THE CHANGING IMAGE OF HOLOCAUST VICTIMS


This program is a collaborative effort with the Association of Teachers of Social Studies of the United Federation of Teachers, the Educators’ Chapter of the UFT Jewish Heritage Committee, and the School of Education of Manhattanville College. Participants in this year’s conference, which included educators from six states, received in-service credit for attending the program.

This conference, organized by Dr. Marlene W. Yahalom, Director of Education of the American Society for Yad Vashem, has proven to be an important educational resource for educators interested in enriching their knowledge and educational tools about this subject. The mission of the American Society — Holocaust remembrance and commemoration through education — is presented and promoted through this program. This conference was created in 1999 by Caroline Massel, Founding Chair of the Young Leadership Associates.

Through the workshops offered this year, participants were encouraged to learn more about the importance of using survivor testimonies in the classroom, the experience of growing up as a member of the “Second Generation” and the valuable educational resources developed by the International School for Holocaust Studies of Yad Vashem. Dr. Yahalom presented a workshop introducing these resources and a second workshop introducing participants to the dangers and challenges of Holocaust denial and the need to include this topic in Holocaust lesson plans and curricula.

Barry Levine, co-chair with Abbi Halperin of the Young Leadership Associates, gave the opening greetings of the program. He spoke about his family’s connection to the Holocaust and their experiences during the war years, and how this impacted his own understanding of the importance of documenting Holocaust survivor testimonies to the Department of Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem, led an engaging discussion about the significance of the heroes of the Holocaust who helped save Jewish lives despite the grave risk to themselves and their families. His remarks and workshop, which were well received, included case studies of non-Jews who were recognized by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations, and offered recommendations on how to incorporate this topic into the classroom as a tool for teaching students the importance of having the courage to “do the right thing” despite overwhelming challenges.

Dr. Yahalom spoke about how studying the Holocaust allows us to see a range of behavior: the beauty and the horror, the hope and the despair, the thoughtlessness and the thoughtlessness, and the kindness and the cruelty of which human beings are capable.

“The main point to keep in mind in this regard is the magnitude of the loss to the Jewish people. Specifically, students should be taught about the lives and rich civilization of the Jewish world before 1939. The total loss is examined and appreciated in the context of what was lost rather than how the destruction was carried out.

“Rather than emphasizing dead bodies and horrific methods of mass murder, we remind students that each victim had a face, a life built around a family, and a community that was destroyed. Each victim was a mother, a father, a daughter, a son, a neighbor and a friend. When we present the facts as a chain of events not limited to death and destruction, our students’ comprehension is increased and the learning process can be most fruitful. Students can then evaluate the loss in terms of the dangers of injustice, discrimination, and intolerance so that they can become sensitive to the consequences of extreme behavior.”

Dr. Yahalom added that “our own awareness of Holocaust survivors should include the changing image of Holocaust victims who survived and who perished. For those who perished, we need to consider how they want to be remembered. For those who survived, we should realize how they have been transformed from victims to heroes. They are our eyewitnesses to history, and their resistance efforts are symbols of the strength and the resilience of the human spirit.”

(Continued on page 3)
DEAL WITH THE DEVIL

Himmler, if I could believe Musy, understood that the war was lost. Tamir: Since when did he understand this? Hecht: Since the end of 1944. That was the basis which made this negotiation possible. By April 1945, Musy was told that Himmler had agreed to the nonevacuation of the camps (which violated the orders of Hitler) by bargaining for a guarantee of nonexecution of the camp guards. The United States was consulted and agreed to the terms. Tamir: Do you know anything, not from hearsay only, about Himmler’s command against the annihilation of the Jews in the camps? Hecht: Through Musy’s connection with Himmler, we transmitted Himmler’s request to Eisenhower, that, under the condition of not fulfilling Hitler’s command, one would deal with the guards of the concentration camps as with prisoners of war. That was for us proof. In addition, the promise was given by Eisenhower that, if these guards would wear the uniform of the Wehrmacht, they would personally be responsible for all their crimes, but before a military court. This example, which I brought before (in previous testimony) about Bergen-Belsen, was for us additional proof, when the highest
When your enemy is sworn to exterminate every one of you, can you — should you — try to cut a deal with him to at least save some lives, knowing that others are doomed? This question lies at the heart of a new documentary by Claude Lanzmann, author of *Shoah*, the hugely acclaimed tableau of the Holocaust. The Last of the Unrj, explores a moral dilemma that Lanzmann briefly touched on his 1985 masterpiece. For three and a half hours, the viewer is taken through an exploration of Benjamin Murmelstein, the last president of the Jewish Council in the "model ghetto" of Theresienstadt in Nazi-annexed Czechoslovakia. Set up by SS colonel Adolf Eichmann as a bogus town run by Jews themselves — a Potemkin village designed to deceive the world — Theresienstadt was one of the grimiest chapters in the long record of Nazi atrocities. It housed 50,000 Jews at its peak periods, over four years, more than 150,000 inhabitants were killed, many of them shipped to the gas chambers of Auschwitz. "It was the peak of Nazi cruelty and perversion... a unique combination of lies and naked violence," Lanzmann, 87, said in an interview with AFP in February. To run Theresienstadt, the Nazis formed a Jewish Council, comprising 12 members and a leader, "the Elder of the Jews," or Judenaetaether in German. Those who refused the appointment were killed. The first Elder was sent to Auschwitz in 1943 and killed six months later; the second was executed in Theresienstadt in 1944. The documentary describes the extraordinary and controversial tale of Benjamin Murmelstein, a former Grand Rabbi of Vienna who became the third and final Elder in Theresienstadt and the only one in all of eastern Europe to survive the war. Survival meant that he became a target. In the early 1940s, Murmelstein was bitterly attacked by some Holocaust survivors, who accused him of collaboration. There were even calls for him to be hanged, like Eichmann, whom Murmelstein knew intimately from Vienna. The documentary is based on hours of filmed interviews that Lanzmann had with Murmelstein in 1975, 14 years before his death. In it, Murmelstein comes across as hugely compelling, a man fiercely intelligent, courageous and ironic, harsh with others but also with himself. Every day, he faced demands from the Nazis that he was obliged to comply with — but he did his utmost to delay or subvert them, and in the process enabled some to avoid the death marches ordered by Hitler, while knowing that others were doomed. He is far from being a stooge or power- mesmerized monster, as other Elders in the eastern European ghettos were and as he himself was later portrayed. "By taking huge risks (in Vienna), he managed to get 120,000 Austrian Jews out of the clutches of their persecutors, and what he recounts is a magisterial lesson in history," said Lanzmann. 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Two Among the Righteous Few: A Story of Courage in the Holocaust

By Marty Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman
Tate Publishing & Enterprises: Mustang, Ok., 2011. 191 pp. $11.95 softcover.

Reviewed by Dr. Diane Cypkin

Both pure evil and pure good fascinate us. Indeed, when it comes to evil, the countless books and materials in all kinds of media on Hitler and every kind of follower of his outrage the common man and woman — more than prove that. (And with the years, the numbers of these items show no sign of diminishing!) We are anxious to know where evil comes from and where brutality is born. We want to know how it is “nurtured” and what supplies the “food” it needs to thrive and grow. For perhaps, having such knowledge — we sincerely hope — will somehow make it possible for us to prevent its destructive presence in our midst.

Our reaction to absolute good is much the same. We want to know where it comes from. We want to know what nurtures it. We want to encourage its development.

Unfortunately, however, the amount of material on this in books and the general media is much, much less . . . and we all so desperately need it! For, in fact, all those who study humans already know how powerful good role models are. The social science literature is full of this finding. Role models show us the good and the way .... And this, in fact, makes Marty Breitman’s slim, unpretentious volume entitled Two Among the Righteous Few very important and a worthy gift to us all!

Breitman introduces us to two simple people who did the extraordinary, the couple Franciscaus and Hermina Wijnakker (Frans and Mien). Both grew up in the small town of Haren, a “relatively poor” agricultural area in the southern part of the nation of the Netherlands, commonly referred to as “Holland.” When they married in 1936 they went to live in the nearby agricultural town of Delden which “together with Demen, its closest neighboring village” had a population of “a few hundred.” There this gentle couple looked forward to a future where they would “work hard, be good Catholics, and raise a family.” Heroic of any kind were not on their minds nor even imagined! But then the Second World War broke out .... and Frans and Mien easily slipped into another role entirely . . . .

Frans was traveling in Amsterdam when the people and the money was always in short supply, so Frans did this, undoubtedly, to supplement what he was making as a miller). While there, he met a doctor who, learning that Frans lived in a rather isolated area, asked a favor of him. Could he take in a child for — say, three weeks? She was unimportant and needed time outside the city to gain back her strength. Frans quickly answered, “Yes, for three weeks. . . . We have enough food.” “This is very important,” the child said, “the girl and learned she was Jewish. It didn’t change his mind at all about helping her. True, at first Frans didn’t really know the dangers he would face by doing this. (The Nazis gener- ally murdered those who helped Jews.) Still, even when he did realize them, nothing changed. Moreover, as it turned out, this young girl was staying with Frans and Mien for much longer than three weeks, as would the goodly number of other Jewish children and adults whom Frans and Mien took in or Frans found places for, “brokering” refuge for them. Soon the Dutch underground heard about what he was doing and eagerly supported his work in every way! Then there were other important connections Frans himself made to feed and care for those Jews who came to him. “I never forgot where the money came from,” he said. “There were many sources. . . .”

Needless to say, though, the danger arose too! There was the town priest — all-powerful in such a small community — who was horrified when he learned what Frans and Mien were doing. Moreover, he could — couldn’t understand WHY they were doing it. In fact, at one point he frantically cried out, “They hung our dear LOR D on the cross, and you take them in your home!” This time Frans was a police chief in the town who threaten- ed Frans .... Then, too, while the Nazis had not been visible in Diden in the early part of the war, soon they started to appear in town .... All of this, incalculable fear Frans and Mien faced, courageously and voluntarily! No, it isn’t all surprising that in 1983 Frans and Mien were recog- nized as “Righteous Among the Nations” by Yad Vashem. They more than deserved it! Indeed, Breitman, our author, would more than agree since his wife’s parents and his wife were saved by these wonderful people. More wonderful still is, that after the war, the actions of Frans and Mien would even be celebrated by their non-Jewish neighbors. For, sadly, in many cases such did not happen. In other places those who saved Jews during the war had to actually leave their homes and escape from their non-Jewish neighbors, angered at what they had done and more than ready to do something about it!

Finally, this reviewer can’t help but think how strange it is that Holland and many European areas are so very close and the people so very different. Then again, Norway is also very close to Germany . . . and look at what Nazism did to that beautiful country, deci- mizing them; and what Germany did, hell-bent on murdering every one of them it could find! It really is curious, amaz- ing, and exceptionally thought-pro- voking!

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

Book Reviews

Two Among the Righteous Few

By Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman

Reviewed by J. Schuessler, Arts at Pace University

The issue has spawned a large liter- ary response, with books often bear- ing polemical titles like The Abandonment of the Jews or Saving the Jews. But in a new volume from Harvard University Press, two histori- ans aim to set the matter straight with what they call both a neutral assess- ment of Roosevelt’s broader record on Jewish issues and a corrective to the popular view of it, which they say have become overly scathing. In FDR and the Jews, Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, pro- fessor of medieval history, con- tend that Roosevelt hardly did every- thing he could. But they maintain that his overall record — several hundred thousand Jews saved, some of them thanks to little-known initiatives — exceeds that of any subsequent pres- ident in responding to genocide in the midst of fierce domestic political opposition.

The consensus among the public is that Roosevelt really failed,” Mr. Breitman said in a recent interview. “In fact, he had only limited options.” Such statements, backed up by footnotes to hundreds of primary documents (some cited here for the first time), are unlikely to satisfy Roosevelt’s fiercest critics. Even before the book’s March 19 release, the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, a research organi- zation in Washington, has circulated a detailed rebuttal, as well as a rival book, FDR and the Holocaust: A Breach of Faith, zeroing in on what it characterizes as Roosevelt’s person- al desire to limit Jewish immigration to the United States. But some leading Holocaust histori- ans welcome FDR and the Jews for remaining dispassionate in a debate too often marked by anger and accu- sation.

A d hominem attacks don’t help uncover the historical truth, and this book really avoids that,” said Deborah Lipstadt, a pro- fessor of modern European history at Emory University and a consultant on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s per- manent exhibition about the American response to the Holocaust. “If people read it and don’t ascribe to the authors an agenda, it could be very important.”

FDR and the Jews offers no dramatic revelations of the sort Mr. Breitman provided in 2009, when he and two other col- leagues drew headlines with evi- dence, discovered in the papers of a former refugee commissioner for the League of Nations, that Roosevelt had personally pushed for a 1938 plan to relocate millions of threatened European Jews to sparsely populated areas of Latin America and the Middle East. But it does, the authors say, provide important new detail and context to that episode, as well as others that have long loomed large in the popular imagination.

They pointed in particular to the fate of the 937 German Jewish refugees on the ocean liner St. Louis, who were turned away from Cuba in May 1939 and sent back to other European countries, where 254 died after war broke out. The episode, made famous in the 1974 book Voyage of the Damned and a subsequent film, has come to seem emblematic of American callousness.

There is simply no evidence, Mr. Breitman and Mr. Lichtman say, to support accounts that the United States Coast Guard was ordered to prevent the refugees from coming ashore in Florida. What’s more, they were turned away from Cuba, the authors argue, as part of a backlash against a perceived influx of so-called “illegal immigrants.” (Continued on page 15)
THE MONUMENTS MEN SHOWS HOW AMERICA SAVED PAINTINGS WHILE LETTING JEWS DIE

BY RAFAEL MEDOFF, TABLET

The story behind the creation of the “monuments men” team, depicted in the new feature film by the same name, begins in the spring of 1943, after the Allies had confirmed that Hitler was carrying out what they called “his oft-repeated intention to exterminate the Jewish people in Europe” — while looting priceless works of art from his victims. Jewish leaders and members of Congress asked Allied leaders to take steps to aid the refugees. Roosevelt administration officials replied that they could not divert military resources for nonmilitary purposes; and they claimed, they would win the war. But to head off growing calls for rescue, the U.S. and British governments announced they would hold a conference in Bermuda to discuss the refugee problem. The talks had been “shunted off to an inaccessible corner so that the world would not be able to listen in,” American Zionism leader Abba Hillel Silver charged. Although American delegates to Bermuda proved to be no simple task. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s first two choices to chair the U.S. delegation, veteran diplomat Myron Taylor and Yale President Charles Seymour, turned him down.

So did Supreme Court Justice Owen Roberts. FDR expressed disappointment that Roberts would not be able to enjoy the lush beauty of the island, “especially at the time of the Easter lies!” In any event, the president joked, “You can tell the Chief Justice that while I yield this time, I will issue a subpoena for you the very next time you are needed!” And as it turned out, that next time was coming soon.

The conference was doomed before it started — because, as Synagogue Council of America President Dr. Israel Goldstein pointed out, its real purpose was “not to rescue victims of Nazi terror, but to rescue our State Department and the British foreign office from possible embarrassment.” The American delegation (led by last-minute choice Harold W. Dodds, president of Princeton University) arrived with strict instructions: no focus on Jews as the primary victims of the Nazis; no increase in the number of refugees admitted to the United States, even though immigration quotas were not even close to full; and no use of American ships to transport refugees not even troop ships that were available at the time.

The conference also rejected the idea of food shipments to starving European Jews. That would violate the Allied blockade of Axis Europe, and no exceptions could be made, they declared. Closing off the last remaining in George Clooney’s new film at Bermuda refused to discuss opening Palestine to refugees and scotched the idea of negotiating with the Nazis for the release of Jews. The release of large numbers of Jews “would be relieving Hitler of an obligation to take care of these useless people,” one British official asserted.

When the Bermuda conference ended, the two governments kept the proceedings secret rather than acknowledge how little had been accomplished. But the meager results were obvious. As Congressman Andrew Somers (D-N.Y.) put it in a radio broadcast, Bermuda proved that “the Jews have not only faced the unbelievable cruelty of the distorted minds bent upon annihilating them, but they have to face the betrayal of those whom they called ‘friends.’”

It was becoming painfully obvious that when it came to saving European Jews, nobody had much interest. When it came to saving European paintings, however, the response was very different. Which is where the story behind Clooney’s The Monuments Men came in.

Shortly after the Bermuda meetings ended, The New York Times published an editorial titled “Europe’s Imperiled Art.” The newspaper, which showed little interest in the fate of Europe’s imperiled Jews, urged strong government action to rescue “cultural treasures” from the battle zones. The White House agreed. Here was something that did merit the diversion of American military resources. In June 1943, the Roosevelt administration announced the establishment of a U.S. government commission “for the protection and preservation of historic and artistic monuments in Europe.”

Finding a chairman for the new rescue agency was not too difficult: FDR turned to Justice Roberts, who may not have had time for the task of rescuing Jews but quickly found the time to chair a commission to rescue paintings and statues. The Roberts Commission set to work planning the mission that was to be carried out by the team that would come to be known as the Monuments Men.

In the autumn of 1943, the Bergson Group’s allies in Congress introduced a resolution urging the president to create a commission to rescue Jews. At a hearing on the resolution, New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia pointed to the creation of the monuments commission: “This very important problem ... is not like the destruction of buildings or monuments, as terrible as that may be, because, after all, they may be rebuilt or even reproduced; but when a life is snuffed out, it is gone. It is gone forever.”

The Roosevelt administration dispatched Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long to Capitol Hill to testify against Bergson’s rescue resolution. Long declared that the United States was deeply concerned about the Jewish refugees, but after all, “you cannot send a regiment in there to pull people out.” Paintings presented no such difficulties, apparently.

The next time Americans would care more about cultural treasures was in 1994, two years later, in a sad fulfillment of Rabbi Berlin’s dire prediction, U.S. Gen. George Patton diverted U.S. troops to rescue 150 prized Lipizzaner dancing horses, which were caught between Allied and Axis forces along the German-Czech border.

Some historian noted the same phenomenon. Meeting with a U.S. senator in 1943, Rabbi Berlin (namesake of the future Bar-Ilan University) remarked: “If horses were being slaughtered as are the Jews of Poland, there would by now be a loud demand for organized action against such cruelty to animals. Somehow, when it concerns Jews, everybody remains silent, including the intellectuals and humanitarians of free and enlightened America.”

Perhaps there is also something to be learned from the people of sympathy for endangered animals. In a bitting essay at the peak of the Darfur genocide, New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof questioned the administration’s priority, with actress Mary Tyler Moore and others rising up in passionate defense of the bird’s rights. “A single homeless hawk aroused more indignation than 2 million homeless Sudanese,” Kristof commented.

Some refugee advocates noted the same phenomenon. Meeting with a U.S. senator in 1943, Rabbi Berlin (namesake of the future Bar-Ilan University) remarked: “If horses were being slaughtered as are the Jews of Poland, there would by now be a loud demand for organized action against such cruelty to animals. Somehow, when it concerns Jews, everybody remains silent, including the intellectuals and humanitarians of free and enlightened America.” Two years later, in a sad fulfillment of Rabbi Berlin’s dire prediction, U.S. Gen. George Patton diverted U.S. troops to rescue 150 prized Lipizzaner dancing horses, which were caught between Allied and Axis forces along the German-Czech border.

None of this detracts from what the Monuments Men accomplished, of course. Their rescue of precious artwork and other historical treasures is deserving of praise. But it’s also a story that has to be told within its historical context: the failure of the Roosevelt administration to accord the rescue of human beings the same priority. In fact, the iconic film The Monuments Men recorded the rescue of cultural treasures.
It was, November 9, 1938, Kristallnacht — the night of broken glass — when the Nazis coordinated a wave of attacks in Germany and Austria, smashing windows, burning synagogues, ransacking homes, looting Jewish-owned stores. They tackled any Jews they found. They even slaughtered cattle and took away milk. For decades, it was a refuge for those who'd endured the living hell of Auschwitz, Theresienstadt, Mauthausen and other camps. And a haven, too, for those who fled before the dark night of German occupation fell over their homeland.

In its heyday, the Selhelhp Home, as it’s called, bustled with Jewish-owned stores. They trashed Jewish-owned stores. They trashed Austrian, smashing windows, burning furniture, and dispatching to her death. She can’t. “The commander said, ‘There is one person extra. Who IS that person? Come forward!’” Oppenheimer remembers, her head still thick with ash, mimicking his stern tone. “My face was hot. It was on fire. I thought if anybody sees me, they’ll know I am the one who isn’t supposed to be there.” An elderly woman was pulled from the line and dispatched to her death. She was killed because of me, because I wanted to be free,” Oppenheimer says, her eyes clouding with tears. “And I feel guilty about that until this day.”

Oppenheimer eventually became a nurse, but couldn’t bear to work with children. “Here you have happy, lovely kids,” she explains. “All I saw were kids being pulled from their mothers and killed. Those are the pictures that I still have in mind.”

The past never totally disappears. One night at dinner someone asked if everyone had received plum cake. Oppenheimer pointed to two table-mates. Suddenly she was reminded of a Nazi commander dabbled “the death finger” because he’d point, then declare with a “you, you, you,” those to be exterminated. She trembles just thinking about it.

Oppenheimer now lives in a, small apartment filled with four generations of family photos. She and her husband — an Auschwitz survivor — had decided long ago they’d eventually move to Selhelhp, but he died before there was a need. Oppenheimer has found comfort there. “I’m happy to know that there are people here I went through the same thing,” she says.

Oppenheimer doesn’t share her memoir with others much. But has written a memoir to record events her three children weren’t all that eager to hear. “My kids didn’t want us to talk about it,” she says. “They’d say, ‘You’re in a free country now. Enjoy the freedom. Forget the past.’”

“Something happened yesterday — I can’t remember,” she says, “but what happened at that time ... it’s still with me. I can never forget it.”

Even when it’s unspoken, the past is the emotional glue for these survivors.

It has been very important for them to live as a group, even though they don’t talk about it,” says Ethan Bensinger, who made a 2012 documentary, Refuge, about the place his 101-year-old mother, Rachel, calls home. “Whether it’s subliminally or unconsciously ... there’s a feeling of togetherness.”

Rachel Bensinger’s story is not uncommon. She left Germany as Hitler’s dictatorial grip tightened. She moved to what was then Palestine, but her life was unalterably shaped by the Holocaust — she lost 25 members of her family.

These traumas have been enor- mous, but they’ve not been all-con- suming. “They don’t want it to be the focus of who they are, they don’t want to be marked,” says Hedy Ciocci, the home’s administrator. “They want to be defined by who they became and what life they’ve had.”

Many became doctors, lawyers, artists, businessmen, teachers, nurses. With roots in Berlin, Prague and Vienna many also had developed a love for the arts that the home sus- tains today with lectures, Sunday con- certs and visits from a movie critic.

It represents this world that they remember, that they had to leave,” Bensinger says. He describes it with the German word: gemütlichkeit — comfort or coziness.

The home actually started as an association in the mid-1930s when a branch of a New York organi- zation called Selhelhp formed in Chicago. Selhelhp was more than a name; it was a philosophy for refugees who didn’t want to depend on government aid. Instead, they started a support group, collecting meager dues to help each other find jobs or apartments, learn English and navi- gate daily life.

“The mission was to create a safe oasis where they could start again,” says Ciocci, whose husband’s grand- mother was an early member.

Gerry Frank, one of the home’s founders, had come from Berlin. Now 92, he still remembers being 17 years old, watching from his bicycle the hateful frenzy of Kristallnacht as Nazi storm troopers painted small crosses in the corner of windowst of Jewish- owned businesses so mobs would know where to attack. He saw a schoolmate pick up a chair lodged in an already-shattered store window and hurl it into a magnif- icent chandelier. “I tell you, it broke something within me,” Franks says. “I thought, ‘What the heck am I doing in this country anymore?’” His family left soon after.

As a Selhelhp founder, Franks along with others decided after about a decade to start a retirement community for their parents and other refugees, many attached to Old World ways.

About 15 years ago, with increasing numbers of survivors dying, Selhelhp — which offers everything from inde- pendent living to around-the-clock care — began opening its doors to Jews who weren’t European war refugees.

Soon, the reason this home was founded will cease to be.

“In a matter of years, this communi- ty will be gone, this sense of culture will cease to be,” Bensinger says. “There’s a great sense of sad- ness for all of us.”

That sorrow, though, has been tem- pered, by those still here to write the last chapter.

Edith Stern sometimes thinks her memory is too strong.

She remembers her improbable wedding ceremony in Theresienstadt. A concentration camp inmate with meningitis, she was too weak to stand, but strong enough to take her vows. Her head was bandaged and a pink silk gown peeked out from her blanket. Her groom stood at her side. “All the people cried,” she says with (Continued on page 12)
JEWS HIDDEN TWICE OVER BY THE CHURCH

BY REBECCA BENHAMOU, THE TIMES OF ISRAEL

Reopening a scandal that broke in 2004, a new French book L'Eglise de France et les enfants juifs (The French Church and Jewish Children) is a 10-year investigation into one of the most controversial postwar Catholic Church policies. The book, which recently hit French bookstores, opens with an October 23, 1944, directive from the French Apostolic Nunciature that author Catherine Poujol found in the Church archives in 2004 inissy-les-Moulineaux, a commune in the southwestern area of Paris.

Leaked to the Italian daily newspaper Corriere Della Sera without her permission on December 28, 2004, the document — written in French and “approved by the Holy Father” — forbids Catholic authorities from allowing Jewish children who had been sheltered by Catholics and bap- tized to be returned to their families and communities.

“For Jews today, children or grand-children of Shoah survivors, the letter from the Aboit Blanc can be read as evidence of what was once feared,” Poujol writes. “We knew that after the war, Jewish organizations doing everything in their power to obtain a letter from the pope, a memorandum asking institutions looking after hidden Jewish children to hand them over.

“Today, we have the evidence that a contrary order came from the Vatican, and affected some of these children,” she adds.

The formal Church directive outlining how to deal with requests from Jewish organizations looking for hid- den children throughout Europe fails to mention the atrocities of the Holocaust.

“Those who have been baptized must not be entrusted to institutions that would not be in a position to guar- antee their Christian upbringing,” the document says. “For children who no longer have their parents, given the fact that the Church is responsible for them, it is not acceptable for them to be abandoned by the Church or entrusted to any persons who have rights over them, at least until they are in a position to choose them- selves in Vannes-le-Sec — received the letter on March 30, 1947, along with another document, entitled “Note from the Aboit Blanc.”

“Baptism is what makes a child a Christian, hence it ‘cancels the Jew,’ which allowed the Church to protect so many endangered Israelis.”

To this day, there are no reliable fig-ures on how many French Jewish children were hidden and saved by Catholics, or directly affected by this Church directive.

For almost a decade, Poujol has refused to talk to the press about her discovery. Now, she explains the rea-sons behind her silence.

“It wasn’t a matter of not wanting to talk about the problem, a matter of not having evidence. But when we pursued this matter, we found proof that the Church was involved in this scandal,” she told The Times of Israel.

Poujol concludes that the Church was not in a position to guarantee the access to these postwar doc-uments would fuel the scandal even more.

“After examining countless sources and traveling throughout Europe, the US and Israel, Poujol came to the conclusion that even if this document clearly outlines the Church’s intention of keeping baptized Jewish children under its custody, it doesn’t cast blame on the entire Catholic Church.

“Many priests and bishops acted indepen- dently and didn’t abide by the directive,” she says.

Poujol notes that there is very little evidence as to which members of the Church did receive the note.

“When the war started, the Church was in an unprecedented, exceptional situation — and wasn’t prepared for it,” she says. “On the one hand, a sacrament, in this case baptism, was adminis-tered to save individuals from a likely death. But on the other hand, Catholics truly believe in the rescue of souls via this sacrament.”

Amid numerous, well-documented exam-ples, Poujol mentions the Finaly Affair, which consumed and divided France in 1953.

In 1944, two Jewish boys, Robert and Gerald Finaly, were sent by their parents to a Catholic nursery in Grenoble. After the parents were deported and died at Auschwitz, their uncle and aunt were living in Israel, attempted to get the children back.

In 1948, French Catholic Church director Antoine Brun baptized the children without the family’s permission and formally adopted them, omitting to tell the judge about the existence of other relatives.

The affair reached the national spot-light when a police investigation found that several nuns of the Notre Dame de Sion order and Basque priests had arranged and executed the kidnap-ping and smuggling of the children in Spain in February 1953.

The boys were returned to their fam- ily on July 25 after an eight-year legal battle that divided the French public opinion.

Poujol explains, “The Finaly Affair is the most emblematic example of the Church’s ambivalent attitude. The debate opposed on the one hand Monsignor Gerlier, who did everything he could to help hand over the chil- dren, and on the other hand, Monsignor Caillot, archbishop of Grenoble and fervent supporter of the Vichy government, who lobbied actively to return the boys to their family.

“French public opinion was divided into two opposing camps, clericals against anticlericals, Zionists against anti-Zionists, and canon law against republican law,” she adds.

In France, 11,600 Jewish children died during World War II, but another 72,400 survived.

“There are many gray areas when it comes to the role of the Catholic Church during and after the war; we cannot jump to a clear-cut, black or white conclusion,” says Poujol. “The very goal of my book is to show that we need to adopt a nuanced stance.”

CZECHS HAIL WARTIME JEWISH LEAGUE

Inside the walls of the transit camp of Terezin, Jewish prisoners used their favorite sport as a means of psychologi-cal escape from Nazi tyranny — if only for the duration of a match. The league was finally granted official recogni-tion by the Czech Football Association.

Looking back on the Nazi transit camp of Terezin, Jewish footballers used their favorite sport as a means of psychological escape from Nazi tyrann-ny — if only for the duration of a match. Between 1941 and 1945, a total of 152,059 Jews passed through the giant Terezin complex. About 34,000 of them perished from disease due to poor sanitation, while 87,000 others met their death after being deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Just 16,352 of the Jews who passed through Terezin camp survived the war. In March, the Czech Football Association executive committee declared “the football competitions played in Terezin are a significant aspect of the Terezin ghetto during World War II.”

In the January 7, 1944, issue of the Czech weekly weekly newspaper, Hirsch — who later perished in Auschwitz-Birkenau — created a sys-tem of football leagues including the “Terezin League,” several divisions, as well as children’s and junior leagues.

“Even in such cruel conditions the folks played football — and football helped them survive,” says Stanislav Krab, head of the Czech Football Association historical committee.

Named after the boys who played in the ghetto, such as “Cooks,” “Used Clothes Storage,” “Electricians,” and “Butchers,” the seven-a-side teams played games of two-35 minute halves in the courtyard of a former army bar-acks surrounded by thousands of spectators watching.

In 1943, the “Used Clothes Storage” team came top of the first Terezin League, after six matches and three draws. The “Butchers” won the first Terezin Cup in the same year.

The ghetto prisoners also played international games, such as Prague versus Vienna.

But player transfers scheduled every Monday from 10 am to 2 pm were a cruel reminder of the horrifying situation the footballers found them-selves in: the lineups changed from week to week as players were deport- ed to death camps.

Terezin players included ones with international careers, such as Paul Mahrer of the “Butchers” team, who as a DFC Prague star had played six games for the former Czechoslovakia in 1923–1926.

“Terezin and Terezin has since spoken of his experience, telling Frantisek Steiner, author of Football and Family, that “For me, football was a kind of comfort in hell’s waiting room.”

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The Times of Israel
AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM HOSTS INAUGURAL FLORIDA TRIBUTE DINNER

Representative of major community organizations and three generations of South Floridians gathered at the Boca Raton Synagogue for the Society’s Inaugural Florida Tribute Dinner. Two hundred seventy guests came to pay tribute to honorees Aron Bell (Bielski) and Brenda Weil Mandel. Aron Bell, who lives in Palm Beach, is the last surviving member of the Bielski family and a founder, along with his older brothers, of the Bielski partisans. Brenda Weil Mandel is a Trustee of Yad Vashem and a member of the second generation of survivors. Consultant General for Israel to Florida Chaim Shacham updated the audience on current events in the State of Israel. Yad Vashem Builder Jimmy Resnick introduced Senator Marco Rubio, our keynote speaker, who participated in the event through the help of Benefactor Norman Braman. A Yad Vashem video presentation, “Remembering the Past, Shaping the Future,” introduced by Yad Vashem Benefactor Jack Pechter, provided a panoramic view of the Yad Vashem campus on the Mount of Remembrance in Jerusalem. Shelly Pechter Himmelrich, a member of the ASYV board of directors, ably and graciously presided over the dinner program.

Greetings and tributes were provided by a number of dignitaries. Leonard Wilf, Chairman of the Board, recalled the founders of the Society in his remarks: “At this Inaugural Dinner — a milestone for the Society—I would like to pay tribute to the memory of Eli Zborowski, its founder. For more than three decades, Eli was the driving force behind this organization. In the early ’50s, Eli marshaled the efforts of survivors like my father, Harry Wilf, of blessed memory, and my Uncle Joe, to become active in raising money for Yad Vashem. Both of them assumed leadership positions in the Society. In turn, they inspired me and other members of the Wilf family to follow in their footsteps.”

“Though he is a Holocaust survivor, my father is by far the most forward-thinking and optimistic person I have ever met. His interest in Yad Vashem is about our future as a global community with human rights for all people. Two decades ago our family undertook to establish the International School for Holocaust Studies. Today, each year, the School attracts more than 100,000 students, 50,000 soldiers and thousands of educators from Israel and around the world. Courses are taught in eight languages other than Hebrew.”

In her acceptance speech, Brenda Weil Mandel said: “I was just a little girl in 1965 when my parents, Julius and Tony Mandel, took me on a trip to Israel to visit members of our family. At that time there were many places we were not allowed to go, including the Western Wall, the Kotel. Two years ago my husband, Lou, and I traveled to Israel with 80 congregants and friends from our synagogue with the specific purpose to visit Yad Vashem, where Lou and I dedicated the Flag Terrace in remembrance of our family.”

“The theme of this year’s tribute dinner is ‘Global Guardian of Holocaust Remembrance.’ Yad Vashem was established in 1953 through an act of the Knesset. In 1965 Yad Vashem was small. Now, with the help of many loyal supporters, it has grown into the impressive structure it is today. One of the purposes of Yad Vashem is to remember the six million Jews who perished, which included members of my family. So many innocent lives snuffed out. Loving life is not enough. Doing for others is the real purpose of life. It is a wonderful feeling to continue in the tradition of my parents and family to support worthy causes. Lou and I try to follow this principle, hoping to be a link in the chain to bring about a better world. I know my parents and family of blessed memory would be very happy to see that we are doing this. Yad Vashem needs to exist to ensure that future generations remember the past.”

Aron Bell accepting the Yad Vashem Remembrance Award. From right to left: Mickey Bielski (son of Bielski Brigade leader Tuvia Bielski), Chairman Leonard Wilf, Aron Bell (Bielski), Henrika Bell, Leah Johnson (Bielski partisans).

From right to left: Chairman Leonard Wilf, Honorable Chaim Shacham, Shelly Pechter Himmelrich, Senator Marco Rubio, Brenda Weil Mandel, Jack Pechter.

Brenda Weil Mandel accepting Yad Vashem Guardian of Remembrance Award. From right to left: S. Isaac Mekel, Director of Development at ASYV; Louis Frock (husband to Mandel); Brenda Weil Mandel; Chairman Leonard Wilf.
PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM YOUNG LEADERSHIP ASSOCIATES WINTER GALA

Barry Levine and Abbi Halpern, co-chairs, Young Leadership Associates; and Leonard A. Wilf, chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem.

2014 Young Leadership Associates Gala Committee.
BY SMSADAR SHIR, YNET NEWS

“My dear brother, my city, Priuli was taken over quite suddenly and very quickly by the German occupiers. My brother — you and your family — are no longer in this world. I cannot imagine what terrible months we have been through — famine, extreme cold, abuse, looting, humiliation... I wanted to die so many times instead of continuing this life! Even when I regretted not dying in the bombings, I still retained one hope — to see you again — even if for just a minute — before my eyes are closed.

But this wish will also not be realized. Youizik, I know that you are a man of my last day, but I am strong and do not fear the end of my life. I am certain that you will avenge the death of your sister. Take revenge on those responsible for the deaths of Tulya, Mara and thousands of others. I kiss you and send greetings to your friends, to my brothers and sisters, and I hope that one day you will avenge our spilled blood.”

The farewell letter, which is now yellow and fading, is signed Eleonora Parnut, from the city of Priuli, Ukraine. She was 15 years old and was not expecting a miracle. It was clear to her that within hours of the ink drying on the paper, they would stand her in a line, and aim their rifles at her, and her body would plunge into the killing pit. And that is how it was. Around 6,000 Jews lived in Priuli at the end of the 1930s. Many of them died in September 1941 when the city was seized by the Nazis. Some of those left were sent to the ghetto, and others were sent to hard labor that many did not survive. In the end, the majority of the Jews remaining in the city — 1,300 men, women and children — were murdered in two operations, in May and September 1942. They were lined up and shot in the killing pits. Some of them were buried alive.

But who was this Eleonora Parnut who left us this chilling letter? And what was the fate of her brother Yuzik?

BRUTAL AND QUICK OPERATION

“We will never know,” says Dr. Lea Prais of the International Institute for Holocaust Research, who is attending a conference in Kharkov dedicated to the collection, research and mapping of the murder sites in Priuli, as part of a former Soviet Union. “In Poland, Germany and France we found diaries that people wrote in hiding, but from Priuli nothing, there is not even mention in the Soviet Union we found only one diary.”

The absence of such diaries is not accidental. “The Holocaust in the former Soviet Union was very brief,” she explains. “The country was occupied within several months — the operation was brutal and quick and the Jews were exterminated before they had an opportunity to develop a communal life under occupation.”

“The Soviet Jews were also afraid of writing diaries. This was a result of years of the Stalinist regime where any personal writings put them in danger. They didn’t know who was going to find the diary. For the same reason they also spoke little and sparingly even during conversations with family members. Instead of diaries they left behind letters. A letter is a small thing that does not require a lot of time or thought, and it is seen as a more democratic way of expression. They are the voice of everyone.”

Eleonora’s letter from Priuli was found by Dr. Prais in the Yad Vashem archives. “Her family members lived in Azerbaijan and kept this letter and her photo like a lucky charm. When they came to visit friends in Israel, they gave the letter and the picture to a woman named Leah Basentin who in turn gave them to Yad Vashem. But she didn’t have any additional information and also didn’t know how to locate the visitors from Azerbaijan.”

“In the last few years we have tried to make contact with Basentin, without any luck. Let’s hope that as a result of this article someone will turn to us. Perhaps we will be successful and find a clue that will lead us to the identities of this girl.”

“The Holocaust is the most researched topic in the world,” says Yad Vashem Chairman Avner Shalev. “In our library we have 140 thousand titles, and the research will never be completed, since the deeper we delve, the more we find that there was lined up and shot into the killing pit. The general pattern and the basic approach were quite similar — they gathered the Jews together and then murdered them — but for us it is important to learn how they coped. We are speaking about enormous amounts of material — diaries, and letters that will require many more years of work.”

Around one and a half million Jews were ordered in the territories of the former Soviet Union, “mainly in ravines — the most famous of which is Babi Yar,” says Shalev. “The Nazis led the Jewish village to large killing pits where they threw the slain — sometimes 10,000 people. These places were never been documented and this is the task before us now. We have identified more than 2,000 death pits and we are researching each site: who fired, in what language the order was given and the level of satisfaction reflected in the reports detailing the completed mission.”

“Written eyewitness accounts speak for themselves. A report from July 16, 1941, which is categorized “Confidential Matter of the Reich,” states: “In the first hours after the Bolshevists’ retreat the local Ukrainian population undertook some praiseworthy actions against the Jews. For example, the synagogue in Dovremil was torched. In Sambor, 50 Jews were beaten to death by an angry crowd. The Security Police rounded up 7,000 Jews and shot them as revenge for their horrific and inhuman actions.”

A soldier called Franz proudly wrote to his parents: “Until now we have sent around a thousand Jews to the place world,” and SS officer August Hepner wrote from the town Belaya Tserkov, Ukraine: “The Wehrmacht soldiers have already dug a ditch that will serve as a grave. The children were brought by tractor. They were lined up on the edge of the ditch and shot to death so that they fell within. It’s impossible to describe the howling. Some children had to be shot four or five times until they stopped.”

The research at Yad Vashem has led to the conclusion that the Holocaust in the former Soviet Union must receive special consideration.

“During the Soviet period the Holocaust was presented as an integral part of the World War in which the Nazis murdered Soviet citizens — some of whom were Jews,” explains Shalev. “The Holocaust was not mentioned in the government educational system and harsh sanctions were applied to any researcher that dared to study this area. Some lone survivors, those whose entire families were murdered in the killing pits while they were fighting at the front, later came to the killing pits, collected eyewitness accounts of each person they had murdered. For them and their lives. Nevertheless, the authorities accused them of being traitors.”

Masha Yonin, born in St. Petersburg and now working at Yad Vashem, grew up in the shadow of this ambiguity.

“After high school I went to study in Estonia because in the city where I was born, Jews were not accepted to study the humanities,” she relates. “I studied literature and Russian language and then returned to St. Petersburg, and together with my husband we joined the new Jewish movement that was set up by refuseniks. The Holocaust ripped up our roots, and we joined the refusenik underground, in private homes, to study Hebrew. Under the Stalinist regime Jews changed their surnames and were afraid to go to the synagogue, Jewish culture was wiped out, and cases of assimilation were widespread. The proof of this is in the fact that once the gates were closed, most of the Jews who wanted to leave the Soviet Union did not request to go to Israel but to United States.”

Unsurprisingly, the KGB did not relate positively to the Jewish Hebrew studies.

“They used to come and turn the house upside down searching for Israeli newspapers, and if they found them they accused the house owner of undermining the state. When they confiscated the papers, they planted drugs on us to get us arrested and sentenced for undermining the state. When they confiscated the papers, they planted drugs among the bookshelves in order to accuse all present of dealing in drugs, which carried a more severe punishment than nationalism. They wanted to ensure that we would receive long prison sentences, as in the case of Minister Edelstein who sat in prison, and they also wanted to humiliate the movement. They often used to say: ‘Who are the members of this movement? They are both nationalists and drug dealers.’”

Despite the fear of being sent to prison, the movement’s members continued to meet in the Jewish underground, “and alongside learning Hebrew we studied Torah, Jewish history and also about the Holocaust that was never mentioned in the Soviet Union,” Yonin relates.

“The Soviet ideology was that all are equal, that all the Soviet people suffered during the Communist Pathic War.”
I recently spoke by phone with a survivor of the Nazi inferno. Then, disappeared without a trace into the gas chambers of Auschwitz to family members who were speaking with her for the brutal realities of the Holocaust that became a horrific reality.

In the last several years to interview the child survivors of Auschwitz, I have become a horrific reality. I’ve had the opportunity over the last several years to interview Holocaust survivors, and have always found it hard to reconcile the calm, collected demeanor of those I’m speaking with to the brutal realities they are describing, from the horrors of Auschwitz to family members who disappeared without a trace into the maw of the Nazi inferno. Then, recently, I spoke by phone with a lovely Canadian woman, Mariette Rozen, who survived the Holocaust hidden in the Netherlands. While thinking about her story, I struck upon a way of contextualizing it by contrasting her experience with those of my maternal grandparents, both of similar age and both of whom grew up in the Netherlands through the brutal years of the Nazi occupation. As their grandson, I can better connect with and understand their experiences — and then, perhaps, Mariette’s, as she lived through the war in the same tiny country having drastically different circumstances.

The Nazis swept into the Netherlands in May of 1940 — and my grandfather Joe den Bok, who passed away last year, remembered the event clearly. The Nazi bombers began to fly over his parents’ house in the village of Veen on May 10 — his seventh birthday.

“I didn’t have much understanding of war yet,” he told me.

“I heard that the Germans, they were barded very heavily. By nine o’clock, the German troops came through the town. There were a lot of troops and horses, and they were laying at the side of the road and just observing it because we were children and a little bit more free to stare than the older people.”

The planes Joe den Bok saw, it turns out, were only the first wave — the Rotterdam Blitz, in which much of the city was leveled by the Luftwaffe, was to happen on May 14.

My grandmother Pia den Bok also remembers the beginning of the German occupation, even though she was only three (born September 17, 1936). On May 13, the day before the Rotterdam Blitz, Pia was in the city with her mother — “just before Pentecost,” as she remembers it. They were shopping for church clothes, and Pia’s mother bought her a pair of beige leather shoes. The fol-

owing morning, Pia stood outside and watched “the smoke and fire of Rotterdam rising in the sky.” The entire city center — including the department store she had been at the day before — had been destroyed by German bombers.

Mariette Rozen’s memories of the year 1940 are much different — she, unlike my grandparents, was Jewish. She was born on May 10, 1935, in Brussels, and the Nazis marched into Belgium a year later in 1941. One of the few memories she has before she was taken into hiding was:

“My mother and my sister Esther and my brother Jack and my brother Henri were walking down a road — turns out we were walking towards Paris to escape Brussels. On the road we met thousands and thousands of people who were walking from Paris to Brussels — of course, I didn’t know this ‘til years later. I know the memory because I looked up and I saw silver birds, which turned out to be planes — and those planes were diving down the road where all the people were and they were shot at. My brother pushed my mother, my sister, and my two brothers and I into the ditch. And that was my first encounter with death — people were falling and blood all over.”

Her slow realization that anti-Semitism was a new and enforced policy started to surface around the same time — around 1939 to 1940, Mariette supposes. “Not just kids on the street, but kids I was playing with!” she told me.

“They started to call me names, and I thought it was because my mother had sewn a yellow star on my dress. I used to tear it off my clothes because I wanted the kids to play with me. But they wouldn’t play — they started calling me a ‘dirty Jew,’ or a dog. I couldn’t understand — I kept saying to my mother, ‘I don’t think they like the yellow star!’”

Indeed, immediately after the invasion of Belgium, the Nazis instituted anti-Jewish policies, including severe restrictions of their civil rights and the outright confiscation of their properties and businesses.

Across the border in the Netherlands, the Nazis lost no time in instituting similar measures against Dutch Jews as well. Many Dutch.Jews moved quickly to assist their Jewish countrymen — at great cost. Pia remembers being sick at home one day and seeing a group of Dutch prisoners across the street at a truck station, arrested by the Germans for hiding Jews. They were wearing thin clothes and their wooden shoes, she recalled, as the Germans clearly hadn’t given them enough time to get dressed. When the Nazis spotted little Pia peering out the window, they pointed their rifles at her to scare her away. She later learned that those arrested were murdered by the Nazis.

In spite of new Nazi policies against Dutch Jews, Mariette’s family decided that sending her to the Netherlands would be safest. Her brother, unfortunately, had believed the Nazis lied that if she registered her family with the authorities, they would be safe from arrest and deportation. Her brother Jean, Mariette remem-

bered, was furious, and her family went into hiding. Little Mariette was first hidden in an orphanage, and then, she remembers, in Holland.

“[My brother] dropped me off outside of this little town and I had to walk and I followed the map. My brother told me...you can’t ask questions, you can’t ask anybody anything. This was always at night, anyways — very few people were out there. I walked to this farm, and the lady knew I was coming. I went to bed and the next morning I had to go to the city hall to tell the Mayor a message which I can say today was that there was eighty Jews hiding in this town and he had to tell them to leave because the Gestapo were coming. I stayed with this lady [and] acted like I was deaf and dumb to the neighbors until I learned to speak and understand. It [took] three months to learn [the] language and speak it.”

Mariette was entering a country under siege — the Germans were everywhere. Joe den Bok recalled that by the end of 1943, twenty-five Germans were living in the large den Bok farmhouse and barn, taking up residence to look after the bridges in the town of Veen. “First the Dutch blew them up so that the Germans (Continued on page 15)
I am writing to you both, my dear children, perhaps for the last time. There are no words that can express our passion to continue living but it is clear that our hearts can not be. We would want at least to see you, my dear ones, "their mother writes to them. "Don't cry. Don't be sad. If both of you return from the front, don't abandon each other. Forgive us if we ever hurt you. Our only sin is that we did not walk to where you are, but who could have imagined that this was what was going to happen?" "Your dear Grandina is with us. She sends her love to you and our grandsons, but don't cry for us. I am leaving ten pictures to remind you of us. That is all that is left."

And the father writes to his sons: "I

(Continued on page 15)
AMERICAN SOCIETY FOR YAD VASHEM HOSTS INAUGURAL FLORIDA TRIBUTE DINNER

(Continued from page 8)

ers feel, Zusha said, Bielski, waged a war of survival and rescue for close to three years in the forests of what is today the country of Belarus. In 2012 on Yom Hashoah, at Yad Vashem, the Knesset, the President, the Prime Minister and the entire country lis-
tened to the ceremonies in Jerusalem. Five minutes into the cer-
emony Tuvia Bielski was quoted from his 1946 book Jews of the Forest. Tuvia describes an argu-
ment among the very first arrivals when he orders the res-
cue of all Jews. "There won’t be enough food." ‘They will find us.’ “We'll kill us.” Tuvia declares, “Let thousands come.” “With that line of the war, Tuvia and his brothers emerged from the forest, having saved over twelve hundred Jewish lives. That is, over twelve hundred stories of triumph to be told. To the partisans and their descendants, I send my love and respect. Those twelve hun-
dred Jewish lives leave a legacy that numbers in the tens of thou-
sands.

Finally, Leah Bedzowski Johnson, one of the oldest surviving Bielski partisans, left the audience with this message: “Let us never forget the struggles of our past. Stand up for what is right! It is with remembrance and support of Israel, we send our love and build a strong community. You are the future.”

Senator Marco Rubio concluded the program with very moving remarks about his visit to Yad Vashem as the first act he took after being elected to the US Senate, and about the impor-
tance of Yad Vashem:

“We’ve all grown up, certainly here today the country of Belarus. In 2012 Yom Hashoah, one of the oldest

The Senator continued by mirroring the warning CG Shacham gave the audience earlier in the program:

The time will come when none of us will be here. For, no matter how long we live, all of our times is limit-
ed. But Yad Vashem will be there to remind future generations of what once did happen and what must never be allowed to happen again.

The American Society for Yad Vashem is grateful to the many organi-
izations who assisted in this inaugural effort: The B’nai Torah Congregation, the Boca Raton Synagogue, the New Weinbaum Yeshiva High School, Next Generations and the Florida Atlantic University Center on the Holocaust and Human Rights.

(Continued from page 2)

secret negotiations with the enemy, which they conducted without my
knowledge and against my wishes, and by illegal-
ly attempting to seize power in the State for
themselves.”

Unsuccessful in an attempt to hide after flee-
ing in disguise from Berlin to Flensburg, Himmler
continued 120 miles south toward the Elbe River, and, on May 21, 1945, was arrested at a
checkpoint on a bridge at Bremervorde.

On May 23, 1945, in British custody at the 31st Civilian
Interrogation Camp near Luneburg, southeast of Hamburg, Heinrich Himmler bit a cyanide pill and
committed suicide.

D E A L W I T H T H E D E V I L

S umming up these final days, Hecht spoke of Himmler in a January 1982 interview with Professor Penkovker:

Hecht: He made a demand that all these leaders, these camp-beasts, should not be treated as war crimi-
nals, but as prisoners of war. This, in my opinion, was the biggest achievement of Musy’s action. Because this was the reason that, from a lot of these camps, the camp commanders fled in the night, and the next morning the people saw that the camps were open, and through this Musy-Himmler agree-
ment the rest of the Jews, a few hundred thousand, were saved…

Himmler’s betrayal enraged Hitler and resulted in Himmler’s dismissal from all posts in April 1945, and an order by Hitler for Himmler’s arrest. In his last will and testament, Hitler accused Himmler of betrayal and treach-
ergy.

Hitler wrote:

“Before my death, I expel the former Reichsführer-SS and
Minister of the Interior, Heinrich Himmler, from the party and from all offices of State…

“Göring and Himmler, quite apart from their disloyalty to my person, have done inmeasurable harm to the country and the whole nation by
REMEMBER HOW DANES DONNED YELLOW STARS TO PROTECT THE JEWS? THAT NEVER HAPPENED

(Continued from page 3)

quent warning issued by Rabbi Marcus Melchior on the morning of Erev Rosh Hashanah, the vast major-
ity of Denmark's Jews escaped the Nazis and the terrible fate of the camps, it was an operation that
required coordination between the Danish resistance and ordinary
Danes who hid Jews in their homes, churches, and hospitals. Fishermen
risked their lives to ferry strangers across the Øresund, the narrow
waterway between Denmark and Sweden, in an estimated 900 boat
trips. Of the nearly 8,000 Jews living in Denmark in 1943, only 472 were
captured, and incredibly, only 53 per-
nished — that's just 5.9 percent of
the population captured and 0.66 percent
ished — that's just 5.9 percent of
the population captured and 0.66 percent
killed. Given that 90 percent of
Poland's Jews were killed and that
population captured and 0.66 percent
ished — that's just 5.9 percent of
the population captured and 0.66 percent
killed. Given that 90 percent of
Poland's Jews were killed and that
had caused the hardest of
and the energy of their resistance
Danes' superior sense of morality,
the battle for Denmark lasted just a lit-
tle over two hours.

So began the Danish policy of nego-
tiation with Germany. The policy
allowed Denmark to maintain its own
autonomy: its own parliament, royal
family, judiciary, police force, fire
brigade and, amazingly, a standing
army of 3,000 troops. It's this policy of
negotiation that has been credited
with saving Danish lives, but recent
revelations have uncovered a darker
truth: Denmark supplied Germany with
up to 15 percent of its agricultur-
al needs, earning the country the
nickname "Germany's Pantry," while
former Danish Prime Minister Anders
Fogh Rasmussen recently said that
Denmark's cooperation with Nazi
occupiers during WWII was "morally
unjustifiable" and that "if everyone in
Europe, if the Americans and the
Russians, had thought the same as the
Danish lawmakers, then Hitler
would have won the war."

But while researching this emerging
controversy of conflicting narratives
for a play I was writing, I delved into
my own family's story and discovered
something startling: Before my grand-
father's brother-in-law Nathan died,
he revealed the identity of the high-
ranking Nazi officer who warned them
to leave Denmark to one of my
cousins, Margit. The problem was
that it didn't make any sense: the Nazi
Nathan claimed had come into the tai-
or's shop all those years ago to give
a warning to Copenhagen's Jews
was Werner Best, the plenipotentiary
overseeing the Danish occupation —
a man better known as "The Butcher
of Paris."

Best was a lifelong mem-
ber of the Nazi Party —
as a teenager, he founded a
chapter of the National Youth
League — and a protégé of Heinrich Himmler. As second
in command of the SS, he was
also a close member of
Hitler's inner circle. Why
would such a man have
shown compassion toward
Denmark's Jews?

Margit, who worked in the
family tailor shop many years
later, knew the only way to
verify Nathan's story was to
find Werner Best's measure-
ment card. She went to the
bureau that housed all their
customer records and pulled
out a dusty shoebox labeled
"1940-43." Inside, amid hun-
dreds of cards that had been hidden
away for decades, was the one that
sent a chill down her spine: it was
labeled "Dr. Karl Rudolph Werner
Best."

But that left an unanswered ques-
tion: Why would the Nazi plenipo-
tiary of Denmark, a lifelong Fascist,
order the round-up of the Jews one
day and then undermine his own
operation the next? The answer, I
believe, lies in the most human of all
impulses: ambition.

Werner Best was nothing if not
ambitious. As a Himmler favorite,
he was being groomed for the very top
of the SS, but an internal power
struggle in 1939 resulted in his
ouster by Reinhard Heydrich.

Instead, Best was posted to France,
where he took out his aggression on
the French, earning his nickname
and a reputation for ruthlessness.
Berlin took notice and asked him to
write a paper on how to maintain the
Thousand-Year Reich after "their
inevitable victory." His conclusion
was simple: Each country should
think that it remained an
autonomous state under the aus-
pices of a Nazi umbrella. When
asked where this theory of the "ideal
satellite state" could be tested, Best
implied it suggested Denmark.

At the end of 1942, Best arrived
in Copenhagen and soon went
about trying to prove this theory. But
with the upswing of sabotage
attacks in 1943 he was instructed
by Berlin to deliver a statement to the
Danish resistance by making
Denmark Judeentränen. With limited
German troops at his disposal, and
fearing — probably rightly — a civil
uprising if he deported 8,000 Danes
to certain death he went about ful-
filling Hitler's order to the letter,
although not in the spirit the Führer
likely intended.

Best sent his naval attaché, Georg
Duckwitz, to Sweden to arrange safe
passage and accommodation for
Denmark's Jews. (Duckwitz would
later become West Germany's ambassador to Denmark in the
1950s and be awarded the honor of
Righteous Among the Nations for his
part in the Danish Jewish rescue.)
And then Best himself walked into a
Jewish tailor's shop in Copenhagen
and warned my grandfather and his
brother-in-law to leave — effectively
saving their lives and by extension
many more.

Ultimately, Denmark was tem-
porarily emptied of Jews. But Best
undermined his own operation not
out of an altruistic desire to save
human life, but out of a pragmatic
need to maintain a stable status quo
in occupied Denmark and prove his
theory of preserving the Reich's
influence. His success depended on
the willingness of the Danish people
to save their Jewish neighbors —
to refuse to see them as anything but
fellow Danes. Maybe that, in the
end, is the true miracle of the Danish
rescue.
THREE CHILDREN UNDER THE SWASTIKA

(Continued from page 11) couldn't use them," he explained, "and in the end the bridges were rebuilt again, because the Germans did that. And as '43 went on, we basically had Germans in our house—yeah, until the end of the war." In Nieuw Beyerland, the Dam family was also forced to host Germans. Pia remembers two German soldiers moving into their house. "Everything was nice and clean, the house had been whitewashed and painted," she said, "but the very first day, the two Germans went next door, stole the neighbor's chickens, and slaughtered them in an upstairs room." Pia's mother, of course, was as furious as she was helpless.

Not all Dutchmen, however, were satisfied with being helpless. Joe den Bok's uncle, he told me, "When [the Germans] were picking up people in town again, he would try to reach our house and hide in the haystack by us, so he did make it to the end of the war." However, not all resistance activities ended well. Pia recalls that the Dutch resistance in her area ambushed and killed the Nazi-appointed Dutch mayor of her city. In retaliation, the Germans "picked out the first ten Dutchmen on bikes, lined them up on the side of the road, and shot them down. One boy, about seventeen to nineteen years old, was one of them...he screamed 'Murder!' so loud you could hear it miles away.

For little Mariette Rozen, the Jewish pose. "To us, we believe there is only one way out. If you are not living in a self-sufficient settlement, there is no way out. If you are not living in a self-sufficient settlement, there is no way out. I also have a picture like that, from first grade, holding a book in my hand. To me, that is a typical Jewish pose."
Save the Date

The American Society for Yad Vashem
Annual Spring Luncheon
Wednesday, May 14, 2014
at Noon

The New York Marriott Marquis Hotel
1535 Broadway at 45th Street

For information please contact
Rachelle Grossman, Event Coordinator
212.220.4304
grossman@yadvashemusa.org
www.yadvashemusa.org

Leonard Wilf, Chairman
Invitation to Follow

A bequest to the American Society for Yad Vashem helps keep the memory of the Six Million alive...

Please remember us in your trust, will, estate plan or with the planned gift. It’s your legacy... to your family, and your people. For more information, or for help with proper wording for the bequest to ASYV, please contact Jonathan Gudema at 212-220-4304.