

MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



Vol. 36-No.4

ISSN 0892-1571

March/April 2010-Adar/Nissan 5770

CHILDREN IN THE DARKEST HOUR OF HUMANITY ELEVENTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

The Education Department of the American Society for Yad Vashem and its Young Leadership Associates convened the Eleventh Annual Professional Development Conference on Holocaust Education. This year's conference is the largest in recent years with close to 200 educators in attendance.

The Association of Teachers of Social Studies / United Federation of Teachers, which once again is co-sponsoring the Conference, points out that "This conference is an invaluable resource for increasing awareness and sensitivity to intolerance and injustice, especially in today's world."

This year's conference focused on *No Child's Play*, a look at the experiences of children during the darkest hour of humanity. The conference looked at the stories of these children through images, film, diary entries, and artwork. We were also pleased to have on display the *No Child's Play* exhibit, created at Yad Vashem in

Jerusalem. "We work to put a face on individual Holocaust victims in order to introduce a human element to the story. Transmitting these messages is our hope for the future," explained Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American Society.

This year's keynote speaker was Dr. Elizabeth Mundlak-Zborowski. Herself a child survivor, Dr. Zborowski made a presentation which included the screening of her film, *I Was Lucky*, and spoke of her life as a hidden child and the reunification with her birth mother.

Close to two hundred educators from the tri-State area, plus Texas and Ohio, attended this year's conference. "The lost world of European Jewry and the tragic consequences should be used as points of departure to educate younger generations of the importance of tolerance, understanding and the dangers of hatred and discrimination," said Mr. Eli Zborowski.



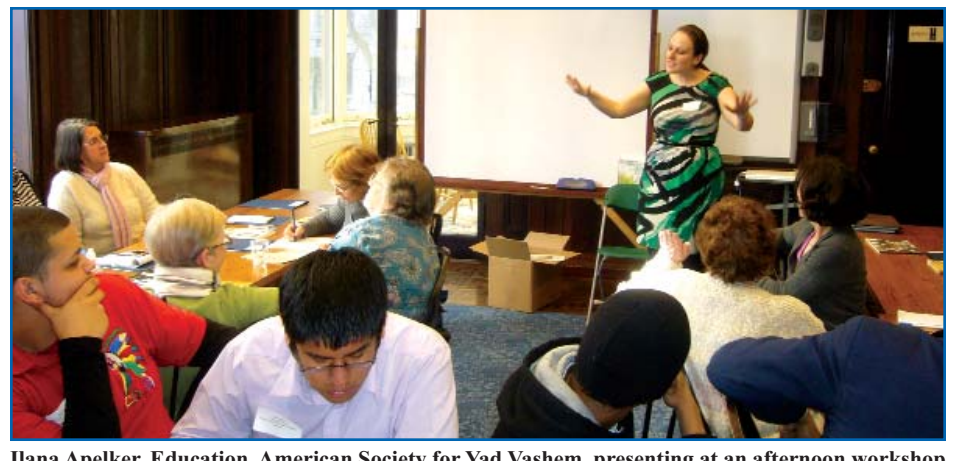
Elizabeth Mundlak-Zborowski, Cultural Director, American Society for Yad Vashem and hidden child survivor, delivered the keynote address to the over 200 teachers gathered at this year's conference. Also pictured are Carolyn Herbst, ATSS/UFT Liaison; and Caroline Massel, Chair, Young Leadership Associates of the American Society for Yad Vashem.



Ofra Biener and Rebecca Hanus, Members of the Young Leadership Associates; Caroline Massel, Chair, Young Leadership Associates of the American Society for Yad Vashem; Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem; and Elizabeth Mundlak-Zborowski, Cultural Director, American Society for Yad Vashem.



Some of the 200 educators during the morning general session.



Ilana Apelker, Education, American Society for Yad Vashem, presenting at an afternoon workshop to some of the educators.

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HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS SUE HUNGARIAN RAILWAY

A group of survivors and descendants of victims of the Holocaust is suing the Hungarian state railroad company in US court for its role in transporting Jews to the Auschwitz death camp.

The class action suit was filed in a US district court in Chicago by attorneys representing the group of 95 plaintiffs. The suit seeks 1.24 billion dollars in compensation and punitive damages.

According to the document, the Hungarian railroad company "knowingly provided the trains for delivering 437,000 Jews to their death in Auschwitz" between March and October 1944.

Railroad employees are accused of "looting the plaintiffs' possessions, valuables, heirlooms, stock certificates, currency and jewelry from the plaintiffs' luggage."

"Without the trains provided by (the defendant), hundreds of thousands of Jews could not have been transported to Auschwitz," the suit charges.

The plaintiffs are asking for 240 million dollars for the stolen property and one billion dollars "as punitive damages reflecting the heinous and zealous participation by the defendants in genocide."

"Even though discussion of money is necessarily crass in the context of the unspeakable evil that was inflicted upon the Holocaust victims, nevertheless the law is powerless to do anything other than to obtain financial restitution," lawsuit says.

According to the plaintiffs, by US law the Hungarian railroad company can be sued if it is "engaged in commercial activity in the United States."

"This final requirement is satisfied by the fact that the defendant sells tickets and passes for its railways through its agents in the United States," the document reads.

In the period 1940-45 some 1.3 million people perished at Auschwitz, 1.1 million of them Jews from across occupied Europe.

BRITISH PRIME MINISTER HONORS BRITS WHO SAVED JEWS DURING HOLOCAUST

British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has honored more than 20 British heroes who saved the lives of Jews during the Holocaust.

It is the first time such recognition has been bestowed by the state as a tribute to civilians who undertook extraordinary acts of courage and self-sacrifice in order to help others.



The award was announced last year by Brown after a visit to Auschwitz and following a campaign by the Holocaust Education Trust to honor those who undertook incredible acts of bravery to help Jews and other persecuted groups during the Holocaust.

"It is right that we reflect and learn from the past as we go forward in the future," the prime minister said. "That is why I was

pleased to create a new award to recognize those amazing British individuals who through extraordinary and selfless acts of bravery protected and rescued Jews and others in the Holocaust."

Two of the award recipients accepted it in person: Denis Avey, 91, who as a British prisoner of war risked his life and swapped clothes with a Jewish prisoner in Auschwitz, and Sir Nicholas Winton, 100, who rescued 669 children from Czechoslovakia.

Those receiving the award posthumously, whose relatives attended the ceremony and accepted the award on their behalf, include June Ravenhall, a British housewife living in Holland who sheltered a young Jewish man even after her husband had

been taken to a concentration camp; Jane Haining from Scotland, who was sent to Auschwitz after caring for 400 Jewish girls in occupied Hungary, and Bertha Bracey, who lobbied the British government during the 1930s to accept persecuted Jewish refugees. Her efforts established the *Kindertransport*, which took an estimated 10,000 mainly Jewish children from mainland Europe to Britain.

GERMANY PLEDGES \$77 MILLION FOR NEEDY HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

Germany will pay \$77 million in subsidies this year to aid needy Holocaust survivors worldwide. The decision is the end result of annual negotiations held in Berlin between the German government and the Claims Conference.

According to the terms of the deal, half of the money will be sent to survivors living in Israel who are in need of home nursing, medicine and food. The sum of \$77 million is an 85 percent increase over last year's budget the German government set aside for impoverished survivors.

The bulk of the funds are earmarked for those who escaped Nazi persecution in the former Soviet Union. These individuals were not officially recognized as Holocaust survivors by the German government since they were not directly under German rule during World War II. Since the mid-1990s, the Claims Conference has supported their efforts to wrest reparations from Berlin. According to organization chairman Reuven Merhav,

the Claims Conference coffers are expected to empty within a few years, necessitating increased financial aid from Germany.

The Claims Conference has long sought to reach agreements with Germany on the establishment of a foundation devoted to the matter of helping needy Holocaust survivors, thus negating the need for annual negotiations.

"It was only in recent years that the Germans began to recognize their responsibility and moral debt toward emigrants from the former Soviet Union who were persecuted by the Nazis," Merhav told *Haaretz*.

"This understanding lies beyond the bounds of any political argument in Germany, and it is being championed by Chancellor Angela Merkel out of a sense that this is the last chapter in negotiations in which we are engaging with Germany over compensation to the victims of the Nazis and to Holocaust survivors."

NEW MUSEUM TAKES SHAPE AT HEART OF NAZI TERROR

Five years after opening a sprawling Holocaust Memorial in the heart of the city, Berlin is preparing to inaugurate a major new museum, this time targeting the Nazi perpetrators.

The new "Topography of Terror" center rests on the site of the former headquarters of both the feared *Gestapo* and Hitler's elite SS force.

It replaces a provisional facility that already draws 500,000 visitors each year — one of the top 10 tourist draws in a city steeped in bitter history.

While little remains of the original buildings — merely a few cellars and pavement stones — the new complex aims to explain how the Nazi persecution apparatus worked with ruthless efficiency.

"We are not here in Pompeii — this is not about seeing the original architecture," museum director Andreas Nachama told AFP during a preview of the new building.

"Rather, it is about comprehending what went out from this place: namely the Nazi terror that spread across Germany and Europe and cost the lives of millions of people."

The 34-million-dollar museum — a squat, light-filled structure — is nearing completion ahead of its official opening on May 6, two days before the 65th anniversary of the end of World War II.

It will be free to the public.

Its two steel-and-glass stories, built to give the visitor the feeling of "floating" above the site, will include a permanent exhibition, a library and a multimedia conference center for school groups, scholars and public talks.

"We are a place to learn and in no way a memorial," Nachama said.

The Holocaust Memorial, a private initiative near the government quarter comprised of a field of 2,700 grey concrete blocks resembling gravestones and an accompanying museum, is not far from the state-funded Topography of Terror.

Information boards, photographs, documents, recordings of interviews with survivors and computer animations will illustrate how Germany went from a flawed democracy to a fascist dictatorship with a state terror apparatus in just a few years.

It was here that political enemies of the Nazis were targeted, but also where the "Germanization" of the occupied territories in Poland and the Soviet Union was

plotted, along with the extermination of European Jewry.

By 1942, nearly 500 people worked here, most of them simple pencil-pushers needed to keep the wheels of Nazi oppression turning.

The 58-year-old Nachama, who is also a rabbi, a historian and a former leader of the Berlin Jewish community, first came upon the disused site in the 1970s while curating an exhibition at a museum next door.

His mother Lilli, a Holocaust survivor, was shocked about his new workplace:



View taken through a hole in a remaining portion of the Berlin wall showing the "Topography of Terror" museum in central Berlin.

"That is the most horrible address in Berlin," he recounted.

It was here, just a stone's throw from Hitler's chancellery, that the Nazi leadership united the *Gestapo* and the SS as well as the *Reich* Main Security Office, which coordinated all police and security forces from 1939 to 1945.

Just a mention of *Prinz Albrecht Strasse*, as the street was known, was enough to drain the color from a Berliner's face, conjuring up the image of the *Gestapo* "house prison" where some 15,000 people were held during the Nazi era.

Prisoners routinely suffered brutal mistreatment during interrogations here and several were driven to suicide. For others, *Prinz Albrecht Strasse* was a transit station to the concentration camps.

Chilling black-and-white identity photographs taken at the time of the detainees' arrests will be prominently displayed in the new exhibition.

There had been plans since the 1980s to erect a proper museum on the site, which at that time was in the shadow of the Berlin Wall.

A trailer-like structure housed a temporary exhibition for years alongside information billboards sprinkled across the barren grounds.

In 2004, early construction work on the center had to be ripped down because of a looming cost explosion.

Today, the building designed by German architect Ursula Wilms is almost complete and on budget.

Looking out from the front window, a visitor has a sweeping view of one of the longest remaining slabs of the Wall in the city center and the former Reich Air Ministry, now the finance ministry, behind it.

"We chose architecture that would let this place come to life," Nachama said.

STUDY: TEACHING HOLOCAUST COMMON DENOMINATOR IN ISRAEL

A national survey of Israeli principals, teachers and students has found that the Holocaust is a common denominator among students of diverse backgrounds, and that there are no major differences between students from different demographic groups in terms of their perceptions of the Holocaust.

The study, headed by Erik Cohen of Bar-Ilan University's School of Education, interviewed 307 principals, 519 teachers and 2,540 ninth- and 12th-grade students from Israeli religious and non-religious schools.

A majority of students, 77 percent, said that the Holocaust affects their worldview and 94 percent said they are committed to preserving its memory. Some 83 percent said they are interested in learning more

about the Holocaust.

Some 99 percent of students who participated in a journey to Poland said it was an effective means of learning about the Holocaust.

Strengthening students' commitment to the existence of an independent State of Israel is an important goal of Holocaust education for 100 percent of principals and 92 percent of teachers, the study found. More than half of the teachers received training in Holocaust education through a professional enrichment course during the past two years.

The study was conducted from 2007 to 2009 with the support of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

HOLOCAUST DENIAL BECOMES ILLEGAL IN HUNGARY

Hungarian President Laszlo Solyom has signed a law making Holocaust denial punishable by three years in prison.

The law was approved last month by Hungarian lawmakers, after more wide-ranging versions of the law had been rejected by courts for limiting free speech.

Spokesman Ferenc Kumin says President Solyom signed the bill because in his opinion the law is not unconstitutional.

The law doesn't infringe the Constitution, Mr. Solyom said in a release after signing the document. Denying the holocaust has now become similar to the use of prohibited autocratic symbols, such

as the red star, the hammer and sickle, or the swastika, which are already among a narrow pool of symbols that don't belong under the umbrella of freedom of speech and freedom of opinion, Mr. Solyom said.

Parliament had rejected an amendment put forward by the center-right opposition adding to the bill crimes by Hungary's pro-Nazi and communist regimes.

The governing Socialist Party and Hungary's growing Jewish community welcomed the news.

Some 550,000 Hungarian Jews and 50,000 Gypsies were killed in the Holocaust.

BIDEN AT YAD VASHEM: ISRAEL A CENTRAL BOLT IN OUR EXISTENCE

United States Vice President Joe Biden visited the Yad Vashem Holocaust History Museum and, at the end of his visit, signed the site's guestbook. He wrote that as a young father, he took his children to visit the *Dachau* death camp in Germany, to make them understand how brutal mankind can be.

He visited the site with his wife Jill. In a note that he left behind he told his hosts how he took his children to visit Europe at the age of 15, and then took his son to Israel, to show him that the human spirit cannot be destroyed, and that it lives on.

Biden added that Israel is the heart, life, and hope of the world's Jews, and that it saves lives every day. He said that anyone who doubts this should visit the museum, and that the State of Israel is a central bolt in the world's existence.

The American vice president added that each day, Israel challenges the words of poet William Butler Yeats, who wrote, "Too long a sacrifice can make a

stone of the heart."

His wife Jill also signed the guest book, and wrote that she will never forget, and will always remember those lost in the Holocaust.



Joe Biden (second from right) at Yad Vashem.

Dr. David Silberklang, a top historian and editor of the Yad Vashem Studies, accompanied the Bidens on their visit, and told Ynet the vice president was very moved by the tour and expressed much interest.

Biden placed a wreath on behalf of the US administration and lit a candle at the museum's *Yizkor* tent.

GERMANY FIGHTS TO KEEP HOLOCAUST ORGANIZER'S FILES SEALED

Germany is fighting to keep sealed the Eichmann files detailing the years the Holocaust's chief logistics organizer spent on the run before he was captured by *Mossad* agents.

Those hoping to have a 50-year secrecy order overturned believe the government is embarrassed by details within that may prove German and Vatican officials colluded in his escape and freedom.

The secrecy order is being challenged in a benchmark court case against the BND, Germany's domestic intelligence service, which wants the 4,500 pages of documents on Adolf Eichmann to remain out of the public domain. The service claims that intelligence agencies in other countries will be "frightened off" in future data-sharing if they are disclosed.

Critics believe this is a smokescreen designed to avoid official embarrassment in both Berlin and the Vatican. It is well documented that German Bishop Alois Hudal in Rome operated postwar "Ratlines," getting passports for wanted Nazis to allow them to escape justice.

Franz Stangl, commandant of the *Treblinka* extermination camp, admitted to British Nazi expert Gitta Sereny that Hudal helped him get away after the Nazi defeat in 1945.

Eichmann also escaped. He was the ultimate "desk murderer" of the Third *Reich* who, as head of department IVB4 of the SS in Berlin, was responsible for the trains that carried millions to their deaths at extermina-

tion centers in Nazi-occupied Poland.

After the war he was captured but fled from Allied custody. As the victors scoured Europe and the world for the top officials of the regime, Eichmann's name was barely known: it was only as more and more details of the Holocaust emerged that his pivotal role in it began to dawn on Nazi hunters.

In 1960, acting on a tip-off, a *Mossad* team was dispatched to Buenos Aires with orders to kidnap him and bring him back to Israel for trial. He was seized, stood trial, found guilty and hanged on May 31, 1962.

Now the Federal Administrative Court in *Leipzig*, Germany, is studying the files about his getaway from Europe and life in Argentina to decide if they should be made public. The application for their release was made by German journalist Gabriele Weber.

The BND maintains that secrecy is necessary because "much of the information contained in the files was provided by an unnamed foreign intelligence service." If released, the BND argues, it would "deter" other nations from sharing intelligence with Germany in the future.

But critics believe what the files will really reveal are the levels of assistance, support and turning a blind eye to Nazi fugitives from officials in defeated Germany, together with details of Vatican assistance to top Nazis like him.

A decision on whether to release the files will be made in the next few weeks.

US LAWMAKERS PUSH INSURERS ON HOLOCAUST CLAIMS

United States' lawmakers unveiled legislation aimed at helping Holocaust survivors or heirs of Nazi victims sue for insurance claims, estimated to run in the hundreds of billions of dollars, in US courts.

Republican Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's bill seeks to compel insurance companies, who often have the sole proof of the existence of Holocaust-era policies, to disclose the names of the insured.

"For too long the insurance companies have had the upper hand, denying Holocaust survivors and their families their rights," said Ros-Lehtinen, the top Republican on the House Foreign

Affairs Committee.

The Nazi regime in Germany did not issue death certificates to prisoners brought to the death camps, and police documents or personal records were often confiscated and destroyed.

The bill would validate state laws on the issue, removing potential federal roadblocks to lawsuits, and subjecting insurers who refuse to whatever punishment individual states decide.

"Insurance companies must disclose the names of policyholders to ensure that just compensation is received. They must not be allowed to hide behind a veil of secrecy any longer," said Ros-Lehtinen.

SURVIVOR'S GRANDSON BUYS MENGELE DIARY

The grandson of a Holocaust survivor has reportedly bought the diary of the notorious Josef Mengele.

The 180-page journal was sold for an undisclosed sum "to an East Coast Jewish philanthropist who wishes to remain anonymous," the Hartford Courant reported, citing an e-mail from Bill Panagopoulos of Alexander Autographs historical artifacts house.

"He is the grandson of an Auschwitz survivor who personally encountered Mengele at Auschwitz," Panagopoulos wrote. "He intends to donate the manuscript to a museum devoted to the Holocaust."

"I am overjoyed," Panagopoulos told the newspaper, "that the manuscript is going where it belongs, where it will be available to historians and scholars."

Nazi memorabilia collectors vying for the artifact belonging to the Nazi doctor known at Auschwitz as the "Angel of

Death" were expected to push the price up to about \$64,000.

The owner of the diary, reported to be a source close to the Mengele family, acquired the volume in Brazil after Mengele died there in 1979, the Daily Mail reported.

The diary begins in May 1960, when Mengele was 49.

At Auschwitz, Mengele determined who would live and die, and he conducted horrific, quasi-medical experiments, including on twins.

News of the auction prompted anger and revulsion among Holocaust survivors and their families. In a statement, The American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants called the proposed sale of the journal "a cynical act of exploitation aimed at profiting from the writings of one of the most heinous Nazi criminals."

HEIRS RELINQUISH CLAIM TO £30M HOLOCAUST PICASSO

As the Nazis came to power in Germany, one of the country's richest bankers suddenly started selling his collection of Impressionist masterpieces — among them a Picasso now valued at £30 million and in the collection of Lord Lloyd-Webber.

Three quarters of a century later, Paul von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's heirs have relinquished their claim to *The Absinthe Drinker* and a staggering array of other paintings, but only after a US court ruling in their favor.

The terms of a settlement between the Andrew Lloyd Webber Art Foundation and the Jewish banker's heirs have been kept "confidential in their entirety," but evidence in a related case in New York has shone a spotlight on von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's collapsing earnings and his changing habits as a collector in Nazi Germany.

In the New York case, Judge Jed Rakoff was shown evidence that between 1933 and 1935 the "Aryanization" of Germany's banking industry forced Mendelssohn-Bartholdy to put paintings on the market, having never previously sold any. The paintings included five by Picasso and six by Van Gogh. His income fell from 436,000 *Reichsmarks* in 1932 to less than 60,000 two years later.

As a proprietor of Germany's largest private bank before the Nazi takeover, von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, nephew of the composer Felix Mendelssohn, "was a wealthy man," John Byrne, an attorney for

his heirs, said. But once subject to Nazi boycotts and "reorganization" of the entire economy, "it was a case of death by a thousand cuts."

The Andrew Lloyd Webber Art Foundation withdrew *The Absinthe Drinker* from auction in New York in 2006 when von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's heirs



Lord Lloyd-Webber and the Picasso. Paul von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's heirs have relinquished their claim to *The Absinthe Drinker*.

claimed that it had been sold under duress in Berlin in 1934.

In the related case, Judge Rakoff decided that the heirs had produced evidence that von Mendelssohn-Bartholdy "never intended to transfer any of his paintings and that he was forced to transfer them only because of threats and economic pressure by the Nazi government." The judge criticized the banker's heirs for concealing the terms of the settlements. But the family welcomed his ruling as recognition that those who lost art because of Nazism should not have to prove that the Nazi authorities seized it directly.



BOOK REVIEWS

SNOW FLOWERS

Snow Flowers: Hungarian Jewish Women in an Airplane Factory, Markkleeberg, Germany.

By Zahava Szász Stessel. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press: Madison, NJ, 2009. 438 pp. \$57.50 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

Amidst all the evil, there were also acts of kindness, minutes of good feelings, creating a kind of a flower in the frost of icy existence.

Zahava Szász Stessel, author and Holocaust survivor, in Snow Flowers . . .

In 1996, this reviewer had the distinct pleasure of reviewing Zahava Szász Stessel's conscientiously researched and beautifully written work, *Wine and Thorns in Tokay Valley: Jewish Life in Hungary: The History of Abaújszántó*, in the pages of *M&R*. That book was Stessel's loving tribute to her hometown, Jewish *Abaújszántó*. There she told us of *Abaújszántó's* history as a place of Jewish settlement. There she told us of its exceptionally vibrant Jewish life, a life she joyfully participated in. There, too, sadly, she told us of Jewish *Abaújszántó's* ruthless annihilation at the hands of the Nazis. Many Jews from *Abaújszántó* were killed. Stessel was one of the few lucky survivors.

In *Snow Flowers: Hungarian Jewish*

Women in an Airplane Factory, Markkleeberg, Germany, Stessel again presents us with a conscientiously researched and beautifully written book. Here, however, the author most especially pays tribute to the human spirit. This is the spirit known for its tenacity. It is the spirit that holds on to life with superhuman courage and endurance, regardless of enemies. Finally, for Stessel, it is the spirit that inspires others to persevere through its acts of kindness. Stessel metaphorically refers to these acts as "flowers," specifically, "snow flowers." And, not surprisingly, the author vividly remembers them, appearing as they did bravely and boldly in a world of pain and "ice" — her world — during World War II.

Thus, in the midst of the Junkers aircraft manufacturing plant in *Markkleeberg*, where Stessel was sent as a Jewish slave laborer in 1944; a place, not far from *Leipzig*, Germany, where 1,300 females toiled like her; a place where hapless and helpless cold and hungry women were

"exploited" to the limits of their physical abilities, tyrannized in the main by heartless *Aufseherins* ("German women overseers") who cared not in the least for them — the author finds these "flowers" . . . and extolls them . . .

Indeed, Stessel notes how, in those years, her younger sister presented the author with a veritable "bouquet." Thirteen-year-old Erszike was always there for the fourteen-year-old Zahava. She shared any food that came her way. She shared her very warmth when that was all the warmth there was. She took care of her older sister when she fell ill — a feat nothing less than heroic, considering their impossible situation. She offered her her hope, when Stessel's flagged. And the author did no less

for Erszike. Each gave to the other.

Stessel notes the kindnesses extended to her by those suffering alongside her. For example, there was the altruistic act performed by Margit Lörinch Hamburg, who the author knew from *Bergen-Belsen*. She "covered for" Stessel at work when

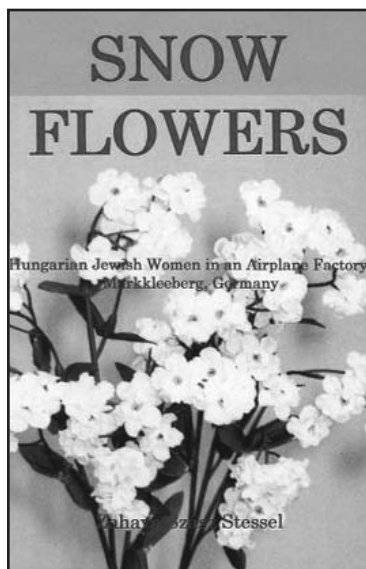
the author was at great risk of being pounced upon by a German overseer, known for his brutality. Stessel repaid this "compassion" with the only payment of any value at the factory: food.

Stessel notes the kindnesses extended by those suffering alongside her to one another. The longed-for rest periods in which one sorrowful inmate would begin singing an old sweet song from home, quickly joined in the song by another inmate's voice, and then another, helped all of them cope with their bitter present. Food shared promised that a civilized humanity still existed. A hand extended, helping, made all the difference . . .

Nor does Stessel ignore those unique and singular "flowers" presented by non-Jews and even Germans to Jews. The food wordlessly left for a slave laborer, the arduous work, somehow, made easier by a more sympathetic German — all promised better days to come . . .

In sum, *Snow Flowers* is a wonderful addition to the library of books on the Holocaust. For, far more than a historical study, it is a sociological and psychological investigation of life in extremis . . . written by an exceptionally perceptive, sensitive, and kind heart.

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



POWER TO REACH HUMAN SOULS

17 Days in Treblinka: Daring to Resist, and Refusing to Die.

By Eddie Weinstein. Yad Vashem Publications, 2008. 173 pp. \$29.95 Softcover.

REVIEWED BY JEFF LUNDON

"Every night, I was surprised to find myself alive," says Eddie Weinstein, his Polish accent softened by 58 years spent living in New York. The 83-year-old is the last survivor of the *Treblinka II* extermination camp. The exact death toll is not known, but some 870,000 people are estimated to have died there between July 1942 and October 1943. Fewer than 100 survived.

Treblinka I, a forced labor camp, was established in 1941. *Treblinka II* opened on July 24, 1942, one mile away. It was founded as part of Operation *Reinhard*, the Nazis' plan for wiping out Polish Jewry, and it had one purpose only: to kill.

"They didn't have a count," Weinstein recalls. "There were no numbers like they had in Auschwitz. They would kill you for anything, so they didn't bother to count us." Most victims died within a few hours of reaching the camp.

Treblinka II, or what remains of it, is buried in deep forest, a deceptively still and peaceful setting for a mass graveyard. When the camp was operational, nothing could be seen from the outside other than smoke curling into the air.

Today, the barbed wire that once surrounded the camp is gone. Walk from the

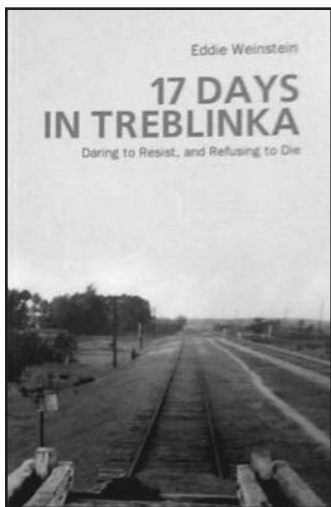
old station to the *Treblinka II* site and you will see a row of standing stones marking where the fence used to be, while the train tracks have been replaced with commemorative stone blocks. Beside the ramp where cattle cars packed with people once pulled in, the ground is uneven, still bearing the scars from the ditches that housed the dead.

Inside, the camp is filled with memorial stones bearing the names of communities that were destroyed there. Only one is dedicated to a person, the educator Janusz Korczak. These stones surround a much larger memorial, with a great crack in it to represent the evil that was perpetrated in *Treblinka*. There is a mass grave nearby, while another stone simply reads: "Never again" in five languages.

Weinstein says that people need to know what happened in this terrible place. His account of his experiences has been published by Yad Vashem, first in Hebrew under the name *Plada Rotahat* and then in English with the title *Quenched Steel: The Story of an Escape from Treblinka*.

This is a powerful and moving book. What Weinstein accomplishes is this: He shows us how quickly and brutally both the successive restrictions upon Jews and their deportations were imposed, and how the trapped Jews clung to illusions (things have been bad before, they will also survive slave labor camps or life in a ghetto, surely the world will learn of their fate and rescue them, the Germans will be defeated)

(Continued on page 14)



HISTORY WRIT SMALL

Good Neighbors, Bad Times: Echoes of My Father's German Village.

By Mimi Schwartz. University of Nebraska Press, 2008. 260 pp. \$24.95.

REVIEWED BY AVIYA KUSHNER

For one month in 1936, my grandfather worked in a bar in *Bremen*, Germany. The owner of that bar, who was not Jewish, risked plenty to pay my teenage grandfather for drying glasses and sweeping the floor. Decades later, he did my grandfather another favor, telling a committee in *Bremen*, "Yes, I knew Zigmund Traum. He worked for me in my bar. On this and this date." Because of that testimony, my grandfather received reparation checks for the rest of his life. The money could not compensate for the murders of two parents and four brothers, but it was an acknowledgment of what had happened.

Such small episodes — my grandfather's month of illegal work, the bar owner's walk to the reparation committee's headquarters — are part of the Holocaust's history, too. In *Good Neighbors, Bad Times*, Mimi Schwartz tells the stories "that history has no time for as it paints the broad brush strokes of the past." These stories take place in *Benheim* (Schwartz changed the name), the German farming community where her father was born in 1898, when half the town's 1,200 residents were Jewish.

After he emigrated to Queens in 1937, Schwartz's father insisted that once his hometown "was the best place for Jews!" At the same time, he spent hours on the

phone persuading others to help him in efforts to assist Jews still stuck in Hitler's Germany to leave, and fast. Schwartz, a professor emerita of the writing program at Richard Stockton College in New Jersey, takes us into the kitchens and gathering places of Germans and Jews alike, accepting drinks, cakes, and stories, in an effort to separate truth from lies in her father's account of good neighbors in a German village.

A hand-typed article she discovers tucked in an old file after his death describes life in the village before Hitler, when it was common practice for neighbors to help each other with feeding the chickens, milking the cows, and stoking coal. Orthodox Jewish residents who commuted by train to *Pforzheim* regularly converted one car into a prayer car, Schwartz's father wrote, "much to the astonishment of Christian travelers. No one shied away from laying tefillin [leather boxes Orthodox men strap on their arms and heads during morning prayers]; one prayed as if one were in a synagogue."

But as the Nazis' power grew during the 1930s, many *Benheim* Jews fled. After her father's death, Schwartz seeks them out to learn what happened in the place they left behind. In Israel, she hears about *Benheim* Christians who rescued a Torah during *Kristallnacht* in 1938. From survivors in Vermont, she learns that there

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THE UNTHINKABLE AS A TOLERANCE LESSON

BY AILEEN JACOBSON,
THE NEW YORK TIMES

A hush had fallen over the ballroom, filled with 45 students from South Woods Middle School in Syosset. Peter Stone, 78, of Oceanside, was speaking about what happened to him when he was 13, the same age as most of his audience: he, his family and other Jews from small towns in Hungary were herded into a train to be taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

"You could barely move," he told his rapt audience one recent morning in the mansion that houses the newly expanded Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center of Nassau County. At the concentration camp, Mr. Stone and his father passed before an SS officer he later learned was the infamous Nazi doctor Josef Mengele. "If he asks you, say you are 16," a person he did not see whispered in his ear, Mr. Stone recalled. He and his father were told to turn left — not right, to the gas chambers — and became slave laborers.

It was just the beginning of their ordeal. Mr. Stone and other Holocaust survivors who now live on Long Island can also be seen telling their stories in videos that are part of a professionally designed new exhibition space that opened last month after a \$3 million refurbishment. The center closed to the public for 18 months while the building was upgraded and unusable sections, like its 100-year-old kitchen, were cleared. The display area was expanded to seven multimedia galleries and a new library, all open to the public.

The exhibition begins with a wall of photos of European Jews before the Holocaust in ordinary situations like family gatherings. "We want to introduce peo-

ple to Jews as human beings, not just as victims and survivors," said Beth Lilach, the director of education, who was in charge of writing the text panels and was the curator of the exhibition. It presents a detailed history using archival material along with artifacts and images related to Long Island families.

In one photo, a boy stands alone bundled up in a hat and coat and wearing fine leather shoes. "That's my brother Zelig, at about age



The reopened Tolerance Center, in a former mansion in Glen Cove, with exhibits about the Holocaust.

4," said Gloria Glantz, 70, of Port Washington, a board member, educator and docent, who was one of several Holocaust survivors who helped guide a reporter through the center recently. Their father owned a leather factory in Poland, which accounted for the boy's handsome shoes.

Zelig, another brother, their parents, and the rest of their extended family were killed in 1942 at *Treblinka*, an extermination camp near their home. Zelig was about 12, Mrs. Glantz said. A few months earlier, when she was 3, she had been taken by her mother to live with a Christian woman on a farm. A photo of her with the woman, Sonia Kowalczyk, is in a gallery devoted to children during the

Holocaust. "I called her Matka, mother in Polish," Mrs. Glantz said.

The first room also contains a picture of Charlotte Gillman, 76, of Westbury, who often gives talks and acts as a docent at the center, guiding visitors or answering questions. In the oversize image, Mrs. Gillman stands with her two sisters during the war. She was about 9, she said, wearing cardboard shoes and a dress her mother had made from scraps of fabric. The girls

images too graphic for children as young as 10, the minimum recommended age.

Until about five years ago, the 17-year-old nonprofit center, which leases its building from Nassau County, focused on having survivors talk to children, said Howard S. Maier, the chairman. "The survivors realized that in the future that wouldn't be enough, because they wouldn't be here," he said. So he and other board members made a "major commitment" to the center, he said, raising money, expanding board membership, visiting Holocaust museums around the country for ideas and broadening the center's mission.

"We evolved the center to one that not only teaches the Holocaust but teaches the lessons of the Holocaust," Mr. Maier said in a telephone interview. Programs that reach some 35,000 people a year, he said, use the Holocaust to teach about prejudice in the workplace or bullying in schools. The center also gives tolerance training to Nassau County police officers, and will soon renovate the second floor to create four high-tech classrooms and new staff offices. The annual operating budget has tripled, Mr. Maier said, to nearly \$1 million over the past five years.

Mr. Maier, 63, of Lattingtown, said his parents emigrated from Germany as teenagers. His grandparents, an aunt, an uncle, and a cousin were among the more than 900 Jewish refugees aboard the *St. Louis*, the German ship that was turned away by Cuba and the United States in 1939 and had to return to Europe. A photograph of his relatives disembarking in England is in the exhibition. They survived, he said, but many of the passengers later perished.

HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS STILL WAIT FOR JUSTICE

BY NAOMI LAKRITZ, CALGARY HERALD

Back in 1995, when Helmut Oberlander left Canada to avoid a bit of trouble that was looming about his Canadian citizenship and his Nazi past, he took a little jaunt to Marco Island, Fla.

When the U.S. Office of Special Investigations caught up with him there, he agreed with the OSI that he really ought to return to Canada. OSI director Eli M. Rosenbaum said at the time: "The rapid tracing of Helmut Oberlander and his removal . . . from this country should send a powerful and unambiguous message far beyond our borders: Under no circumstances will the United States allow itself to become a haven for those who are credibly accused by other governments of complicity in the barbaric crimes of the Nazi regime."

Now, if only Canada felt the same way. Here we are, 14 years later, and Oberlander, now 86, is not only still in Canada, but recently, the Federal Court of Appeal ordered the federal cabinet to re-examine the decision to revoke his citizenship. Reason? The court seized upon the idea that Oberlander served with the Nazis' mobile killing unit, *Einsatzgruppe D*, under duress.

Mark Freiman, president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, calls this a "hyper-technical point of interpretation" because really, all that matters is the big lie. As CJC chief executive Bernie Farber says, "You were a member of a killing unit and you didn't put that forward when you came to Canada, you

lied to obtain citizenship."

Reached by telephone Farber said: "Duress was brought up at the last minute. There were, sadly, many soldiers who were forced into service during the war. But it's been historically proven that if anybody wanted out of a killing unit, they were able to get out; they weren't sent to the Russian front, they were sent elsewhere . . . He certainly had the opportunity to know what was going on. He had the choice to leave."

Einsatzgruppe D was responsible for the deaths of 90,000 Jews. Oberlander's section, *Einsatzkommando 10A*, was responsible for the deaths of more than 23,000, in southern Ukraine and *Crimea*. Oberlander, who spoke German, Russian, and Ukrainian, served as the unit's translator. Oberlander's daughter, Irene, told the media her father was never a Nazi.

Farber said: "Oberlander may not have pulled the gun, but he was a member of a killing unit. Every member, whether a cook or (someone who would) shine shoes, was part of the grease that made the engine of murder run." What would such a unit need a translator for? Farber said that with so many Jews of different linguistic backgrounds being rounded up, "the killing unit,

when they brought people into the woods to shoot them, they needed people to give instructions. I'm not saying Oberlander did that, but it's fair to speculate."

A detailed story on the activities of Oberlander's unit, much of it citing testimony provided to the Munich State Court, and published in 2000 in the



Helmut Oberlander leaves court after an immigration hearing in Toronto in 2002 accompanied by his wife, Margret, and daughter Irene Rooney.

Kitchener-Waterloo Record, which would be local resident Oberlander's daily paper, stated that "Heinz Seetzen, who came to the death squad from the Gestapo, was a hard leader who is reputed to have ordered all *Einsatzkommando 10A* members to participate in executions. Postwar prosecutors uncovered Seetzen's alleged execution order while investigating members of the death

squad through the 1960s." Historian Lawrence Stokes says in the article that Seetzen "is quoted over and over again by different of these policemen, being interrogated, as having said that. No one's got it in writing."

Farber is the child of Holocaust survivors. His father's first wife and their two little boys were gassed in the *Treblinka* death camp. "There is no statute of limitations on such vile acts," Farber said. And while many war criminals and Nazi enablers are "old and doddering, some are sick and feeble, we have to think of them as they were then, committing some of the most vile crimes in human history. They were young, they were brutes, they were bullies, they were murderers."

The U.S. has revoked the citizenship of more than 100 of these people and deported them. Canada has done the same for just one — Jacob Luitjens.

"It's terrible to think that the perpetrators and victims came together to this country and they shared the same wealth and beauty of this land, when really only the victims should have been allowed to do that," Farber said.

What can be done? The federal government can appeal the ruling on Oberlander to the Supreme Court. Not only can it do this, it has a moral obligation to do it. Carole Saindon, a Justice Department spokeswoman, told the media the government is looking at its options as it examines the ruling.

The survivors are counting on Ottawa to see that justice is done. They've waited more than 60 years. Let's hope Ottawa does not let them down.

SURVIVORS' CORNER

SISTERS SURVIVED HOLOCAUST DEATH CAMPS

BY JESSICA A. YORK, TIMES-HERALD

January 27 marks 65 years since the Allies liberated the infamous Auschwitz concentration camp from the Germans.

Despite the date's international significance, it is just another day on the calendar for two Vallejo sisters who lived through the events now detailed in memoirs and history books.

It's not that the liberation of Poland's Auschwitz concentration camp was not a momentous event for Debora "Debbie" Sessler and Bertha "Beppy" Leaver. The two had avoided joining a final death march evacuation from the camp, prior to its liberation, only by being bedridden in a camp hospital.

It's that the women, Dutch Jews, know their own suffering, and that is enough.

"Sixty-five years is a long time," Sessler, 83, said, seated beside her sister at their dining room table. "It's not important to me. You know, I never really thought about it, of liberation and stuff like that. It was just a way of living, a way of life. A way our life went."

Commemorative events, books and films like the 1993 Oscar-winning *Schindler's List*, by Steven Spielberg, are important, though, the sisters agree. Sessler said she was even interviewed by Spielberg's company, her story archived on DVD in Washington, D.C., at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

"You see, the point is this. We know we are getting old (and soon) all that we've been through is history," Leaver, 81, said. "There won't be anybody alive, because even we were young, we were 14, we were one of the youngest ones to go into the camp and come out."

Born in Amsterdam in the late 1920s and raised in an orphanage after their mother died, the sisters said they first felt the coming Nazi persecution when they were confined to Jewish neighborhoods and given an 8 p.m. curfew.

"There were huge boards in front of the Jewish neighborhood. Signs that said 'Jew Street' ... and that's where the Jewish people lived," Sessler said.

By 1942, the girls' father, who had paid the orphanage to look after his daughters, was taken to "work" for the Germans.

"You see, the Germans told us we would go to work for the Germans, go to work for them in Germany, so not to worry," Sessler said. "He'll go to get your food, and everything. So, he went, and we never saw him again."

The small bit of German language the girls had gleaned from German Jewish children

sent to the same orphanage over a decade's time served them as an adaptive skill. The language became imperative when all the children from the orphanage, and the director, were sent to the Netherlands holding camp — *Westerbork* — in 1943.



Sisters Beppie Leaver, left, and Debbie Sessler of Vallejo survived German concentration camps during World War II as teens, including the infamous Auschwitz. Sessler now gives presentations about her experiences, while her sister prefers to keep her memories more to herself.

The weekly trains to *Westerbork* were billed as work opportunities.

"They didn't tell you you were going to be gassed in concentration camps," Sessler said. "So, everybody believed them, you know. Every Monday night, they would come into the barracks and they would call all the names out, right? And one week, they called all the names up, all the people from our orphanage, all the names were called off — except ours." The administrators were planning on send-

ing the sisters with their father. When the girls said their father had already left, they were scheduled for the next week's train.

From *Westerbork*, they were sent to the German "death camp" *Sobibor*, in Nazi-occupied Poland, packed like cattle in box cars, with no food or bathroom facilities, for a three- or four-day trip, they said.

"So, sure enough, the next week, we were on there with our (orphanage) director, and later on, we found out that the train which was before us, all those kids were immediately sent into the gas chambers," Sessler said. "So, that was one of our lucks. We had a couple of lucky days there."

Their second "luck" was when the Nazis called for 30 volunteer women to clean and sew. The girls lied and said they wanted to stay with their mother, who they said was 65 — too old for the manual work.

"That was the second luck because the whole lot, gassed. We were two of them out of *Sobibor*," Sessler said. "I think there were not many people ... out of *Sobibor*. Anyway, very few people came out of *Sobibor* alive. And we did."

Sessler pulled out a printed sheet of statistics, listing 1,100 women who went from *Westerbork* to *Sobibor* in March 1943. Thirteen women came out alive from that transport.

"And we were two of them," Leaver said.

The girls remained ignorant of their peers' fate, traveling again by train to a camp in *Lublin*, Poland. The idea of death

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MEMORIES OF THE HOLOCAUST: ZIGI SHIPPER

BY STUART JEFFRIES, THE GUARDIAN

One morning after war broke out in September 1939, Zigi Shipper woke up to find his father standing by his bed. "He told me the Germans were coming and he had to go away." How could he leave you, I ask? "Like a lot of people in *Lódz* [the Polish city where Zigi was born], he thought the Nazis would only be after men of fighting age, not children and women. Nobody thought they would want to kill all Jews. How wrong we were. But still, my father ran away to Russia, thinking that was the right thing to do."

Zigi (short for Zygmunt) was nine. "That was the last time I saw my dad," he tells me in his living room in *Bushey, Hertfordshire*. His father returned to Poland later in the war but could only get as far as the Warsaw ghetto. What happened to him? "I presume he died. I have been to all the museums and I can't find a trace of him. He might have died in the Warsaw ghetto or *Treblinka* [the death camp]. Finding ways to die was not difficult for a Jew."

Zigi was raised by his grandparents in the ghetto in *Lódz* that the Nazis established in November 1939. His mother, divorced from his father before the war, had moved to Belgium. "I presumed she was dead." He was wrong.

Food was so scarce in the ghetto that Zigi's grandfather became weak and died. Death was everywhere: "When I was 10 I stepped over dead bodies in the ghetto without much feeling." Ghetto life took on

a routine for him and his grandmother. He worked in a metal factory producing munitions. But the routine was broken when, in 1941, the Nazis began to round up Jews for what they called "resettlement." On one of these raids, Zigi was slung into a truck. "I managed to jump off — I ran and ran and luckily, no German saw me."



Zigi Shipper, Holocaust survivor.

Zigi stops telling his story for a moment. "I feel [like] the luckiest person alive. I survived concentration camps, I jumped out of a truck without being seen."

He was hospitalized for a mild heart attack aged 51. "While I was there I had a massive coronary. Let me tell you, the best place to have a coronary is in hospital. All my life I asked myself, why did I survive? My answer is: 95% of it was luck." Zigi celebrated his 80th birthday recently. "If you had told me when I was a boy I would be alive at 60, let alone 80, I would have laughed at you."

In July 1944, the Nazis decided to liqui-

date the *Lódz* ghetto. Zigi and his grandmother found themselves on a cattle truck heading to a death camp. The first thing Zigi noticed when he got off the train at Auschwitz was that the sky was hazy. Then he noticed the terrible smell. "From a distance we saw chimneys with smoke coming out. Rumors started spreading that it was a crematorium. I still didn't know what that meant."

He was lined up for selection. To the left went the fit men, who showered, changed into a uniform and went to their barracks. Within an hour those who went to the right were gassed to death — women, children, disabled and elderly people. Again, Zigi was lucky: he was 15, fit enough to work. All but inexplicably, Shipper's grandmother survived the Auschwitz selections too.

Zigi soon left Auschwitz to work in a series of labor camps. But that didn't mean the horrors of the Holocaust were over for him. One day, while he was working in a railway yard, five men were caught stealing cigarettes. They were hanged in front of the whole camp. "Each one jumped off the stools they were put on so as not to give the Germans the satisfaction of knowing they killed them."

Zigi was liberated from his German captors by the British army on 3 May 1945. He ended up recuperating in a children's home in Germany. While there he

received a letter with a British postmark. "It was from a woman telling me it was quite possible that I was her son. She asked me to look at my left wrist to see if there was a burn mark, which she knew happened to me as a four-year-old. I knew then the letter was from my mother." He didn't, though, want to live with her. "She was a stranger to me — I hadn't see her since I was four."

But he went to London to meet her, and stayed. For all the love that Zigi now professes for Britain, he felt lonely in London. Then one day he went to a dance at a club for young Holocaust survivors in *Belsize Park* in London. "I looked around and thought, 'I know him from the ghetto, him from Auschwitz.' I felt as though I had found my family again." More than that: at the club he found a wife — a French Jewish woman called Jeanette to whom he has now been married for 55 years.

Years after the war he found out what had happened to his grandmother. "After Auschwitz, we were separated. I found out she died in *Theresienstadt* on the day of liberation. She didn't have one day of freedom. She was wonderful to me. I would have loved to put my arms around her for one last time."

He only returned to Poland about a decade ago. "I went to Auschwitz after being nagged by my children." He recalls standing under the "*Arbeit macht frei*" sign at the camp entrance, which was stolen and then recovered last year. "It meant nothing to me. I stood under that sign and said: 'After all that Hitler tried to do, he didn't succeed, for I am still here!'"

CHILDREN OF NAZI MONSTERS SPEAK

BY ALLAN HALL, THE SUN

They are the children of the damned, descendants of Nazi Germany's most brutal monsters. Now, for the first time, they have come together to talk on film about how it feels to have relatives responsible for the worst crimes in history.

Hitler's Children is a searing TV documentary focusing on these tormented souls who look, talk, eat, and breathe like everyone else... and yet feel as if they were spawned by the devil.

Bettina Goering, 53, is a great-niece of Adolf Hitler's second in command Hermann Goering.

He founded the *Gestapo* secret police and organized the Blitz on Britain that killed thousands.

She had herself sterilized so she would "not pass on the blood of a monster."

Other participants include Monika Hertwig, 65, daughter of Nazi death camp commandant Amon Goeth, played by Ralph Fiennes in the Oscar-winning movie *Schindler's List*.

Monika tells how it feels to be related to a man who shot babies for "sport" and who got an extra kick from his depraved hobby when victims died slowly and painfully.

A tormented man is Niklas Frank, 70, the son of Hans Frank, Hitler's governor of occupied Poland and the man responsible for the extermination camp program which killed six million Jews.

Frank was hanged by the Allies after the war but Niklas says he was "condemned to a living death because of the slime-hole of a Hitler fanatic that I had for a father."

Chanoch Zeevi, the Israeli director of

Hitler's Children, found "fascinating similarities" between the emotions of those related to Holocaust perpetrators and those of survivors, some of whom meet the children of their tormentors in the program.

He says: "I have made a powerful, mesmerizing dialogue between the children of the perpetrators and the children of the survivors. Both live out the Holocaust daily, unable to move forward with their lives."



Monika Hertwig, daughter of camp commander Amon Goeth.

"Both finally face the past and are empowered to move on."

Hitler had no children, while those of his propaganda chief Josef Goebbels died with him and his wife in the same bunker in which their Fuehrer killed himself.

And many others at the dark heart of the *Reich* had families — something encouraged by Hitler, who idolized youth as the bedrock of his empire slated to last for 1,000 years.

Some of the children can even remember being patted on the head by Hitler as they went with their parents to his mountaintop home in *Berchtesgaden*.

It has taken until now for them to go before the cameras to talk about their feelings of pain, revulsion, and confusion, sometimes mixed with love and regret.

Niklas Frank remembers being stroked

on the face by Hitler at his mountain home — and being taken to a death camp by his father.

He remembers seeing prisoners tormented as he and his father chuckled.

Niklas says: "Thin men were mounted on to a wild donkey by powerful German hands."

"The donkey bucked and the men fell off, and they could only pick themselves up again very slowly, and they didn't find it as funny as I did."

"And again and again they got back on and the donkey was given a slap and again they fell off and they tried to help each other — it was a fantastic afternoon."

"Then we had cocoa with the most important soldier."

"These are the s***** images I carry around of my father. I dream of the piles of corpses in the camps."

"My country will never be rid of that history. It is a story that is still not over."

He lectures about his infamous father to young people in the former East Germany in a bid to prevent them from straying into the neo-Nazi scene that preys on the young, unemployed and desperate.

"I have never managed in my life to get rid of the memory of him," he said. "I live with this deep shame about what he did."

Bettina Goering now lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she practices herbal medicine.

She told how both she and her brother were voluntarily sterilized, explaining. "I had my tubes tied at the age of 30 because I feared I would create another monster."

"I look like him for a start — the eyes, the cheekbone, the profile. I look more like him than his own daughter."

Bettina said her father Heinz was adopted by his infamous uncle after his own father died. Heinz became a fighter pilot for the *Luftwaffe*.

He was shot down over the Soviet

Union and returned from captivity in 1952 to find that his two brothers had killed themselves because of their shame — and the family's fortunes were gone.

Hermann Goering was sentenced to death along with 11 others at the Nuremberg trials in 1946, but he committed suicide by swallowing a poison pill in his cell the night before his scheduled execution.



Bettina Goering, the great-niece of Hermann Goering, was sterilized to prevent passing "tainted blood" to children.

Bettina's father, who died in 1981, never spoke about the Holocaust, or about his notorious uncle. "But my grandmother was less evasive — she adored him," she said.

"As head of the Red Cross in Nazi Germany she hobnobbed with the regime's other top leaders and had many pictures of herself alongside Hitler."

"We would be watching a documentary on TV together about the Holocaust and she would yell, 'It's all lies, it didn't happen.'"

"The hardest part is admitting that I could have liked Goering. I was so shocked by that. Now I am accepting myself more for who I am, whatever that encompasses — the good, the bad and the ugly."

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"THEY REALLY DO SMELL LIKE BLOOD"

AMONG HITLER'S EXECUTIONERS ON THE EASTERN FRONT

As a young woman, Annette Schücking-Homeyer served as a Red Cross volunteer on the Eastern Front in Ukraine. In an interview with Spiegel, the retired judge discusses the horrors committed against the Jews there, how everyone knew about them and why, even after the war, most people just wanted to forget.

SPIEGEL: After World War II, most Germans denied having known about the Holocaust. From 1941 to 1943, you were a volunteer with the German Red Cross behind the lines on the Eastern Front. When did you discover that Jews were being murdered?

Annette Schücking-Homeyer: In the train on the way to the front. It was October 1941. I had been sent with another nurse to run a so-called soldiers' home in *Zwiahel*, a small city 200 kilometers (125 miles) west of Kiev. After *Brest-Litovsk*, two soldiers joined us in our compartment, but I don't remember whether they were with the SS or just regular soldiers. All of a sudden, one of them told us how he had been ordered to shoot a woman in *Brest*. He said the woman had begged for mercy, pleading that she had to take care of her handicapped sister. He had someone get the sister, and then he shot them both. We were horrified, but we didn't say anything.

SPIEGEL: Before you arrived in

Zwiahel, the city's Jewish community — which had numbered in the thousands — was annihilated. When did you learn of this?

Schücking-Homeyer: On the day we got there, an older officer told us that there weren't any more Jews, that they were all dead and that their houses were empty.

SPIEGEL: Did the man tell you this in private?

Schücking-Homeyer: No, he told us at the dinner table. I described it in a letter I sent to my parents soon thereafter. I also wrote that other nurses had told me that I had shouted in my sleep: "But that's impossible, it's completely impossible, it's against all international laws."

SPIEGEL: What did the town look like?

Schücking-Homeyer: The houses that had belonged to the Jews were ransacked, and you could often find Hebrew texts lying in the dirt on the floors. We were told that we could find nice Jewish candlesticks there. One of the officers took one home with him.

SPIEGEL: Did you see any mass graves?

Schücking-Homeyer: One day, the director of the combat engineering staff offered to show us the historic fortifications of *Zwiahel*. He pointed to a spot on the bank of the *Sluch* River and said that 450 Jewish men, women, and children were buried there. I didn't say anything in response.



In 1941, Annette Schücking-Homeyer joined the Red Cross after completing her legal studies. The next two years would bring her into close contact with the men committing atrocities against the Jews of Eastern Europe. Much can be gleaned from her letters and diaries.

SPIEGEL: Do you know how many people were killed in *Zwiahel*?

Schücking-Homeyer: A few local Ukrainian girls helped us out in the soldiers' home; they said 10,000 people had been murdered. In any case, it was a large number, as I realized a few weeks later when the National Socialist People's Welfare (NSV) opened a huge clothing warehouse in *Zwiahel*. Since our

Ukrainian helpers always had so little to wear, one of the officers asked me if they wanted to have any of the clothes. So I went there with the girls. There was a lot of children's clothing. Some of our girls didn't want to take anything; others said "Heil Hitler" when thanking the soldiers. I wrote to my mother about it and immediately informed the nurses in *Hamburg* that under no circumstances should they take any clothing from the NSV — because it was coming from murdered Jews.

SPIEGEL: Did you ever witness any of these crimes with your own eyes?

Schücking-Homeyer: No. But it almost happened once. Every week, I would travel to *Rivne*, about 100 kilometers away, to pick up food and beer for the soldiers' home. There was a large ghetto there. One day — it was in July 1942 — the brewery where many Jews had worked was closed for business. Then we drove through the ghetto, but it was deserted. It had apparently been cleared just a short time before. And then we saw Germans soldiers herding together women and children who had apparently been hiding. There was no doubt that they were about to be shot. When I got back to *Zwiahel*, I was still crying. All I wanted to do was go home.

SPIEGEL: *Rivne* saw several waves of murder, and thousands were killed. Do you know anything about the circumstances?

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AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM

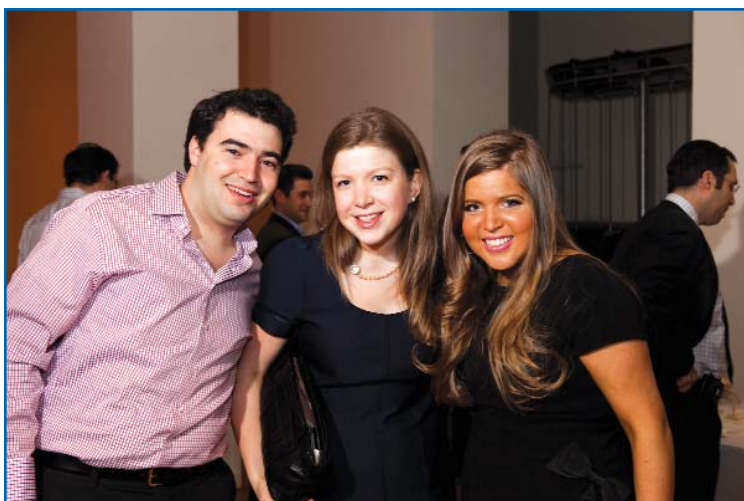
Young Leadersh



Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem; Elizabeth Mundlak-Zborowski, Cultural Director, American Society for Yad Vashem; Caroline Massel, Chair, Young Leadership Associates, American Society for Yad Vashem; Jaci Paradis, 2010 Young Leadership Associates Winter Gala Event Co-Chair; Rebecca Hanus, 2010 Young Leadership Associates Winter Gala Event Co-Chair; and Barry Levine, 2010 Young Leadership Associates Winter Gala Event Co-Chair.



Members of the Young Leadership Associates gathered at the Metropolitan Pavilion on February 4, 2010 in New York City.



Over 800 people attended the Young Leadership Associates' Annual Winter Gala at the Metropolitan Pavilion in New York City.

Featured at this year's Gala was a portrait of Carol Deutsch's Bible Paintings.

Carol Deutsch, a Jewish painter, was born in Belgium during the Nazi conquest of Belgium, the local Jewish population of the Jewish people – the Shoah. Deutsch used an assumed name. During the years 1941-1942, she created reproductions of the Bible and a wooden box to protect her two-year-old daughter, Ingrid. On September 10, 1942, SS. His wife tried to rescue him by going to the attic, but she was arrested. On the night of September 11, 1942, she was in transport 22B to Auschwitz, and were killed. The Bible and the Bible were saved by neighbors. Ingrid died in 1982. She bequeathed the Bible Paintings to the American Society for Yad Vashem. This exhibit is one of several available for viewing at the American Society for Yad Vashem.

The Young Leadership Associates, a highly motivated young professionals organization, supports the American Society for Yad Vashem's efforts to combat antisemitism through education. They ensure the continuity of programs, social events and activities.



Exhibition of paintings from the Carol Deutsch Bible Paintings series.



Friendship Associates Winter Gala

American Society for Yad Vashem Young Winter Gala on February 4, 2010 at the

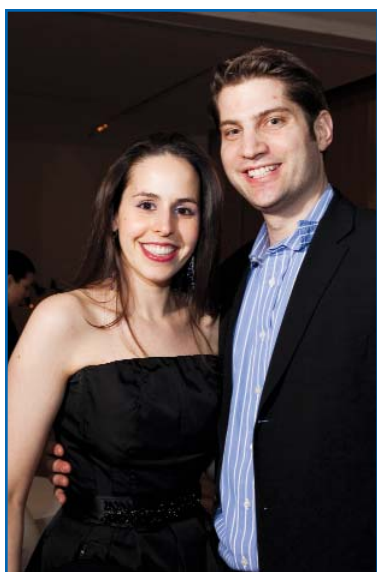
dedication of the Yad Vashem Exhibit of Carol

Deutsch in 1894 in Antwerp, Belgium. After the war, the Jewish population was included in the destruction. Deutsch and his family hid in Brussels under the alias of a Dutch family. In 1942, Deutsch painted a series of 99 illustrations to hold them, as a birthday present for his wife. On October 3, 1943, Deutsch was arrested by the Gestapo. He was taken to the police, but, as a result, she herself was arrested. On October 3-4, Deutsch and his wife were shipped to Auschwitz and murdered there on September 22. Ingrid Deutsch moved to the United States, where she donated her illustrations and box to Yad Vashem. The American Society for Yad Vashem is pleased to loan free of charge by the American

group of dedicated future leaders and are an integral part of the American Society for Yad Vashem. We commemorate the Holocaust through education and this mission through educational pro-



Reproducible Illustrations from Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.





REPORT FROM YAD VASHEM

A MOSAIC OF LIFE AND DEATH

BY DR. LEA PRAIS

Seventy years after the Nazi regime established its first Jewish ghetto – *Piotrków Trybunalski* in Poland – Yad Vashem has released a new publication: the *Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos During the Holocaust*. Written by researchers at the International Institute for Holocaust Research and edited by Prof. Guy Miron and Shlomit Shulchani, the encyclopedia includes entries on close to 1,100 ghettos established in the areas occupied by the Germans: Greater Poland, the Russian Republic, Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Transnistria, Romania and Greece.

As the first and only comprehensive collection of the ghettos established by the Nazi regime, the encyclopedia marks an important milestone in the history of Holocaust research and historiography. While some ghettos are quite familiar to the general public – *Warsaw, Lodz, Lwow, Vilna and Bialystok* – this epic chronicle also includes the vast majority of ghettos, large and small, that existed for a few weeks or years throughout the Soviet Union and Hungary.

Deciding which cases to include in the encyclopedia was a complex and almost undecipherable problem. In the town of *Szydlowiec* in the *Kielce* district

of Poland, for example, there were some 12,000 Jews.

The order to establish the ghetto was given at the end of December 1941 but



Jews in the Lodz Ghetto.

was carried out only in April 1942. The entire town, except for two streets, was eventually transformed into the ghetto, albeit without walls or fences. By contrast, in *Mglin*, the district town of the *Orel* Province in the Russian Federation, the ghetto was established in the local prison. Six hundred Jews from the town, men and

women separately, were imprisoned there for six weeks until they were taken away and murdered in the municipal park.

These and other cases raised the question: what is a ghetto? Is it an open and unsurrounded town, or a prison under lock and key?

Eventually, the term “ghetto” was defined as any community that existed in the areas of German occupation where the Jews were entirely or partially coercively concentrated for a period of at least a number of weeks. Nevertheless, the editors of the encyclopedia were not entirely satisfied with this definition, and in a series of introductions that preface the entries give their attention to the many problems that derive from the complexity of the phenomenon. The issue of the Jewish houses (*Juden*

Häuser) is one such example. These were living compounds, scattered throughout Germany's cities, to which local Jews were forcibly transferred until their deportation. Despite the fact that the Jewish houses in Germany were never defined as ghettos, their resemblance to the definition of a ghetto is certainly eye-opening.

Historians and experts spent six years researching and writing the encyclopedia. Consequently, even in areas that had already been ostensibly surveyed and researched, such as occupied Poland, new ghettos were discovered whose existence had previously eluded the researchers.

Thus, for example, it was discovered that a ghetto had been established in the Fortress of *Solipse* in *Deblin-Irena* in the *Lublin* province (known as *Modzitz* to the Jews), where some 3,500 Jews lived. The main information about its history was discovered in one of the documents stored in the “*Oneg Shabbat*” archives assembled underground in the Warsaw ghetto.

A collection of over 250 photographs, some in color, form an important part of the encyclopedia. The collection paints the miserable and somber ghetto life in a vivid and human light, as frequently reflected in the texts. The power of photographs to commemorate the transient and ephemeral remains an historic tool of the first order.

In addition to the volume itself, an accompanying DVD includes a series of films taken in the ghettos or on the eve of their establishment. The cinematography's raw materials, devotedly gathered and researched by Yad Vashem film curator Efrat Komisar-Kaplan, were edited by (Continued on page 13)

LAST-DITCH ATTEMPT TO GET NAMES OF MURDERED JEWS FROM HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS

BY ARIEH O'SULLIVAN, THE MEDIA LINE

A final campaign is underway to get Holocaust survivors to record the names of lost family members.

For the tenacious, eighty-six-year-old Yehoshua Neiditz, surviving has been a way of life: evading Nazis in his native Poland and hiding out with the Partisans, logging one lucky escape after another. But his entire family number among the estimated six million Jews murdered in the Second World War.

“I never wanted to think about it,” says Neiditz in his small, tidy flat in Tel Aviv. “It makes me anxious to relive it. It's not good for my mind.”

Sixty-seven years later he has at last found the courage to dig up painful memories, share his testimony and record the names of family members from his hometown of *Pinsk* in the main database of the Nazi genocide.

The Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial and Museum has launched what may be the last viable campaign to get remaining Holocaust survivors to record the names of Jews murdered in the war.

A media campaign across Israel, the country with the largest living concentration of Holocaust survivors, has urged them to come forward and give the names of those who died.

According to the Centre of Organizations of Holocaust Survivors in Israel, an estimated 327,000 Holocaust survivors eventually received Israeli citizenship. About 167,000 are still alive today and the majority of them are over 80 years old.

When Yad Vashem was founded in the 1950s, it was guided by the principle that “every victim has a name,” and thus began the monumental task of identifying the victims of the Holocaust. It got off to a tough start. In the early years of the state, native Israelis ridiculed Holocaust survivors for not having fought the Nazis. The stigma caused many to hide their past. As of today, Yad Vashem has collected the names of nearly four million victims and is trying to recover as many more identities as possible while survivors still live.

“A name is essentially a person's soul,” says Cynthia Wroclawski, manager of the Holocaust Victims' Names Recovery Project at Yad Vashem. “It is their identity. The Nazis tried to wipe off every memory of their victim ... and when we try and create a personal commemoration to each and every victim we are in a sense recreating the great tragic loss of six million of our brothers and sisters who were taken from us brutally.”

The present campaign in Israel has included broadcasts on national radio stations and has generated hundreds of telephone calls a day. Identities can be added on the Yad Vashem Names Internet site, but volunteers are also dispatched to the homes of survivors to help them fill out the forms.

“We are really in a race against time,” says Wroclawski. “Time is passing and we don't know how many more years we have left to speak with actual witnesses who still remember this information.” Volunteers, like Zahava Schwartz, whose parents went through the Holocaust, have been reaching out to survivors. She says approaching death has caused some sur-

vivors to finally speak before it is too late. “Now they feel that they are old and they have to talk about it, otherwise it will be forgotten,” Schwartz says. “Every person is a new story and every person is a sad story, so it is difficult, and sometimes we cry together and sometimes I go home and then I cry.”

Wroclawski says there are about 250 volunteers from across the country helping with the program. Most of the missing identities come from areas of the former Soviet Union and eastern Poland. Also, the ultra-Orthodox community, which often shuns national institutions, has been hesitant to register names with Yad Vashem.

“For many survivors this really is the last opportunity to bear witness to what they know,” she says. “If they know the help is there they will reach out.”

Drinking hot water, Neiditz, a retired barber, seems like a bundle of energy and much younger than his 86 years. It is as if he has been holding inside of himself his stories of survival for decades and they are now bursting out almost uncontrollably.

“My mother held on to me, saying, ‘They took your father and brother. You have to stay with me,’” he recalls. He describes how he hid under the floorboards as a Nazi officer came in and bellowed “‘Ver ist der mander?’ ‘Gone to work camps,’ my mother said. The officer knew that meant they had been sent to their deaths and said ‘Das ist gut.’”

“The most important thing is for a person who has suffered through this to tell it like it was during the Nazi times, the annihilation of the Jews, and that this be documented by the media,” Neiditz says. “To

see it and hear it, and for it to be told for another 200 years.”

Asked why he waited until now to give the names of his parents and siblings, Neiditz sits back in his chair and says, “The train has already left the station. There's nothing to say. If I say, ‘what a pity,’ will it help? No. What I'm doing now is better than nothing because we are only a few remaining Holocaust survivors in our old age.”

Thelma Ophel, the volunteer helping him fill out the forms, says she has seen in Neiditz and other survivors a character trait of living in a perpetual state of survival, manifested by burying the past and concentrating on the task immediately at hand.

“What he did from the moment Nazis entered the ghetto is live his life in order to survive,” Ophel says. “I think character, his great zest for life, his ability to get by and stay alive despite everything, has continued until this day. Other matters like recording his family members with Yad Vashem were not important. He just lives his life.”

Neiditz smacks her hand and says, “Exactly. It's exactly as you say.” Yad Vashem says it has no dialogue with Holocaust deniers, but there is no doubt the list could serve as a rebuttal to those who say it was exaggerated.

“I know that the issue of Holocaust denial, which is rampant today, is an incentive to some of the survivors to say, ‘Listen, this was my family. I know who they were,’” Wroclawski says. “Each page of testimony with the name of the person who actually knew that individual is in itself a testimony against Holocaust denial.”

JEWIS LEAVE SWEDISH CITY AFTER SHARP RISE IN ANTI-SEMITIC HATE CRIMES

BY NICK MEO,
THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH

When she first arrived in Sweden after her rescue from a Nazi concentration camp, Judith Popinski was treated with great kindness.

She raised a family in the city of *Malmö*, and for the next six decades lived happily in her adopted homeland – until last year.

In 2009, a chapel serving the city's 700-strong Jewish community was set ablaze. Jewish cemeteries were repeatedly desecrated, worshippers were abused on their way home from prayer, and "Hitler" was mockingly chanted in the streets by masked men.

"I never thought I would see this hatred again in my lifetime, not in Sweden anyway," Mrs Popinski told *The Sunday Telegraph*.

"This new hatred comes from Muslim immigrants. The Jewish people are afraid now."

Malmö's Jews, however, do not just point the finger at bigoted Muslims and their fellow racists in the country's neo-Nazi fringe. They also accuse Ilmar Reepalu, the left-wing mayor who has been in power for 15 years, of failing to protect them.

Mr. Reepalu, who is blamed for lax policing, is at the center of a growing controversy for saying that what the Jews perceive as naked anti-Semitism is in fact just a sad but understandable consequence of Israeli policy in the Middle East.

While his views are far from unusual on the European liberal left, which is often accused of a pro-Palestinian bias, his Jewish critics say they encourage young Muslim hotheads to abuse and harass them.

The future looks so bleak that by one estimate, around 30 Jewish families have

already left for Stockholm, England or Israel, and more are preparing to go.

With its young people planning new lives elsewhere, the remaining Jewish households, many of which are made up of Holocaust survivors and their descendants, fear they will soon be gone altogether. Mrs. Popinski, an 86-year-old widow, said she has even encountered hostility when invited to talk about the Holocaust in schools.

"Muslim schoolchildren often ignore me now when I talk about my experiences in the camps," she said. "It is because of what their parents tell them about Jews. The hatreds of the Middle East have come to *Malmö*. Schools in Muslim areas of the city simply won't invite Holocaust survivors to speak any more."

Hate crimes, mainly directed against Jews, doubled last year with *Malmö's* police recording 79 incidents and admitting that far more probably went unreported. As of yet, no direct attacks on people have been recorded but many Jews believe it is only a matter of time in the current climate.

The city's synagogue has guards and rock-proof glass in the windows, while the Jewish kindergarten can only be reached through thick steel security doors.

It is a far cry from the city Mrs. Popinski arrived in 65 years ago, half-dead from starvation and typhus.

At Auschwitz she had been separated from her Polish family, all of whom were murdered. She escaped the gas chambers after being sent as a slave laborer. Then she was moved to a women's concentration camp, *Ravensbrück*, from which she was

then evacuated in a release deal negotiated between the Swedish Red Cross and senior Nazis, who were by then trying to save their own lives.

After the war, just as liberal Sweden took in Jews who survived the Holocaust as a humanitarian act, it also took in new waves of refugees from tyranny and conflicts in the Middle East. Muslims are now estimated to make up about a fifth of *Malmö's* population of nearly 300,000.



Judith Popinski pictured next to the White Bus at the Red Cross museum in *Malmö*, Sweden.

"This new hatred from a group 40,000 strong is focused on a small group of Jews," Mrs. Popinski said. "Some Swedish politicians are letting them do it, including the mayor. Of course the Muslims have more votes than the Jews."

The worst incident was last year during Israel's brief war in Gaza, when a small demonstration in favor of Israel was attacked by a screaming mob of Arabs and Swedish leftists, who threw bottles and firecrackers as the police looked on.

"I haven't seen hatred like that for decades," Mrs. Popinski said. "It reminded me of what I saw in my youth. Jews feel vulnerable here now."

HOW DIPLOMAT'S PAPERWORK SAVED LIVES IN HOLOCAUST

BY CLAUDIA TORRENS AND
RANDY HERSCHAFT, AP

It took Ina Polak 35 years to discover the dusty piece of paper that probably saved her and her family in *Bergen-Belsen* concentration camp.

It wasn't until she was cleaning her mother's New York City apartment following her death in 1980 that she discovered the document listing her, her sister, and their parents. It was a Salvadoran citizenship certificate.

"My first reaction was 'Oh, now I understand!'" said Polak, who is 87.

She and her family were Dutch Jews, with nothing to connect them with the distant Central American country of El Salvador. Yet the certificate dated 1944 became their lifeline, thanks to a man named George Mantello.

Mantello, a Jew born in what is now Romania, was one of a handful of diplomats who during World War II saved thousands of Jews and others on the run from the Nazis by giving them visas or citizenships, often without their governments' knowledge.

They were men such as Hiram Bingham IV, a U.S. consular official in *Marseille*, France who issued visas and other travel documents that are credited with helping to rescue about 2,000 people; or Chiune Sugihara, a Japanese envoy in Lithuania, thought to have saved 3,500; or Dr. Feng Shan Ho, the Chinese consul in Vienna

whose visas got 18,000 Jews to safety in Shanghai.

Best known of all is Raoul Wallenberg of Sweden, whose efforts probably contributed to saving 90,000 Jewish lives in Hungary before he vanished in what became an abiding mystery of the Holocaust.

Now the work of Mantello is getting fresh attention as scholars dig into newly released files and piece together the lives



It took 35 years for Ina Polak to discover that a dusty Salvadoran citizenship certificate probably saved her from one of Nazi Germany's concentration camps.

he saved by gaming the diplomatic bureaucracy.

Working as first secretary in the Salvadoran consulate in Geneva, Switzerland, Mantello used a network of contacts to issue papers to Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe between 1942 and 1944 – up to 10,000 documents, according to his son, Enrico Mantello.

The same figure is given by historian David Kranzler, who published a book about the diplomat in 2000 called *The Man Who Stopped the Trains to Auschwitz* that also describes Mantello's critical role in publicizing the so-called Auschwitz Protocol, a description of the Nazis' biggest death camp by two escaped inmates.

It is not known how many lives were saved by Mantello's documents — "definitely, hundreds," says Mordecai Paldiel, a Holocaust studies professor at Yeshiva University in New York. A letter from Carl Lutz, a Swiss diplomat who worked with Mantello, speaks of "thousands" saved.

Without the Salvadoran certificate, Polak and her family would likely have been worked to death in *Bergen-Belsen* or sent to other camps or the salt mines. Instead they were moved to a small camp enclosure full of Jews with Latin American documents, and finally put on a train out of *Bergen-Belsen* along with 2,400 people, and were rescued by US troops in April 1945.

"Back then," Polak said, if a German official "saw a paper, and if it had the right stamp on it and the signature, then it was legal. People with these papers were eligible, in the Germans' eyes, to be sent to a neutral country, to a better camp."

Mantello sent out notarized copies of the certificates and kept the originals, more

Sweden has had a long record of offering a safe haven to Jews, the first of whom arrived from the east in the mid-nineteenth century. Today the Jewish population is about 18,000 nationally, with around 3000 in southern Sweden.

"Jews came to Sweden to get away from persecution, and now they find it is no longer a safe haven," said Rabbi Shneur Kesselman, 31. "That is a horrible feeling."

One who has had enough is Marcus Eilenberg, a 32-year-old *Malmö*-born lawyer, who is moving to Israel in April with his young family.

"*Malmö* has really changed in the past year," he said. "I am optimistic by nature, but I have no faith in a future here for my children. There is definitely a threat."

"It started during the Gaza war when Jewish demonstrators were attacked. It was a horrible feeling, being attacked in your own city. Just as bad was the realization that we were not being protected by our own leaders."

Mr. Eilenberg said he and his wife considered moving to Stockholm where Jews feel safer than in *Malmö*. "But we decided not to because in five years' time I think it will be just as bad there," he said.

"This is happening all over Europe. I have cousins who are leaving their homes in Amsterdam and France for the same reason as me."

For many of *Malmö's* white Swedish population, meanwhile, the racial problems are bewildering after years of liberal immigration policies.

"I first encountered race hatred when I was an au pair in England and I was shocked," said Mrs. Popinski's friend Ulla-Lena Cavling, 72, a retired teacher.

"I thought, 'This couldn't happen in Sweden.' Now I know otherwise."

than 1,000 of which were found in a suitcase in a Geneva basement in 2005 and donated to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., by his son three years later.

Now museum researchers are trying to trace recipients of the certificates to get an idea of how many of them actually saved lives and learn the full scope of Mantello's rescue efforts.

Judith Cohen, director of photo archives, says she has discovered how two Dutch families were released from *Bergen-Belsen* in January 1945 thanks to the documents, sent first to Switzerland and then to North Africa to be exchanged for German prisoners.

"We know that Salvadoran certificates actually helped pull someone out of the concentration camp and send them to freedom," said Cohen. While calling it "a very small footnote to history," she notes the Jewish saying that "he who saves just one person is like he who has saved the whole world."

In a speech last year, Cohen noted that "even when the rescue attempts were unsuccessful, the mere existence of the certificates proves that people cared for others and tried to extend help to friends under occupation to a greater extent than is commonly acknowledged."

And the areas targeted by the rescuers help fill in another blank in Holocaust history by indicating "who knew what when" about what was going on under the Nazi

(Continued on page 12)

HOW DIPLOMAT'S PAPERWORK SAVED LIVES IN HOLOCAUST

(Continued from page 11)

thumb, she said.

After the war, Polak married a fellow survivor, Jaap Polak. She believes that maybe friends of her father gave Mantello the name of her family.

Her father, Abraham Soep, was a diamond manufacturer in Amsterdam, and probably received the citizenship certificate while the family were in a Dutch transit Nazi camp before being sent to *Bergen-Belsen* (the same camp where another girl from Holland, the diarist Anne Frank, perished).



This Dec. 7, 1944 photo released by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum shows the Satmar Rebbe, third from left, with George Mantello, second from left, in white coat, arguing with Swiss border guards for the entry of the rebbe into Switzerland.

Citizenship papers entitled their holders to sometimes wear their own clothes instead of prison uniforms and to live in a separate section of *Bergen-Belsen*.

The difference was critical, said Paul Shapiro, director of the Washington museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies. "Remember that if you were in the wrong part of the camp, you were dead."

While Wallenberg's activities were initiated and supported by his government,

other diplomats acted against their countries' immigration policies or interpreted them "very, very, liberally," says Yeshiva University's Paldiel, who wrote a book titled "Diplomat Heroes of the Holocaust."

In her speech, Cohen said diplomats from Portugal and Romania, as well as representatives of the Vatican and the International Red Cross, helped spread Mantello's documents.

Those who made a sustained effort to save Jews numbered just "a few dozen" out of thousands of diplomats stationed in Europe, says Dr. Rafael Medoff, director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies in Washington, D.C.

As a Jew, Mantello might himself have easily fallen victim to the Nazis. He had held honorary diplomatic positions for the El Salvador government starting in 1939, and had changed his name from Mandel to the more Spanish-sounding Mantello. But he was arrested by the Germans in Belgrade in 1942. He managed to escape to Geneva, where he became first secretary of the Salvadoran consulate, and set about saving fellow Jews.

Col. Jose Arturo Castellanos, the consul general, allowed him to issue the certificates, and only later did his government find out about it. El Salvador wasn't a neutral country at the time — it was backing the Allies, so Mantello had to use emissaries to distribute the certificates.

According to the Washington museum, copies of the certificates produced by Mantello and his team of Swiss volunteer clerks were sent to almost every country in occupied Europe — and even into Auschwitz — with varying degrees of success.

The Germans, for their part, had a use for Jewish prisoners with such documents — to trade for German nationals held in

Latin America or the U.S., said Medoff.

"So even when the Germans suspected these documents might not be authentic, they often did not care because they considered these prisoners to be very useful," he said.

In January 1945, 800 Germans who had been held in the Americas were exchanged for 800 American and Latin American citizens in Germany, and among them were 149 Jews from *Bergen-Belsen* with Latin American documents, said Medoff.

Robert Fisch, a Minneapolis pediatrician, remembers seeing a citizenship certificate in his house in Budapest in 1944.

"My mother told me, even wrote, 'don't give out this paper. It is very important,'" said Fisch, now 84.

While his work on citizenship papers stayed discreet, his role in publicizing the Auschwitz Protocol led to Swiss public protests, prayers and angry headlines. The worldwide protests they stirred may have played a part in the Hungarian government's decision to temporarily suspend deportations of Jews to Auschwitz.

According to Paldiel, Mantello is insufficiently appreciated because he was an outsider of the Jewish organizations, a businessman who created his own network of volunteers and emissaries. After the war he had difficulty continuing his diplomatic career, and was accused of being financially corrupt, but charges were dropped after an investigation.

One man who appreciated his efforts — and said so in writing — was Lutz, the Swiss diplomat in Budapest who delivered many of Mantello's documents to Jews.

"You can be assured that ... you rendered a valuable service which will get

you the thanks — as soon as normal conditions again prevail in this world — of thousands of human beings whose lives you saved," he wrote in a letter stored at the Washington museum.

Enrico Mantello, now 80 and living in Geneva and Rome, said he remembers his father issuing one certificate after the other.

"He was a very driving, energetic per-



This April 13, 1945 photo released by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum shows a train stopped in *Farsleben*, Germany, while transporting about 2,500 inmates, primarily Jewish, from *Bergen-Belsen* to another Nazi concentration camp at *Theresienstadt*. After a six-day journey they were liberated by the 30th Infantry Division of the U.S. Ninth Army. Among the passengers were Ina Polak and her family, probably saved from death in *Bergen-Belsen* because they had Salvadoran citizenship papers supplied to them by George Mantello.

son. He needed very little sleep," he said. "He was passionate, he did not take no for an answer."

But after the war and until his death in 1992, Mantello was a haunted man.

Among those to whom he sent citizenship papers were his parents in what then was Hungary, but they arrived one or two days too late, and his mother and father, along with the rest of the Jews in their town, were sent to Auschwitz and murdered.

"It is a horrible, sad irony," said Cohen, the museum researcher. "The certificates were saving people all over Europe, and despite his efforts he was unable to save his own parents."

NAZI PERPETRATORS MUST FACE JUSTICE

BY EFRAIM ZUROFF, JTA

The efforts to hold Holocaust perpetrators accountable are indeed in their final phase. Still, with legal action of various forms having been taken recently against four of the 10 Nazi war criminals on the Wiesenthal Center's "Most Wanted" list, it seems clear that the push for justice will continue — and register more victories than initially expected.

The individuals in question — Ukrainian Sobibor guard Ivan Demjanjuk (No. 1); Hungarian *gendarmarie* officer Dr. Sandor Kepiro (2); Dutch SS hit man Heinrich Boere (6); and Hungarian army officer Karoly (Charles) Zentai (7) — represent a cross-section of the suspects still unprosecuted who were involved in a variety of crimes ranging from being an accessory to mass murder (Demjanjuk and Kepiro) to carrying out the execution of individuals (Boere and Zentai).

While Zentai is incarcerated in Perth, Australia, pending approval of his extradition to Hungary, the Demjanjuk trial has started in Munich and Boere is on trial in *Aachen*, Germany. Kepiro, whose passport was seized by the authorities, is facing the prospect of prosecution in Budapest.

I have a special interest in the two

Hungarian cases because they were discovered in the framework of the Wiesenthal Center's "Operation: Last Chance," a project launched in 2002 with the generous assistance of the Targum Shlishi Foundation of Miami founded and headed by Aryeh Rubin.

Cognizant of the diminishing prospects for the prosecution of Holocaust perpetrators, Aryeh suggested offering financial rewards for information that would lead to the prosecution and punishment of Nazi war criminals — and helped launch the project by providing a generous grant. Our primary objective was to try to discover suspects who had been unknown to us and to the authorities.

Our initial focus was on post-communist Europe, where local collaboration with the Nazis had been particularly lethal and extensive, and where Cold War politics had prevented an honest accounting with the past from 1945 until 1991. In that respect, we were encouraged by the conviction in 1999 of former Jasenovac commander Dinko Sakic, whose extradition from Argentina and prosecution in Zagreb we had helped facilitate, and whose trial had a significant impact on Holocaust issues in Croatia.

Over the past seven years, we were

contacted by thousands of people from all over the world and received the names of more than 530 suspects from 25 countries. About 100 of the names eventually were turned over to the local prosecutors after we verified that the allegation was credible and the suspect was alive, was healthy enough to stand trial, and had never been prosecuted.

Among the most serious cases were those of Kepiro and Zentai. Kepiro was among the officers who organized the massacre by Hungarian forces of at least 1,300 civilians (mostly Jews, but also Serbs and Roma) in the city of *Novi Sad*, Serbia, on Jan. 23, 1942. Zentai is accused of the murder in Budapest on Nov. 8, 1944, of an 18-year-old Jewish boy named Peter Balasz, whom he caught on a streetcar without the required yellow star.

In both cases, although the evidence we provided was very substantial, the cases proceeded at a snail's pace, jeopardizing the chances of prosecution given the age of the suspects. In Kepiro's case, the investigation in Hungary was slowed by innumerable delays influenced by the fact that his crimes had been committed in Serbia. In Australia, Zentai's lawyers were able to delay his extradition for about four years by mounting various

technical legal challenges unconnected to the case.

Now, however, we are finally approaching the moment of truth in both cases. Reports from Budapest indicate that the prosecution is satisfied that it has sufficient evidence to prosecute Kepiro and hopefully will do so shortly, and Zentai is in jail pending his final appeal after Australian Minister for Home Affairs Brendan O'Connor approved his extradition to Hungary to stand trial. In short, by the end of 2009, we almost certainly will know whether these two suspected Holocaust perpetrators will be held accountable for their crimes.

While the process of facilitating these and other cases (in which excellent suspects died before they could be prosecuted) often is nerve-racking, there is no alternative but to try our best to maximize justice through the existing legal system. This is our obligation to the victims of the Holocaust, one which fully deserves a serious effort to achieve as much justice as possible despite the difficulties engendered by the passage of time. "Operation: Last Chance" is an important part of that effort.

Dr. Efraim Zuroff is the chief Nazi hunter of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and director of its Israel Office.

THE MUFTI OF JERUSALEM: ARCHITECT OF THE HOLOCAUST?

BY PAMELA GELLER

The original blueprints for the Auschwitz death camp went on display in late January after being discovered in November 2008. They were found by chance behind a wall in a Berlin apartment during renovation work, yet the exact location of their discovery is being kept secret. No one will say whose apartment it was.

There are numerous bits of evidence, however, that point to a possible location where Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, lived during World War II. And in the course of investigating this, I have found that the Mufti was involved in and may even have created the Final Solution for European Jews – and yet his central participation in the Holocaust has been covered up and forgotten.

The Mufti, whom his nephew Yasser Arafat called “our hero,” is famous for his fanatical Jew-hatred. During World War II, the Mufti lived in Berlin, where he met Hitler and traveled in top Nazi circles (he even stayed in Hitler’s bunker toward the end of the war). Among his close friends was Adolf Eichmann, who is commonly thought to be the architect of the Holocaust. Journalist Maurice Pearlman, author of the 1947 book *The Mufti of Jerusalem*, said that



the Mufti advised Eichmann on the best ways to persecute Jews.

Hitler gave the Mufti a radio station, which al-Husseini used to preach Nazism and genocide in Arabic. In one of his broadcasts, the Mufti exhorted Arabs:

“According to the Muslim religion, the defense of your life is a duty which can only be fulfilled by annihilating the Jews. This is your best opportunity to get rid of this dirty race, which has usurped your rights and brought misfortune and destruction on your countries. Kill the Jews, burn their property, destroy their stores, annihilate these base supporters of British imperialism. Your sole hope of salvation lies in annihilating the Jews before they annihilate you.”

Al-Husseini practiced what he preached. During the Nuremberg Trials in July 1946, Eichmann’s assistant, Dieter Wisliczeny, testified that Mufti was a central figure in the planning of the genocide of the Jews:

“The Grand Mufti has repeatedly suggested to the Nazi authorities – including Hitler, von Ribbentrop and Himmler – the extermination of European Jewry. ... The Mufti was one of the initiators of the systematic extermination of European Jewry and had been a collaborator and adviser of Eichmann and Himmler in the execution of this plan... He was one of Eichmann’s best friends and had constantly incited him to accelerate the extermination measures. I heard him say, accompanied by Eichmann, he had visited incognito the gas chambers of Auschwitz.”

Wisliczeny also testified that al-Husseini asked Heinrich Himmler to send one of Eichmann’s assistants to Jerusalem once the war was over, to aid the Mufti in “solving the Jewish question in the Middle East.”

And according to the Arab Higher Committee:

“In virtually identical letters, the Mufti, in the summer of 1944, approached Germany, Romania, Bulgaria, and Hungary to speed the extermination of the Jews by sending them to Poland where the Nazi death chambers were located.”

The Mufti successfully demanded that 400,000 Jews who were about to be deported to the Holy Land instead be sent to their deaths. That’s not merely a collaborator, that’s a partner with great influence and power.

Yet after the war the Mufti was not

prosecuted. He got off scot-free, and lived comfortably until 1974. Why? And why the cover-up now about in whose apartment the documents were found? Germany does not hide information like this after World War II; why are they hiding this now? The only plausible reason to keep this location secret would be because it would incriminate the Mufti. There are no other reasons. German authorities should come clean.

The denial about the key role that this Muslim leader played in the Holocaust must end. The only difference between Hitler and the Mufti is that Hitler was defeated and punished. The slaughtering Mufti went on to spawn Yasser Arafat, inspire Saddam Hussein, and work to destroy the Jewish homeland and its people.

There is no statute of limitations on genocide. I indict the Mufti and the Muslim world. They were equal partners in mass death. Not only does the *ummah* not own what they did (let alone apologize, as the Germans have done repeatedly), but it is still pursuing the annihilation of the Jews (not to mention all non-believers). Just recently in Iran, according to the Middle East Media Research Institute, Khamenei’s representative in the Iranian Martyr Foundation said this:

“We have manufactured missiles that allow us, when necessary, to replace Israel in its entirety with a big holocaust.”

It’s time to tell the truth about the Muslims role in the Holocaust, and their desire to start a new one.

AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM MOURNS THE PASSING OF DAVID BANKIER

David Bankier, who helped expand the contours of Holocaust research by examining the participation of ordinary Europeans in the extermination of their Jewish neighbors, died after a long illness, Yad Vashem, the Jerusalem Holocaust center, announced. He was 63.

Mr. Bankier, who was head of the International Institute for Holocaust Research at Yad Vashem, focused his scholarly work on anti-Semitism, especially its use by the Nazis to promote and sustain a broader ideology. He was the author of *Germans and the Final Solution: Public Opinion under Nazism* as well as a collection of essays, *Hitler, the Holocaust and German Society: Cooperation and Awareness*.

Born in Germany just before the state of Israel was created, Mr. Bankier grew up and was educated here, earning his doctorate in Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He held a professorship at Hebrew University and had served as a visiting professor in Britain, the United States, South Africa and South America. He spoke excellent English and Spanish, in addition to German and Hebrew.

Divorced, Mr. Bankier is survived by three children.

A rumpled, somber man who sought to understand the most bewildering aspects of genocide — how someone could play soccer with an acquaintance one day and assist in his murder the next — Mr. Bankier insisted both on the uniqueness of the Nazi Holocaust of six

million Jews and on its applicability to other cases of mass murder.

For anti-Semites, “Jews represent mysterious, mythic and evil forces,” he said at a recent lecture, “an omnipotence playing a sinister role in world history.”

At another lecture he noted that for Hitler, “Nazism was a doctrine of world salvation to redeem humanity from the Jewish-Christian-Marxist doctrine.

The acquisition and maintenance of total suppression of the German race, Hitler believed, must be through total war of Germans against the Jews.”

At the same time, Mr. Bankier said last year that the work he was overseeing at Yad Vashem on the role of bystanders and neighbors in numerous smaller mass killings across the former Soviet Union

in the early 1940s had important implications for contemporary genocide in Africa and other places.

He argued that the world was a different place as a result of what the Nazis had done, that if genocide in far-off places shocked average people today it was partly because of their knowledge of the details of the Holocaust. In other words, Holocaust deniers aside, Holocaust awareness was central to contemporary sensibility.

Avner Shalev, chairman of Yad Vashem, said that with Mr. Bankier’s death, the world had lost one of its most important scholars in the field. He noted that Mr. Bankier, who had fought his illness over a long period, kept a regular schedule until his last day.



A MOSAIC OF LIFE AND DEATH

(Continued from page 10)

film producer Nathan Lifshitz. The circumstances in which the films were photographed, as well as the identity of the photographers – mostly members of the Nazi propaganda units – convinced

features maps and diagrams of the ghetto areas, appended to the relevant entry. Some of the illustrations display the frequent changes the ghetto area underwent, such as in *Kovno*, whose area was drawn in real time by the Bauhaus artist Fritz Gadiel.

An analysis of Jewish life in the ghettos would not be complete without exploring their day-to-day lives and spiritual world. The encyclopedia presents articles that characterized the daily routine of the ghetto inhabitants, such as the yellow patch or the labor and ration cards, alongside the artistic works and drawings they created in the nadir of those darkest days.

Likewise, excerpts from the extensive literature written by ghetto residents provide a personal and human soundtrack to the formal texts, and act as a small window on the pulse of life in the ghetto. As Egon Redlich, *Terezin* ghetto resident, expressed in his diary: “My God, what a life! Multi-shaded, horrible, filled with contrasts and flowing rapidly... a cabaret performance on the one hand and alongside it dying old men... problems with disinfectant, eradicating lice infestations, manufacturing beds – a colorful mosaic of life and death.”



Fleeing the Warsaw Ghetto.

Lifshitz to add an introductory film explaining the aspects and challenges these film segments harbor. Nevertheless, the rarity of the films and their ability to project an authentic picture of the physical surroundings and the faces of the ghetto Jews, most of them anonymous, provide a unique and unusual supplement to the accounts themselves.

In addition to the collection of photographs and films, the encyclopedia also

“THEY REALLY DO SMELL LIKE BLOOD”

(Continued from page 7)

Schücking-Homeyer: I would often go to the office of the military administration in Rivne to pick up ration coupon books. The soldiers discussed the resettlements so nonchalantly that I had to ask. “What’s this resettlement all about?” I would ask. “When do they find out about it...”

SPIEGEL: At that point, had you already figured out that “resettlement” was just a polite way of saying “murdering Jews”?

Schücking-Homeyer: Yes, but I don’t remember exactly when and how I found out. At any rate, the people at the military administration in Rivne said: “We are notified on the evening before it happens that a resettlement is going to take place at a specific location, and that it could get violent. The locally stationed troops aren’t supposed to worry about it or get involved.” Today, we know that special task forces and police officers carried out the shootings.

SPIEGEL: On Nov. 5, 1941, you wrote to your parents: “What Papa says is true: people with no moral inhibitions exude a strange odor. I can now pick out these people, and many of them really do smell like blood. Oh, what an enormous slaughterhouse the world is.” Did you think you could detect the murderers?

Schücking-Homeyer: Yes, at least I thought so at the time. If you are a master

one day I was in a car with a sergeant named Frank. He said he was from Münster and that he was going to be part of a major campaign in the coming weeks in which people would be executed by firing squad. He said he was doing it because he wanted a promotion. I told him not to do it, that he wouldn’t be able to sleep afterwards. He did it anyway, and later he complained to me about not being able to sleep and about how bad he felt. “I told you so,” I replied.

SPIEGEL: Of course, your letters also contain passages that lead one to believe that you let yourself be infected by your surroundings.

Schücking-Homeyer: No. My father had been an attorney, but he had been barred from practicing since 1933, so I was very afraid of censorship. I was never an anti-Semite. On the contrary, on several occasions later in the war, we helped out persecuted Jews.

SPIEGEL: After the war, what did you do with your knowledge about what had happened in Zwiabel?

Schücking-Homeyer: I had concluded that soldiers would file legal complaints, but then I didn’t hear anything about it. And so, in 1945, I suggested to the public prosecutor in Münster — who had trained me in 1943 and was the senior public prosecutor by then — that he should take legal steps to prevent evidence from being destroyed. After all, at the time, the facts were all still available, including information about which units ... were stationed there. But he responded that we should leave it up to the English. I suppose he was too cowardly. Three or four weeks later, I informed the Jewish community in Dortmund, where I was living at the time, but no one there was interested, either.

SPIEGEL: And later?

Schücking-Homeyer: It was impossible to talk about it openly in the court system with any colleagues who had been in the East. Former Nazis were everywhere. It wasn’t until a few years before I retired that the subject of Zwiabel came up again. In 1974, I was a judge at a social welfare court in Detmold. I was handed a retirement pension insurance case that had to do with an ethnic German who wanted credit for his service in 1941 with the German police in Zwiabel. He had been part of the so-called Ukrainian protective team, which I assumed had taken part in the so-called resettlements. I wrote to him that I knew exactly what had happened in Zwiabel in October 1941 and that it would be better for him to file a challenge against my taking the case on the grounds that I was biased. He did so right away. My substitute gave him the credit, as the law unfortunately required.

SPIEGEL: You didn’t report the man to the police?

Schücking-Homeyer: No, he was just a little cog in the wheel. But then I contacted the central office in Ludwigsburg to find out whether it had investigated the murders in Zwiabel yet. Then, when I testified, I told them everything I knew. Still, as a witness, I could only testify against Sergeant Frank. But he couldn’t be located.

Interview conducted by Martin Doerry and Klaus Wiegrefe, Spiegel.



A street in Zwiabel.

over life and death, you behave and move differently than other people do. You give off the impression that you are the one making all the decisions.

SPIEGEL: Your letters contain many passages like “But the Jews, who ran most of the shops, are all dead” or “There aren’t any more Jews here in Zwiabel.” You write nothing about killing or murder. Were you afraid you might be censored?

Schücking-Homeyer: Of course. You know, I was an anxious girl. I wrote to my mother — who was completely different from me — that she wouldn’t have lasted there a day. And I’m sure she would’ve found a way to get away from there. By staying there, you were basically supporting the system. But I didn’t know what reason I could give for wanting to leave, and I needed a permit to go back to Germany.

SPIEGEL: Could you talk about these things with the other nurses?

Schücking-Homeyer: No, we didn’t discuss such things.

SPIEGEL: But did everyone know what was going on?

Schücking-Homeyer: I can’t say for sure whether soldiers at the front knew. But everyone behind the lines — and especially those who’d been there for a while — knew about it.

SPIEGEL: What makes you so sure?

Schücking-Homeyer: Because, in conversation, it was always assumed that everyone knew. I haven’t told you yet, but

POWER TO REACH HUMAN SOULS

(Continued from page 4)

ed, etc.). Weinstein describes how older people were simply unable to uproot themselves overnight. He shows us how surreal Treblinka’s killing fields truly were, where 870,000 Jews were rapidly and relentlessly murdered.

The gratuitous cruelty is heart-stopping. Deported Jews were subjected to torturous thirst, hunger, cold, and filth, smothered and dehydrated in box cars or broken by forced marches before they were killed. The Nazi killers kept screaming, beating, shoving, and striking their prey. Those Jews who dared to beg for their lives were immediately beaten to death as punishment — and then shot for good measure, as were those modest, frightened Jewish girls and women who tried to cover their nakedness. Laughing killers shot infants down into huge burning pits. Random killings, mass killings never stopped.

In Treblinka, Weinstein was shot right in the chest, “into the lungs,” but he did not die. He managed to hide under a vast pile of Jewish clothing, which was being sorted; then, he became a sorter of the dead Jewish clothing for 17 days, “each of which was more like a century.” Miraculously, Weinstein and some young friends managed to dodge death in Treblinka and escape. Their troubles continued because now they were at the mercy both of roving German soldiers and of their fellow Poles, who sold water to the

dying Jews only for valuables, like gold or jewelry; who had already occupied Jewish homes, appropriated Jewish money, food, or valuables, and who were already wearing and selling Jewish clothes — and who were, themselves, at the mercy of a ravenous German army.

All of Weinstein’s relatives perished — except his father, whom he found in a slave labor camp. Together they, and a handful of others, escaped, and for two years faced death every moment as they lived in hiding, first under a pigsty, then a fishpond, and then a forest bunker, where some Poles risked their lives to bring them food — which they only did for exorbitant sums of money. Even then, they were always threatening to turn them in and often tried to kill their Jews-in-hiding in very primitive ways.

Weinstein’s personal anecdotes of deadly Polish anti-Semitism, envy, and avarice, after Poland was liberated by Soviet Russia are unbearable to read. Anyone who suggests that Jews return to Poland might read his book. (And yes, of course, there were Poles who heroically hid and saved Jews. Their stories must also be told, their deeds memorialized.)

Each detail of this brief but remarkable book is as fresh, vivid, outrageous, and memorable as when Weinstein first wrote about it in the mid-1940s in a DP camp. His words retain their power to reach other human souls.

SISTERS SURVIVED HOLOCAUST DEATH CAMPS

(Continued from page 6)

camps was still unheard of for them.

“Every morning, you had roll call. Roll call is ... outside, sometimes in the nude,” Sessler said. “Because they want to see how thin you are. If you were too thin, you couldn’t work, you were gassed. Well, we didn’t at that time know you were gassed. We figured you went to a hospital, they got you better.”

But soon, the girls realized the terrible-smelling chimney smoke, similar to the odor of chicken fat burning, meant people were dying.

Sessler speaks annually with Benicia middle school students about hate, touching on some of her experiences during World War II. But the sisters rarely speak in detail about the three years they spent in work and concentration camps between 1942 and 1945.

Leaver, in particular, avoids extensive story-telling, “though she’s gotten better,” her sister said.

Sessler tells their story now with an easy flow, though there was a time when she told nearly no one, not even her husband of 13 years, who is now deceased.

Speaking recently with a reporter and two others, the women shared stories of whips with metal pieces at their tips, and once-a-day bread and soup rationing.

They revealed faded blue numbers tattooed down their arms, A-13918 and A-13919.

They speak of their bouts with typhus, tuberculosis, mouth and leg sores and scarcity of clothing while picking through clothes of the dead.

At one point, a small group from Lublin that included the sisters was sent to a marmalade factory, and they were able to eat carrot scraps for nourishment.

They briefly described “sadistic” death marches, ceremonial hangings, Nazi soldiers’ constant screaming, showers-turned-

gas-chambers, the sweeping up of human ash and the dumping of human waste.

While sharing their own strengths — familiarity with a regimented life from their orphanage upbringing, youth, knowledge of German, relative ignorance of what was going on around them — they said others were not so lucky. The girls saw bodies strewn in front of an electrified fence following apparent suicides.

Despite the gravity of their story, the women manage to break much of it up with moments of levity, speaking of living their “golden years” out together as a pair for the past two decades, following their respective husbands’ deaths, and anecdotes of friendly strangers at the grocery store.

They briefly, as well, tell of the seeming insanity of how Leaver was nursed through a grave battle with typhus while in the concentration camp, while healthy people were killed. The Red Cross would check in on the hospitals, they later learned, and those nursed back to health were for show.

The women said they ended their travails in Auschwitz-Birkenau, and survived because they were near death in a hospital.

Following the camp’s liberation, they were sent from Russia back to Holland, but the two left soon after for England. Sessler then traveled to America, while her sister stayed in England and married a pub and restaurant owner. Sessler married a Californian, became stepmother to two sons, and had a daughter.

“You see, I always believed in the God,” Sessler said of her survival. “I always told my sister, ‘We’ll get out.’”

“I still believe in God. She doesn’t. My sister does not believe. She could not understand that a God could let that happen. Six million Jews were killed — for what reason?”

CHILDREN OF NAZI MONSTERS SPEAK

(Continued from page 7)

"And another hard part for *Hitler's Children* is that they thought they were the descendants of heroes. And they were not. We are the descendants of criminals and mass murderers."

Monika Hertwig finds that she cannot accept anything about her own father. As commandant of the Auschwitz sub-camp of *Plaszow*, he was hanged in 1946 for the murders of tens of thousands of people, 500 of them by his own hands.

She says: "He liked to shoot women with babies in their arms from the balcony of his house, to see if one bullet could kill two."

"How far do you separate the murderer from the father? How much of the murderer is in me? These things torment me."



Katrin Himmler, the great-niece of Heinrich Himmler, wept as his crimes were shown on television.

"I always remember meeting a man years ago, before I knew what my father did. It was 1958.

"He was washing dishes in a cafe and rolled up his sleeves and I saw the number tattooed on his arm. He had been in a camp.

"He said he had been in *Krakow*. 'Oh my father ran a camp there,' I said.

"He froze. He said, 'Your father was Amon Goeth?' I smiled back at him, thrilled that I might find someone who could tell me things about my father.

"He pointed to the door of the cafe and told me never to come back."

In the film she meets a Jewish man who suffered under her father. His testimony about Goeth's daily cruelties is heart-breaking and Monika weeps.

Her mother Ruth – Goeth's mistress - committed suicide in 1983, unable to compre-

hend the crimes of the man she once loved.

Monika was 11 when Ruth told her: "You are like your father and you will die like him."

She says: "I think he was a sadist who took pleasure in killing. Jews were the true heroes and I feel nothing but contempt for those who still idolize the Nazis, those cowardly, rabid dogs."



Hitler and Goering's baby Edda.

Katrin Himmler, 43, the great-niece of Heinrich Himmler – the SS chief second only to Hitler and in charge of the extermination program – married an Israeli Jew and ponders how "one day, I will tell the story to my son about his great-great-uncle Heinrich."

She says: "I don't believe I inherited his 'badness.' But I live with his name. When I was 11 the TV series *Holocaust* was shown in Germany. I sat at my desk crying and crying because the name Himmler was repeated again and again.

"I realize he was the worst mass murderer of modern times. But I am not responsible."

Other children of once-powerful Nazis speak on the program – set for worldwide release when it is completed in the summer.

They include archaeology professor Ricardo Eichmann, 55, who talks about his dad – "desk murderer" Adolf Eichmann, who organized the transport of the six million Jews who died in the Holocaust to the extermination centers.

Adolf Eichmann was kidnapped by Israeli agents in Buenos Aires and flown to Israel, where he was hanged for his crimes in 1962.

Ricardo once said: "I tend to compare our family history to that of a multi-stage rocket. My father was the part that was dropped to the sea shortly after take-off, while we continue flying. I am glad I do not have to live with him."

DON'T FALL FOR ANTI-SEMITES' NEWEST TACTIC — TRIVIALIZING THE HOLOCAUST

Be aware that the newest tactic employed by anti-Semites is not denying the Holocaust but rather trivializing it.

Holocaust deniers are easy to refute, thanks to a more than abundant body of evidence.

The Holocaust trivializers are different. They do not quibble about numbers. Instead, they say, "Let's accept that 6 million Jews were killed. Big deal, consider that somewhere between 40 and 50 million people were killed during World War II, most of these civilian men, women and children."

In late September in New York, Hugo Chavez added to this the murderous conflicts associated with the European settlement of the New World and the decimation of Native Americans.

These and other episodes of mass killings throughout history are undeniably

true. But what they ignore and what is also undeniably true, is that no other such orgy of murder was performed by as calculating, rational, industrial, efficient and heartless manner as was that of the 6 million victims of the Jewish Holocaust.

Evidence of this assertion is readily available. Trains carrying Jews to the death camps had priority over even troop movements. Victims were classified and tattooed by number, and their bodies stripped of recyclable resources such as eyeglasses, gold teeth, hair and more.

Evaluations were held to determine the least expensive mode of murder. It was decided that bullets could be saved and the bother of digging graves averted if the Jews were murdered en masse by gas and subsequently burned to ash.

It was the coldest, cruelest, most immoral, least humane mass murder of that magnitude in history.

HOLOCAUST'S HORRORS

LEONARD GRAY, THE NEWS-STAR

Today, there is a persistent claim that the Holocaust didn't actually happen. Well, it really did happen. It was real. I saw it.

I was a liaison-observation pilot in World War II, flying off a chain-link runway in a pear orchard in Holland when the Allied Forces crossed the *Rhine* River and captured the major *Luftwaffe* air base in *Weisbaden*, Germany. We established our flight headquarters there for the remainder of the war.

About the third week in April 1945, I was assigned the mission of flying the medical inspecting officer to the *Buchenwald* concentration camp near *Weimar*, Germany. This, only a matter of days after the camp was liberated by U.S. troops. What we saw there was absolutely horrible.

Since I had flown the medical officer there to report on what we found, we took many photographs for evidence. When we entered the first barrack we were hit by a terrible odor. On each side of the room were two rows of sleeping places, each about 3 feet wide and high. Each of them was filled with mostly naked men.

In the middle of the room was a garbage-style container (50 gallons or so) filled with thin "dishwater-looking" soup for their food. Our guide was a small humped-backed Jewish prisoner. He explained his physical condition as being a broken shoulder, caused by his being hung from the public hanging rack for punishment for being too long in the toilet. He was hung by his thumbs with his hands tied behind his back, resulting in a broken shoulder.

Passing through the building, I saw a prisoner come out of his bunk, crawling on his hands and knees directly at me. Concerned, I asked our guide, "What does he want, and why is he doing this?"

He spoke to the man and then explained to me, "He wants to touch your feet to thank you because you saved their lives."

Even with this humbling and frightening experience, I still was not prepared for what we found when we went out the back door. Immediately on our left was a stack of naked human bodies about waist high. My immediate reaction was anger, because I thought they were wax dummies put there to impress our medical inspector. But they were real. Many had their eyes and mouths open.

The large area where we visited next held several more barracks. A wagon, loaded with dead bodies, was headed for one of them, and our guide explained that the medics had set up three barracks: one for dead bodies, one for people so near death nothing could be done to save them, and the third for those whose lives they were still trying to save.

Then we passed through a crematorium area where there was a row of large ovens, like huge country mail boxes, where the bodies were burned. We saw some of them held partially burned human remains, and between each of the ovens was a pile of human ashes and bits of bones 3- or 4-feet high.

After that, we came to the public hanging site, where our guide had been strung up. He led us on to another building used for pickling and tanning of human skin they had cut from prisoners who had interesting tattoos.



Here is a picture taken of camp prisoners during the time of liberation at *Buchenwald*.

The most shocking thing we saw was a lamp shade made of those tanned human skins, as a special gift for Hitler's woman, Eva Braun.

I kept the photos of those things we saw, but after several years of seeing them in our photo album I was so repulsed by the sights and memories that I threw them all in the trash.

However, if you wish to see those photos, go to your Internet and search for *Buchenwald* concentration camp. They are all there.

Yes, the Holocaust was real. *Buchenwald* was real, and you can still visit the place where an estimated 56,000 prisoners were killed before U.S. troops freed the thousands facing those same horrors. I know, because I was there.

I will never forget what happened there. I hope America never will forget, either.

HISTORY WRIT SMALL

(Continued from page 4)

are actually two extant *Benheim* Torahs. And she hears stories that confirm that brave acts by non-Jews weren't confined to her father's village. One *Benheim* survivor, a woman named Ilse Loew, tells Schwartz about a woman from Holland she met recently who had hidden Jews during the war: "One day someone knocked on her door – it was either the Dutch police or a Nazi – and demanded she hand over the Jews. She offered him a cup of coffee and while he drank, she got a gun and killed him." An undertaker friend stowed the body in a coffin with another corpse.

But good neighbors are not the whole story, either. There were many seemingly nice local ladies who moved into vacant Jewish homes and live there still, tending flowers. Gradually, Schwartz pieces together the story of who let whom hide whom. The pharmacist who initially sheltered Loew and her future husband during *Kristallnacht* soon sent them out into the

streets, where Nazi thugs roamed. *Benheim* men sent to *Dachau* all returned in March 1939 – thin, but alive. Most sent to concentration camps later did not return. Of the 89 *Benheimers* who were deported in 1940-41, 87 were murdered.

Those who read widely in the crowded field of Holocaust studies will find some facets of this book familiar. Like Daniel Mendelsohn, author of *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million* (2006), Schwartz goes to elderly neighbors and relatives, and finally travels thousands of miles, to hear the stories she was "allergic to" as a kid. These stories may be less reliable than historical data, she admits, but "I liked how one person's memory bumped another, muddying the moral waters of easy judgment." This book of moments and little stories surprises and horrifies, soothes and disturbs. But it is, above all, a beautiful read by a charming writer. And it reminds us that behind every story is the flawed human being who told it.

STOLEN HOLOCAUST ART RETURNED

The Israel Museum opened two new exhibitions of Holocaust-era art in February, giving light to nearly 100 paintings and Jewish ceremonial artifacts stolen by Nazi looters during the Second World War.

The exhibit "Looking for Owners: Custody, Research and Restitution of Art Stolen in France during World War II" includes 58 paintings by some of the biggest names in European art, representing hundreds of years and a wide variety of painting styles and topics. Paintings include non-Jewish works by artists such as Paul Cézanne and Édouard Manet, as well as Jewish painters such as Marc Chagall, Max Liebermann and others.

Israel Museum officials stress that while most of the art was stolen from Jewish collectors and private homes, some of the works were taken from French non-Jews and culture institutions. Many were sold in "legitimate" commercial transactions for prices far below market value or in forced sales. Following the war, many pieces were

Museum officials consider the "second" exhibition, entitled "Orphaned Art: Looted Art from the Holocaust," to be secondary in importance to the French exhibit, but in many ways it is more descriptive of everyday Jewish life in prewar Europe than the



Marc Chagall, *The Rabbi. Réunion des Musé.*

primary exhibition. With more than 50 Jewish ceremonial objects, paintings, books and prints, all stolen from Jewish families throughout the Third Reich, the artifacts are stunning in their simplicity. Museum Director James Snyder said many of the objects, particularly the Judaica, would not be considered "valuable" in the international art marketplace, but nonetheless they are an important record of the history of European Jewry.

In addition to providing a non-traditional history of the Holocaust period in France, the exhibit highlights one of the most painful subjects for survivors of the tragedy: restitution and poverty. Museum sources say efforts to bring the exhibit to Jerusalem have been under way for more than a decade, but have hit stumbling



Chanukah lamp from *Frankfurt, Germany. The Israel Museum.*

blocks along the way from French authorities and culture institutions such as the Musées Nationaux Récupération (MNR), the current custodian of many of the French works, who were concerned about possible restitution claims by Holocaust survivors in Israel.

The concern was not unfounded: In the mid-1990s a legal battle surrounding a

loan by Austria's Leopold Foundation to the New York Museum of Modern Art caused Attorney General Robert Morgenthau to prevent the return of several paintings by early 20th century artist Egon Schiele to Austria because of claims by two families that exhibits in the show belonged to their relatives murdered by the Nazis. The New York Court of Appeals, the state's highest legal authority, eventually decided against the plaintiffs, but the case set a precedent for future claims.

In order to host the exhibition, the Israel Museum pushed the *Knesset* to pass the Immunity from Seizure Law, preventing survivors or heirs from claiming ownership of the property. The controversial bill became law in 2007, and museum officials say that many of the law's detractors



Moritz Daniel Oppenheim, *Marriage Portrait of Charlotte von Rothschild. The Israel Museum.*

eventually came to support the law, for a variety of reasons.

"The law is important because there was no way France was going to agree to let us host this exhibition here," said Dena Scher, the Israel Museum Foreign Press Officer. "People began to realize that if we don't pass the law we are never going to see these paintings."

Furthermore, Scher said the law is a positive one that not only moves to protect the rights of Holocaust survivors, but also provides a mechanism to facilitate potential claims.

"The law only says that survivors can't lay claim to the art here in Israel. But it also stipulates that the lending country, in this case France, must have a functioning body to adjudicate survivor claims. France does – there is a tribunal that meets once or twice a year to listen to claims.

"In addition, we had to publish the works at least one month before the exhibition, to allow the public to survey the works and file claims if they had any. All the works in this show were put on the Justice Ministry website on December 28 and stayed there for a month. No claims were made, and the material was prepared for shipment at the end of January," she said.



Torah crown from *Alsace, France.*

returned to France, but restoring the material to the rightful owners proved impossible because many or most of the original owners were killed, both in concentration camps and as a direct result of the war.

In a gallery featuring many priceless masterpieces, one of the most sobering features of the exhibition is a series of eight photographs documenting the theft of French art. There are images of hundreds of classic paintings, boxed up and awaiting shipment to Germany; one shows the walls of the Paris Central Train Station laden with fine art, and another shows a similar view of the private homes of some Nazi higher-ups. And of course, no exhibition on Holocaust-era theft would be complete without images of stolen Torah scrolls and other Judaica.

As with many things Nazi-related, the numbers are astounding. From April 1941 to July 1944, 138 railcars were packed with 4,174 cases of stolen artwork and shipped to Germany – an average of more than three per month. In all, more than 22,000 objects were taken during this period, some of the nearly 60,000 pieces of art looted during the war.

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MARTYRDOM AND RESISTANCE
500 FIFTH AVENUE, 42ND FLOOR
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10110-4299
Web site: www.yadvashemus.org

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POST
PAID
NEW YORK, N.Y.
PERMIT NO. 9313

Martyrdom & Resistance

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*Published Bimonthly
by the International Society
for Yad Vashem, Inc.
500 Fifth Avenue, 42nd Floor
New York, NY 10110
(212) 220-4304

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*1974-85, as Newsletter for the American Federation of Jewish Fighters, Camp Inmates, and Nazi Victims
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AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON

This year's Annual Spring Luncheon will be held on Thursday, May 27th, 2010 at the Grand Hyatt New York, 109 East 42nd Street. We are proud to announce that this year's honorees are Doris Gross, a survivor, and Yonina Gomberg, an active member of our Young Leadership Associates and the granddaughter of survivors. As we continue to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust are transmitted to the world, and to prevent history from repeating itself, the theme of this year's luncheon is Continuity. A formal invitation will be arriving shortly.

We look forward to greeting you on May 27th.