

# MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



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## THE LEGACY OF SURVIVAL

### INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

The 2010 observance of the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims of the Holocaust focused on a central theme: "The Legacy of Survival," which emphasizes the universal lessons that the survivors will pass on to succeeding generations. With fewer survivors alive to tell their stories, it is of primary importance to share this legacy with people everywhere, to encourage respect for diversity and human rights for generations to come.

A series of events took place the week of 25 January 2010 at United Nations Headquarters. One of them was the opening of the exhibition "Architecture of Murder: The Auschwitz-Birkenau Blueprints."

The aim of the exhibition is to emphasize that Auschwitz-Birkenau, the concentration and extermination camp, which became known worldwide as the insignia of human evil, was engineered for the destruction of European Jewry. The Auschwitz camp complex was the largest and most important extermination complex built by Nazi Germany. During the period of its operation between June 1940 and January 1945, the Germans murdered more than a million people on site, most of whom were Jews.

The exhibition was curated and produced by Yad Vashem — The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority and sponsored by the American & International Societies for Yad Vashem.

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General, speaking at the exhibit opening, thanked "everyone involved in bringing this important exhibition to the United Nations — and in particular, Yad Vashem, a close partner of the United Nations in our vital work of Holocaust education and remembrance."

"This exhibition delivers a vital message that bears repeating again and again: the Holocaust did not just happen; it was planned. The abominable crimes committed against so many millions of Jews and others were not just incidental casualties of war; they were its very intent.

"The blueprints for Auschwitz-Birkenau show just how many people it took to build this enterprise of death. The Nazi leaders who commissioned the extermination

camps. The architects and engineers who designed the gas chambers and crematoria, with chilling efficiency. The drivers who delivered the wood, the workers who hammered the nails and laid the bricks.

"And then, once these facilities were

"And yet, remarkably, many people survived the camps and the ghettos. Those survivors carry a crucial message for all of us. A message about the triumph of the human spirit. A living testament that tyranny, though it may

Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American & International Societies of Yad Vashem, addressing more than two hundred guests present at the opening, said:

"In observing the 65th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz and in commemoration of International Remembrance Day of the Holocaust, on behalf of the survivors and the world community, we extend our deepest thanks to the United Nations for opening its doors for the Yad Vashem exhibit 'Architecture of Murder — the Auschwitz-Birkenau Blueprints'.

"Yad Vashem is the National Remembrance Authority and the world's largest archival depository of Holocaust related material that is being used for research and studies, teaching the history of that tragic period.

"In remembering the victims of the unspeakable atrocities, we also honor the Righteous Among the Nations, those who risked their lives to save Jewish lives. Part of my family and I were saved by two Polish families who were hiding us for two years.

"The rescuers were few in number compared with the murderers, yet their courage and heroism were given a place of honor in the Boulevard and the Garden of the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem.

"This Exhibition, 'Architecture of Murder — The Auschwitz-Birkenau Blueprints,' further illustrates for the entire world the demonic details of this factory of torture and death. This archival material, the original document, was handed over by the Chancellor of Germany, Angela Merkel, to the Prime Minister of Israel, the Jewish state, Mr. Benjamin Netanyahu, for safekeeping at Yad Vashem.

"This was a significant step being recorded in the aftermath of the Holocaust history. This is a powerful document against deniers of the Holocaust.

"Germany, since the days of the late Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, is fearlessly confronting the past.

"The donation of these documents by the German newspaper *Bild*, published by Axel-Springer Verlag, demonstrates that openness and truth can lift the burden of the past from successive generations.

"The American Society for Yad Vashem in partnership with Yad Vashem in Jerusalem is proud to have brought you this exhibit. We thank the Constantiner family for their sponsorship and the leadership of the United Nations — the conscience of the world — for hosting it in these hallowed halls.

"We want to acknowledge with thanks the extraordinary work done by Yad Vashem's museum curator, Ms. Yehudit Inbar, and her team in producing this exhibit based on the original architectural blueprints.

"If 'Never Again' is to be a reality — it will come about through education and evidence such as this."



Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General, and Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem, at the exhibit opening.

ready for their grim business, the commanders and guards who herded people into rows; who turned on the poison gas; who saw the panic on people's faces; and who heard, clearly, the dying cries of men, women, boys, and girls.

rise, will surely not prevail.

"That is why, at United Nations offices around the world, the theme of this year's International Day in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust is the legacy of survival. Survivors play a vital role in keeping the lessons of the Holocaust alive for future generations.

"The United Nations Outreach Programme on the Holocaust is working closely with survivors to ensure that their stories are heard and heeded as a warning of the consequences of anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination. Holocaust survivors will not be with us forever, but the legacy of their survival must live on. We must preserve their stories, through memorials, through education, most of all through robust efforts to prevent genocide and other grave crimes," said Ban Ki-moon.

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# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COMMEMORATION IN MEMORY OF THE VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

## ISRAEL: HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE DAY MARKED

A wail of sirens brought Israel to a standstill on the morning of January 26 for a two-minute silence to remember the victims of the Holocaust.

At a ceremony, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Holocaust deniers would never be allowed to carry out another Holocaust against the Jewish people.

During the two-minute silence in Israel, pedestrians stopped in their tracks, drivers pulled over and got out of their cars and people in offices rose to stand next to their desks.

At the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, survivors Lia and Iudit — twin sisters — lit a torch to open the Remembrance Day ceremony, before Israeli President Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Netanyahu laid a wreath.

In the Hall of Remembrance names of the victims were recited.

Mr. Netanyahu said it was the supreme commitment of the State of Israel to never again let the Jewish people perish in a Holocaust.



Names of the victims were recited and flowers were laid at a ceremony at the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial in Jerusalem.

An official ceremony was also held in the Israeli parliament, the Knesset.

The Holocaust Remembrance Day is also being marked in communities all over Israel with prayers and musical performances.

An estimated 250,000 Holocaust survivors are living in Israel.

## POLAND: HOLOCAUST DAY MARKED AT NAZI DEATH CAMP AUSCHWITZ

Events have taken place at Auschwitz to commemorate the 65th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camp.

Elderly survivors gathered in freezing weather in Poland, where the camp was built under German occupation.

Israel's prime minister and president urged that the Holocaust should never be forgotten, mourned its dead, and warned of a new danger posed by Iran.



Many participants prayed at Auschwitz, vowing to never again let the Jewish people perish in a Holocaust.

Speaking in a tent pitched amid snowy conditions at Birkenau death camp, next door to Auschwitz, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said:

"We have gathered here, Poles and Jews, at the crossroads of tragedy. Our long shared history included tremendous cultural accomplishments and the lowest low humanity has experienced. We were

here. We remember those who froze to death; if they did not freeze to death, they were executed by gas, burned in the ovens. We remember also that one-third of the Righteous Gentiles, those who risked their lives and their children's lives and those of their families in order to save others, were Poles. We remember all this.

"To those who were murdered here, and to those who survived the destruction, I come from Jerusalem today with this promise: We will never forget! We will never permit those who desecrated this monument to death to distort or wipe away your memory. We will always remember what Amalek's Nazi heirs did to you. We will be prepared to defend ourselves when a new Amalek appears on the stage of history and threatens again to annihilate the Jews."

"I stand here today on the ground where so many of my people perished — and I am not alone. The State of Israel and all the Jewish people stand with me. We bow our heads to honor your memory and lift our heads as we raise our flag, a flag of blue and white with a Star of David in its center.

"And everyone sees. And everyone hears. And everyone knows — that our hope is not lost."

## TURKEY: HOLOCAUST IS MOST GRAVE CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY IN HISTORY

The Turkish Foreign Ministry marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day with a statement in which it condemned the Holocaust and vowed to prevent anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

Sources in the Israeli Foreign Ministry say that the Turkish statement was exceptional compared to statements of recent years.

"Condemning the Holocaust as the most grave and unprecedented crime against humanity throughout history, taking necessary precautions to prevent genocides in the future and promoting the endeavors to educate new generations are not only a

duty of every member state of the UN, but also an obligation to humanity," the Turkish statement read.

"Stemming from its belief in mutual understanding, tolerance, freedom, security and democracy, Turkey is resolute to continue its stance to prevent anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and discrimination."

The Turkish statement also commended Turkish diplomats who risked their lives during the Second World War to save people from the Nazis.

The Turkish statement did not refer specifically to Israel or Jews as victims of the Holocaust.

## GERMANY: SHIMON PERES ADDRESSES REICHSTAG AS WORLD MARKS HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY

The significance of the occasion could not have been overstated — and it was not lost on the 622 politicians gathered in the Reichstag, a symbol of postwar transparency and democracy.

Shimon Peres became the first Israeli president to choose Holocaust Remembrance Day to address the nation responsible for the murder of six million Jews, on what was described as a "groundbreaking occasion" in both Jerusalem and Berlin.

Traditionally, German leaders have travelled to Israel on this day, the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp by Red Army soldiers, and given speeches in the Knesset which have often been boycotted by Israeli politicians.

This time, it was Peres's chance to use the occasion to address Germany, which is seeking a more intense relationship with Israel at a time when other countries are becoming more distant towards it.

German commentators said it was significant that the country's chancellor, Angela Merkel, and her colleagues had greeted Peres with kisses and hugs at a time when Israeli leaders are getting increasingly chilly receptions elsewhere.

At times during his 30-minute speech, the 86-year-old, who was wearing a skullcap, reduced some parliamentarians to tears with his personal account of the Holocaust.

At other moments, they clapped enthusiastically, bringing to life a parliament in which business is usually conducted in a manner as staid and dull as its largely grey interior.

His words — a mixture of emotion and

diplomacy — flowed as he drew parallels between the dangers of the regime in Tehran and the Nazi dictatorship, and referred to Germany's moral duty, as the country that once tried to destroy the Jews, to protect Israel from outside attack.

He said Holocaust Remembrance Day "not only represents a memorial day for the victims, not only the pangs of con-



The Israeli president, Shimon Peres, addresses the Reichstag in Berlin on Holocaust Memorial Day.

science of humankind in the face of the incomprehensible atrocity that took place, but also of the tragedy that derived from the procrastination in taking action."

Earlier during his three-day visit, Peres visited platform 17 of *Grunewald* station, in Berlin, from which thousands of Jews were deported to concentration camps.

Laying a wreath with Peres, the German president, Horst Koehler, stressed the "unique relationship" between Germany and Israel, saying: "The responsibility resulting from the Shoah is and remains part of the German identity."

## NEW YORK: ADDED ISSUE IN RECALLING HOLOCAUST IN ITALY

As they have for the past four years, prominent people and passers-by joined together outside New York's Italian Consulate on January 27 to take turns reading the names of 8,600 Jews rounded up in Italy between 1938 and 1945, never to be seen again.

But this year's observance of Holocaust Remembrance Day carried an added weight of silence, coming soon after the outbreak of an international, interfaith



Cardinal Edward M. Egan, in cap, and Elena Kildani were among those reading the names of 8,600 Italian Holocaust victims.

controversy over the proposed canonization of Pope Pius XII, who presided in Rome during World War II.

None of the readers, including Cardinal Edward M. Egan and several prominent rabbis, made mention of the dispute while standing at microphones placed along Park Avenue, reciting names that included about 1,000 Roman Jews rounded up by German and Italian authorities in a single day, Oct. 16, 1943.

Benedict XVI visited that city's Great Synagogue on Jan. 17, a month after setting off protests by signing a decree that initiated the process of making Pius XII a saint. He told assembled Jewish leaders there that he would never forget "the Roman Jews who were snatched from their homes before these very walls," but provoked further criticism by adding the assertion that the Vatican helped Jews during the Holocaust, "often in a hidden and discreet way."

Many historians contend that Pius XII did not do enough to save Jews during the Holocaust. The Vatican has long said that Pius, who was pope from 1939 to 1958, helped save many Jews who were hidden in Roman Catholic churches, monasteries and convents.

Natalia Indrimi, one of the organizers of the event and director of the New York office of Centro Primo Levi, a group dedicated to the history of Italian Jews, said the question of Pius's role during the Holocaust would be settled only when all papal records of the wartime period were unsealed by the Vatican, which so far has released only some.

The reading of the names took all day. Public officials, clergy members, prominent citizens and scholars came, stood before a bank of four microphones, read about 20 names each, then left.

In the morning, Bishop Nicholas A. DiMarzio of Brooklyn stood next to Matilda Cuomo, the wife of the ex-governor, reading names. In the afternoon, there were ambassadors and businessmen.

## ANTI-SEMITISM, HOMOPHOBIA ON RISE IN EUROPE

Anti-Semitism and homophobia are on the rise in Europe, according to an annual study of social trends involving xenophobia.

For the first time, the "German Situation" study, conducted by the University of Bielefeld Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on Conflict and Violence under sociologist Wilhelm Heitmeyer, included attitudes in other European countries.

The study found that fear of Islam and hatred of Muslims has dropped slightly since 2008 in Europe, and that general xenophobia, sexism and racism have declined as well. Overall, Germans are no more xenophobic now than in 2002, when the first study was conducted.

But an increase in anti-Semitism could be linked to economic fears, social psychologist Beate Kupper told reporters.

"Whoever feels threatened by immigration is not only hostile to immigrants but is

also anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, sexist, and anti-gay," she said.

An international team of social scientists found that French and Dutch respondents were the least xenophobic, while Poles and Hungarians had the highest levels of hatred toward Jews, Muslims, foreigners, and homosexuals.

On the topic of anti-Semitism, 41.2 percent of Europeans overall agreed with the anti-Semitic stereotype that Jews try to use the Holocaust for their own benefit. According to the study, 72 percent of Poles — the highest of any country — agreed with the statement, while Dutch citizens were least likely to agree, at 5.6 percent.

Nearly one-quarter of all Europeans agreed with the statement that "Jews have too much influence." Almost one-third agreed that "Jews in general do not care about anything or anyone but their own kind."

## AUSCHWITZ DRAWS IN RECORD NUMBER OF VISITORS IN 2009

The international interest in the world's most important symbol of the Holocaust, Auschwitz-Birkenau, is bigger than ever. According to the memorial's press office, 1.3 million people from all over the world visited the former German concentration and extermination camp last year — a record in the memorial's 62-year history. The number of visitors was about 100,000 above the previous record of 1.22 million set in 2007.

The vast majority of visitors — 821,000 — are young people, of which 600,000 are from Poland, where visiting the camp has been made mandatory for students. Compared to 2008, the number of young visitors from all over the world increased by 120,000 — which the director of the museum, Piotr M.A. Cywinski, considers a

very pleasant development.

"The importance of this place in the history of the world can not be overestimated," he said. "The Europe of today cannot be understood without an in-depth knowledge of Auschwitz."

It is, he added, impossible to grasp one's own responsibility without listening to the stories of the victims of the Holocaust. "Therefore, I am very happy about the increase in young visitors. The future of the world lies in their hands."

The top five countries represented among visitors to the memorial are Poland, Britain, Italy, Israel, and Germany. The head of the public service section, Kaczorzyk Andrew, recorded an increase of more than 18,000 among Israeli tourists alone, compared to last year's numbers.

Germany news agency DPA added that fewer visitors came from North America, a development probably related to the economic crisis and the depreciation of the dollar, whereas the number of visitors from Asia has been constantly growing.



very pleasant development.

## BLUEPRINT FOR GENOCIDE ON DISPLAY AT YAD VASHEM HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

BY JAMES HIDER, TIMESONLINE

How did a project that started out developing organic herbs and apples transform into the most horrific nightmare in human history? An exhibition on the evolution of Auschwitz shows, for the first time, a bizarre story of settlers, blueprints and gas chambers, turf wars over slave labor and the clashing demands of Nazi ideology and a wartime economy.

In plans and photographs that demonstrate the so-called banality of evil, "Architecture of Murder," which marks the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, details the rapid development of a conquered Polish backwater into the heart of the Final Solution.

After the fall of Poland in 1939 the Nazis wanted to re-colonize Upper Silesia, which had been part of the German Reich until the end of the First World War, when modern Poland was founded, said Daniel Uziel, one the historians behind the exhibition.

One of the first tasks of the SS was to settle ethnic Germans in the town of Auschwitz, while to the southeast it experimented in growing organic fruit and vegetables in greenhouses and developing advanced irrigation techniques. Its goal was to plant the steppes that the Third

Reich was soon to seize in the east and to sustain Aryan settlers in *Lebensraum*.

At the same time the Austro-Hungarian barracks at Auschwitz were turned into a small concentration camp for Polish political prisoners. One of them, Prisoner 471, was a local draughtsman press-ganged into designing the vast camp at Birkenau in 1941, which the SS expected to fill with hundreds of thousands of Russian prisoners of war. The barracks were converted stables that were packed with bunks.

The SS had signed a contract with IG Farben, the German chemical conglomerate, to provide slave labor in the factory that it was building near Auschwitz. The regular German Army, however, was reluctant to use vital transport to ship prisoners there, often preferring to let them die. When it finally realized the value of forced labor it wanted to keep Russian prisoners for the work camps.

Enough Russian prisoners made it to Auschwitz to build the huge neighboring camp that would become *Birkenau*, with its gas chambers and crematoriums. They also provided the first guinea-pigs for the gas chambers. So many died in the winter of 1941 that the camp had to be

## OPERATION AIMS TO RESCUE HOLOCAUST ARTIFACTS

The Ghetto Fighters House initiated Operation Attic, a rescue of documents, including letters, diaries and testimonies, and photographs and other artifacts from the Holocaust period, that are lying in attics, basements, and closets in communities around the world.

The Ghetto Fighters House (its full name is the Itzhak Katzenelson Holocaust and Jewish Resistance Heritage Museum and Study Center) was the first museum commemorating the Holocaust and Jewish heroism, and was founded in 1949 by survivors who were members of *Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot*, between *Acre* and *Nahariya*.

Operation Attic is a response to the many instances of loss, destruction, and disposal of artifacts from the Holocaust period that have historical value, Rami Hochman, director of the museum, said.

"Lately, we have been hearing about valuable materials that are located in Jewish homes in communities throughout Western and Eastern Europe, Canada and the USA," Hochman said. "One example of document rescue and restoration is the diary of Pola Elster, who was a fighter in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising [in 1943]."

The diary was brought to the Ghetto Fighters House by Nachi Rottenberg, the son of Wanda Elster-Rottenberg, who was also a fighter in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and Pola's sister.

Wanda, who survived the uprising, found the body of her sister with her diary, which was partly burned, by her side.

She took the diary with her, put it in the attic

of her home and never looked at it again.

After Wanda's death, her son Nachi Rottenberg found the diary, but could not imagine its value.

He decided to bring it to the Ghetto Fighters House archives, and after a long restoration process to prevent further deterioration, translation of the diary from Yiddish began.

According to the Ghetto Fighters House, a hidden treasure of information about the days of the uprising was discovered as described in the words of Pola Elster.

Yossi Shavit, director of the archives, said that the pages that were in good enough shape to be translated include memories of the destruction of the Warsaw Ghetto (April 1943), the subsequent assemblage of Jews at the *Umshlagplatz* (train station), boarding the trains, and riding the cars to the *Poniatowa* forced labor camp, 30 km. west of *Lublin*.

These sections were written after Pola's rescue from *Poniatowa* by the underground in July 1943.

Nachi Rottenberg said that in his home, the family talked a lot about the Holocaust, but the attic was always out of bounds.

"After my mother's death, I felt a deep need to bring everything that was lying in the attic for decades to professionals, but I never imagined just how dramatic the outcome of this decision would be," Rottenberg said. "When I was told what the translators from the Ghetto Fighters House archives discovered in the diary, I trembled, learning new information of which I had no idea."

## SAO PAULO SETS SHOAH REMEMBRANCE DAY

Sao Paulo Mayor Gilberto Kassab signed a measure that sets Jan. 27 as a municipal day to honor Shoah victims. Sao Paulo Municipal Holocaust Remembrance Day was held for the first time in 2010.

"The Holocaust was a terrible period in the history of humanity," Kassab told Brazilian media. "This date is our opportunity for the city of Sao Paulo to have a

special day of reflection."

Jewish council member Floriano Pesaro had proposed the bill.

Several Jewish officials attended the announcement. At the end of the ceremony, the fourth *Chanukah* candle was lit.

Sao Paulo is the capital city of Sao Paulo state, which has a 60,000-member Jewish community, or half of Brazil's Jews.



Two SS officers having fun on a motorcycle in the snow next to Crematorium IV, Birkenau, in the winter of 1943.

completed by Jewish prisoners.

By early 1942 the Final Solution was under way and the SS had to balance the genocidal demands with the need to squeeze valuable work out of its slave population.

The exhibition at Yad Vashem, the Holocaust memorial center in

Jerusalem, pulls together the blueprints — some decorated with ornamental trees, as though planning a suburban development rather than gas chambers — that helped the genocide to evolve.

It includes diagrams found in a Berlin apartment two years ago and bought by the German magazine *Bild*, which never disclosed who had owned them. Many of the others, including one diagram initialed

by Heinrich Himmler, were salvaged from the SS Central Construction Directorate's offices, one of the few buildings that the fleeing Nazis failed to destroy.

As well as plans there are chilling photographs: SS draughtsmen poring over plans that would aid the murder of millions just outside their offices; two German soldiers laughing on a motorbike in the snow with *Birkenau's* gas chambers being built in the background.

One shows a wooden bridge over a cesspit near the ramps where trains disgorged new arrivals for the life-or-death selection. Martha Weiss, an Auschwitz survivor, told *The Times* that when she arrived, aged 10, in November 1944, she and her older sister were ordered to cross it. There were two guards on the bridge.

"We heard one of the guards suggest to the other, 'Let's have a little fun. I'll push the little one in and we'll see how quickly she sinks,'" she said.

Ms Weiss was lucky: the sewage was too thick for her to drown and a young inmate risked execution, as well as death from cold and disease, to pull her out.

She and her sister were experimented on by Dr Josef Mengele, sickened and swollen with injections and in daily terror of their lives, but survived and returned home after the war to find their parents still alive.



# BOOK REVIEWS

## HERE, THERE ARE NO SARAHS

Here, There Are No Sarahs: A Woman's Courageous Fight Against the Nazis and Her Bittersweet Fulfillment of the American Dream.

By Sonia Shainwald Orbuch and Fred Rosenbaum. RDR Books: Muskegon, MI, 2009. 241 pp. \$16.95, paperback.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

"Only by joining one story with another, hearing each of these narratives, can we begin to understand the scope of an event we call by one name, the 'Holocaust' . . ."

Foreword, Michael Berenbaum, Holocaust Scholar

Sarah Shainwald felt exceptionally lucky! Among the many who took the "rigorous" tests to get into "the gimnazjum, the only academic high school in Luboml," Volhynia, she was one of the very few who passed! Moreover, even though the school was expensive, her older brother and parents quickly agreed to cover the costs. Her mother lovingly sewed her a school uniform. Her mother made her a "fine coat." Sarah eagerly bought her books and school supplies. School would start soon . . . in September,

1939. Indeed, she could hardly wait . . .

Needless to say, full of beautiful dreams and high hopes, Sarah could never have imagined the dreadful upheaval — the fiery cataclysm — her world would experience in September, 1939. No, she couldn't possibly have imagined the Red Army takeover of her beloved Jewish Luboml in that month, nor the ruthless Nazi invasion of it not long after. Few people, older than her, could have imagined it . . . except for the perpetrators.

Thus, *Here, There Are No Sarahs: A Woman's Courageous Fight Against the Nazis and Her Bittersweet Fulfillment of the American Dream* by Sonia Shainwald Orbuch and Fred Rosenbaum, is the story of the hand fate dealt her. It tells us of how she and her parents ended up in a Nazi ghetto. It tells us of the brutal and relentless murders there of thousands of Jews. It tells us of

Sarah's and her parents' fortuitous escape to the forest and their even more fortuitous meeting with an unusual Ukrainian peasant who took care of them and was ultimately responsible for their linking up with Soviet partisans. Then it tells us of how Sarah Shainwald became Sonia, the resistance fighter.

In the midst of all this, the devilish "work" of the greater majority of the Ukrainians, willing partners to the Nazis, is pointed out and "credited." Good. The Ukrainians have done a "marvelous" job of sweeping their evil wartime handiwork under the rug. It's time more people knew . . . The Ukrainians are only too eager to keep the world in the dark about their Nazi collaborationist acts! Instead, they would rather talk about their later "suffering" under the Communists.

Additionally, in *Here, There Are No Sarahs*, Sonia Shainwald Orbuch, who writes this, her autobiography, with Fred Rosenbaum, gives us a very good picture

of what it was like to be a Jewish woman resistance fighter among male Soviet partisans during World War II. To put it mildly: it was no easy matter. In fact, it was a very delicate position to be in. For Sonia, good friends made all the difference . . .

Then, in this volume, we read of Sonia's life after the war . . . up till today.

Since this reviewer would like the readers of *M&R* to read *Here, There Are No Sarahs* and not just this review, specific details vis-a-vis Sarah/Sonia's story have herein been purposely abbreviated. The book is a well-written and worthy addition to the greater story of the Holocaust and its study. It will leave you thinking . . . about many things .

By the way, after the war Sonia did not forget that altruistic Ukrainian peasant who helped her and her family survive. Through the help of Eli Zborowski, head of the American Society for Yad Vashem (and Editor-in-Chief of this newspaper), she made sure that Tichon Martynetz, who died in a Soviet prison in 1961, "was honored posthumously as one of the Righteous Among the Nations."

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



## APPRECIATING AN ARTIST WHO BECAME AN ICON

Anne Frank: The Book, the Life, the Afterlife.

By Francine Prose. HarperCollins Publishers: NY, 2009. 336 pp. \$16.49.

REVIEWED BY JULIA RIDLEY SMITH

Francine Prose's *Anne Frank: The Book, the Life, the Afterlife* is, in effect, a biography of the book. Reviewers, scholars and teachers have encouraged readers of *The Diary of Anne Frank* to approach the book in many ways — as memoir, inspirational account, history, Holocaust narrative or, simply, a diary of a girl living in extraordinary times.

But Prose offers another way of reading *The Diary* — she examines it as a literary work and looks at Anne Frank as an artist.

First, Prose reminds us of the facts of Anne's short life in Amsterdam. During World War II, when the Nazis were rounding up Jews, Otto Frank arranged for his wife and two daughters to go into hiding in rooms above his office. They lived in this "secret annex" with four other people for 25

months. Arrested by the Gestapo in 1944, they were sent to concentration camps. Anne, age 15, died at *Bergen-Belsen*. Otto was the only one of the Frank family to survive.

That Anne's diary also survived was a miracle. Miep Gies, a woman who had helped the families hide, found Anne's papers and saved them. After the war, she gave them to Otto Frank. He combined work from two manuscripts — the original diary and Anne's revision — to produce the

text we know as *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

First published in English in 1952, *The Diary of Anne Frank* has touched countless readers.

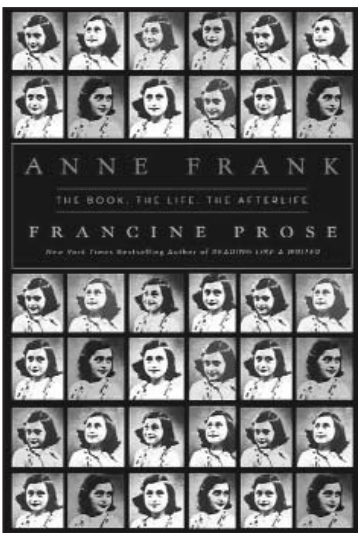
But Prose wants us to see the work as more than just a young girl's diary: "The fact remains that Anne Frank has only rarely been given her due as a writer." The diary "has rarely ever been viewed as a work of art."

Herself an accomplished author of fiction and nonfiction — including the *New York Times* best seller *Reading Like a Writer* — Prose makes a strong case for viewing Anne's writing as art, as work made with deliberate intention. Prose demonstrates how Anne's revision of her diary shows her growth as a literary artist who was learning to shape a story and write with elegance. Anne worked hard to assemble a whole and vivid picture of her difficult, but far from joyless, life. In losing her, Prose says, the world certainly lost a vivacious young girl — representative of the millions killed in the Holocaust — but also a gifted writer.

Over the years, *The Diary* has sparked controversy, and Prose discusses some of these quarrels at length. Early on, there was disagreement over who should write the film and play adaptations, and particularly over how the character of Anne should be portrayed. Many have complained that the Anne of stage and screen is simplified, too full of Pollyannaish optimism.

Yet in some ways, Prose contends, the universalizing of Anne — the stripping away of her Jewishness and her victim-

(Continued on page 15)



## HOW A CITY BECAME A CASUALTY OF THE HOLOCAUST

Ghettostadt: Lodz and the Making of a Nazi City.

By Gordon J. Horwitz. Harvard/Belknap Press: Cambridge, 2008. 416 pp. \$29.95.

REVIEWED BY JOHN MERRIMAN

When German forces stormed into Poland on Sept. 1, 1939, *Lodz* was the country's second-largest city and the second-largest Jewish community in Poland. The city's population was well over 600,000, including about 200,000 Jews, most quite poor. The German population of *Lodz* was about 60,000. The city would never be the same.

German propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels proclaimed *Lodz* a hideous city, industrial, dirty, and diseased, because so many Jews lived there. The city was renamed *Lodsch* and the following April named *Litzmannstadt*, after a World War I general and fervent Nazi. Polish names had to go. The largest boulevard became *Adolf-Hitler-Strasse*.

*Litzmannstadt* was to be a modern city without Jews or other Poles, ready to welcome ethnic Germans from Soviet-occupied eastern Poland, Galicia, Estonia, and Latvia. Jews would be confined in a ghetto on the northern edge of the city, before being banished. In May 1940, 164,000 Jews lived in a ghetto no more than four kilometers square, barbed wire separating them from the rest of the city. The buildings they left behind were "decontaminated."

A film crew arrived in 1941 to present to

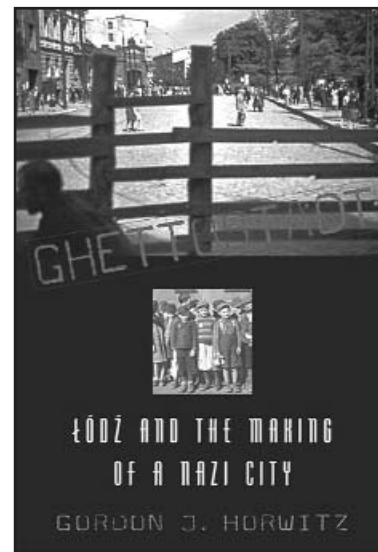
German viewers the new efficient Nazi city. Hitler's decree that October designated the city for future special development. A park-like area was being laid out with a pond and walkways. Germans participated in festivals, attended concerts. The Strength Through Joy program celebrated sports and the German child. Germans flocked to the zoo, where exotic animals could be viewed in cages, while not far away Jews were confined to their ghetto. Gordon J. Horwitz's juxtaposition of life beyond the ghetto and within it is extraordinarily compelling.

Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski is an important part of this poignant, sad story. He was "a boor," ambitious and self-absorbed. Named in October 1939 to head the Jewish community, his charge was to coordinate the implementation of Nazi policies dealing with the Jews of the city. He organized the ghetto, overseeing schools, hospitals, and the care of orphans and the elderly.

The ghetto was to pay for its upkeep. Gold, silver, currency, and jewelry confiscated from Jewish fami-

lies and then sold would not be nearly enough. Hans Biebow served as the German director of the industrial work of the ghetto, working with Rumkowski. Biebow's obsession was to assure the productivity of the work force. Tailors, seamstresses, and other workers and more than 5,000 sewing machines would turn out uniforms, underwear, earmuffs, gloves, hats, boots and shoes (200,000 pairs in December 1942) for Nazi soldiers,

(Continued on page 15)



## ESCAPING DEATH CAMP LIFE OF "HELL"

**John Demjanjuk is accused of helping to murder more than 27,000 Jews at the Nazi death camp of Sobibor in occupied Poland. The BBC's Steve Rosenberg returns to the site of the camp with one man who survived its horrors.**

In the Jewish cemetery in the town of Izbica, 84-year-old Philip Bialowitz shows me a battered gravestone among a tangle of bushes.

"This is the place where I was shot," he tells me. "I was brought here with a group of people and we were shot with machine guns."



Philip Bialowitz.

The Nazis murdered 4,000 Jews in the cemetery. Philip's mother was killed here. But her son had a remarkable escape. Lined up with other Jewish prisoners by the side of a freshly dug grave, he jumped in as soon as the bullets started to fly.

"I fell down and pretended I was dead. I made myself room to breathe. Many people were screaming. They were injured. I couldn't help them. I lay there a few hours covered in blood. Then I managed to get out."

A few months later, Philip was rearrested, together with his brother, his two sisters and his niece. This time they were not taken to the cemetery. They were transported to Sobibor.

"We knew that Sobibor was a death camp," Philip recalls. "We'd heard. So when they took us on the road to Sobibor we knew that this is the end of our life."

Sobibor was one of three secret killing factories built by the Nazis in eastern Poland. In 18 months, a quarter of a million Jews were transported here and murdered in the gas chambers. Their bodies were incinerated, their ashes buried in pits.

I go with Philip to Sobibor.

"Every inch of this ground is holy," he tells me. We're standing on waste ground; little remains of the camp.

"This is where the people perished, where they were gassed, where they were burned."

When Philip Bialowitz was transported here, an SS officer selected him and his brother Simcha to be slave laborers. It would delay their death sentence. The brothers were then separated from their relatives.

"We said goodbye to them. Even my seven-year-old niece knew she was going to die."

As a Jewish slave laborer, Philip had to help unload the transports of Jews arriving at Sobibor and remove the bodies of dead passengers.

"One Sunday, a German guard took 10 of us to help unload a transport. The smell was terrible. He told me to take people out of the wagon. When I pulled out a woman, her skin remained in my hands. I still have nightmares about that episode," he says.

While Polish Jews like Philip knew Sobibor was a death camp when they got here, Jews arriving from other countries had little idea what lay in store.

"Jews from Holland were deceived by the Nazis into thinking they were going to be resettled," says Philip.

"I helped them out of the trains with all

their baggage. My heart was bleeding knowing that in half an hour they would be reduced to ashes. I couldn't tell them. I wasn't allowed to speak. Even if I told them, they would not believe they were going to die.

The Gestapo man welcomed them and apologized for the inconvenience of travel. He said that because of typhus they had to take a disinfection. They must undress. 'But before you undress,' he said, 'I would strongly recommend you send home postcards to your dear ones that you are here in a nice place.' So people were clapping. Some even cheered 'Bravo!'"

Naked, at gunpoint, the Jews were herded down a path through the forest. It led not to the shower rooms, but to the gas chambers.

"A few minutes later the whole camp heard screams. First loud and strong. And later subsiding, until we didn't hear anything. This went on every day."

But one remarkable day the Jews of Sobibor fought back.

On 14 October 1943, the slave laborers launched an uprising. It was led by a Polish Jew, Leon Feldhendler, and a Russian Jewish POW, Sasha Pechersky.

Their escape plan exploited the Nazis' greed. Slave laborers, whose job it was to sort the clothes of murdered Jews, put aside the best items. These were then used to lure the SS guards into traps one by one.

"I was one of the messengers," remembers Philip. "I went up to a Gestapo and told him, 'I've been sent to tell you they

found a very beautiful leather coat and boots for you. Come to the warehouse to try it on'. When they went in, they were killed with knives and axes."

The Jews killed 12 SS men before the plot was discovered.

In the chaos which followed, more than 300 of the 600 Jewish slave workers



Sobibor was a Nazi extermination camp in the Lublin region of occupied Poland.

broke out of the camp. Many were killed by mines or shot dead. Around 50 escapees survived till the end of the war.

After the uprising, the Nazis murdered the Jews who had stayed behind. Then, to try to conceal the systematic slaughter they had carried out here, they pulled down the death camp.

After escaping from Sobibor, Philip and his brother Simcha took refuge on a farm near their home town of Izbica. A Polish farmer risked his life by hiding them under his barn. They remained there for a year. Once the war was over, Philip began a new life in America, his brother Simcha in Israel.

"In Sobibor life was hell," Philip says. "But we took revenge. We escaped to tell the world what had happened. And I made a victory over the Germans. I created a new family of five children and 14 grandchildren. This is my biggest victory."

## FDR AND THE "VOYAGE OF THE DAMNED"

BY DR. RAFAEL MEDOFF

Miami Beach was certainly a fitting choice as the site for last December's reunion of passengers from the ill-fated MS *St. Louis*, the ship of Jewish refugees that sailed from Nazi Germany in May 1939. As children, they gazed at the lights of Miami as the *St. Louis* hovered off the Florida coast, hoping desperately for permission to land.

In the 70 years since that tragic voyage, the story of the *St. Louis* has been told and retold, taught and studied, researched and pondered. It has been to Hollywood, in the 1976 film *Voyage of the Damned*, starring Faye Dunaway. It was the subject of a U.S. Senate resolution expressing remorse over what happened. It was featured in a full-page political cartoon in the *Washington Post* (by Art Spiegelman of *Maus* fame and this author). It was the focus of a project by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to trace the fate of each of the more than 900 passengers.

And it continues to fascinate historians — including an Israeli scholar who has uncovered a new document that sheds light on President Franklin Roosevelt's attitude toward the *St. Louis*.

### THE SADDEST SHIP AFLOAT

Hans Fisher, today a professor at Rutgers University, grew up in the German city of Breslau. He still vividly remembers the torments he and other Jewish children endured there in the early

years of the Hitler regime.

"When my friends and I would come out of our school building, members of the Hitler Youth would be waiting nearby," he recalls. "They would chase us, and if they caught us, they would beat us."

His father, George Fisher, was one of the tens of thousands of Jewish men arrested during the November 1938 *Kristallnacht* program and sent to concentration camps. After nearly two months in *Buchenwald*, George was released on condition he leave the country within two weeks. He secured a visa to Cuba and immediately upon his arrival there began making arrangements for Hans, his sister Ruth, and their mother to join him. They purchased tickets to sail on the MS *St. Louis* in May 1939.

Hans's grandparents, Wolf and Emma Gottheimer, chose to stay behind.

"My grandfather was convinced that since four of his sons had given their lives for Germany in World War I, the Nazis would never persecute him," Hans explains. "In fact, my grandparents had gone to Palestine in 1935, but then returned to Germany, to the shock and amazement of their friends."

Hans's grandparents would eventually perish in the *Theresienstadt* concentration camp.

The two-week voyage from Hamburg to Havana proceeded without incident. "I was young, I was happy that we were getting away from Nazi Germany, I certainly couldn't appreciate how tenuous our position was," Hans says.

"When we reached Havana, all of our suitcases were brought up to the deck as we got ready to disembark. It was a terrible shock to be standing there by the rail, our suitcases in hand, and told we could not get off the ship."



Franklin D. Roosevelt.

All but thirty of the passengers held documents granting them entry to Cuba as tourists, which they had purchased in Germany, at the astronomical sum of \$500 each, from an unscrupulous Cuban government official. Cuba's authorities, furious at the backroom profiteering and sensitive to domestic anti-Semitism, refused to recognize the validity of the entry documents.

The *St. Louis* remained in the Havana port for several days as officials of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee negotiated with Cuban leaders. Meanwhile, relatives of the passengers rented small boats and rowed close to the *St. Louis*, hoping to catch a glimpse of their loved ones.

"I could see my father in one of the rowboats," Hans recalls. "But they were not allowed to get close enough for us to hear each other. It was very painful."

When the Cuban government refused to budge, the "saddest ship afloat," as *The New York Times* called it, sailed north and hovered off the coast of Florida, hoping that the American president, who was known as a humanitarian and a champion of "the little guy" would take pity on them.

For three days, the refugees gazed longingly at the lights of Miami. The passengers sent a telegram to the White House, pleading for mercy and emphasizing that "more than 400 [of the refugees] are women and children."

The reply came in the form of a Coast Guard cutter, dispatched to the scene to make sure the *St. Louis* did not approach America's shore.

### "FILTHY, UN-AMERICAN, AND DANGEROUS"

Though many German Jews hoped to escape Hitler by fleeing to the United States, immigration was severely restricted. America's traditional open door immigration policy, which had permitted the unfettered entry of millions of newcomers in the late 1800s and early 1900s, was reversed in the early 1920s as Congress enacted a tight quota system based on national origins.

The number of immigrants from any single country each year could not exceed two percent of the number of immigrants (Continued on page 13)

# SURVIVORS' CORNER

## THE MAN WHO SMUGGLED HIMSELF INTO AUSCHWITZ

BY ROB BROOMBY, BBC NEWS

When millions would have done anything to get out, one remarkable British soldier smuggled himself into Auschwitz to witness the horror so he could tell others the truth.

Denis Avey is a remarkable man by any measure. A courageous and determined soldier in World War II, he was captured by the Germans and imprisoned in a camp connected to the Germans' largest concentration camp, Auschwitz.



Denis Avey.

But his actions while in the camp — which he has never spoken about until now — are truly extraordinary. When millions would have done anything to get out, Mr. Avey repeatedly smuggled himself into the camp.

Now 91 and living in Derbyshire, he says he wanted to witness what was going on inside and find out the truth about the gas chambers, so he could tell others. He knows he took "a hell of a chance."

"When you think about it in today's envi-

ronment it is ludicrous, absolutely ludicrous," he says.

"You wouldn't think anyone would think or do that, but that is how I was. I had red hair and a temperament to match. Nothing would stop me."

He arranged to swap for one night at a time with a Jewish inmate he had come to trust. He exchanged his uniform for the filthy, stripy garments the man had to wear. For the Auschwitz inmate it meant valuable food and rest in the British camp, while for Denis it was a chance to gather facts on the inside.

He describes Auschwitz as "hell on earth" and says he would lie awake at night listening to the ramblings and screams of prisoners.

"It was pretty ghastly at night, you got this terrible stench," he says.

He talked to Jewish prisoners but says they rarely spoke of their previous life. Instead they were focused on the hell they were living and the work they were forced to do in factories outside the camp.

"There were nearly three million human beings worked to death in different factories," says Mr. Avey. "They knew at that rate they'd last about five months."

"They very seldom talked about their civil life. They only talked about the situation, the punishments they were getting, the work they were made to do."

He says he would ask where people he'd met previously had gone and he would be told they'd "gone up the chimney."

"It was so impersonal. Auschwitz was evil, everything about it was wrong."

He also witnessed the brutality meted out to the prisoners, saying people were shot daily. He was determined to help, especially when he met Jewish prisoner Ernst Lobethall.



Ernst Lobethall moved to the U.S.

Mr. Lobethall told him he had a sister Susana who had escaped to England as a child, on the eve of war. Back in his own camp, Mr. Avey contacted her via a coded letter to his mother.

He arranged for cigarettes, chocolate and a letter from Susana to be sent to him and smuggled them to his friend. Cigarettes were more valuable than gold in the camp and he hoped he would be able to trade them for favors to ease his plight — and he was right.

Mr. Lobethall traded two packs of Players cigarettes in return for getting his shoes resoled. It helped save his life when thousands perished or were murdered on the notorious death marches out of the camps in winter in 1945.

Mr. Avey briefly met Susana Lobethall in 1945, when he came home from the war. He was fresh from the camp and was traumatized by what he'd witnessed and endured.

At the time both of them thought Ernst

was dead. He'd actually survived, thanks — in part — to the smuggled cigarettes. But she lost touch with Mr. Avey and was never able to tell him the good news.

The BBC has now reunited the pair after tracing Susana, who is now Susana Timms and lives in the Midlands. Mr. Avey was told his friend moved to America after the war, where he had children and lived a long and happy life. The old soldier says the news is "bloody marvellous."

Sadly, the emotional reunion came too late for Ernst — later Ernie — who died never even knowing the real name of the soldier who he says helped him survive Auschwitz.

But before he died Mr. Lobethall recorded his survival story on video for the Shoah Foundation, which videos the testimonies of Holocaust survivors and witnesses. In it he spoke of his friendship with a British soldier in Auschwitz whom he simply called "Ginger." It was Denis.

He also recalled how the cigarettes, chocolate and a letter from his sister in England were smuggled to him in the midst of war.

"It was like being given the Rockefeller Center," he says in the video.

Mr. Avey traded places twice and slept overnight in Auschwitz. He tried a third time but he was almost caught and the plan was aborted.

He suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder when he came back from the war and has only recently been able to speak about what he did and what he saw.

He admits some may find it hard to believe and acknowledges it was "foolhardy."

"But that is how I was," he simply says.

## A SURVIVOR IN BERLIN

DAVID GEFFEN, THE JERUSALEM POST

In 1933, Hitler took power and became supreme ruler and dictator of Germany. Berlin Jewish population... around 165,000... end of World War II-1945, about 1,700 Jewish Berliners stayed alive by hiding out in the city... 3,000 more survived in the concentration camps." So writes Holocaust survivor Bert Lewyn in his memoir *On the Run in Nazi Berlin*.

Lewyn, a witness to *Kristallnacht* 71 years ago today, reminds us that "fewer than 5,000 of Berlin's Jews were left to inform the world of what they had experienced. I am one of those who survived."

Born in Berlin in 1923, the son of Johanna and Leopold Lewin, Bert was 15 when *Kristallnacht* occurred. On November 9, 1938, the rampage began when storm troopers and SS men attacked synagogues throughout Germany, destroying stained-glass windows and setting fire to the interiors. Other Nazis, civilians and military men, attacked Jewish shop owners, punching and clubbing them senseless. Having been sent home from the Jewish school he attended, Lewyn's innate curiosity led him to one of the centers of Berlin where he actually saw Jewish shop owners being dragged, covered in blood, to the army trucks and shoved inside. These

Berlin Jews were hauled off to concentration camps, never to return.

In his expanded appendix on *Kristallnacht*, Lewyn recalled his feelings at the time. "Why would the German people attack Jews? Destroy their businesses? Burn their synagogues? Club old men? We were Germans." He cringed in fear as he watched "display windows being smashed... Nazi looters taking furs, jewelry, clothes, furniture, everything they could carry." Lewyn wrote that six decades later "he could still smell the smoke from the Berlin synagogues burning continually."

As a part of his personal tale of surviving in Nazi Berlin, he researched the German archives and located a key Nazi military order describing what was to happen on *Kristallnacht*. For his book he has reprinted the document in the original German signed by Reinhard Heydrich, deputy chief of the *Gestapo*, and translated it into English. Seventy-one years later, what an eye-opener; each sentence of the order spells out precisely how *Kristallnacht* was to occur throughout Germany — not a detail is lost.

The story of Bert Lewyn is more extensive than just this event in his teen years, as horrible as it was. What he relates poignantly in *On the Run in Nazi Berlin* is what he had to do daily to stay alive in the years from 1942 to 1945, when as a self-

described "U-boat," he lived secretly in the homes of kind souls, at times in the guise of an SS man, in bombed-out skeletons of buildings, in a *Gestapo* prison from which he escaped, and then in the home of friends at the end of the war where the greatest "miracle" of all was convincing Russian soldiers that he was a Jew and not a Nazi in hiding.

How the book came into being is itself a story, since Bert was hesitant to discuss his personal history, much less put it into writing for more than 30 years, after beginning a new life in the US in 1949. As with most Holocaust survivors, he started to work soon after his arrival. Establishing his own business selling large imported woodworking machinery, he has done very well through the years.

It was his first cousin in Jerusalem, also a survivor and noted expert in oral history, Prof. Dov Levin, who began the Holocaust searching process in 1980. During a family visit to the U.S., Bert spoke and Dov asked the questions and taped the replies. The ultimate telling had started.

A decade later, after Bev Saltzman married Marc Lewyn, Bert's son, she, a professional CNN writer and researcher, worked tirelessly with her father-in-law prying out of his memory facts long forgotten — in particular, the tale of the woman he married in Berlin and who survived with a child of her

first marriage. They were divorced when both were in DP camps after the war. Then Bev and Bert put together the first of several drafts of the book.

Not to be forgotten in this process is Bert's wife, Esther Sloan, who has worked together with him since they married in 1951. They have five children, a statement in its own right, since few of their contemporaries have more than three children. Now there are six grandchildren. Trained as a special education teacher, Esther entered the field of business with Bert and helped him succeed in many ways. She too was most anxious that his story be told.

The book by Bert and Bev first appeared in 2001. Initially, the response was quite good because Bert's family, friends and business colleagues had been waiting for years to read the actual tale. Not satisfied, Bert decided to reach wider audiences. He started speaking on college campuses. Then, he visited book fairs in the US and Europe, where his book was exhibited widely. One letter he received was from a 15-year-old girl from St. Louis, whose father brought the book home from a book fair. Her words make it clear what Bert had achieved.

"As I read the first few pages, I became glued to the book... could not put it down. Upon hearing your life story, I was over-

(Continued on page 14)

# “WE WERE THE CHILDREN OF MONSTERS”

**WWII babies fathered by German soldiers in occupied Europe coming to terms with past.**

BY EDWARD CODY,  
THE WASHINGTON POST

Jean-Jacques Delorme was 23 before he got the truth.

After years of mystery, during which his mother maintained a stubborn silence, Delorme's grandmother reached into a big armoire and pulled out a yellowed envelope filled with photos of a German soldier. He had been his mother's lover during the occupation of France in World War II.

"That's when I understood everything," Delorme recalled, choking up at the memory of that anguished afternoon in 1967. "At last I had a father."

Historians estimate that more than 800,000 children were born to German soldiers enforcing the four-year Nazi occupation of Europe, about 200,000 in France alone. Like Delorme, most were raised behind a veil of secrecy and shame, derided in school and unable to understand what they had done wrong. Many of their mothers had been shaved bald and paraded naked through the streets after the Germans retreated. Others, like Delorme's, were jailed as traitors.

More than six decades later, with the children in their 60s, the beginning of a change is in the air. Some of Europe's war babies have begun to talk among themselves, lamenting the shame they were made to feel. A growing number have decided to seek out their German families and fathers.

The revelation by Delorme's grandmother was only the beginning of a decades-long search, of harassing German archivists, of begging historians for clues, of following false leads. His mother, singled by postwar imprisonment as a collaborator, was no help. Delorme pushed on, however, and three years ago completed his family tree at last:

His father, he discovered, was Hans Hoffmann, a baker from Mainz. During the war, Hoffmann played the cello in a *Wehrmacht* orchestra dispatched to entertain occupied Paris, where he took a French woman as his mistress. Then, as the Third Reich crumbled, he was killed in a Bavarian village on April 25, 1945, resisting an onslaught by U.S. tanks.

"I did not find peace [with the discovery]. Peace is too strong a word. But I attained a certain degree of serenity," said Delorme, now 65 and retired from the French postal service in Menton on the French Riviera. "All of a sudden, I had my father, aunts, cousins. The whole family."

To help people like himself who are coming to terms with their origins, Delorme founded Hearts Without Borders. The three-year-old organization, with 300 members — all children of German soldiers — provides phone numbers that war babies can call to talk about what it was like growing up behind the veil. The group held a convention in November 2009 in Caen to exchange stories and listen to historians describe where they fit in.

"What we have lived through and the deprivation we felt all our lives push us to make our voices heard," said Gerlina

Swillen, a Belgian secondary school teacher and researcher at Vrije University in Brussels. "We do not wish any child to have to go through this."

Swillen said people have begun to speak out now in part because they dared to do so only after the deaths of their mothers. In addition, she said, social attitudes have changed, lessening the stigma, and German archives have become more readily available to outsiders in recent years.

Swillen said she had long suspected something was amiss in her past. She discovered that her father was a German soldier — one of an estimated 20,000 in Belgium — only when her mother told her in 2007. Her mother had corresponded with her former lover after the war but destroyed the letters when she married a Belgian man. The veil descended after that.

## THE GERMAN RESPONSE

Georg Lilienthal, director of the Hadamar Memorial to Nazi "euthanasia" victims in Germany, said few Germans are willing to talk about the issue despite the stirrings in countries that were occupied. Many German soldiers who fathered war babies had wives and children back home. In most cases, the fathers are dead by now, he noted, but some war babies have been welcomed by their half brothers and half sisters, while others have been rejected.

"More time needs to pass," Lilienthal added.

French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner recently asked the German

government to grant citizenship to French war babies who seek it after tracing their filiations. A half-dozen have since obtained German passports, and more than 20 others have applied, including Delorme. Similar facilities will be made available soon to German soldiers' children in other countries, Lilienthal predicted.

"Acknowledging German citizenship for these people is an important decision, a very important symbolic act, by the German government," he said. "The problems and difficulties these children have had throughout their lives continue to traumatize them today."

## PAINFUL CHILDHOODS

Delorme had been curious about his parentage since discovering on his family ID card, at age 12, that he was "legitimized" by his mother's postwar husband. He asked what it meant, but no one would tell him.

"From then on, there was a bee in my bonnet," he recalled.

He repeatedly asked his grandmother, who had raised him, and his mother about his origins. From his grandmother, he got evasion. From his mother, he got anger and silence.

At school in a small Normandy town, meanwhile, he was taunted as the child of a German. The truth began to take shape as he grew older; the worst was confirmed with his grandmother's belated decision to show him the photos.

"We were the children of monsters," he said, recalling the hatred of Nazis as he

(Continued on page 15)

# HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS GO UP IN EASTERN EUROPE, WITH SOME FLAWS

BY RUTH ELLEN GRUBER, JTA

Under Communism, Jewish suffering in World War II generally was treated as a footnote to the overall losses in what the Soviets called the "Great Patriotic War."

Public monuments existed at some Holocaust sites in Eastern Europe, such as Auschwitz, the *Paneriai* forest near Vilnius where at least 70,000 Jews were killed, and *Babi Yar*, where tens of thousands of Jews were killed in ravines outside Kiev. But



Holocaust memorial in the shape of a weeping willow tree, erected in 1990 in back of the Dohany Street Synagogue in Budapest.

these usually commemorated generic "victims of fascism" and did not acknowledge the involvement of local collaborators.

Since the fall of Communism 20 years ago, however, a host of new Holocaust memorials have gone up in post-Communist states while Communist-era monuments have been revamped by state authorities, local civic groups and Jewish organizations, giving the Jewish tragedy of World War II more prominence.

The new memorials range from simple plaques to modest monuments to huge memorial complexes, such as the monument at the *Belzec* death camp. A joint project of the Polish government and the American Jewish Committee, the monument was inaugurated in 2004 by the Polish president.

Some new sites, such as *Belzec* and the state-run Holocaust memorial center in Budapest, which also opened in 2004, include museums or educational facilities.

In other cases, including at *Babi Yar* and *Paneriai*, new inscriptions or components have been added to provide more accurate information and context in order for the memorial site to teach and inform as well as commemorate.

This can become contentious if, for example, the new inscriptions make reference to local collaboration in the killing of Jews.

"After the problem of funding, the hardest part of getting monuments and memorials erected has not been getting some kind of general consent, but it has been working out the specifics of the design and especially the language on the inscription,"

said the president of the International Survey of Jewish Monuments, Samuel Gruber, who has written about Holocaust memory and consulted on Holocaust monument projects.

"Most older memorials have been very general in their language, so much so that it is often hard to figure out what events are being commemorated, and rarely can one learn about who did what to whom and when," he said.

This remains a concern, even with monuments whose positioning and design make them prominent. Some memorials form a striking symbolic presence, but provide little or no information as to what they commemorate. Visitors are presumed to know already what they represent.

In the heart of the Slovak capital Bratislava, for example, a chiseled image of a destroyed synagogue now serves as a Holocaust memorial. But other than the word "Remember," no information is provided on how the wartime fascist state collaborated with the Nazis in killing most of Slovakia's 135,000-strong pre-war Jewish community.

Likewise, in *Sopron*, Hungary, a small but powerful sculptural monument depicting empty clothing hung outside the Auschwitz gas chambers stands near an abandoned synagogue. The memorial bears Hebrew lettering and the *Sh'ma* prayer, but no further information.

"How can one remember what one doesn't know?" Gruber said. "How can one 'not forget' what is never fully discussed or taught?"

On Slovakia's Holocaust Memorial Day, Sept. 9, Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico presided over the dedication of a memorial to Slovaks who helped rescue Jews at the time of the anti-Nazi Slovak National Uprising in 1944.

Funded by the Israeli Chamber of Commerce in Slovakia and several private sources, the memorial was built in the town of *Zvolen* next to the mass gravesite of Jews who were killed by the Nazis. It also includes

a digital information point.

"This represents a different way of presenting Slovak national history that is at the same time a rejection of the [Nazi-allied] Slovak national puppet state of Josef Tiso," said Rabbi Andrew Baker, the



A monument on the bank of the Danube commemorates Jews who were shot dead and thrown into the water by the local Fascist Arrow Cross during the Holocaust.

American Jewish Committee's director of international Jewish affairs, who has advised on Holocaust memorial projects in several countries. "Fico deserves credit for doing this, and he also speaks emotionally about the importance of Holocaust education in his country."

Though flawed at times, the memorials serve an important purpose.

"Memorials have a permanent presence," said Warren Miller, chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, which has been involved in Holocaust memorial projects in Latvia, Romania, the former East Germany, and other countries. "Going to a powerful memorial will help people want to learn more."

# EXHIBITION OPENING "ARCHITECTURE OF MURDER: THE AUSCHWITZ-BIRKENAU BLUEPRINTS" AT UN IN NEW YORK



Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem; Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General; Minister Yuli-Yoel Edelstein, Minister of Information and Diaspora.



Elizabeth Mundlak Zborowski, Cultural Director, American Society for Yad Vashem; Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem; Kiyo Akasaka, UN Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.



Ambassador Gabriela Shalev, Israel's Permanent Representative to the United Nations; Elizabeth Mundlak Zborowski, Cultural Director, American Society for Yad Vashem; Minister Yuli-Yoel Edelstein, Minister of Information and Diaspora, Israel; Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem; and Eugen Gluck.



Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem; Elizabeth Mundlak Zborowski, Cultural Director, American Society for Yad Vashem; Yuli-Yoel Edelstein, Minister of Information and Diaspora, Israel; Marilyn & Barry Rubinstein.



Rick Barton, United States Representative to the Economic and Social Council; Yehudit Inbar, curator of the exhibit and Director, Museums Division, Yad Vashem, Israel; Ambassador Gabriela Shalev, Israel's Permanent Representative to the United Nations; Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem; Elizabeth Mundlak Zborowski, Cultural Director, American Society for Yad Vashem; Yuli-Yoel Edelstein, Minister of Information and Diaspora, Israel; Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General; Mrs. Yoo Soon-taek.; Kiyo Akasaka, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.



Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem; Elizabeth Mundlak Zborowski, Cultural Director, American Society for Yad Vashem; Ambassador Andrzej Towpik, Republic of Poland's Permanent Representative to the United Nations; Boaz Zborowski.



Audience view.



Ambassador Peter Wittig, the German Republic's Permanent Representative to the U.N.; Elizabeth Mundlak Zborowski, Cultural Director, and Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem.



# HITLER'S POPE WAS NO SAINT

DOUGLAS BLOOMFIELD,  
THE JERUSALEM POST

Pope Benedict XVI's appearance at Rome's Great Synagogue in January did nothing to quell the controversy over plans to confer sainthood on Pius XII, the wartime pontiff who has been called Hitler's pope. In fact, he may have made matters worse when just two days earlier he took a further step in the process by declaring Pius's "heroic virtues."

One prominent Italian rabbi and a number of Holocaust survivors boycotted the pope's visit in protest against the beatification of Pius. Riccardo Pacifici, the president of Rome's Jewish community, did attend and declared, "The silence of Pius XII before the Shoah still hurts because something should have been done."

To this day, the Vatican has produced no hard evidence that Pius uttered a word or lifted a finger to help when, on October 16, 1943, the Germans rounded up 1,021 Roman Jews and held them for two days just across the Tiber from the Vatican before sending them to Auschwitz; only 17 returned after the war.

"The cries of the victims were met by Pius with silence," said Elan Steinberg, vice president of the American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants.

Benedict told his audience that the Church had aided Jews in a "hidden and discreet way" during the Holocaust, but he offered no specifics about Pius's own involvement.

If there is evidence it lies buried deep in the Vatican vaults. For a decade the Church has been promising to open its wartime records to scholars "soon," but the latest word is it will be at least another five years. When some prewar archives were opened to a handpicked Catholic scholar, John Cornwell, to write a Vatican-

sanctioned biography of Pius, he was shocked by what he found.

Pius, who as Cardinal Eugenio Pacelli was the papal nuncio in Germany in the 1920s, the Vatican's secretary of state in the 1930s and became pontiff in 1939. He drew the Church "into complicity with the darkest forces of the era," Cornwell wrote. Pius "was the ideal pope for Hitler's unspeakable plan. He was Hitler's pawn. He was Hitler's pope... [He was] not only an ideal pope for the Nazis' Final Solution, but a hypocrite... to his everlasting shame and to the shame of the Catholic Church."

Tad Szulc, Pope John Paul II's biographer, called Pacelli "the Führer's best imaginable ally." Pacelli even betrayed Catholic leaders who might have challenged Hitler and his extermination policies. "He prevented Catholic protest in defense of Jews, even if they'd converted to Christianity," Cornwell wrote. Pius also rebuffed a personal plea from President Franklin D. Roosevelt in late 1942 to publicly condemn Hitler's extermination of the Jews and refused to meet the chief rabbi of Jerusalem, Isaac Herzog, who came to appeal for his help in saving Jewish lives.

Although Israeli governments have largely avoided the dispute, calling it an issue between the Jewish people and the Vatican and not a diplomatic matter involving the two states, Deputy Premier Silvan Shalom said he raised it when he was at the Rome synagogue, but he gave no indication of any response.

Israel and the Vatican currently are involved in a dispute over Church ownership of property in the country and its tax treatment.

Pius's defenders say he worked quietly and behind the scenes, and had he spoken

out forcefully, it would have only made matters worse for Jews and Catholics in Nazi-controlled countries. It is difficult to imagine how much worse conditions could have been for the Jews had he acted.

If Pius really was helpful, it should be easy enough to prove. The 65 years since the fall of the Nazis are enough time to sort through the archives for evidence of the pontiff's saintly efforts to help the



Benedict waves as he arrives at Rome's main synagogue.

Jews. The Vatican is the only country that has not opened its wartime archives to scholars, Steinberg said.

The Vatican's failure to produce hard evidence that Pius did anything to help, however, should not detract from the heroism of many individual nuns, priests and other Catholics who risked their own lives to rescue thousands of Jews. If anything, their behavior demonstrates how much the Vatican could have done. The continued refusal to open archives lends credence to charges against the pope and undermines the credibility of the Church.

Researchers also believe documents hidden deep in the Vatican can shed light on information found in the US National Archives indicating the pro-Nazi Croatian

*Ustasche* delivered large quantities of gold to the Vatican in exchange for help in the escape of high-ranking Nazis. Other material discovered at the US archives indicate assets looted by the Nazis and their allies from the Jews and others may have wound up in Vatican vaults, or at least evidence of where they went. US government pleas to open the Vatican archives on that subject have been rebuffed.

The Vatican's insistence there is no "smoking gun" is a "specious argument which turns the burden of proof on its head," said Steinberg. "The known historical record confirms Pius's silence."

The Vatican insists sainthood is based on his "Christian life," not his historical record, but popes have been important political and diplomatic players, and the two elements cannot be separated, critics insist.

A driving force behind the canonization are Church conservatives opposed to the reforms of the Second Vatican Council.

January 24th was Benedict's third visit to a synagogue, an important move in healing relations between the Church and the Jews; his predecessor, John Paul II, was only the first pontiff ever to make such a visit when he went to the Rome synagogue in 1986.

The German-born Benedict, 82, was warmly received, but his relationship with the Jews has not been without problems. Just a year ago, he revoked the excommunication of four bishops of the anti-Semitic Society of St. Pius X, including one notorious Holocaust denier.

Last year, the pope went to Israel and in a speech at Yad Vashem never mentioned Germany or the Nazis, as his predecessor had done. Rabbi Yisrael Lau, a former Ashkenazi chief rabbi, urged Benedict, "Don't make [Pius XII] holy," because it will only "hurt... deeply" survivors "knowing that the man who could save, could do much more and did not do it."

## FROM ROME TO THIRD REICH: ANTI-SEMITISM HAS LONG HISTORY

**The Holocaust has its roots in Roman times, according to Dutch professor Leonard Rutgers, who published a book recently on how the Jewish identity was shaped in Christian minds.**

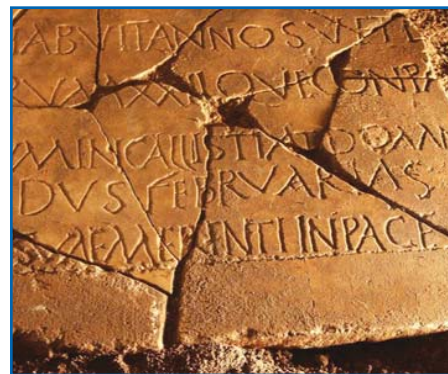
BY DIRK VLASBOM, NRC HANDELSBLAD

In 388 AD a Christian mob led by a local bishop destroyed the synagogue of Callinicum, a Greco-Roman city in northern Syria. The attack angered emperor Theodosius I, who had declared Christianity the religion of the Roman state just eight years earlier. As the Jewish community enjoyed a protected status under Roman laws, he ordered the synagogue be rebuilt at the bishop's expense. This triggered Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, to write the emperor a letter defending the obliteration of the Jewish temple. What could possibly be wrong with destroying a "house of betrayal and godlessness" where Christ's name was sullied on a daily basis, Ambrose asked.

Since the second century, Christian leaders had been publishing texts denouncing "the synagogue," a metaphor for all the followers of Judaism in the Roman empire. While American historians have dismissed these attacks as "ideological constructions," Leonard Rutgers, a professor of Late Antiquity at the University of Utrecht specialized in religion, recently published a book disputing

this rosy perspective. His book, *Making Myths – Jews in Early Christian Identity Formation*, describes how the verbal violence directed at the Jewish population by the church leaders became physical in the fourth century.

It was during the Late Antiquity (4th-6th century AD) that Christianity became the dominant religion in both the western and eastern parts of the Roman empire.



A tombstone marks a Christian grave from the fourth century in the catacombs below Rome.

"Monotheistic religions tend to exclude others after they assume a position of power," Rutgers said in an interview with *NRC Handelsblad*. Christian sects that fell out of favor could be easily denounced as heretics, but Judaism posed a more complex problem, Rutgers explained, "since Christianity's roots are themselves

Jewish."

Christians were still prosecuted under emperor Diocletian (303-306), but Constantine I lifted the ban on Christianity in 313 and it became the state religion by 380. "The archaeological record proves that Jewish communities in the empire were doing very well at the time," Rutgers said. "Synagogues were constructed in prominent places, challenging Christian self-esteem. Christians thought of themselves as the true Israel, but looking out the window they were confronted with a synagogue. Drawing on scriptures from both the Old and the New Testament they started calling 'the synagogue' every bad name they could think of."

The word synagogue gained new meaning in patristic writings. While originally only denoting a religious meeting place and its congregants, it became a metaphor for "the people of Israel" and Judaism in general. A metaphor which mostly existed to be heckled and derided.

The sermons of John Chrysostom (347-407) were particularly infamous in this respect. He was notorious for his denunciations of the synagogue as a "theatre of the effeminate," "a garbage belt for vagabonds" and "a house of demons and place of idolatry."

These sermons directed at "the synagogue" always built up to a predictable climax: the crucifixion of Jesus, which was squarely blamed on the Jews.

According to Rutgers, the name-calling escalated into physical aggression over time. "Synagogues were first attacked by the end of the fourth century and the beginning of the fifth. Around that time the emperor started issuing edicts protecting synagogues in every corner of the empire. This wouldn't have been necessary if no real threat existed. The archaeological record offers further evidence," Rutgers said. "Once synagogues were destroyed, Christians often constructed churches over their ruins, thus affirming their newfound religious and social power."

Rutgers believes the murder of Jews during the Crusades, their expulsion from Spain and Portugal in the late 15th century, the pogroms of Eastern Europe, and the Holocaust of the 20th century can all be seen as the culmination of a gradual development which began in the fourth century. Rutgers distances himself from the common distinction between anti-Semitism and anti-Judaism.

According to Rutgers, anti-Semitism was only made possible by the existence of anti-Judaism. "By the time anti-Judaism became racially motivated, it was able to draw on a collective subconscious mindset which had long theretofore been institutionalized by the church. Large segments of the population already believed everything Jewish was bad, and the pseudoscientific anti-Semitic theories made use of that sentiment," Rutgers said.



# REPORT FROM YAD VASHEM

## NAZI'S GRANDSON TRIES TO SELL ITEMS TO YAD VASHEM

ELDAD BECK, YNETNEWS

The Yad Vashem Holocaust museum in Jerusalem recently received an unusual, and angering, appeal: The grandson of Rudolf Höss, the infamous commander of the Auschwitz concentration camp, offered to sell the museum private items which had belonged to his Nazi grandfather.

In a letter sent to the museum several months ago, titled "Rare items, Auschwitz, Commander Höss," the grandson writes in a businesslike manner: "The subject is several items from the inheritance of Rudolf Ferdinand Höss, the commander of Auschwitz: A massive fireproof case with official symbols – a gift from Himmler (the SS commander), weighing 50 kilograms; a knife for opening letters and files; slides from Auschwitz which have yet to be presented in public; letters from the captivity period in Krakow. I would appreciate a brief response. Sincerely, Reiner Höss."

The Yad Vashem management was shocked by the offer and rejected it out of hand. Museum officials expressed their disgust at the fact that the criminal's relative sought to make a profit from the mem-

ory of the Holocaust.

"This is where we must ask the obvious question: 'Have you killed and also gained a profit?'" said a Yad Vashem official.

Nonetheless, the museum made it clear to Höss' grandson, Reiner, that he may donate the original items to Yad Vashem in order to perpetuate the horrors of Nazism.

Talking to *Yedioth Ahranoth*, 44-year-old Höss said that he came up with the idea to sell the items to Yad Vashem following a conversation with a friend, the grandson of Baldur von Schirach, who was the leader of the *Hitler-Jugend* Nazi youth movement.

"These items were in the family's possession," Höss said in a phone call. "We knew about them, and elements from outside of the family have known about them for a long time. There have been quite a few bodies which asked to purchase them from us, including famous media outlets like the *Der Spiegel* weekly and the Axel Springer publishing house.



Rudolf Höss. Responsible for annihilation of 430,000 of Hungary's Jews.

"Following von Schirach's recommendation I thought it would be appropriate to sell the items to Yad Vashem. I don't want these items to reach the wrong hands."

We asked Höss whether he would be willing to donate the items to Yad Vashem.

"That's a good question," he replied. I can't make such a decision on my own. I am inclined to agree to donate the items, but I will have to consult the rest of the family. We want the items to reach a museum dealing with history."

Reiner Höss, a security officer working in a big American company, says he learned about his grandfather's identity and actions for the first time in school at the age of 12.

"I was completely shocked. A teacher of Czech descent gave me books to read, and I suddenly realized who my grandfather was. I returned home and asked my parents and my grandmother about it, and they confirmed it. Since then I have been

interested in the issue. I tried to travel to Auschwitz several times, but they didn't let me join trips to the camp because of my last name. However, I have visited other concentration camps like *Dachau*."

Recruited to the SS in 1934 by Heinrich Himmler, one of the most powerful men in Nazi Germany. Following a "training period" in the *Dachau* concentration camp, he was sent to Auschwitz in 1940 and was responsible for the establishment of a concentration camp in the area and for turning it into a death camp.

Four years later, he was personally responsible for the annihilation of 430,000 of Hungary's Jews within 56 days. For this "work" he received awards of excellence from the Third Reich. After the war, Höss managed to hide for a while under a false identity, but was eventually identified and extradited to the Polish government. He was sentenced to death and hanged in Auschwitz on April 16, 1947.

"I have a very clear stance about what took place in that period," Höss' grandson said. "I am far from that world view, and since my parents' divorce I have completely cut all ties with my father, Rudolf's son."

## YAD VASHEM HONORS POLISH RIGHTEOUS AMONG THE NATIONS

Yad Vashem held a ceremony honoring the late Wojciech Twardzicki from Poland and his daughters Helena, Zofia, and the late Wladyslawa, as Righteous Among the Nations.

The ceremony took place in the presence of the granddaughter of the Righteous, Jadwiga Zarnowiecka, who arrived from Poland for the event, Holocaust survivor Zahava (born Waic) Schwartz, and Polish Ambassador to Israel Agnieszka Magdziak Miszewska.

The memorial event in the Hall of Remembrance was followed by the ceremony awarding the medal and certificate to the Righteous in the synagogue and the unveiling of the names of the Righteous in the Garden of the Righteous at Yad Vashem.

On September 8, 1939, the city of *Jaslo* in Western *Galicia* was occupied by the Nazis. Many Jews attempted to flee, but the German Army prevented their escape and returned them to their homes.

The Jews of *Jaslo* suffered and were persecuted. They were beaten in the streets and sent forcibly to hard labor. Their homes and stores were looted and they were obligated to wear a white armband marked with a blue Star of David.

In 1941, the Jews were sequestered in a ghetto in a small quarter of the city.

In July 1942, some months before the liquidation of the ghetto, young Zahava Schwartz escaped from the ghetto to the house of some family friends, the Twardzickis, who lived in the neighboring

town of *Birowka*, where she was hidden together with her cousin Mina.

The Twardzicki family was kind and warm hearted. The mother of the family died of an illness shortly after the arrival of Zahava and Mina, and the father, Wojciech, together with his three daughters, Helena, Wladyslawa and Zofia, devotedly cared for the two girls.



From L to R: Holocaust survivor Zahava Schwartz, Jadwiga Zarnowiecka, and Polish Ambassador to Israel Agnieszka Magdziak Miszewska at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

For two years, the family provided the young girls with food, shelter, and all their needs, all without receiving any compensation. They protected them, hiding them in a closet, the attic, or the stables during raids by the German police.

Zahava's parents, Hinda and Pinchas Elazar Waic, and her sister Esther were murdered when the *Jaslo* ghetto was liquidated.

On April 10, 1994, the Commission for the Designation of the Righteous at Yad Vashem decided to recognize Wojciech Twardzicki and his daughters, Helena, Wladyslawa, and Zofia, as Righteous Among the Nations.

## COUSINS REUNITE AT YAD VASHEM – SIXTY-FOUR YEARS LATER

They lost touch with one another when they went their separate ways to rebuild their lives after the war.

This past summer, volunteers from Yad Vashem's Shoah Victims' Names Recovery Project went to the *Bayit B'lev* nursing home in Jerusalem to assist survivors there to fill out "pages of testimony" to commemorate their loved ones who were killed in the Holocaust.

Veronica, 81, asked to commemorate her cousins from the Reiter family. Searching the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names, Yad Vashem staff discovered that Livia Prince, formerly Lili Reiter, had filled out pages of testimony for her parents, Viktor and Iren, and for her sister Agnes in 2006.

The volunteers brought the pages of testimony to Veronica, who was overjoyed to discover her cousin's address in Toronto. She wrote to her immediately, and she received a phone call 10 days later.

Prince flew from Toronto to Israel to reunite with her cousin. They visited Yad

Vashem together and lit a *ner neshamah* (candle of the soul) in Yad Vashem's Valley of Communities.

"For me, this [lighting the candle in the Valley of the Communities] is closure... Not that there will ever be closure," Prince said.

"This is history, and now we have to talk about it, and fast," she said.

As part of Yad Vashem's effort to recover the names and identities of all the Jews murdered in the Shoah, Yad Vashem sends volunteers to survivors' homes and to nursing homes throughout Israel to help residents fill out pages of testimony in memory of the people they knew who were murdered.

Volunteers search the database to avoid duplicates and assist in the often emotionally difficult task of completing the forms. So far, the Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names contains some 3.6 million names.

Efforts are underway around the world to try to recover as many of the six million names as possible. People who know of individuals who were murdered in the Shoah are encouraged to visit Yad Vashem's website ([www.yadvashem.org](http://www.yadvashem.org)) to ensure that all the victims are memorialized in the Hall of Names.



Veronica Zer, left, and Livia Prince visit the Valley of the Communities at Yad Vashem. It commemorates the destroyed Jewish communities of Europe.

## FIRST-EVER MOROCCAN EDUCATORS' SEMINAR

A groundbreaking seminar for educators from Morocco brought 18 educators and opinion-makers together for an intensive weeklong period of study at Yad Vashem. The group, hosted by the International School for Holocaust Studies, explored topics as diverse as the historical rise of anti-Semitism, pre-war Jewish life in Europe and North Africa, anti-Jewish Nazi policy, and confronting Holocaust Denial. In addition, the

participants learned how to access and utilize the extensive resources available on the Yad Vashem website to enhance their knowledge.

The group left not only with essential educational resources for teaching about the Holocaust in Morocco, but having become part of the supportive educational network of Yad Vashem's International School.

# AS THE NAZIS AND ADOLESCENCE TOOK HOLD

BY THOMAS VINCIGUERRA,  
NEW YORK TIMES

More than 60 years ago, as she awaited the final horrors of the Holocaust in the *Bedzin* ghetto of Poland, a 14-year-old Jewish girl named Rutka Laskier committed her thoughts to a diary. Although the journal covers only a few months in 1943, its arresting combination of detail — from Nazi atrocities to adolescent infatuation — has drawn comparisons to the celebrated diary of Anne Frank.

Recovered after the war by a childhood friend of Rutka's, the document was publicly unveiled last week at Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust museum. It has been published in English as *Rutka's Notebook*, by Yad Vashem Publications. Excerpts follow.

The 60-page diary's first entry.

Jan. 19, 1943

I cannot grasp that it is already 1943, four years since this hell began. The days pass by quickly; each day looks just like the previous one. Every day it's the same frozen and oppressive boredom. There is great excitement in town. A lot of people are about to leave for "the land of our forefathers," to Palestine. Among these happy people are Syma, Bomek and Ran. I don't know how to explain the feeling that overcame me when I learned about it. It must have been mixed feelings of joy and jealousy. We too live in the hope of getting papers.

Jan. 27, 1943

I'll give you a detailed description of my body. Well, I'm tall, thin, with pretty nice legs, very thin at the waist, I've got elongated hands but ugly, or more accurately, uncared-for fingernails. I have big black eyes, thick brown eyebrows and long eyelashes, even very long. Black hair, trimmed short and combed back, small but pug nose, nicely outlined lips, snow-

white teeth — and there's my portrait.

Jan. 28, 1943

All right, enough with the writing for now. I notice that I feel very reassured, as if I confessed to someone. I wonder if Jewish women are allowed to confess to a Christian priest. Whom can I ask about it?

Feb. 5, 1943

The rope around us is getting tighter and tighter. Next month there should already be a ghetto, a real one, surrounded by walls. In the summer it will be unbearable. To sit in a gray locked cage, without being able to see fields and flowers. Last year I used to go to the fields; I always had many flowers, and it reminded me that one day it would be possible to go to *Malachowska* Street without taking the risk of being deported. Being able to go to the cinema in the evening. I'm already so "flooded" with the atrocities of the war that even the worst reports have no effect on me. I simply can't believe that one day I'll be able to leave the house without the yellow star. Or even that this war will end one day ... If this happens, I will probably lose my mind from joy. ...

Well, Rutka, you've probably gone completely

crazy. You are calling upon God as if He exists. The little faith I used to have has been completely shattered. If God existed, He would have certainly not permitted that human beings be thrown alive into furnaces, and the heads of little toddlers be smashed with butt of guns or be

shoved into sacks and gassed to death. ... It sounds like a fairy tale. Those who haven't seen this would never believe it. But it's not a legend; it's the truth. Or the time when they beat an old man until he became unconscious, because he didn't cross the street properly.



Rutka Laskier, far right, with her family in 1939. Her recently published diary lasts three months and ends just before she was taken to Auschwitz in 1943.

Feb. 6, 1943

I think my womanhood has awoken in me. That means, yesterday when I was taking a bath and the water stroked my body, I longed for someone's hands to stroke me ... I didn't know what it was, I have never had such sensations until now. ...

## SPECIAL GROUP OF JEWISH HEROES

In December of last year Julius Berman, Chairman of the Claims Conference, attended the opening of a new exhibit at the Palmach Museum in Jerusalem, "The Contribution of Holocaust Survivors to Israel's War of Independence."

Moved by the powerful display Mr. Berman wrote a letter to Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American Society of Yad Vashem, sharing his experience of the exhibition. Below is an excerpt from his letter.

The Claims Conference provided funding for this exhibit, which proved to be extremely well-done and moving. Having escaped indescribable horrors and losing everything, these survivors turned their backs on Europe only to arrive in a completely foreign place where nothing was familiar and often no family or friends waited to welcome them.

Having already endured the worst, they had to change immediately from survivors to soldiers in order to pursue the simple goal of having a home where they could live in peace, free from fear, persecution, and attacks. They did so in a place where the language, climate, and customs were all drastically different from their home countries.

Like the Maccabees, these survivors who fought against the armies of five Arab nations were the few against the many and the weak against the strong. And as with the Maccabees, G-d wrought a mira-

cle for the Jewish army. Much of Al Hanisim that we say during Chanukah also evokes the outcome of the War of Independence, and the redemption that Holocaust survivors found in helping to establish the State of Israel:

"We thank You also for the miraculous deeds and for the redemption and for the mighty deeds and the saving acts wrought by You, as well as for the wars which You waged for our ancestors. You in your abundant mercy rose up for them in the time of their trouble, pled their cause, executed judgment, avenged their wrong, and delivered the strong into the hands of the weak, the many into the hands of the few, and unto Your people did You achieve a great deliverance and redemption."

Below are excerpts from my remarks at the Palmach Museum:

It has dawned on me that we may be making a tragic historical mistake in framing a definition for history of a survivor as someone who survived the greatest human tragedy to the Jewish people, but did so barely, broken, sick, eventually aged, infirm, disabled, and needing society's aid to survive their last years.

Is that the heritage we want recorded in history for the era of survivors? Definitely and certainly, we at the Claims Conference feel strongly otherwise. And that is why this exhibit that the Claims Conference proudly participated in funding is critically important. It is not the total antidote, but it is certainly a good start.

History should record that the survivors that came to Israel were and are much, much more than a large group of aged, infirm, and disabled Jews that need the help of society and the Claims Conference to survive their last years on this earth.

Simply put, they participated in building the nation. As you have seen in the exhibit, many of them came off the boats from Europe and were transported to the fronts during the War of Independence and throughout the early years, fighting in defense of the fledgling state. And they immersed themselves in the economic development of the country, raised families, and it is the children and grandchildren of these survivors who in large part are the leadership of the country.

Now, years later, they are well deserving of our gratitude and support. Through their activities, we see the fulfillment of the covenant in the Torah:

"I am Hashem your G-d who brought you out of the land of Egypt and I broke the bars of your yoke and led you forth standing upright."

Not broken, weak, sick remnants, but upright with full force and energy, and the living embodiment of the prayer we repeat every morning:

"And bring us back in peace from the four corners of the world and lead us upright to our land."

I join in the salute to the survivors. We are privileged to share in this tribute to a unique, special group of Jewish heroes.

Oh, I forgot the most important thing. I saw how a soldier tore a baby, who was only a few months old, out of his mother's hands and bashed his head against an electric pylon. The baby's brain splashed on the wood. The mother went crazy. I am writing this as if nothing has happened. As if I were in an army experienced in cruelty. But I'm young, I'm 14, and I haven't seen much in my life, and I'm already so indifferent. Now I am terrified when I see "uniforms." I'm turning into an animal waiting to die.

Feb. 15, 1943

I had an argument with Tuska but it was for her own good. I saw how jealous she was (though at that time I didn't understand that). She was afraid to leave me alone in the room with Janek. I made a scene and we fell out. She was basically very pleased with it. And one more thing: I have decided to let Janek kiss me. Eventually someone will kiss me for the first time, so let it be Janek. I do like him.

March 8, 1943

Because of whom or what am I crying? Because of Janek, certainly not. Then because of whom? Probably because of freedom. I am sick and tired of these gray houses, of the steady fear ... This fear clutches on to everyone and doesn't let go. Today, probably Nica, Jumeck, Janek will come to me. Damn it, Janek again. I decided not to think about him, but thoughts about him keep coming back. Have I really lost my head because of him? I don't know, is this what they call love?

The diary's last entry. In August, Rutka and her family were deported to Auschwitz, where apparently she was killed on arrival.

April 24, 1943

The town is already empty. Almost everyone lives in *Kamionka*. We will probably move there this week too. Meanwhile I'm very bored. The entire day I'm walking around the room, I have nothing to do.

## ROUNDUP OF TUNISIAN JEWS REMEMBERED

Ceremonies held in December at Yad Vashem and at the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris marked the Dec. 9, 1942 roundup of Tunisian Jews, as part of an effort to raise awareness of Jewish suffering in Nazi-occupied North Africa during the Holocaust.

Jews in Tunisia were forced to wear yellow stars and work in labor camps; some were deported to Auschwitz. Jews in other Vichy France colonies in Algeria and Morocco, as well as in Italian-occupied Libya, suffered similar fates.

Martin Gilbert, the pre-eminent Holocaust historian, also marked the anniversary with a statement.

"In my historical work over the past 50 years, I have been struck by the neglect of the story of the Jews of North Africa and the dangers facing them under Vichy French and Italian Fascist rule," Gilbert said in his statement.

"The story of the persecution of the Jews in North Africa during the Second World War is an integral part of the history of the Holocaust in France; the fate of the Jews living in French North Africa was directly connected to the fate of the Jews living in Metropolitan France. The collaborationist Vichy France extended its anti-Jewish laws — passed in France — to its three North African colonies. Thousands of Jews were sent to camps for slave labor between 1940 and 1943."

## “ORDINARY THIEVES” HELD IN AUSCHWITZ THEFT

Polish police have recovered the infamous Nazi sign stolen from the former Auschwitz death camp, cut into three pieces, and said it appeared to have been taken by common criminals seeking profit.

Five men were arrested after the damaged “*Arbeit Macht Frei*” (“Work Sets You Free”) sign was found near one of their homes in a snowy forest outside *Czemikowo*, a village near the northern Polish city of *Torun*, on the other side of the country from the memorial site.

The brazen theft of one of the Holocaust’s most chilling symbols sparked outrage from around the world. Polish leaders launched an intensive search for the 16-foot sign that spanned the main gate of the camp in southern Poland where more than 1 million people, mostly Jews, were killed during World War II.

The men’s arrest came after more than 100 tips, said Andrzej Rokita, the chief police investigator in the case.

The suspects have not been identified publicly, but Rokita said they were between the ages of 20 and 39 and that their past offenses were “either against property or against health and life,” implying that at least one of them has a record for violent crime.

At first police thought that it was an ordinary theft.

“Robbery and material gain are considered one of the main possible motives,”

said deputy investigator Marek Wozniczka.

However, later into the investigation it has become clear that the theft was masterminded by a Swedish neo-Nazi group on behalf of an as-yet-unnamed collector.

Anders Hogstrom — who founded Sweden’s virulently anti-immigrant National Socialist Front in 1994 — told local media that he was hired to collect the sign from the Polish gang that carried out the theft and pass it to a buyer.

### “HIDDEN IN THE WOODS”?

Four of the five men are believed to have carried out the theft, removing the 65- to 90-pound steel sign from above the Auschwitz gate in the town of Oswiecim, about 30 miles west of Krakow.

“It seems they cut the sign up already in Oswiecim, to make transport easier,” Rokita said at a news conference in Krakow. It was “hidden in the woods near the home of one of them.”

Police in Krakow released a photograph showing investigators removing the cut-up sign — covered in brown protective paper — from a van. A second photograph showed one of the suspects being pulled from the van, a hooded sweat shirt pulled over his head and hiding his face.

Wozniczka said the suspects will all be charged with theft of an object of special cultural value and could face up to 10 years in prison. He said other charges could pos-

sibly be added during the investigation.

Museum authorities welcomed the news with relief despite the damage.

Spokesman Pawel Sawicki said authorities hope to restore it to its place as soon as it can be repaired and were working to develop a new security plan.

### “ULTIMATE EVIL”?

The chairman of Yad Vashem, Israel’s official Holocaust memorial, expressed relief.

“The theft of the sign, which had become a symbol both of the ultimate evil that found its expression in Auschwitz, and of the memory of the Shoah — Jewish Holocaust, gave pain to Holocaust survivors and people of conscience everywhere,” Avner Shalev said in a statement. “The concern expressed by people around the world, illustrates the importance and awareness of Holocaust remembrance today.”

Noach Flug, an Auschwitz survivor and chair of a consortium of survivors’ groups, welcomed the sign’s recovery and called for tighter security.

Security guards patrol the 940-acre site around the clock, but due to its vast size they only pass by any one area at intervals.

After occupying Poland in 1939, the

Nazis established the Auschwitz I camp, which initially housed German political prisoners and non-Jewish Polish prisoners. The sign was made in 1940. Two years later, hundreds of thousands of Jews began arriving by cattle trains to the wooden barracks of nearby *Birkenau*, also called Auschwitz II.

More than 1 million people, mostly Jews, but also Gypsies, Poles and others, died in the gas chambers or from starvation and disease while performing forced



labor. The camp was liberated by the Soviet army on Jan. 27, 1945.

The grim slogan “*Arbeit Macht Frei*” was so counter to the actual function of the camp that it has been etched into history. The phrase appeared at the entrances of other Nazi camps, including *Dachau* and *Sachsenhausen*, but the long curving sign at Auschwitz was the best known.

## HOLOCAUST VICTIMS SEEK COMPENSATION FROM GERMAN DEATH CAMP RAILWAYS

DAVID CHARTER, TIMESONLINE

The last remaining Polish victims of the transport trains that took millions to Nazi death camps have mounted a claim for compensation after learning that Germany’s state rail company is planning to run again on Polish rails.

Some 7,000 survivors, all pensioners, are calling for *Deutsche Bahn* to help to pay their medicine and care bills from the profits of the company’s expansion, which was made possible by the deregulation of rail competition across Europe from January 1.

*Deutsche Bahn*, which is owned by the German government, is the successor to the wartime *Reichsbahn*, which charged its coerced passengers for their journeys to concentration camps — including Auschwitz.



The first deportation from *Minden*, *Lippe-Detmold* and *Schaumburg-Lippe* leaves Germany in December 1941.

The claim is a last effort by the dwindling number of Holocaust survivors to win payments from Germany after the Polish government formally closed the issue of seeking compensation from Berlin in 2004.

“*Deutsche Bahn* wants to profit in our country,” said Stanislaw Zalewski, 85, head of the Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners of Hitler’s Prisons and Concentration Camps.

The call for compensation is being supported by Train of Commemoration, a German organization dedicated to preserving the memory of the three million victims of Nazi deportations.

It estimates that *Deutsche Reichsbahn* made at least 445 million euros at today’s value by charging transportees from all over Europe. It said that its research showed that the price was raised for a trip to death camps such as Auschwitz: “*Deutsche Reichsbahn* was a state-owned logistical system of the Nazi regime so every deportation was carried out by them. This is *Deutsche Bahn*’s heritage and its obligation.”

*Deutsche Bahn*’s website does not shy away from its predecessor company’s grim history. It states: “*Deutsche Reichsbahn* was involved directly in the Holocaust because it handled the deportation of numerous people. Without the railway, the systematic murder of the European Jews, Sinti and Roma would not have been possible. Some three million people from almost the whole of Europe were transported to the Nazi extermination camps.” It has so far refused to answer calls for compensation for the deportees, although it said it had supported a foundation set up by German industry to help forced labor victims.

A spokesman said: “*Deutsche Bahn AG* is not the legal successor of the *Deutsche Reichsbahn*. Nevertheless, *Deutsche Bahn AG* is fully aware of its historical responsibility. For that reason, it supports various projects within the ‘Remembrance, Responsibility and Future’ foundation and is also involved in other projects.”

Margot Kleinberger was deported in 1942, at 11, to the *Theresienstadt* concentration camp. “Without the railway it would not have been possible,” she said. Herbert Shenkman, who was deported as a teenager, added: “This is not just about material compensation, but also the assumption of moral responsibility.”

## CONTROVERSY OVER REMAINS OF NAZI LEADER

Russia’s intelligence service FSB has denied claims by an American scientist that skull fragments in its archive are not those of Adolf Hitler. The scientist recently conducted a DNA test and concluded that the skull belonged to a woman.

The controversy surrounding Adolf Hitler’s skull fragments is a little embarrassing for the Russian secret services. In 2000 they presented a skull fragment and a piece of jawbone that they claimed were the remains of the Nazi leader. It was an attempt to quash outlandish rumors that he had escaped alive at the end of World War II.

But in October U.S. researchers presented the results of DNA tests on the skull and said it definitely didn’t belong to the dictator because it was from a female. Scientists had already harbored doubts about the authenticity of the piece of bone because it was thinner than a male’s usually is.

“The bone seemed very thin — male bone tends to be more robust. It corresponds to a woman between the ages of 20 and 40,” said Nick Bellantoni of the University of Connecticut. The position of the exit wound at the back of the skull also made scientists suspicious because eyewitnesses said Hitler had committed suicide by firing into his right temple.

Russia’s FSB intelligence service, the successor to the KGB, has now rejected the doubts. The bones are definitely Hitler’s, Vasily Khristoforov, the director of the FSB archives, told the newspaper *Izvestiya*. “These researchers never got in contact with us,” Khristoforov said, adding, “With what could they have compared the DNA?”

Moscow is the only place with the mortal remains of Hitler, Khristoforov said. However, Bellantoni said he was allowed to work on the skull for an hour.

When he flew home from Moscow he had two samples in his luggage: a sample from the skull fragment and one sample of blood from the sofa on which Hitler is said to have shot himself.

Bellantoni was able to compare the bloodstains on the blood-stained fabric with photos the Soviets took after they seized Hitler’s bunker in Berlin.

The stains had matched those in the photos. The research showed that the sofa blood DNA did not match the skull DNA. The sofa blood was male and the skull belonged to a woman, claimed Bellantoni.

Khristoforov insists that Soviet leader Joseph Stalin himself had ordered a precise investigation of the bone pieces because he was not convinced Hitler was dead. The comparison of the jaw bones with X-ray photos of Hitler made in 1944 had satisfied Stalin that Hitler was dead.

The archive director said the corpses of Hitler and Eva Braun, Joseph Goebbels and his wife and their six poisoned children had been destroyed on April 4, 1970.

“The order came from KGB chief Yuri Andropov, the later state and party leader,” said Khristoforov.

The remains had been stored in the eastern German city of *Magdeburg* but had then been incinerated, and the ash was scattered in the river.

“That was probably the right solution. Otherwise the burial site would have become a pilgrimage site for fascists who exist everywhere — regrettably in Russia too.”

However, Russian officials don’t all agree on whether the bones are really Hitler’s. After the U.S. research was revealed in October, the vice president of the Russian state archive, Vladimir Kozlov, said: “No one claimed that was Hitler’s skull.”

# FDR AND THE “VOYAGE OF THE DAMNED”

(Continued from page 5)

from that country who had been living in the U.S. at the time of the 1890 national census. This sharply reduced the number of Jews and (predominantly Catholic) Italians, since the bulk of Jewish and Italian immigrants in the U.S. had not arrived until after 1890.

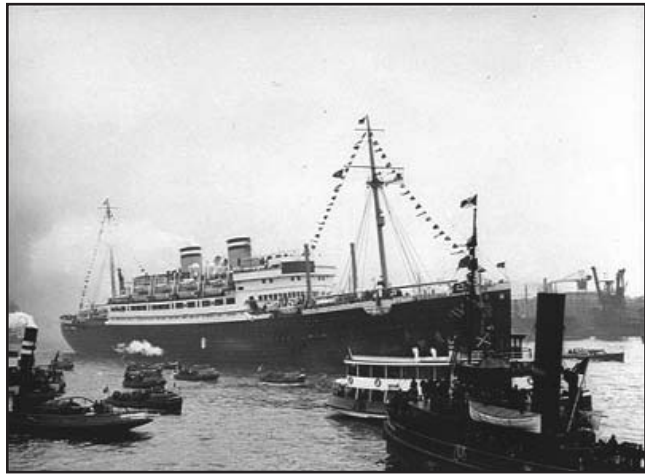
Keeping Jews out was one of the motives for the new system. The original version of the quota bill was submitted to Congress with a report by the chief of the United States Consular Service characterizing would-be Jewish immigrants from Poland as “filthy, un-American, and often dangerous in their habits . . . lacking any conception of patriotism or national spirit.”

Anti-Semitism was only part of the reason behind the strong public and congressional support for immigration restriction. The 1917 Soviet revolution in Russia sparked anxiety about Communism and the danger that European radicals would export it to America. The changing face of American society as a result of the influx of European immigrants provoked fears of foreigners. And prominent anthropologists and eugenicists contributed to the public's growing racism and paranoia by promoting theories that non-Caucasian races were corrupting Anglo-Saxon society.

## SAVING LIVES WITHOUT CHANGING LAWS

As Nazi Germany's persecution of Jews intensified during the mid and late 1930s, the U.S. quota system functioned precisely as its creators had intended: it kept out all but a handful of Jews.

The annual quota for Germany and Austria was 27,370. For Poland, it was just 6,542. Even those meager quota allotments were almost always under-filled, as zealous consular officials erected bureaucratic obstacles to immigration — what Prof. David S. Wyman called “paper walls.”



MS *St. Louis* surrounded by smaller vessels, Havana, June 1939.

In 1933, Hitler's first year in power, the German quota was only 5.3 percent filled (1,324 immigrants). It was 13.7 percent filled in 1934, 20.2 percent in 1935, 24.3 percent in 1936, 42.1 percent in 1937, and 65.3 percent in 1938. The only year between 1933 and 1945 that the German quota was fully filled was 1939.

This meant that between 1933 and 1939, there were 106,484 unused quota places for German citizens.

Later, during the period of the Nazi genocide, from late 1941 until early 1945, only ten percent of the quotas from Axis-controlled European countries were used. That means almost 190,000 quota places were unused.

The question of unused quota places is important because when American Jewish refugee advocates privately asked the Roosevelt administration, in the 1930s, to permit more immigration, they were told

nothing could be done because the administration could not persuade Congress to liberalize the immigration laws.

To this day, FDR's supporters continue to blame the 1920s immigration laws as the obstacle to refugee immigration in the 1930s. “It has always seemed to me a bit unfair to blame President Roosevelt for a law that was passed and signed by . . . Calvin Coolidge,” military historian Gerhard Weinberg asserted in a recent radio interview. “Until the Congress changed the immigration law . . . President Roosevelt, like any other president, was obliged to enforce the law.”

Similarly, Roosevelt Institute president William vanden Heuvel wrote in *American Heritage* magazine: “Roosevelt's critics severely underestimate limitations on presidential power. Clearly, the President could not unilaterally command an increase in quotas.”

But in fact, many lives could have been saved without changing a single law or fighting Congress. All FDR had to do was quietly instruct the State Department to admit as many refugees as the law allowed. That alone would have saved more than 100,000 German Jews before World War II — and nearly 200,000 more during the Holocaust years.

## “20,000 UGLY ADULTS”

Meanwhile, just as the *St. Louis* crisis was escalating, members of Congress were considering legislation, introduced by Senator Robert F. Wagner (D-NY) and Rep. Edith Rogers (R-MA), to admit 20,000 German refugee children outside the quota system.

Supporters of the bill included prominent church figures, leaders of the AFL and CIO labor unions, university presidents, New York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia, the 1936 Republican presidential and vice-presidential candidates, and former First Lady Grace Coolidge, who announced that she and her friends in Northampton, Massachusetts would personally care for 25 of the children.

Nativist and isolationist groups vociferously opposed the Wagner-Rogers bill. Typical of their perspective was a remark by FDR's cousin, Laura Delano Houghteling, who was the wife of the U.S. commissioner of immigration: she warned that “20,000 charming children would all too soon grow into 20,000 ugly adults.”

FDR responded negatively to a private appeal to him by First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt for his support of the bill. He did tell Eleanor that he would not object if she endorsed it, but she refrained from doing so. When a congresswoman inquired as to the president's position on the bill, FDR returned the note to his secretary marked “File No action FDR.”

Mindful of polls showing most Americans opposed to more immigration, Roosevelt preferred to follow public opinion rather than lead it. Without his support, the Wagner-Rogers bill was buried in committee.

## “ROOSEVELT WAS APATHETIC”

Roosevelt's silence with regard to the *St. Louis* has long intrigued historians. On the one hand, Roosevelt is well

known for his tendency to refrain from committing his private thoughts to writing. On the other hand, it is remarkable that an episode such as the controversy over the *St. Louis*, which made the front pages of America's major newspapers for nearly a week, and which raised important questions about U.S. policies, did not elicit any



Passengers aboard the *St. Louis*. These refugees from Nazi Germany were forced to return to Europe after both Cuba and the U.S. denied them refuge. May or June 1939.

comment from the president.

A newly discovered document offers a rare insider's account of the Roosevelt administration's response to the *St. Louis*.

The document was unearthed by Dr. Bat-Ami Zucker, a historian at Bar-Ilan University in Israel who has written extensively on America's response to the Holocaust and whose latest book is *Cecilia Razovsky and the American Jewish Women's Rescue Operations in the Second World War* (published by Vallentine Mitchell).

Cecilia Razovsky, a refugee advocate and senior official of the National Council of Jewish Women, went to Havana in May 1939 and took part in high-level discussions with Cuban and U.S. officials in an attempt to resolve the *St. Louis* crisis. In Razovsky's papers, Dr. Zucker discovered an unpublished memoir about the *St. Louis* episode that Razovsky wrote after the war.

In the memoir, Razovsky described how, when the Cuban authorities refused to yield, she met with diplomats from “other South American countries” in the hope they would take at least some of the *St. Louis* refugees, but to no avail. (Canada also refused a request for haven.)

Then Razovsky wrote: “We again at that time tried to get permission from Secretary of State Hull to take them but our State Dept. was unsympathetic and Franklin Delano was apathetic, although Eleanor did everything in her power to change their attitude.”

Razovsky's assessment of Hull's lack of sympathy, FDR's apathy, and the First Lady's unsuccessful intervention seems to have been based on her direct contacts with official Washington. During the 1930s and 1940s, Razovsky met repeatedly with senior U.S. officials, including cabinet members, to lobby for the rescue of Jewish refugees. She was one of the best-positioned eyewitnesses to the response of the Roosevelt administration to the plight of the Jews.

Her memoir provides additional first-person evidence of the president's decision

to turn a blind eye to a humanitarian crisis on America's very doorstep.

What could FDR have done to aid the Jews on the *St. Louis*? He could have issued an executive order placing the refugees in a temporary detention center until it was safe for them to return to Germany. He could have put meaningful

pressure on the British to let the passengers go to Mandatory Palestine. Or he could have leaned on America's Latin American allies to take in the refugees.

Instead, he was, as Razovsky put it, “apathetic.” He turned away, in effect forcing the *St. Louis* to return to Europe. The same apathy would characterize Roosevelt's response to the Nazi mass murder of the Jews in the years to follow.

“Roosevelt was a very shrewd and cunning politician,” Hans Fisher recalls. “He did what was politically useful for him.”

## HAVENS — BUT NOT FOR LONG

With America's doors closed, the *St. Louis* slowly sailed back towards Europe. A Nazi newspaper, *Der Weltkampf*, gloated: “We are saying openly that we do not want the Jews, while the democracies keep on claiming that they are willing to receive them — then leave them out in the cold.”

At the same time, however, the Joint Distribution Committee was negotiating with the governments of England, France, Belgium and the Netherlands, and convinced them to each accept a portion of the *St. Louis* passengers. For a time, it seemed the refugees were saved.

Those who were admitted to England did indeed survive the war. And some of those who went to the other countries found ways to escape Europe. Hans Fisher, his mother, and his sister were among those who disembarked in France, but within six months Hans's father had managed to procure another set of Cuban visas for them. They left Europe for good in December 1939, on a ship carrying refugees from the Spanish civil war.

But many of the others were not so fortunate. In the spring of 1940, the Germans invaded France, Holland, and Belgium. Nearly half of the *St. Louis* refugees who were admitted to those countries were murdered in Nazi death camps.

*Dr. Rafael Medoff is director of The David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies.*

## MEMOIRS OF HITLER AIDE COULD FINALLY END HOLOCAUST CLAIMS

*The memoirs of the last SS adjutant to Adolf Hitler are to be published in a move historians say could cast away the last shred of doubt over his personal involvement in the Holocaust.*

BY ALLAN HALL, TELEGRAPH

Fritz Darges died over the weekend aged 96 with instructions for his manuscript about his time spent at the side of the *Führer* to be published once he was gone.

Darges was the last surviving member of Hitler's inner circle and was present for all major conferences, social engagements and policy announcements for four years of the war.

Experts say his account of his time as Hitler's direct link to the SS could discount the claims of revisionists who have tried to claim the German leader knew nothing of the extermination program.

Right-wing historians have claimed the planning for the murder of six million Jews was carried out by SS chief Heinrich Himmler.

Mainstream historians believe it inconceivable that Hitler did not issue verbal directives about the mass killings in Darges' presence. Other courtiers, such as armaments minister Albert Speer and

propaganda chief Josef Goebbels, had their diaries published post war with no reference to hearing Hitler ordering the "Final Solution."

Darges died still believing in the man who engineered the Jewish Holocaust as "the greatest who ever lived." His memoirs will be published now in accordance with his will.

Darges trained as an export clerk but joined the SS in April 1933. His zeal for National Socialism soon earmarked him for great things and by 1936 he was the senior adjutant to Martin Bormann, Hitler's all-powerful secretary.

"I first met the *Führer* at the Nuremberg party rally in 1934," he said in an interview given to a German newspaper shortly before his death at his home in *Celle*. "He had a sympathetic look, he was warm-hearted. I rated him from the off."

After serving in the SS panzer division *Wiking* in France and Russia he was promoted on to the *Führer's* personal staff in 1940. He rose to the rank of Lt. Col. and

was awarded the Knights Cross, the highest gallantry award for bravery in the field.

Much of his time after 1942 was either spent at Hitler's eastern headquarters the "Wolf's Lair" at *Rastenburg*, East Prussia, or at his holiday home, the *Berghof*, on a mountain in *Berchtesgaden, Bavaria*.

"It was a very familial atmosphere at the



Adolf Hitler with Fritz Darges.

*Berghof*," he recalled. "One time we went off to Italy together with Eva Braun and her sister Gretel in an open-topped car.

"I had to organize all the finances. I had the feeling that Eva's sister was interested in me but I didn't think I should become the brother-in-law of the *Führer*."

## A SURVIVOR IN BERLIN

(Continued from page 6)

whelmed. I could vividly see God's hand upon you throughout the book as if you were meant to live through turmoil and strife to eventually pass on this story. After reading your story, I felt so blessed to live in a country where I could freely worship God without fear of harm or death. I have all of my friends read your book. Bert, as each chapter would go by, I would find myself praying and hoping for your safety! I felt compelled to write this letter simply to thank you for sharing your story."

What is Bert's story? In the early part of the book, he describes how, in 1934, his uncle, his father's older brother from New York, took time on a business trip to Europe to come to Berlin. At the Lewin home, he urged them to leave now before it was too late, since Hitler was in power. Sadly, the answer was no. Two years later, that same uncle offered assistance through a friend attending the Olympics, but again Leopold Lewin said no. Constantly, in the late 1930s Rabbi Tobias Geffen of Atlanta, Georgia, corresponded with his nephew Leopold, hoping at least Bert could leave Germany.

When *Kristallnacht* occurred, it was too late for the Lewin family — no exit visas — no possibilities to escape the Nazi regime. Bert captures the shock of his family entrapped with little or no hope. Leopold's metalworking business was taken away; each day brought new horrors for the Jews in Berlin. The *Gestapo* made its appearance at homes in the city, apprehending Jews. For Bert and his parents, it became a life of constant fear until 1942. Bert was in a metalworking course; his father worked. They still had their apartment.

On March 27, 1942, the inevitable knock on the door. Bert let two *Gestapo* agents enter with their line, "Herr Lewin, we are here to assist you." This was an "infamous" *Gestapo* tactic; supposedly "they wanted to help the Jews in these troubling times." His mother, Johanna, ran back and forth in frenzy when told that they had to pack two suitcases and leave. Bert has provided his impression of that visit.

"The *Gestapo* watched us closely,

stone-faced and businesslike. For all they said, they were not there to help us. This day was a culmination of events which had been many years in the making, a day that every German Jew knew, in his heart, must come. The *Gestapo* knew their business and the goal of that business was the obliteration of our race."

The Lewins and their suitcases were put in a truck where other Jews were sitting. They were transported to the *Levetzowstrasse* synagogue in the *Moabit* district of Berlin. Still blackened from



A burned out Berlin synagogue.

*Kristallnacht*, the synagogue had been turned into a massive collection point for hundreds of Berlin Jews. Bert realized the deportation was at hand. "I was in a panic. From somewhere deep within me, I felt the beginnings of a rage, rising and spreading through my body like an electrical current, until I thought I would explode. 'Oh my God,' I thought, 'they're going to separate me from my parents.'"

Because he was young and healthy and had studied metalworking, Bert was ordered to leave his parents and accompany a *Gestapo* agent. "It took a second for me to grasp what was happening. My parents were being taken away from me. This might be my only opportunity to say good-bye. My mother was just coming to understand the *Gestapo* agent's orders. A look of unspeakable horror came over her face. She moaned... my father's eyes were blank, his face broken. We all fell

into each other's arms... gripped each other tightly hoping the Nazis would not be able to penetrate. The *Gestapo* reached into the huddle and forced us apart."

They were separated and Bert wrote: "It was over. Although I could not have known at the time, I would never see my parents again."

Johanna and Leopold were taken away on March 28, 1942, and sent to *Trawniki*, Poland. Earlier this year Bert received a description of what actually happened to his parents. "From *Trawniki* station they had to walk as a part of their group 12 kilometers to a ghetto called *Piaski*. They had to live under horrible living conditions — no proper rooms — only scarce food, no sanitary facilities. In autumn 1942 the SS marched them to *Sobibor* where they were executed. Their bodies were stuffed into open graves."

Now Bert was on his own. From late March 1942 until May 1945, he used his mind, his stealth, his muscles and his intuition to stay alive and

become one of those 1,700 Berlin Jews who survived in the city itself. That part of the book covers 250 pages and reads like the finest adventure story. Except this is an issue of life and death for Bert Lewyn, who was determined to rise out of the horrible cesspool of Nazi Berlin. He points to three miracles which saved him.

"What were the odds that I would encounter my friend Heinrich on my way to work at the gun factory? That Heinrich would risk severe punishment to tell me that all Jewish workers were being deported... Had I missed him I would have been deported along with the other Jewish workers to a concentration camp." The first miracle for Bert.

"What were the odds that, once I was finally arrested by the *Gestapo*, I would find myself in a prison where I could make a key to a locked gate enabling me to escape?" Miracle No. 2.

"As adjutant I was responsible for his day-to-day program. I must, and was, always there for him, at every conference, at every inter-service liaison meeting, at all war conferences.

"I must say I found him a genius."

But Darges misjudged the "warm-hearted" *Führer* deeply during one conference at *Rastenburg* on July 18, 1944 — two days before a bomb plot nearly succeeded in killing him.

During a strategy conference a fly began buzzing around the room, landing on Hitler's shoulder and on the surface of a map several times.

Irritated, Hitler ordered Darges to "dispatch the nuisance." Darges suggested whimsically that, as it was an "airborne pest" the job should go to the *Luftwaffe* adjutant, Nicolaus von Below.

Enraged, Hitler dismissed Darges on the spot. "You're for the eastern front!" he yelled. And so he was sent into combat.

But despite the dramatic end to his time with Hitler, he would still hear nothing against "the boss."

"We all dreamed of a greater German empire," he said. "That is why I served him and would do it all again now," said the man who had a career after the war selling cars.

For the third miracle, the entrance of the Red Army into Berlin in May 1945 was needed. Several Russian soldiers burst into the apartment where Bert was staying with a friendly family. The soldiers were about to kill these individuals who they believed were Nazis in hiding. With amazing bravado Bert was able to prove that they were Jews because he had an uncle, Boris Levin, in Moscow who was an electrical engineer and had written textbooks in the field. One Russian soldier, a Jew and an electrician, had used Boris Levin's materials. He believed Bert and ordered his fellow soldiers not to kill them. Miracle No. 3 now opened the door to freedom as the war ended.

As fate would have it, almost four years were to pass before Bert Lewyn was able to leave Germany. During that period, his aunt, Riva Guttman, a Holocaust survivor from Lithuania who had lost her entire family, joined him in the DP camp. As a woman, she was able to make aliya in 1946. Finally, in June 1949 Bert departed a DP camp in *Feldafing*, Germany and traveled to the U.S. There he joined his great-aunt and uncle, Sara Hene and Rabbi Tobias Geffen in Atlanta. There for the last 60 years, he has built his life as a U.S. citizen. There he has written his telling memoir.

Two interesting twists have carried Bert's story much beyond what he had expected. In 2002 the noted author of children's and teenage historical books, Dr. Susan Campbell Bartoletti, chose to include Bert's story in her book *Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler's Shadow*. The book details the development of the million-member Hitler Youth movement. Moreover, Bartoletti focuses on those German youth who resisted and who were brutally beheaded by the Nazis.

The tale of a Jewish youth in Berlin, Bert Lewyn, was for Bartoletti a "gem" demonstrating the uniqueness of his existence in the horrors swirling all about him. The book has won many awards since being published in 2003 with almost 120,000 copies being sold in the US and Canada. In 2007 it was translated into German and is required reading in most German high schools.

## MIEP GIES, HEROINE OF THE HOLOCAUST

BY GABE PRESSMAN, NBC

Miep Gies insisted she wasn't a heroine. "I myself am just an ordinary woman," she said. "I simply had no choice."

The woman who risked her life for more than two years as one of the protectors of Anne Frank - and then risked her life again to find and preserve Anne's diary - has died. Miep Gies was 100 years old.

Her death has special meaning, her life special poignancy for the many descendants of Holocaust survivors who live in New York and America. Miep Gies was a heroine — and she was so modest she never understood why people regarded her as courageous and selfless.



Miep Gies insisted she wasn't a heroine. "I myself am just an ordinary woman," she said. "I simply had no choice."

In the darkest days of World War II, she helped protect the Frank family and four of their friends who hid from the Nazis in an attic in Amsterdam. She and five other employees of Anne Frank's father helped keep the attic dwellers alive, smuggling in food and other supplies. It was Gies who brought the girl her first - and last - pair of high-heeled shoes and watched her struggle to walk in them. But, Gies said, the eight people who hid in the attic were "the brave people," the true heroes.

Anne Frank didn't agree. She expressed her appreciation for the people who risked their lives to hide her. She wrote in her diary of "our helpers"—that they "have managed to pull us through so far and will hopefully bring us safely to shore, because otherwise they'll find themselves sharing the fate of those they're trying to protect.

"Never have they uttered a single word about the burden we must be, never have they complained that we're too much trouble. They come upstairs every day and talk to the men about business and poli-

tics, to the women about food and wartime difficulties and to the children about books and newspapers."

On August 4, 1944, the attic dwellers were betrayed. Nazi police raided the hiding place and took the eight people to Gestapo headquarters in Amsterdam. Otto Frank was the only survivor of the eight who hid. They all died in Nazi extermination camps.

When Otto Frank, mourning his family, returned to Amsterdam after the war, Miep Gies reached into her desk drawer and pulled out the paper and notebooks in which Anne had written her diary. "Here," she told Frank, "is your daughter's legacy to you."

The father decided to publish the diary in 1947. Since then it has sold more than 25 million copies in 54 languages. After the Bible, it is believed to be the most widely read book in the world.

Anne Frank didn't live to see her 16th birthday. Yet Miep Gies, a tiny, white-haired woman, kept her words very much alive. It was Gies who, risking her life again, climbed the attic steps one last time - after the Franks had been arrested - and, rummaging through the notebooks and papers left on the floor during the Nazi raid, managed to save the essence of Anne Frank's diary.

Every year during Gies's life she observed the anniversary of the raid on the attic, August 4, 1944, in a special way. "I close the curtains of my home and do not answer the doorbell or the telephone. It is the day that my Jewish friends were taken away to the death camps. I have never overcome that shock."

Once she told a college audience in Ann Arbor: "It is our human duty to help those who are in trouble. I could foresee many, many sleepless nights and a miserable life if I had refused to help the Franks. Yes, I have wept countless times when I thought of my dear friends. But still, I am happy that these are not tears of remorse for refusing to assist those in trouble."

I spoke to Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel, chronicler of the Holocaust. He said: "She showed the simplicity of heroism. It's so simple. She belongs to the few who have been heroes."

If not for this brave woman, the world would have never known about Anne Frank.

## APPRECIATING AN ARTIST WHO BECAME AN ICON

(Continued from page 4)

hood, the emphasis on her girlish qualities — is part of what has made her a cultural icon. The beloved character in the play and movie may have moved people to read a book they otherwise would never have read. Similarly, Prose says, because the book is seen as "just" the diary of a young girl, it is an approachable way for children and others to learn about World War II and the Holocaust.

Prose touches briefly on other interesting aspects of the Anne Frank story, including Holocaust deniers' claim that the diary is a hoax and cases of the book being banned in schools. She describes the Anne Frank house museum in Amsterdam and talks about its effect on visitors. For readers who want to know more about a particular aspect of Anne's

life or writings, she provides a selected bibliography.

At the end of the book, Prose talks about teaching *The Diary* to college students. Their reactions remind us how Anne's brave, funny, intelligent voice speaks to individual readers with an immediacy that erases time. That voice, Prose says, is an accomplishment: "The fact that a girl could write such a book is itself a piece of information, as valuable as any of the improving moral principles that can be extracted from the words that a lonely child, imprisoned in an attic, confided to her imaginary friend."

Many of us remember a first youthful encounter with Anne Frank. Prose's Anne Frank may prompt you to reread a classic you think you've outgrown and celebrate a writer who was just beginning to bloom.

## "WE WERE THE CHILDREN OF MONSTERS"

(Continued from page 7)

grew up in postwar France. "I was a bastard by my mother, and what's more, I was the bastard of a kraut. Whenever I spoke about my origins, people pulled away from me. So I took the habit of keeping quiet about it."



Jean-Jacques Delorme's French mother met his father, a German soldier, during the occupation of Paris.

Delorme's mother died in 1994, but by then the research was well underway. After years wasted following the lead of a "cousin" of his father's who turned out to be no relation, Delorme finally found out about the army orchestra and contacted an archivist in Berlin, who came up with a list of its members.

In 2007, Delorme traveled to Mainz to meet his half brother and half sister.

Until then, his siblings had no idea of

their father's relationship in occupied France. But after some awkward moments, Delorme said, they welcomed him as a member of the family. The three have started exchanging Christmas presents. They recently decided to visit each other once a year, alternating between

Germany and France.

Delorme said, however, that he will keep his name, that of his grandmother and grandfather — and his mother. It will stay on his French documents and eventually go on his German passport, he said.

Smiling, he added, "I'll use the German passport in France and the French passport in Germany, just to get back at them all."

## HOW A CITY BECAME A CASUALTY OF THE HOLOCAUST

(Continued from page 4)

and clothes for the German domestic market.

In the meantime, food for the ghetto was kept at a minimum, amid soaring mortality and a rising number of suicides. Rumkowski pleaded for more food so that weakened workers could remain productive. He also insisted that Jews demonstrate proper respect to Germans whose responsibilities brought them into the ghetto by saluting all officers and civilian officials.

Rumkowski was proud of what appeared to be a good relationship with the Germans. "Dictatorship is not a dirty word," he told ghetto listeners, "Through dictatorship I earned the Germans' respect for my work." In the spring of 1942, he learned of the mass killings of Jews. He thought that continued efficient industrial production in the ghetto could save a good part of the Jewish community. Soon, however, Rumkowski presided over the deportation of the children of the ghetto who were too young to work, beginning with the orphans.

The Jewish Order Service (*Ordnungsdienst*), whom Rumkowski viewed as providing stability inside the ghetto, remained on the alert for smugglers and black-marketers. On one occasion police removed by force strikers refusing to work, on another arresting a man who had not reported the death of his 7-year-old so he could use his ration coupons.

In December 1941 Rumkowski was ordered to pick 20,000 residents to be transported. He took it as a sign of German faith in his work that he bargained to have the number cut in half. In September 1942, the Jewish Order Service tracked down young children and

pulled them from their hiding places. "We have learned something from our guards after all," mused someone in the ghetto, "How to hunt human beings."

More and more Jews, along with 5,000 Gypsies, were brought into the ghetto from Berlin, Vienna, and other places. At a ceremony in the ghetto was a banner with the slogan, "Work Is Our Only Path." At Auschwitz, those arriving passed under a gate above which could be seen a ghastly similar slogan. The Warsaw ghetto rose up, *Lodz* did not, but it is hard to imagine what could have been done.

*Ghettostadt* is wrenching, absolutely heartbreaking. We of course already know the horrific outcome. The Jews then remaining in the ghetto, hoping against hope, did not. Part of the sheer horror of it all is the recounting of daily life, amid disease, hunger, and death, each rumor generating waves of anxiety, anguish, and panic, particularly as deportations increased. One could see piles of clothes, bedding, and other personal belongings of Jews who had been sent out of the ghetto. Could one believe the cards that arrived from recent deportees that conditions were good in the new location? (Their authors were forced to write them before being killed.)

At the end of July 1944, the 68,000 people still in the ghetto were crammed into buses and trains, and taken away to be exterminated. On the anniversary of its absorption into the *Reich*, as the Red Army drew near, only a handful of Jews were left.

John Merriman is a professor of history at Yale University.

## THE MIRACULOUS STORY OF THE JEWS OF ZAKYNTHOS

BY LEORA GOLDBERG,  
THE JERUSALEM POST

I needed a break at the end of a long and exhausting semester. My family was off to the southern end of the Balkan Peninsula, to the island of *Zakynthos* in Greece. I decided to join them.



Bishop Chrysostomos.

The drive from the airport to our villa lasted a few minutes. An old lady, a typical Greek villager dressed all in black, welcomed us with a warm smile into her home. She asked to show us around her beloved mansion. It was obvious that this place was the source of her pride.

The landlady gave us a short tour of the old-style bedrooms, bathrooms and salon. In the kitchen, we noticed the beautiful authentic Greek dishes that were hanging over her antique-looking stove. All these were for our use.

We explained to her that for religious reasons, unfortunately, we would not be able to enjoy using her kitchenware and that we had brought our own.

This is when it all began. She seemed confused. She looked at my dad and suddenly her eyes lit up. She noticed his *kippa* (*varmulke*). We were asked to follow her out to the garden.

From the high point where we were standing, we saw a fantastic view of the ocean and the ships. But she pointed the other way completely.

From this moment on until I left Greece, the relaxing summer holiday drinking ouzo on the beach became a fascinating journey. By the end of it, I uncovered an unforgettable story.

The next morning, I got on my rented moped and drove to the cemetery. It was a huge cemetery containing hundreds of graves from the 16th century up until 1955. The grounds were well-kept and little stones were set on many graves, as if they had had visitors recently.

1955. I thought for a moment. Whoever knows the history of Greece and its islands even faintly knows that there was no place struck harder by the Nazis.

*Rhodes, Corfu, Salonika, Athens.* The loss

of Jewish life in Greece was devastating.

From 1944, there were almost no Jews left even in the bigger communities.

I did not, however, understand the meaning of the "1955" grave, and decided to investigate.

Within five minutes I was at City Hall. When I told the clerk at the front desk what I was after, he asked if I had already been to the synagogue. The question was posed casually, as though it's asked on a daily basis.

"Excuse me?" I thought I hadn't heard right. "A synagogue on this island?"

He gave me directions.

The synagogue was located on a busy road in the center of the island. Off the main street, in a space between two buildings, was a black iron gate, just like the one I had seen not long ago at the cemetery. Above it was a stone arc with an open book.

It read, in a loose translation from the original Hebrew, "At this holy place stood the Shalom Synagogue. Here, at the time of the earthquake in 1953, old Torah scrolls, bought before the community was established, were burned."

Through the locked gate I saw two statues. Judging by their long beards, they looked to me like rabbis. The writing on the wall proved me wrong: "This plaque commemorates the gratitude of the Jews of *Zakynthos* to Mayor Karrer and Bishop Chrysostomos."

What was the acknowledgment about? Who were these people? Why the statues? What happened here? I had lots of questions. I returned to City Hall, excited and trembling.

I approached the clerk, who already recognized me, and started questioning him about what had happened here. He referred me to the mayor's deputy on the third floor. Half an hour later I came out with this:



This plaque commemorates the gratitude of the Jews of *Zakynthos* to Mayor Karrer and Bishop Chrysostomos.

On September 9, 1943, the governor of the German occupation, named Berenz had asked the mayor, Loukas Karrer, for a list of all Jews on the island.

Rejecting the demand after consulting with Bishop Chrysostomos, they decided to go together to the governor's office the next day. When Berenz insisted once again for the list, the bishop explained that these Jews weren't Christians but had lived here in peace and quiet for hundreds of years.

They had never bothered anyone, he said. They were Greeks just like all other

Greeks, and it would offend all the residents of *Zakynthos* if they were to leave.

But the governor persisted that they give him the names.

The bishop then handed him a piece of paper containing only two names: Bishop Chrysostomos and Mayor Karrer.

In addition, the bishop wrote a letter to Hitler himself, declaring that the Jews in *Zakynthos* were under his authority.



Mayor Loukas Karrer.

The speechless governor took both documents and sent them to the Nazi military commander in Berlin. In the meantime, not knowing what would happen, the local Jews were sent by the leaders of the island to hide inside Christian homes in the hills. However, a Nazi order to round up the Jews was soon revoked — thanks to the devoted leaders who risked their lives to save them.

In October 1944, the Germans withdrew from the island, leaving behind 275 Jews. The entire Jewish population had survived, while in many other regions Jewish communities were eliminated.

According to tour guide Haim Ischakis, in 1947, a large number of *Zakynthos* Jews made *aliya* while others moved to Athens.

In 1948, in recognition of the heroism of the *Zakynthians* during the Holocaust, the Jewish community donated stained glass for the windows of the Church of Saint Dionysios.

In August 1953, the island was struck by a severe earthquake and the entire Jewish quarter, including its two synagogues, was destroyed. Not long afterwards, the remaining 38 Jews moved to Athens.

In 1978, *Yad Vashem* honored Bishop Chrysostomos and Mayor Loukas Karrer with the title of "Righteous Among the Nations."

In March 1982, the last remaining Jew in *Zakynthos*, Ermandos Mordos, died on the island and was buried in Athens. Thus the circle of Jewish presence came to its close after five centuries.

In 1992, on the site where the Sephardic synagogue stood before the earthquake, the Board of Jewish Communities in Greece erected two marble memorial monuments as a tribute to the bishop and mayor.

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