memory of the murdered Jews of that city and northern Norway; it is situated in the city's Jewish cemetery (Information Portal to European Sites of Remembrance, n.d). However, Klein's memorial, located amidst a city park near her home, seems not only to remind the viewer of the loss but also, metaphorically, to bring the victims back home, embedding them in their pre-war neighborhood.

### **BEFORE THE DEPORTATIONS: JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN NORWAY**

Jewish immigration to Norway began in the mid-to-late 19th century, after the Norwegian National Assembly (*Storting*) voted in favor of the removal of a paragraph in Article 2 of the Norwegian constitution that banned Jews from entering the country. Thus, from the 1880s to the 1920s, some 1,300 Jews from the Baltic countries, Belorussia, and Ukraine, who were escaping poverty, suppression, and pogroms, emigrated to Norway, settling mainly in Oslo and Trondheim (Bruland, Tangestuen, Torp-Holte, & Levin, 2013, p. 7). This wave of immigration included Cissi Klein's parents, Wolf and Mille, who in 1905 left Lithuania and Latvia respectively and settled in the northern city of Narvik, where their two children were born: Abraham in 1926 and Cissi-Pera in 1929 (Paltiel, personal correspondence, 2014). During the 1930s, the family moved to Trondheim and opened the Soap Magazine (*Såpemagasinet*), a department store situated on Tomas Angell Street in the center of the town. The Kleins became part of the Jewish community, which rapidly integrated economically, socially, and culturally while maintaining its Jewish cultural-religious traditions, as manifested by the existence of several Jewish educational and welfare institutions as well as a synagogue built there.

Until the outbreak of the Second World War, despite latent antisemitism, the Jewish Norwegian community enjoyed normal and peaceful lives. It is estimated that in 1940 about 2,100 Jews lived in Norway, whose policy of neutrality, similar to that practiced during the First World War, attracted about 400 Jewish refugees who had fled Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia to escape the Nazi regime (Maier, 2009; Bruland & Tangestuen, 2011, pp. 588–589; Bruland et al., 2013).

### **SYSTEMATIC PERSECUTION AND RESCUE OPERATIONS UNDER NAZI OCCUPATION**

With the German invasion of Norway in April 1940 and its occupation by the Reich, pre-war tranquility was shattered. Yet despite the 1940–1941 antisemitic measures and the increasing restrictions, such as the requirement that

the Oslo and Trondheim Jewish communities submit lists of their members and the confiscation of radios owned by Jews, most of the Jewish community believed that they would be able to get through the war safely. Unfortunately, the harsh and tragic events of 1942 proved them wrong. In January of that year, Jews were obliged to have their identity papers stamped with a red J, which proved to be the first step towards their arrest and deportation. From February on, following the nomination of Quisling as Minister President, a drastic deterioration occurred. In March, the infamous Article 2 of the constitution, banning Jews' entry into Norway, was reinstated. Henceforth, Jews were undesirables, their businesses and properties were confiscated, and they themselves were to be deported.

October marked a grave escalation in the German oppression. Following the imposition of martial law on Trondheim, on October 6, one Jew was executed, and the following day all Jewish men in Trondheim over the age of 15, including Cissi's brother and father, were arrested and interned in the Falstad prison camp, a labor, transit, and death site in the vicinity of Trondheim, while the women and children were concentrated in several Jewish apartments, including the Klein family's home, on Museum Street. Mille Klein, Cissi's mother, became ill and was hospitalized, which, ironically, ultimately saved her life.

Pursuant to the legislation of October 26, all Norwegian Jewish males were to be arrested, while the women, the children, and the elderly left behind served as hostages who had to report to the police authorities, a duty that they fulfilled for fear that disobedience would cause reprisals for their detained relatives. This threat prevented these families from going into hiding or being smuggled out of the country (Bruland et al., 2013, pp. 10–12), which was not a rare phenomenon during the Nazi occupation. More than 1,100 Norwegian Jews, some aided by Norwegian friends, managed to flee to Sweden, where they lived for the remainder of the war (Paltiel, 2014; Bruland & Tangestuen, 2011, pp. 590–591).

### **LAST VOYAGE: DEPORTATION**

On October 25, the *Hirden*, the National Socialist militia founded by Quisling and the Nazified Norwegian police, rounded up 532 Jews to be shipped the following day from Oslo harbor on the steamer *Donnau* to Stettin, Poland. Their voyage was torturous and painful, as attested by Herman Sachnowitz (2014), a young Norwegian Jew who was shipped on the *Donnau* with his father and brothers.

The sea was high and stormy . . . the mood among the Germans was also stormy. They abused and tortured us continually; perhaps it was out of sheer evil, perhaps they wanted to break our spirits, so that we would never dare to rise up against them. They . . .

forced us to jump, to lie down, to stand up, and to make all kinds of exercises that almost snuffed out our souls . . . they had wild and crazy stares. They chose a representative from each family, and his father and brothers were forced to watch him being kicked, beaten, and tortured . . . until he collapsed from exhaustion. (pp. 16–17)

When the ship docked, the passengers were taken from there by train to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where they arrived on December 1.

On November 20 and 26, the steamer *Monte Rosa* left Oslo harbor with 20 and 26 more Jews, respectively. The destination was Auschwitz (Bruland et al., 2013, pp. 27–29).

Wolf and Abraham Klein, who had been interned since early October, met Cissi again on November 26 at the Trondheim train station. This must have been a bitter-sweet reunion, as the young girl, her brother, and her father had been taken there to be transported to Auschwitz via Oslo. Mille Klein escaped deportation because she was still hospitalized. The transport was delayed, so the Klein family and other prisoners were detained in the Bredtveit concentration camp until February 24, 1943, when the *Gotenland* left Oslo with Cissi among the 158 Norwegian Jews on board (Bruland et al., 2013, p. 29).

The 13-year-old Cissy, her 16-year-old brother, Abraham, and their father, Wolf, along with the others on the transport, reached the death camp on March 2 and were murdered in the gas chambers on March 3 (Paltiel, 2014). Cissi's mother, Mille, the only survivor of the family, managed to reach Sweden and later immigrated to Israel.

### CONFRONTING THE PAST

The unveiling of the *Cissi Klein Memorial* was attended by many notables, including the mayor of Trondheim, Marvin Wiseth. It took place on October 6, 1997, a dark day that marked the 55th anniversary of the arrest and internment of the Trondheim Jewish males, including Cissi's father and brother. The memorial attests to contemporary Norwegian efforts to confront the country's past, embrace the Jewish victims of the Nazis, and incorporate them into the active memories of that country. The city authorities renamed Museum Street, on which the Klein house is situated, Cissi Klein Street, and also turned the memorial into a place where, annually, on Norwegian Constitution Day (May 17), students of Cissi Klein's school visit the park to commemorate its past pupil, who never had the opportunity to graduate.

The belated commemoration of the Norwegian role in the Holocaust through the *Oslo Holocaust Memorial* (2000) and the *Cissi Klein Memorial* (1997) raises the question of why these monuments were created only some six decades after the fact. The Scandinavian historians Antero Holmila

and Karin Kvist Geverts (2011) state that in recent decades there has been increased interest in Holocaust remembrance on the part of Scandinavian countries. This upsurge, which mirrors the dynamics and the contested nature of collective memories of wartime Scandinavia, reflects, perhaps, the fact that “the 1990s marks the starting point of a process by which Holocaust remembrance has become officially embedded into European memory” (p. 520). Burland and Tangestum (2011), while examining the changing views and representations of the Holocaust in Norway, argue that the main shift in the country's discourse lies in the understanding of its collaboration and acknowledgment of Norwegians' role as perpetrators. Thus the absence of the fate of Norway's Jews from Norwegian national memory for a long time is gradually rectified, as is visualized in the Oslo and Trondheim memorials.

### ANNE FRANK AND ME?

Klein is often referred to as the Norwegian Anne Frank. Perhaps it is because both were born in 1929, Cissi on April 19 and Anne on June 12. They were 13 when they were confronted with Nazi hostilities. Maybe it is due to their physical resemblance. Perhaps it is the fact that Anne Frank has been transformed from an individual into a collective, universal symbol of the lost promise of the million-and-a-half murdered Jewish children, similar to the role assumed by Klein in her memorial, where she symbolizes the young Jewish victims of Trondheim.

This twinning does not diminish the uniqueness of Cissi's story, a brief overview of which can be seen on the New Zealand Children's Holocaust Memorial website ([www.nzchmemorial.com](http://www.nzchmemorial.com)), where a short narration based on research done by the Trondheim Jewish Museum staff is offered. Cissi did not keep a diary, and her real testimony does not exist, but the researchers present a diary-like narrative based on facts of Cissi's young life. In this narrative, Cissi, similarly to Anne Frank, introduces her family members, her mundane daily activities, and her best friends, one of whom “is named *Kitty*” (author's emphasis), thus strengthening the Anne–Cissi bond:

My name is Cissi Klein and I am a 13-year-old girl. I am from a Jewish family, but I do not differ much from the other girls I know. My hair is black and my eyes are brown. I love playing cannonball. We are doing that mostly every evening, we, the kids living at the Museum Place [*Museumspllass*]. . . . I have many good friends. One of them is named Rut. Another is named Kitty. We are playing a lot together, because I am spending a lot of the time being outdoors. My parents are working the whole day in the shop. . . . They are selling everything there. . . . I am quite an ordinary school girl who is quite careful with my school work.



I am a pupil at the Calf Leather School [*Kalvskinnet skole*]. But because of the war going on our classroom has been moved to the School of Domestic Science in The Queen's Street [*Dronningen's Gate*]. . . . I wear a skirt and stockings. Often I am wearing a checked suit which I am very fond of. . . . I have a red coat and a school bag. . . . It is war. . . . We are terribly frightened. (New Zealand Children's Holocaust Memorial, n.d., n.p.; bracketed text in original)

This fictionalized but accurate personal account subtly hints at the current events that would soon put a brutal and tragic end to its protagonist. The prosaic and matter-of-fact reference to Cissi's schooling foreshadows her arrest, while the depiction of her wardrobe and school bag, as well as her pleasant and playful activities in the museum's park, stand in sharp contrast to her dispirited commemorative figure, situated in the very same place.

No doubt such moving, diary-like narrative, through which one becomes acquainted with Cissi's appearance and her daily adolescent routine, enables young students to identify with those their own age murdered in the Holocaust. They visualize her as embedded in her familial surroundings and follow her as a student and during her leisure activities, which are not that different from those of today's youngsters. Thus, this familiarity turns somewhat alien history into a relevant story through which they can better grasp the truth of the fate of young and adult Jews during the Holocaust.

Just like Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* (1998), Cissi Klein's story and her sculpted likeness transcend language barriers and give voice from, and insight into, a frightening and solitary world, serving as a tangible recounting of young lives cut tragically short.

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#### END NOTES

[1] In an instance of poetic justice, after the war, on October 24, 1945, Quisling was executed by a firing squad at the Akershus Castle. The word *quisling* has since become a term used for a traitor and collaborator.

[2] Among the members of the Cissi Klein Committee were Egil Mogstad, a former teacher presently serving as a Catholic priest; Toril Strand, a municipal commissioner; and Jens Otto Hoff, a local businessman.

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Pnina Rosenberg writes, "I offer sincere gratitude to Lise Rebekka Paltiel, director of the Jewish Museum, Trondheim, for being so attentive to my queries and furnishing me invaluable material on the Klein family and Cissy Klein's Memorial; to Jon Reitan, director of the Falstad Memorial, Norway, for his outstanding research on Trondheim Jewry and for introducing me to the memorial; to John Seriot, lecturer, Faculty of Teacher Education and Sport, Sogn og Fjordane University College, Sogndal (Norway), a crucial resource for information about the Oslo Memorial and the fate of Norwegian Jewry; to Stein Adler Bernhoft, Exhibit Architect, Sverres Borg-Trøndelag Folkemuseum, Trondheim, and Ida Kjeøy, Center for Studies of the Holocaust and Religious Minorities, Norway, for information and the inspiring photographs of Cissy Klein's Memorial and the Oslo Holocaust Memorial, respectively.

In this lightly sketched portrait, Vanessa Waltz describes her fascination with Anne Frank, whose pictures “pass ... before my eyes” and whose narrative “imprints itself on my brain,” even as “I ... continue on, in the world.”

Vanessa Waltz

# Anne

The woman turns to us, her hands pressed tightly together.

“Welcome to the world of the Holocaust.”

With those words, the elevator opens. Its passengers spill silently out of the car to meet abrupt flooring and dim, disorienting light.



Some years ago, I made a one-day research trip to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, DC. I had wanted to visit the museum specifically, and the city generally, since 1993. That year, my mother pressed Anne Frank's diary into my nine-year-old hands with the same sweet urgency with which Anne records Edith Frank pressing a prayer book into her own.

Since that year, I have been caught up in Anne's world. To this day, when coming across a world history encyclopedia or volume on display, I flip to the index, and look up “Frank, Anne,” “Holocaust,” “concentration camps” in that order. I absorb the pictures and accompanying text quietly, studiously. Each picture passes before my eyes and the narrative imprints itself on my brain—and then I close the work and continue on.

Anne, a self-described chatterbox and frolicsome little goat tugging at its tether, functions for me and, I suspect, for many young girls, as an adored older sister—even as I surpassed her in age a decade-and-a-half ago. Anne remains averse to studying algebra. She is, however, interested in mythology, movie stars, royal families, and brooding in notebooks grandly referred to as diaries. Anne remains equally interested in strolling about her neighborhood in a short summer dress with the ideal boy. She is secretly and not-so-secretly boy-mad and, at inopportune times, a reader of romances; she is considered a terrible flirt. These last characterizations are noted for posterity in the contemplative appeal of the diary's final paragraphs.



In the museum, I stop in a corner. Only then, having spent the better part of an hour unconsciously searching for her among the exhibits, do I stumble upon Anne.

In an introductory photograph tucked into this corner, near an exit, there is Anne, writing. She sits at a desk, head up and pen in hand. I see her in the museum's snapshots, and the past becomes present. I see Anne outside the office of her father, Otto, importantly checking her wristwatch. A small cap covers the dark locks that she would grow out, and of which she would be so proud, as her girlhood friend Lies later remembers. In one photograph, I see Anne, elder sister Margot, and their mother, Edith, clustered together for a snapshot by Papa Frank prior to a day of shopping. In one more photograph, I see Anne, older, bent down on the neighborhood square, revealing knobby knees. Squinting, she greets the camera with a quick and ready smile. She crouches close to Lies, who stands to shyly reach and brush hair from her face. In a final museum photograph, I see Anne on her family's flat roof, paused, hat on lap, in spring sunshine.



Soon enough, Anne will think of packing. At that moment, in the sun, she may well be thinking of her favorite screen stars; her little cat; admirers. At a later moment, preoccupied, she will stick curlers, handkerchiefs, old letters, schoolbooks, and a comb into a schoolbag. She'll acknowledge that they're the craziest things to pack, but she's not sorry that she cannot take all of her belongings into hiding. Memories mean more to her than dresses. Paused in that final museum photograph, Anne grins bashfully.

Some time later, a train starts, wanders, and stops to deposit other persons under that same spring sun. Dazed, disoriented, its passengers spill out of boxcars. Somewhere, prisoners form lines and make their way *en masse* into a camp.





Some years after that initial visit to the museum, I search for Anne again, this time among its online content. Here I stumble upon another half of the known Anne—and searching such content, I make connections between the photographs I recall from my in-person visit and the website photographs I see now. Anne still functions for me as an adored older sister from girlhood. The contemplative appeal of the well-worn diary's paragraphs comes back to me.

In an introductory photograph, there is Anne, tucked into a corner of the website, still writing. She sits at a desk, head tilted up and pen held tightly in hand. I see her on the museum's website, and the past again becomes present. I see Anne snugly settled inside a photo booth, in proper pose, yet her eyes glint mischievously. A small, jaunty cap partially covers the dark locks that she will grow out, and with which her girlhood sweetheart Peter will later play. In one photograph, I see Anne, elder sister Margot, and their mother, Edith, clustered together anew for a snapshot by Papa Frank prior to a day of shopping. Anne, Margot, and Edith pose properly in caps, coats, and shoes, yet the corners of Edith's mouth turn upwards, possibly in anticipation of the family outing. In one more photograph, I see Anne, older, head pensively tilted up, revealing enormous, absorbing eyes. She meets the camera's gaze with an unsteady smile, displaying a dimple in her chin. That's her only beauty, she will subsequently tell Peter! In a final set of museum website photographs, I see Anne, paused, in springtime snapshots.



Soon enough, Anne will organize these photographs in her album. At alternate moments, in the snapshots, the happy-go-lucky Anne grins brightly, laughs, seems to give a flip-pant reply, shrugs her slim shoulders, and pretends not to give a darn. By Anne's 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.

Some time later, a train starts, wanders, and stops to deposit persons under an autumn sun. Dazed, disoriented, lolling tongues lusting for water, its passengers spill, stricken, out of boxcars. Somewhere, prisoners in lines and in tears make their way *en masse* into a camp.



I absorb Anne's pictures and accompanying text on one of the museum's web pages. Each picture passes before my eyes and the narrative imprints itself on my brain—and then I close the web page and continue on, in the world.



© PHOTO BY ANNE FRANK FONDS - BASEL VIA GETTY IMAGES

"Is it possible," Lore Baer writes, "that two years of separation between a child and her parents can fuel a lifetime of emotions? Fear, confusion, shame, helplessness, distrust, insecurity, vulnerability, guilt, anger, faith, independence, love, hope: I realize now that they can."

Lore Baer

## Moments: Separation and Return



FIG. 1. Parents and Lore before going into hiding.

### REUNION DELUSION

I would run into their arms, they into mine [Fig 1]. We would kiss and hug for hours, and cry at the same time. My parents' joy at seeing their only child again could not be contained. My father's worst fears would vanish upon seeing me in good health and well nourished.

Now we could talk about those two years spent apart and make up for all the lost time, the times we lost heart. We would discuss the many endless days when fear filled the air, and the despair we felt not knowing whether the other was alive. We would describe in great detail all that we did from the moment we rose and the ways that we hid . . .

For the next year or so they would try to explain how the separation from me had caused them much pain. We would slowly begin to heal the wounds.

We would thank our caregivers, who had risked their lives, grateful forever to the Schoutens and the Rijs [Fig 2]. We would move forward and leave Holland behind, seeking new beginnings in America. We would start a new life; I would have a new school and friends. We would never leave each other alone; we would spend every waking moment together.

We would be a happy family again.

### REUNION

I did not greet them warmly. I did not kiss or hug them. I did not touch them. I did not know them.

I could not be so dishonest. I did not feel anything for them anymore. They had told me to forget my name. They had told me to forget my religion. They had told me to forget them. They had never told me to remember it all when they returned . . . if they returned. They were gone from my life. They had deserted me without explanation.

And now they returned without explanation, and expected an embrace.

However, I owed my allegiance to Cornelia, Oma, and Pa Schouten, who had taken care of me for two years [Fig 3]. I had been a total stranger, yet they had taken me in. I was a Jewish-looking Jewish girl, yet they had taken me in. They were Catholic farmers, yet they had taken me in. They were my parents now.

My mother said I didn't recognize them. My father said I didn't go over to them, but two years, after all, was a very long time. I didn't hug them, they said, because I was so shy.



FIG. 2. Lore Baer with her parents and their rescuers, the Rijs family, 1945.



My mother told me I was all they had lived for. Without thinking of me every waking moment, she said, she could not have gone on. I had to understand they were forced to leave me; God knows they didn't want to, but it hadn't been safe to be together then. Separation had been our best hope for survival. Their life had been very tough. They had stayed in a small house with a kind but very poor family. They hadn't written or communicated with me because that would have been too dangerous, but my mother had knitted me a sweater . . .

I didn't believe a word of it. What must they have been thinking? How did they expect it to be? I stood behind Cornelia, hiding.



FIG. 3. Ma & Pa Schouten, Cornelia, Jan, Cor, and the author, 1945.



Lore Baer returned to Holland frequently to visit the family that had hidden her. This sketch, below, captures the warmth and security this haven provided the author during the Holocaust.

### MEETING

In the sunny Dutch kitchen, one floral, chipped cup leans against three cracked, imitation-Delft saucers drying on a stained blue-and-white checked towel, placed this way by Jo Schouten for the past 50 years.

This small farmhouse kitchen was witness to the voices of children laughing, running happily through it, looking for cookies. It echoed with the words of the farm hands, counting the milked cows, commenting on how

much milk had been collected. It shook in 1943 when a group of Nazis drove up on their motorcycles looking for all the men, women, and children they suspected were hidden in different corners of the farm [Fig 4]. The cups and saucers, forks and knives served food and drink to the many lost, hungry, hopeless, helpless refugees who stopped here for an hour, day, month, or year or two. Here neighbors in this small town of Oosterblokker exchanged stories about the war, the only war Holland remembers. It

is here, to this very kitchen, that I return 50 years later, remembering that here I was kept safe, warm, and nurtured by the Schouten family.

Jo offers her American visitors a cup of coffee. I look at each corner of this kitchen and feel it, smell it as it was then. I see myself as a 5-year-old girl, protected and loved by this wonderful family, as much theirs and a part of their home as the floral chipped cup leaning against the blue Delft saucers, set out on a checked towel to dry in the bright Dutch sun.



FIG. 4. Farm in Oosterblokker in 1945.



John Guzowski writes, "My father grew up on a small farm north of Poznan, Poland. An orphan, he was raised by an aunt and uncle who had no education and saw no point in his getting any. He couldn't read and didn't know anything about the world. Years later, he joked that when he was deported, he didn't know where Germany was or where the tracks would lead: China? Argentina? He wasn't sure. He spent over four years in Buchenwald as a slave laborer, working in the armaments factories. When he was liberated in May 1945, he weighed 75 pounds and was blind in one eye. A DP camp in Germany was his university. He listened to the interned professors, musicians, artists, politicians, and doctors talk about the great men of history, the operas they had written, the paintings they had painted, the discoveries they had made. Nothing, however, prepared him for America and the questions it raised about the nature of the world and why some people are one way and others are another."

*John Guzowski*

## *My Father's First Day in America*

It was as if the world poured  
Into his one good eye. He saw  
Sidewalks, steel buildings, a single  
Airplane in the sky, a little girl eating

A piece of bread with jam, another  
Drinking something red out of a bottle,  
A priest consulting his watch before  
Crossing a street, a sheet of newspaper

Blowing sideways, two drunks dancing  
A heavy-footed leaping dance,  
So many cars not even an educated man  
Who could count could count so many,

Men in suits with suitcases so small  
A child could carry four or five of them  
Even to Moscow or Magdeburg,  
Women in dresses so light the slightest



Wind would reveal every bone  
And the curving flesh around it,  
Their beauty so pure he felt his hands  
Open and his palms turn to them.

And he asked the blessed world before him  
in a Polish it would never understand,  
“Why did the Germans do it, drag us off,  
kill us, and keep us chained for so long?”



“There is a strong and logical kinship between history and poetry,” observes Holly Mandelkern, who here shares her efforts to capture in poetry a portrait of survivor Roman Kent. Artist Byron Marshall enhances Mandelkern’s works with sketches of scenes from Kent’s boyhood and his experiences during and after the Holocaust.

*Holly Mandelkern*

## A Portrait in Poetry: Writing From the Testimony of Roman Kent

Hearing a survivor offer testimony is a crucial part of learning about the Holocaust. Listening to a survivor’s account makes history personal and unforgettable, and connects listeners to historical events that are otherwise overwhelming in scale. In response to hearing a survivor, listeners may offer thanks and, later, write a heartfelt letter of gratitude. In the weeks following the interaction, though, how do listeners internalize and remember what they have heard?

Writing poetry about survivors and their testimony, which requires processing information and making meaning from it by transforming it into a personal work, can extend and deepen the bond between listener and survivor and create a uniquely personal way for present and subsequent generations to learn and tell survivors’ stories. Responding to testimony through one’s own poetry becomes, in effect, a handmade portrait of the survivor’s narrative, the truth from an insider retold by an outsider.

The impulse to write in response to meeting a survivor and hearing his or her testimony came to me after I met Roman Kent (Kniker) and his wife, Hannah, also a survivor [Fig. 1].

Kent’s manner was gracious and welcoming, and he spoke about his life before, during, and after the Holocaust with a Southern accent, which surprised me. I knew then that I wanted to write about him, but I filed away that thought until several years later, when I read *Courage Was My Only Option* (Kent, 2008), an expanded testimony of his Holocaust experience and description of his life before and after the war.

According to his autobiography, Roman Kniker (b. 1929) lived a comfortable life in Łódź, Poland, attending a

Jewish high school, participating in sports, and enjoying the support and love of his caring parents, a younger brother, Leon, and two older sisters, Dasza and Renia. The family summered at their rural villa, where his father, the successful owner of a textile factory in Łódź, introduced his sons to his hobby, vegetable gardening [Fig. 2].



**FIG. 1.** Roman and Hannah Kent. Illustration courtesy of Byron Marshall.





**FIG. 2.** Roman at the villa garden before the war. Illustration courtesy of Byron Marshall.

With the start of war and the Nazi invasion of Poland, Roman's carefree life ended abruptly. In March 1940, his family was forced into a ghetto, where they suffered harsh conditions under strict regulations. Yet his father continued growing vegetables in the ghetto in accordance with the policy of Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, head of the Jewish Council. Rumkowski told ghetto residents of the May 11, 1940, announcement from the Department of Gardens and Land Cultivation that offered "small plots of land for agricultural purposes. Department inspectors will provide seeds, saplings and training; those working the plots may keep the crops for themselves" (YIVO, 2004).

Kent (2008) explains:

When we first came to the ghetto, Rumkowski's administration subdivided empty lots and assigned them to families to grow their own food. The assigned plots were in large fields in Marysin that were designated for cultivation and divided between the families. Each little piece of property was called a *dzialki* (about 20' × 20'). (p. 56)

Kent's father promptly took advantage of this offer and, in addition, purchased plots from residents who were unwilling or unable to till the stony soil, further supplementing resources for his family (Kent, 2008).

Kent and his brother, Leon, worked with other boys of



**FIG. 3.** Roman at the Leder and Sattler Ressort leather factory, Łódź Ghetto. Illustration courtesy of Byron Marshall.

the Łódź Ghetto at the Leder and Sattler Ressort leather factory, sewing knapsacks, belts, and all types of leather goods for the German army [Fig. 3], even as they continued to tend the garden and guard the crops day and night, sometimes sneaking away from their factory jobs to do so. In late 1942, their father became acutely ill and died in 1943, and the boys then shouldered the responsibility of feeding the family—raking, planting, watering, weeding, and fretting over their crops.

The last Jews were deported from the ghetto in late summer 1944. Desperately hungry, some raided food supplies as they were leaving, including everything but the potatoes in the Kniker family's garden. "We armed ourselves with sticks and brooms, bent on protecting what was still in the ground" (Kent, 2008, p. 75). [Fig. 4].

Their potatoes grew undetected underground and could sustain them, but shortly afterwards, the Kniker family, along with most of the remaining ghetto inhabitants, were deported to Auschwitz, where Kent's mother was murdered and the brothers were separated from their sisters.

From Auschwitz, the brothers were sent to Gross-Rosen and then to Flossenbürg. Then, on April 23, 1945, while on a forced march from Flossenbürg to Dachau, they were liberated by American soldiers. In Lübeck, Germany, they reunited briefly with their sisters, who were leaving for Sweden to receive critical care for Dasza. She died soon after they arrived, and Renia remained in Sweden.



**FIG. 4.** Roman at the garden in Marysin, Łódź Ghetto, August 1944. Illustration courtesy of Byron Marshall.



**FIG. 5.** Roman at his first home in Atlanta, 1946. Illustration courtesy of Byron Marshall.

In 1946, the boys arrived in New York and were sent to Atlanta to live with a prosperous Jewish family [Fig. 5]. However, the host family seemed emotionally detached

from the boys and neglected their nutritional needs, and Roman protested. He and Leon were moved to a nurturing home where they flourished physically, emotionally, and academically, learning to speak English with a Southern drawl, as he explained in a speech he gave in Washington, DC (2010). Both boys graduated from Emory University. Roman moved to New York, where he made his career in international trade, and Leon became a neurosurgeon.

#### **ROMAN KENT'S STORY IN A POEM**

After reading Kent's expanded testimony in *Courage Was My Only Option*, I knew I had the material for the poems I wanted to write. I began with a poem I call "Uprooted," an overview of Kent's boyhood days of leisure and learning, his Holocaust experience, and his life in the immediate aftermath. I combined his autobiographical testimony with the narrative I had heard when he spoke:

Kilometers from Łódź, / we summer at our villa, / chasing soccer and volleyballs, / tasting fruits from Father's garden. / September war halts our play — / we leave behind ripe kernels, / swells of radish and roots, / the flavor of strawberriesweet days. // In Marysin, / the better part of Ghetto Łódź, / Brother and I turn stones to till our plot. / Some cede their patch to Father for cash; / our ground grows by squares. / Cabbage, lettuce, cucumbers give life. / Potatoes sprout from buried eyes. / Beets, carrots, and radishes seed / dreams beyond the leather factory / where we sew knapsacks for the enemy. / We stand guard over our crops. // Roundups send the last of Łódź to trains. / Before they leave, the leaving / pick our every ear and leaf and stem, / the nightshades that foreshadow hunger. / I sob over wasted work / though buried potatoes still feed / until we, too, are found. // After Auschwitz and Flossenbürg, / Brother and I sail for New York — / orphans. / Bureaus send us south to a dot of map / that I know from *Gone With the Wind*: / red clay glazed in fire, / planted rows strewn with leathered / harnesses and hoof prints, / hunger. / Their restored homes and gardens / sit grand and green. / We stand alone in a house of strangers, / our story driven underground / like potatoes in Łódź.

#### **WRITING POETRY FROM HISTORY**

History has accurately and artfully been rendered through the prism of poetry in any number of outstanding books. Stephen Vincent Benét's *John Brown's Body* (1928) is a Pulitzer Prize-winning American epic of the Civil War written in poetry. Through various voices, Marilyn Nelson's *Carver: A Life in Poems* (2001) relates the life and work of George Washington Carver in poetic segments combined with photographs. Former United States poet laureate



Natasha Trethewey breathes life into Black soldiers who served in the Union Army in her collection *Native Guard* (2007). J. Patrick Lewis and Jane Yolen's *Self-Portrait With Seven Fingers: The Life of Marc Chagall in Verse* (2011) is ekphrastic poetry at its finest. In this volume, based on Chagall's colorful paintings, biographical information about the artist forms the heart of each poem. Martin Steingesser tenderly adapted a young Dutch woman's letters and journal from the Holocaust period into prosody in his *The Thinking Heart: The Life & Loves of Etty Hillesum: Poetic Variations* (2012). Charles Reznikoff wrote his book-length poem *Holocaust* (2007), described in Myrna Goldenberg's 2015 essay in *PRISM* (pp. 46–50), based on “hundreds of hours and miles of shelves of written court records and original documents detailing the process and prosecution of mass murder” (p. 47). These titles suggest a strong and logical kinship between history and poetry.

How does one prepare to write historically based poetry derived from survivor testimony? A poem that aims to portray a survivor's experience, whether that experience has been transmitted in person, through a video interview, or in a written narrative, should be—as should all poetry—artfully crafted, but it also must be historically accurate and constructed on the solid foundation of what the survivor states. Knowing the historical context of the testimony is critical and can be accomplished by reference to primary and secondary source materials.

For my poem “Uprooted,” Kent's autobiography (2008) was mandatory source material, as was his testimony of over three hours, available online at <https://sf.usc.edu/news/2014/05/voices-visual-history-archive-roman-kent>. Kent wrote about his schoolmate David Sierakowiak (1996), whose diary is another excellent source of information about Łódź Ghetto life. *Łódź Ghetto: Inside a Community Under Siege* (Adelson & Lapidés, 1991) includes excerpts from Sierakowiak's diary as well as a wealth of historical information about the ghetto. I viewed YIVO's online Zonabend Collection of documents from the Łódź Ghetto regarding the unusual provision for use of small plots of land for gardening (YIVO, 2004). I listened to speeches Kent has given, including an address at Auschwitz (2015) and his remarks in Washington, DC, to teachers of the Holocaust (2010), to note which parts of his story he emphasizes.

Photographs also can lend historicity to the process: Testimony poems illustrated by family photos make a unique and lasting contribution to the survivor and to learners alike. Although individual survivors usually have only a handful of such photos to share, relevant documentary photos are widely available. For example, Mendel Grossman's (1977) heartrending photographs, taken in secret, of residents of the Łódź Ghetto serve as a vital resource that helps illustrate and make vivid survivor testimony. Kent's autobiography and his USC Shoah Founda-

tion interview (1996) featured photos that I chose to illustrate my work. Other artistic primary and secondary sources may be paired with any poem. Such collaborative work provides a valuable learning experience in balancing the visual with the written word, as I learned from my work with Byron Marshall, a professional graphic artist, illustrator, fine artist, and author, who has worked with me to illustrate my poetry and this essay with his sketches of Kent's photos.

How does one begin to write a poem after the historical foundation has been laid and the testimony heard? I began by trying to show too much, and I soon realized that the particular, the specific, narrows the focus and heightens the impact of the poem, as in any portrait, and that metaphors are the shorthand that strengthens and spotlights the focus. In “Uprooted,” therefore, I limited the incidents I shared about Kent's life, although there were many, and I chose the extended metaphor of the garden and, specifically, potatoes, which are hardy, hidden, and associated with hunger.

Next, I learned that silences also speak. The phrase “after Auschwitz and Flossenbürg,” for example, implies that there has been more suffering in his life than is portrayed in the poem. Then, too, the language of poetry is lean, and Kent's reduced circumstances suggested bare, simple word choices. Direct language invites us into poetry, and simple, strong words are the ones that we know from the songs and poems we love.

Thoughtfully chosen adjective and adverb phrases and clauses get the poem moving, but choosing vibrant nouns and verbs is essential. The poet Mary Oliver (1994) notes, “Every adjective and adverb is worth five cents. Every verb is worth fifty cents” (p. 90). I used the direct language of the speaker because it reflects his age, social standing, and circumstances of the time depicted in the poem as well as the way he tells his story today.

Because I wanted to tell Kent's story in a conversational mode, I used free verse, so his words would flow. I used the present tense to keep the account moving quickly, and the first-person voice because it lends immediacy to the telling. Using his autobiography, I tried to portray Kent's thoughts, insights, and experiences, such as the fact that as a child he had read *Gone With the Wind* in Polish, and that this had served as his only context for understanding his American destination (Kent, 2008). Finally, I used parallelism to balance the segments of his life as they unfolded and to further the concept of the continuity of his personality, observations, and values.

## FOUND POETRY

A poetic retelling also is a way to distill a long personal account that has been written or spoken in interview form and can serve as a *found poem*, created when one chooses

exact words and phrases from a prose portrait and weaves these words into art. Using Kent's testimony of seven taped sessions from the Shoah Foundation (1996), I wrote a found poem I titled "Our Father's Garden," which followed the chronology as it was presented there. Because his testimony is not in transcript form [often such testimony is; see Paula Cowan's "A Selective, Annotated Guide to Holocaust Websites," in the 2015 edition of *PRISM*, pp. 96–100—Ed.], I listened carefully and took note of any descriptions and quotes that might fuel a poem, particularly those relating to hunger and his search for food. Each stanza is derived from one taped session and written in order: The first stanza is based on the first taped session, the second stanza on the second. The seventh stanza consists solely of a quotation from a Jewish source as related by Kent's son, Jeffrey, in the last taped interview.

#### Our Father's Garden

At our Jewish school in Łódź, / half-Polish, half-Hebrew scholars teach / language, geometry, history, and Torah; / my favorite is no subject—gymnastics. Horseback riding through our summer villa, / I see countrysides of corn, wheat, and potatoes. / Father likes to hear us singing holiday songs, / our whole family around the table. // Uniforms force us to the ghetto / where money buys extra food. / Grownups understand it much better. / We are sheltered by parents who worry for us / when they see from day to day the starving. / Only the young, stitching leather, / slow down production to sing / that workers here are heroes, / that we are not afraid. // Under the eyes of Father, / we become farmers in Marysin. / We learn to plant potatoes; / between potatoes we can have lettuce. / We fetch water in buckets for seedlings and watch. / My brother and I sneak away from leather to tend crops. / Sisters pinch crumbs in a bakery. / When Father dies, / my brother and I and all of us guarding the fields / see the thousands coming from all sides. / All summer we had prepared winter's food. / We are only thinking: the food is all gone — / only buried potatoes escape the picking. / We are left crying. / I don't know how we left the ghetto — // Days don't count. / We organize (we do not say steal) / under the eyes of the Germans. / Brother and I devise a profession to leave camp. / Wintercold, we break stones and chop wood. / Sometimes I work inside, cleaning up, organizing / extra food to share with my brother. // I want to stay; hundreds of children / are sent back to die. / We have no nights, we have no days, / Brother and I, always together. / We see a tank with a white star painted, / its men machine-gunning the SS, / its men throwing food for us, / the men of Patton's Third Army in Bavaria. / We eat, we sleep, we take food at

the home of a peasant. / A band, we "Happy Boys" play songs for American soldiers / for food, cigarettes, a car to use in the forest / beneath their white star. // We find our sisters in Lübeck, / the older lying in bed, / skin and bones. / Only her eyes talk — / our sick mother was killed. / Orphans, / we ship to a Jewish family in Atlanta. / (Yes, I know their name although I try to forget / school with no breakfast, no lunch.) / They find us a new home with a widow of good heart / — what we need most — / who gives us breakfast, lunch. / My children call her grandmother.

— "He who has a generous eye, a humble spirit, and a kind soul is a disciple of Abraham."

— *Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers)* 5:19, as quoted by Jeffrey Kent, Roman Kent's son, in the USC Shoah Foundation interview with Roman Kent, April 29, 1996

Some poets follow the rigid found-poetry protocol of using the exact words in the exact order they appear in the prose, with provisions for tense changes, plurals, and capitalization. Others favor a variation called *borrowed poetry*, which incorporates exact words from a prose text (testimony, in this case) but permits shifting phrases, adding original material, changing words, and rearranging the results into a rhyme and meter that reflects the meaning and theme of the words. John Drury (1991) advises, "Try to retain a good deal of the original diction, but compress the phrases and sentences as much as possible. Remember that you're not merely copying the original—you're remaking it into your own poem" (p. 149). Citing the prose source for the found or borrowed poem is, of course, required. Drury cites the opening section of "The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket" by Robert Lowell (1946) as a well-crafted borrowing from Henry David Thoreau's description of a shipwreck in Cape Cod (1864).

I prefer the borrowed to the found poem, because the former implies an interrelationship between the original source and the poet, a giving back in return for what has been given. In writing the following borrowed poem, I used the same testimony from the Shoah Foundation (1996) and kept the focus very narrow, again on the theme of hunger.

#### Transplanted

Half-Polish, half-Hebrew teachers / and countrysides of corn and potatoes / hear us singing, / our whole family gathered around the table. / Locked in Łódź, / we have parents who worry for us. / We guard potatoes and stitch leather goods, / slowing down to sing that workers here are heroes, / that we are not afraid. / Our father dead, / the thousands pick our every leaf, ear, and stem; / only potatoes below survive. / We, the



last of Łódź, are forced to leave / under the eyes of  
Germans. / I break stones and chop winter's wood. /  
Inside, I organize food to share with my brother. /  
Tanks with painted white stars plant / soldiers—  
American—and food. / Orphans, / we land in Atlanta,  
/ at last tended by a woman / of humble soul, / who  
fed us with kindness / and raised us up / in new soil.

— *From the USC Shoah Foundation interview with  
Roman Kent, April 29, 1996*

Poems—all poems—must be edited to eliminate clutter and keep the edge, the focus, the ambition, and the audacity. Poetry is an oral tradition, so I read my work aloud as I craft it, powering my thoughts-turned-art through voice to fully own my version of what I have studied, heard, struggled with, and built into a poem. As Mary Oliver (1994) states, “Poetry is a river; many voices travel in it; poem after poem moves along in the exciting crests and falls of the river waves” (p. 9). When my voice flows in this river of memory, then I, too, become a carrier of survivors' stories.

The creative work of turning a survivor's words into a poetic portrait, with its myriad details, decisions, and distillations, promises that the poet will long remember this endeavor of mind and heart, a personal effort that shapes the tale of a survivor into the poet's own lyrical narrative. We need new artists to preserve the testimony of the witnesses, to paint and transmit in vivid narrative these invaluable stories.

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#### END NOTES

[1] I met the Kents in Washington, DC, in the late 1990s while attending a joint conference of alumni of the Jewish Labor Committee's Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Teachers' Fellowship Program and the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors. Roman Kent has long dedicated himself to Holocaust education and has played a leading role in major Holocaust organizations, including the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, and the United States Holocaust Memorial Council.

[2] An excellent essay that illustrates the writing of found poetry based on survivor testimony is Dana Humphrey's "Living in the Shadow: Bernard Gotfryd's 'An Encounter in Linz' and Elie Wiesel's 'The Watch'" (in *The Call of Memory: Learning About the Holocaust Through Narrative: A Teacher's Guide*, ed. K. Shawn and K. Goldfrad, 2008, Teaneck, NJ: Ben Yehuda Press, pp. 411–424.) The idea is easy to implement in literature, language arts, history, and social studies classrooms and can be used to differentiate assessments as well as to highlight students' poetic and artistic talents.

Photographer Kelly Lee Webeck writes, “In Hebrew, the number 18 represents *chai*, the Hebrew word for life. ‘Life: Survivor Portraits’ is a photographic exploration of the lives that a number of Houston-area survivors have built in the aftermath of the Holocaust. The original exhibit at the Holocaust Museum Houston included 36 framed and titled images<sup>1</sup>: 18 portraits of survivors and 18 portrayals that document the home space each survivor created. The photographs, 10 x 10 inch gelatin silver prints, were made using traditional photographic techniques, shot with film using a Hasselblad, and printed in a darkroom.” Here we present 24 of those images.

*Kelly Lee Webeck*

## Life: Survivor Portraits

I have worked with Holocaust Museum Houston since 2007, when I began photographically documenting daily workshops of the Warren Fellowship for Future Teachers and growing close to the survivor community. Many local survivors came to meet the students and listen to the lectures; sometimes, they participated in the workshop sessions. As I listened to survivors talk to these young teachers about their experiences, I wondered what their lives were like when they were not in the museum. I yearned to see where they lived, what life was like when they were at home.

I have always been interested in the objects with which people choose to surround themselves and how the spaces people create become a part of their identity. In 2010, I envisioned a survivor-portrait photography project in which I would go to their homes and see the spaces they had created for themselves. I wrote to the survivors I had come to know and care about, asking whether they would be willing to participate.

The time spent with survivors making images was not to capture their testimony or their Holocaust experiences. Rather, it was to record the lives they had created for themselves in the aftermath; it was to document who and how they were in their home space. Portraits are visual testimony and these images offer moments that prompt quiet reflection. In my subjects’ homes, I found spaces that speak of identity, memory, and passion. Stories can be learned through reading the lines in the faces of my subjects and observing the objects with which they surround themselves, the things that are special to them, salvaged from their experiences before and during the Holocaust and proudly acquired in the years afterwards.

I am engrossed in the image-making process. My subjects are aware of the camera but are given space to themselves. When I photograph someone, I never know exactly what I am looking for or what truths I will discover. As I

work, I question: What does it mean to be a survivor? How does one photograph a story? How does one photograph family members no longer alive? How do the objects in a person’s space matter?

Conceptualizing the “Life: Survivor Portraits” project was an exploration of self, photography, and others. Making the photographs, both the shooting and the printing aspect, was transformative. These people, whom I have come to care about deeply as I have come to know them better, have changed how I see my place in today’s complex world and how I view and respond to humanity and the shared challenges we face.

I am drawn to the histories of my subjects. Throughout this process, I questioned the stages of my own development, recognizing that many of these people were my age during the Holocaust. I wonder how I would have reacted. What would I have become? These survivors are more than living remnants of a dark history. They are creative, multidimensional, articulate, caring, and generous people. They have lived through a history of life experiences that defy the imagination. They have flourished and, in many cases, bettered the world around them.

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### END NOTE

[1] Titles with an \* are not the original titles.





NAOMI WARREN AND HER HOME  
2011

Naomi Warren was born Naomi Kaplan in Wołkowysk, Poland, on September 1, 1920. She survived a labor detail at Auschwitz-Birkenau before being deported to Ravensbrück. She was liberated from Bergen-Belsen. In 1946, she came to Houston, Texas, joining her sister, Helen, who had come there before the Holocaust. Naomi and her second husband, Martin Warren, had three children: Helen, Geri, and Benjamin. Naomi has eight grandchildren and six great-grandchildren and considers the teachers she trains through the fellowships she sponsors to be an extension of her family.



BILL MORGAN AND HIS HOME  
2014

Bill Morgan was born Yossl Margulies in Cerańów, Poland, on May 18, 1925. Bill survived the Holocaust by posing as a Polish farm worker, constantly moving from town to town. In 1949, Bill came to the US; he settled in Houston in the early 1950s. He and his wife, Shirley, have five children and 14 grandchildren.



EDITH HAMER AND HER HOME  
2014

Edith Hamer was born Edith Finkelstein in Klaipeda, Lithuania, on May 14, 1937. She survived the Holocaust thanks to the intervention of Chiune Sugihara, the Japanese consul in Kaunas (Kovno), Lithuania, who helped Jewish refugees escape through Japan by granting them visas. Edith married Paul Hamer in 1957. She later moved to Houston to be closer to her twin sons, Louis and David. Edith and Paul have three granddaughters.



WALTER KASE AND HIS MEMENTOS FROM SPEAKING  
2014

Walter Kase was born Wladyslaw Kasrylewicz, in Lodz, on August 17, 1929. His family was confined to the Lodz Ghetto before he and his father were deported to the Pionki labor camp, and then to Auschwitz, Sonsnowiec, and Mauthausen, before finally being liberated from the camp at Gunskirchen. He immigrated to the United States in 1947 and lived in Houston with his wife, Chris. Walter Kase passed away on March 4, 2015.





CHAJA VERVEER HOLDING A STONE FOUND AT HER FATHER'S GRAVESITE AND CHAJA IN HER HOME \*  
2011

Chaja Verveer was born in Maarsbergen, Holland, on September 24, 1941. She survived the war as a hidden child under the name Carla van den Berg with a Dutch family active in the Resistance before she was deported as an orphan to Westerbork and Bergen-Belsen, where she survived with a group of 51 other "unknown children." She was liberated from Theresienstadt, in Czechoslovakia, and reunited with her mother. She settled in Houston in the 1970s.



RUTH STEINFELD AND HER HOME  
2014

Ruth Steinfeld was born Ruth Krell in Mannheim, Germany, on July 8, 1933. She survived with her sister, Lea, under the care of the Jewish organization *Oeuvres de Secours aux Enfants* (OSE), first in a group home, then posing as a Catholic child with a foster family, and finally in a French orphanage. Ruth and Lea immigrated together to the US in 1946, and together moved to Houston soon after. Ruth and her husband, Larry Steinfeld, have three daughters, seven grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.



PAULINE RUBIN AND A PHOTO OF HER RESCUER, MARIE LUCIE BRION \*  
2014

Pauline Rubin was born Pauline Cramarz in Brussels, Belgium, on June 30, 1936. She survived the war in hiding with a number of Belgian families. She moved to the US in 1950, married Sam Rubin in 1956, and moved to Houston in 1958. They have two children, Allan and Rhonda.



SAM RUBIN TODAY AND SAM HOLDING A PHOTO OF HIMSELF AS A CHILD \*  
2012

Samuel Rubin was born in Charleroi, Belgium, on October 7, 1928. He survived the Holocaust in hiding with a Belgian family. He immigrated to the US in 1948 and proudly served his new country in the Korean War. Sam married Pauline Cramarz in 1956 and moved to Houston in 1958. They have two children, Allan and Rhonda. Samuel Rubin passed away on October 11, 2014.





HELEN COLIN AND HER HOME  
2014

Helen Colin was born Helen Goldstein in Tuszyn, Poland, on April 15, 1923. She married Kopel Colin while living in the Lodz Ghetto but was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau shortly after. Liberated from Bergen-Belsen on her 22nd birthday, she was reunited with her husband, and together they settled in Houston in 1950. She has two daughters, three grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren.



EDITH MINCEBERG AND EDITH, TRANSLATING  
2013

Edith Minceberg was born Edyta-Dita Sternlicht in Chybie, Poland, on September 30, 1924. She survived the Holocaust as a slave laborer in a Soviet government farm in Siberia, then as a refugee in Dzhambul, Kazakhstan. She met her husband, Josef, in the American Zone of Germany after the war and together they moved to Houston in 1949. She has two children, David and Pearl; eight grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.



ROSINE CHAPPELL AND HER BELGIAN CUTWORK TABLECLOTH  
2014

Rosine Chappell was born Rosine Joseph in Bucharest, Romania, on November 1, 1928. She and her father were American citizens, which allowed them to flee Europe in 1941 through the Middle East to India, where they sailed to the US. She settled in Houston in 1967 with her husband, Cliff. She has three children, Glen, Andrea, and Richard, and two living grandchildren.



ZOLY ZAMIR AND HIS HOME  
2012

Zoly Zamir was born Zoltan Schulzinger in Sieu Magherus, Romania, on July 22, 1922. He remained in Romania under the Iron Guard until 1941, when he fled to Palestine, where he joined the Haganah and fought in the 1948 War of Independence. He moved to the US in 1962 with his wife, Shoshana, settling in Houston in 1982. He has two daughters, Yardena and Varda, five grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.



Elizabeth Rosner's portrait of her father's insatiable need for chocolate, along with Teresa Moszkowicz-Syrop's "The Tomatoes" (p. 3) and Freida Harris's "Moments: Hunger" (p. 88), offers insight into the profound deprivation forced on Jews during the Holocaust.

*Elizabeth Rosner*

## *Chocolate*

My father hoards it,  
needs a stash of dark  
nougat hidden in shoeboxes  
on high closet shelves, under  
piles of winter hats, behind  
unmatched socks, trapped  
between old bills and  
unanswered letters.  
Instead of lint or loose  
change, his pockets store  
gold and silver foil:  
the shed skin of secret feasting  
against the memory of hunger.



Hunger was a source of overpowering anguish during the Holocaust. Here, Freida Harris, a child of a survivor, describes the effects of that hunger as she paints a portrait of a moment in her mother's kitchen. Include Teresa Moszkowicz-Syrop's "The Tomatoes" (p. 3) and Elizabeth Rosner's "Chocolate" (p. 87) as you discuss the transformative power of trauma.

*Freida Harris*

## Moments: Hunger

No, I have never known hunger, but I cannot waste food. Waste is not in my vocabulary, and food—well, that has a status all its own. I see my mother standing by the sink, peeling a potato. No, she does not use a peeler. She is sure that it would cut away some of the precious white flesh. A black eye, or a bruise—it is sacrilegious, criminal, to hack away the blemish. Slowly, layer by layer, she removes the offending spot. Meticulously she cuts, like a skilled surgeon removing a cataract, always conscious that if he digs too deeply, he will blind his patient.

On occasion, if I yell at her to cut a bigger chunk of the spoilage away, she will again relate the story of the best meal she ever ate. It was made of blackened potato peels and a *traif* (non-kosher) ox tail that she found while searching in the trash cans of Łódź in 1945. It was the first meal she was able to cook after her release from the camps. It had a "*taam of Gan Eden*"—a taste of the Garden of Eden.

While she will not waste a morsel of white flesh, neither will she stoop to eat a spot of black. This is America, the country of great bounty.

She stands patiently by the sink, ministering to her precious potatoes, counting out exactly how many she will need. She bathes them gently and places them in a pot to boil.

I never eat potatoes.



"As the son of a survivor," Alan Kaufman has written, "I have seen firsthand its effects not only upon my mother, Marie, but upon the entire world. . . . and . . . on me," including "my very perception of the most ordinary things." To Marie, "the three bolt locks / on her door are more important / than the collected works of Shakespeare."

*Alan Kaufman*

## *My Mother Doesn't Know Who Allen Ginsberg Is*

"Ginsberg?" she asks by phone, "Is that your friend from Israel?"  
"He's a famous poet," I explain. "I've been invited with him  
and Kathy Acker to a Jewish festival in Berlin."  
"Acker," says my mother, her voice cross, "This is a Jewish name?"

My mother doesn't know  
who Allen Ginsberg is.  
She doesn't know who Anne  
Waldman is, or Charles Bukowski.  
My mother doesn't know that I make  
a kind of living on stages  
screaming my heart out  
to strangers at five hundred dollars a pop,  
and that there's some debate about whether  
or not what I and others like me do should be considered  
poetry. My mother was arrested by the Gestapo in 1942.  
She was twelve then. She's sixty now. She lives in Florida,  
where every so often a German tourist gets shot.  
To my mother, that is poetry.

My mother doesn't like the idea of a Berlin  
Jewish festival. She cannot understand what  
Jews feel festive about over there.  
"And what is this 'celebration' for?" she asks coldly.  
And changes the subject before I can answer.  
"So, what will you do there?" she asks, "Give lectures?"



"We'll read our works," I say, "talk in panel discussions."

"Talk?" she says. "In English, I hope!"

My mother doesn't like the sound of German.

"It's a funny thing," she says. "I see the tourists on the beach, in their bathing suits . . . What could be more harmless? But when I hear them speak, I imagine them in uniforms, and become afraid."

My mother sees Germans in bathing suits transformed into Germans in uniform, and my mother fears that having once narrowly missed killing her, they might yet succeed in killing me. As a child in war, she saw such things as babies tossed through the air and shot.

"Like crying angels, they looked," she says.

My mother doesn't know who Allen Ginsberg is.

She watches German tourists sun themselves on the shore. Sometimes they don uniforms of German language, march to her condo, call up through the intercom and order her downstairs with one suitcase containing six kilos of clothing, and food for a journey of three days.

My mother doesn't know who

Allen Ginsberg is

and I wonder if she knows who

Alan Kaufman is.

She can't understand

why any Jew would ever

want to go to Germany.

My mother doesn't know who Allen

Ginsberg is. She looks older

than her years

but younger than the death she

still manages to escape

in retirement on the beaches



of Florida, where there are not too many  
roundups for the camps, and one is safe,  
generally speaking, if one stays indoors,  
pretends not to be a Jew, even  
to other Jews.

My mother doesn't know  
who Allen Ginsberg is.  
She has tended to regard most  
"high" culture  
as a kind of Disneyworld  
for intelligent people —  
to her, the three bolt locks  
on her door are more important  
than the collected works of Shakespeare.  
She knows that she's supposed  
to appreciate books and pretends  
to, but my mother doesn't know who  
Norman Mailer is, she doesn't know who  
Maya Angelou is, she doesn't know who  
wrote *On the Road* or *Leaves of Grass* or *The  
Awful Rowing Towards God*.  
She has seen six million of the best minds  
of her generation gassed and burned.

She is making baked fish  
in the oven tonight, regardless of what  
my father says about the smell  
and, tossing a nice salad,  
she goes into the living room, sets down  
the meal on the TV tray, and as she eats,  
stares through the big plate glass  
window filled with night, measuring the  
distance between herself and the sprawling,  
creeping lights out there, humming the Kaddish  
in her throat, the prayer for the dead,  
for so many, many illusions dressed as life.



In this group portrait of the "Buchenwald Boys," Gail Fishman Gerwin highlights Sid, "who goes there every night / in his dreams."  
Read this with Marjorie Agosín's "Helena's Haggadah" (pp. 48–49) as you teach about coping strategies and the resilience of survivors.

*Gail Fishman Gerwin*

## *Freedom Dancers*

*"Buchenwald Boys Celebrate 70 Years of Freedom"*

—Andrew Harris, *Tablet Magazine*, April 20, 2015

On the anniversary of liberation, they dance, the boys of Buchenwald, a dwindling group of octogenarians, in Melbourne, this year especially poignant, exactly seventy years since the Third Army entered the camp.

With their children, their grandchildren, they dance at the Buchenwald Ball. One of the survivors' sons says, They get together and they drink and they sing and they drink some more and they sing some more.

Were there fragrant blossoms outside the camps that April day in 1945? Could the boys see troops who'd bravely faced the enemy for years, their own families waiting, empty their stomachs on the side of sodden paths?

They dance, they celebrate freedom, they celebrate those who left the camp with them, those who remain together, those — four this year — who have left them forever.



•

Decades ago, on a trip to Israel with our young daughters,  
a gentle man named Sid sat behind us on the bus  
as we sang our way through the Upper Galilee. He was  
at Buchenwald, said his wife; he goes there every night  
in his dreams. All I can do is watch, wipe his brow.

•

They dance, the Buchenwald Boys, they sing, drink,  
perhaps erase their own dreams, the memories of lost  
families, perhaps pray in silence, Never again, please.  
Never again.



“What can I, a young Black South African, learn from this to ensure that this does *not* happen in my society?” This question, raised by a Holocaust museum guide of Zulu descent, forms the basis for this fascinating portrait written by Brenda Gouws with her mentor, Johan Wassermann.

*Brenda Gouws with Johan Wassermann*

## “Is the Holocaust Even My Story to Tell?” Portrait of Thandeka, a Black South African Holocaust Educator

I first met Thandeka<sup>1</sup> briefly a year ago at a Holocaust education event for the local Jewish community and the museum educators working at the Durban Holocaust Centre, our local Holocaust museum. At the time, I was struck by her confident manner and exuberant enthusiasm for teaching about the Holocaust, and as we sat down together for an interview, my first impressions didn't waver. She was clearly passionate about teaching this subject and she remained warm, engaged, and self-assured, often emphasizing the points she made by speaking animatedly and knocking on the table. Given her cultural and ethnic background and the questions she herself posed about becoming a Holocaust museum guide, I felt drawn to her story and wanted to know more about this woman and her work. Why was she, a Black African of Zulu descent, with no European or World War II connections, so passionate about teaching the Holocaust, an event far removed from her geographically and historically? What frame of reference did she use to connect to the events of the Holocaust, given that few Black Africans know anything at all about the Holocaust and most have never met a Jewish person?<sup>2</sup> How did she learn, and how was she teaching, the Holocaust narrative? As part of my research on Holocaust education in South Africa, I decided to interview her and learn her story in depth.<sup>3</sup>

### **PREPARING THE CANVAS: THANDEKA'S SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE**

Thandeka is a South African Holocaust museum educator. She was born in 1993 to Black, upper middle-class parents.

In this respect, she was somewhat different from the majority of Black women of her generation, being both financially and educationally advantaged. Her father is a medical doctor and she was one of only a few Black students at the time to attend a prestigious English-speaking private school. Growing up as a child, and now as an adult, she speaks English at home and, as a result, does not bear any trace of an accent of isiZulu—her ancestral language and the language of the region in which she lives and works. In fact, as I learned during the course of our discussion, she does not speak isiZulu very well at all; when she began teaching at the Holocaust museum, it was necessary for her to brush up on her isiZulu language skills.

Thandeka's path crossed that of the Holocaust and Holocaust education when one of her Jewish friends from her school days, Sarah, was busily organizing a travelling exhibition on Ethiopian Jews in Israel and asked her to assist. Although initially completely disinterested, as this was a topic unrelated to any of her personal interests at the time, Thandeka reluctantly agreed to help. So, despite her lack of enthusiasm and expecting to be thoroughly bored, she sank down onto a comfortable couch and began to read through the exhibition material. Contrary to her expectations, she found the material riveting. Less than a month later, armed with her new knowledge, she found herself eagerly guiding learners through the exhibition panels on Ethiopian Jews. Apart from being excited about gaining new knowledge herself, she thoroughly enjoyed the contact with the visitors and students.

A year later, administrators of the newly opened



Holocaust museum were in the process of sourcing suitable staff to become museum educators. They remembered Thandeka and how successful and enthusiastic a guide she had been during the Ethiopian exhibition. When the museum director approached her and invited her to join the museum staff, Thandeka was delighted and jumped at the opportunity, becoming one of the two permanent educators for the museum.

### PAINTING THE PORTRAIT OF A MUSEUM EDUCATOR

A few weeks passed uneventfully, and despite enjoying her work and studying hard to learn the relevant material, Thandeka was beset by nagging doubts: about herself, her lack of teaching qualifications, her shortage of knowledge about the Holocaust itself, and her motivation for teaching this aspect of the history of the Jewish people. She shared these doubts—what she called her “first internal issues”—with me during our interview as she explained the questions that plagued her:

Is this even my story to tell? Do you know what I mean? Like why am I telling this story? You know . . . this is so far removed from me. Do I have a right to be standing up and speaking to these learners about this history?

It took many cups of coffee and much thoughtful introspection, she told me, before she came to understand that the answers to her questions lay not in books or in conversations with other people or on the Internet, but rather deep within her own consciousness. She came to understand that the focus of her experience at the Holocaust museum was to discover “what can I, a young Black South African, learn from this to ensure that this does *not* happen in my society?” She also realized that the fundamental social issues that related to the Holocaust—those that appeared in the exhibition panels on racism, discrimination, and antisemitism—were the ones most important to her, and she was keen to communicate to learners the message of the dangers of racism and stereotyping while at the same time teaching them about democracy. Upholding human rights was a matter close to her heart, so for her this was an opportunity to help individuals confront their own biases and become conscious of the importance of not repeating past mistakes. She knew, too, that she had the ability to relay her passion for teaching the Holocaust to those who would come through the museum. Finally, dispelling the last of her doubts, the thought crystallized that the Holocaust was not only a subject for Jews to study: It was a human story for everyone to learn. She surely could relate to someone else’s past, for the past is not the exclusive domain of a single group.

To understand the source of Thandeka’s questioning,

it is necessary to paint the context of her experiences into her portrait, as this adds richness and depth to the as-yet unfinished picture. Broad brushstrokes reveal that part of her portrait lies in the macro picture of the South African educational system, both past and present.



**FIG. 1.** Students from Gugulesizwe High School listening to the introductory session on Holocaust history. Courtesy Durban Holocaust Centre.

Currently, learning about the Holocaust in South African schools is not a curriculum choice [Fig 1]. The topic is mandated for all Grade 9 learners under the umbrella of Social Sciences, a learning area covering both history and geography. This is in line with one of the purposes of the study of history at this grade level, namely, to “support citizenship within a democracy by explaining and encouraging the values of the South African Constitution” (Department of Basic Education, 2011, p. 9).

This idea of values in education emerged after South Africa’s transition to democracy in 1994 in the form of the *Manifesto on Values, Education and Democracy* (Department of Education, 2001), a document dedicated to rethinking education in post-apartheid South Africa and building on the hope for an all-inclusive, anti-racist democracy. This was to be done by incorporating “strategies for instilling democratic values in young South Africans in the learning environment” (Department of Education, 2001, p. 3). The incumbent, democratically elected African National Congress (ANC) government therefore determined that the curriculum should reflect the human-rights underpinnings of the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights (Keet & Carrim, 2005). The inclusion of the Holocaust in the curriculum was a synergistic choice, mirroring the constitution’s concern with democracy, justice, and the elimination of racism. Hence the Holocaust was introduced into the post-colonial, post-apartheid, Third World South African history classroom in 2007.

The inclusion of this Jewish history in the curriculum galvanized the South African Jewish community, and in

response, two new Holocaust museums were planned, one in Johannesburg, Gauteng, which was established in 2008 and opened in 2015, and one in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, which was built in 2007. These museums were based on the pre-existing Holocaust museum in Cape Town, Western Cape, which had come into being 10 years earlier. Their purpose is to stand as memorials to the six million Jews who died during the Holocaust and to honor local Holocaust survivors, and also to remind the larger South African community that such genocide must never happen again. Most important, however, they support education about the Holocaust in the national history and social science curricula. The museums are regularly used as a resource by many schools across the country. For example, more than 4,000 learners visited the Durban Holocaust Centre in 2014 alone (South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation, 2015). The majority of the visiting learners at the Durban museum are Grade 9 and Grade 11 learners from KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape schools, rural and urban, government and private, economically depressed and affluent, and they span the entire spectrum of the South African population [Fig 2].



**FIG. 2.** Panel in the permanent exhibition at the Durban Holocaust Centre. Photo courtesy of Nicola Meyer from her blog, *Run on Coffee*.

It was against this educational backdrop that Thandeka found herself teaching about the Holocaust. From the outset, she acknowledged that she was not a trained teacher. She had to work hard to familiarize herself with Holocaust concepts and terminology, remarking wryly that her training, or “self-training,” as she described it, did not make this easy for her. Further, she explained, she works with a number of Black African schools whose students know “very, very little—nothing at all”—about Jews. “Most of the students whom I meet are very similar to me, to my own experience,” she said.

After accepting the position of museum educator, she explained, she was handed the official Holocaust museum materials, a teacher’s manual, an educator’s manual, and a DVD created by the South African Holocaust and Genocide Foundation,<sup>4</sup> and was sent away to study them. As she said:

Okay. So I was given . . . books, the educator’s manual as well as the learner’s manual, and I also had to basically learn from those books. I spent, I think it was a month, plowing through, trying to get an understanding, more of an understanding of the Holocaust from those books, and also I went through the museum with other guides, as well.

The museum provided no official formal guidance: She was simply told that when she felt reasonably comfortable with the facts, she would shadow other, more experienced museum educators and would in this way learn their techniques and tricks of the trade. She found this to be rather intimidating but accepted the challenge.

Days passed, and then weeks. Without clear direction, Thandeka floundered as she struggled to find a focus in the mountain of material and get a grip on it. Not only had she read the official manuals from cover to cover, but she also had searched for and found information on the Holocaust in books, in films, and on the Internet. She found this information overwhelming but persevered nevertheless. Clarity eventually seeped in through the doors of her consciousness as she came to the conclusion that she could not possibly absorb all the knowledge related to the Holocaust and should rather focus on elements of it that interested her. In this way, she reasoned, she would automatically transfer her passion, and hence her knowledge, to the learners:

So it’s very, very hard to also think, you know, what I should focus on. That’s one of the first questions [I had] when I was learning: What should I focus on? And then slowly I learned that really it’s best to focus on what I’m interested in, where I’m passionate . . . because if it’s not something that I’m passionate about or that I don’t feel comfortable or confident with, then



I can't give my best to the learners—because it's ultimately an experience, as well, for them.

This kind of introspection characterized Thandeka's depth as a Holocaust educator. She was aware of both her shortcomings and her strengths. At the same time, she was conscious of her responsibilities as a museum educator, which were not only to teach the facts but also to implement the museum's educational goal: to create “upstanders” in the face of injustice who “see themselves as agents and shapers of their world, capable of making a difference” (Freedman, 2014, p. 139). She took this role as a museum educator seriously:

In my opinion, the role of the guide is to . . . facilitate the experience, this learning of the Holocaust. I think the Holocaust is, especially for a young person, a very shocking, deeply disturbing aspect of our history. I think it takes a certain maturity to be able to internalize, to grasp, and for me, personally, I think, for it not to wound . . . I can't think of a better word.

Although she is primarily an English speaker, as the only museum educator who could also speak isiZulu, even if somewhat imperfectly, Thandeka did most of the facilitating for the many isiZulu-speaking learners who visited the permanent exhibition. This meant that she conducted the initial session, in which learners were familiarized with the key concepts of the Holocaust before being escorted through the exhibition by the guides. After the exhibition, the learners were brought together again as a group to discuss what they had learned and to try to make sense of some of the questions that had arisen during the course of their tour. The learners were encouraged to explore what their own actions might be in situations where discrimination or racism arose. Would they be bystanders, victims, or even perpetrators? If bystanders, would they be active or passive in speaking out against injustice? This was sometimes a difficult task in her view, as learners often struggled with the concepts and sometimes made emotional connections to their own life stories.

Conceptually, merely understanding the Holocaust is difficult, and for some history learners it is almost impossible to understand in its complexity and enormity. Compounding this, many South African history teachers have “little or no knowledge of the Holocaust” (Nates, 2011, p. 9) and are therefore unable to manage Holocaust education effectively in the classroom, resulting in their possible avoidance of such a sensitive topic. As a result, the museum educators were often left to deal with difficult questions that lay beyond the scope of the curriculum but were nevertheless raised by both learners and their teachers during their visits to the Holocaust museum, such as “Why did Hitler hate

the Jews?” and “Why didn't the Jews fight back?” These are sensitive issues that can be very demanding for educators.

For Thandeka, this situation was exacerbated by the fact that many of the learners and teachers knew little or nothing about Jews or Judaism, and she included herself in this group:

You know, I didn't know *anything* about Judaism, at . . . all, before I worked in the museum, so one of the first questions I ask in my introduction is: “What does it mean to be Jewish? Does anyone know anyone who's Jewish?” So I think it's important for us to deal with that first, actually.

Moreover, for many South African educators, teaching about the Holocaust is an emotional experience. Black Africans like Thandeka's family, who lived through the apartheid era in South Africa, were subjected to many discriminatory laws and violations of human rights similar to those that were experienced by the Jews in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1938. Forced removals, the need to carry identification, being unable to use White facilities such as benches and beaches, and the prohibition of mixed marriages, for instance, were familiar to Thandeka's family. Holocaust education can churn up memory wounds that are raw for Black South Africans, resulting in classroom lessons that may be fraught with deep emotional connections. The result is that some “educators cannot divorce their own personal history from that of the required curriculum and find it increasingly difficult to teach about this period” (Nates, 2010, p. S19).

Thandeka was no exception. Like many of the teachers, learners, and other museum educators, she found education about the Holocaust to be a emotional experience, as “the narratives of the Holocaust illustrate the extremes of human behavior, of hatred and cruelty but also of courage and humanity,” while raising “important moral, theological, and ethical questions” (Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust education, 2015). Emotion lurks in many guises in Holocaust education: in personal connections that are forged, in the disturbing content of the exhibits, in intense discussions about the consequences of the Holocaust, in the affective strategies employed by the museum educators to emphasize certain exhibition material, and in dealing with emotional learners. According to Paul Salmons (2001),

There is a potential for real harm when we teach the Holocaust. We need to be sensitive to the emotional impact that this subject can have on young people. We need strategies for moving students without traumatizing them, for ensuring they understand the enormity of the events without titillating or horrifying them with graphic images. (p. 8)

While emotions generally are regarded as an important element of the educational process, where there is a confrontation with the Holocaust, there is also the danger of “emotional overload or emotional resistance” (FRA, 2010, p. 12). Thandeka felt this keenly and was sometimes so overwhelmed by the material that she simply chose to avoid those educational elements that touched her too deeply, such as films. She explained it thus:

I can't watch any more videos or movies or whatever. My heart can't take it. It's too, too, too much. It's just . . . I just can't. I can do this on a daily basis because it's also my job. So you learn to sort of separate it out.

In fact, according to her, she did not even like to go through the exhibition on her own, as she felt that it was “too much like going to a cemetery.”

Compounding this emotional situation was the thorny issue of language, which Thandeka placed at the top of her list of pedagogical challenges. Language issues can be problematic even for first-language English speakers as they conceptually tussle with Holocaust issues. For many South African learners, English is a second, third, or even fourth language, as there are 11 official languages in South Africa. Further, according to Tali Nates (2011), few, if any, Holocaust resources exist in the mother tongue of many learners. Moreover, language is intertwined with the legacy of racial discrimination in education in South Africa, a difficulty faced by many Black African teachers today. In fact, one of the triggers for the 1976 Soweto Uprising by Black learners, according to Sifiso Ndlovu (2006), was the fact that Afrikaans was being enforced as the language of instruction for certain subjects.

Through her reading, however, Thandeka found some answers to her language questions. For instance, she found that educators should strive for precision in language. As the *Guidelines for Teachers* provided by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (2015) warns, “Words that describe human behavior often have multiple meanings” (n.p.). Taking heed of this warning, she chose her words carefully, for instance, avoiding the word *German* when she meant specifically Nazi. As she discovered, language plays a complex role in Holocaust education in a Third World educational environment such as South Africa.

## DEFT BRUSHSTROKES HIGHLIGHT TWO MAJOR LANGUAGE CHALLENGES

Two major language challenges beset Thandeka. She used language to set the scene when she presented the introductory session: Language was a tool to facilitate learning. For English learners, facilitation was conducted in English. For those whose mother-tongue was isiZulu, she spoke isiZulu. However, as she exclaimed, “My hugest, hugest,

hugest challenge is when I guide learners whose mother tongue is neither English nor isiZulu, but rather another African language, through the museum.” In such cases, she confessed, she mostly gave the introduction in isiZulu or English or a combination of the two, but she was severely hampered by the learners’ lack of comprehension. According to her, this restricted her presentation considerably, and she limited her teaching to ensuring that the learners simply understood certain key words related to the Holocaust to enable them to have some, albeit limited, understanding of the concepts as they were guided through the exhibition, mostly by English-speaking guides.

Her second major challenge was one that she believed was substantially different from the challenges faced by the other museum educators: that posed by the isiZulu language itself. According to Thandeka, the problem lay in the fact that certain English words simply do not exist in isiZulu. She explained, “The Zulu language is very different from the English language . . . there are many words in English, a more modern language than Zulu, that aren’t in the Zulu language.” So when guiding or facilitating in English, Thandeka would simply say “discrimination” or “antisemitism” or “prejudice.” When speaking in isiZulu, however, she was often at a loss for words. For instance, she explained, when she spoke about antisemitism, “There’s no word for antisemitism in Zulu, so I would have to translate that and say, ‘It is the dislike or hatred of Jews.’” Instead of using a single word, as in English, she had to use three or four sentences in isiZulu to explain a single concept, a situation that frustrated her. These concepts are fundamental in Holocaust education, and she was never sure of whether her explanations were fully correct or apt, or even whether the learners actually understood the essential ideas she was trying to explain.

So those are my huge challenges, because those three words in the English language [*discrimination, antisemitism, and prejudice*], they’ve got different nuances, they *mean* different things, and there’s more of a power when you use them in certain contexts, while in Zulu there’s just one word for these concepts and nuances.

Such translation attempts were not only time-consuming; they also meant that guiding and facilitating in English were far more personally powerful for her than was guiding in isiZulu, which she felt cut what she had to say in half. In this language, she was constantly paring down the content, which resulted in her feeling that she was dumbing down her presentation. Consequently, she believed that she was able to communicate less effectively with the learners from disadvantaged Black African schools, a situation that confounded her moral sensibility and separated her from her colleagues.



In desperation, she turned to her supervisor at the local university, where she was studying towards a master's degree in communication. She explained:

I asked him what I should do in this situation. I told him, "I feel that I can't use the wonderful flowery words that the other guides use, as those words are way over the heads of the learners. Yet I feel that I don't have the tools to effectively transfer the ideas and concepts that are so necessary to explain this history to the learners."

Her supervisor validated her concerns, saying, "Yes, I understand your dilemma, Thandeka." Then he said, "Let me ask you this. Are you doing the whole Bantu education thing, where you're doing separate sorts of things for different race groups?"<sup>5</sup>

She answered, "I try so hard not to, but how do I keep it simple enough for them to understand? Do I go into a wonderful question-answer-get-everybody-involved sort of thing, or should I be providing factual, simple information?" She continued:

For example, the other day I had a visit from students from a wonderful, brilliant school. It's a girls' school with a majority of Black learners, but they do have also Indian learners, Colored<sup>6</sup> learners, and White learners. What I did with them is this: I had a worksheet where I had written "before the Holocaust," "during the Holocaust," and "after the Holocaust," and I included quotes from young learners from Poland, Latvia, Germany, and other countries, just quotes about what they experienced, and I had their photographs, as well. Each of the learners got a copy, and I had different learners read the quotes aloud, and we tried to analyze and speak about the quote. Now I can't possibly do that with a learner who has no idea what the Holocaust is.

The supervisor responded, "So, Thandeka, maybe you've answered your own question. What does your response tell you about how you should teach this section?"

She thought for a moment, she told me, and responded, "Of course! It really depends on the audience that I have. I cannot do the same program for one group that I would do for another group of learners!"

This was an *aha* moment for Thandeka, as she suddenly understood that it was necessary to adapt her program and presentation to suit the needs and abilities of the different groups and that she simply could not do exactly the same work with every group. She had to take their varied and complex cultural, educational, and linguistic backgrounds into account [Fig 3].



**FIG. 3.** Students from Berea Primary School, in the Anne Frank Room at the Durban Holocaust Centre. Photo courtesy of the Durban Holocaust Centre.

It thus was clear to her that in these situations, far from helping her to bridge the communication gap between her and the learners visiting the Holocaust museum, language created a barrier. Further, for certain learners, comprehension was confounded not only by spoken language, but also by the language of the Holocaust.

### PLANTING THE SEEDS

As I put the final touches to Thandeka's portrait, I see that I must paint her as a perfectionist. She wanted to be the best Holocaust educator she could be, and so she strove constantly to learn and improve even as she acknowledged that there was still room for her to grow. According to her,

I want to know as much as possible. I want to be the best facilitator-guide possible. So for me, my knowledge is nowhere near where I would like it to be, nowhere near, so that's why I keep having to read more and more and more and more.

Thandeka was fervent in her belief that teaching about the Holocaust would ultimately result in anti-racism and the prevention of genocide; she was optimistic about the long-term outcome of the Holocaust education program. She believed that through it, learners would gain enough knowledge to put them on a path that would last beyond their visit to the Holocaust museum. She was pragmatic about the shortcomings of a single three-hour tour, but, she explained, "What I'm hoping the students get out of it is more of a lifelong process that can happen, rather than something in three or four hours . . . but hopefully the seeds are planted."

### THE PORTRAIT IS COMPLETE: TIME FOR REFLECTION

My artist's brush is still as I step back from Thandeka's portrait and contemplate both what has been revealed and what would be added were I to paint it again. The portrait illustrates how Thandeka's personal experiences and

understanding of her own story influenced and shaped the way she taught the Holocaust. She continued to grow both personally and professionally, using her burgeoning understanding to touch the hearts and minds of the learners. It was evident that when she taught about the Holocaust, Thandeka connected to it deeply, both intellectually and emotionally, and though she was sometimes overwhelmed by the enormity of her task, she grappled with the various challenges head-on.



**FIG. 4.** The Children's Memorial in the Garden of Remembrance at the Durban Holocaust Center. Photo courtesy of Nicola Meyer from her blog, *Run on Coffee*.

However, this completed portrait is static and finite, unlike life, which is fluid and changeable. Young families grow and drift away from their hometowns to take up new challenges and opportunities in other parts of the country, and this was the case with Thandeka. This passionate, committed young woman quite recently left her position at the Holocaust museum to work in another part of South Africa, and her current position lies outside the Holocaust education sector. Unfortunately, a high staff turnover is, according to Lorna Abungu (2002), one of the challenges faced by African museums.

Ultimately, though, the work that she did at the Holocaust museum sowed seeds in the fertile imaginations of many learners. This is supported by a quote from a learner who visited the museum: "Today's program was the best; it really changed my attitude towards the way I think of other people. I feel like a different person now" (South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation, 2014). Also, in line with her personal understanding of some of the potential messages of the Holocaust and her passion for improving South African society, Thandeka carries her teaching

experience and its meaning with her and continues to make an impact on the world around her wherever and whenever she is able.

Thandeka's portrait stands as a reminder to all who view it that the meaning we make from both learning about and teaching the Holocaust will continue to influence and affect the lives of those touched by dedicated museum educators such as she. The Holocaust now has become a key part of Thandeka's personal portrait. She will continue to add to it elsewhere as she seeks to influence and improve South African society.

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#### END NOTES

[1] All the names in this article are pseudonyms, as per the ethical clearance directive of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

[2] The population of South Africa is approximately 53 million, of whom 43 million people are Black (Statistics South Africa, 2014, p. 8). The Jewish population of South Africa stands at approximately 67,000, that is, 0.1% of the entire population (American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, 2015).

[3] Brenda Gouws is the writer of these reflections of her interview experiences. Professor Johan Wassermann, her supervisor, was instrumental in guiding, editing, and advising. His valuable insight and assistance is acknowledged with gratitude.

[4] The Holocaust: Lessons for Humanity (DVD), The Holocaust: Lessons for Humanity: Learner's Interactive Resource Book, The Holocaust: Lessons for Humanity: Educator's Resource Manual and Guide for Introductory Film, and other resource materials for Holocaust education are available via the website of the South African Holocaust and Genocide Foundation (South African Holocaust & Genocide Foundation, 2011).

[5] Bantu education was the term used to describe the racist, unequal, and oppressive education provided for Black Africans during the apartheid era. Prior to 1953, when the Bantu Education Act was implemented, most Black schools were independent and run by missionaries. However, after 1953, Bantu education was brought under a separate school system. Its aim was to create a Black workforce that would ultimately service a white-run economy, and it completely ignored the aspirations of the individual, advocating the view that Black people and communities were essentially rural and unchanging. The origin of this philosophy lay in a document that "called for 'Christian National Education' and advocated separate schools for each of South Africa's 'population' groups—Whites, Africans, Indians, and Coloreds" (South Africa: Overcoming Apartheid, Building Democracy, 2015, p. 1). There were enormous disparities in the funding provided for the different groups, with Black learners receiving a tiny percentage of the amount provided for White learners. School buildings were dilapidated, classes overflowed, there was a lack of teacher training, and textbooks were scarce.

[6] The term Colored is used in South Africa to refer to individuals of mixed racial heritage. For example, a child having a White mother and a Black father would be classified as Colored.



Stephen Herz recounts his son's response to seeing the ovens of Auschwitz and the same piles of suitcases where one bearing the name Fanny Klinger (p. 6) rests. Pair this with Norita Dittberner-Jax's "Name Tag" to prompt a discussion on using artifacts to teach about the Holocaust.

*Stephen Herz*

## *My Son Returns From Auschwitz,*

tells me how this oven  
made him want to puke

when he saw the firm's name: *Topf*  
engraved on the door

like it was some toaster  
or oven for your kitchen:

tells me how another name  
caught his eye

written on the side  
of this battered black bag:

*H-E-R-Z*  
spelling *HERZ*

his name  
and my name

and my grandfather's name  
and my grandfather's father's name

and the German name  
for heart.



Elizabeth Spalding writes, "As faculty at the University of Kentucky's College of Education, I was asked to lead pre- and in-service educators on the March of Remembrance and Hope, an extension of the March of the Living for university students of all religions. My own knowledge of the Holocaust at that time had been acquired mainly from films, television, and novels; on this trip, I was overwhelmed by what I learned. When we finally reached Majdanek, I was reluctant to enter the barrack; I felt I had seen enough. Yet I had come to be a witness, and witness I must. So I entered, and forced myself to look. This poem is a result of that experience."

We never can know what moment of Holocaust history—which person or place, which story, which artifact—will be the one that causes a learner to reflect and say, "And then I understood and wept." Illustrate this poem with Debbie Teichholz Guedalia's portraits of Majdanek on pp. 105–110.

*Elizabeth Spalding*

## *Majdanek*

What did the people of Lublin think as they saw  
The road being built to Majdanek  
The barracks going up  
The watchtowers rising  
The barbed wire fence with a death's head sign that declared "*Achtung!*"?

If not residents of Lublin,  
Then who won the contract on  
Rubber seals for the gas chambers  
Bricks for the crematoria  
And the coke that fired them?  
Who delivered seven thousand seven hundred kilograms  
Of Zyklon B?

What did they think as three hundred thousand people, dazed,  
Disembarked from cattle cars and marched through their town  
Clinging to a single suitcase that held all their worldly possessions  
And the delusion of resettlement  
That made the inevitable bearable?



Did music blaring from two loudspeakers really mask the sound  
of twelve solid hours of machine gun fire that killed  
eighteen thousand in a single day?  
Who served the executioners their meals  
When they took their breaks in town?

What did they think was burning in Majdanek  
As two hundred thirty-five thousand corpses went up in smoke?

And when the camp was liberated  
What math did they use to calculate  
How many square acres thirteen hundred cubic meters  
Of compost rich in ash and bone could fertilize?  
How fifteen hundred living inmates could wear  
Eight hundred thousand pairs of shoes?

I wandered through those shoes.  
They filled three prison barracks at Majdanek.  
Floor to ceiling, rows on rows.  
I could not comprehend this crime.  
The numbers were too huge.

But when I saw a pair of red high-heeled sandals  
Still bright among the piles of rotting shoes  
I stopped.

What kind of woman would wear  
high-heeled sandals to a death camp?  
I realized: my mother.  
And then I understood and wept.



Photographer Debbie Teicholz Guedalia writes, "I went on a six-day organized trip to Poland. I visited Warsaw, Krakow, Plaszow, Majdanek, Lublin, Auschwitz-Birkenau, and the Lopuchowo Forest. I had never before wanted to visit the camps, satisfied to know that I was alive in spite of them. My father was born in Poland, and he refused to return to the country where he spent his youth. Yet, I decided to take this pilgrimage because I had the opportunity to experience it with friends whose sensitivity, I knew, would provide the support I needed." This photo essay is a record of her trip.

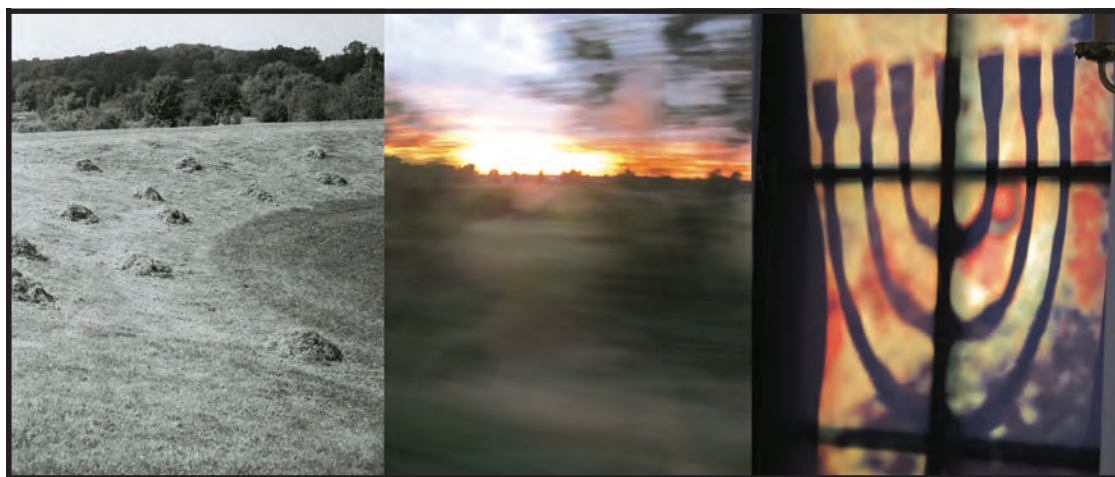
*Debbie Teicholz Guedalia*

## The Earth Has Not Forgotten: A Journey to Poland



Krakow:

Standing on a bridge, we looked at archival images from our guide's book: a sign forbidding Jews to enter; Jews on the same bridge over the Vistula River during their deportation to the ghetto.



Plaszow:

We stood on a field of freshly cut grass, a few feet away from the enormous memorial that commemorates thousands of Jews killed and buried there in mass graves.



There I saw an elderly Polish woman in her seventies sit down on the ground, take off her shirt, and sunbathe, in her bra.



Was this her hometown? Did she see the prisoners walk up this hill to their deaths? Did she hear their screams? She is lying, sunning herself, on top of their graves. Does she hear them now, with her ear to the ground?



Auschwitz:  
Before I was born, before you were born ...





SS officers sat at this desk, looked out that window at thousands of people—my parents could have been there, my parents' friends—and as they took in the view, the officers surely laughed and drank their coffee.



Auschwitz-Birkenau:  
When I walked through the gates, I was astonished by the size of the place.  
You can fit a lot of people into one square mile.



Yet, I still could not grasp the overwhelming number of people who were forced, for years, to enter these rooms ...



and who never left. They are still here.



I never could have imagined that I would walk into, and out of, a crematorium.



I had to confront the reality of how many people and how much work it took to design and to build these places, where we can still witness the physical framework of methodical, pure evil.





Traveling:

Every sunset in Poland looked like the Earth was on fire. The Earth has not forgotten.



Majdanek:

Pretty flower boxes, lush green forests, the sound of a train announcing its arrival.

Today, trains still run on the same tracks that led the Jews to their final destination.



The Majdanek Memorial, an exposed round structure with an open pit in the middle, was built at the far end of the camp. The center of the memorial is a huge, circular urn, shaped like a saucer. It contains soil mixed with human ashes and fragments of bone from the human bodies burned in the crematoria and found here after liberation.

Over 360,000 people were murdered on this site.



On August 11, 2010, a mysterious fire spread through the original wooden barracks at Majdanek. Ten thousand pairs of shoes, which had been found on the site after the Holocaust and had served as a memorial to those to whom they belonged, burned. There were no smoke alarms or sprinkler systems. When we visited, we were told that the camp had 24-hour surveillance. Those shoes, evidence of history, have vanished, turned into ash.



Lopuchowo Forest:  
In August 1941, two thousand Jews were marched into this forest, shot, and buried here in mass graves. As long as the trees still sway with fear, we will visit and protect these sacred sites. We will breathe new life into the stories of those who are beneath this very earth, and we will share the history of those who survived.

*The archival photographs in this essay are reproduced here with permission of Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.*



Rajzel Zychlinsky's portrait of "a survivor / of Hitler's gas chambers" confronts us with the realities of survivors' nighttime ghosts and, in so doing, haunts us, too.

*Rajzel Zychlinsky*

## *The Undarkened Window*

In the daytime, I see him in the street  
in a dark suit,  
shaved,  
combed,  
wearing a tie —  
at night the light shines in his window  
across from my window.

A survivor  
of Hitler's gas chambers,  
he sails at night around  
his undarkened window —  
a wandering ship  
on oceans of darkness,  
and no port  
allows it to enter,  
so it may anchor  
and darken.

Only in the mornings  
does the light go out,  
the sickly yellow light  
in his window.

*Translated from the Yiddish by Barnett Zumoff*



Survivor Arno Roland tells us, "This was written in a moment of utter environmental quiet, without a sound inside or out. Surrounded by total silence, I wondered: What happened to everybody I ever and never knew?"

*Arno Roland*

## *Settings*

There is a house with many chairs.  
They are not standing by themselves, not alone, as it were;  
they are standing in groups.  
There are some gracious Windsor chairs  
gathered around a slender cricket table and an old pub bench,  
waiting for friends to drink.  
Others, alongside a farmhouse table thick with generations of wax  
and behind a heavy bench  
invite company for a meal.  
Postcards and photographs,  
images of people, depictions of places,  
perch atop two benches beside a kitchen table.  
There is a fireplace  
flanked by cushioned sofas;  
in between, a crude old plank of wood well worn,  
waiting for voices to talk, to laugh, softly, loudly.

Outside on the patio  
there linger mushroom-shaped tree stumps  
around a raised stone slab  
for balmy summer evenings  
to catch a cooling breeze



to watch the sun set  
and the twinkling lights of the town near on the horizon  
the horizon that harbors the faces of those  
who did not come to sit on  
the chairs  
the benches  
the sofas  
the tree stumps.

They are the unremembered faces of the playmates of childhood  
never again to mingle with my life.  
Faded, the faces of the comrades of youth  
the faces of family long gone  
of relatives scattered, dispersed,  
unrecognized, the fleeting faces met in war  
dissolved to mist  
and vanished behind that horizon,  
the faces unmet, unseen,  
hovering over  
empty chairs  
vacant benches  
idle sofas  
bare tree stumps.



## About the Contributors

### Editor

**KAREN SHAWN**, Ph.D., is visiting associate professor of Jewish education at the Azrieli Graduate School and editor of this journal. The founder of the Holocaust Educators' Consortium, an international, interreligious community of practice, Shawn has spoken and written extensively on Holocaust education. A recipient of the Covenant Award for Excellence in Jewish Education (2000), her most recent publication is "How Will We Teach About the Holocaust When the Survivors Can No Longer Testify?" in *Tworcze praktyki polonistyczne (Creative Polish Language and Literature Practices)*, Krakow, Taiwan Universitas, 2015.

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### Authors

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## Acknowledgments, Credits, and Permissions

Many thanks to Myra Berkovitz, education specialist, and Susan Dubin, librarian, of the Sperling Kronberg Mack Holocaust Resource Center in Las Vegas (Nevada); Doug Unger, Chair of the [Nevada] Governor's Advisory Council on Education Relating to the Holocaust; and Lyn Robinson, photographer, for permission to publish the cover photos of survivors from the Center's exhibit *Wall of Hope*.

We thank Daniel L. Berek for the photo of the Korczak Medal, p. 22; Tomek Bogacki for the paintings, pp.19 and 21; and Mariola Strahlberg, Founder and Executive Director of the Janusz Korczak Association of the USA, for securing these photos for us.

Our thanks to Lore Baer, Myra Genn, Frieda Harris, Arno Roland, and Claire Schuschny for their permission to reprint their works originally published in *In the Aftermath of the Holocaust: Three Generations Speak* (ed. K. Shawn, 1995, Englewood, New Jersey: Moriah School).

We thank Norita Dittberner-Jax for permission to publish "Name Tag," and Alan Kaufman for permission to publish "My Mother Doesn't Know Who Allen Ginsberg Is," reprinted from *Blood to Remember: American Poets on the Holocaust* (2007, Time Being Books).

We thank the Durban Holocaust Centre for the photos on pp. 95 and 99.

We thank Stephen Herz for permission to publish "My Son Returns From Auschwitz," reprinted from his book *Marked: Poems of the Holocaust* (NYQ Books, 2014).

We thank Debbie Teicholz Guedalia for her photo essay, which included archival photographs reproduced with permission of Yad Vashem and the USHMM.

We thank Marek Kanter, the son of Rajzel Zychlinsky, for his generous permission to publish "The Undarkened Window."

We thank Seymour Mayne for permission to publish "Yiddish," reprinted from *Ricochet: Word Sonnets* (Mosaic Press, 2004).

We thank Nicola Meyer for permission to use the photos (pp. 96, 100) from her *Run On Coffee* blog.

We thank Elizabeth Rosner for permission to publish "Chocolate," reprinted from *Gravity* (2014, Atelier 26 Books).

We thank Joanna Wróblewska-Kujawska, the great-niece of Zofia Nałkowska, for her gracious generosity in allowing us to publish "In the Darkness," and Dr. Marzena Kubacz, director of the Nałkowska Museum, for her kind permission to publish the photo of Nałkowska on p. 9.

We thank our project manager, Steven Schloss; our art director, Emily Scherer Steinberg; and our copy editor, David B. Greenberg, for their endless patience, long hours, remarkable attention to detail, and excellent work.





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