

# MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



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## UN MARKS THE HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

Over six decades after 6 million Jews, nearly a third of the total, and countless other minorities were butchered in the Nazi German Holocaust, it is more vital than ever to learn from the tragedy to prevent further atrocities, United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned in his speech on January 27.

the fourth since the General Assembly instituted the annual commemoration.

"But we can and must do more if we are to make that hope a reality," he stressed. "We must uphold the standards and laws that the United Nations has put in place to protect people and fight impunity for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Our world continues to be plagued by ruthless violence, utter disregard for human rights, and the targeting of people solely for who they are."

As well as the ceremony, chaired by Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Kiyo Akasaka, the UN marked the occasion with panel discussions and other events, including an initiative by the UN Department of Public Information called the "Footprints of Hope," which brings the global network of the UN Information Centers together with local schools to further youngsters' understanding of the Holocaust and their respect for human rights through documentary and film resources.

A new exhibit has also opened in the Visitors' Lobby about the Nazi regime called "Deadly Medicine: Creating the Master Race."

General Assembly President Miguel d'Escoto echoed Mr. Ban's call to the world to learn the lesson of the Holocaust. "We need to move beyond our statements of grief and memory, however powerfully felt, and work to develop new ways of thinking about the Holocaust, about genocide, about the apparently bottomless capacity for peoples' cruelty to each other," he said in a message.

"That capacity is shared by all of us. At their core, all genocides, all holocausts, start with the alienation, demonization and the marginalization of the "Other" – those citizens of another religion, another race, ethnicity, another set of political ideas, or another sexual orientation than our own," he added, calling for a struggle against

intolerance and for relationships that replace "us and them" with "we and ours."

Also about unlearned lessons of the Holocaust was the speech of Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council. Here are some excerpts from his very moving speech delivered at the UN headquarters in New York.

"On April 11, 1995 50 years to the day of liberation of the concentration camp of *Buchenwald* I was invited to *Buchenwald*. This was my second visit. The first time I arrived there, together with my older brother Naftalie, in January of 1945. I was seven-and-a-half-years old. We've got two prisoner numbers, one after another, and at that moment, I lost my identity. I was nobody. I was a number. On my second visit in 1995 I was a citizen of the independent state, the state of Israel, and I was a Chief Rabbi of the state of Israel. Not nobody, but somebody, and not a number any more.

You will agree that many things have changed during these 50 years. May be you will say it is time to open a new chapter. Let's forget. Let's forgive. I came to tell you: We cannot forget. It is impossible to forget and we are not authorized to for-

Holocaust, not because of the numbers, the gas chambers but because of the systematic quest to liquidate a nation. First Hitler declared it in his work "Mein Kampf." Years later came *Nuremberg Laws* that declared that Jews have no rights to possessions, to freedom, not to life. Years later came the *Kristallnacht*, when 1500 synagogues were burned and 30,000 Jews sent to the concentration camps. What was the reaction of the free world? What did they see? What did they say? Now we know – almost nothing.

Three years later was *Baby Yar*. Thirty three thousand, seven hundred seventy-one victims: children, babies, women. What was the reaction? Almost none. Three months later the *Wannsee Conference* took place near Berlin: How to liquidate the Jewish people. They called it the "Final Solution." The final solution to solve the world's problems would be to get rid of the Jews, because we are the international poisoner.

Let me tell you several things about anti-Semitism. I believe that UN by declaring January 27 the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust is looking not to



Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, Yad Vashem Council Chairman, addresses Holocaust Memorial Ceremony.

"We must continue to examine why the world failed to prevent the Holocaust and other atrocities since. That way, we will be better armed to defeat anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance," he said in a message marking the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

"We must continue to teach our children the lessons of history's darkest chapters. That will help them do a better job than their elders in building a world of peaceful coexistence. We must combat Holocaust denial, and speak out in the face of bigotry and hatred," he added in the message, read at a ceremony at UN Headquarters in New York by Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro.

Mr. Ban noted that new initiatives in Holocaust remembrance and education have given an authentic basis for hope, which is the theme of this year's observance,



Holocaust Memorial Ceremony attendees at the UN observe Moment of Silence.

give. Even if I am a man of forgiveness and kindness, I have no right to forgive on behalf of my father, who was murdered in Treblinka at the age of fifty, of my 13-year old brother Schmulik. I have no mandate from my mother, who died from torture, and starvation, and diseases in concentration camp of *Ravensbruk*, and my forty-two cousins. I cannot forgive.

Sixty years later the UN was clever and kind enough to declare January 27, the day of liberation of Auschwitz by Red Army, the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. Sixty years after the horror, but better later than never.

I want to share with you some of my thoughts. Nothing can be compared to

just condemn anti-Semitism, but to defeat it, if it's possible. Anti-Semitism is a spiritual thesis, which has nothing to do with logic. Why were we the target of the liquidation? Did we threaten any nation in the world? Did we have an army?

What did we do? Why did you hate us? Why did you kill us?

In Poland, where I was born, it was said that the society rejects us, Jews, because we are different. We wear beards, black hats, we look strange. If we were like everyone else the society would embrace us. Next to Poland, in Germany, many Jews were like everybody else. They contributed to arts, literature, politics, finances, they were doctors, lawyers,

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## BLUEPRINTS FOR AUSCHWITZ CAMP FOUND IN GERMANY

The original construction plans believed used for a major expansion of the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz in 1941 have been found in a Berlin flat, Germany's *Bild* newspaper reported.

The daily printed three architect's drawings on yellowing paper from the batch of 28 pages of blueprints it obtained. One



One of the barracks and a watch tower are seen in the former Nazi death camp Auschwitz in Oswiecim, Poland.

has an 11.66 meter by 11.20 meter room marked "Gaskammer" (gas chamber) that was part of a "delousing facility."

The plans, published ahead of the 70th anniversary of the "Kristallnacht" also include a crematorium and a "L. Keller" — an abbreviation for "Leichenkeller" or corpse cellar.

A drawing of the building for Auschwitz's main gate was also found in the documents that *Bild* said were believed to have been discovered when a Berlin flat was cleaned out.

The mass-circulation newspaper quoted

Hans-Dieter Kreikamp, head of the federal archives office in Berlin, as saying the blueprints offered "authentic evidence of the systematically planned genocide of European Jews."

There were mass killings of about one million Jews before the Nazi's "Final Solution" was formulated in late 1941. The decision to kill Europe's 11 million Jews was made at the Wannsee Conference in January 1942.

A copy of the minutes, known as the "Wannsee Protocol," is one of the most important documents from the war.

The newly found Auschwitz blueprints are dated October 23 1941 and could offer historians earlier evidence of Nazi plans to kill Jews on a mass scale, *Bild* said.

"These documents reveal that everyone who had even anything remotely to do with the planning and construction of the concentration camp must have known that people were to be gassed to death in assembly-line fashion," *Bild* wrote.

"The documents refute once and for all claims by those who deny the Holocaust even took place," it added.

The concentration camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland was the largest — at least 1.1 million Jews were killed there.

Auschwitz I was set up in May 1940 in an old Polish army barracks. The first victims were gassed in September 1941. Auschwitz II, or Birkenau, opened in October 1941. Four large gas chambers were added to the camp in January 1942.

## WITON TRAIN TO COMMEMORATE SAVED JEWISH CHILDREN

The CD Czech railway operator will on September 1, 2009, dispatch a train from Prague to London to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the rescue transports of Jewish children from former Czechoslovakia organized by Briton Nicholas Winton in 1939.

Within the project, The "Winton Train — Inspired by the Good" art contest was launched for secondary school and university students aged 15-26.

They will compete in the categories of photography, literature, plastic art and film. All artifacts will be connected by the topics of humanity, decency and charity.

The winners will get a free ticket for the "Winton Train" from Prague to London.

The train, with a steam engine and period wagons, will follow exactly the same

route as 70 years ago

Winton saved a total of 669 Jewish children who were transported to Britain before the war erupted.

He had to secure for departure permits for all children from Germans, entry permits from the British authorities and the admission to British families. Other Jewish children who stayed in the country ended in concentration camps, where most of them died.

Winton received a high Czech state decoration, and Queen Elizabeth II promoted him to knighthood.

Some of the people whose lives Winton saved, and their descendants, will travel on the special train later this year.

Winton, who will turn 100 then, will probably attend the train's festive arrival in London.

## UN MARKS THE HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY

(Continued from page 1)

bankers, politicians. Did they like us, did they embrace us? So if you don't like us because we are different and you don't like us because we are the same as you — make a decision of what you want from us.

In Europe, they say it is not your home, we hate the foreigners, go to your home and we'll embrace you. So we went to our home. Now that we are home do you like us? Ask our neighbors... The anti-Semitism is beyond logic.

A friend of mine, a Holocaust survivor, once said that Auschwitz was on a different planet. I told him that I totally disagree, that it happened here, on our planet. They were people like us — they liked music, literature, poetry, they could kiss their own babies and they could tear our babies into two pieces. I saw it with my own eyes. We can't escape the story of Holocaust by saying that it happened on another planet. They were human beings like us, and if they could do what they did, we have to investigate. How can we promise that these things will never happen again? Did

we learn something sixty-four years later?

Two million children in Africa died of starvation twenty years ago, and what did the world do? A million people were killed in Kosovo ten years ago for what? It means that the world had learned nothing from the Holocaust. We have to study from the very beginning. Every day, eighteen thousand children in the world die of starvation, and this is happening more than sixty years after the Holocaust. And this means that we have learned nothing from the Holocaust.

There is an alley at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem lined with trees, each of which carries a name of a righteous gentile who saved Jews during the Holocaust. It is a small alley, but if the world was not silent, if the Vatican would say a word to condemn anti-Semitism and to fight Nazis this alley could stretch from Yad Vashem in Jerusalem to the UN building in New York.

This is my prayer to the Lord Almighty: Lord, make peace in Heaven and create peace among us and the entire world. And let us say amen."

## JEWISH ANGER AS POPE REINSTATES HOLOCAUST-DENIER

Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre slammed a Holocaust-denying English bishop whose excommunication has been cancelled by Pope Benedict XVI.

"It is scandalous that someone of this stature in the Church denies the Holocaust," the institution said in a statement referring to Bishop Richard Williamson, who has publicly denied the murder of six million Jews during World War II.

"Denial of the Holocaust not only insults the survivors, memory of the victims and the righteous among the nations who risked their lives to rescue the Jews, it is a brutal attack on truth," Yad Vashem said. "What kind of message is this sending regarding the Church's attitude toward the Holocaust?"

The Wiesenthal Center, an international Jewish human rights body, said: "The Pope's decision to welcome back such a hater into the Church lends moral credence to deniers of history's worst crime. In addition to Bishop Williamson's Holocaust denial looms the unchanging virulent anti-Semitism of the Society of Saint Pius as a whole," it said.

## WARSAW MARKS BORDERS OF FORMER GHETTO

Polish officials marked the border of the former Warsaw Ghetto with plaques and boundary lines traced in the ground to preserve the memory of the tragic World War II-era Jewish quarter.

The head of Poland's Jewish community, Piotr Kadlcik, called the project "very important" and "the fulfillment of a dream."

"For many years it was deliberate — no one really remembered that there used to be another city here, there used to be another reality," Kadlcik said.

The Warsaw Ghetto was set up by Nazi Germany in 1940, the year after it invaded and occupied Poland, sparking World War II. Over the next three years, half a million Jews were imprisoned in the overcrowded enclave, many dying of disease or hunger. For most, however, it served as a holding place before they were sent to the death camps.

Eleonora Bergman, the head of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, said marking the boundaries of the ghetto — shaped like a ragged puzzle piece in the center of the city — will help people understand the suffering better.

"It's not in a museum — it's in a real space," Bergman said. "It seems huge, but if you know half a million people lived here, you realize it was very overcrowded."

Krystyna Budnicka, an elderly woman who lived in the ghetto as a girl and escaped at age 11 through sewage canals, was among the group, and also praised the project.

"Many people don't know anything about the ghetto, and it's important to make them aware," said Budnicka, 76. "There was fear, hunger, extreme poverty, your life was constantly in danger. I was a child, but I realized I could die at any time."

For herself, though, she said it is some-

The pope cancelled the excommunication of Williamson and three other bishops in a bid to heal a 20-year schism with traditionalists led by rebel French archbishop Marcel Lefebvre.

The Roman Catholic Church published an edict lifting the 1998 sanction on Lefebvre's successor, Bernard Fellay, and three other bishops in his breakaway conservative movement, including Williamson.

He is on record as denying the existence of the gas chambers.

"I believe there were no gas chambers... I think that 200,000 to 300,000 Jews perished in Nazi concentration camps but none of them by gas chambers," Williamson was quoted as saying in an interview with Swedish SVT television.

"There was not one Jew killed by the gas chambers. It was all lies, lies, lies!" Italian Jewish groups criticized the decision as a "negative, worrying and incomprehensible signal."

Uneasy relations between the Vatican and Israel have been further strained by plans to declare Nazi-era Pope Pius XII a saint, despite widespread criticism of his inaction during the Holocaust.

times better not to reflect too much — and is strangely thankful that the whole area was leveled by the Nazis and later rebuilt. That way, she doesn't have to walk past the building where she lived with her parents, sister and six brothers — all of whom were killed in the Holocaust.



School children inspect a memorial plaque that marks the border of the former Warsaw Ghetto in Warsaw, Poland.

"It's the same place, but at the same time it's not the same place. Only the street names are the same," said Budnicka, who still lives within the boundaries of the former ghetto.

Officials said inhabitants in the area were supportive of the project, in some cases allowing markers to go up on private property.

Mayor Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz said she wants the city to remember the suffering of a people who made up a third of its population before the war.

## YAD VASHEM EXHIBITION AT THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

"Auschwitz: From the Depth of the Abyss," an exhibition by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial and Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem, was shown on 27 January at the European Parliament in Brussels in the framework of the annual International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

The exhibition comprises photographs from *The Auschwitz Album* and sketches by Jewish artist Zinovii Tolkatchev, a sol-

dier in the Red Army who was present at the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on 27 January 1945.

The International Holocaust Remembrance Day was marked at the European Parliament by a special ceremony co-organized by the European Coalition for Israel and the European Jewish Community Center, under the patronage of the parliament's president Hans-Gert Poettering.

# INTERNATIONAL HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY COMMEMORATED AROUND THE GLOBE

**ISRAEL** — An exhibition on Albanian Muslims who sheltered Jews during World War II opened in a mixed Jewish-Arab town of Ramle on January 27 to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day, but the event was overshadowed by tensions from Israel's offensive in the Gaza Strip.

It was the first time that Yad Vashem, Israel's national Holocaust memorial, has hosted a standing exhibition in Hebrew and Arabic. Holding the event in Ramle, a working-class town where thousands of Arabs live alongside Jews, underscored the organizers' goal of improving relations.

Some 20 Arab high school students toured the exhibition, confronted by a picture of strewn corpses in Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and then of black-and-white photographs of Albanian Muslims who sheltered Jews.



Holocaust survivors lay a wreath during a Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Students were clearly interested. But the Gaza offensive, which ended just over a week ago, was also on their minds.

Yad Vashem's chairman, Avner Shalev, said the timing of the exhibit was unintended, since it was planned months ago to coincide with the international Holocaust day. Yad Vashem hosts a much larger ceremony on Israel's annual Holocaust memorial day, which is marked according to the Hebrew calendar and takes place each spring.

Shalev said Yad Vashem does not involve itself in the modern-day Mideast conflict, but said he hoped the exhibition would inspire and provoke discussion.

"There is nothing in common with that period and this bitter conflict that goes on and on ... but if both sides recognize their right to exist, side-by-side, we'll find a way. This kind of exhibition sheds light, it gives hope of the humanity of human beings," Shalev said.

Yad Vashem has honored 63 Muslim Albanians for sheltering Jews during World War Two. They are among 22,000 people that the museum recognizes as "Righteous Among the Nations" — non-Jews who defied their communities and governments to save Jews from death at the hands of Nazis. The exhibition will run for three months in Ramle.

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**UKRAINE** — Jewish communities in Ukraine lit candles and observed a moment of silence to honor the 6 million Jewish Holocaust victims.

The moment of silence culminated a week of events to commemorate International Holocaust Remembrance Day and to remember the 1.5 million Jews killed in Ukraine, including meetings, roundtables, seminars and discussions, exhibitions and film screenings.

There was no official national ceremony,

but the Jewish Forum of Ukraine, the All-Ukrainian Association of Jews — made up of concentration camp and ghetto survivors — and the Ukrainian Center for Holocaust Studies co-hosted a memorial meeting called "Six Million Hearts" in Kiev on January 27 at the Academic Institution for Political and Ethnic Studies. At the same time, a group of Ukrainian youngsters gathered to mark the event at the Jewish Council of Ukraine.

Odessa, Dnepropetrovsk and Kharkov hosted commemorative meetings in remembrance of Holocaust.

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**GERMANY** — Germany's Central Council of Jews boycotted a ceremony in the Berlin parliament on Tuesday which commemorated victims of the Holocaust, saying their leaders had been treated without the proper respect in previous years.

The Council said its representatives would not attend a speech by President Horst Koehler for the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp, as they had not been greeted personally and had been treated merely as "onlookers."

"At some point, it is enough," Stephan Kramer, General Secretary of the Council, told Reuters.

He also complained that in previous years, the Council's leaders, including Holocaust survivors, had been given seats among other visitors in the gallery, rather than in the main plenary hall.

"This symbol speaks for itself and is unsur-



German President Horst Koehler delivers a speech during a commemoration service for the victims of national socialism at the Reichstag building, seat of the German lower house of Parliament Bundestag, in Berlin.

passable in terms of its lack of respect," Kramer told *Die Welt* newspaper.

He criticized politicians for failing to adjust the protocol at a time when Germany was seeing a record number of far-right crimes, and when Pope Benedict was rehabilitating a bishop who had denied the extent of the Holocaust.

In his speech, Koehler said Germans had a duty to protect Jews and the constant threat of anti-Semitic attacks was shameful in the country responsible for the Holocaust.

"It is a scandal that police have to protect Jewish places from old and new extremists," said Koehler. "Let us stand on the side of our fellow Jews. Whoever attacks them, attacks us all."

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**IRELAND** — Four Irish-resident survivors of Nazi concentration camps took part in the National Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration at the Mansion House.

In a moving ritual at the Dublin event, Tomi Reichental, Suzi Diamond, Jan Kaminski and Zoltan Zinn-Collis spoke separately and at intervals the words "I am here today not because of who I am but because of what I am. I am a survivor

of the Holocaust."

In the keynote address, President McAleese said: "Our job is not done until all can sleep easy in their beds at night and freely go about their business by day."

She said: "The wickedness and cruelty of the Holocaust lacerate our hearts to this day,



Sister Carmel Niland, a member of the Council of Christians and Jews, and Shiela Zietsman, a chaplain of East Glendalough School, lighting candles during the Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration at the Mansion House, Dublin.

as they should. God forbid that any generation will ever know the indulgence of forgetting or ever cease to probe how it all came to be. For somewhere in our world today, there are men and women who are teaching their children to hate the otherness of others and, in that toxic teaching, there germinates the seed that makes such a nightmare possible all over again."

She continued: "Never forgetting is our duty and our responsibility . . . Europe's laws and protective structures have progressed considerably these 60 years, but for all that, hate-filled ideas are still touted and individuals still live in fear, and our job is not done until all can sleep easy in their beds at night and freely go about their business by day."

The Lord Mayor of Dublin, Eibhlín Byrne, welcomed all at the beginning. Claes Ljungdahl, the Swedish Ambassador to Ireland, read the Stockholm Declaration of 2000, which promised to remember the victims and survivors of the Holocaust and reaffirmed humanity's common aspiration to tolerance and democracy.

A candle-lighting ceremony commemorated all who died in the camps.

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**SPAIN** — A Jewish human rights group has condemned the cancellation of this year's ceremony marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day by the Catalan government in Barcelona on the grounds of Israel's recent military operation in Gaza.

In *La Vanguardia* newspaper, an official from the city of Barcelona explained the cancellation by saying: "Marking the Jewish Holocaust while a Palestinian Holocaust is taking place is not right."

"This remark came in the midst of a flood of reports in the local media that drew analogies between Nazi atrocities and Israel's actions against Hamas terrorism. Such discourse unfortunately seems to have become endemic in Catalunya," *B'nai B'rith* Europe said in a statement. "Not only is it cynical to relate the systematic mass murder of six million Jews and numerous other victims at the hand of the Nazis to the deeply regrettable plight of the Palestinian population in Gaza. It also abets the agenda of Holocaust deniers and other revisionists who seek to down-

play or even deny this unprecedented crime against humanity," it said.

Rather than to impute to the State of the survivors of the Holocaust the most evil of all intentions, its biased critics ought to have a closer look at the ideological foundation of Hamas and of its parent, the Muslim Brotherhood, which even precedes the creation of the State of Israel.

"If Catalunya were to take its anti-fascist stance and its solidarity with the Palestinians seriously, it would critically confront this Islamist terrorist movement and its anti-Semitic agenda, which is also at the root of the civilian population's suffering in Gaza, rather than to resort to aggressive symbolic gestures that amount to an insult to both the dead and the survivors of the Holocaust," *B'nai B'rith* added.

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**BELGIUM** — In the framework of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day, the European Jewish Community Center and other European Jewish organizations took part in an exhibition about the Shoah displayed at the European Parliament in Brussels.

The exhibition, featuring videos, testimonies and footages, is open at the lobby of the Altiero Spinelli building.

On January 25, at the initiative of the European Friends of Israel, a delegation of 20 members of the European Parliament and of EU national parliaments visited the former Auschwitz Nazi death camp in southern Poland.



The International Holocaust Memorial Exhibition displayed in the lobby of the European Parliament building in Brussels.

They were joined by a delegation of the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and later visited the Auschwitz Jewish Center, which opened in 2000 to teach future generations about the destruction caused by the Holocaust.

Before Auschwitz became the ultimate symbol of the *Shoah* or Holocaust, it was just an ordinary town known as *Oswiecim*.

1.5 million Jews died at the hands of the Nazis at Auschwitz-Birkenau during WWII.

On January 28, European Parliament President Hans-Gert Poettering and members of the assembly attended a special commemoration in the parliament premises.

The event ceremony for the European Union member states was addressed by Moshe Kantor, President of the European Jewish Congress.

"With the palpable rise in anti-Semitism and xenophobia felt in the European nations, the Holocaust is a crucial historical period to be memorialized and never forgotten," the EJC president said in a statement.

"The lessons of the Holocaust are universal ones which serve to remind all of humanity of the dangers inherent within hatred, intolerance and ignorance," he added.

"As an international community, it is critical that we welcome this occasion to once again educate people all over the globe that this darkest of periods must never be forgotten."



# BOOK REVIEWS

## THE MASCOT: UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY OF MY JEWISH FATHER'S NAZI BOYHOOD

The Mascot: Unraveling the Mystery of My Jewish Father's Nazi Boyhood. By Mark Kurzem. The Penguin Group: New York, 2007. 418 pp. \$26.95, hardcover

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

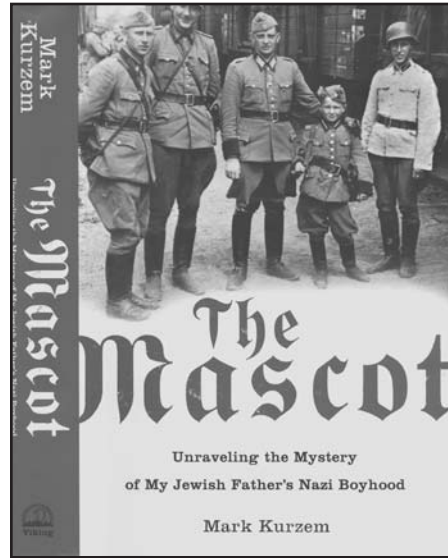
During the war, on a stormy night, a little boy of about five years old, runs out of his home into the darkness. Where to go? He has no idea. But in the morning he has an excellent view of a horrific scene. He sees his mother and his siblings shot and slashed by the Nazis and their Latvian collaborators.

After a stunned silence, the boy simply runs cold, and alone till he sees a house and frightened, enters. An old and kindly woman lives there. She gives him food, clothing, a warm place to lie down. But then her own son comes home and everything changes. He immediately realizes the boy is a Jew, roughly and mercilessly throws him into a wooden basket, and takes him to the Latvians to be killed.

Then the miracle happens. The Latvian sergeant, the leader of this band of killers, somehow takes a liking to the boy. Was it the way the poor boy cried for a piece of bread just as he was about to be shot? Could the boy have reminded the sergeant of someone else? We will never know. But even after the sergeant knows for certain that the boy is a Jew, he convinces his men to make him their "mascot," keeping the secret of the boy's reli-

gion to himself.

So what is a "mascot"? In return for a name, a birthdate, food, and some kind of shelter in the world, the boy gathers wood for these Latvian Nazis; he prepares tea; picks strawberries; he goes on sorties



(Jew killing expeditions) with them; and, in the end, wears an SS uniform, like them, and at times, a gun for photos.

*The Mascot: Unraveling the Mystery of My Jewish Father's Nazi Boyhood* by Mark Kurzem picks up the story many, many years later. The boy, now a man, calling himself Alex Kurzem (the soldiers initially named him Uldis Kurzemnieks), is

beginning to unravel himself. He sits, he thinks, he can't sleep. All that he determinedly repressed the many years he was with the Latvians has taken their toll. Now the only thing Kurzem wants is to find out, where he comes from, who his mother was, and just about anything else possible about himself. The only evidence he has to go on are two words: "Koidanov" and "Panok." He has absolutely no idea what they mean. But those words have been with him for as long as he can remember. Perhaps they hold the key to his identity.

Kurzem goes to his son Mark for help, and thus this "must read" book, this page-turner, this absolute thriller, begins. Mark will leave no stone unturned. He will patiently wait for just the right moment to ask his father questions. He will just as patiently wait for the answers. He will get his father to tell him everything about the contents of the battered suitcase of memories he always carries with him. Growing up, his father shared a little bit of information from that case with his family. Now, Mark needs to know much more. Mark will find people who knew his father. He will find photos, and even movies . . .

What exactly does he find out? That's for the readers of this fascinating and unique book to discover. Does it help Kurzem any? Well, that's another question . . .

*P.S. – While readers of M&R may feel they've read every kind of story about the Holocaust, this true story will surely make them feel differently.*

## RETHINKING POLES AND JEWS

Rethinking Poles and Jews: Troubled Past, Brighter Future Edited by Robert Cherry and Annamaria Orla-Bukowska. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 230 pp. \$75.00 cloth, \$27.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY CHARLES CHOTKOWSKI

Those of us active in Polish-Jewish relations have been doubly fortunate in 2007 with the appearance of two recent collective works in our field. The first was Volume 19 of "Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry," which was dedicated to Polish-Jewish Relations in North America.

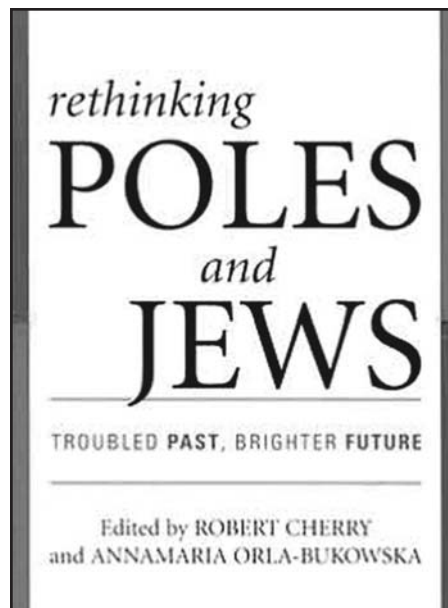
Now comes "Rethinking Poles and Jews," in which editors Cherry and Orla-Bukowska have assembled a foreword, a preface, four introductions, and thirteen articles, all of which address forthrightly the contentious issues that always seem to crop up in discussions between Jews and Poles.

As a longtime participant in these discussions, I can attest that the contributors to "Rethinking Poles and Jews" are knowledgeable persons, experienced in Polish-Jewish dialogue, whose individual efforts over the years have helped to bring about the "brighter future" foreseen in the subtitle.

The book is divided into three parts. The first deals with anti-Polish stereotypes, the second with contextual understanding and dialogue, and the third with contemporary Poland.

The first part unflinchingly addresses stereotypes of the kind Polish-Americans have long had to deal with. In his introduction to this part, Thaddeus Radzilowski writes of "anti-Polonism," a term avoided by others as a neologism, although the prejudice it denotes is nonetheless very real.

Two articles deal with the depiction of Poland and the Poles in the cinema. Mieczyslaw B. Biskupski reviews the negative presentations found in Hollywood productions, which avoid the realities of life in Poland, especially in wartime, and are fundamentally dishonest. Lawrence Baron discusses the rejection of positive



depictions in Wajda's "Korczak" and Polanski's "The Pianist" by critics who prefer condemnation of the Poles over the nuanced truth.

Shana Penn's review of American press coverage notes the positive changes in reports on commemorations of the liberation of Auschwitz in 2005, as contrasted to 1995, as well as noting the success of Polish diplomats in correcting references to "Polish death camps."

The signal contribution of Robert Cherry has been the measurement of anti-Polish bias in this country. While there have been extensive surveys of anti-Semitism abroad, including in Poland, few similar studies of anti-Polonism have been made here. His article surveys anti-Polish biases among Holocaust teachers, finding greater bias among non-historians than among specialists in the field.

In "Polish-Jewish relations in America," Guy Billauer's introduction to the second part, he notes "a steady but very slow improvement in the way Jews view Poles and Poles view Jews . . . [but] the two communities still see each other largely in negative terms."

Much of the negativity derives from conflicting memories of the Holocaust. Surprisingly, Havi Ben-Sasson finds that during the Holocaust years in Poland, Jewish attitudes toward Poles were initially positive, and only later turned negative, as expectations of Polish support and rescue were disappointed. I believe the rift was inevitable, given the different fates the Germans imposed on the persecuted Poles and exterminated Jews. As Jerzy Andrzejewski wrote in his novel "Holy Week," "Affairs great and small divide people, yet none so sharply as the inequality of fate."

Helene Sinnreich describes how "powerful national mythologies" affect historiography, with Poles emphasizing Polish victims and Jews emphasizing Jewish victims. She finds that some historians, both Polish and Jewish, now write "more balanced, contextualized histories."

Father John Pawlikowski shares his

(Continued on page 15)

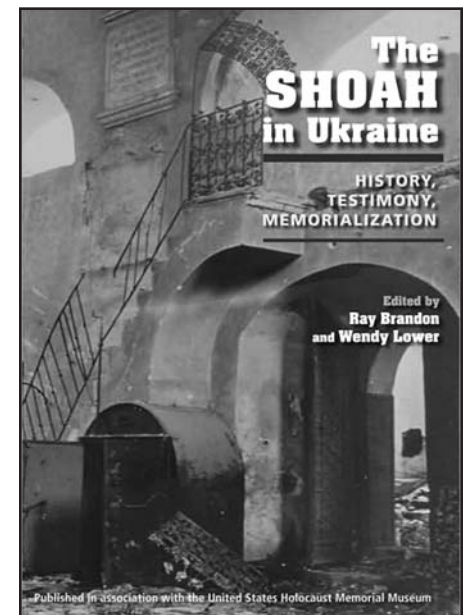
## ANATOMY OF THE UKRAINIAN GENOCIDE

The Shoah in Ukraine: History, Testimony, Memorialization. Edited by Ray Brandon and Wendy Lower. Indiana University Press, US Holocaust Memorial Museum. 392 pp. \$35

REVIEWED BY ALEXANDER ZVIELLI

This extensive collection of studies on the Holocaust in Ukraine originated in the summer research workshop held at the US Holocaust Museum in 1999. Since then, the editors – Ray Brandon, a historian based in Berlin and the former editor of the English edition of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and Wendy Lower, of the Ludwig Maximilian University at Munich and the author of *Nazi Empire Building and the Holocaust in Ukraine* – sought out additional contributions from international experts who were doing groundbreaking research on this subject.

They show how Hitler's grandiose plan to settle 10 million Germans and establish his private paradise in Ukraine failed dismally, but more than 1.5 million Jews were robbed and murdered there.



Lower describes how the Nazis developed a sinister, utopian plan for exploiting Ukraine's human and natural resources. They firmly believed that this was absolutely essential to secure the *Reich's* future and the continued sustenance of the *Wehrmacht*, and since the largest population of Soviet Jews resided there, they had to be eliminated, and as fast as possible.

The plan put an end to Ukrainian hopes for independence, but this did not prevent them from cooperating with the regime, at least insofar as the robbery and the murder of Jews was concerned.

Hitler appointed the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg to be the minister of the *Reich Commissariat Ukraine*.

Accompanied by top Nazis, Rosenberg had brought in commissars, or "the torchbearers of the German nation," especially educated for this purpose. They were no bureaucrats, but dictators who ruled with the gun and a whip, which they placed on their desk in office hours. When one became "too soft," he was quickly sidelined by others. Social outcasts, amateurs, adventurers and careerists became the colonial-style governors and decided who shall live and who shall die.

The detailed history of the district of

(Continued on page 13)

## THE UNHOLY LEGACY OF PIUS XII

*The man who presided over the Vatican during the war stands accused of turning a blind eye to the Holocaust. And his reputation is still a source of division between Catholics and Jews.*

BY PETER POPHAM,  
THE INDEPENDENT

The "Pius Wars" that have long raged over the Vatican's desire to declare Pope Pius XII a saint flared up again when the Jesuit priest in charge of the canonization process declared that Pope Benedict XVI could not visit Israel until a disputed panel in Jerusalem's Holocaust museum, which refers disparagingly to Pius, is removed.

Pius XII, the austere, bespectacled Vatican diplomat who reigned from 1939 to 1958, has long been regarded by conservative Catholics as one of the greatest of modern popes. His claim to sainthood was opened by Pope Paul VI, "with the same sort of urgency and certainty," the Vatican journalist Robert Mickens said, "as when John Paul II opened the case for Mother Teresa."

But the Pius XII depicted in the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum is a very different figure. Included among the "Unjust," those responsible directly or indirectly for the Holocaust, he is castigated on a large panel in the museum for his failure "to leave his palace, with crucifix high, to witness one day of pogrom." "When reports of the massacre of the Jews reached the Vatican," it goes on, "he did not react with written or verbal protests. In 1942, he did not associate himself with the condemnation of the killing of the Jews issued by the Allies. When they were deported from Rome to Auschwitz, Pius XII did not intervene."

"As long as that panel remains in the museum," Father Peter Gumpel said,

"Benedict XVI cannot go to Israel because it would be a scandal for Catholics. The Catholic Church is doing everything possible to have good relations with Israel, but friendly relations can only be built if there is reciprocity."

A spokesman for the Israeli foreign ministry skirted the museum issue in his reply. "If Benedict XVI would like to visit Israel, he would be a welcome and beloved guest," said Yossi Levy. "Pope Ratzinger has already been officially invited and whether he accepts or not depends entirely on his will."

But Sergio Itzhak Minervi, a former Israeli ambassador to Brussels and a historian, commented: "No moral entity, and least of all Yad Vashem, can treat these historical questions as if they were in a market, as Father Gumpel would wish: 'unless you cancel those phrases, I don't come.' Let us be serious. History has need of proof, of documents, which the church would be well to show to the world."

At the crux of the dispute, as the museum caption states, is the failure of Pope Pius to make a protest of any kind, either verbally or in writing, as millions of Jews all over Europe were taken to the gas chambers. By the end of 1942, he had received reports of the ongoing murder of Jews from at least nine different countries where the Holocaust was under way, including Poland, Slovakia and Croatia. The British envoy to the Holy See, Sir D'Arcy Osborne, practically a prisoner inside the Vatican after the Nazi occupation of Rome, wrote in his diary late in 1942: "The more I think of it, the more I am revolted by Hitler's massacre of the Jewish race on the one hand, and, on the other, the Vatican's almost exclusive preoccupation with the ... possibilities of the bombardment of Rome."

By the following year, the Holocaust had

arrived under the Pope's nose: in October 1943, more than 1,000 Roman Jews had been rounded up and were being processed for extermination in a military school a few hundred yards from the Pope's window. The Pope was personally



Eugenio Pacelli: a controversial Pope who failed to condemn the Holocaust of World War II.

warned by an Italian princess, Enza Pignatelli, who had managed to force a way into his study, about the imminent assault on the city's ancient Jewish community. "You must act immediately," she had told him. "The Germans are arresting the Jews and taking them away. Only you can stop them." He told her: "I will do all I can."

On 18 October, the day the 1,000 Jews were dispatched to Auschwitz in cattle cars, Osborne was received by the Pope. Pius remarked that "until now the Germans have always behaved correctly," respecting Vatican neutrality, but he hoped they would put more police on the streets.

Supporters of Pius claim that his silence was necessary: to protest would have exposed the church and Catholics across Europe to Nazi attack and made the Pope

himself vulnerable. Thousands of Jews, they point out, were hidden and protected by individual priests and nuns. They also insist that Pius's canonization is a purely internal matter for the Church. "For Benedict and other conservatives in the Church," says Mr Mickens, "Pius XII has for a long time been an iconic figure, a figure of reason and stability. They also like the fact that he was a staunch anti-Communist. They say that, if he had spoken out against the Nazis, he would have put even more lives in jeopardy."

But Robert Katz, author of several narrative histories of Rome during the Nazi occupation, said: "They argue that a lot of worse things would have happened if he had spoken. But what worse could have happened than did happen?"

He went on: "It's true that he did what he could to protect the Vatican, and it's true that there were many individual acts by Catholics to save Jews. But these were not ordered by the Vatican. If they made him a saint he would become a role model for Catholics worldwide. His deeds would be singled out for imitation and veneration; virtue would be found in a passivity that was sometimes indistinguishable from complicity before the acts of perpetrators of crimes against humanity."

The new row over Pius emerges exactly 50 years after his death. "His supporters are extremely frustrated," said Mr Mickens. "They were hoping that his canonization would have happened by that anniversary." Instead, even Pope Benedict, one of Pius's ardent admirers, is now calling for a truce. The issue of the museum caption was "important but not decisive," said his spokesman, Father Federico Lombardi. And regarding Pius's canonization, the Pope "maintains that a period of deeper study and reflection is opportune."

## ITALY'S MOVING EFFORT TO RECOUNT JEWS' JOURNEY

BY JUDITH MONACHINA,  
THE BOSTON GLOBE

In December of last year, the Italian state railway launched a 186-mile-per-hour train that revolutionized travel in Italy. But below the track of that train's send-off from Milan's Central Station, another important door to history was opened. The state railway recently signed an agreement to allow work to begin on a Holocaust memorial there.

The heart of the memorial will be the track used to deport Jews and others from 1943 to 1945. It has remained untouched since. "It's a ruin, an archeological find," said architect Guido Morpurgo, and his design, with the track as the memorial's heart, reflects this.

During the German occupation of Italy, 8,628 Jews were deported from Italy and its territories, according to historian Liliana Picciotto. On Jan. 30, 1944, one of the 15 deportation trains to leave this station carried 605 Jews to Auschwitz; most were killed on arrival; 20 survived. Liliana Segre, who was 13, and her father were on that train. He was killed. She is active in the memorial project.

Advocates of the memorial say that Italy has had a difficult time coming to grips with its role in this history, and indeed the story is mixed. The great majority of Italian Jews escaped deportation, in part due to assistance from their non-Jewish friends and neighbors, and there were no deportations prior to the German occupation. Still, Italy was Germany's ally, and did

implement racial laws in 1938 that seriously restricted the lives of Italian Jews. The immediate family members of Morpurgo, who is Jewish, were not deported, but his father suffered greatly from the persecution.



The track that was used to deport Jews and others from Italy.

Mussolini was deposed in July of 1943; Italy surrendered to the Allies less than two months later, but Germany still occupied much of the peninsula.

It was in this chaos, in late 1943, that the first train left Milan. Italians have naturally wanted to remember their very active resistance movements, and, compared with other occupied countries, their better record in terms of Jewish deportations. But this focus has often frustrated

Holocaust historians.

The memorial will open a living history book. Visitors will hear the rumbles and screeches of arrivals and departures over them, just as the prisoners would have heard them 65 years ago, as they were

violently loaded from trucks to train cars in this hidden, underground part of the station. The train cars were then raised on a lift and sent to concentration camps.

Fifty years later, it was a church that first recognized the track's role in history. For 10 years, members of St. Egidio have held services at the track to remember the deportations. "The most important guest (at the services) was not the chief rabbi of Milan, but the archbishop," said Roberto

Jarach, vice president of the Memorial Foundation.

Advocates from the Center for Documentation of Contemporary Jewish History and Children of the Shoah worked to win support for the memorial and obtain the space from the railway.

Throughout Italy, schools and organizations commemorate the liberation of Auschwitz every Jan. 27. There is so much Day of Memory activity that one might think memorials unnecessary. But the foundation representatives say memory can slip away, especially as survivors die.

One point of contention is the memorial's scope. Of Italy's 23,000 political deportees, most of them not Jewish, hundreds were deported from the Milan station, and their memory should be included here too, say some historians. Jarach understands, but makes a distinction: "One thing is deportation, another is extermination."

Jarach hopes programs at the site will deal with that part of the station's history, as well as Italy's current problems integrating immigrants.

However this debate is decided, the memorial may be an important step for Italy. In such a public setting, where 320,000 people pass daily, it will be a place to learn about what happened, and to help visitors reflect on the dangers of tyranny and be alert to the first signs of it in their own governments. Before the trains leave the station.

# SURVIVORS' CORNER

## HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR MEETS HER POLISH SAVIOR

During World War II, the Sozanska family gave shelter to Rozia Rothschild and her family, hiding them from the Nazis. Sixty years later, Rozia reunites with Wiktorja Sozanska for the first time. "Her bravery is what has allowed me to live and build a wonderful family of my own," she says.

A moving reunion between a Holocaust survivor and the Polish woman who risked her life to save her took place at JFK Airport in New York in November of last year.

Organized by the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, the meeting brought together Rozia Rothschild, who now lives



Wiktorja Sozanska and Rozia Rothschild meet in New York.

in Tivon, Israel, with her rescuer, Wiktorja Sozanska from *Wroclaw*, Poland, for the first time in over 60 years.

Sozanska and her widowed mother and five siblings hid Rozia Rothschild (nee Seifert) and her brother, father and aunt in

a bunker on their farm in *Turka*, Poland, from 1942-1944.

"I cannot fully express how grateful I am to Wiktorja and her mother Anna. They opened their home and their hearts to me, risking their own lives in order to save me," said Rozia.

"Their bravery is what has allowed me to live and build a wonderful family of my own, with three children and four grandchildren. I am so thankful to them and the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous for making this extraordinary reunion possible."

In the fall of 1942, the Jews of *Turka* (now Ukraine) and the surrounding villages were ordered by the Germans to move into the *Samberg ghetto*. The Seifert family was among this group of 5,000 Jews who lived in *Turka*.

While the able-bodied adults could hide in a bunker in the woods, children and the unhealthy were forced to go to the ghetto, and the families had to sell all their belongings beforehand.

When Wiktorja Jaworska came with her mother Anna, a widow with six children, to look at the furniture, her mother saw Rozia and her brother Lucien and wondered what would become of them. When she heard they were going to be sent to the ghetto with her father and aunt who were disabled, she said, "We will take care of you. You will come with us."

In the middle of the next night, Wiktorja's brother Mikolaj came to the Seifert home in a hay cart and secreted Rozia, her brother

Lucien, her father Mendel and aunt Fanya away, past patrolling Germans, and hid them in an underground bunker in her barn for two years. Each day Wiktorja and her family brought food to the Seiferts and carried away their waste. While the Jaworska family had very little, they shared what they had with Rozia and her family.

There were several close calls. Wiktorja had given her identity documents to a Jewish neighbor and was interrogated by the Gestapo for days, never betraying her neighbor or the Seiferts. Wiktorja was finally released by the Gestapo, when she convinced them that she had not given her identity papers to a Jewess.

In the summer of 1944, as the Soviet army was approaching *Turka*, the Germans came through the area confiscating animals, taking food, and searching for both deserters and hidden Jews. Wiktorja and her mother moved the Seiferts to the woods, where they lived for two weeks until the region was liberated.

Mendel, Fanya, Rozia and Lucien returned to *Turka* and found devastation.

After the war, Mendel married Fanya and the family moved to the United States. Rozia met an Israeli, they married and moved to Israel. She now goes by the name Shoshanna, which is Hebrew for



A Seifert family photo from 1955.

"rose" – the same as her name in Polish. Wiktorja is in her 80s and lives in *Wroclaw*, Poland.

"In the many years we have worked with survivors and their rescuers, I remain awestruck by the heroism of the thousands of rescuers who risked their lives to save others. By holding true to their values, these individuals saved Jews from certain death," said JFR Executive Vice President Stanlee Stahl.

"We owe a great debt of gratitude to these men and women, and through our work, hope to improve their lives and preserve their stories," he added.

The Jewish Foundation for the Righteous was created in 1986 to provide financial assistance to non-Jews who risked their lives and often the lives of their families to rescue Jews during the Holocaust. Today the JFR supports more than 1,200 aged rescuers in 26 countries.

## THE "NO-PARENT" KINDERTRANSPORT

AMNON RUBINSTEIN,  
THE JERUSALEM POST

Seventy years ago, the first of the *Kindertransport* left Germany for safety in Britain. The first one arrived at *Harwich* on December 2 bringing 200 children from Berlin's Jewish orphanage, torched the month before during the pogrom named *Kristallnacht*. This event is rightly celebrated in Britain. Here was an act of generosity and kindness which stood out in singular isolation.

Following the *Kristallnacht* pogrom, the British Parliament and government decided to give shelter to refugee children, mostly Jewish, menaced by the Nazi regime. Indeed, Britain's exceptional humanity and generosity contrast dramatically with the universal indifference to the unfolding Jewish tragedy in Germany of 1938. Moreover, the children were generally well received: One of them – now 81 – told London's *Evening Standard* how he was elected vice-captain in a Margate school, although he hardly knew any English.

Britain's act of humanity contrasts sharply with the American failure. A similar effort in the US failed to pass the congressional committees. Eventually, 1,000 mostly Jewish children were allowed into America between 1934 and 1945 in a semi-clandestine operation, which has come to be known as the "One Thousand Children." Britain was different.

The year 1938 was a watershed: In July, the *Evian* conference ended in a fiasco. Thirty-two countries deliberated the

refugee question – without mentioning the word Jew – and decided to do nothing. Almost all of the participating countries openly refused to take in Jewish refugees.

Hitler rightly saw in that refusal a green light to unleash his hordes in the November pogrom. Then came the quick action of the British government which managed – with the brave help of Quakers – to save almost 10,000 children.

Having said that, there are other aspects to the *kindertransport*. The British government did not allow them to immigrate to Britain. They were given only temporary shelter, and a condition was attached: They had to come without their parents. Thus the children – ranging from infants to 17-year-olds – had to leave their parents in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia amid tragic scenes in which, by Nazi orders, no emotion was allowed to be shown. They made their way to Britain via Holland as de facto orphans. Infants were carried by their older siblings and the absence of their mothers and fathers was, naturally, traumatic.

This is significant. Here were parents ready to send their unaccompanied offspring to a foreign land. The *Evian* partic-



Children of the *Kindertransport*.

ipants could have conceivably deluded themselves into believing that no mortal danger awaited the Jews. But now, in December 1938, after the pogrom, the readiness of the parents testified to their realization that they had to save the lives of their children. The mortal danger was palpable. From now on the failure of the West to take in Jewish refugees acquired a new dimension: indifference in the face of death.

At the same time, the *kindertransport* showed that the Nazis were ready to let Jews out. The fate of the Jews was sealed by both the Nazis' brutality and the absence of sheltering countries. But why were the parents not allowed to enter

Britain? After all, here was the *crème-de-la-crème* of European society – leading citizens who would have enriched the economy, science and arts of the British isles. And there was not even an issue of immigration. The parents, like their children, could have been granted temporary shelter, thus avoiding a cruel separation.

But the children arrived *ohne eltern*, without parents; they were *elternlose kinder* – parentless children. In other words: the *kindertransport* is both testament to British generosity and to the then-prevailing prejudice against Jews. Most parents, needless to say, did not survive to see their children.

Why is this important nowadays? Because the events of the Holocaust are remembered by Jews as characterized by two types of responsibility – for the actual murder, and for the failure to save the menaced Jews. Of course, there is no comparison between the actual butchers and the indifferent onlookers, but anybody who wants to understand the Israeli psyche must realize that even Britain's unique act of humanity delivers a double message – a double sense of horror at the actual slaughter, as well as a sense of being betrayed by the Western democracies.

Israelis live with these double traumas.

# BATTLE FOR HOLOCAUST ASSETS ROILS ISRAEL

BY CAM SIMPSON,  
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

The global quest to ferret out money and property left behind by Jews killed in the Holocaust is now targeting Israel, and investigators say it's proving at least as difficult in the Jewish state as it did in Europe.

Many big banks and the government itself have resisted efforts to claim hundreds of millions of dollars in compensation for bank deposits, land, corporate shares, art and other assets that investigators say once belonged to Jews killed by the Nazis and their allies.

"I cannot say that the Israeli establishment has been, or is, happy about the return of properties," says Avraham Roet, the recently retired chairman of the Company for Location & Restitution of Holocaust Victims Assets Ltd. The private firm, often referred to simply as the Company, was created by the Israeli parliament after its investigators identified up to 9,000 bank accounts suspected of belonging to Holocaust victims.

Thousands of European Jews deposited or invested tidy sums here during the decades before World War II, often without visiting what was then British-controlled Palestine. After many were killed in the Holocaust, their substantial assets went unclaimed, passing into the hands of the government of the newly created nation of Israel and some of its largest banks.

While some Israeli institutions have challenged the validity of the Company's claims, they are generally loath to say much about any of this in public. Mr. Roet and others say the institutions privately argue they should be treated more gently than their European counterparts because they are in a different position than banks and governments that actively assisted the Nazis. They also say any assets once owned by Holocaust victims that were subsumed over the years served a public good because they went toward building a Jewish homeland.

"They said, 'We are not really cheating the survivors. It's all within the Jewish

community, within Israel. It's not the same as it being held by the Swiss,'" Michael Bazylar, an expert on Holocaust assets from the Chapman University School of Law in California, says Israeli bankers told him in 2006. "That was sort of their excuse. And I'm saying, 'Wait a second. It's not your money.'"

Mr. Roet, whose two sisters died in a

each of those accounts, the bank's directors said they would give about \$4.79 million to the Company. Although insistent that it owed nothing, the bank said the payment was being made "out of public sentiment and as a gesture of goodwill." The bank disputes many of Mr. Roet's claims and says it owes little.

While most of the Company's focus has

it recovers. When it can't find heirs, it transfers the money to needy Holocaust survivors living in Israel. Recovered proceeds also fund the company's operations.

Run out of a suite of offices in a glass-and-steel tower four stories above a hardwood-flooring store in this suburb of Tel Aviv, the Company has so far recovered assets valued at just over \$183.9 million. That includes about \$44.7 million from the government.

Mr. Roet estimates conservatively that there's \$500 million of victim's assets in Israel. That's based on those already recovered and claims either already made or being prepared. He believes that figure could reach as much as \$1 billion when the quest is over, especially if land values continue to rise in Israel's urban centers.

By comparison, a 2001 settlement between Jewish groups and Austria's government and private sector totaled about \$360 million. A 1998 settlement between Jewish groups and a collection of Swiss banks reached \$1.25 billion.

As in Europe, it's impossible to know how much was really lost in Israel. The Nazis and their surrogates tried to hide their genocide. There is no reliable registry of the dead, nor of their international assets. Those who survived didn't typically hold onto the sort of records that can buttress a claim.

In the 1990s and earlier this decade, Jewish groups threatened or took legal action against European governments and businesses. The U.S. got involved, threatening reluctant European companies with sanctions.

Under intense international pressure, deals were reached across the Continent. Settlements were often based on fragmentary evidence and statistical estimates of what banks and institutions owed. After hammering out a total price tag, the targeted institutions funded settlement pools, or agreed to specific procedures for paying claims. Heirs with verified accounts or other documented assets typically got top priority. The remaining cash

(Continued on page 14)



Estelle Sapir displays a photo of her late father Joseph Sapir, a World War II death camp victim, during a news conference in 1998. Ms. Sapir announced she had reached a settlement with Credit Suisse over her claim on her father.

concentration camp near Auschwitz, Poland, started investigating and targeting some of Israel's most powerful institutions after his firm opened last year. The 80-year-old stepped down from the Company's top job in August but remained a director and its most public face.

Earlier this year, he went after *Bank Leumi Le-Israel B.M.*, Israel's second-largest financial institution, claiming it owed more than \$34 million, a figure derived from a government-approved formula for fixing the value of roughly 1,300 accounts once held at the bank.

Last year, on the same day *Bank Leumi*, the Company's biggest private target so far, announced that it had hired a retired Israeli Supreme Court justice to scrutinize

been on bank accounts, it says it has also located about \$86.7 million worth of real estate that had belonged to Holocaust victims and more than 1,000 stolen works of art in the Israeli Museum that had been recovered by the Allies from the Nazis. Museum officials have published a complete catalog on their Web site and the Company's Web site. They also sponsored a special exhibition earlier this year titled, "Orphaned Art: Looted Art from the Holocaust in the Israel Museum."

The Company has sweeping powers allowing it access to government and business records to find lost assets and lay claim to them. It then tries to locate heirs — whose names it is forbidden by law to publicly disclose — for any money

## AS NAZIS AGE, LEADS STILL ALIVE

Six decades after the end of World War II, the world's remaining Nazi war criminals and witnesses to their atrocities are fast dying of old age. But the German office charged with preparing prosecutions of Nazi crimes, far from shutting down, has rarely been busier.

"Twenty-five years ago, we thought our work would be coming to an end now," said Kurt Schrimm, lead prosecutor of Germany's central office for the investigation of "National Socialist Crimes."

But as Schrimm and his staff of six comb records around the world in a final push for justice, they continue to come up with fresh leads and evidence. Today the office is pursuing 20 to 40 cases, he said including the extradition of former U.S. autoworker and accused *Sobibor* death camp guard John Demjanjuk. At least a few cases are still going to trial. "There are still thousands of cases no one's ever heard of," he said. "And I'm sure there are still thousands of culprits out there."

"Last Chance" to find Nazi war criminals in South America Prosecuting Nazi war crimes has always had its challenges. The first head of Schrimm's office, established in 1958 to pursue further Nazi prosecutions in the wake of the Nuremberg trials,

was eventually discovered to be a former Hitler storm trooper.

Until the 1970s, German law included a statute of limitations on murder that threatened to put an end to the office's efforts to prosecute Nazi criminals. That was lifted.

Today, the biggest problem facing the agency is that both its targets and the witnesses needed to effectively prosecute them are generally in their mid-80s or older. Many have died, and others are too frail for trial.

"You can start a trial only with the accused alive and witnesses alive that you can call to testify," said Carlo Gentile, an expert on Nazi war crimes at the *University of Cologne*. "If you don't have witnesses and perpetrators, then you can only work as a historian."

Getting aging criminals to court is an increasing challenge but not an impossibility. Currently Josef Scheungraber, an elderly former German infantryman, is on trial in Munich on charges of taking part in a massacre of 11 men and boys in the Italian village of *Falzano*.

German prosecutors hope to prove that Scheungraber and fellow soldiers committed murder when they locked 12 Italians in a farmhouse and later blew it up. The sole

survivor of the attack today, now 79, has been called to testify as a witness.

An Italian court convicted Scheungraber of the crime in 2006, but in absentia, and he had continued to live freely in southern Germany until the latest prosecution effort.

Schrimm's office also hopes within a year to extradite Demjanjuk to face charges of murdering Jews at a Nazi prison camp in occupied Poland, where the Ukrainian-born U.S. autoworker allegedly was a guard.

"To prove there was killing isn't sufficient," Schrimm said. "You have to prove it was murder find evidence of motives like racism or show it was extremely gruesome. And after 60 years it's extremely difficult to prove what somebody thought."

With witnesses dying out, most of the tips Schrimm's office receives these days are from documents. In the mid-1990s, Italian officials discovered a room full of files documenting Nazi war crimes. The trove of documents, created by the Allies, had been handed to the Italians for use in prosecutions but instead was locked away. Today the so-called "Closet of Shame" has become a major source of new prosecutions,

including that of Scheungraber.

Schrimm's prosecutors also recently discovered that Josef Mengele, Adolf Eichmann and other infamous Nazis who fled to South America after World War II carried a particular type of International Red Cross travel document. Schrimm's agency is now combing through Immigration records in Argentina and other South American nations looking for similar documents and "people we don't know the names of yet."

The *Ludwigsburg* office, which celebrated its 50th anniversary in December, has so far forwarded 7,394 investigations to Germany's courts for prosecution.

Keeping up morale in the German office can be a challenge, particularly as an increasing number of prosecutions fail as the accused or key witnesses die.

"I have long talks with everyone that you can't measure your success by the people you manage to jail," Schrimm said. Still, the office will stay open, German state prosecutors have said.

These days, "the goal and satisfaction for us is to clarify what really happened," said Schrimm, whose team has amassed a vast archive of documentation on Nazi crimes. "Even victims say their interest is not that an old person goes to prison but that the world knows what happened."

First published in *Chicago Tribune*.

# RABBI LAU VISITS THE OFFICE OF THE



Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American and International Societies for Yad Vashem, Caroline Massel, Chair, American Society for Yad Vashem Young Leadership Associates, Ariel Zborowski and Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council.

After the official United Nation's International Day of Holocaust ceremony Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chairman of the American and International Societies for Yad Vashem, spoke before his appointment as a Chairman of the Yad Vashem Annual Tribute Dinner of the American and International Societies for Yad Vashem.

Rabbi Lau briefed the Board that, in Yad Vashem is the cornerstone of the new International School of Holocaust Studies of this project since 91 seminars for teachers and students at Yad Vashem last year alone.

One of such seminars last summer was attended by 700 students in China. They bring back to their classrooms what they learned.

"I am very happy that the torch of remembrance is being passed to the young survivors", said Rabbi Lau, "because we are not allowed to forget."

At the end Rabbi Lau, recognized the great work for the American Society for Yad Vashem and its chairman, Eli Zborowski.



David Halpern, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council and Jeremy Halpern.



Mr. and Mrs. Arturo Constantiner, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American and International Societies for Yad Vashem, Elizabeth Zborowski, Eugen Gluck.



At the Board Meeting: Elizabeth Wilf, Eugen Gluck, Zygmunt Wilf, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Melvin Bukiet, Joseph Wilf, Leonard Wilf, Eli Zborowski, David Halpern, Marilyn & Barry Rubenstein and Louis Rosenbaum.



Lili Stawski, Ellis & Israel Krakowski, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American and International Societies for Yad Vashem.



# AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM

of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust. The Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council visited the office of the American Society for Yad Vashem and participated in the Board Meeting. Twice a month, the American Society for Yad Vashem Council, Rabbi Lau was a guest speaker at the National Societies for Yad Vashem in New York. In Jerusalem just a week ago, he placed the cornerstone for the Holocaust Studies Center. Rabbi Lau stressed the importance of Holocaust education for young people and educators from all over the world were held in Jerusalem.

Over 100 teachers from 52 countries including Japan and the United States have learned in three weeks at Yad Vashem. Rabbi Lau said, "It is given to the second and third generations of survivors to keep this light of remembrance from being extinguished." He stressed the importance of the cause of remembrance done by The American Society for Yad Vashem.



Hon. Kiyo Akasaka, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Public Information, Hon. Asha-Rose Migiro, United Nations Deputy Secretary-General, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, Ambassador Gabriella Shalev.



Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American and International Societies for Yad Vashem, Israel Krakowski and Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem Council.



Rebecca Hanus, Nicole Pines, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, Ariel Zborowski, Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American and International Societies for Yad Vashem, Jeremy Halpern, Julie Kopel, Aaron Bernstein, Caroline Massel, Chair, American Society for Yad Vashem Young Leadership Associates and Alan Fried.



Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem Council, Elizabeth Zborowski, Eugen Gluck, Rebbetzin Lau, and Eli Zborowski.



Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American and International Societies for Yad Vashem, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau, Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, Harry and Danielle Karten.



# REPORT FROM YAD VASHEM

## NEW YAD VASHEM BOOKS TEACH HOLOCAUST TO HAREDIM

MATTHEW WAGNER,  
THE JERUSALEM POST

A new four-book series entitled *Years Wherein We Have Seen Evil* that teaches the Holocaust from a religious perspective was launched by Yad Vashem.

The books, and the accompanying testimonies preserved on CD, will be used as the basis for teaching the Holocaust in *haredi* educational institutions.

The books mark an ongoing trend at Yad Vashem to emphasize the particular, subjective experiences of individual Holocaust victims over attempts to view the Holocaust as a collective experience, said historians, educators and *haredi* figures involved with the project.

"The secular Zionist state originally created Yad Vashem to present the Holocaust as a collective memory that fit nicely into a secular Zionist narrative," said Dudi Zilbershlag, the first *haredi* board member of Yad Vashem.

"It basically ignored the courage of spirit demonstrated by so many pious Jews who did not lose faith throughout the horrors of the *Shoah*.

*Haredim* distanced themselves from the Zionist tendency to emphasize the few

examples of physical courage, militarism and revolt against the Nazis that helped shatter the myth that Jews were led as sheep to the slaughter.

But over the years, people at Yad Vashem realized the absurdity of it all. How can you focus on the few incidents of partisan uprisings when these make up just a fraction of Holocaust experience?"

Nava Weiss, head of Yad Vashem's *Haredi* Department, which was established seven years ago, said that tailoring the teaching of the Holocaust to the special needs of the *haredi* community is part of larger trend in Israeli society.

"Over the past few decades we have seen the focus move from the collective to the individual," said Weiss. "Israeli society has matured. We no longer think in terms of a monolithic whole. Rather, we recognize the diversity of different groups. Teaching the Holocaust is no different."

The four-book series focuses on the lives of Orthodox Jewry during the Holocaust and the special moral and religious dilemmas they faced.

The first volume tells the story of the Orthodox community in Germany during the 1930s. According to Zilbershlag, the book intentionally shatters the stereotype

of the *haredi* Jew as coming exclusively from Eastern Europe.

"It presents the heritage of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, the forerunner of modern Orthodoxy, who combined Torah scholarship with work and world-

devoted to the attempts by Rabbi Chaim Michael Dov Weissmandl to save Jews through bribery.

The fourth and final volume is devoted to the Final Solution.

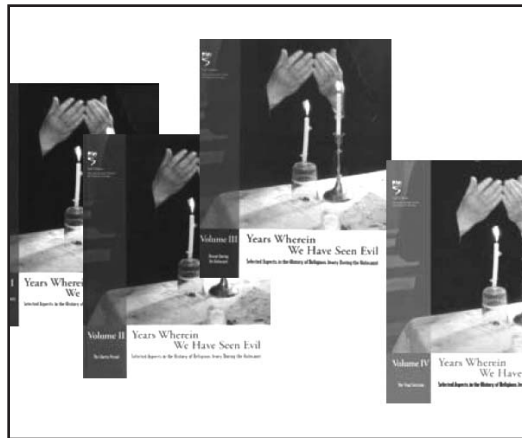
Funding of the series was provided by Rudolph and Edith Tessler in memory of the children of Shlomo and Esther Tessler and the children of David and Fradel Hoffman.

Until recently, the *haredi* education system did not teach the Holocaust.

In part this was due to a dearth of teaching materials, said Weiss. But it was also part of the *haredi* rejection of Zionist narrative of the Holocaust and its refusal to recognize Holocaust Remembrance Day, which fell on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

Even today, the teaching of the Holocaust and other "secular subjects" are discontinued for boys when they reach the eighth grade and graduate from *Talmud Torah* to *yeshiva*. In *yeshivot*, studies are restricted to the learning of the *Talmud* and other strictly religious subjects.

Females continue to devote themselves to general studies through high school and there is even Holocaust studies at the women-only *Beit Vegan College* in Jerusalem, which has a predominately *haredi* student body.



liness," he explained. The second volume traces the life of religious Jews in the ghettos.

Specifically religious dilemmas, such as maintaining a *kosher* diet when starvation is rampant, or celebrating the holidays without being allowed access to houses of prayer, are examined.

The third volume is about various rescue attempts, including an entire chapter

## NEW YAD VASHEM RESEARCH CENTER FOCUSES ON POST-WAR EXPERIENCES

ETGAR LEFKOVITS,  
THE JERUSALEM POST

Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial inaugurated in December 2008 a new research center on the aftermath of the Holocaust, focusing on survivors' post-war experiences in an attempt to better preserve the memory of the *Shoah*.

The establishment of the Diana Zborowski Center for the Study of the Aftermath of the *Shoah*, which will operate under the auspices of the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem, comes amid widespread Holocaust revisionism as the number of survivors continues to dwindle.

Dr. Ze'ev Mankowitz, the center's director, noted that it was being launched at a time when contemporary Holocaust educators from around the world were trying to grapple with how to preserve the memory of the Holocaust today.

"Until now, the priority of Yad Vashem has been to focus on the issue of the Holocaust itself, but now the question of the memory of the Holocaust has emerged to be of equally crucial importance," Mankowitz said in an interview.

Serving as a hub for higher learning, the center will promote research and educational activities relating to the study of survivors' post-war experiences. It will focus on topics such as Europe as viewed by survivors, early attempts to institutionalize the memory of the Holocaust, the crisis of liberation for the survivors, and the *Shoah* as depicted in modern literature and films.

"For decades, we have addressed aspects of the Holocaust through the academic work of our research institute. Now, post-Holocaust issues dealing with the survivors, history and memory - which directly relate to how the Holocaust is

viewed by young people today - will receive the same scholarly attention it so richly deserves," said Yad Vashem chairman Avner Shalev.

"A critical aspect of the story of the Holocaust survivors is how we struggled to return to life. How were the survivors received by their countrymen and societies? How did our new countries treat us and view us? These questions, I believe, are vital to a deeper understanding of the long-lasting effects of the Holocaust," said survivor Eli Zborowski, chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem and a donor of the new center.

Due to time constraints, the center - which will operate with a basic staff of six people but will work with researchers around the world - will initially focus on the consequences and implications of the *Shoah* for the Jewish people worldwide in the first quarter-century after the Holocaust, primarily during 1944-1961.

"This is a huge undertaking, and we are trying not to bite off more than we can chew," Mankowitz said.

He noted that the center's work would include the debate among survivors in the early days of the state regarding whether to accept money from Germany, as well as the trials of Nazi war criminals such as the 1961 Eichmann trial, the struggle for return of Jewish property, and memorialization of Holocaust victims.

"Our priority is to give survivors a microphone so they have an opportunity to make their voices heard," Mankowitz said.

About 250,000 Holocaust survivors live in Israel.

"The Holocaust has become so critical in public debate about human rights in Europe," he said. "Holocaust remembrance is becoming something of a litmus test of decency."

## PIECE BY PIECE

### YAD VASHEM ARCHIVES REVEAL THE FATE OF RABBI DAVID HALIVNI'S FAMILY

BY SHALOM BRONSTEIN

The Yad Vashem Archives hold solutions to questions many people never thought could be answered. In his 1996 book *The Book and the Sword—A Life of Learning in the Shadow of Destruction*, my teacher, mentor and friend, 2008 Israel Prize Laureate Prof. David Weiss Halivni writes: "I do not say kaddish for my sister Channa Yitte or for my father, because I do

not know when they died. But I do remember them during the Yizkor service." After I read the book, I asked Rabbi Halivni if anyone had checked Yad Vashem for more information about the fate of his family. With his permission, I began a search that continues to this day.

I first discovered that the story he was told and believed for many years about his father, Zaler (Bezalel) Wiedermann, turned out to be incorrect. In his book, Halivni relates that his father was deported to Auschwitz in 1944: "I was told by some people that from Auschwitz he had been taken to Warsaw to clean up the rubble, and from there, on his way to *Dachau*, he had stepped off the wrong side of a train, was attacked by SS dogs, and consequently died." According to the "Original *Dachau* Entry Register" in the postwar International Tracing Service Repository at Bad Arolsen, a copy of

which can be found in the Yad Vashem Archives, Zaler Wiedermann was indeed on the death march from Warsaw to *Dachau*. However, he arrived in *Dachau* on 6 August 1944, and died there on 11 March 1945.

Halivni also mentions his great-uncle, Rabbi Leib Weiss of *Tyachevo*, "whose picture on the ramp in Auschwitz has been reproduced, unidentified, in many books on the Holocaust, including the *Encyclopedia Judaica*."

The *Encyclopedia* credits Yad Vashem for the photograph. I brought this information to the Yad Vashem Photo Archives. Since German soldiers took the photographs secretly, often to show the humiliation of Jews, it is extremely rare to know the identity of people in such photos. The naming of Rabbi Weiss then led to further identifications by Halivni and his late wife Tziporah of people in other pictures at Yad Vashem, enabling formerly anonymous Jews to regain their true identities. The picture is now displayed in the Holocaust History Museum with all

its subjects properly identified.

In describing his own experience, Halivni writes that when he jumped off the train upon arrival in Auschwitz, his aunt called out to him in Yiddish, "May the Torah that you have so diligently labored on protect you!" Halivni knew that Josef

(Continued on page 15)



Rabbi Leib Weiss of Tyachevo (center), his son Shlomo Weiss (right) and Itzo Einhorn (left) in a group of men undergoing selection after their arrival at Auschwitz-Birkenau, May 1944.

## FIORIELLO H. LAGUARDIA: A FRIEND TO EUROPE'S JEWS?

BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

Politicians, the best of them, are a peculiar breed. Sometimes they do things because they care. Sometimes they do things for the vote. And sometimes, due to political expediency, they move on to another issue . . .

Interestingly, when we, survivors, children of survivors, or great-grandchildren of survivors, think of World War II, the name Fiorello H. LaGuardia seldom comes to mind. If we do think of him at all, it's in terms of his being the beloved mayor of New York City from 1934-1945. However, this five-foot man, described as "pugnacious, loquacious, competitive, and blunt" in the book by Thomas Mann entitled, *Fiorello LaGuardia: A Fighter Against His Times 1882-1933*, always tried to do what he could for the European Jews whenever he could . . . that is, when he was politically able to . . .

For example, in 1919, United States House of Representatives member LaGuardia, then thirty-seven years-of-age, was concerned about the anti-Semitic riots going on in the "new nation states carved out of the German, Austrian,

and Russian empires." Because of this, he introduced "a resolution of protest" which would direct the delegates to the Paris Peace Conference to make it clear that the United States would neither consort with nor aid nations that allowed such acts to be committed in their midst. The result: "civil and religious rights" for Jews were made a part of the treaties formally organizing these "new states in eastern and central Europe." (That these treaties, in the end, would mean little, well, that's another issue.)

Additionally, throughout his early career in the House, LaGuardia determinedly fought against the tightening of immigration quotas — especially of southern and eastern Europeans, in other words, Italians and Jews. Thus, he found himself often defending their ways and their lifestyles. For, sadly, even among Americans, there were a growing number of those who felt

Nordics were "superior" and more worthy of United States citizenship.

Then, in 1933, LaGuardia was quick to recognize who and what Hitler was about, and, as was LaGuardia's wont, he shared his opinions with everyone! In countless passionate speeches, according to La Guardia historians Ronald H. Bayer, Alyn Brodsky, Lawrence Elliott, J. Paul Jeffers, and Thomas Kessner, who wrote of that period, he railed against Hitler calling him all kinds of names. In fact, "he called him 'that brown-shirted fanatic now menacing the peace of the world' and suggested that he be enshrined in a chamber of horrors at the forthcoming [1939] New York World's Fair."

Moreover, as the expression goes, "La Guardia didn't just talk the talk, he walked the walk." Among other things, according to the above-noted, he didn't want Americans to buy German goods, he didn't want the city to utilize materials made

in Germany, he retaliated when an American Jew could not be assured of his safety when traveling to Germany, soon he wanted America to sell planes again to Britain and France — hence ending "the restrictive neutrality laws" (Kessner 469).

Indeed, throughout the war LaGuardia tried to do what he could for us . . . but, he never went so far as to confront the president vis-à-vis rescuing the suffering Jews of Europe. Why? LaGuardia had dreams, dreams of acquiring a national post .

In later years, LaGuardia was director general of the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. In later years, he also visited Germany and couldn't believe the horrific evidence of German evil that he saw there. So, while many American soldiers were good to the Germans, LaGuardia, was totally unforgiving. It was then that he told the world to remember what the Germans had done. It was then, that he truly realized all that the Jews of Europe had suffered.

P.S. — *While LaGuardia's mother was Jewish, he considered himself an American Protestant of Italian descent.*

*Dr. Diane Cypkin is a Professor of Media and Communication Arts at Pace University.*



Fiorello H. LaGuardia

## THREE BROTHERS DEFIED TERROR

BY SHERRI DAY,  
ST. PETERSBURG TIMES

As a child, Brendon Rennert always knew his grandfather was special.

Strangers would wait outside his grandfather's Brooklyn apartment to talk. His house teemed with "aunts" and "uncles" who constantly enveloped him in hugs and kisses. A memorial in Brooklyn bore his name.

Rennert's mother told him his grandfather was famous, but Rennert was a teenager before he fully understood. His grandfather, Tuvia Bielski, was a Holocaust survivor. But more than that, Bielski and two of his brothers were part of a fascinating but little-known chapter of World War II when they hid 1,200 Jews in a forest in Belarus for more than two years. Together, they evaded the Nazis and likely avoided certain death.

Although the Bielski brothers' story has been told in two books and a documentary, it remains widely unknown. But not for long.

In January, the Bielski brothers' story makes its big-screen debut in *Defiance*, directed by Ed Zwick, who also directed *Blood Diamond* and *Glory*. Daniel Craig, the British actor and reigning James Bond, has the lead role of Tuvia Bielski.

And in November, an exhibit that focuses on the brothers' exploits opened at the Florida Holocaust Museum in St. Petersburg. Museum officials say the exhibit, *Courage and Compassion: The Legacy of the Bielski Brothers*, is the only one of its kind.

Rennert, who lives in Tampa and helped engineer the St. Petersburg exhibit, can barely contain his excitement. Finally, the world will know about his grandfather's heroism.

"To me, it's one of the greatest stories that have ever been told," said Rennert. "I always get the same look from people when I tell them about it. Jaws open."

Although Rennert, 40, says his grandfather talked little about what happened in the forest, he remembers his stories well. As told by Rennert, his uncle and the

Holocaust Museum's curator, the tale unfolds this way:

Tuvia Bielski was one of 11 children in a family of millers in what is now known as Belarus. The family's farm bordered a thick forest. As the Nazis made their way through Belarus, they hauled off Bielski's parents and two of his brothers to a ghetto. Bielski later learned his family had been executed.

Fearing the same fate for themselves, four of the Bielski brothers — Tuvia, Zus, Asael and 12-year-old Aron — fled to the forest. The land seemed dense and uninhabitable to outsiders, but it had been their childhood playground. After learning their family's fate, the three older brothers decided to save as many Jews from extinction as they could by harboring them in the woods.

Tuvia, whose fluency in several languages and physical appearance allowed him to pass as a non-Jew, made frequent trips to ghettos where he implored Jews to flee to the forest. Later, when visits became

more difficult, he sent notes telling of freedom beyond the ghetto. His was a fighting force. But any Jew — the old, infirm, women and infants — was welcome. They called it Jerusalem in the woods.

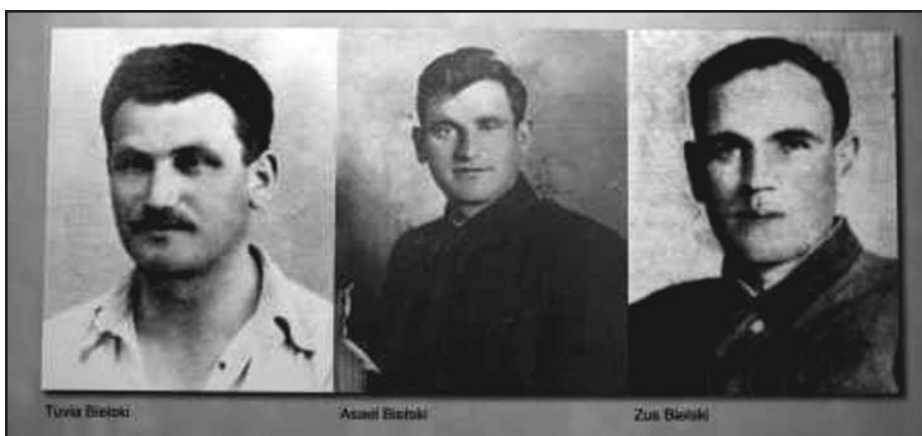
In the forest, the brothers had built a community blanketed by dense foliage and invisible by air. There was a bakery, a blacksmith shop, a tannery, an ammunition workshop and a bath house to ward off typhus. The inhabitants slept in underground dugouts.

They made their living repairing weapons and providing other services for Russian partisans, who paid them in arms. They took other necessities by force.

The alliance with the Russians protected them from the Nazis, who had no

idea how many people were in the forest or their fighting strength. When the Germans did attack, the Bielskis and their allies fought back and retreated deeper into the forest.

In the summer of 1944, German soldiers came upon the encampment as they fled from Russian soldiers. In the standoff, a handful of Jews died, but more than 1,200 walked out alive. The Bielskis emerged as well: Asael joined the Russian army and later died in battle. Tuvia and Zus eventually came to the United States and settled in Brooklyn. Rennert's grandfather, Tuvia, died in 1987, Zus in 1995.



Three Bielski brothers - (from left to right) Tuvia, Asael, and Zus — used a thick forest in Belarus to conceal about 1,200 Jews during World War II.

Last year, Rennert and his relatives traveled to Lithuania to see *Defiance* being filmed. On the way home, the grandson got the idea to create an exhibit to share his grandfather's story with another generation.

The Florida Holocaust Museum was happy to oblige.

"The Bielskis are such a unique story because they weren't only focused on fighting back," said Erin Blankenship, museum curator. "They were focused on saving as many people as they could, and they took in anybody, the old, the sick, children. A lot of other partisan groups turned those people away."

Rennert, who is in telecommunications sales, reached out to family for artifacts.

Everybody had a little something — a shirt, a book. The collectibles, along with artifacts unearthed in a dig in Belarus, make up the 50 items in the display. There are also photographs and video testimony from survivors, 29 of whom are still alive.

Robert Bielsky, Tuvia's son and Rennert's uncle, who has a different name spelling, has seen *Defiance* six times. He organized the Lithuania excursion and a side trip to Belarus to trace their ancestors' journey. He keeps the names of each person who lived in the forest. They are family.

He appreciates the film and takes pride in his father's heroics, but Bielsky suspects he wouldn't have sought the spotlight.

"What was very important to my father was to see those babies and those children of the descendants being born and grown up because of his feats," said Bielsky, 50, who owns a commercial real estate firm in New York City. "When (he) attended parties, like weddings and *bar mitzvahs*, his satisfaction was to see

the children and the grandchildren of the survivors — the regeneration of families that never had the chance to survive."

Hollywood being Hollywood, the movie takes liberties. Tuvia, for instance, didn't die penniless and was not a cab driver, but owned a trucking company, Bielsky said. Still the film lives up to the family's expectations by telling the truth about what happened in the forest.

Now that his grandfather isn't around to tell the tale, Rennert wants to ensure it lives on.

"It's a really great story in every aspect of it," Rennert said. "It's not about death and destruction. It's about life and living. To me, that's the greatest story that's around."

# HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR RECONNECTS WITH FAMILY THAT SAVED HER LIFE

BY ETGAR LEFKOVITS,  
THE JERUSALEM POST

A 94-year-old Holocaust survivor, the mother of the prominent Israeli businessman Yossi Maiman, has reconnected with the Polish family who saved her life and that of her own mother by sheltering them from the Nazis in Poland during World War II.

The story of life and bravery amid death and destruction begins nearly a century ago in Poland.

Esfira Maiman was born in 1914 in the central Polish city of Lodz, where her family was in the textile business.

After the German invasion of Poland in 1939, she and her parents made their way to Warsaw, where they were incarcerated in the Warsaw Ghetto.

In 1942, she managed to escape the ghetto, where her father had died of a heart attack, due to her job as a steel laborer, which afforded her the rare privilege of leaving the restricted zone.

Abetted by her husband's contacts with the underground, Maiman quickly connected with a Polish woman, Stanislaw Slawinska, who lived in the rural community of *Grodzisk Mazowiecki*, about 30 km. from Warsaw.

Slawinska, a Polish Catholic, vehemently opposed the Nazis even though her own father was German, and readily took Maiman in.

"From the minute we entered her home we became friends," Maiman recounts from her home in an upscale retirement

complex in *Herzliya Pituach*.

A week later, Maiman was able to get her mother smuggled out of the ghetto and into Slawinska's home, as well.

Her husband was caught and murdered by the Nazis on one of his underground missions.

Maiman and her mother spent the next two years in the safety of Slawinska's home, which she also opened to other



Esfira Maiman (center) with daughter Michelle and son Yossi.

Jews hiding from the Nazis.

The home was situated in a rural area, with train tracks one side and a bloc of German soldiers on the other, she said.

"Every day I would see the trains going by, taking the Jews from their homes and villages to their death, and on the other side, the German soldiers drawing water from a well," Maiman recalled.

To avoid detection, Maiman rarely left the home for the next two years, too fear-

ful to even venture to a small bathroom outside the house. The residents placed a piece of spoiled meat at the entrance to the hiding place to repel the dogs of the German soldiers if they ever searched the house.

Though at one point she was blackmailed by a Polish neighbor who knew she was hiding Jews, Slawinska, who was childless, never turned them out, despite the danger to her own life.

After the war ended, Maiman remarried, and spent the next year and half in a DP camp in Germany, where her son Yossi was born.

In 1948 she and her husband and mother moved to Peru, where she had a cousin who survived the war, and where they lived for the next two decades.

Over the years, she would send packages of rice and flour – along with some money – to her Polish savior, but never

got a reply, she said, and contact between the two women was lost.

The Maimans moved to Israel in 1972; today, Yossi Maimon is chairman of the Merhav Group, which is known worldwide for project development, contracting and finance.

Despite the passage of time, the nonagenarian never forgot the woman who saved her life.

Six months ago, Michele approached an

Israeli official with the New York-based International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation and recounted her mother's story.

The decade-old organization, which seeks to identify stories of Holocaust rescue that have not been previously uncovered, rushed into action.

Maiman was sure that Slawinska, who was about seven years older than she was, was no longer alive, but she remembered her nephew, Roman, who was a boy during the war, and who kept the secret of the hidden Jews.

Within weeks the Foundation was able to locate Roman Slawinska, who was still living in the same Warsaw suburb, and found documentation of his aunt's courageous deeds.

Maiman and Slawinska were soon on the phone, sharing stories of their linked past, crying tears of joy.

In September, Yad Vashem posthumously bestowed the Holocaust Memorial's highest honor on Stanislaw Slawinska, said Danny Rainer, the vice president of the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation.

"We feel that the rescuers have to be recognized – especially by the younger generation," Rainer said.

"I am very happy that my mother is with us to live this moment of joy," Yossi Maiman said.

"Now she feels at peace," her daughter Michele added.

"It is the realization of a dream," Esfira Maiman said, adding, tearfully, "She should have gotten the award herself."

## A HELPING HAND FOR NAZI VICTIMS

The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, known as Claims Conference, works to secure compensation and restitution for survivors of the Holocaust.

Since 1951, the Claims Conference – working in partnership with the State of Israel – has negotiated for and distributed payments from Germany, Austria, other governments, and certain industries; recovered unclaimed German Jewish property; and funded programs to assist the neediest Jewish victims of Nazism.

More than 500,000 Holocaust survivors in 75 countries have received compensa-

### NAZI VICTIMS IN GAZA REGION RECEIVE AID

The Claims Conference is allocating more than \$428,000 to assist Nazi victims, living in areas under missile attack from Gaza, who may be especially



traumatized by the current conflict. These new grants build on the Claims Conference's support over the past years to help Nazi victims in southern Israel cope with the additional distress evoked by their present situation.

Claims Conference assistance includes: \$268,000 to pay for full memberships in 2009 for Nazi victims in "supportive communities." Supportive communities provide emergency life buttons, enabling elderly residents to easily contact (without use of a telephone) emergency medical assistance directly. Additional services

also include home modifications, counseling, security, and socialization programs. The Claims Conference allocated \$250,000 for this program in 2008.

The Claims Conference has enhanced its ongoing support of AMCHA, the National Israeli Center for Psychological Support of Nazi Victims, with a \$50,000 grant for 2009, specifically to provide psychosocial support to Nazi victims living near Gaza. In 2008, the Claims Conference funded a new AMCHA branch in *Sderot*.

Special emergency allocations in 2009 of \$36,000 to provide shatter-proof glass windows in three nursing homes – *Beit Avot Ashdod*, Association for the Welfare of the Aged in *Beersheva*, and *Neve Oranim* in *Gedera* – in southern Israel. A total of 290 Nazi victims live in these nursing homes.

Hunger relief programs in Ashkelon and Ashdod. For 2009, the Claims Conference allocated \$74,088 to *Eshel Ashdod* and \$32,256 to *Eshel Ashkelon* for food programs that include hot meals for Nazi victims, a program that can be of great comfort in a traumatic time. For 2007 and 2008, these agencies received a combined \$268,000 for hunger relief for Nazi victims.

### PAYMENTS FOR SURVIVORS OF NAZI SIEGE OF LENINGRAD NOW LIVING IN WEST

In an historic breakthrough, the Claims Conference has negotiated one-time

payments as a result of the work of the Claims Conference.

Payments to Holocaust survivors as a result of the work of the Claims Conference have come to more than \$60 billion.

The Claims Conference has allocated approximately \$1 billion to organizations meeting the social service needs of Holocaust survivors, and engaging in education, research, and documentation of the *Shoah*.

Today we publish the latest news on the accomplishments of Claims Conference.

payments from Germany for certain Jewish victims of the Nazi siege of Leningrad.

In recent negotiations, the German government has agreed to include these Jewish victims in the Claims Conference Hardship Fund, provided they meet the program's other eligibility criteria. The program issues a one-time payment of €2,556.

It is expected that this agreement will lead to the payment to thousands of Jewish victims of Nazism from the former Soviet Union now living in Israel, the United States, Germany and other Western countries. It is the first time that the persecution of Jews who lived through the 900-day siege of Leningrad has been recognized by Germany.

Because of the Claims Conference negotiations, certain Jewish persons who stayed in Leningrad at some time between September 1941 and January 1944, or fled from there during this period, may

receive a one-time Hardship Fund payment, if they meet the other requirements of the Hardship Fund.

### CLAIMS CONFERENCE SECURES €12 MILLION FOR JEWISH BUDAPEST HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

In negotiations with the German government, the Claims Conference has secured payments for certain Jewish survivors of the Nazi occupation of Budapest. In recognition of the incarceration and suffering of Budapest Holocaust survivors, certain Jewish survivors of Nazi-era Budapest, who currently reside in Eastern Europe and previously did not receive any payments from certain major compensation programs, will receive a one-time payment of €1,900 from the Claims Conference Budapest Fund.

Payments totaling approximately €12.3 million will be issued to approximately 6,500 survivors living in Hungary.

To streamline the process and distribute the funds as quickly as possible, the Claims Conference has reviewed over 25,000 files to identify eligible survivors. Brief and simple waiver forms, as required by the German government, are proactively being sent by the Claims Conference to 5,790 survivors who it believes may be eligible for this payment.



## TUSKEGEE AIRMEN OVER AUSCHWITZ

DR. RAFAEL MEDOFF,  
THE JERUSALEM POST

The invitation to members of the Tuskegee Airmen, the all-black units of World War II pilots, to attend the presidential inauguration, is an important reminder of the long road America has traveled from the era of segregation to the election of the first African-American president.

It also offers an opportunity to reflect on a little-known episode involving the Tuskegee Airmen and the Holocaust – and on the question of how the new president will respond to genocide in our own time.

Defying racist War Department officials who regarded them as inferior and did not want them to fly, the Tuskegee Airmen scored extraordinary achievements in battle. Tuskegee squadrons shot down more than 100 German planes and repeatedly won Distinguished Unit Citations and other medals for performance in their missions over Europe. They were so admired by their fellow pilots that bomber groups often specifically requested the Tuskegee units as escorts for their bombing raids.

One of those raids took place in the skies over Auschwitz.

On the morning of August 20, 1944, a group 127 US B-17 bombers, called Flying Fortresses, approached Auschwitz. They were escorted by 100 P-51 Mustang fighter planes. Most of the Mustangs were piloted by Tuskegee Airmen of the 332nd Fighter Group. The attacking force dropped more than 1,000 500-pound bombs on German oil factories less than five miles from the gas chambers. Despite German anti-aircraft fire and a squadron of German fighter planes, none of the Mustangs was hit, and only one of the US planes was shot down. All of the units reported successfully hitting their targets.

On the ground below, Jewish slave laborers, including 15 year-old Elie Wiesel, cheered the bombing. In his best-selling memoir, *Night*, Wiesel described their reaction: "We were not afraid. And yet, if a bomb had fallen on the blocks [the

prisoners' barracks], it alone would have claimed hundreds of victims on the spot. But we were no longer afraid of death; at any rate, not of that death. Every bomb that exploded filled us with joy and gave us new confidence in life. The raid lasted over an hour. If it could only have lasted ten times ten hours!"

But it did not. Even though there were additional US bombing raids on German industrial sites in the Auschwitz region in the weeks and month to follow, the gas chambers and crematoria were never targeted.

The Roosevelt administration knew about the mass murder going on in Auschwitz, and even possessed diagrams of the camp that were prepared by two escapees. But when Jewish organizations asked the Roosevelt administration to order the bombing of the camp and the railways leading to it, the requests were rejected. US officials claimed such raids were "impracticable" because they would require "considerable diversion" of planes needed for the war effort.

But the Tuskegee veterans know that claim was false. They were right there in the skies above Auschwitz. No "diversion" was necessary to drop a few bombs on the mass-murder machinery or the railways leading into the camp. Sadly, those orders were never given.

The decision to refrain from bombing Auschwitz was part of a broader policy by the Roosevelt administration to refrain from taking action to rescue Jews from the Nazis or provide havens for them. The US did not want to deal with the burden of

caring for large numbers of refugees. And its ally, Great Britain, would not open the doors to Palestine to the Jews, for fear of angering Arab opinion. The result was that the Allies failed to confront one of history's most compelling moral challenges.

Today, America again faces the challenge of responding to genocide. The Darfur genocide continues, yet the Arab League, China and Russia are trying to prevent the prosecution of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir for



This aerial view shows the layout of the largest concentration camp and death camp run by Nazi Germany during World War II at Auschwitz near the Polish town of Oswiecim, Poland, Aug. 25, 1944. Auschwitz is the main camp and Birkenau is the nearby extermination center.

his role in the slaughter. What will the United States do? Iranian leaders have threatened genocide against Israel, and Syria is developing nuclear weapons to go along with its other weapons of mass destruction. How should America respond? The Roosevelt administration had the opportunity to send the Tuskegee Airmen and other pilots to interrupt the Nazi genocide, but it chose not to do so. The Obama administration will face comparable moral challenges.

*The writer is director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, which focuses on issues related to America's response to the Holocaust.*

## JEWISH MUSEUM BREAKS GROUND IN SAN FRANCISCO

The Jewish museum that opened in San Francisco is unlike almost every other such institution in the world: It is a light-filled place focused on the future, not the darkness of the past.

The Contemporary Jewish Museum does not contain permanent space dedicated to remembering the Holocaust, housing Jewish artifacts, or recording the genealogy of the Jewish diaspora.

Instead, it is a fresh, happy site that asks the Jewish people to create new expressions of who they are, in a city where Jews have always thrived.

"This is a museum of life," Director Connie Wolf said. "It's not that we aren't embracing the Holocaust, that incredibly important and pivotal moment in world history. We just always want to be thinking about other issues as well."

The new building is designed by famed architect Daniel Libeskind.

Libeskind is best-known for designing Berlin's Jewish Museum, where visitors are asked to acknowledge that the horror of Jewish and German histories are linked forever.

"Despite all the things that have happened, life is about celebrating," said Libeskind, also the master planner for the World Trade Center memorial in New York City. "This museum is not in the shadow of the history that will always be part of Europe. The optimism of this museum and America are intertwined."

The sentiment could not be more welcome in San Francisco, a city founded partly by Jewish pioneers like Levi Strauss and the forefathers of Wells Fargo Bank, said Marc Dollinger, professor of Jewish Studies at San Francisco State University.

"To Jews, California was the new Zion, and San Francisco was the new Jerusalem," Dollinger said.

As a result, Jews were largely assimilated: The San Francisco and Oakland area has the third highest number of Jews of any U.S. metropolitan area, after New York and Los Angeles. But there are no distinctly Jewish neighborhoods, and inter-marriage rates reach 90 percent, Dollinger said.

This reality is also reflected in the museum, which has taken a decisively pluralistic approach to its exhibits.

## ANATOMY OF THE UKRAINIAN GENOCIDE

(Continued from page 13)

*Zhytomir* provides an example of such a "settlement." Dieter Pohl, of Munich's Institute of Contemporary History, describes how the first mass killings by the *Einsatzgruppen* and the *Wehrmacht*, accompanied by Ukrainian auxiliaries, were followed by a planned, systematic murder, robbery and destruction of Jewish communities.

The Jewish existence in Western *Wolhynia* from 1921 to 1945 in general, and in the typical village of *Kolky* in particular, is described in depth by Timothy Snyder of Yale. There was not much love lost between the local Jews, Ukrainians and Polish settlers. Each community lived more or less according to its own agenda. Poles sought to "polonize" the area; Ukrainians fought for their independence and were largely responsible for violence. The Soviet occupation of September 1939 offered Jews comparative safety and new opportunities, but the German invasion of June 1941 turned their lives into burning inferno.

Frank Golczewski, of Hamburg University, presents *Galicia* as an important case study of mutual German-Ukrainian relations. Ukrainians knew that

they were cheated by Germans, but this did not stop them from serving in various German military detachments, robbing and killing Jews, and being described as "the worst" by Holocaust survivors. The Ukrainian auxiliaries were often assigned the bloodiest tasks, and their collaboration made a significant contribution to the Jewish genocide.

Dennis Deletant, of London University College, examines the deportation of Jews from *Bessarabia* and *Bukowina* to *Transnistria*, which Romania occupied after the joint German-Romanian attack on the Soviet Union. *Transnistria* became the graveyard of more than 250,000 Jews, the principal victims of Romanian dictator Ion Antonescu and his deputy Mihai Antonescu. Both subscribed to the "ethnic purification" of Romania, free of Slavs and Jews, sharing a common border with Nazi Germany.

It was only after *Stalingrad* that Antonescu put a stop to the Jewish deportations and turned down the German request to send the remaining Romanian Jews to the extermination camps in Poland.

Andrei Angric, of the Hamburg Foundation for the Promotion of Science and Culture,

writes about the *Thoroughfare IV*, Hitler's grandiose plan to build a highway across Ukraine, which was expected to support both the conquest and the German settlement. Soon, however, the Germans realized that the anticipated large numbers of Jews and Soviet POWs needed for the heavy labor had already been murdered. German civilian authorities, who badly needed slave labor, often vainly tried to persuade the SS that it would be more convenient to murder Jews by hard labor, hunger and exhaustion.

Martin Dean, a scholar from the US Holocaust Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, describes how the ethnic Germans who settled in Russia before the October Revolution served Hitler rather well, with few exceptions.

Alexander Kruglov, a writer from *Kharkov*, provides us with detailed statistics of the Jewish losses during those crucial years of 1941-1944.

Karel Berkhoff, of the Center for Holocaust Studies of the University of Amsterdam, comments on the story of Dina Pronicheva, one of the few survivors of the *Babi Yar* massacre.

Omer Bartov, of Brown University in his *"White Spaces and Black Holes"*

describes *Galicia's* past and present. The "white spaces" illustrate the omissions and poverty of the Ukrainian Holocaust memory, while the "black holes" note the selective marginalization of the past.

An extensive index accompanies this well-edited, printed and bound volume. Ukraine has almost completely erased its Jewish past. In the town of *Kosiv*, for instance, where once 2,400 Jews lived, the house which belonged to a local rabbi was turned into a museum in memory of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which murdered Jews. We find almost no traces of shame or regret.

Bitter memories and the specter of the Holocaust continue to haunt Jewish-Ukrainian relations. However the fact that 1,200 Ukrainians were awarded the title of Righteous Gentiles by Yad Vashem testifies that there must have been many more Ukrainians who helped Jews in hiding. But only a full admission of the disturbing facts of the past and a full respect for the perpetuation of the memory of the former Jewish communities may at least partly exorcise the guilt and open a new page of the mutual relations. Perhaps this book may serve as one of the guiding lights in this direction.

## NEWS OF FABRICATED HOLOCAUST MEMOIR SPARKS ANGER, SADNESS

In the November/December issue of *M & R*, a story, "Romance in the Holocaust," about Holocaust survivors Herman Rosenblat and his wife Roma was published on page six. Same story with slight variations appeared in numerous other newspapers, magazines, and Internet editions. As it turns out a big part of that story is not true. Many Holocaust experts and survivors came forward with proof of Rosenblat's lies, which eventually forced Herman Rosenblat to recant his own story. Below, we are offering you an article published by Associated Press about Herman Rosenblat's hoax.

"Herman Rosenblat and his wife are the most gentle, loving, beautiful people," literary agent Andrea Hurst said, anguishing over why she, and so many others, were taken by Rosenblat's story of love born on opposite sides of a barbed-wire fence at a Nazi concentration camp in Germany.

"I question why I never questioned it. I believed it; it was an incredible, hope-filled story."

Last month, Berkley Books canceled Rosenblat's memoir, "Angel at the Fence." Rosenblat acknowledged that he and his wife did not meet, as they had said for years, at a sub-camp of *Buchenwald*, where she allegedly sneaked him apples and bread. The book was supposed to come out in February.

Rosenblat, 79, has been married to the former Roma Radzicky for 50 years, since meeting her on a blind date in New York. In a statement through his agent, he described himself as an advocate of love and tolerance who falsified his past to better spread his message.

"I wanted to bring happiness to people," said Rosenblat, who now lives



Herman and Roma Rosenblat.

in the Miami area. "I brought hope to a lot of people. My motivation was to make good in this world."

Rosenblat's believers included not only his agent and his publisher, but TV talk show host Oprah Winfrey, film producers, journalists, family members and strangers who ignored, or did not know about, the warnings from scholars that his story did not make sense.

Other Holocaust memoirists have devised greater fantasies. Misha Defonseca, author

of "Misha: A Memoire of the Holocaust Years," pretended she was a Jewish girl who lived with wolves during the war, when she was actually a non-Jew who lived, without wolves, in Belgium.

Historical records prove Rosenblat was indeed at Buchenwald and other camps.

"How sad that he felt he had to embellish a life of surviving the Holocaust and of being married for half a century," said Holocaust scholar Michael Berenbaum.

The damage is broad. Publishing, the most trusting of industries, has again been burned by a memoir that fact-checking might have prevented. The damage is deep. Scholars and other skeptics, as well as fellow survivors fear that Rosenblat's fabrications will only encourage doubts about the Holocaust.

"I am very worried because many of us speak to thousands of students each year," says Sidney Finkel, a longtime friend of Rosenblat's and a fellow survivor. "We go before audiences. We tell them a story and now some people will question what I experienced."

"This was not Holocaust education but miseducation," Ken Waltzer, director of Jewish Studies at Michigan State University, said in a statement.

"Holocaust experience is not heart-warm-

ing, it is heart-rending. All this shows something about the broad unwillingness in our culture to confront the difficult knowledge of the Holocaust," Waltzer said. "All the more important, then, to have real memoirs that tell of real experience in the camps."

Among the fooled, at least the partially fooled, was Berenbaum, former director of the United States Holocaust Research Institute at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. Berenbaum had been asked to read the manuscript by film producer Harris Salomon, who still plans an adaptation of the book.

Berenbaum's tentative support — "Crazier things have happened," he told The Associated Press last fall — was cited by the publisher as it initially defended the book. Berenbaum now says he saw factual errors, including Rosenblat's description of *Theresienstadt*, the camp from which he was eventually liberated, but did not think of challenging the love story.

"There's a limit to what I can verify, because I was not there," he says. "I can verify the general historical narrative, but in my research, I rely upon the survivors to present the specifics of their existence with integrity. When they don't, they destroy so much and they ruin so much, and that's terrible."

"I was burned," he added. "And I have to read books more skeptically because I was burned."

## BATTLE FOR HOLOCAUST ASSETS ROILS ISRAEL

(Continued from page 7)

was designated for other victims of Nazi persecution, including refugees and slave laborers.

The European cases led Israeli scholars in 2000 to publish research showing heirs had been having difficulty recovering assets in the Jewish state. The revelations led to a parliamentary investigation, and, in 2006, the law creating the Company.

The Israeli law sets up a process similar to the one in Europe. Verified heirs are supposed to get paid first, with needy Holocaust survivors getting the rest. But there's a crucial difference from earlier settlements: The Company must target each institution over each asset that it allegedly held. As with Bank Leumi, this gives the targeted institutions a chance to fight claims case-by-case, then shekel-by-shekel within each case.

Company investigators have traveled to Poland, Latvia and Lithuania to dig up school report cards, birth records and marriage documents to try to make their cases. They also check Holocaust archives in Israel, Germany and elsewhere to try to prove account holders died in the tragedy.

Making matters more complex, many of the dormant bank accounts the Company has tried to recover have been transferred from one institution to another or from a bank to the government, and, in some cases, back again.

Some of the contested accounts have even been paid out to heirs. These cases get at a particularly contentious issue between the Company and the banks. The heirs may have gotten the face value of the accounts, but the law provides a formula to calculate what the account should be worth when factors such as inflation, currency revaluations and accrued interest are taken into account.

For example, suppose a European Jew who would later perish in the Holocaust opened a bank account in 1936 with the equivalent of \$1,000. If heirs eventually identified the account and recovered the money this year from the bank or government custodians, Mr. Roet says they most likely got only the face value of the original investment, or minimal interest on top of it. But the legally mandated formula the Company uses calculates the "lost value" in that account over the years. Under that formula, the \$1,000 deposit in 1936 would be valued today at the equivalent of about \$23,000.

And Mr. Roet says the banks — even those that have already paid out at face value — still owe the difference for that legally defined lost value. Without any of the international pressure that European firms faced, however, many Israeli institutions are offering stiff resistance.

Aviram Cohen, a *Bank Leumi* spokesman, says the bank's own investigation shows 600 accounts identified by Mr. Roet belonged to people who couldn't be Holocaust victims, since there was activity in the accounts after the war.

The Company's lawyer, Nadav Haetzni, acknowledged that about 100 of the 1,300 cases were submitted to the bank by mistake. They involved Holocaust survivors, rather than confirmed victims, he says. However, Mr. Haetzni also says the error was quickly corrected, that the accounts in question had little value and that the sum of the claims against Bank Leumi won't be materially diminished.

In addition, he says the Company recently slapped a second round of claims against *Bank Leumi* seeking an additional \$31.5 million.

On the issue of lost value, Mr. Haetzni said the law is clear. It appears the dispute is headed for the Israeli courts.

From the beginning, Israeli banks have had an uneasy relationship with those cam-

paing to recover dormant accounts. After a nearly five-year parliamentary investigation, lawmakers identified up to 9,000 bank accounts investigators suspected belonged to victims.

Banks implicated in the report rejected 2005 findings as speculative. So lawmakers established the Company in 2006.

A \$3.15 million claim the Company has prepared against *Mizrahi Tafahot Bank Ltd.* grew out of a faded banker's memo that drew attention during the *Knesset* hearings. Dated Oct. 29, 1939, eight weeks after the Nazis blitzed Poland, the document pledges deposits held by European Jews, mostly in Poland, as collateral on a loan from another bank.

"The depositors cannot claim their deposits now because they are abroad or we foresee that they won't claim the money for other reasons," the memo reads in Hebrew. A representative of *Mizrahi Bank* declined to comment.

Mr. Roet has proved to be a dogged adversary. He was chosen as the Company's chairman because he had led a group that helped secure a series of Holocaust settlements in the Netherlands valued at more than \$300 million.

After the arrest of his two sisters in 1943 and their deportation to Auschwitz, he shuttled among more than a dozen Christian homes, finishing out the war pretending to be the son of a Catholic couple on a dairy farm in southern Holland. "I learned to milk cows," he says.

He came to Israel alone in 1946 at age 17, then went on to build successful businesses, including one importing raw materials for Israel's booming pharmaceutical industry. But he has dedicated his retirement to Holocaust victims.

Last year, Mr. Roet began assembling his team. Accountants, archivists and self-styled gumshoes occupy workspaces that offer few hints about the task at hand.

Holocaust-related records are hidden behind the covers of blue and red binders shelved near a Homer Simpson poster.

Although the parliamentary findings made banks natural targets when the Company opened, there were few clues about land in Israel purchased by those who were later killed in the Holocaust. Jewish academics documented a more than threefold increase in Jewish land purchases in British Palestine from 1914 to 1940. Parcels were sold in Europe by traveling Zionist salesman.

Across Israel, the Company so far has title to about 480 individual parcels, 300 of which were handed over by the government. They are in some of Israel's hottest areas, including trendy Tel Aviv. The Company values the lands it holds so far at about \$86.7 million.

Based on evidence uncovered thus far, Mr. Roet believes there are scores of still-hidden parcels across the nation.

While the quest for assets is under way, so is the hunt for heirs. While trying to piece together records in Europe and listing recovered assets on its Web site, the Company has reached into the country's Holocaust legacy to seek out victims' families.

The Company's Elinor Kritoru appears regularly on an Israeli radio show called *Hipoos Krovim*, which means "searching for relatives" in Hebrew. It first aired in 1945, broadcasting the pleas of Holocaust survivors looking for lost loved ones. It later went off the air, but returned in 2000 as a more generic reunion show.

Ms. Kritoru's appearances echo bygone broadcasts, as she calls out the names of the dead.

"We're looking for the heirs of Yitzhak Meir Abeliow, from *Bialystock*, Poland," she said earlier this year. "We'd be very happy to find the descendents of David Tishanski....We're also looking for heirs of Lazar Abeleff from *Kononov*, Ukraine."

## THE "MEXICAN SCHINDLER" IS HONORED BY THE ANTI-DEFAMATION LEAGUE

BY ARI B. BLOOMEKATZ,  
LOS ANGELES TIMES

Gilberto Bosques Saldívar has never been the subject of a major motion picture by Steven Spielberg. American history books seldom, if ever, mention his name, and he does not have his own Wikipedia page, in Spanish or English.

But the former Mexican diplomat, stationed in France during World War II, helped save as many as 40,000 Jews and other refugees from Nazi persecution.

"It is still a chapter of the Holocaust that has not been written," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League. "I believe that there are a lot of other cases that we do not know about that are surfacing little by little."

At a reception held in Saldívar's honor in Beverly Hills, the ADL presented his daughter with a posthumous Courage to Care Award, which was created in 1987 to recognize non-Jews who helped rescue and hide refugees during the Holocaust.

Foxman noted that, other than industrialist Oskar Schindler and Swedish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg, most non-Jews who defied the Nazis and helped Jews during the Holocaust are not well-known. Even Schindler's efforts were largely lost to history until Spielberg made the movie, "*Schindler's List*."

Calling Saldívar the "Mexican Schindler," Foxman said, "Bosques' life is a shining example of human decency, moral courage and conviction, and his actions highlight the less well-known initiatives of Latin Americans who helped to save Jews during the Holocaust."

Foxman reflected on others who reached out to Jews in need. Their generosity, he said, is "difficult to comprehend because they frequently risked everything, including the lives of their families, to help people who, very often, they did not know at all. Difficult also because — apart from their willingness to help others — they do not seem to have had much in common. They were Catholic, Orthodox Christian, Evangelical, Baptist, Lutheran, and also Muslim."

Foxman owes his own life to such a person.

"I stand here before you because of someone like Gilberto Bosques

Saldívar," he said.

As a young boy in Poland during the war, Foxman was sheltered by a Catholic woman in an "overwhelmingly unfriendly" Europe.

"Were it not for her, I would not be alive today to bear witness," he said. Foxman described Saldívar's efforts when he served as Mexican consul general in *Marseilles* in 1939: He rented two *chateaux* to house European Jews and other refugees, including leaders of the Spanish Republic, who were defeated in the Spanish Civil War by the Fascist forces of Francisco Franco.



Laura Bosques Manjarrez, 83, is presented with the Anti-Defamation League's Courage to Care Award on behalf of her father, Gilberto Bosques Saldívar. She called the ceremony a "symbol of human solidarity."

In two years, he issued about 40,000 visas, and chartered ships to take Jews and other refugees to various African nations, where they then went on to Argentina, Mexico and Brazil.

Saldívar was arrested, along with his family and about 40 consular staff members, by the Germans in 1943, and was held for about a year near Bonn until Mexico reached an agreement with the Nazis for his release.

According to the ADL, in 1944, Saldívar wrote that he had implemented "a policy of help, of material and moral support to the heroic defenders of the Spanish Republic, to the relentless brave people who fought against Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Petain and Laval." (He was referring to Philippe Petain and Pierre Laval, French leaders who cooperated with the Nazis.)

Saldívar later served as an ambassador to Cuba, Finland, Portugal and Sweden. He died in 1995 at the age of 103.

## PIECE BY PIECE

(Continued from page 10)

Mengele sent his mother and grandfather to the left (i.e., to death in the gas chambers), but what about his 20-year-old sister and his 29-year-old aunt Etel? When more Bad Arolsen material arrived at Yad Vashem in early 2008, I discovered a document with his aunt's personal details and signature in one of the files. She had been sent from Auschwitz to *Stutthof*.

In February 1945, when the *Gross-Rosen camp* was liquidated and occupied by the Russians, Halivni was transferred to *Ebensee*, part of the *Mauthausen complex* in Upper Austria. The original *Mauthausen* prisoner admission cards are at Yad Vashem, so I photocopied his card for him, as well as that of his parents, which include the names of his grandparents. (No trace has yet been found of his sister Channa

Yitte.) These cards track Halivni from *Wolfsberg* in *Gross-Rosen* to *Ebensee* in *Mauthausen* and then to Munich after liberation. The *Wolfsberg Labor Camp Machzor*, published by Yad Vashem, features his moving article on prayer.

After showing him all the information I found, Halivni asserted that, "the credit for anything we have uncovered goes first and foremost to Yad Vashem. Had it not been for Yad Vashem, I never would have had what I now know. I lost my entire family, and from 1944 until I married Tzipora in 1953, I was totally alone. The records we found provide some consolation. Their names are recorded for posterity."

The author, ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary, is a Jerusalem resident, researcher, and Deputy Director of the *Jacobi Center of the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy*.

## RETHINKING POLES AND JEWS

(Continued from page 4)

manifold experiences as a leading member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council and the National Polish American-Jewish American Council; both groups have had disputes over the precise definition of "Holocaust," as it relates to Nazi persecution of the Poles. Regrettably, Father Pawlikowski criticizes the attitudes of some Polish participants without providing the background information needed to understand their positions.

This part concludes with Antony Polonski's reflections on his participation in Polish-Jewish relations since the conference on "Polish-Jewish Relations in Modern History" at Oxford in 1984; he foresees a "normalization" in relations.

None other than Michael Schudrich, the chief rabbi of Poland, wrote the introduction to the third part on contemporary Poland, describing how Poles of Jewish origin recovered their heritage after the fall of Communism. On the Poles, he writes, "To view Poles today as being mostly antisemitic is false and unfair."

One can see how things have changed for the better in articles by Stanislaw Krajewski on "a new atmosphere" in Catholic-Jewish relations in Poland since 1989, thanks to major contributions by Pope John Paul II, and by Joanna B. Michlic on anti-Semitism in contemporary Poland. She finds that opposition to anti-Semitism "has succeeded in gaining influence in mainstream politics and culture, especially in the last decade."

The publication of *Neighbors* by Jan T. Gross, on the *Jedwabne* massacre,

became a turning point in Polish-Jewish relations. Natalia Aleksiu considers the impact of the book on Polish historians, producing a permanent change in the way they approach the Polish-Jewish past. Polish-Americans, who have long been concerned about the negative stereotypes promoted by the March of the Living, will appreciate how Carolyn Slutsky confronts the problems with this organization, which brings Jewish teenagers to Holocaust sites in Poland. One outrageous example was the Jewish leader who showed his group the houses next to the Majdanek concentration camp and claimed, "these people were just sitting in their backyards barbecuing while this mass murder was taking place." Of course, the houses were built after the war, German food rationing did not allow for barbecuing, and Poles too were murdered at Majdanek. And as Annamaria Orla-Bukowska notes in the final article, Jewish visitors to Poland will find that from the mostly non-Jewish people of Poland, — and not from Jews from abroad — will arise the scholars and curators who will research the Jewish heritage of Poland, and protect its artifacts.

In their preface, the editors state their goal: "to make an intellectual contribution to a field that is often emotional." In this, they have succeeded.

Charles Chotkowski, a member of the executive board of the National Polish-American Jewish-American Council, is Director of Research for the Holocaust Documentation Committee of the Polish-American Congress.

## JERUSALEM CONCERT FEATURES VIOLINS SAVED FROM NAZIS

Sixteen violins used by Jewish Holocaust victims — including an instrument whose case was used to smuggle explosives that blew up a Nazi base — were played in September in a concert in Jerusalem.

"Each violin has its own story," said Amnon Weinstein, 69, who, together with his son has spent over a decade restoring the violins collected from across Europe.

Weinstein, a violin maker, said he received the instruments in various states of disrepair, many of them decorated with stars of David, a testimony to their former Jewish owners.

"By restoring their violins, their legacy is born again," said Weinstein, who lost most of his family in the Holocaust.

They were played together for the first time in a concert entitled "Violins of Hope" by members of Israel's *Raanana Symphonette* and the *Philharmonia Istanbul Orchestra*. World-renowned Israeli virtuoso Shlomo Mintz will play one.

One of the featured instruments, called *Motele's Violin*, belonged to a 12-year-old Jewish boy who played it for Nazi officers from Hitler's SS in Belarus in 1944.

*Motele*, with his violin, had joined other anti-Nazi partisans in a village near the border with Ukraine and managed to infiltrate a Nazi building there.

"The German officers heard him play in the streets one day and later brought him to perform every night in their compound in town," said Sefi Hanegbi, whose father played alongside *Motele* in a partisan camp in a forest during World War Two.

After each performance, *Motele* hid his violin in the building and walked out with an empty case. He would return with the violin case full of explosives, stuffing them into cracks in the walls, and eventually

setting them off, Hanegbi said.

*Motele* was later killed in a German ambush, and Hanegbi's family brought his violin to Israel where it sat in a closet for decades. Weinstein first restored it about eight years ago.

The oldest violin in the collection, Weinstein said, had been donated to the Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra by revered 19th-century Norwegian violinist Ole Bull.

Ernst Glaser, a Jewish musician, was set to perform with that violin in the German-occupied Norwegian city of



*Bergen* in 1941, but the concert was interrupted when local pro-Nazi youth began rioting and threatened to lynch Glaser for "befouling" the famed instrument.

Only when the conductor instructed the orchestra to play the Norwegian national anthem, prompting the rioting youth to stand at attention, was Glaser able to escape, Weinstein said.

"The violin was our savior," said Helen Livnat, 68, who donated the instrument her father used to earn food for her starving family in a ghetto in Ukraine in the early 1940s.

"It's an honor knowing the violins that were once played in a time of hunger and suffering will be heard again with pride in the country that we love," she said.

# THE HOLOCAUST, VIEWED NOT FROM THEN BUT FROM THE HERE AND NOW

BY MICHAEL KIMMELMAN,  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Habbo Knoch, who runs the new Bergen-Belsen Memorial at the former concentration camp, invited various scholars and museum directors to a four-day conference called "Witnessing: Sites of Destruction and the Representation of the Holocaust." He asked a question one evening during a break: "Will people in 20 years look back and say we built a museum that focuses on Nazi genocide while Darfur was happening? Will they ask whether anyone raised this issue?"

Consider it raised.

The new memorial is an immense concrete and glass museum emerging from a copse of trees beside the cemetery of mass graves (there are more than 70,000 bodies buried there), which had been the camp site. The permanent exhibition is a model of its kind, focused on the meticulous and sober reconstruction of the past.



The new Bergen-Belsen Memorial museum in Germany, located beside the former camp site, is focused on the meticulous and sober reconstruction of the past.

From time to time, the present literally intrudes with a bang, though, when practice rounds of tank fire from the British military base next door boom over the treetops.

Otherwise, you might be struck by how ordinary the whole area seems. During the war, prisoners — at first Soviet soldiers, later Jews — used to be marched several miles from a railway terminal beyond the base, which was then for the *Wehrmacht*, and past fields, farms and houses. Some survivors have said they were struck by the pretty scenery.

At the camp, corpses lay in piles and thousands were dying of starvation and disease, from genocide by neglect. The farmers and villagers who had watched the prisoners go by afterward mostly claimed they knew nothing about it.

Times change. Some of the children of

those farmers and villagers recall on videotaped interviews the endless lines of walking dead. It was impossible not to see what was plainly in front of them.

Videos are only one form of evidence, a French researcher ventured, inadequate by themselves as history.

True.

That said, the Holocaust has become what one expert here called the "master narrative" for suffering, shaping discussions about every present conflict over genocide and human rights, even as comparisons distort history and can serve the purposes of propaganda as often as the truth. "Every generation gets the stories it wants to hear," is how Heidemarie Uhl, an Austrian scholar, put it, which is to say that the master narrative of the Shoah itself has evolved to suit different eras. She pointed out that the memorial at the former *Mauthausen* concentration camp in northern Austria was for several years after the war controlled by the Soviets, who put up a monument to Communist resistance but none to the Jews.

Today the message at *Mauthausen* has come to reflect Austria's "negative memory," Ms. Uhl said, referring to the collective sentiment of Austrians (many of them, she might have added, but alas, still not enough) who admit their country willingly committed genocide. As at Bergen-Belsen, the permanent exhibition there now speaks to a kind of post-ideological, post-cold-war world that prizes victimhood and individual resilience, just as the

Communist memorial spoke to Soviet priorities.

History keeps moving, in other words. Here at Bergen-Belsen, after liberation in April 1945, the military training barracks became a camp for displaced persons. Jews awaited transport to America, Australia and to the new Israel, a flashpoint with British authorities who also controlled Palestine. Some Jewish survivors inaugurated a theater company called *Kazet* (the name played on the German *KZ*, for concentration camp). Life started over in other ways, too. Henri Lustiger-Thaler, who helped organize the conference, recalled that his mother, a former prisoner, returned from Paris to give birth at the camp hospital because her friends were here.

Then Bergen-Belsen fell into neglect. Ronald Reagan was responsible (inadver-

tently) for its revival. The announcement that he would visit Nazi graves at Bitburg in 1985 resulted in an uproar that forced his staff to scramble, and Bergen-Belsen was suddenly added to his itinerary. Embarrassed Germans, who preferred to



In the permanent exhibition there, testimonies by Jewish survivors.

forget the site, threw together a small documentation center. It soon became inadequate to the accumulating archives, to the general liberalizing process of German identity building after the wall fell, and to the growing public appetite abroad for Holocaust museums, along with the tourist economy they generated.

Nothing about the present museum dramatizes information for visitors the way, say, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington apparently feels it needs to. Divorced as it is from the sites of persecution, it turns relics of genocide, like a Zyklon B canister and a cattle car that transported Jews to Auschwitz into props.

Bergen-Belsen has the camp as evidence, or what's left of it. After liberation, the British burned down the prisoners' barracks to stem the spread of typhus, and hired an architect to turn bulldozed graves into a pastoral cemetery. The architect turned out to be a favorite of the Nazis, adding insult to injury, but by the time that scandal broke, it was already too late, and the graves today look like Teutonic mounds, covered in lavender.

In the absence of original buildings, the aura of Bergen-Belsen now, as at all haunted places, can be linked to the superstition people tend to bring to it — the vague hope that our presence might somehow help renew the ground. Meanwhile the sheer emptiness of the landscape, never mind the graves, speaks clearly to loss.

Of course, there are still the photo-

graphs and films made by arriving British troops to show what once was here. Various camps liberated before Bergen-Belsen had been evacuated or destroyed, but the Germans turned this place over as it had been. Circulated

worldwide in newspapers, magazines and movie theaters, the pictures made unconditional surrender obligatory and the site forever synonymous with the worst Nazi atrocities.

In a sense, the images have become too familiar, too loaded. The museum stresses the survivor testimonies instead. These run silently on monitors throughout the galleries, accompanied by subtitles in German and English. As Geoffrey Hartman, the literary scholar who helped start the Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies at Yale, remarked after walking through the museum, the quiet promotes a space in which "to think that thinking is important."

But you can also wear headphones to hear the voices. Mr. Hartman borrowed Paul Celan's famous phrase about bottles in the ocean tossed at "the shoreline of a heart" to describe the effect.

One survivor is Robert Rijxman. "I was sitting on a rock," he recalls on screen. "It was sunny, in winter. I just prayed to die, but it didn't work."

Without sound, he's the picture of defiance, elfin and smiling, clutching a pipe like an old Swiss mountaineer after a walk in the Alps. But listening to him, you hear that he needs a moment to collect himself and it suddenly becomes clear that Mr. Rijxman wishes to convey a thought darker and more complicated than simple defiance.

Praying for death "didn't work," is what he said.

"Not to this day," he added.

Another reminder of history's relentlessness.

## Martyrdom & Resistance

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