

# MARTYRDOM & RESISTANCE



Vol. 36-No.5

ISSN 0892-1571

May/June 2010-Iyyar/Sivan 5770

## 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON OF THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM

More than 200 people attended the Annual Spring Luncheon, which took place May 27th, 2010, at the Grand Hyatt in New York City. This year's Luncheon theme was "Continuity." Lili Stawski, Spring Luncheon Chairwoman, opened the event.

Honoree and survivor Doris Gross was introduced by her daughter Lili Gross Barasch, and Honoree and Young Leadership Associate Yonina Gomberg was introduced by her grandmother and Yad Vashem Benefactor Gladys Halpern.

Marilyn Rubenstein, a Yad Vashem Benefactor and longtime supporter of the American Society, introduced this year's guest speaker, Professor Joseph Kertes, recipient of the Canadian National Jewish Book Award and the U.S. National Jewish Book Award for Fiction for his latest novel, *Gratitude*.

The luncheon's theme of Continuity was evident throughout the entire event as we saw many third-generation participants take their place among the guests. As a member of the Young Leadership Associates, Yonina pledged on behalf of the third generation to assume a leadership role in the American Society for Yad Vashem and continue the mission of Remembrance so that the world may never forget.



Doris Gross, 2010 Spring Luncheon Honoree, Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem; Yonina Gomberg, 2010 Spring Luncheon Honoree.



Sam and Gladys Halpern; Fred Halpern; Yonina Gomberg, Honoree; Eric Gomberg; Cheryl Halpern; and Estelle and Rabbi Avrum Feldman.



Lionel Barasch, Andrea Moneton, Fela Moncznik, Carol Moneton, Doris Gross, Lili Barasch, Kimberly Barasch, Nicholas Barasch and Gene Moneton.



Members of the Young Leadership Associates.

### IN THIS ISSUE

Annual Spring Luncheon of The American Society for Yad Vashem.....	1, 8-9
Yom Hashoah observed around the world.....	2
Heirs sought for Holocaust fortunes.....	5
Great escape.....	6
The Arab position on the Holocaust.....	7
Yad Vashem ramping up effort to combat Holocaust denial.....	10
Death on the Baltic.....	11
Memories of the Holocaust.....	13
Athens unveils its first Holocaust memorial.....	14
My sister Kathy.....	15
Revealing the young bureaucrats behind the Nazi terror.....	16



Robin Klatt, Alice Klein, Ilana Kahn and Adina Burian.



# YOM HASHOAH OBSERVED AROUND THE WORLD

**Israel** – Yad Vashem picked “Voices of the Survivors” as the theme of this year’s Holocaust Remembrance Day. A special exhibition of the works of Holocaust survivors opened at Yad Vashem.

“The voice of the survivors is the link that binds the painful and tormented history of the Jewish people during the Holocaust to



(R to L) President of Israel Shimon Peres; Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem; and Elizabeth Zborowski, Cultural Director, American Society of Yad Vashem, in Yad Vashem, Jerusalem on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

the future, to hope and to rebirth,” Yad Vashem said on its Web site.

Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin opened the Every Person Has a Name ceremony by reading aloud the names of children who had taken shelter in France only to be found and sent to Auschwitz.

President Shimon Peres, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, opposition leader Tzipi Livni, Knesset members and Holocaust survivors also participated in the ceremony.

Peres read the names of his own family members and recounted their story, including that of his grandfather Rabbi Zvi Meltzer, who was rounded up with other Jews in the *Vishniev* synagogue that was then torched by Nazis.

Peres commemorated “my family members, who were slaughtered with 2,060 of their fellow community members in *Vishniev* in August 1942 at the hands of the Nazis and their local conspirators, who gathered the city’s residents in the wooden synagogue and brutally murdered by shooting and fire.”

The B’nai B’rith World Center and the Jewish National Fund held a unique ceremony in Israel dedicated to the commemoration of the heroism of Jews who rescued fellow Jews during the Holocaust.

The ceremony took place in the Scroll of Fire Square, located in the Martyrs’ Forest where six million trees have been planted in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.

Some 600 people participated in the ceremony, including 250 junior high school students and some 250 Border Patrol recruits.

During the ceremony, Ambassador of Romania to Israel Losiper noted that the issue of Jewish rescuers has been neglected over the years. The ambassador paid tribute to the Holocaust-era leaders of the Jewish community, including the president of the community and the chief rabbi, who conducted an uncompromising strug-

gle until the end of the war to save the Jewish community from annihilation.

According to B’nai B’rith, thanks to that struggle half of Romania’s Jewry survived. Many of these Jews immigrated to Israel and contributed greatly to its development.

Aleksander Czoban-Sarel, president of the “Moshe Shor” B’nai B’rith lodge in Tel Aviv, escaped the Nazis at the age of 14 after both of his parents were murdered. Along with his younger sister, he survived by hiding among Poles and adopting a false identity. He vowed to continue to convey his personal story to future generations.

“We remained alive, even though we could have found ourselves among the dead at any moment and at any time. Destiny wanted us to survive. I am proud that I chose to live in Eretz Israel,” he said.

\*\*\*

**USA** – Toby Edelstein, 9 years old, stood on *Yom Hashoah* evening before a synagogue audience of about 350 to talk about his grandmother. The details were few, but they were enough.

Grandma, Aviva Rohloff Zylberberg, was a child herself during the Holocaust, that cataclysm of cataclysms in the blood-soaked 20th century. A Jew in Germany, she survived by passing as a Christian. Other young people — some in their 30s but most in their teens — also rose at the Park Avenue Synagogue, on East 87th Street, to recount in a few unadorned sentences how a grandmother or a grandfather eluded the Nazis’ industrialized slaughter of Europe’s Jews.

Cara Levine told of Anne and Saul Celnik, who hid in Warsaw after escaping from that city’s ghetto. Jennifer and Matt Balaban spoke of Irene Anshelewitz Schwadron, who endured through concen-



Elana Rozenfeld, the cantor at Park Avenue Synagogue, with a boy about to read on Holocaust Remembrance Day.

tration camps and a death march. “Our two great-aunts were killed,” Matt Balaban said, “but the bullets somehow missed our grandmother.” Michael Silverstone talked about Henry Vogelstein, who fled Nazi Germany in 1939, emigrated to the United States and returned to Germany as an American combat soldier.

If an event may be said to possess a commodity, then, by definition, memory is the principal one for Holocaust Remembrance Day. But it is a perishable commodity. Preserving it requires work.

The day was observed in various ways around the city. As usual, the largest event was a ceremony at Temple Emanu-El. At the Jewish Community Center in Manhat-

tan, on the Upper West Side, there was a daylong recitation of names of the dead. In Lower Manhattan, some survivors went to the Museum of Jewish Heritage — A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, to relate their experiences to visiting school-children.

More and more, though, survivors are not the principal bearers of their own stories. That responsibility is falling with greater urgency to their children and, as the Park Avenue Synagogue ceremony underscored, to their grandchildren. The war, after all, ended 65 years ago. Holocaust survivors are not getting any younger. Worse, one by one they are not getting any older.

The emphasis on a new generation is inexorable. That “transfer of memory” was behind the Park Avenue Synagogue’s reliance on grandchildren, said Menachem Z. Rosensaft, a lawyer, who organized the program with a cantor at the synagogue, Elana Rozenfeld.

Interlaced with the stories of ordeal and endurance were songs in Yiddish, written for the most part during the Holocaust.

One song written after the war was a sad, sweet number called “*Mayn Shvester Chaye*” (“My Sister Chaye”). This was a tribute by a Yiddish poet, Binem Heller, to his sister, who raised him in their house “with tumbledown steps.” Chaye, with the green eyes. Chaye, with the black braids. Chaye, who died in the *Treblinka* extermination camp, not quite 10 years old.

\*\*\*

**Poland** – Thousands of young Jews, along with Holocaust survivors, marched at Auschwitz to remember those who perished in the Nazi death camp, and to honor Poland’s late president.

The 10,000 or so people from around the world attending the annual March of the Living walked the stretch of about 3 kilometers (2 miles) between the red-brick Auschwitz compound and the death camp’s wooden barracks section of *Birkenau*.

At least 1.1 million people — mostly Jews, Poles and Roma — died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz or from starvation, disease and forced labor at the camp that German Nazis built in occupied Poland during World War II.

Many in the annual march also wore black arm bands or carried black ribbons in memory of Poland’s President Lech Kaczynski and his wife, Maria, who were killed in a plane crash along with 94 others en route to WWII-era observances in western Russia.

Israeli Ambassador Zvi Rav-Ner read out a message in Hebrew, English and Polish saying this year’s marchers were also “paying homage” to Kaczynski and the other plane crash victims.

“Lech Kaczynski and his wife were friends of the state of Israel and of the Jewish nation. Today we will march in solidarity with the entire Polish nation,” Rav-Ner said while standing by the infamous gate with a sign reading “*Arbeit Macht Frei*,” or “Work Makes You Free.”

The inscription was meant to mislead inmates into thinking they were arriving at Auschwitz to work, not to die. The metal

sign now in place is a replica of the original, which is undergoing renovation after it was stolen in December and recovered two days later.

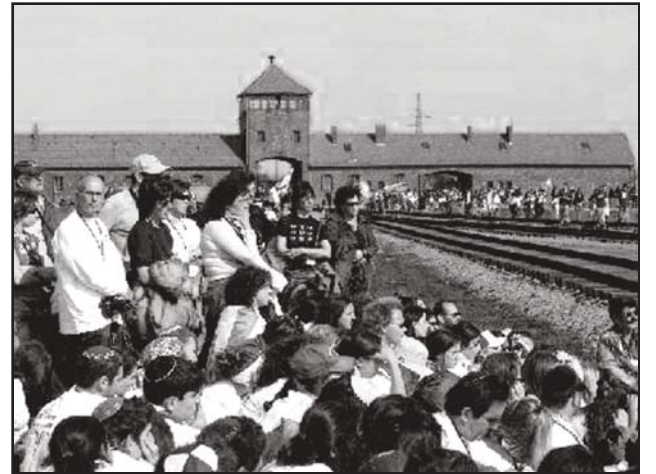
By tradition, the march started with the blowing of the shofar, at the gate.

The Auschwitz camp was liberated in January 1945 by Soviet troops.

\*\*\*

**Canada** – Holocaust Remembrance Day was marked by solemn ceremonies in Canada and abroad just as a report was released showing that violent attacks against Jews worldwide more than doubled last year.

Survivors of the *Buchenwald* concentration camp gathered with U.S. veterans and German dignitaries at a ceremony marking the 65th anniversary of the camp’s liberation.



Participants in the March of the Living at Auschwitz.

Holocaust survivors laid flowers at the site of the concentration camp near *Weimar*, Germany, to mark the date. About 56,000 people, including Jews, Communists, and Gypsies from across Europe, were killed at the Nazi camp. The U.S. Army freed *Buchenwald* on April 11, 1945.

In Toronto, the city’s Jewish community gathered for a service at Earl Bales Park.

Toronto’s remembrance service is the second largest commemoration outside of Israel, drawing in about 2,000 people from across the Greater Toronto Area. This year’s ceremony focused on Holocaust survivors living in Toronto and highlighted their contributions to Canada, organizers said.

But on a day meant for remembering past violence against Jews, a new study points to continuing prejudice.

The study from Tel Aviv University reports that there were 1,129 anti-Semitic incidents worldwide last year that ranged from vandalism and arson against Jewish targets to beatings of Jews. The figure is the highest since the survey began more than two decades ago, and is up from 559 incidents the year before.

In his Holocaust Remembrance Day statement, Prime Minister Stephen Harper acknowledged the continuing presence of the kind of hatred and bigotry that led to the Holocaust.

“Anti-Semitic crimes in Canada, including recent vandalism at Jewish schools in Calgary, Montreal and Toronto, demonstrate the continuing need for both action and education,” he said.

“They remind us of the necessity of standing firm and taking decisive action against the evils of anti-Semitism. Our government is doing both while taking steps to ensure that the lessons of the Holocaust are remembered.”



## FORMER SS SOLDIER SENTENCED TO LIFE

Former SS member Heinrich Boere was convicted and sentenced to life in prison for killing three civilians in Nazi-occupied Holland.

Boere, 88, had admitted to the district court in *Aachen*, Germany, that he shot the three in 1944, but insisted he was following military orders and could have faced imprisonment in a concentration camp or the death penalty if he refused.

The shootings were ordered in reprisal for attacks carried out by the Dutch resistance.

Lead judge Gerd Nohl said that the murders were of "practically incomparable maliciousness and cowardice — beyond the decency of any soldier," according to German news reports. The defendant, who is half German and half Dutch, was an enthusiastic National Socialist and handed over fellow citizens to be executed, the judge said.

Efraim Zuroff, Israel director and chief Nazi hunter for the Simon Wiesenthal Center, praised the efforts of prosecutor Ulrich Maas and said the trial proved that Holocaust perpetrators could still be held accountable for their crimes.

"The conviction of Boere, who volunteered to join the SS and openly admitted the crimes he committed, is an important reminder that the overwhelming majority of the murderers of the Holocaust did so willingly and without any coercion whatsoever," Zuroff said in a statement.

"Despite the passage of decades, this trial clearly shows that Nazi war criminals can still be brought to justice if there is political will to do so, which unfortunately is not the case in most European countries," he said.



Heinrich Boere.

Zuroff has been among many observers of the ongoing trial in Munich of John Demjanjuk, 89, for involvement in more than 29,000 murders in the *Sobibor* death camp.

Boere had told *Focus* magazine last year that he was following orders.

"It was not difficult: you just had to bend a finger," he said.

After the war, Boere was found guilty of murder in Holland and fled to Germany, where he took on German citizenship. Meanwhile, the Dutch death sentence was commuted to a life sentence.

## JEWISH GROUP PRAISES GERMANY, US FOR CHASING NAZIS

The Simon Wiesenthal Center gave Germany and the United States top marks for pursuing and prosecuting Nazi war criminals but slammed Australia, Canada and several former east-bloc countries for "complete failure" to bring suspects to justice.

In an annual report released on the eve of Holocaust Remembrance Day, the Los Angeles-based Jewish organization said that contrary to widely held belief it is still not too late to apprehend and try Nazis.

"It is clear that at least several such criminals will be brought to trial during the coming years," wrote the report's author, the center's Israel director, Efraim Zuroff.

"While it is generally assumed that it is the age of the suspects that is the biggest obstacle to prosecution, in many

cases it is the lack of political will, more than anything else," he said.

The report said the most disappointing case was that of Sandor Kepiro, convicted by Hungary of helping to organize the 1942 murder of at least 1,200 civilians in Serbia but never punished, although the center has located him in Budapest.

The report listed Estonia, Lithuania and Ukraine along with Australia, Canada and Hungary as countries "in which there are no legal obstacles to the investigation and prosecution of suspected Nazi war criminals, but whose efforts (or lack thereof) have resulted in complete failure during the period under review."

Germany and the United States were the only countries the report gave an "A" grade for their "highly successful investigation and prosecution program."

## NY DEALER OFFERS "SCHINDLER'S LIST" FOR SALE

A New York memorabilia dealer is selling what he claims is the last privately-owned copy of a World War II manuscript of Jewish names known as "Schindler's list" and made famous in a 1993 movie of the same name.



A suitcase belonging to Oskar Schindler with the original copy of a list of over 1,200 Polish Jews known as "Schindler's list" is shown in *Stuttgart*, October 15, 1999.

The list was kept by German industrialist Oskar Schindler, who saved more than 1000 Jews from the Holocaust by employing them in his factory during World War II.

New York memorabilia dealer Gary Zimet, who is seeking \$2.2 million for his list, said three others are owned by museums, including the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington and the Holocaust memorial Yad Vashem in Jerusalem.

Zimet, who is representing the manuscript's seller, told Reuters it had been held for over 55 years by the family of Schindler's accountant, Itzhak Stern. The Stern family recently sold it to the current, unidentified owner, Zimet said.

David Crowe, a professor at Elon College in North Carolina and a Schindler expert, had seen a picture of the list and reckoned it could be one of many Schindler produced over the course of the war.

"The Nazis were fanatical about keeping records, new lists were constantly being made," said Crowe.

Dated April 18, 1945, typed on onion-skin paper, the slightly frayed list being sold by Zimet contains 801 all-male names, and is 14 pages long. It details the names of the workers along with their birthdates and jobs.

## SECRET GERMAN FILES TO REVEAL POSTWAR MYSTERY OF THE "HOLOCAUST ARCHITECT"

The story of the man known as "the architect of the Holocaust" is well known, but nobody knows who helped Adolf Eichmann flee Germany in the postwar era.

After fleeing Germany, Eichmann was captured in Argentina by Israel's *Mossad* and hanged after a trial in Jerusalem.

There were speculations that the Vatican helped war criminals hide or escape after the Second World War — allegations Church officials have always denied.

But a secret 4,500-page document by the German intelligence service, the BND, could shed light on the postwar life of the coordinator of the Nazi genocide policy.

While BND claims that the files must remain secret, freelance reporter Gabriele Weber has sued the agency to declassify the documents that may answer the question: who helped Eichmann escape?

How much did Germany know about where he was?

Weber is hoping to obtain at least partial access to the files being reviewed by three judges at the federal administrative court in *Leipzig*.

"I think it's impossible that in Germany we are hiding documents about a convicted Nazi mass murderer," she said.

The American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants group has also called for the release of the files.

"The withholding of files on Eichmann more than a half century after the war is unconscionable and indecent," said vice-president Elan Steinberg.

The BND argues that much of the information came from a "foreign intelligence service," and opening it up to public scrutiny would harm future co-operation with that unidentified country.

## A JEWESS WHO MET HITLER

Marguerite Simmons has never forgotten the day she met Adolf Hitler.

Today she is 104, lives quietly in *Guiseley*, *Leeds* and is very probably the only living Jewish woman to have talked to the architect of the Holocaust while he was ruler of Germany.

And it is even more improbable that anyone can have met the man and then been hunted by his henchmen after being photographed with him.

Marguerite had to abandon her life in Germany before the outbreak of the Second World War when she was recognized as a Jew in a photograph with her young son, John Muller, and Hitler.

Marguerite said: "When the Nazis came I had to get out of Germany. It was very scary growing up in Germany as a Jew.

"Hitler addressed my little boy when he was only a few years old.

"He was a famous man and I knew he was hated. I was very scared."

Marguerite and six-year-old John were staying in a hotel in *Cologne* in 1934 and were told that Hitler and propaganda chief Joseph Goebbels were also guests.

They were told to line the stairs to greet him, but Hitler noticed blond-haired, blue-eyed John, who was wearing a Bavarian outfit, and approached him.

Marguerite's granddaughter Katy Muller, from *Yeadon*, said: "Hitler loved children so he came up to my father, patted him on the head and asked him where he was from. My father told him he was from *Cologne* and he walked off.

"My grandmother was very nervous about meeting him and she knew that he wasn't well liked but she was still quite excited. She must be the only living person that has met Hitler."

A photograph was taken of the pair with the Nazi dictator and when it was published someone recognized Marguerite as being Jewish and it caused widespread outcry.

The negatives and copies of the photograph were confiscated and destroyed.

She was hunted down by the SS, who demanded that she report to their passport control. Fearing for her life, Marguerite fled to England in 1936, leaving her son and then husband behind in Germany.

On her arrival in England she was interned on the *Isle of Man* and she was soon remarried to Erwin Simmons, who was a German Jewish refugee serving as an officer in the British Army.

When John Muller turned 17 he came to Britain to trace his mother and spent most of his life working as a senior lecturer at Leeds University.



## AUSCHWITZ DOCUMENTS FOUND, REFERENCES TO ANGEL OF DEATH, JOSEPH MENGELE

Documents associated with the lives of several guards from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp were recently discovered in the nearby town of *Oswiecim*.

Auschwitz Museum spokesman Pawel Sawick said that the documents included food coupons, death certificates, and a map. The rest of the documents are still being evaluated.

The documents were discovered in an attic of a home in the southern Polish town of *Oswiecim* that was undergoing renovation, Sawick said.

"The sensational value of this discovery is in the fact that these original documents, bearing the names of main murderers from Auschwitz, were found so many years after the war," said Adam Cyra, a historian for the Auschwitz Memorial in an interview with the Associated Press.

"The documents contain the names of people who played a decisive role in murdering Jews at Auschwitz-Birkenau, who were in charge of selecting Jews, or of the use of Zyklon B," said Cyra. Zyklon B was the poisonous gas used to kill the Jews.

A food coupon for sugar bears a signature that is suspected to be from Joseph Mengele, the infamous *Schutzstaffel* (SS) doctor known for his inhumane experiments.

Mengele, one of the few high-level SS officials who were never captured, is reported to have drowned in 1979 in Brazil. Another document includes mention of Dr. Victor Capesius, who conducted other medical experiments and was known as one of the camp pharmacists.

None of the files are said to document the crimes against humanity conducted at the concentration camp.





# BOOK REVIEWS

## THEY WERE JUST PEOPLE

They Were Just People: Stories of Rescue in Poland During the Holocaust.

By Bill Tammus and Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn. University of Missouri Press: Columbia, Missouri, 2009. 236 pp. \$24.95 paperback.

REVIEWED BY DR. DIANE CYPKIN

This reviewer would like to begin by stating that the book, *They Were Just People: Stories of Rescue in Poland During the Holocaust*, by Bill Tammus and Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, is a fascinating and absorbing work. The conscientious research, the reader-friendly writing — they're all well done. However, this reviewer does have a "bone to pick" with the authors.

In the "Introduction" to their work the authors write that both the Jews that were rescued and those that rescued them were "just people." Yes . . . and no . . . Yes, surely the Jews, those that saved them, and everyone else in the world has two hands, two feet, a face, etc. (except if they've been injured somehow). But to say

that those non-Jews who put their own lives and, oftentimes, the lives of their own families on the line in order to save a Jew or Jews are "just people" . . .

I don't know about that!

Indeed, Felix Zandman, relating in this volume of how Anna Puchalska, a non-Jew, saved him, himself calls Anna "Extraordinary," asking "How a mother could have the courage, the guts, the inspiration to risk the life of her five children. Herself, maybe. But five children?" He still can't get over it! Moreover, in later years, when Felix was asked if he would have done what Anna did, he answered, not likely. And, surely, not if he had children to think of!

So, what did Anna do? Put simply, Felix, a frightened, young Jewish boy from *Grodno*, running from the Nazis, asked Anna to take him in for just one night.

Anna did that and more. She hid him for many months . . . Felix and four other Jews . . . all the while risking her life and the lives of her family members!

In another story related in this volume by Tammus and Rabbi Cukierkorn, we read about how Andre Nowacki and his mother were saved by the Kwiecinskis, another exceptional, non-Jewish family living in Warsaw. For two years Andre and his mother were with Mrs. Kwiecinski, an actress, and her three caring and compassionate daughters. And they grew so close that, to this day, Andre refers to the three

Kwiecinski daughters as his "sisters." Nor were Andre and his mother the only Jews this family helped. From time to time others joined them.

Interestingly, both Ms. Puchalska and the Kwiecinskis experienced "close calls." But

that never swayed them from determinedly doing what they felt was right. In fact, such is the case with all those non-Jews that rescued Jews presented in this book.

So, were these "just people"?

Then again, perhaps the authors refer to those who saved Jews as "just people" for another reason. Perhaps it's their way of showing us that we all have the capacity to do what they did. That we don't have to be nine feet tall. That we don't have to have any unique physical characteristics to take on what they took on . . . to save the life of a fellow human being. Yes, I can see that that's it . . . That's their reasoning . . . Still, not everyone would have done what they did, nor, to be brutally honest, would everyone do it today. Thus, those who saved Jews during World War II are very special people, rightly recognized for their "specialness" by Yad Vashem. They are surely the angels among us.

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



## BLOOMS OF DARKNESS

Blooms of Darkness: A Novel

By Aharon Appelfeld. Schocken Books, 2010. 288 pp. \$25.95 hardcover.

REVIEWED BY RABBI ISRAEL ZOBERMAN

Israeli survivor Aharon Appelfeld proves his uncanny talent to connect us time and again to his deep springs of early Holocaust exposure and those embedded memories which continue to flow unabated.

He was but seven years old when German troops entered his multi-cultured hometown of Czrnowitz, Romania, and his young world as well as that of so many others would be turned upside down, forever altered. *Blooms of Darkness* is Appelfeld's latest novel translated from the Hebrew. With autobiographical features, it centers on eleven-year-old Hugo, the only child of prosperous yet assimilated Jewish pharmacists who graciously lend support to all in financial need.

The father is taken away and disappears, while the mother and son succeed in escaping through the underground sewers from the ghetto that is in the process of being liquidated. The devoted and desperate mother, who fails to secure for her son as proper a hiding place as possible given the constricting circumstances, turns as last resort to Mariana, whom she had befriended and supported since elementary school. Mariana, whose hard and abusive life leads her to prostitution, is commendably and even heroically willing to accept Hugo, whose mom surprisingly and wisely bestows on her a substantial gift.

Hugo, assuming a Christian identity, learns to adjust to hiding in a brothel, his new and quite unusual and unsuitable home for a child who is protected nonetheless by his innocence, his smarts, and his mother's pre-parting warning not to be too inquisitive. The brothel visits of German soldiers will at war's end doom Mariana and the girls at her side, harshly regarded

as traitors and executed. The vulnerable and precocious Hugo grows attached to Mariana, and she too finds him to be a reassuring though worrisome presence in her own unstable and dangerous world.

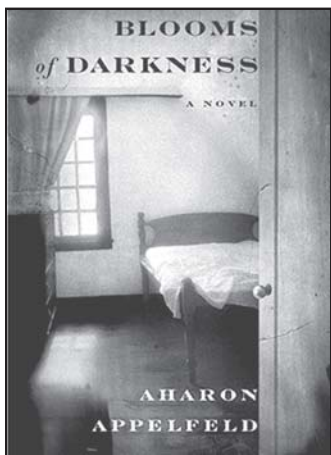
Thus the mutually supportive bonding leads to tender intimacy as well as a physical one for this unlikely couple. The unique bond, born of such an extraordinary scenario, comes to an abrupt end with the Russian victory over the Nazis. Once again Hugo is tried, undergoing a forced and traumatic separation from a most significant figure in his life, this time a mother-substitute.

As in Appelfeld's other works, the Christian faith while not necessarily church-practiced, remains a source of inspiring loving-kindness for simple folks such as Mariana. In contrast, the pre-war well-off and university-educated Jews, like Hugo's parents, have lost their traditional roots, though not the caring Jewish values and optimistic thrust.

The author's characteristic terse style, concealing more than revealing, is suited for the dreadful subject at hand in creating a suspenseful aura in which the unavoidable drama can unfold. The book's title connotes that even in the midst of the *Shoah's* darkness and denseness of evil, there are to be found consoling and promising flowers of rare beauty and humanity.

Such a flower is unassuming, child-like Mariana, whose embrace of a pursued Jewish child and his people, at a grave risk to herself, reassures us that both human evil and fear are not without the grace of the penetrating light of love and decency. She and other righteous gentiles remind us of an essential lesson, that the Jewish people are not alone in a universe that has often treated us as aliens.

*Rabbi Israel Zoberman is the spiritual leader of Congregation Beth Chaverim in Virginia Beach, Virginia.*



## HOLOCAUST BYSTANDERS

The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews 1939-1945.

By Saul Friedlander. HarperCollins, 2008. 896 pp. \$39.95, hardcover.

REVIEWED BY STEVEN WELCH

Since the publication in 1966 of his book *Pius XII and the Third Reich*, Saul Friedlander has been one of the internationally acknowledged experts on the Holocaust. In *The Years of Extermination* he has provided us with an up-to-date, authoritative account of the murderous Nazi assault against European Jewry during World War II.

As was the case with his previous widely acclaimed volume, *The Years of Persecution 1933-1939*, published in 1997, this is a conventional, non-theoretical work of synthesis aimed at a broad audience. The narrative is linear and the organization strictly chronological. Each of the 10 chapters is given a title that simply indicates the time period covered, such as "December 1941-July 1942". These 10 chapters are

in turn grouped into three major parts: Terror (autumn 1939 to summer 1941); Mass Murder (summer 1941 to summer 1942); and *Shoah* (summer 1942 to spring 1945).

Any historian dealing with the Holocaust faces the daunting task of organizing a vast amount of information about a complex set of interrelated episodes that unfolded across an entire continent. Friedlander has chosen to use the familiar triad of perpetrators, bystanders and victims to structure his narrative.

While acknowledging the importance of analyzing Nazi policy-making, Friedlander is particularly concerned to move beyond a German-centered approach in order to provide what he terms a "more globally oriented inquiry" that allocates a central place

in the story to the experiences of the Jewish communities targeted by Hitler.

The juxtaposition of the high politics of the perpetrators with the individual histories of their Jewish victims represents the most innovative and distinctive aspect of Friedlander's approach.

In his examination of Nazi policy-making, Friedlander keeps the focus on Hitler and repeatedly stresses the centrality of the Fuhrer's fanatical anti-Semitic ideology in seeking to understand why and how the Holocaust occurred. For Friedlander, ideas are both important and primary. He rejects

explanations that stress the force of circumstances or that see the murder of European Jewry as a byproduct of a larger process of capitalist rationalization or modernizing social engineering.

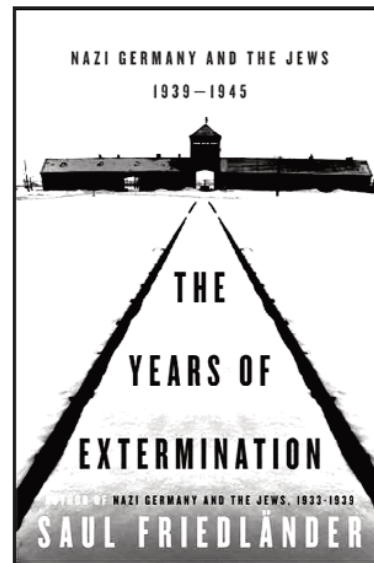
In Friedlander's view, Nazism is best understood as a form of political religion of which the major article of faith was anti-Semitism. "Hitler," he observes, "perceived his mission as a kind of crusade to redeem the world by eliminating the Jews."

In every chapter he provides extensive quotations from speeches and private declarations that leave no doubt about Hitler's obsessive and pathological hatred for Jews.

Hitler convinced himself — and a very substantial number of his followers — that "the Jew" was the driving force behind both Bolshevism and capitalism. Stalin and Roosevelt, he insisted, were nothing but the latest frontmen for an ancient and ongoing global Jewish conspiracy aimed at destroying the Aryan race. This irrational and absurd world view provided the justification for the genocidal program that began to take concrete shape over the course of 1941.

While Friedlander stresses the importance of Hitler's ideology as a crucial factor

(Continued on page 14)





# NAZI DEATH CAMP STORIES UNFOLD ON NEW USF SITE

BY LINDSAY PETERSON,  
THE TAMPA TRIBUNE

Leonard Lubin got used to seeing bodies in the final days of World War II. The images that stuck in his mind were of the living – half out of their minds, running, some crawling like animals, from a concentration camp in Austria.

Lubin, a military veteran from St. Petersburg, told his story to Michael Hirsh, who interviewed nearly 150 military men and women for a new book, *The Liberators: America's Witnesses to the Holocaust*.

Hirsh has donated his interview recordings to the University of South Florida.

Lubin was 19 when he and the other members of the 71st Infantry Division came upon the labor camp in a town called *Wels*. As they arrived, prisoners were pouring out of an open gate. Unsure about who these soldiers were, "they were running from us like crazy in a panic," Lubin told Hirsh.

One man caught Lubin's eye. Starving like the rest, he had found an empty tomato can, its top still partly attached and jagged all around from the way it had been opened.

"He had it with both of his hands jammed up against his face, trying to get his tongue into it to lick the contents, and lick the top lid and sides of the top lid. Blood was pouring down his face, and he was acting totally insane," Lubin said.

"So in my nightmares, that's what I see. And to me that's what the Holocaust was.

It wasn't death; it was torment of the kind that can reduce a human being to sub-animal status, to be willing to lacerate himself and cut himself to get that slight bit of nourishment."

Lubin, 83, died in April. His 49-page interview, in print and audio form, is now part of the USF Libraries Holocaust and Genocide Studies Center. It's one of the dozens that Hirsh completed as research for his book.

The book tells the stories of the GIs who happened upon the concentration camps scattered across Germany and Austria, where millions of men, women, and children were held as slave laborers until they were killed or died from disease or starvation.

The soldiers were in their late teens and early 20s and what they experienced never left them. Forrest Robinson was so traumatized by the masses of dead bodies at *Nordhausen* he lost his memory for two weeks.

Albert Adams described finding the ovens at *Mauthausen* still hot. One of the prisoners gave him a tour of the camp. "He showed me where they tortured them,

where they would hang them, hang them up and beat them."

Adams also watched prisoners beat to death a "kapo," another prisoner who had cooperated with the guards. After the liberations, the soldiers shot SS officers with no second thoughts.

Now in their 80s and 90s, the men were sometimes fuzzy on exact



U.S. troops execute *Dachau* guards on liberation day.

dates and the sequence of events, Hirsh said. But their memories of specific events, the sights and especially the smells, were as clear as if they'd happened the day before.

"One thing that surprised me was the number of guys who still suffer from what we now know as PTSD. They still can't get these visions out of their heads," Hirsh said.

Many had never told their closest relatives what they'd seen.

Hirsh was surprised no one had ever collected these stories for a nonfiction book. The story of the Holocaust has been told, Hirsh said, but never through the eyes of the GIs who found the survivors after the prison guards abandoned their posts.

"Who would have thought there were any untold Holocaust stories?"

Hirsh is a Vietnam veteran, screenwriter and documentary producer who donated several of his scripts to USF a few years ago. Last year, as he was starting to write *Liberators*, he was talking to his USF library contact, Mark Greenberg, and mentioned he had the transcripts of his interviews.

"I could feel the phone start to vibrate," he said.

USF had just opened its Holocaust and Genocide Studies Center, and Greenberg was the director.

The university will launch a new Web page: the Concentration Camp Liberators Oral History Project. Of nearly 150 interviews by Hirsh, 31 are available there now and the rest soon will be.

"I'm trying to fill a hole in history that everyone thought had been completely written," says Hirsh.

"The problem is that the hole needed to have been filled in 20 years ago. And if I'd waited any longer, there would have been no way to fill it."

## HEIRS SOUGHT FOR HOLOCAUST FORTUNES

BY ANNE BARKER, ABC NEWS

In recent years European banks have begun paying millions of dollars to the families of Holocaust victims whose assets were dormant in bank coffers after the war.

But one country where banks are still fighting claims for restitution is Israel.

Thousands of European Jews opened accounts in the Holy Land before or during the war. They have gone but their wealth lives on, in the banks.

Now, a group in Israel is embarking on a worldwide search for the rightful heirs.

David Hillinger's grandparents were gassed in Auschwitz in World War II.

But in 1940 before they died, his grandfather deposited 1,400 English pounds in the Anglo Palestine Bank in what is now Israel.

Like so many European Jews, they hoped the money would assist their escape from persecution after the war.

"He was afraid of the Germans, so he was thinking like other people also, 'If I send money in Palestine, perhaps they send me a visa and I can live in Palestine, yes?'" Mr. Hillinger said.

After the war the Anglo Palestine and other banks still held the deposits of thousands of Jews who had died in the Holocaust.

David Hillinger's family had the documents for his grandfather's account, which he says is now worth about half a million shekels.

But Leumi Bank, which took over from Anglo Palestine, said the account did not exist and refused to pay.

"I was angry because it is Israeli banks stole Israeli money from people who died in the *Shoah*," he said.

David Hillinger is one of maybe hundreds of thousands of heirs of Holocaust victims who deposited money in what are now Israeli banks.

Many European Jews even bought property in Palestine before the war, in the hope they would eventually live in the Holy Land.

But six decades on, much of the money is still locked away and land and houses are still vacant.

Elinor Kroitoru works for the Company for Location and Restitution of Holocaust Victims' Assets, which has taken up the fight with the Israeli banks.

"We have a few hundred plots of land and they sum up to quite a nice amount of millions of Israeli shekels," she said.

Two of the banks recently settled out of court but of the other three, she claims Leumi still owes about 300 million shekels (\$90 million).

"We know about 10,000 accounts that we're speaking of, but some of the accounts were given back to the heirs after the war," she said.

"So I think it's about around 7,000 accounts that we're talking about today."

Now the company is about to begin a worldwide search for the relatives of Holocaust victims who invested in Palestine before they died.

And Ms. Kroitoru suspects most have no idea they are the heirs to a small fortune or even property.

"Many people didn't even know that even their father bought a plot of land in Palestine," she said.

Leumi Bank says it handed most of the money in the accounts to British authorities after the war, and at most would only be liable for the interest accrued.

And recently it paid 20 million shekels – as a goodwill gesture – to the company representing the heirs.

In the meantime, it has agreed to enter an arbitration process to resolve the claims.

## WEST GERMAN SPY AGENCY EMPLOYED ABOUT 200 FORMER NAZIS

The German spy service has admitted that it employed about 200 former Nazi criminals for at least 15 years after the end of the Second World War.

Some had been involved in massacres in Poland and Russia, others were Gestapo torturers; all found a berth in the West German intelligence service. The cases have been brought to light because the Federal German Intelligence Service (BND) is compiling a history of its espionage activities since 1956 – and so polishing up its image, in the manner of MI6.

There was never any attempt to hide the fact that the BND employed Nazis – it was set up in a hurry, with US help, to create spying networks against the Soviet Union – but it has always been vague about its war records.

Now the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper has been given access to files from the 1960s that detail how the BND tried, belatedly, to weed out suspected war criminals. Potted biographies of the agents, with lightly disguised names, have been published at [www.faz.net/bnd](http://www.faz.net/bnd).

According to the newspaper the BND was thrown into confusion by the discovery of two Soviet moles, Heinz Felfe and Johannes Clemens, in 1961. Felfe had previously been a member of the SS while Clemens had been nicknamed "The Tiger of Como" for his savage treatment of Italian dissidents during the war.

The head of the BND, Reinhard Gehlen – himself a former intelligence officer in the *Wehrmacht* – decided that a criminal war record could make his agents a security risk, giving Moscow blackmail material. The old Nazis had served their purpose, providing agent networks and inside knowledge of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Now they had to be screened.

Gehlen, one of the legendary Cold War spymasters, assigned a 32-year-old mole-

hunter, Hans-Henning Crome, to the task. In 1963 Mr Crome, now a pensioner, set up a team called Unit 85, which established itself in the attic of Gehlen's villa on the BND compound. Co-operating with Nazi-hunters in *Ludwigsburg*, they started to work through the records of the agency's 2,450 employees.

Many had made only rudimentary attempts to cover their tracks. A certain Kurt W, formerly of the Gestapo in *Koblenz*, for example, had claimed to be a passport control officer in *Sajmiste*, near Belgrade. In fact, *Sajmiste* was the site of a concentration camp in which thousands of Jews were detained and murdered. Kurt W. – a promising officer in the BND – was thought to have been involved in the killings.

Georg W had been a young officer in the *Gestapo*, and joined an *Einsatzkommando* – in essence a killing squad – that murdered the Polish intelligentsia after the German invasion. His unit killed 1,700 Poles, including women and children, in a single day in a wood outside *Palmiry*. By the end of the war, he was hunting down Jews and communists in hiding in *Kassel*. Then he joined the BND and rose through the ranks. He had plenty of opportunities to bump into old comrades in the canteen – Helmut S, for example, whose SS unit was deemed responsible for the slaughter of 24,000 people, most of them Jews, in the Soviet Union.

Gehlen recorded his contacts and reports from the war and stored the microfilms in water-tight barrels in various sites in the Austrian Alps; he later traded them for his freedom. One of his nuggets of information was that several members of the American Office of Strategic Services – the precursor to the CIA – had been secret members of the US Communist Party.

But the BND was a spy service without a real tradition, and even after the sacking of the Nazis and Gehlen's retirement in 1968, it was plagued by moles.



# SURVIVORS' CORNER

## SURVIVAL TALES TOLD IN SNAPSHOTS: CZECH JEWS ENDURING THE HOLOCAUST

BY JOSEPH BERGER,  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

We have seen these images before, wizened men and women recalling unspeakable events that occurred when they were teenagers, sometimes tartly mocking their own cluelessness.

In a series of four documentaries about the little-known ordeals of Czech Jews during World War II, for example, Anna Kraus Bauer looks back at her train journey to an Estonian labor camp. "I remember I kept looking at the moon, telling myself it is shining here, and it is shining at home too — the very same one," she says. "So maybe things won't be so bad."

But what makes *Forgotten Transports* stand out from the multitude of Holocaust documentaries is that its director, Lukas Pribyl, did more than track down survivors or burrow through film archives and deportation records.

Over 10 years and visits to 30 countries, he hunted down photographs of SS camp commanders and snapshots taken by local residents and workers who might have encountered inmates, sometimes trading bottles of vodka for the artifacts. The impression conveyed is that a photographer was along for the nightmare ride of the Czech Jews.

When Mrs. Bauer and friends who managed to stay together through the war speak of Aleksander Laak, their SS commander, there he is in his fearsome ramrod authority, and, at the film's end, there he is 15 years later in Canada, looking plump and content, surrounded by the kinds of relatives he never let his victims keep.

(When his crimes were revealed in 1960, he hanged himself.)

And when Jews at *Salaspils*, a Latvian camp, recall an Ernst Ballon who escaped and the retributive hanging that followed, there are photographs of Ballon; the SS commander, Otto Teckemeier, who ordered the hanging; the Jewish block elder,

Siegfried Kaufmann, who chose the scapegoat; and *Salaspils* inmates watching a hanging.

"Behind every picture there is several hundred phone calls," Mr. Pribyl, a 36-year-old Czech Jewish historian who studied at Brandeis and Columbia, said in a telephone interview from Prague. "I decided everything people say will be docu-

vived by naïve denial. Children in the Riga ghetto played soccer, walked to school past bodies strung from gallows, and later, in *Kaiserwald*, heard their parents make futile plans to hide them under barracks floorboards.

In each film well-dressed survivors sit in comfortable living rooms calmly recollecting without a narrator's intrusion. Mr. Pribyl

other up, sometimes dividing a caged piece of bread.

"We tried to keep each other's head above water," one of them, Hana Fuchs-Klenk, said. "We were willing to give everything up if we could help somebody else or that she needed it more."

The films show heaps of fly-covered corpses and naked, frightened women waiting to be shot in a trench. But it also captures eruptions of human quirkiness — sometimes generous, sometimes cruel — that bring the Holocaust down to an earthly level.

Gisela Danziger Herzl recalls how she spotted the suit of her husband, Karel, on another man and "finally knew what I thought was going on." In the *Kivioli* camp, Mrs. Herzl was about to be shot when the German commandant interceded.

"Gisela, make this chicken for me — it tastes like my mother used to make it," Mrs. Herzl recalled his saying. "So the chicken saved my life."

One SS officer, Heinz Droshin, pulled off his insignia and fled the camp with a beautiful Jewish girl, Inge Sylten. Photographs of both are shown.

"It was like they forgot where they are completely," Mrs. Danziger said.

In Riga an SS officer catches a young woman hiding red wool among clothes she was sorting for shipment to Germany and shoots not only her but also every fourth woman in her group. But at *Kaiserwald* in Latvia, another SS officer, after a trifling bribe, looks the other way while men dig a tunnel so women from the adjoining camp can sneak under the fence and spend the night.

The survivors sometimes chuckle as they look back in disbelief. Mr. Pribyl said he felt that survivors had a sense of humor and an optimistic outlook in common. But ultimately, Mr. Pribyl said, his research proved that "the only recipe for survival is to have a lot of good luck."



Deported women as conscripted laborers. Documented with authentic pictures and footage from that time and place.

Together the films trace the experiences of 76 of the 270 survivors among the thousands of Czech Jews deported, not to the familiar *Theresienstadt* ghetto or to Auschwitz, but to less-well-known camps like *Jagala* and *Kaiserwald*. Mr. Pribyl chose that approach because his grandfather was sent to an obscure camp.

The films weave several strands in an approach echoing the chapter structure of Joyce's *Ulysses*. Each film portrays different groups in different locations — single women in Estonia, men in Belarus, families in the Riga ghetto of Latvia, escapees from the *Lublin* region of Poland.

Each film also depicts a different mode of survival. The men from Belarus quickly grasped their fate and hatched ways to join partisan units. The Estonian women sur-

also avoided standard historical footage of events like Nazi parades.

"You won't see Hitler in my films," he said. "What I'm interested in is when you take a person from a relatively normal life and suddenly throw them into completely apocalyptic conditions — how does that person react?"

Working with a cameraman and the financial backing of relatives and others, he pestered subjects for years to talk or hand over photographs. In one visit to an SS officer's kin, he pressed the doorbell insistently.

"Go to the garage," he recalled an exasperated relative's snapping. "Grandpa's suitcase is there. Take it and leave us alone."

The film about Estonia shows how women who grew close on the transport to *Jagala* made sure to buck each

## GREAT ESCAPE

young Polish women who did housework and looked after the children. "I had a good youth," Sonya told me. "I was one of the privileged ones."

Sonya's parents, Abraham and Tamara, owned an appliance store. Abraham called his daughter Sonyaleh. Many of his customers, non-Jewish state officials, befriended him and called him Abramaleh, or Meme. When there was tension between the Jews and Poles of the town, they would often turn to Meme to mediate.

The children attended Jewish schools where they studied Hebrew, Torah, and Jewish history, as well as math, science, and literature. She went on to study to be a doctor and was accepted to medical school in *Bialystok*, to begin in the fall of 1939.

By September of that year *Novogrudek* was in danger of German invasion. The Polish authorities fled, knowing they would be overpowered. The Jews there believed the Russians would be more sympathetic rulers than the Germans, and so when Soviet sol-

diers marched into town on September 17, they were greeted with flowers and hugs.

The afternoon of June 24, 1941, Sonya was the only one at home on Pilsudski Street. As she passed the tall brick chimney in the center of the house, she heard a bomb fall. Then another. She stood frozen while the entire house collapsed in a heavy sigh of dust and boards. After the smoke settled, Sonya stood stunned next to the brick chimney.

The Germans had invaded *Novogrudek* and turned the Jewish neighborhoods to rubble. The shops in the marketplace, mostly Jewish-owned, were burnt and smashed, as were the Jewish libraries and schools. Of all the synagogues, only a few walls remained. There were 300 casualties, mostly Jewish.

It was bitterly cold six months later, on Saturday, December 6, when 6,500 Jews, half the town's population, were instructed to assemble at the courthouse yard. The Gorodinskys trudged toward the town center clutching pillows, boxes of photo-

graphs, and sacks of clothing. Soldiers locked the gates of the courthouse yard behind them.

For two days, the Jews neither slept nor ate. On December 8, Sonya's grandparents and little brother were sent to their deaths, while Sonya, her parents, and her remaining siblings were locked into the courthouse compound along with *Novogrudek's* remaining 1,500 Jews. It was a makeshift ghetto surrounded by barbed wire and armed guards. The people inside were craftsmen saved for their skills. Each morning the ghetto gates would open and tailors, shoemakers, metalworkers, carpenters, saddlers, and mechanics, along with their families, were ushered under gunpoint to their workshops to sew fur linings into boots, manufacture guns, or mend German army uniforms.

On May 7, 1943, there was another roundup in the courthouse square. SS guards swarmed around the exhausted

(Continued on page 12)

BY GILA LYONS, TABLET

I met Sonya Oshman at the world premiere of *A Partisan Returns: The Legacy of Two Sisters*, a documentary about the 1943 escape of 250 Jews, including Sonya, from a work camp in Poland through a 700-foot tunnel dug by hand.

Sonya's speech at the podium impressed on me her sheer will to survive, gratitude for surviving, and mission to share her story.

Several weeks after the film screening, I sat in Sonya Oshman's sunny living room at her assisted-living facility in New Jersey. At 86, she was small but sturdy, with feathery brown hair, round deep-set eyes, and thin eyebrows that arched upwards when she smiled.

In 1931, Sonya Gorodinsky was 9 years old, the eldest of four children, with a sister yet to be born. The family lived on Pilsudski Street, in a home next to Sonya's maternal grandparents, who employed two



# THE ARAB POSITION ON THE HOLOCAUST

BY SHLOMO AVINERI, HAARETZ

One sometimes encounters the Palestinian argument that there is a basic injustice in the fact that they appear to have to pay the price for Europe's crimes during the Holocaust. It's true, of course, that Nazi Germany and its allies, and not the Palestinians, are those guilty of perpetrating the Holocaust.

Nonetheless, any argument that links the establishment of the State of Israel exclusively to the Holocaust ignores the fact that modern Zionism preceded the annihilation of the Jews in World War II, even if the Holocaust clearly strengthened the claim for Jewish sovereignty.

Yet the Arab argument that places all responsibility on Europe is not completely correct. When the Arab revolt against British rule in Palestine broke out in 1936, its aim was to change the British position, which had supported Jewish immigration to Palestine since the Balfour Declaration. The revolt was also meant to hurt the Jewish community and discourage Jews who were planning to immigrate. The British, in time-honored colonial tradition, cruelly suppressed the revolt, assisted by the

Jewish community and helped by the British Mandatory government.

But in the winter of 1938-39, the British changed their policy after the government of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain realized that its appeasement of Hitler had failed. Britain began to prepare for a war against the Nazis, and as part of this it changed its Middle East policy. Britain reintroduced the draft, started massive production of tanks and aircraft, and developed the radar. In light of the need to insure the Empire's critical link to India via the Suez Canal, Britain feared that continued violent suppression of the Arab revolt in Palestine would push all Arabs in the region closer to Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. It consequently decided to move closer to the Arabs and away from the Jews and Zionism. As Colonial Secretary Malcolm MacDonald explained to the Zionist leadership, the change was prompted not by a British conviction that Arab claims were justified, but rather by realpolitik: There were more Arabs than Jews; the Jews would support Britain against the Nazis in any case, but the Arabs have the option of joining Nazi Germany.

The cruel paradox lies in the fact that appeasement of the Arabs started just as Britain relinquished its appeasement policy vis-à-vis Hitler and was preparing for war against Germany. This was the reason for

the 1939 White Paper, which drastically limited the right of Jews to buy land in Mandatory Palestine and placed a ceiling of 75,000 on Jewish immigration. The message to the Arabs was clear: The Jews would remain a minority in Palestine.

This policy did not completely achieve its goal; the Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, found his way to Berlin anyway. An anti-British and pro-Nazi rebellion erupted in Iraq, led by Rashid Ali. But as far as the Jews were concerned, the British continued to consistently apply the principles of the White Paper during the war. The gates were shut to legal Jewish immigration, the British navy fought illegal immigration, and ships seeking to save Jews from the Nazi occupation (such as the *Struma*) were returned to their port of origin; some of their passengers died at sea, others in the gas chambers.

Guilt for the Holocaust lies with Nazi Germany and its allies. But an untold number of Jews, perhaps as many as hundreds of thousands – including my grandparents from the Polish town of *Makow Podhalanski* – were not saved and did not reach Mandatory Palestine because of the position taken by the Arabs: they succeeded in shutting the country's gates during the darkest hour of the Jewish people.

## POLISH WOMAN'S JEWISH "SHOCK"

More than 27,000 Jews were killed at the *Sobibor* death camp, built by the Nazis in Poland. The BBC's Steve Rosenberg travelled to Poland to meet a woman who only recently discovered that she, herself, was Jewish and that her family had been killed in one such camp.

Bogomila always suspected that her mother had a secret.

"She always looked frightened," Bogomila tells me. "My husband used to say, 'Your mother is afraid of her own shadow.'"

Last summer, her 67-year-old mother Barbara finally revealed her secret. She is a Jewish child of the Holocaust. Suddenly, at the age of 37, Bogomila realized she was Jewish, too.

"I was in shock," Bogomila admits. "I didn't sleep at all that night. I couldn't eat for the next two weeks."

I'm sitting with Barbara and Bogomila in the Jewish community center in *Lublin*. Before World War II, more than 40,000 Jews lived in this city. The Holocaust changed everything.

"My whole family was killed by the Nazis," Barbara says.

"I survived because a Polish family agreed to hide me. When I was growing up I realized the Polish 'mother' couldn't be my real mother, she was too old. When I was 12 she told me the truth."

I ask Barbara why she had waited so many years before telling Bogomila and her other two daughters of their Jewish heritage.

"My husband is Catholic," Barbara says, "He didn't want the girls to know. His own family didn't like Jews. He didn't want the girls to have problems. I'd had problems when I was small. In school the other children used to make fun of me. They used to pull my curly hair to try to make it straight. I was made to feel different."

Today Jews in Poland continue to suffer abuse.

"I wouldn't call it anti-Semitism," says the President of the Union of Jewish Communities of Poland, Piotr Kadłcik. "It's more a broad dislike of Jews. What's worrying is a certain level of leniency of the prosecutor's office in relation to hate crimes, Nazi salutes and the vandalism of Jewish cemeteries."

Barbara admits that she never planned to reveal her secret. It was Bogomila's persistent questioning about the past that forced her to change her mind.

Her daughter had been bombarding her with questions about her ancestors, desperate to discover more about her family.

After the initial shock of discovering she was Jewish, Bogomila says she is "very happy" with her new identity. She has even signed up for a course of Jewish studies in *Lublin*.

She attends the small Sabbath meal here in the community center. And she recently visited the Nazi death camp *Sobibor*, where a quarter of a million Jews were murdered in the gas chambers.

I ask Bogomila if she has told her own children the news.

"I would like to tell them," she says, "but they are so small. Agatha is 10, Christopher is six and Julia is five."

"Are they really too young to be told?" I ask.

"If I tell them, then my oldest child, Agatha, will probably go and tell her other grandmother – my mother-in-law," Bogomila explains.

"And my mother-in-law doesn't like Jews. As for my husband's grandmother, she hates Jews."

# HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR FIGHTS APATHY

BY RAY FURLONG, BBC

Hedi Fried was never supposed to return home. Packed into a cattle truck in 1944, she was deported to Auschwitz with the other 17,000 Jews in *Sighet*, now *Sighetu Marmatiei* in Romania.

But like her town's most famous son, the Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel, she survived and has often returned to the town to bear witness to what happened with talks and lectures.

Now, aged 85, she's made an emotional final journey there.

The rain streams down as we draw up outside *Sighet's* Jewish cemetery.

"This is my pilgrimage, the last one," says Hedi, stepping over a large brown puddle.

"When I come to *Sighet* I remember my childhood stories, and I see the ghosts. When I walk the streets I see people coming and going. But they're not here any more, none of them."

There are rows of gravestones at odd angles in the grass, many engraved with the word *Auschwitz* and several names. Hedi's family gravestone contains, among others, her mother and father.

"They went up in smoke," she says, "but I had their names put here."

A prayer for the dead is recited, and Hedi shows me her grandmother's gravestone nearby. She died long before the Holocaust, when Hedi was a child.

"I remember how she always used to give me sweets," she says, recalling a bygone age when *Sighet* was a bustling Jewish city.

As we drive through potholed streets to our next stop, she points at the low-rise houses with crumbling 1920s facades.

"All of these were Jewish houses," she says, the only person in the town who can remember what it was like.

Her family moved into a new house in 1937. "I was delighted with it. I thought we had invented functionalist architecture!" she says, as we stand outside an elegant but decayed building.

"That was my window. I can see myself talking to my boyfriend," she says. But the

mood instantly darkens. "I can also remember leaving for the last time."

"This was the most modern house in town, the first with a water-closet. So the last thing I did here was to flush the toilet.

"I thought we'd come back soon. We didn't. My parents didn't come back. My sister and I survived just by chance."

After surviving Auschwitz, Hedi and her sister were moved to *Bergen-Belsen*, later liberated by the British. After the war they moved to Sweden, where Hedi worked as a psychologist.

She has also been a tireless campaigner to keep retelling the story of the Holocaust, travelling the world to give talks and lectures, first returning to *Sighet* in 1968.

"So many survivors found it impossible to talk about what happened. But for me it's actually therapy. Even now, coming here, I'm working through it."

"At first I thought I could never return to Auschwitz, but I did and since then my nightmares are not as strong. I still have them but I no longer wake up in a damp sweat."

But Hedi is also concerned that new generations are not learning the truth about the Holocaust.

"My aim to come to *Sighet* was that the children understand what their great-grandparents have done, because when I lived here as a child I was a 'damned Jewess,'" she says.

"They don't know what their grandparents have done: some have been perpetrators, a few rescuers, the majority bystanders. And that's what they have to learn: never, ever be a bystander."

At the Elie Wiesel museum in *Sighet*, schoolchildren perform a folk dance for Hedi. She gives a talk – but the event is disorganised.

While she sits behind a table, teenagers stand huddled in front of her looking embarrassed.

Others are outside in the corridor. They couldn't hear a word even if they were trying to – which they're not.

I ask one 17-year-old boy why he is here.

"I don't know why, we've been told to come," he says, laughing.

"What do you know about the Holocaust?" I ask.

"Nothing, we haven't done it at school yet."

A 15-year-old girl who was inside is a little more forthcoming. She says Hedi spoke about her childhood in *Sighet* and what happened to her family.

"Were you surprised?" I ask.



Hedi Fried.

"Yes," she replies.

"Have you ever heard what happened here in your town before?"

"No."

Monosyllabic answers are common to teenagers. But the local schools clearly did not see Hedi's visit as an opportunity to teach their pupils about this town's horrific recent history.

Of the 17,000 Jews who lived here before the war, there's hardly a trace – just a few families and a single surviving synagogue.

After the talk, Hedi joins in the folk dance, drawing on enviable reserves of energy for an 85-year-old.

But back at the hotel afterwards, she's clearly tired when asked about the lukewarm response that her testimony drew from the local youth.

"People don't want to talk about it, especially what happened in their own community. The bystanders are ashamed of it," she says.

"But tomorrow I am going to another school."



# 10<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL SPRING LUNCHEON OF THE CONTINUITY IN ACTION



**Eli Zborowski, Chairman of The American Society for Yad Vashem**

Dear Guests of Honor, Doris Gross and Yonina Gomberg; Luncheon Chairperson, Lili Stawski; our Guest Speaker, Prof. Joseph Kertes; dear friends:

On behalf of the American and International Societies for Yad Vashem, our Officers and Board, as well as Yad Vashem Jerusalem, it is my pleasure to welcome you all to our 10th Annual Spring Luncheon.

This afternoon's program is a celebration of continuity... The continuity of our work from generation to generation, and our ongoing efforts towards our future in preserving memory and commitment to education. Indeed, this year's Luncheon theme is "Continuity," and it is only befitting that our Guests of Honor should be Doris Gross, a Survivor, and Yonina Gomberg, the daughter of Cheryl and Fred Halpern and granddaughter of Gladys and Sam Halpern, Survivors.

Doris is a Holocaust Survivor and is deeply committed to the cause of Remembrance. She, together with her late husband Sam, was part of our organization since its inception and worked tirelessly on its behalf. Yonina, a very active member of our Young Leadership, is part of our Third Generation, and with her peers is committed to continue our important mission. Yonina and her peers are determined to carry the torch held by her grandparents, by Doris, and by the other members of our generation.

It gives us great *Nachat* to witness real CONTINUITY IN ACTION, the two Guests of Honor, Doris the Survivor and Yonina the grandchild of Survivors. Look around: the majority of guests are 2nd-and 3rd-generation, starting with the Luncheon Chairperson, Lili Stawski, a daughter of Survivors, as well as the presence of both Chairpersons of the Young Leadership Associates – Caroline Massel and Jeremy Halpern – both grandchildren of Survivors – the leaders of our torch-carriers. We consider one of the Societies' greatest achievements in assuring continuity by having you, our children and grandchildren, with us in our work on behalf of Remembrance, which is the mandate of Yad Vashem.

The important work of our two outstanding women Honorees, together with all of you, dear friends, enables us each day to commemorate and educate.

This year, we are honored to have with us Professor Joseph Kertes as our guest speaker. Last but not least, I would also like to acknowledge the efforts of Rachelle Grossman, our Event Coordinator, who together with the staff is responsible for the Luncheon arrangements.



Jean Gluck; Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem; and Fanya Gottesfeld Heller.



Stella Skura and Cheryl Lifshitz, benefactors.



**Lili Stawski, Luncheon Chairwoman**

On behalf of the entire Yad Vashem Committee, I am so happy to welcome you here today and thank you for your support. I am honored to serve as Chairperson of this year's Spring Luncheon.

Eli and Elizabeth Zborowski never cease to inspire me; their total devotion and dedication to Yad Vashem are utterly amazing and if not for their hard work, Yad Vashem would not be where it is today – so thank you!

Also, we are very grateful and fortunate to have Rachelle Grossman, who helped make today's event so special.

I very much appreciate and want to share my enthusiasm for the American Society for Yad Vashem. This year's theme is "Continuity" – and the best way to begin is at the beginning: going back to 1980, when one of the very first

meetings of Yad Vashem was held at the home of my parents Elli and Izzy Krakowski. It was my brother Harry Krakowski who offered to be the first supporter of Eli's vision – Yad Vashem.

Coming from a family of Survivors, both my immediate as well as my extended family, one grew up knowing how important it is that one does not forget – that we remember and honor the past. As one of my daughters, Ariella, quotes Elie Wiesel: "One person of integrity can make a difference."

In order for continuity to go on, we must all recognize how instrumental Yad Vashem is to all of us. As Elli and Izzy Krakowski, Survivors who passed on their stories and their values to my brother Harry, sister-in-law Andrea and onto the next generation, my dear daughters Ariella and Ilana Stawski, and Rachel, Sarah, Sophie, and Leah Krakowski, *L'Dor Va Dor*.

Thus it is with great pride and joy that I acknowledge this year's Yad Vashem's Honorees: Doris Gross, a Survivor, and Yonina Gomberg, a grandchild of Survivors Gladys and Sam Halpern, who is an outstanding lawyer and works so hard for her community.



Attendees of the 2010 Spring Luncheon.



Prof. Joseph Kertes, Guest Speaker, and Marilyn Rubenstein, benefactor.



# THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM

## TEACHING THE LESSONS OF HISTORY



**Doris Gross, Spring Luncheon Honoree**

Thank you, Lili, for your introduction, and thanks to your family and my daughter Carol and her family and my sister-in-law Fela Moncznik and all my guests who came here in support of the Society – a partner to Yad Vashem in its sacred work on behalf of Remembrance.

Seventy years ago I was a happy child nurtured by loving parents. Suddenly, however, my life turned upside down and the next five years pushed me through unspeakable horrors. I experienced life in the ghetto, was sent to forced labor and to concentration camp. My entire family perished except for my late brother Bernard and myself. And I will always remember the last words my father said to me: Don't always be the first, but don't also be the last.

My late husband, Sam, was equally dedicated to Remembrance and we were deeply involved with this organization from its inception.

I am honored to be this year's Spring Luncheon Honoree together with an active member of the young leadership, Yonina Gomberg. This is a real tribute to the success of our work where we all work together with our next generation, the younger people who dedicate their efforts to remembering the history of the Holocaust. I am grateful to G-d for having survived, for having married my beloved late husband, for having a beautiful family, for my children and grandchildren. After all the hardship I went through I consider working within the American Society towards helping Yad Vashem preserve the memory of the Six Million, a privilege and an obligation. Teaching the lessons of history to our children and their children for future generations to come is what we are about.

In closing I again wish to thank all of you for bestowing this honor on me.

## COMMITMENT TO REMEMBRANCE



**Yonina Gomberg, Spring Luncheon Honoree**

Thank you, Grandma, for that beautiful introduction. Congratulations to Mrs. Doris Gross, my fellow Honoree. Your story of survival and triumph is an inspiration to us all. It is truly a privilege to share this day with you.

And thank you, Eli and Elizabeth Zborowski, for all that you did for the American Society for Yad Vashem; Lili Stawski, our Luncheon Chairwoman, and Rachelle Grossman, for your efforts to make a beautiful and successful luncheon; and dear friends.

I am so honored to be here today representing the third generation.

My parents, Fred and Cheryl Halpern, and my grandparents, Rabbi Avrum and Estelle Feldman and Sam and Gladys Halpern, always demonstrated the importance of family, yiddishkeit, tzedakah and Israel. I am blessed to have such exemplary role models.

It was my grandparents, Sam and Gladys, who taught me the importance of keeping alive the memory of the Holocaust. Many of you know of their experiences during the *Shoah*. Grandpa Sam and his brother, z'l, Arie were in the *Kamionka* labor camp. After escaping from the camp the night before the camp was liquidated, they went into hiding in the home of the Gorniak family. Grandma Gladys, her mother, and two aunts spent 18 months hiding in the home of Marian Halicki. My family owes its existence to these righteous gentiles.

What we can't possibly know, however, are the stories of so many others who were murdered. In anticipation of today's luncheon I searched through Yad Vashem's central database of *Shoah* victims names. I came across many women named Janina, or Jonina with a "J," and a few whose names were spelled exactly like mine, with a "Y." Yoninas who were victims of the *Shoah*. Reading the testimony dedicated to their memory affected me profoundly.

Therefore, I gratefully accept this honor in the name of these Yoninas:

Yonina Figer was born in *Podzelva*, Lithuania to Yekhezkel and Rivka. She remained in *Podzelva*, where she perished in the Holocaust.

Yonina Gilersonaite was born in *Kowno* in 1936 to Solomon and Frida Kaplan. She was a child, only 5 years old when she perished in 1941.

Yonina Grynbaum was born in Poland. Married to Avraham, she spent her days before the war as a housewife in Warsaw. During the war she was in the Warsaw Ghetto, where she perished.

Yonina Kretinger was born in *Vilkaviskis* in 1905 to Bentzion and Feiga. She never had an opportunity to marry and start her own family...she perished in 1942 in the *Shoah*.

Reading testimonies such as these affirmed for me why Yad Vashem is a unique institution whose mission is indispensable when it comes to remembrance, documentation, research, and education.

Many who are not as close to Yad Vashem or the *Shoah* as we, speak of the Holocaust and think of the collective six million – an incomprehensible number. But Yad Vashem focuses us on six million individuals. The Pages of Testimony project, which is the effort to collect the names as well as any anecdotal information about these six million Jews who were lost to us, is just one of many ways that Yad Vashem commemorates the murdered and documents the atrocities of the Holocaust.

I salute Mrs. Gross and all of you here today for your incredible work on behalf of the American Society for Yad Vashem and Yad Vashem Jerusalem. As a member of the Young Leadership Associates, I pledge to my fellow honoree, Doris Gross, to Eli Zborowski, to my dear grandparents and parents, and to all of you here today, that the third-generation is devoted to continuing your work. Indeed today's theme, "Continuity," epitomizes this commitment to remembrance.

I want to thank you all for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here today and for so generously supporting Yad Vashem. Personally, I feel humbled and truly blessed, that, *baruch Hashem*, I can stand here today, a grandchild of survivors.

I, also, thank my husband Eric, and our sons Liam and Tobias, for being so supportive, inspiring and loving. Once again, thank you for this honor.



Ilana Stawski; Lili Stawski, 2010 Spring Luncheon Chair; Regina Petersiel; Elli and Israel Krakowski.



Fred Halpern, Sam Halpern and Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem.



Nicole Pines Lieberman, Robyn Gelberg and Danielle Schwartz.





# REPORT FROM YAD VASHEM

## THE AUSCHWITZ ALBUM: THE STORY OF A TRANSPORT – ILONA BERK'S STORY

Jim Berk, a sports journalist and guide-training at the Holocaust Memorial Center Zekelman Family Campus in Farmington Hills, Michigan, was attending a viewing of the exhibit "The Auschwitz Album: Story of a Transport," when he came upon a startling discovery that caused his breath to catch in his throat and his heart to skip a beat. He recognized his mother — Ilona Dorenter Berk — in one of the photos with a group of women, upon arrival from the train to the notorious death camp, Auschwitz.

The American Society for Yad Vashem brought this exhibit from Yad Vashem in Jerusalem four years ago, when it had its premiere at the United Nations in New York City. Since then, the exhibit has travelled throughout the United States to several cities, colleges and museums in Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, and now Detroit.

The Auschwitz Album is the only surviving visual evidence of the process of mass murder at Auschwitz-Birkenau. It is a unique document and was donated to Yad Vashem by Lilly Jacob-Zelmanovic Meier in 1994.

The photos were taken at the end of May or beginning of June 1944, either by Ernst Hofmann or by Bernhard Walter, two SS men whose task was to take ID photos and fingerprints of the inmates (not of the Jews who were sent directly to the gas chambers). The photos show the arrival of Hungarian Jews from Carpatho-Ruthenia. Many of them came from the *Berehovo*

ghetto, which itself was a collecting point for Jews from several other small towns.

The purpose of the album is unclear. It was not intended for propaganda purposes, nor does it have any obvious per-



Ilona and Sam Berk, wedding day, 1953.

sonal use. One assumes that it was prepared as an official reference for a higher authority, as were photo albums from other concentration camps. The photos in the Auschwitz Album show the entire process except for the killing itself.

Ilona Berk (nee Dorenter) was one of the fortunate who survived. In 1944 she was a young Jewish woman of 25, liv-

ing in the *Berehovo* ghetto in Hungary during the darkest days of Nazi-occupied Europe. She was born in 1918 in the town of *Uzhhorod*, (*Ungvar* in Hungarian), which was in Czechoslovakia prior to Hungary's annexation. In May 1944, she was deported from the ghetto to the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in this infamous transport, whose ultimate purpose was the total extermination of Hungarian Jewry by the Nazis. Ilona, the second of eight children, with their mother, was deported and put onto this transport. She was one of the lucky ones — upon arrival at the camp, during the horrific selection process by the SS, she was selected for forced labor, and she survived. Thousands of others were not as lucky.

Today Ilona is 91 years old, and lives in Lincoln, Nebraska. While telling her story, at many moments she became very emotional. Understandably, these are very difficult and painful memories to recall. Ilona remembers the trip on the transport took three or four days, and many people died on the way, before reaching Auschwitz. She believes that her skills as a seamstress, and her ability to speak German, helped her to survive that terrible time. She lost a sister and two brothers at Auschwitz.

After the war ended, Ilona lived in Sweden for a few years, and eventually made her way to the United States. In 1952, at age 33, she visited Miami Beach for a holiday, where she met her husband, who was from Grand Rapids, Michigan. They married in 1953 and settled in Lincoln, Nebraska; their son Jim was born in 1954. Jim lives in West Bloomfield, Michigan, and is active in the cause for Holocaust remembrance.

Today, the numbers of *Shoah* survivors like Ilona Berk are quickly shrinking. Amid a world in which Holocaust denial is resurgent — their spirit cries to each of us who remains: "Remember."

We need your help to make sure that the names and stories of the victims are not forgotten.

The American Society for Yad Vashem supports the work of Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the world's pre-eminent Holocaust memorial, museum, and research center.

Your support will help us to continue our work in the field of Holocaust research, remembrance, and commemoration. Please be generous with a gift today and please remember Yad Vashem in your will.

**To support the work of Yad Vashem with a gift today, please contact Madelyn Cohen at 212-220-4304 or mcohen@yadvashemusa.org.**

## VIRTUES OF MEMORY: SIX DECADES OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS' CREATIVITY

BY YEHUDIT SHENDAR

The yoke of memory is borne by Holocaust survivors day in and day out. Over the years, they have unburdened themselves piece by piece: some by writing, some by the spoken word and some by means of the visual image, in art and in film. Each one has found a personal path to share his or her experience with immediate family, fellow Jews and others, wherever they may be.

The unique commandment they were given — not on the peak of Mount Sinai, but in the depths of the abyss — is that of telling their story, as stated in Exodus 13:8: "On that day you shall tell your child" — the sons and daughters of the human race.

The testimonies of the survivors first entered the public discourse during the 1961 Eichmann trial in Jerusalem. That is when we learned to listen to their personal accounts. The annals of each survivor became interwoven with each other in a dense fabric of warp and weft — and the texture of the Holocaust's collective memory slowly took shape. Since then, a supreme effort has been made to gather testimonies in every place where survivors live, turning each into a witness in the trial of history.

However, the word in whatever form — in writing, in speech — is not the only instrument to guarantee memory. What happens to those for whom the word is not the appropriate vehicle for expression, who com-

studied in a manner that examines not each individual work, but rather how the artist remembers by means of expression, and thus bequeaths the legacy of remembrance to others.



Adolf Frankl (b. 1903, Austria-Hungary, d. 1983, Austria), *Distribution of Food in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp*.

mitted their memories to canvas, or by chiseling or carving in wood — a language whose syntax is visual?

Since its inception, hundreds of artworks, the fruits of paintbrush and chisel, have been collected at Yad Vashem in nothing less than a wondrous fashion. This is a tremendous body of visual testimony, that together with the printed and uttered words give a voice to the survivors. However, this corpus has yet to be comprehensively

The new Yad Vashem exhibition "Virtues of Memory: Six Decades of Holocaust Survivors' Creativity" opens up this body of artistic expression, enabling us, those who were not there, to touch a reality through visual aspects. It presents a language of powerful signs and symbols, stemming from the directness of the expression, and the urgent need of the one who remembers to delve into the depths of memory, bleak and unadorned. It is not an attempt to recreate reality, but rather reality itself, both external and internal, tinted with the hues of personal experience.

The exhibition is arranged by thematic or visual categories of the works. Survivor testimonies, echoing the impetus of their creative expression, complement the exhibition's presentation.

These "virtues of memory" thus take their shape and form in a multi-faceted visual puzzle. Each work is the voice of an individual; combined they form a multi-voiced choir, powerfully reverberating throughout the exhibition space.

## IDENTIFYING NOTES FROM THE WARSAW GHETTO

BY DR. LEA PRAIS

The end of the war saw the gathering of an astounding yield of personal documentation written by Jews under Nazi occupation.

Entire archives, alongside chronicles of events, personal diaries, notes, and witness reports, all created under the most unusual circumstances, were revealed and, as time passed, became an essential basis for Holocaust study. In addition to their historic importance and literary value, the discovery of these writings was itself intriguing: the fascinating, emotional tales of their endurance when often the authors themselves did not survive.

Astonished by the impact of these manuscripts, historians and archivists joined together to publish them. Their sense of obligation was fueled in part by their understanding that they were fulfilling the moral legacy and wishes of the writers. The last line in the diary kept by Chaim Aharon Kaplan in the Warsaw ghetto, written on the evening of 4 August 1942 at the height of the hunt to deport him to *Treblinka*, reads: "If my end is nigh — what will become of my diary?"

Some of the writings were published as early as the late 1940s. The Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw, where some Polish Jewish historians who had survived gathered, had one of the most valuable documentary treasures — the underground archive known as *Oyneg Shabbes* (*Oneg Shabbat*) — and, in its periodicals, pub-

(Continued on page 15)



# DEATH ON THE BALTIC

BY JEREMY ELIAS,  
THE JERUSALEM POST

On May 3, 1945, thousands of prisoners were loaded onto ships in Lübeck Bay, off the northern coast of Germany. They had endured years of Nazi brutality and were within hours of Allied liberation and the end of a seemingly endless hell. Before that hour could arrive, more than 7,000 would be dead in one of the greatest maritime disasters of World War II. My grandfather was there.

I've always known my grandfather's story. I can't remember a particular time when he first sat me down from beginning to end. So it's as if I was born with a vague understanding of what happened, and the rest of my life was for filling in the details.

In 1941, at 15, Henry Bawnik was rounded up on the streets of the Lodz ghetto. He would be leaving his family, and the one place he knew. Scared and anxious, he looked around the group of unfortunate Jews. Through the panicked men, and their barking tormentors, he saw David, an older neighborhood friend he'd always looked up to. David was the one familiar face in the newly assembled group. Thank God for David, a protector, my grandfather thought.

David was beaten to death within hours.

This was an unfamiliar world, and it wouldn't be a kind one.

From his year in the Lodz ghetto, and some four years in the camps, there are countless stories. They are painted with senseless violence and inconceivable brutality. They are the kind that come from any victim who bears witness to the madness of men and lives with the burden and courage to speak about it.

But the most prominent theme in all my grandfather's accounts isn't murder and destruction – it is luck. And never was luck more imminent than that afternoon on the Baltic 65 years ago.

In January 1945, as the Allies drew closer, my grandfather left *Fürstengrube*, a subcamp of Auschwitz, for *Gleiwitz*. It was the first leg of a death march north, continuously missing liberation by days and sometimes hours. In *Gleiwitz*, they boarded cattle cars. With the lack of food, space and sanitation, the cars became boxes for rotting corpses, starved and diseased. My grandfather and other prisoners began using these corpses as furniture – a couch, a mattress. Death had been a daily occurrence. It wasn't a tragedy but an accepted inevitability. One day he too would be a couch or a mattress, and that was justification enough.

After 10 days in the cattle cars, they arrived at *Dora-Mittelbau*. Each living prisoner dragged a dead body to a growing pile of skeletons. The indistinguishable men and women, with sunken cheeks and hollowed eyes, were thrown upon each other, a tangled mountain of death. The bodies were burned that night.

In April, the Allies again drew closer, and once again my grandfather was forced to flee an approaching liberation. The Germans were running out of land. Soon there would be repercussions, and a light would shine on years of horror. For that they were not prepared, so they continued to march.

Max Schmidt, a young SS officer and camp commander, loaded my grandfather and the 540 other prisoners onto barges up the Elbe River. With no camps left, he would take them to his family's estate in *Ahrensböck*, Germany.

The area of northern Germany was becoming livelier. British bombers filled the

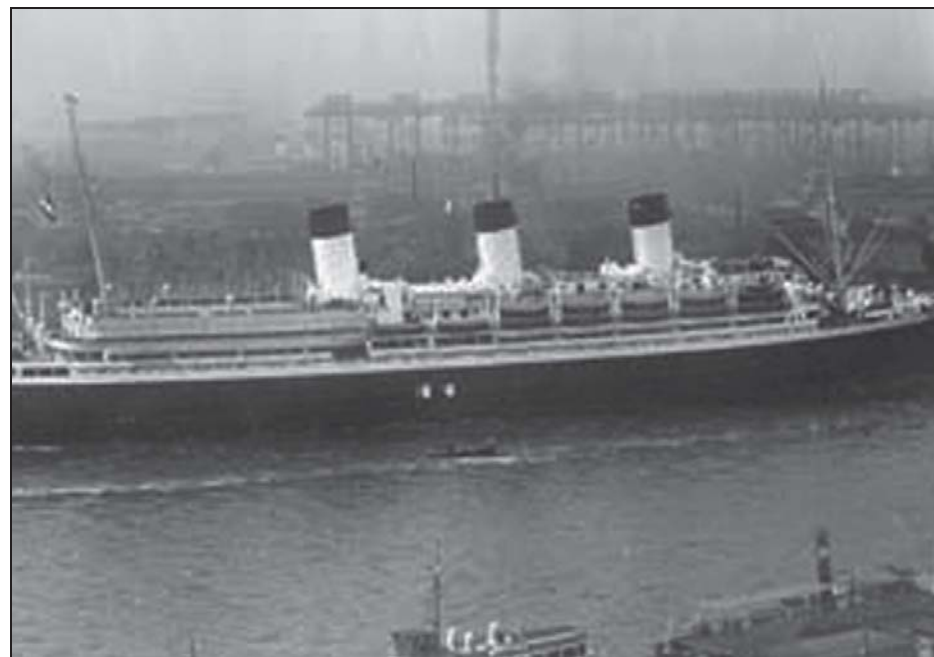
sky as the prisoners lined up to be counted. Schmidt leaned back with his hands on his hips, slowly dipping his head to the sky. "*Ich sehe schwarz*," he quietly said. "I see black."

But even Schmidt could not foresee the darkness to come.

The night of May 2, the prisoners were awakened from their sleep to once again march. It wouldn't be a long march, just to the coast. They'd finally run out of land. My grandfather and the 500 others were marching to the sea.

Then they reached *Neustadt*. The *Cap Arcona* sat idle, three kilometers off the sandy beaches of the harbor. The water was filled with U-boats, barges and ships. The prisoners boarded a group of smaller boats waiting to take them to the *Cap Arcona*. They filed on in reverse alphabetical order, starting with "Z."

In its prime, the *Cap Arcona* was a beautiful ship, making voyages from South America to Germany for the rich



and famous. Coincidentally enough, it was used in a Joseph Goebbels propaganda film based on the *Titanic*, where the German protagonist prophetically warns of imminent danger ahead – proving his superior intellect.

Now, the motor was completely shot. The ship served as a floating cell for the tortured. There was no more land for their labors, no more camps for their deaths. They resorted to the sea, and a ship just fit to stay afloat.

The small rafts, loaded with prisoners, inched toward the 213-meter cruise liner. My grandfather wondered where they'd be going. Another camp, he supposed. It had always been that way. Wake up, move and work to live one more day. But of course even that was not certain. The only thing he did know was that the Nazis weren't going to tell him much, and if they did, it meant nothing.

When the rafts got to the base of the *Cap Arcona*, the captain yelled down that no more prisoners would fit. They'd been loading the ship for more than a week. In the hull, thousands were packed like sardines – no window, no air, just the swaying motion against the swell of the Baltic.

The SS officer told the captain that loading the prisoners was an order, not an option. My grandfather was in one of the last groups to climb on board. He stood in the back of the boat, with hundreds of other striped prisoners roaming the deck. Below them were levels of cramped men and women, leaning on each other, fighting for air, fighting for everything. Their decrepit

bodies filled the once extravagant banquet halls and living quarters.

Henry wasn't there more than two hours before the bombing started. British Typhoons were roaring through the sky, blasting everything in their path. It was a show, an extravagant display of power and force, fire and destruction. They'd hit the U-boats. My grandfather had a front-row seat, the air shaking from the blasts and the cold water of the Baltic exploding with each hit. The prisoners on deck were cheering. The pilots were ordered to bomb everything in their path, and they'd been doing so with precision and effectiveness.

At 2:30 p.m., however, their paths crossed with the *Cap Arcona*. The first Typhoon flew overhead, only about 1,000 feet up. As it dove for the great ship, the bomb ripped the far end of the deck open. Men and women fell to the floor as the flames erupted. Prisoners screamed as the scene turned to utter chaos. They tried to put the flames out, but the fire hoses

scared. This was it. After fighting for each day for the last five years, it would all end in a minute or two. The exhaustion would be over, the struggle would finally end. The ship was almost completely capsized, the hull sticking up to the sky. My grandfather hit the cold water, the rope no longer serving its purpose. As he prepared for the inevitable, a voice rang through the air, "Henry, Henry!" Like an angel from heaven, it was Peter Abramowitz, one of his closest friends from the camps. He was walking along the bottom of the ship, his clothing still on. He leaned over the side. "I'll bring you up," he said.

Peter carried my grandfather on his back, the base of the ship too hot for bare skin. They walked to the partially submerged section, able to sit down. They looked around and counted – 300 people, naked. In a matter of hours, their friends, who had been in the camps with them for at least three years, were at the bottom of the Baltic.

On shore, the British had already seized control. They sent out Germans from the U-boat school to pick up the 350 survivors of the 4,500 on board. Three small tug boats pulled up to the *Cap Arcona*. "What camp are we going to now?" my grandfather instinctively asked.

"No camp," the German replied. "The war is over."

The frequent question is why the British would bomb the *Cap Arcona* and the two other civilian ships. The Allies were concerned that high-ranking Germans were making an escape for Norway. The pilots were not aware of the ship's true passengers, and in fact thought it was filled with SS officers. Ordered to bomb everything in their path, the British Typhoons would make an escape impossible.

However, it has been documented that the British were informed of the ship's cargo the previous day, but RAF personnel never passed the message on. It was an oversight that led to the sinking of the *Thielbek*, the *Deutschland* and the *Cap Arcona*. And with those three ships, more than 7,000 prisoners would lose their lives, never knowing just how close they came to liberation.

Benjamin Jacobs, a prisoner whose story is almost identical to my grandfather's, wrote the most comprehensive account of the *Cap Arcona*, *The 100-Year Secret*. Within that book, he writes, "Those who perished were not just prisoners. They were tough, tenacious, unrelenting fighters, with hearts stubborn enough to survive all the Nazis had cast upon them. And yet, they died on the very doorstep of freedom."

Sixty-five years later, the British government has never made any public reference to the event, denying the dead the recognition they deserve. With the files sealed until 100 years after the disaster, information that would bring the tragedy to the public eye is locked until 2045.

By then, all survivors and many of their children will be gone. And with their passing, a chest of personal memories, of when their friends died on the last page of the long and tragic epic, will be gone too. The onus will then lie on us to tell their stories. We'll tell about the "tough, tenacious, unrelenting fighters" who lost their lives at a time when the world went mad. And to prove we've learned since then, we'll show that a human life should never go unrecognized and their deaths should never be forgotten. This is my grandfather's story, and it is theirs as well. We should strive to make it ours.

were cut. Soon more Typhoons, and more direct hits.

My grandfather looked down at the smoking floor. Screams of death and pain permeated the air. The stairwell from below, where thousands were being asphyxiated, reached the deck through a small door. They were fighting for fresh air, clawing to escape the coffin of smoke. Most were quickly consumed by the flames. He looked at the SS guard still on board. He was lost, the tormentor becoming the tortured. Two Russian POWs quickly tossed the guard overboard. Prisoners began taking their clothing off. They'd risk the 3-km swim to shore. Most who tried were paralyzed by the 7°C water. But those strong enough to bear the temperature would be gunned down by SS, Hitler Youth, naval personnel and townspeople, all of whom were firing their guns from the sandy beaches of *Neustadt*. My grandfather couldn't swim, but he took his clothes off anyway.

Suddenly, the ship began to tilt on its side. Hundreds of naked men and women fell overboard. My grandfather ran to the high side of the ship and grabbed a rope. He looked down at the approaching water. He watched as the naked men and women sank into the sea – 200, 100, 50 left treading.

The approaching water was clear. Henry could see the prisoners descending to darkness, their bodies slowly fading out of sight.

It wouldn't be long until he reached the water and the same fate. He wasn't



# GREAT ESCAPE

(Continued from page 6)

crowd. Among the guards was Zbisheck, Sonya's former neighbor, who looked her in the eye.

Zbisheck's family had lived across from the Gorodinkys on Pilsudski Street. Zbisheck and Sonya were playmates for years. Perhaps when Zbisheck saw Sonya in the crowd he was reminded of her bicycle, her summer dresses, the scallions in her garden. Zbisheck motioned for Sonya to follow him. They entered a room in the courthouse where the skilled workers waited, including her father. Sonya grabbed Zbisheck's arm and whispered, "You saved my life and I thank you. But please, can you help my sister and my mother too?" Zbisheck answered under his breath that he had already risked his life to save her.

That day the ghetto population was reduced by half. Sonya heard later that her mother linked arms with relatives and her 11-year-old daughter and said "Come, let's go together to the grave." Now only an essential 250 workers, along with some children, remained. They began to plot their escape that night.

The original breakout plan had been to storm the ghetto gates on a Sunday night, when the guards notoriously drank and grew lazy. In preparation, some people bribed hand grenades from guards, others smuggled in guns from peasants outside the ghetto, still others stole iron rods and knives from their workshops. The Jews would throw everything they had and run. The casualty rate would be high, but it would be better than certain death at the hands of their oppressors.

Everyone was ready in their places on the appointed evening. A man near the front gate was poised to throw the first grenade. Sonya, waiting in the bunk, fingered a small gold ring in the pocket of her tattered skirt. A few weeks before her death, her mother had pulled her daughter aside and tugged at her finger. Pressing something small and warm into Sonya's palm, she said, "Listen, my daughter. Have this ring. Maybe you will need it. Maybe you will survive."

Before the first grenade was thrown, a reinforcement of guards arrived at the main gate, braced for action. The action was called off. Each subsequent night, a reinforcement of guards arrived at dusk, and the Jews eventually abandoned their escape plan. The wife of an injured doctor had leaked word of the plan, not wanting her husband to be left behind and killed. But the younger Jews didn't want to wait for death. "We saw that everything was finished," Sonya told me. "What was left was only one person from each family. The young people started to scream, 'We don't want to die like our parents died. We'll run away.'" But the older people didn't want them to run, because the Germans would kill whoever remained in retribution.

Berl Yoselevitch, a carpenter, thought of a tunnel as a compromise. The weak and injured wouldn't have to run fast or fight. They would hide themselves when everyone else left. The Jews would dig a passage from under a bed located along the northern barracks wall, closest to the outer walls of the ghetto and the woods. The tunnel would drop four and a half feet, then run north under the ghetto to a field next to the forest. They would escape on a moonless July night, when the wheat and grass were uncut and high enough to provide cover as they ran. Once out, they hoped to join the Bielski partisans and seek revenge.

"We wanted to show the world that Jews are not sheep that go to the slaughter," Sonya remembered. "We decided whoever will make it will make it and whoever would not would not. It was better to die this way than the other way. And maybe someone will survive to tell the world what happened."

Digging began right away, and details were kept to a select few in order to prevent information leaks. Not everyone was for it. Some Jews feared the tunnel would be impossible to complete before the Germans found out about it. There was one man whom nobody trusted; to ensure that he wouldn't talk to the Germans, the Jews killed him.

Throughout the summer of 1943, Sonya clawed at the soil underneath the courthouse to escape a place she had, until recently, loved her whole life. Much of the tunnel was dug by children and small men, who could maneuver within its narrow walls. An electrician named Rakovski diverted a current from the ghetto and strung electric bulbs along the tunnel ceiling. He also figured out how to disconnect the searchlights that surveyed the ghetto grounds, and he did so occasionally, so the

kind. Four feet underground, muddy with damp soil, Sonya and Aaron fell in love.

To remove dirt displaced by the tunnel, the diggers filled sacks of it that they then passed back until it reached the hole under the bed in the ghetto. Half a million pounds of earth were packed into false double walls built in the courthouse barracks. Soil was hidden in corners where the attic ceiling slanted to meet the floor, and buried under floorboards that were ripped up and then replaced. Ghetto residents smuggled sacks of soil to toilets — holes in the ground — outhouses at the end of the camp. One of the group's carpenters laid a wooden track along the tunnel floor so they could use a cart to haul the dirt out.

By July 1943, the tunnel was about 240 feet long and near completion. But July was rainy that year, and the sappy earth leaked, muddying the tunnel. The group feared the tunnel would collapse. Determined not to let his plan fail, Berl Yoselevitch stole wood slats from his workshop to reinforce the walls and ceiling. He also organized the digging of small drains and channels in the floor to divert water.

In the meantime, the wheat fields were harvested, leaving a vast area of open

ghetto searchlights and turned on the tunnel lights. Nails in the barracks' tin roof were loosened, amplifying the sounds of the falling rain in order to mask sounds of escape. The Jews quietly assembled, waiting in the darkness for their turn to lower themselves into the lighted earth. Sonya stood with Aaron and her brothers. Some families tied themselves to one another; others held hands.

One couple had secretly given birth in the ghetto. Before the escape, the mother strangled her child to death — the group could not take the chance that the baby would cry during its escape and alert guards above ground.

Like the Jews fleeing Egypt, the Jews of *Novogrudok* crawled as quickly as they could through the dirt. Sonya was in the middle. At her hands were people's feet, at her feet, others' hands. She felt like a mouse in a line of them, crawling silently. She hypnotized herself with a chant: Sonya, you got to make it, you got to make it. She then changed it to, God, please let me go through. Don't bury me. Don't bury me. Don't bury me. Every movement she made, she was sure that the world would bury her alive.

At the end of the tunnel, it was pouring rain, and the escapees couldn't see in the new darkness above ground. Seventy of them accidentally ran toward the ghetto and were shot by guards who thought partisans were ambushing them. Among them were two of Sonya's cousins and Berl Yoselevitch, the tunnel's mastermind.

When Sonya emerged, she immediately lost Aaron and her brother in the confusion. She heard shots and shouting from the right, and to her left she could just make out a road. "I got into a little ditch and out from the ditch I went through a cornfield where the leaves and the stalks were quite high. During the night I crawled around. During the day I sat in the bushes and waited." She had no shoes. Her dress was torn. She ate nothing.

Early the morning after the escape, Germans stormed into the barracks to see why no Jews had lined up for the daily roll. By one account, they found an ironically formal letter explaining that Jews were needed elsewhere. In another version, the letter informed the Germans that they were liberating themselves and that they would take revenge. Afraid to enter the tunnel in case bombs or traps had been set up inside, the Germans forced a member of the *Judenrat* to crawl through. When he arrived safely on the other end, he was hanged. Peasants crowded into the courthouse to gaze at the gaping hole the Jews had left behind.

For two weeks Sonya ran through the forests during the night and tried to rest and hide during the day. She grew so hungry that when she finally saw a little house with a light on at the bottom of a hill, she couldn't resist trying for help, despite the frightening prospect that her fate depended on the kindness of the person inside. Through the window she saw an old man at a table, patching clothes. He looked like pictures she'd seen of St. Nicholas, with white hair and beard. Sonya knocked on the window and when he came to the door he simply said, "I know who you are. I want to help you."

The *Novogrudok* escape had been on the radio, and the Nazis announced that anyone who turned in a Jew would receive several pounds of sugar. But the man offered Sonya his cellar, about 10 feet from the house, where he stored potatoes.

(Continued on page 13)



Germans would get used to these "short-ages" and not suspect anything when one took place on the night of the escape.

The children dug lying down, bellies pressed against the earth. I asked Sonya if she remembered the smell of the earth, how it felt on her cheeks and under her fingernails. "I did not smell or feel a thing," she replied. "We were anxious to get out as fast as we can because we had death waiting for us. I don't even know whether I was breathing or not. I didn't care at all, Mamika. We were full of worries that we forgot about anything else. We just wanted to get out. We wanted our lives."

In order not to soil their only clothing and arouse suspicion, the children dug naked or wore robes of burlap sacks or old cloth sewn especially for the task. Sonya dug with her brother, Shaul, sometimes with a cousin, and with her new friend, Aaron Oshman, who at 30 was 10 years older than she and had been moved with his brother to the *Novogrudok* ghetto about a year earlier, when his ghetto in *Ivinitz*, a small town in White Russia, was liquidated. Theirs had been a wealthy family before the war; their father owned a hardware business. When Aaron arrived in *Novogrudok*, he sat in an empty workshop crying for his parents. In a Shoah Testimony video interview, given before his death in 2004, Aaron recalled the first time he saw Sonya. "In walked a beautiful woman. She was 19 years old. She said, 'Don't cry, young man, you still have your life.'" Aaron discussed philosophy and Zionism with Sonya. He was articulate and

ground between the camp and the forest. Rumors floated that the ghetto was to be liquidated further, leaving just 20 people alive. Many of the Jews wanted to leave immediately, but more decided to delay departure and dig 100 feet farther, which would put the tunnel's exit closer to the forest. They'd leave the digging of the actual exit until the night of the escape. The first people to go through would be the young, carrying shovels to dig the final distance and guns and hand grenades should they face guards when they surfaced. The older people would wait and take up the rear so that if they moved too slowly or fainted they wouldn't hold everyone else back.

In August, the tunnel was complete. It was 750 feet, and the Jews watched the late summer sky for signs of a storm that would provide cover during an escape. But the nights were clear, and the moonless days passed. While they waited, 11 skilled craftsmen, including Sonya's father, were transferred to *Koldichevo*, a camp that ran a weapons factory. Of Sonya's family of seven, only she and her brother Shaul remained in *Novogrudok*.

Over the next several weeks the Jews rehearsed their escape to see how long it would take. Two to three hours seemed enough time for 240 people to pass through the tunnel. They submitted names of those they wanted to leave with, and were instructed when to appear at the mouth of the tunnel.

Sunday, September 26, 1943, was a moonless stormy night. Around 8 p.m., Rakovski, the electrician, cut power to the



## MEMORIES OF THE HOLOCAUST: KITTY HART-MOXON

BY STUART JEFFRIES, THE GUARDIAN

In Birmingham, after the war, people would ask Auschwitz survivor Kitty Hart-Moxon about the tattoo on her forearm: "Is that your boyfriend's telephone number?" "People simply knew nothing," says Kitty. "If I did say what happened to me and my mother, people would say: 'That sounds farfetched.' I would explain that I saw thousands walk into a gas chamber and never come out. But they could not get their heads round it. They found it impossible to comprehend that there was massacre on a huge scale, that thousands were murdered deliberately."

What was worse was that no one wanted to know. She and her mother had arrived at Dover in late 1946 to be met by her uncle, the husband of her mother's sister. "He said: 'I don't want you to talk about anything that happened to you. I don't want to know.' My mother and I became very angry at being silenced."

Did you ever receive counseling? Kitty favors me with a justifiable sardonic look as we sit in her living room in Harpenden, Hertfordshire. "Counseling? No. My mother and I sorted ourselves out by countless discussions about what had happened to us." Kitty wrote two books about her experiences: *I Am Alive* (1961) and *Return to Auschwitz* (1981). She also has made award-winning films about her return to the death camp and about her time after Auschwitz. Kitty, a retired radiographer, has been speaking for decades in schools, colleges, universities to all who are prepared to listen. In 2003 she received the OBE for her work on Holocaust education

She was born Kitty Felix in 1926 in *Bielsko*, a Polish town where Jews, Czechs, Poles and Germans mixed. She recalls a blissful sporty childhood with her brother Robert – hiking in the mountains in summer and skiing in winter. She was educated by nuns and was oblivious to anti-Semitism until she and her Jewish swimming team were stoned during a competition. A few days prior to Hitler's invasion on 1 September 1939, Kitty's family fled eastward to elude the *Wehrmacht* but were overtaken by the Nazis and became trapped in the *Lublin* ghetto. After many at-

tempts, the family escaped and obtained non-Jewish documents.

They had to split up to maximize their chances of survival. Kitty and her mother posed as Polish forced laborers and were transported to *Bitterfeld* within Germany to work in a munitions plant. But in March 1943, Kitty, her mother and 12 other women suspected of being Jewish were betrayed and later sentenced to death by firing squad.

"We were prepared to die there, but it turned out to be a mock execution." It was a piece of Nazi cruelty: the guards fired shots into the air. "Instead, we were sentenced to life imprisonment in Auschwitz. First we were transferred to a prison in *Dresden*. Our cell had writing on the walls: 'We are on our way to Auschwitz, see you in hell. No one ever gets out.' My mother was baffled. She knew Auschwitz as a place where one went fishing in the numerous ponds."

Auschwitz, Kitty says, was the Crewe of Eastern Europe – an important rail junction. "In Auschwitz, the obedient prisoner who stuck to the rules lived for three to six weeks. Camp food could not sustain life for long. The camp soup was laced with a poison, a form of bromide." Kitty and her mother survived nearly two years there. "There were occasions when I was lucky with jobs. If you couldn't escape from working out in the open, outside the camp, you could not survive long-term."

Over a period of eight months Kitty was fortunate to work with a group of inmates sorting belongings of those deported to Auschwitz. It was in that place, she says with bitter irony, that she regained her strength and her health. "My life was saved there – because of access to food and water." Kitty tells me that at one point in Auschwitz she worked in the dysentery block: when she came on duty one day all the patients had been killed on the orders of SS doctor Josef Mengele.

She tells me about sorting men's jackets. "You had to search each one for valuables – gold, jewelry, currency. But to be found with a single valuable item was punishable by death. Any currency found

was of no value to us and we used it as toilet paper. We ate from rotting piles of food that littered the place – though this was forbidden."

She recognizes that she never gave up. "You could see it in people's vacant expressions when they gave up – by the way they shuffled and stooped. You distanced yourself from these people, believing it was contagious. It was a ruthless place, the most unequal society in the world."

Her proximity to the four crematoria and gas chambers meant that she witnessed relentless killing from April to November 1944, when the greatest number of victims were murdered. "It's been said that 1.5 million died. We, who were there, say it was in excess of 2.5 million. Our brains could



Kitty Hart Moxon, Holocaust survivor.

simply not accept what we were witnessing, but it was happening." Among those who died were 30 members of her own family.

How did she survive? "A few fortunate events." One was when her mother, who had been working in the so-called hospital, managed to speak to a *kommandant* called Hossler. "This was incredibly difficult. Two things baffled him. She was in her 50s, which was rare since there were no women of that age, and she spoke perfect German, which seemed to impress him." That conversation, in which she pleaded for her daughter not to be killed, probably saved Kitty's life. She tells me it was generally believed that those who were direct witnesses to mass murder would not be transferred to other camps but summarily executed.

On 11 November 1944, mother and daughter were transferred to a camp near *Wroclaw* (the Polish name for what was

then *Breslau* in eastern Germany), to work in the Philips electronics factory. On 18 February 1945, they were forced on a two-week death march over the *Sudeten* mountains without food or shelter, before being put on to open coal trucks and taken 1,000 km across Europe to work in an underground factory in north-west Germany. Only about 200 survived the journey from the original 10,000 who had set out. Her mother was by then 55 years old.

It was sometime in March that Kitty and her mother were taken to *Bergen-Belsen* concentration camp, from where they were put inside sealed cattle trucks. The train was abandoned and they were expected to die. Many women in her truck suffocated. "We took turns to breathe through a crack in the floor. We heard a noise and banged on the walls when suddenly the door was pulled open by three German soldiers. We said, 'Shoot us, we are not going back in.'" They were taken to a nearby camp outside *Salzwedel* and were liberated on 14 April by American troops.

After liberation, Kitty and her mother became interpreters for the British army and later worked with the Quaker Relief Team in a displaced persons' camp. They discovered that they were the only survivors of their family. Kitty's father had been murdered by the Gestapo. Her brother Robert died fighting at Stalingrad. Her grandmother was murdered in the gas chambers of *Belzec* death camp.

Their work for the British army earned Kitty and her mother special permits to live in the UK. She started a new life in Birmingham. She married and had two sons and qualified in radiography. "I hid nothing from my sons. They grew up in an environment where everything was discussed because I believed they had to know. If they didn't eat their meals, they were told how grateful I would have been for any food in the war and that no food must ever be wasted or thrown away."

Kitty's mother lived with her until her death in 1974. Now widowed and retired, Kitty has two sons and eight grandchildren. "Auschwitz shaped my life," she says. "It was all my teenage years, it was my complete education, my university."

## GREAT ESCAPE

(Continued from page 12)

Sonya buried herself there, thinking about a future without her family and friends. During the day, she didn't move. Late each night the old man would bring her bread, a little milk, a cooked potato, whatever he had. After six weeks, he came with only a small bit of bread. He had nothing left for either of them to eat. Sonya looked at the ring her mother had given her and said, "Please take this. Sell it for food." The man refused. The whole town knew he was poor. If he came to them with a gold ring, they would know he was hiding a Jew.

Nearby, at the edge of the forest, there was a house where people often came and went by horse in the middle of the night. He had heard that these were the Bielskis, and he offered to cover Sonya with straw in the back of his wagon and take her to that house. Sonya agreed. There she found her brother Shaul, some surviving relatives, and friends from neighboring ghettos. She also found Aaron, whom she asked to marry her.

In the Bielski group, everyone had a job to perform. While Sonya's relatives made fur hats and boots, Sonya stood

look-out on a hill. One morning about two weeks after she arrived, Sonya saw a group of men walking toward her. From their skeletal frames, she could tell that they were escapees hoping for refuge. They told her they had recently fled *Koldichevo*, the camp where her father had been held. Sonya asked about him. "He had escaped with us," they told her. "He's probably on his way to see you now."

Sonya stood guard for two days and nights, forgoing sleep, watching for a familiar figure. Finally, on the third day, a man approached. He was smaller than her father, but, she thought, perhaps he'd shrunk under hardship. She sobbed waiting for him to reach her, to see the crinkle in his eyes, to hear him call her Sonyaleh.

When the man was near enough, Sonya saw that it was not her father.

"Why are you crying, child?"

"I am waiting for my father, Abraham Gorodinsky, from *Koldichevo*."

"Stop crying, my child," he said. "Your father is never coming."

The man had been a doctor at *Koldichevo*, while her father had worked fixing watches and appliances. Each

night, the Germans appointed a different inmate to guard their jewels. When it came Abraham's turn, he knew he was too tired to stay awake and hired a friend to take his turn rather than risk falling asleep on the job and being killed for it. But his friend was exhausted too and fell asleep in the barracks before even taking up the post. When a guard came to check that a watchman was there, he discovered an empty chair. The next day, the Germans made all the inmates gather around as they beat Abraham so badly that his body lost its shape. "However," said the doctor, "your father yelled to the soldiers when the beating began, saying, 'You will kill me today, but I have a son and a daughter and they will survive and tell what happened here.'"

When they heard that the war had ended, the remaining Jews of *Novogrudek* marched back to their hometown. They found nothing but painful memories. With other refugees, Aaron and Sonya walked across Europe to a displaced persons camp in Italy. They hoped it would be a stopping point on the way to Israel, but Sonya got sick and needed penicillin,

which was available then only in the United States. The couple married and departed for Brooklyn shortly after the birth of their first son.

Aaron died six years ago, after 56 years of marriage. Sonya has two sons, both lawyers, and four grandchildren. She travels to schools, synagogues, community centers to share her story. "My name is Sonya Oshman," she says, "and I wish to speak of my father. From 30,000 Jews [in the region], perhaps only 150 survived, and from the Gorodinsky family, I am now the only living member. My brother who escaped with me died five years ago. He was a major in the Israeli army. But I want to keep my father's promise, so I am standing here tonight and filling out the last wish of my dad. I am telling you a little fragment of my story. In this way, I hope my father's life will be one of the lives remembered."

Meanwhile *Novogrudek's* Jewish graveyard is overgrown, its headstones mostly missing; peasants have scavenged the granite slabs to line their basements and the walls of cisterns. Once home to 6,500 Jews, *Novogrudek* now has one.



## ATHENS UNVEILS ITS FIRST HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL

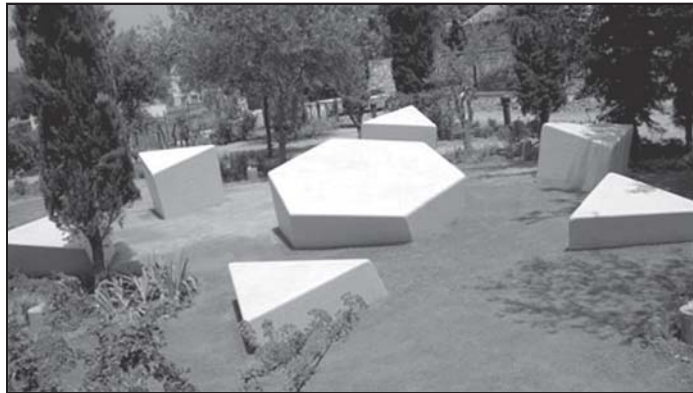
BY HELENA SMITH, THE GUARDIAN

It has taken nearly 70 years, but a monument to honor Greece's Holocaust victims was finally unveiled in Athens.

Athens is the last EU capital to commemorate those who perished at the hands of Nazi forces.

"To get here has been difficult but now it is done the message is simple. We have not forgotten and we will not forget," said Benjamin Albalas, president of the Jewish community in Athens.

Greece lost more of its Jewish population in the Final Solution, proportionately, than almost any other country in Europe during the second world war. Around 65,000 men,



The Holocaust memorial in Athens in the shape of a broken Star of David.

women and children were dispatched to their deaths in Auschwitz between 1941 and 1944.

An estimated 1,000 Athenian Jews were packed off to the concentration camp in April 1944 after thousands fled or went underground. Arriving there after a two-week train journey, they were met by Dr Josef Mengele. "He selected 320 men and 328 women for his own 'research,'" writes the historian, Mark Ma-

zower, in his book *Inside Hitler's Greece*. "The others were immediately gassed and burned in crematoria."

What remains of the country's Jewish community today had campaigned long and hard for the memorial to be erected. The quest began in earnest last year when the municipality of Athens donated a prime piece of real estate, overlooking the ornate cemetery where Pericles delivered his famous funeral oration in honour of the Athenians killed during the Peloponnesian War in 431 BC. Few areas resonate as much with the ideals of freedom, equality and democracy.

More symbolically, the site is also close to the synagogue in Melidoni Street where, under a ruse of food handouts, the Jews of Athens were trapped and captured by the Germans.

The acclaimed Greek-American artist DeAnna Maganias conveyed what the Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel describes as "man's inhumanity to man" in a plaque on the site. Carved in the form of the Star of David – the ancient symbol of Judaism – acting like a compass, the sculpture points to the cities and villages across Greece from where tens of thousands of Jews were gathered and deported. The community chose it on the basis of its "simplicity" and "ingenious design."

"In keeping with the Jewish tradition it symbolized death and the memory of death in a quiet and calm way," said a committee member who oversaw an international competition for the memorial. But the marble monument, which is set in a

herb garden, is also about healing. While six of the work's pieces are triangular, conjoining broken-off pieces of the star, the central piece, a massive hexagon block, remains intact and is reminiscent of rejuvenation and survival.

"The herbal garden is a symbol of healing and place," said Maganias. "The idea is that people walk around the monument. The orientation of the star, engraved with the names of cities and towns from which victims were deported, and the smell from the herbs aim to act as a catalyst of memory."

The unveiling of the monument comes against a backdrop of growing attacks against Jewish targets in Greece. In January Crete's historic synagogue was firebombed twice following the vandalism of cemeteries nationwide. Constantine Plevris, a prominent neo-Nazi accused of inciting racial violence with a book glorifying Hitler, was also acquitted by the supreme court.

"Incidents of anti-Semitism are definitely on the rise and our fear is they will increase with the economic crisis afflicting Greece," said David Saltiel, who heads the Central Jewish Council representing the country's 7000-strong community.

"We feel especially depressed by the decision of the supreme court. This monument, which as a community we dedicate to this city, is a reminder of what can happen when a society loses its tolerance for people who are different."

Mary Michalidou, an expert on monuments in Greece, agrees that Athens' Holocaust memorial is long overdue. "But," she says, "while it should have happened earlier, its location aesthetically and symbolically couldn't be better. It will now rank among Europe's best Holocaust monuments."

## ANTI-SEMITISM INSTITUTE TO BE ESTABLISHED AT UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

JONNY PAUL, THE JERUSALEM POST

The University of London is set to open a new institute for the study of anti-Semitism, which will work in partnership with the world's oldest Holocaust library, after London-based Pears Foundation donated £1.5 million to the project.

The new institute will become part of the college's School of Social Sciences, History and Philosophy and will have close links with the College's School of Arts and its School of Law.

The Institute will work in partnership with the Wiener Library, the world's oldest Holocaust memorial institution, which is set to move to the university in 2011 from its current central London location.

The library will allow Birkbeck academic staff and students, as well as others, to use its vast resource for research, teaching and outreach activities in the area of anti-Semitism, religious and racial intolerance.

"We are delighted that the Pears Foundation donation enables us to establish the institute and also that we will be able to provide a home for the Wiener Library," Prof. David Latchman, the master of Birkbeck, said.

"Birkbeck commands an unparalleled combination of expertise in the field of anti-Semitism and intolerance in a wide range of disciplines, from political sciences to psychosocial studies and from history to law," he continued.

"Birkbeck will also offer related courses to attract a wide range of students from a host of backgrounds – from community, religious and educational leaders, school teachers; local government employees and civil servants.

"The Pears Foundation commissioned a research/mapping report which established that there appears to be no academic faculty or institution at any UK university undertaking the role we foresee for this new institute," said Trevor Pears, executive chair of the Pears Foundation.

"We believe that the study of anti-Semitism is vital to the understanding of all racism and xenophobia. Our concern is that anti-Semitism is misunderstood and viewed solely as a Jewish issue. We believe anti-Semitism is a 'societal illness' – a rise in anti-Semitism signals something is wrong or worsening in society."

The institute is the result of several years of work, reflecting the Pears Foundation's philosophy of promoting understanding of "the other" through better education. This is exemplified in the foundation's work in Holocaust Education; the School Linking Network, which supports local authorities across the UK to bring together high school students from diverse backgrounds; and Shared Futures, an interactive educational resource for students and teachers that explores Judaism in Britain today.

The Wiener Library is the world's oldest institution for the study of anti-Semitism and the crimes of Nazi Germany, the history of German and Central European Jewry, the Holocaust and its aftermath. It is a major archive comprising not only 60,000 books and 2,000 periodical titles but also 1.5 million pages of archival material.

## HOLOCAUST BYSTANDERS

(Continued from page 4)

leading to the Holocaust, he insists that there was no extermination plan concocted in advance by Hitler and consciously pursued by the Nazi regime.

In line with several recent studies, he argues instead that the Nazis up to 1941 extended the same model of terroristic persecution developed within Germany in the late 1930s to the Jewish populations that came under their control. This approach focused on identification, segregation, expropriation, concentration, and emigration, but not on physical extermination.

The invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941 opened a second, much more lethal phase of mass murder, with German mobile killing squads carrying out mass executions of Soviet Jews. In retrospect, the introduction of mass killing behind the Eastern Front can be seen as the beginning of what became the "final solution," but Friedlander insists that these murder operations – which initially targeted only Jewish males – were designed primarily to hasten the collapse of the Red Army and the Soviet system and were not part of a calculated plan of mass extermination of the entire Jewish population.

The crucial turning point came with the entry of the United States into the war in early December 1941. From Hitler's perspective, this transformed a European conflict into a true world war, and he was certain, of course, that the Jews were to blame for this decisive escalation. He responded by ordering the extermination of all Jews, thus fulfilling his January 1939 "prophecy" that if the Jews brought about

a world war the result would be "the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe."

Beginning in summer 1942, the bureaucratically organized, industrialized extermination of the Jews of Europe in custom-built death camps hit full stride. Such a massive undertaking was unthinkable without the co-operation of mid-level technocrats and organizers aided by the leaders and populations throughout Nazi-controlled Europe.

Friedlander paints a damning portrait of the conduct of the bystanders. Passivity and indifference predominated, but in many cases the Nazis could count on the active support of non-German authorities and their security forces in facilitating the annihilation process.

As he points out, "not one social group, not one religious community, not one scholarly institution or professional association in Germany and throughout Europe declared its solidarity with the Jews."

Friedlander is especially critical of the failure of the Christian churches, Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox, to respond to the onslaught against the Jews. He identifies the virulent anti-Judaism cultivated by Christianity over centuries as a major contributor to the anti-Semitic culture that, he argues, took hold in Germany under Nazism but also flourished in the rest of Europe as well.

The fact that Christian churches shared with Nazism anti-communist, anti-liberal and anti-materialist views rendered the churches incapable of coming to the defense of the Jewish population.

Pope Pius XII comes in for heavy criticism for his "selective appeasement" of the Nazis. While the Pope sought in some cases to raise objections to Nazi measures, his concern did not extend to the mass murder perpetrated against the Jews. The Pope's silence stands as a disturbing example of the broader moral failure of the European and American spiritual and intellectual elites in the face of the Holocaust.

More than is the case in most Holocaust histories, Friedlander's book strives to bring the voices of the victims into the story. He quotes extensively from a wide and diverse range of Jewish diarists, from the well-known, such as Viktor Klemperer and Emanuel Ringelblum, to more obscure figures such as the 12-year-old Dawid Rubinowicz and the teenage Moshe Flinker.

Their observations are by turns poignant, painful, revelatory, and depressing. They infuse an essential individual, human dimension into the overarching narrative of mass destruction. In the later chapters, one is repeatedly confronted by jolting "final entries" that signal that yet another individual has fallen victim to the vast Nazi killing program.

Friedlander's book represents a major contribution to the study of the Holocaust. No small part of his achievement lies in his ability to highlight the crucial role of human agency in history. His account reminds us that the Holocaust was not a "natural" catastrophe, not something inexorable and unstoppable, but was instead the terrible consequence of conscious human decisions, aided and abetted by the widespread failure of the bystanders to act in opposition.



## MY SISTER KATHY

BY DR. EDGAR EICHBAUM

In December 1931, the village of *Petershagen* sparkled under a clean blanket of snow. My mother was in her last week of pregnancy, but her slim body and loose shift hid her grown abdomen.

On the tenth of the month feverish activity started in the house. I did not understand why, but became infected with the prevalent mood of expectation.

A strange, heavy-set woman in a white dress took charge. She heated water in two large pots. My mother was locked in her bedroom.

The women smiled at me. "Soon the stork is coming to bring you a new baby. Go up to the roof and watch for him." She said.

I hurried upstairs and waited on the snow-covered roof. The cold wind cut into my face and my hands. Nothing happened. The only sight was the black smoke belching from the chimney. No stork.

From the bedroom window the lady in white called up to me: "Edward, where are you hiding? The stork just left. He brought you a little baby sister and some chocolate cookies."

I zoomed down from the freezing roof and saw my mom in bed, smiling and holding a little screaming bundle. My father was away on business. The midwife pinched my frozen cheek, handed me some cookies. "Were you sleeping when the stork came down through the chimney?"

That is how my sister was born.

Little Kathy became the center of my mother's attention, and I found myself suddenly free to roam around without any

adult supervision. In the past I had never sought much of my mother's attention, but now when I saw the deep affection and care she gave to the baby, I became jealous of my little sister. Still I liked to hold her when she was smiling and not smelling, and I never tried to harm her.

Summer 1936, almost five years had passed. We had moved to Berlin. The Nazi regime in Germany had already severely restricted the civil rights of its Jewish residents. Their children were not allowed to attend public schools. I was lucky to have been accepted to the only, crowded, school of the Jewish community. I was ten years old, and considered myself almost a grown up. Kathy became a beautiful little girl, but to me she remained my baby sister who hung on to me like chewing gum to fingers. I always had a hard time to get rid of her company.

\*\*\*

"Mommy, I am going to visit a friend," I announced on my way out.

"Mommy, I want to go with Edward." I heard my four-year-old sister in the background.

Oh my, this nag does not leave me alone, I thought when mom begged me: "Take Kathy with you. She has no one to play with here."

"Mom, you know that we do not play with girls and certainly not with babies," I responded angrily and stormed out of the house. I could still hear my sister crying.

"I wish she had never been born," passed the evil thought through my mind, but once I was in the street, running while kicking an occasional stone in my path, and dreaming about Gulliver's journey or Robinson Crusoe's adventures, I forgot that I had a sister.

So time passed. It was now December 1937. My parents were taking me to the train station on my way to Palestine, where I was to live in a youth village. My father on my right was very quiet. My mother on my left sobbed continuously. My six-year-old sister happily hopped along.

Suddenly my father gripped my hand and said:

"Edward, you know that we love you very much. You are going far away and we do not know when we will meet again. We paid for your trip, but if you wish to stay, we will just go home."

Mom looked down to me, trying to smile. No. My mind was made up. I was going to Palestine to be a pioneer.

"You Jewish swine – go to Palestine" sounded the cry of Hitler-Youth in my ears.

"You see, she is happy that I am leaving," I said, pointing at my sister.

Mother started to cry again.

"Kathy is too young to understand that she is losing her big brother for a long time," father said.

I looked at her with much dislike, thinking that now, at last, I was getting rid of her for a long time.

Two years passed. The Second World War started. After many months of lonely and difficult acclimatization to the new environment and language, my fellow children accepted me. On the Sabbath, parents and siblings visited most of my peers. I would look at those reunions with heaviness in my chest. Now I missed my parents and my sister Kathy so much. She would be eight years old in a few months. If she were here, I would be a proud big

brother watching over her and defending her against any of the boys who would be mean to her.

In March 1941, I got the last letter from my parents. There was a picture of Kathy, smiling, standing in line with her classmates. On the back of the photo she wrote "Edi I miss you much, Love, Kathy."

She was so pretty, my little sister. I kissed the picture and cried.

Summer of 1945, the war ended. The horrors of the Holocaust became known all over the globe. An aunt, who survived the carnage, informed me that my parents and Kathy were cremated in one of the infamous "Lagers." I lost all my family.

Today was December tenth 1945, Kathy's birthday. She would have been fourteen years old now, a lady. We would have been best friends, and together planning our future.

How would I ever be forgiven for the cruelty and dislike I had shown her when she was little? Now I would have asked her to come with me to all my social events. But she was no more, just dust that the wind carried around the globe. There was no grave where I could show her my love and pay her my respect, and ask her to forgive me.

Her only tombstone is her birthday. So since, for the last sixty years, on December 10, I remember you, Kathy. I see you, the four-year-old girl with one tiny hand holding mommy's skirt, looking up to her and begging: "Mommy, can I go with Edward?"

And I say "Yes, come with me, my best friend."

Leave me never again.

## IDENTIFYING NOTES FROM THE WARSAW GHETTO

(Continued from page 10)

ished selected documents from the repository. However, the tremendous scope of the documentary material, the precarious state of some of the documents, the difficulties in deciphering the handwriting and in identifying the writers, in addition to var-



Rabbi Shimon Huberband.

ious political and other constraints, made publication of these documents a complex, drawn-out and incomplete affair.

At the end of the 1950s and especially in the 1960s, a greater number of writings from the Holocaust started to appear.

In 1961, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto* by Emanuel Ringelblum, founder and director of *Oyneg Shabbes*, was published in Warsaw. The same year, YIVO in New York published an edited Yiddish version of a Vilna ghetto diary kept by Herman Kruk, and in 1966, Yad Vashem published *The Scroll of Agony* by Chaim Aharon Kaplan from the Warsaw ghetto. Around the same time, the Zachor Publishing House put out *Kiddush Hashem: Jewish Religious and Cultural Life in Poland During the*

*Holocaust* (1969), a collection of the Holocaust-era writings of Rabbi Shimon Huberband, one of the notable contributors to the *Oyneg Shabbes* archive. These and many other books were a supremely important element in the formation of the Jewish narrative of the Holocaust. However, it later became clear that they did not include all that had been written by their authors during the war; upon new study of the collections, additional chronicles or notes are sometimes discovered. Recently, previously unknown pages were found in the Hersch Wasser Collection at YIVO, later identified as Rabbi Huberband's writings. These chronicles, as well as sections left out of *Kiddush Hashem* (in both its Hebrew and English editions), will soon be published in an article by the author of this article in the upcoming volume of *Yad Vashem Studies* (38:1).

The importance of the texts so far unearthed lies in their contents and the time and place in which they were written – May-June 1942, the period of terror in the Warsaw ghetto – and in the writer himself, Shimon Huberband, an unusual figure among the *Oyneg Shabbes* archivists, in part because of his association with Orthodox Judaism. In his writings, Huberband looked at the world of the religious Jew in the ghetto, though he did not ignore other issues. After Huberband's murder on 18 August 1942, Emanuel Ringelblum emphasized his noble character, his meticulousness and his extensive knowledge, calling him one of the pillars of the archive. "Only some of the material he collected was preserved. Most of it disappeared with him," Ringelblum wrote in Huberband's memory. Any document from Huberband's pen, any additional piece of information from his own hand, is a real historic find.

## LAUNCH OF NEW YAD VASHEM ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE GHETTOS

After 6 years of research, the groundbreaking new *Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos During the Holocaust* was launched in New York on May 13, 2010, by the American Society for Yad Vashem and New York University Press, its distributor. Over 100 people attended this landmark event.

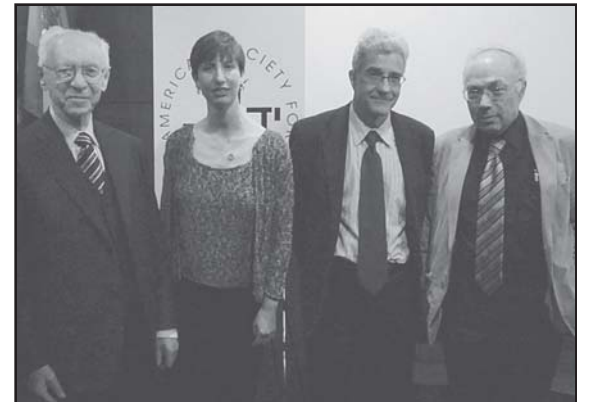
The 2-volume *Yad Vashem Encyclopedia of the Ghettos* covers all the ghettos established by the Nazis in Europe during the Holocaust and includes 250 photographs, 62 maps, essays and a DVD of wartime footage of ghettos filmed in real time during the Holocaust. Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem, describes it as "a groundbreaking undertaking."

"The Encyclopedia is the outcome of pioneering research on the unique phenomenon of ghettos," said Avner Shalev, Chairman of Yad Vashem. "With information on conditions, administration, leadership and coping methodologies that have never before been gathered together into one encyclopedia, it is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of the Holocaust."

Professor Dan Michman, Chief Historian of Yad Vashem and a contributor to the Encyclopedia, spoke at the event and noted: "More than a technical inventory covering over 1,100 ghettos that existed under the Nazis and their allies, the encyclopedia reflects an historiographic understanding that ghettos were implemented only for Jews, and, as such, the phenomenon is conceptually separate from the concentration camps."

A series of introductions explain the historical origins and the emergence of the ghettos, their characteristics and regional

differences, as well as the sources and nature of the photographic material left behind. Each entry, written by experts in the field, includes the city's [ghetto's] present location, wartime name and geographical coordinates and, where applicable, sections on life prior to World War II, the Soviet occupation, German-Nazi occupation, the



Eli Zborowski, Chairman, American Society for Yad Vashem; Jennifer Hammer, Editor, New York University Press; Prof. Omer Bartov, John P. Birkelund Distinguished Professor of European History, Brown University; Prof. Dan Michman, Chief Historian, International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.

ghetto setup, ghetto institutions and communal life; murder, terror and killing operations; underground and resistance; and number of survivors at liberation.

Professor Omer Bartov, John P. Birkelund Distinguished Professor of European History at Brown University, one of the most renowned experts in the field also spoke at the event and noted: "This encyclopedia presents scholars and laymen for the first time with a comprehensive view of the ghetto phenomenon which was so central to Jewish life during the Holocaust."

The Encyclopedia is available for purchase from New York University Press. Call 1-800-996-6987/ 212-998-2546 to order.



## REVEALING THE YOUNG BUREAUCRATS BEHIND THE NAZI TERROR

BY JAN FRIEDMANN, SPIEGEL ONLINE

Who exactly were the men who planned and administered the Nazi crimes? The new "Topography of Terror" documentation center opened in Berlin at the site of the former *Gestapo* and SS headquarters. It reveals the faces of the almost unknown perpetrators of the Holocaust.

The index cards cover an entire wall, several hundred of them in pink, beige or green, containing names, dates of birth and handwritten notes. They are the details of some of the 7,000 former employees of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, the



The Topography of Terror site in the center of Berlin. It was from this site that the Nazi death machine was administered.

amalgamation of the feared SS paramilitary group and *Gestapo* secret police force – the men who worked at the very epicenter of the Nazi terror regime.

Sixteen of these thousands of cards that were collected by investigators in Berlin in 1963 jut out from the wall, representing the only former employees of this terror headquarters who ever faced prosecution. And three of these cards are raised further – showing the trio who were eventually convicted. That is just three out of a total of 7,000.

The exhibition can be seen at the new "Topography of Terror" documentation center opened by German President Horst Köhler, just two days before the 65th anniversary of the end of World War II. Unlike the nearby Holocaust Memorial, which is dedicated to the Nazis' victims, this modest metallic gray building is designed to highlight the role of the perpetrators, those managers and bureaucrats who from their Berlin offices administered mass murder across Europe.

The center also reveals the worst historical legacy of the German Federal Republic: the fact that thousands of murderers and their accomplices were able to lead quiet lives in postwar Germany, undisturbed by the criminal justice system. The site of the exhibition is probably the most historically contaminated place in Berlin. The complex on what was once *Prinz Albrecht Strasse*, just a stone's throw from today's government buildings, was the headquarters for the Third Reich's brutal repression.

In 1933 the *Gestapo* made the former art school at *Prinz Albrecht Strasse* 8 its headquarters. The adjacent Hotel *Prinz Albrecht* became the SS headquarters in 1934 and that same year the SS intelligence service, the SD, took over the *Prinz Albrecht* palace on nearby *Wilhelm Strasse*. It was from this complex of buildings that Hitler's officials administered the concentration and

extermination camps, directed the deadly campaigns by the SS death squads and kept an eye on the regime's opponents.

The "Final Solution" that was discussed at the famed *Wannsee* Conference on Jan. 20, 1942, was also prepared here. A group of ministerial officials and SS functionaries based here chose the venue for the conference of high-ranking Nazis, where the plan for the murder of Europe's Jews was hatched.

Hitler was rarely at the complex. He preferred to stay away from Berlin, sometimes ruling from his Wolf's Lair military headquarters and sometimes from his Bavarian mountain retreat. But this was where the brains behind the Nazi crimes, such as SS leader Heinrich Himmler and SD chief Reinhard Heydrich, had their offices.

And they surrounded themselves by men who didn't necessarily fit into today's stereotype of a Nazi war criminal, neither boorish sadists nor bloodless bureaucrats. They were ambitious university-educated men, aged around 30 and more likely to be ideologues than technocrats. They alternated between serving at the Berlin headquarters and in foreign posts, like young managers at a big company making their way up the career ladder. And after the rupture of 1945 most of them simply faded away into the background.

Erich Ehrlinger, for example, a lawyer from *Giengen* in southern Germany, who at the age of 25 was already a staff leader at the SD main office, before becoming a commander in the German security police in Ukraine and leading the 1b *Einsatzkommando*, or mobile death squad. A case against him in 1969 was dropped because he was deemed incapable of standing trial. Yet Ehrlinger lived for another 35 years.

Then there was the *Munich* businessman, Josef Spacil, who joined the SS at the age of 27. He was stationed in an occupied area of the Soviet Union as an SS economist, then came back to *Prinz Albrecht Strasse* to serve as a department head. He appeared as a witness in the Nuremberg Trials but was never prosecuted himself.

Photographs of a group of young lawyers, Werner Best, Ernst Kaltenbrunner and Hans Nockemann, stare down from the walls — all were born in 1903. "One easily forgets that National Socialism was a young movement," say Andreas Nachama, the director of the new documentation center.

Nachama proudly walks through the building, showing its concrete walls and dark stone floor. "The site is our most important exhibit," he says. "We don't need impressive architecture, it is all there." He points to the views. Across the way is the former Air Ministry of Hermann Göring, now the German Finance Ministry. A few meters away is the Berlin state parliament, once the seat of the Prussian parliament. Adjacent to the site is a 170-meter section

of the Berlin Wall. No other place contains quite so much German history.

It is hard to understand today why this crucial historical site was neglected for so long. Between 1949 and 1956 the authorities demolished the war-damaged buildings. It might have been possible then to reconstruct the site, but people preferred to forget this place of horror.

It was a left-wing citizens group in the 1980s that rediscovered the site, not only as a place where the perpetrators planned the Holocaust but also as a site of the German resistance. Around 15,000 people were arrested by the *Gestapo* and kept in the ground-floor cells of *Prinz Albrecht Strasse* 8.

Excavation work uncovered the floors of the cells, as well as parts of the walls and foundations. A provisional exhibition was put on in 1987 as part of Berlin's 750th anniversary celebrations. That original Topography of Terror, a row of information boards displaying text in the open air, stayed put for over 20 years and eventually would attract half a million visitors annually.

And it took almost that long until the documentation could be housed properly. An architecture competition from 1993 ended in chaos. Then architect Ursula Wilms and landscape architect Heinz Hallman stepped in with their project, which was finished in two and half years.

A good end to a long-drawn-out process. However, valuable years were wasted, during which the area's government quarters and other memorials rapidly changed. The Topography now appears as a latecomer. And the opportunity was wasted to bring together the various Nazi memorials in the city under the umbrella of a single foundation. That would have been in a better position to cooperate with big documentation centers abroad, as well as



A woman inspects the remains of the original buildings along the former *Prinz Albrecht Strasse*.

the Holocaust museums in Washington and London and the *Mémorial de la Shoah* in Paris. Nachama, however, says that the Topography of Terror was never supposed to supply comprehensive answers. "We are pleased if visitors leave us with more questions than they started with."

These visitors can stare in amazement at the photograph of Karl Wolff, head of Himmler's personal staff, as he stands happily in front of his house on *Starnberg* Lake and waters his plants.

Or at a color photo from 2002 that shows Friedrich Engel, the former head of the SS in Genoa, in a *Hamburg* court. Engel, known as the "Butcher of Genoa," was convicted in absentia by an Italian military court for the 1944 murder of hundreds of Italian captives. Germany's highest court, the *Bundesgerichtshof*, then overturned his *Hamburg* conviction. Engel died in 2006 – a free man.

International Society for Yad Vashem  
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

Eli Zborowski,  
Editor-in-Chief

Yefim Krasnyanskiy, M.A.,  
Editor

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

#### EDITORIAL BOARD

Eli Zborowski  
Marvin Zborowski  
Mark Palmer  
Sam Skura\*\*  
Israel Krakowski  
William Mandell  
Sam Halpern  
Isidore Karten\*\*  
Norman Belfer  
Joseph Bukiet\*\*

\*1974-85, as Newsletter for the American  
Federation of Jewish Fighters, Camp In-  
mates, and Nazi Victims  
\*\*deceased